

Special Thematic Section on "Social Justice Issues for Counselling Psychologists in Greece"

Social Justice Issues for Counselling Psychologists in Greece

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The European Journal of Counselling Psychology, 2018, Vol. 7(1), 86–89, doi:10.5964/ejcop.v7i1.196

Published (VoR): 2018-10-31.

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Going through a long period of economic crisis, Greece has been called upon to deal with homeless and jobless people and the psychological problems following them. Due to its geographical position, Greece is also faced with immigration and refugee problems transforming it into a multi-cultural country with all its assets and liabilities. Many immigrants trying to be integrated into the country or refugees seeking asylum face emotional problems that need to be dealt with. Multi-cultural competencies and social justice principles for human rights, fairness and equity are called upon to deal with respect to this diversity.

Multiculturalism and diversity have been under the lens of counselling psychology for several decades. In terms of counselling, multiculturalism refers to respecting ideas, values, beliefs and worldviews of diverse racial, ethnic or other marginalized groups or individuals. This had been the focus of counselling psychology in the last two decades of the 20th century. Students were trained to become multiculturally competent in order to provide specifics for culturally sensitive helping (Roysircar, Arredondo, Fuertes, Ponterotto, & Toporek, 2003). Paul Pedersen named multiculturalism the fourth force in the counselling profession (Pedersen, 1991) in an effort to emphasize the distinct knowledge, behaviours and skills required in multicultural counselling. However, multicultural counsellors and counselling psychologists came soon to realize that the influence of other social and economic factors affected the psychological and emotional state as well as people's quality of life.

The dawn of the 21st century marked the emphasis of counselling psychology on social justice (Toporek, Gerstein, Fouad, Roysircar, & Israel, 2006). Social justice has been integral to the whole philosophy of counselling psychology since its inception (Kiselica & Robinson, 2001). All the basic principles and values of counselling psychology coincide with the meaning and orientation of social justice, which emphasizes the equal participation of all people in a society shaped to satisfy their needs.

Social justice is now considered the "fifth force" in counselling (Ratts, D'Andrea, & Arredondo, 2004), because in addition to its sensitivity and respect to diversity, it recognizes the impact of lack of privileges and oppression

to minority groups on their mental health (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). Social justice is concerned with issues of human rights, fairness and equity (Ivey & Bradford-Ivey, 2003). Therefore, it places greater emphasis on dealing with oppression and marginalization and calls on counselling psychologists to act as agents of social change. “Social justice is related to the ways advantages and disadvantages are distributed to individuals of a society” (Miller, 1999, p. 11). It is in the heart of multiculturalism.

This special issue of The European Journal of Counselling Psychology on the topic of Social Justice Issues for Counselling Psychologists in Greece attempts to bring to its readership some of the issues addressed at the sixth Pan-Hellenic Counselling Psychology conference, held in Athens, Greece and organized by the Division of Counselling Psychology of the Hellenic Psychological Society, the theme of which was “*Issues of Multiculturalism and Social Justice in Counselling Psychology*”. Rebecca Toporek and Rachel Tribe, authoring the first two articles of this issue, were invited keynote speakers of the conference and their articles are based on their keynote speeches.

Rebecca Toporek’s (2018, this section) article on “*Strength, Solidarity, Strategy and Sustainability: A Counselling Psychologist’s Guide to Social Action*” maintains the spirit of this special issue. It proposes a model to support counselling psychologists who want to become more engaged in social justice work. Interesting is the distinction the author makes between social justice and philanthropy and the different kinds of justice she is referring to.

Rachel Tribe and Deanne Bell’s (2018, this section) article on “*Social Justice, Diversity and Leadership*” discusses the meaning of social justice in relation to counselling psychology within the United Kingdom but also in a wider context. The authors argue that at the center of the counselling psychologist’s profession lies an active leadership role to encourage the promotion of social justice.

In Athena Androutsopoulou and Maria-Marditsa Stefanou’s (2018, this section) article entitled “*Seeking ‘Home’: Personal Narratives and Turning Points in the Lives of Adult Homeless*”, emphasis is placed on helping homeless persons shape their identities through self-narratives. Implications for social caring in exploring the deeper meaning of “home” are discussed.

The aim of the study on “*The Interplay Between Self-Construal, Social Support, and Psychological Adaptation of Indian Immigrants in Greece*” by Evangelia Kateri and Evangelos Karademas (2018, this section), was to examine the relationships of self-construal and social support to immigrants’ anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. The indirect effects of social support on the relation of self-construal to psychological well-being were measured as well. The authors suggest that the findings may have some implications regarding the impact of cultural values on counselling and the role of social support in immigrants’ psychological adaptation.

The following article entitled “*Experiences of Mental Health Service Users on Their Empowerment and Social Integration in the Community*” by Vasiliki Yotsidi and Kalliope Kounenou (2018, this section) deals with important and contemporary issues related to the provision of mental services and the important issue of reintegration of people with mental health problems in the community. It followed a qualitative methodology analyzing the dialogues of three focus groups consisting of six members with psychotic disorders each. It explored the experiences of people with severe mental disorders in nine areas of their community participation, shedding light on their social integration needs.

The next article by Georgios Tsouvelas and Vassilis Pavlopoulos (2018, this section) studied the “*Greek Host Community Acculturation Expectations Towards Immigrants From Albania and Pakistan: The Role of Existential Parameters*”. It was found that the prevailing host community acculturation expectations were integrationism and individualism, for immigrants from Albania, and individualism and integrationism-transformation, for immigrants from Pakistan. The findings suggested that host community acculturation expectations of Greeks are related to existential anxiety as a trait rather than as a state.

Finally, the article by Ioanna Giannopoulou, Paraskevi Bitsakou, Eleftheria Ralli, Fedon Chatzis, and Danai Papadatou (2018, this section) “*Addressing Cultural Issues in Grief Counseling With Immigrants: The Case of a Bereaved Filipino Family Following Homicide*” discusses cultural considerations and approaches to working with immigrants who are coping with grief and traumatic loss. The presentation of a clinical case is used to elaborate on issues related to cultural identity, level of acculturation and religious beliefs and spiritual rituals among Filipinos living in Greece.

All the above-mentioned articles of this special issue highlight some of the multiculturalism and social justice issues facing Greek counselling psychology, especially since the economic crisis. At the same time, they reflect the richness of the professional and research activity of Greek counselling psychologists, despite the unfavorable socio-economic condition they live in. We hope that this special issue will trigger more research to investigate many more issues facing today’s Greek multi-cultural society and provide answers or show the way to social justice and call on counselling psychologists to act as agents of social change.

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The guest editors, July 2018

Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The authors have no support to report.

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