

Education for the knowledge society

Is there a need for counselling psychology and guidance services in kosova?

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Abstract

In the XXI century when the pendulum has reached its max height in the individual freedom, society feels a need to raise its awareness one step further in its overall social and cultural development. Emergence of new values makes keeping society from falling apart harder than ever before. A special care should be given to education, physical health and especially, mental health.

Counseling psychology and guidance services play an important role in this view because they define and increase structural factors of human activity and through it promote positive mental health. Such services help intra and inter-individual relations of human life, which are reflected in the wellbeing of a society.

Our study is an attempt at researching the impact of counseling psychology and guidance services in Kosovar society, especially within Prizren region. Introduction of such services within a system of education that aims at uncovering all the hidden potentials of each and every individual, who will be more productive and useful to society, is an attempt worth taking.

Key terms: society, education, psychology, research, counseling and guidance services.

Introduction

Human society at the present century is facing a pressure in its development. The concepts of progress and modernity flung the pendulum high in the individual freedom and gave rise to identity “values” (Giordan, 1994); rapid development of technology and tight market competition put additional stress on society in order to reform its educational policies accordingly. These circumstances added a growing interest to counselling psychology and guidance services, as one of disciplines of psychology (Dryden and Mytton, 1999). In reference to psychology, the word counselling was first used by Carl Rogers in 1930s, who tried to bypass legal regulations of that time and gain a permit to

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practice psychotherapy using his person-centred approach (Dryden and Mytton, 1999). Since then, counselling psychology as a discipline continued to exist and spread touching on all levels of human life. This sub discipline of psychology marked its development in Germany, Western Europe especially, as a vocational guidance services (Rott, 2008). In the States it existed only in last 50 years and emerged from vocational and educational counselling, however now, it covers a wide range of study areas including culture, minority issues, and recently, religion and spirituality (Harisson, 2008).

Our study aims at researching the importance of counselling psychology and guidance services in Kosova education system. For this purpose, we will present a brief summary of the benefits of these services; give the situation in neighbouring countries; and then show the situation in Kosova with a quick portrayal of the general psychology services provided after the war, and in the present years, as well as point at the significance of research, as means of accomplishing this goal.

Relevance of Counselling psychology and guidance

Counselling psychology and guidance promote positive health through the identification and enhancement of constructive aspects of human functioning, and as such, touch on every aspect of human life in its most fundamental level of its daily activities and interpersonal relations (Altmaier and Hansen, 2012).

These services focus mainly on, but are not limited to, educational and vocational element of an individual, as they are the most relevant areas of modern human existence. In reference to this, most people show anxiety and find themselves under a lot of pressure when they have to decide about which school to go to, or what profession to follow, as their most important choices in life (Abaci, 2008). The relevance of these services lies in the facility to help individuals in their struggles with education, their carrier choices, and how to cope with and overcome difficult situations. One of the functions of counselling services is facilitating learner achievement and promoting accomplishment in education (Abaci, 2008). Another function of counselling which is a follow up of the first one is its assistance with career choice. A well-chosen career can bring forth the true potential of individual and foster positive feelings of strength, health and security. The individual thus, becomes more reliable, productive and profitable for a society (Abaci, 2008). Career guidance can help in identifying and addressing to the needs of society in form of facilitating education and matching it to the demands of a labour market, and this is also recognised by International Labour Organisation, that promotion of such positive aspects of career guidance help especially, countries in development (Zelloth, 2009).

Counselling Psychology in the neighbouring countries

Other states in Europe, such as smaller Balkan states Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania have very little research done in the field of educational and vocational psychology (Zelloth, 2009). A survey carried out in Montenegro in 2007 showed that one third of final-grade pupils in primary school are uncertain about their education development (Zelloth, 2009). Macedonia state employment strategies show a high level of mismatch between system of education and skills needed in labour market, which resulted in establishing career centres in some vocational schools and this move spread in total of 57 schools around the country (Zelloth, 2009).

In Albania, another Balkan state bordering with Kosova, a Centre for psychology

counselling services was founded within Albanian University of Shkodra, Faculty of Education in 2011, and offered counselling services presented by national and international scholars. The concerns of students encountered in this centre are pretty much the same all around the region: informing society and helping students to be aware and develop their abilities so that they are not hindered from seeking assistance from the counselling service (Lumanaj, 2011).

Psychology Services in Kosova

Psychological services in Kosova, especially after the war, were provided exclusively through the help of international community. The aftermath of war in Kosova in 1999, attracted many international organizations that tried to assist and give their help to the people of Kosova in overcoming the crisis. The assistance in the form of psychological counselling consisted mostly to the refugee mental health (in camps, and those transported to other countries); later of the former combatants, and the most vulnerable groups (widows, orphans, and the elderly with chronic illnesses). A considerable number of organizations covered all these different areas and vulnerable groups in Kosova that needed both psychological and psychosocial assistance. Further we are going to mention only a few. IOM was one of such first organizations that addressed the need for psychological treatment of refugees and war trauma present in the region, right after the war, in 1999 (IOM, 2001). After the initial assessment of the war trauma of refugees within camps in Albania and Macedonia, IOM attended also to the needs of former combatants and helped in their social integration through vocational trainings and employment opportunities (IOM, 2001). Social Welfare and Care sector in Kosova received its share of international help thanks to efforts of the international charity organization called One to One Children's Fund. They extended their services by opening two counselling centres in Prizren and Peja in order to cover the area that was most affected by war, destruction and trauma (One to One, 2010). The centres were forced to close down in 2010 due to end of programme and reluctance of the government to continue funding of the project. IFRC covered many psychology related issues including the suicide rates in the country (IFRC, 2001).

All the mentioned services were provided as an aid to a nation in distress. In relation to this De Jong (1999), the mental health specialist, says that "in situation of massive destruction and human tragedy, the tendency to focus on the immediate negative effects of violence on the human psyche is understandable". Consequently, there should be a distinction between a person with mental disorder and an individual who experienced a trauma. De Jong (1999) further believes that people who experience a war trauma show "normal reactions to abnormal circumstances" and treating these reactions as pathological can have a devastating effect to the health of a trauma victim. This intervention can cause more harm than help.

The situation is no different in Kosova and this predisposition to view mental health in connection to mental illnesses and disorders is also stressed by Fanaj (2010). Especially in Prizren region, mental illnesses are associated with the term of psychology, and individuals with such prejudices try to keep their distance on the very mention of the word psychology. However, it is a fact that one third of people that check in with the physician, in general, suffer from some kind of psychological problems (Dryden and Mytton, 1999). And, it is also true that the attitude of Kosova is changing towards psychology, opening up its culture gradually but surely to benefit from these services, as it

was witnessed by providers of such services (De Jong et al., 1999).

In fact, the fear of society is more related to psychotherapy than to counselling. This is because counselling psychology and guidance differ from psychotherapy. We have a client in the first one, a patient in the second; one is practised at educational premises, the other one at a hospital (Abaci, 2008). One treats health defects and the other one stresses the normal growth (Altmaier and Hansen, 2012; Fanaj, 2010). Both are different in their goals, methods they apply and problems they deal with (Abaci, 2008). To begin appreciating the true value of counselling psychology we give below some of its purposes as listed by Abaci (2008):

- Assist in self-fulfilment of an individual
- Assist in achievement of a positive identification of an individual
- Assist in building up the self-confidence of an individual
- Enhance the stability of emotions, thoughts and behaviour of an individual
- Teach an individual how to successfully interact with people,
- Assist an individual to take an active part in adapting to its environment
- Assist in reaching their genuine ability to make their own choices
- Educate individuals on how to cope with future challenges

Due to the above benefits and reflecting the positive side of these services, psychological counselling, in developed countries, is incorporated into the education system as a supplement to the mental health of a society, or as “additional educative services” in Fanaj’s (2010) words. The need for these programmes in developed countries arose out of widespread psychosocial phenomena including behavioural issues at schools, learning difficulties, use of drugs, serious emotional disturbances and even the more extreme cases of suicide attempts (Fanaj, 2010).

This is the reason why educational researches see education as composed of three elements: education, administration and individual counselling services for pupils (Dryden and Mytton, 1999). Out of these three elements in education, Kosova lacks only the third one and that is student counselling services. Usually, there are very few to none of official counselling psychologist at schools around Kosova, and instead, this position is filled in by a teacher that teaches the subject of psychology at the school (Fanaj, 2010). Yet, a considerable part of students in Kosova feel that there is a need to have this kind of counselling within school building. And so, amid Fanaj’s (2010) research that summed up situation in Kosova in a single page, stating that counselling services generally, are not provided in Kosova schools; two years after his study we find a faint ray of light which speaks of the opposite. We find this bold attempt at a secondary school “Hajdar Dushi” in the capital of Prishtina. Here Blerta Sulhasi, a young psychologist, established a counselling centre within a framework of School-Based Psychological Services Program with an aim of promoting mental health of high school children, preventing disruptive behaviour and improving students’ academic success (Sulhasi, 2012). Again, such an endeavour was achieved thanks to the international efforts of the American Psychological Association.

However, despite evident results of a successful boost of mental health, which shows the importance of psychosocial counselling, the government’s priority remained focused on other sectors, and not mental health care of its nation (Rinvest, 2009). Reluctance of the state to adjust its education system accordingly is pointed out by Fanaj (2010), too. Further, he observes that even the state rules and regulations failed to include the issue of

mental health within education system, and a few rules on education mentioned this only in reference to individuals with limited abilities (Fanaj, 2010).

However, the culpability is not to be placed entirely on the state's attitude towards allocating a budget for psychological counselling in the country. Relevant studies have shown that any decision-making in policy of a country is largely evidence-based, gathered through valid and reliable research done about a specific segment of a society (IOM, 2001). Meaning that, in order to have changes implemented in the policy of a country, as regards in our case, psychological counselling and guidance services within the system of education, there should be evidence for the necessity of these services. Evidence or, arguments that introduce and support new ideas in modern societies are usually obtained through valid research data. Needless to say, the same should be implemented also in Kosova. However, this seems not to be the case.

Evidence show that there is very little reported research done in the field of psychological counselling in Kosova today, or social sciences in general (Riinvest, 2009). The research that was conducted right after the war by international community present in the country, was mostly done to alleviate the war effects (for refugees, former combatants, widows and orphans) and their projects were based on the previous experience and assessments that organizations had done in other Balkan states which suffered the same violence, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, (De Jong et al., 1999). These included the usual psychological and at the same time social phenomena existing in Kosova in the aftermath of war including the most frequent depression, PTSD, trafficking, unemployment, use and distribution of drugs. Because doing a research at the time of crisis in Kosova was not possible due to lack of any kind of statistical data and mostly, budget, counselling services were provided based on research carried out in other countries (IFRC, 2001; Fanaj, 2010; De Jong et al., 1999).

However, more than a decade after the war, situation seems to have changed very little as regards research work. The scarce research that does exist is mostly "imposed" and done by private companies (Riinvest, 2009), again, established and/or funded by international community. A study administered by Riinvest (2009) on research capacities in social sciences in Kosova exposes an upsetting picture of this reality. In it the highest education institutions are carrying few to none research due to lack of researchers with PhDs; there is low budgeting for research due to absence of a national science program and there is no available credible statistical data of the country (Riinvest, 2009).

Without this fundamental element in data collection, there is little hope that academics in Kosova can have a say in policy-making of their country; and even fewer optimism for the people of Kosova that their real needs will be met by counselling services.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to look at the impact of counselling psychology and guidance services in Kosovar society, especially within Prizren region. We hope that our work will support the promotion of counselling and guidance services within the education system of Kosova. By presenting the relevance of these services and their important role in ensuring positive mental health of our young nation, we provide a positive answer to our research question.

Kosova, and especially Prizren region, need psychological counselling and guidance in education institutions. But they also need research to decide on the best possible services that will address their acute and chronic states. It needs an organized and available

database of records that will show the specific and genuine concerns of its people. It needs counselling sensibility which will treat its people not as patients with mental disorders, but as forbearing victims that experienced war. It needs a proper psychological assistance which will build upon the existing coping mechanisms of its nation, and which will take into consideration the established social networks, religion and culture, strong family ties and a long history of tolerance (De Jong et al., 1999) of which Kosovars take pride in.

Kosova, as a country looking towards the EU integration should show an equal concern to the mental health and education of its nation. Therewith focus, such services help intra and inter-individual relations of human life, which are reflected in the wellbeing of a society. Introduction of such services within the system of education that aims at uncovering all the hidden potential of each and every individual, who will be more productive and useful to society, is an attempt worth taking.

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