BELGRADE e-SYMPOSIUM ON CRISIS, DISASTER AND TRAUMA PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIAL GROUP FUNCTIONING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BORIS KORDIĆ

INTRODUCTION

- Demonstrate unconscious functioning at the level of large social groups during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Hans-Jürgen Wirth (2021) – important social psychological factors in coping with collective crises:
  - A certain "readiness to fear" and the ability to worry and to concern
  - The feeling of trust - it is essential that we can trust the leaders to cognitively manage these processes, that they do not lie to the population, and that they make well-considered decisions

AUTHORITY OF THE LEADERS

- political leaders are people too, they are also vulnerable, susceptible to panic, group pressures, urgent demands, etc.
- state leaders began to imitate one another in adoption of measures against the pandemic
- Zachary Green & David McCallum (2020) analyse the collective psychological stages of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis

THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN CONTAGION RESPONSE

- Pre-Contagion
  - ignorance - avoiding behaviors (I don't want to know)
  - indifference - the fact that infection exists cannot be avoided but there is no emotional investment (I don't care)
  - denial - the infection is recognized as a danger but attempts are made to deny it in order to prevent the onset of fear (it's not here)
- Contagion
- Post-Contagion

THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN CONTAGION RESPONSE

- Contagion
  - contamination - blame others for the contagion
    (We got it from “them”)
  - panic - the contagion of fear dominates the mind of the collective leading to poor, often counter-productive, even destructive decision making (Anyone can be contagious)
  - chaos - efforts at control of the contagion can also be seen as planting seeds for totalitarian rule rather than responsible public health mitigation measures (We can’t do without others)
  - containment

THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN CONTAGION RESPONSE

- containment - maturing of new ideas that will be translated into activities aimed at adopting new norms in social behavior, (We are in this together)

- Post-Contagion
  - isolation - norms of “self-isolation” and “social distancing”, opportunity for reflection and refinement of one’s orientation to the world
  - emergence - a rapid return to human contact
  - return/renewal - restoration at the level of the self, family and institutions where trust was eroded and recovery challenged

GROUP FUNCTIONING

- sophisticated functioning (Bion, 1961)
  - working groups, on a conscious level of behavior, aimed at achieving goals in reality
- regressive, primitive functioning
  - groups of basic assumptions, on an unconscious level, aimed at solving problems related to the emotional life of the group
- it is ideal if the dynamics of the basic assumption do not interfere with conscious functioning but support it

EXAMPLES of ba during pandemic

- categories of basic assumptions are dependence, fight-flight, and pairing
  - a manifestation of instinctual wishes and drives related to attachment, aggression, and sexuality (Erlich, 2001)
- baD - dependence on the recommendations of the World Health Organization, government agencies, crisis staffs, virologists, epidemiologists, ...

or unreliable authorities who offered salvation through various advices on the use of medicines, ...

EXAMPLES of ba during pandemic

- baF - locating the „the invisible enemy“ potencialy in any human being and keeping your distance

or directing anger and hatred toward returnees, pet owners, irresponsible population that moves freely in parks and the like

- baP - hopes that vaccination will solve the problem

or beleive in fake pandimic

FAILURE OF ba

- Hopper (2003) – failure of a basic assumption within the social unconscious of a group evoke and exacerbating anxieties of annihilation
  - focuse on survival
- ba Incohesion (aggregation and massification)
  - the individual member is to become a colluding member
  - sanctions for “thinking one’s own thoughts”

LEADERS IN TIME OF CRISIS

- need for proactive and progressive behavior
- the connection of citizens and political leaders
- the ability to worry and to concern
- example from Germany:
  - after nuclear crisis in Fukushima German population joined the demands of the anti-nuclear movement
  - Chancellor Merkel decided within four days to shut down the oldest reactors, she initiated the phase-out of nuclear power

TIME FOR DISCUSSION