Editor's note

Psychology, education and mental health in special times

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Abstract

Periodically the world is confronting with special situations. Pandemics affected the population a few times until now in the history of humankind, but the current situation seems to be more special in the context of the increased liberty of humanity in the last 20 years or so. According to a few theoretical-experimental approaches applied to the present situation, one could observe that the psychological development and, implicitly, the mental balance has been affected more in this pandemic period than in others.

The paper analyzes a few effects of the imposed social limitations on human psychological dynamics.

Keywords: pandemic; personality; development; psychology; education

1. Introduction

The current period has brought many changes accompanied by tensions, in the conditions of an unexpected pandemic. People found themselves quite suddenly in new situations, being forced to face major changes professionally and, often, to mix the professional space with the family one. At the same time, the predominant mode of socialization has shifted from face-to-face relationships to online socialization, and leisure activities (travel, vacations, hiking, visits, etc.) have been extremely limited. What effects do these changes have on the human mind?

2. Approaches applied to actual times

If we apply to these changes in our existence some theoretical-experimental approaches that have proved their special value over time, we would probably notice the major impact on the human mind.

2.1. A psycho-social approach

Erik Erikson suggested that personality development is achieved through the interaction between the individual and the social (Vasile, 2014). In his theory, Erikson shows that, at different stages of development, there are opposite directions in the evolution of personality, focused on the individual's relationships with other members of society. Depending on how it develops the relationship between the individual and society, the personality goes towards one of the two directions.

The central thesis of this theory is that the developmental potential of the individual acquires fulfillment throughout his existence, each stage being open to a new psychosocial acquisition as a result of a developmental crisis.

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We will analyze here, briefly, what could happen considering the current social limitations, in some of the eight stages of development described by Erikson:

- In early childhood (1-3 years) the individual can develop autonomy or, conversely, dependence on others according to the way of interaction with the social world. The new physical challenges he faces can sustain his confidence or simply make him feel incapable. During this period it will be established the general attitude with which the child will go on. Given the prolonged limitation of social interactions and, as such, the lack of social experiences, the probability of a child developing more dependence on the family is increased.
- In the period of 3-6 years, the personality dynamics is characterized by the antagonism between initiative and guilt. But the initiative can be developed by experimenting in social situations, especially in kindergarten. Lack of social experience can not lead to guilt but can slow down / delay or even block the integration of one of the two directions.
- During adolescence, the individual needs multiple social experiences so he effectively integrate the antagonism between identity and role confusion. Prolonged limitation of social experiences (through the limitations imposed by authorities during the pandemic) can only lead to the development of a personality full of confusion.
- In adulthood (35-60 years), there is an antagonism between achievement and routine. However, when the professional life is mixed with the family one (through work at home) the personality system could ineffectively integrate this period.

In his approach to the life cycles and seasons, Daniel Levinson considers that human life is built around two major directions: family and profession (Vasile, 2014). Sometimes there is a third direction (hobbies). In the area of mental health (counseling, psychotherapy) it is known the lack of boundaries between professional and family life leads to problems, with a few exceptions. However, the current period has forced people to mix the two directions, and this has led to a consistent increase in destructive stress in the first year of pandemic limitations.

2.2. A moral approach

Lawrence Kohlberg considers that moral judgment develops between childhood and adolescence (Vasile, 2014). However, moral norms can be internalized mainly in the social context, which means that to reach the sedimentation of one's own value system, an individual needs social experiences. The social limitations imposed by the authorities can lead to the delay in fixing a personal system of values. Moreover, brain plasticity differs during childhood from adolescence and adulthood, which can seriously affect the forming of "moral" nervous paths and, implicitly the set of moral norms.

2.3. A socio-cognitive approach

L.S. Vygotsky considers that cognitive development takes place under socio-cultural influences (Vasile, 2014). Vygotsky considered that the child's development is achieved thanks to the means offered to him by his social environment in multiple social interactions. Development involves a permanent play between intrapsychic and interpsychic (interindividual) processes, training the subject to internalize what he learns with the help of someone else.

Although the official educational mediator is during this period the teacher, the mediation is mostly done online, which greatly changes the rules and implications of the educational process. The teacher can no longer manage attendance at classes in an efficient way, and education begins to transform from a relationship with two actors (teacher-student) into a largely one-way activity. This influences not only the educational process but also the social group formed in the educational environment.

3. Discussions

Discussing these approaches in the new context of limiting social interactions can help us understand how mental balance and educational activity can be affected by the hasty decisions of the authorities.

Requests for intervention in cases of anxiety disorders and stress reactions have increased in the last year, and the problems resulting from the limitations imposed by the authorities have reached alarming levels (Panchal et al., 2021). The negative implications are becoming overwhelming in education and the area of mental health, but, unfortunately, few studies draw attention to these results.

The natural dynamic of the society is facing now issues in the social, moral, and cognitive development area, both at the individual and societal level.

References

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