

Therapists facing present-day challenges: Economic Crisis-Social Isolation The experience of Greece

The Voice of Youth:

the opinion of adolescents and young adults regarding their relationship with their family of origin.



My dreams for my own family



Therapist's own reflections in relation to clients' psychosocial stress

Economic crisis leads inevitably to social conflict, violence and aggression (death of an adolescent attacked by two policemen in 2008). Individuals feel disoriented and at an impasse, though with a need to undertake collective action.

As adult role models become more and more untrustworthy, contradictory and unreliable for adolescents, they tend towards destructive reenactments which eventually lead them to frustration and dead ends.

When the social environment is unreliable, unstable and persecutory, young people may search for security in violent acts that can give them a pseudo sense of power.

There is a great need today in Greece to begin a conversation with the young people that express this kind of "blind violence". Is it a product of anger, of feeling humiliated, of having being treated as inferiors that triggers these violent reactions? A mixture of contempt and humiliation breeds violence in a never-ending spiral.

Adolescents may be prone to manipulation, nevertheless, they are always searching for an ideal society with non-negotiable values and principles.

What is important today is that anger may be transformed into a creative feeling that will enable human beings to move towards new positions and choices, which in turn may change tension and conflict into progress and evolution of Life.

The new status quo created by work-related roaming, the pervasive sense of instability and insecurity felt by individuals today carry feelings of frustration and intense anger.

- Human beings work more each day but earn less.
- Human beings end up burned out in their jobs.
- Human beings see their labour rights violated day by day.

Human beings who lose their jobs or go through a long period of unemployment may feel emotionally confused, socially isolated and suffer a deep a deep identity crisis.

We live in an atmosphere in which escalating anger and despair are pervasive. Human beings may feel disoriented, confused and destabilized. Under such circumstances, individuals become prone to psychological dysfunction, i.e. panic attacks, phobias, stress, substance abuse, etc.

Families undergoing a long period of unemployment and tough living conditions may probably have to face substance abuse (such as drug or alcohol abuse) by one or more of its members.

Children who belong to families where parents are unemployed, usually grow up in an atmosphere charged with marital conflict, poor parenting practices and may be neglected regarding school supervision and social skills education. These children are prone to substance abuse and delinquent behavior.

Close relationships, i.e. with friends, family, romantic partners are the first victims to be affected by socio-economic crisis. These bonds undergo difficult tests, and sometimes, as they become readjusted, they crumble.

The time has finally come for therapists to focus on what works for people, i.e. help families and groups find their strengths and values. This will free their creativity and will enable them to live meaningful lives.

Identifying and building on people's strengths produces greater benefits than just finding and correcting their weaknesses.

The awakening of personal responsibility as a trigger for growth and as a foundation for collective (joint) creativity

Group psychotherapy processes underscore the multiplicity of voices that conform a human being's identity. An individual is formed by many voices: the voice of family, of community, of political identity all of which influence his/her way of being in the world.

One of the most important processes for human beings is the need to search for meaning in life, be it in the workplace or elsewhere.

It is important to conceive a different type of conflict in which the winners and the losers are not individuals, but the processes that promote (or destroy) human beings and their human-ness. The biggest conflicts that a human being has to face, are his own internal conflicts. Conversely, in society we have to confront those processes that tie us down to obsolete structures that prevent us from growing up and moving forward.

Emergence of survival skills:

- Creative endurance and strength when faced with chaos and ambiguity
- Stamina, zest for life
- Flexibility and re-negotiation skills when faced with new "life-contracts"
- Awareness of personal and collective ways for bringing about social change
- The "new generation" learns to cope when faced with job-related insecurity
- New skills develop when dealing with unexpected and difficult situations in close relationships
- Search for meaning in life through non-conventional activities
- Strengthening of values such as solidarity and collective responsibility
- From social dead-end to creative adaptability
- Focus placed on values such as Humanity, Wisdom, Justice, Love.

Resources:

Michailidou Caterina
Psychotherapist (Excerpts from discussions of new adults)

Polemi-Todoulou Mina
PhD, Psychologist, Psychotherapist, Secretary of EFTA-NFTO

Poulopoulos Charalampos
PhD, KETHEA Director (Therapy Center for Dependent Individual)

Professional Meeting ELASYTH 6/12/2008
Human-Family-Community faced with the new work reality

Authors:

Maria Angelou M.A Systemic Therapist, EFTA member
Katerina Zymnis M.Sc., Ph.D. Candidate Panteion University of Athens,
Systemic Therapist, EFTA member