

**SUPPORTING SELF-HELP/MUTUAL AID GROUPS
IN ERAS OF SOCIAL DISLOCATION:
EMERGING THEMES FROM THE FIELD**

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Greece. A country in deep crisis that faces social dislocation phenomena.

- Greek is in crisis even before 2010
- After 2010 there was an implementation of extreme neoliberal policies (Based on IMF principles). These policies resulted into:
- Welfare State degradation:
 - Difficulties in access in health care system
 - Increase of medically uninsured population, 2 million in a population of 11 million (April '14)

These policies resulted into:

- ◎ Increase of health problems
 - Cardiovascular diseases
 - HIV
 - Psychosocial problems (addiction, suicides)
- ◎ Decrease of life expectancy (estimation based on preliminary data and according to international experiences)

Observations about changes in societal relations these last years

- A positive outcome:

Emergence of new social movements based on social solidarity:

- Square occupation movement
- Local medical centers and pharmacies initiated by active citizens themselves or in cooperation with municipal authorities
- Citizens assemblies at local level
- Soup Kitchens

Observations about changes in societal relations these last years

- But mostly negative outcomes:
- -Individualization
- -Passivity
- -Introversion
- -Low tolerance in human diversity
- -Social conflicts
- These features were reflected in their extreme form in the acceptance of a nazist party (7% voted for Golden Dawn at the last elections)

Summing up:

- The last years we have an extreme conservative shift in the central policies in all fields (labour relationships, social security, health, education).
- A significant part of the institutional and the democratic values had to be violated in order neoliberal policies to prevail on the country. This continuing violation and the lack of democracy led to the described social dislocation.

Arising questions:

1) Where do we stand as self-help supporters in such a context?

2) How do we work in such conditions?

- Regarding the 1st question:
- Viewing crisis as opportunity
- Remembering the genealogical roots of self-help movement
- Remembering the sociopolitical dimensions of our professional roles

Regarding the 2nd question

How do we do our work in such conditions?

- A. Continuation of our work as it has been established all these years (Support in creating new self-help/mutual aid groups, support of existing self-help/mutual aid groups, education of students and health professionals, research)

How do we do our work in such conditions?

B. Methodologies and ideas arising as an answer to the new reality

- Main strategy of planning and implementing new set of actions to this changing environment is Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- Main principles of PAR that we use:
 - Participatory planning
 - Emphasis on local experience and experiential knowledge
 - Active role of the directly involved citizens
 - Combination of praxis with theory

Specific steps and methods that we follow in this new changing environment:

- ① We give emphasis to the support of self-help / mutual aid groups or citizens initiatives that aim apart from mutual aid to assertiveness and collective action.
- ② We promote horizontal collaboration and solidarity actions among various groups with different problems (e.g. Network of various associations for physical health problems in northern Greece) .
- ③ Systematic recording of local paradigms in order to be used as guide for new interventions in different areas.
 - Formation of instruments (e.g. manuals for the creation of self-help groups) that can be enriched continuously by the systematic recording and the inclusion of the local experiences.

Specific steps and methods that we follow in this new changing environment:

- Introducing and educating stakeholders (self-helpers) to these ideas regarding self-help. The usage of stakeholders as educators to other stakeholders in order to diffuse their experience in different areas (e.g. Self-helpers in Greece establishing social enterprises).

Specific steps and methods that we follow in this new changing environment:

- Attempt of introducing different models of self-help/mutual aid groups in the field of addiction which are:
 - A) Adapted to local characteristics (e.g. Moderation Management Groups in Crete)
 - B) Or Based to our long term experience with addiction and self-help /mutual aid groups (e.g. formation of a model of shg that emphasizes to the existential dimensions of addiction)
 - C) Or Responding to the reality of addiction field in Greece (e.g. 12 step groups for members of substitution treatment programs)
 - D) Or Introducing self-help/mutual aid groups alternative to 12 step based groups.

Specific steps and methods that we follow in this new changing environment:

- Pilot project of self-help/mutual aid promotion in cooperation and under the auspice of Greek Ministry of Health in four Greek cities (Thessaloniki, Larisa, Chania and Sitia) where Self-Help Promotion Programs function.
- This project will be based in the principles that we have already described
- This project will be implemented in cooperation with the local public primary health care centers

Pilot project of self-help/mutual aid promotion in cooperation and under the auspice of Greek Ministry of Health

- Main aims:
- Introduction of self-help mutual aid ideas in local communities
- Establishment of different self-help/mutual aid groups and initiatives regarding physical health and/or psychosocial problems
- Interconnection of various shgs with primary health care system
- Education and informing of health practitioners (especially those working in the field of primary health care) in self-help support methodologies

Regarding the education and sensitization of health practitioners in self-help support methodologies

- Education about:
- Self-help/mutual aid philosophy and practices
- Self-Help Support Methodologies
- Provision of helping materials (manuals etc)
- Participatory Action Research
- Variety of self-help/mutual aid groups in different areas

Characteristics of the health professionals for a more community oriented self-help support

- ⦿ Acknowledgement of the for a shift to health professionals' roles to the adaptation of more collaborating roles.
- ⦿ The health professionals focus on the right that people have to self determination, on their empirical knowledge and on the value of self activation.
- ⦿ Emphasis on the values of the relationship between health professional and the directly involved people.

Final thoughts:

- ① The significance of the basic values of self-help movement as a guide to this changing environment
- ① A wider definition of self-help/mutual aid when we are referring to community oriented projects?
- ① Self-help/mutual aid groups or initiatives and citizens' movements based on solidarity. Hopes and dangers.