

The contribution of lifelong learning in reintegrating socially vulnerable people: The case of current and former psychoactive substance users

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relation between lifelong learning and social reintegration/rehabilitation of vulnerable social groups analyzing the case of current or former of psychoactive substances. The aim of this survey is to explore current or former psychoactive substances users' attitudes, perceptions and behavior and investigate how lifelong learning can contribute to their social reintegration. Data concerning the participation incentives to reintegration programs are also obtained. The sample consists of 93 persons, aged between 17-55 years, who are members of the social reintegration and therapeutic programs of KETHEA NOSTOS KETHEA INTERVENTION, KETHEA ITHACA, KETHEA CELL, members of the Transitional School KETHEA in Athens-Greece and KETHEA graduates. The data collection tool is a questionnaire developed by European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2004). The statistical analysis results show that former users of psychotropic substances evaluate that lifelong learning helped the formation of their personality in their attempt to enter the labor market. Also, the participants believe that lifelong learning is achieved through formal (school or university), informal (at work) and non-formal learning (training sessions). Moreover, participants state that the cost of training programs, flexibility in working schedule and accurate information are important incentives for participation in lifelong learning programs.

Keywords. Social exclusion, social inclusion, lifelong learning, socially vulnerable groups, labor market, drug addiction, drug free individuals, psychotropic substances

1. Introduction

During the last years, the social exclusion of people in underprivileged groups such as poor people, long term unemployed, ex-convicts and former drug users is growing. The phenomenon of social exclusion is multidimensional; there are social, political, cultural and economic dimensions, and exclusion can appear at different levels of society. Social exclusion is directly connected to education issues, access to the labor market as well as other psychological factors (personal development, reduction of self-esteem, insecurity, etc.) of a person. Edwards et al. (2001), report that social exclusion affects human dignity, depriving people of their fundamental human rights, leading them to marginalization and therefore reinforces social inequalities.

Many researchers have dealt with the issue of vulnerable people social exclusion. Clayton (1999) argued that both the rapid changes in society and labor market and high structural unemployment levels lead to social inequalities and exclusion. By using labor as distinction criteria we can recognize the permanent labor workforce, the short-term workforce, the small entrepreneurs and those who are unemployed or excluded from the labour market. The distribution between those who are integrated in society and those who are socially

excluded is constantly changing. Brandsma (2000), argues that access and participation can be seen as key elements in the process of social exclusion or inclusion. The extent to which social groups have access to economic, socio-cultural and educational resources as well as processes for making decisions will affect the opportunities for their social integration or lead to social exclusion. There is a high risk of rising unemployment and social exclusion if a person does not have access to education and a person can't adapt to rapid technological and social changes (Kalaitzidis et al., 2011; Chalikias et al., 2011). People who need more to improve their lives are those belonging to vulnerable social groups. Attention should be paid on people's social intelligence (Chalikias, 2012; Skordoulis et al., 2014; Skordoulis et al., 2016; Tsitmideli et al., 2016) a skill to transform learning experiences and knowledge. Social intelligence can play a great role in the adoption of new data that constantly appear into the framework of a competitive social reality and labor market, in order to avoid obstacles that would lead to social exclusion. Additionally, Lanczak (2010) states that person's connection features of lifelong learning and personal welfare is particularly critical. Significant obstacles for the implementation of education process are deficiencies in basic skills, resulting to limited participation of socially excluded people in adult education (Chalikias, 2012). In addition, lifelong learning, contributes to person's integration in society in order to maintain social cohesion and also in improving psychological health and leading to an overall good condition (Pro-Skills, 2006). It must be noted that the exclusion from the labor market creates barriers, with the lack in working experience to be the most important one (Church et al, 2000). European Union's survey on citizens' views on lifelong learning (CEDEFOP, 2004), focused on the population of ex-addicts of psychotropic substances. CEDEFOP has placed lifelong learning as a primary objective EU's medium-term priorities of the period between 2003 and 2006. Thus, in an effort for the lack of comparable and comprehensive data on lifelong learning at an EU level compensation, a Eurobarometer on lifelong learning was developed. This was the first step to provide updated and innovative information from the perspective of people, recording their views on lifelong learning, their experiences, their intentions for future participation and finally their learning preferences. Another survey called Benefits of Lifelong Learning (BeLL, 2014) was conducted by the Institute of Education, University of London. The BeLL was a project funded by the EU aiming to explore the wider benefits of lifelong learning, with participants from 10 European countries. The program operated from November 1, 2011 until January 31, 2014 and the final report was submitted on 31 May 2014. The aim of BeLL was to examine the complex relationship between participation in educational activities and benefits for the welfare of the participants and the communities which they live. The investigation focused on the social benefits of learning (e.g. improving social cohesion, efficient networks, improving public health and the growing participation of citizenship) and the individual benefits of learning (improved confidence and greater self-awareness).

We believe that environmental education is an attractive field for people belonging to social vulnerable groups. Nowadays, the interest on organic agriculture is growing since it can offer an alternative, "greener" product as compared to traditional farming methods. An interesting study for the use of organic pesticides is presented by Kyriakopoulos and Doulia (2007). According to Kalaitzidis et al (2011), education in the fields of environment and agriculture is expected to play a crucial role in promoting rural development and can contribute towards sustainable farming. In the previous paper the contribution of municipalities in education is discussed. Local municipalities should take actions in establishing educational centers in order to promote social skills and knowledge of farmers and other groups of interest, in the field of environmental education and especially sustainable agriculture. Within those educational structures which will operate within the area of each municipality, people belonging to vulnerable social groups are offered a pathway towards successful integration into a local community's workspace, in the area of farming. Acquisition of knowledge on the area of biomass may also help social vulnerable people in strengthening their self-confidence in the challenges of their lives. This area is believed to attract the interest of investors and shareholders and thus create new labor positions. The interest on wooden biomass as a cheaper heating alternative has increased during the last

years, also promoted by the economic crisis, as can be seen by several studies (Chalikias et al, 2010; 2012; Kyriakopoulos et al., 2010).

In addition to the above, the purpose of this research is to properly reflect the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of people who are in the detox process of psychoactive substances and the contribution of lifelong learning to social reintegration combating social exclusion.

2. Materials and methods

The research sample consists of 93 (N = 93) KETHEA NOSTOS, KETHEA INTERVENTION, KETHEA CELL, KETHEA ITHACA Therapeutic Programs members and members of the KETHEA Transitional School in Athens and was selected by using simple/random sampling. According to the KETHEA (2014), 437 people received services from the Centres for Social Reintegration in 2013. KETHEA has established treatment programs tailored to the needs of people who differ in age, marital status, degree of involvement with substances and the kind of involvement. KETHEA is regulated by the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity Affairs.

The questionnaire was tested for its validity, which was very satisfying (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). Hypotheses test were conducted by utilizing non-parametric methods, namely chi-square test (χ^2). A formal written permission was given from the institution rehabilitation supervisor to conduct the research for the above programs. The permission was given after a written request to the Department of KETHEA Research which is also responsible for the research conducted at the institution. Then a cooperation protocol was signed, with the terms and conditions set by the operator. With the cooperation therapeutic programs instructors, the questionnaires were handed out to respondents. Questionnaires were either integrated into the group therapeutic sessions in order to obtain reliable responses, or in some cases were given out individually, during private sessions.

3. Results

Concerning the sample demographics, the average age of the participants was 33.2 years, with the youngest respondent to be 17 years old and the oldest one 55 years old, while an 81.3% of the respondents were males and an 18.7% were females.(fig. 1)



Fig.1: Gender (sample demographics)

Concerning the marital status, the 87% of the respondents were single while the 13% declared to be married. (fig.2)

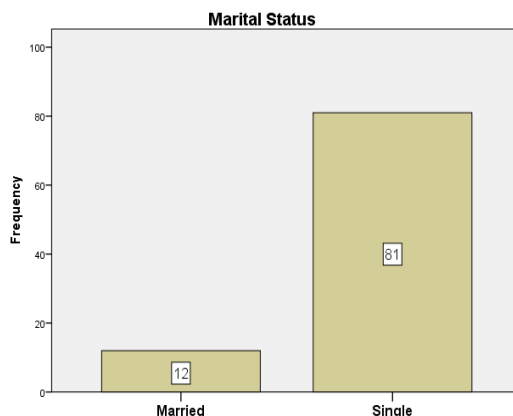


Fig. 2: Marital Status (sample demographics)

By looking at the educational level of the sample we obtained the following results: 14% have completed compulsory education and 61.3% have completed secondary education. Furthermore, a 16.1% of the respondents have completed a post-secondary education while a 6.5% have a higher education degree.

Concerning the question stating 'I have started or resumed education or training within the last year', a percentage of 50% of the sample stated that they have done so, while 44% haven't done so. In their professional status, 58% were unemployed and 36% were employed as private employees. A percentage of 5% stated that they are freelancer or entrepreneur and a very small percentage of 1% declared to be farmers. Concerning unemployment period which is a critical topic, this is counted from the introduction of the people to the stage of social reintegration after they have completed their primary treatment phase. This is because at the main treatment phase they can't work, so they are in fact unemployed and the time period of stay in unemployment varies from person to person. Thus, the average unemployment period is 7.4 months for the 54 unemployed participants in the sample.

Concerning samples opinion on questions concerning lifelong learning, the results are summarized in table 1. The most important findings are that respondents consider lifelong learning suitable for everyone and also place emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning for living satisfaction and fulfillment.

Table 1: Respondents opinion on Lifelong learning (maximum is 5)

Sample opinions on Lifelong learning (maximum is 5)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lifelong learning is for everyone	4,19	1,035
Lifelong learning is important for someone to live a full and satisfying life	4,16	,825
Lifelong learning contributes to the improvement of work and career prospects	4,15	,722

Lifelong learning helps people make changes in their professional lives	4,08	,783
Lifelong learning is important for social reasons.	3,99	,866
Lifelong learning is important to improve the lives of socially vulnerable people	3,94	1,019
Lifelong learning allows people to take their lives in their hands	3,94	,942
Lifelong learning helps people to cope with rapid changes in society and economy	3,91	,917
Lifelong learning is important for economic reasons	3,81	,958
Lifelong learning helps people avoid unemployment	3,73	1,143
Lifelong learning is mainly for people who have not finished school	2,61	1,234
Lifelong learning is mainly for middle-aged	1,92	,947
Lifelong learning is only for the young	1,89	,902
Valid N (listwise)	93	

The relationship of lifelong learning in shaping the personality of people in the case study, the insertion to the labor market, and efficiency at the work place and maintaining this were investigated. Chi-Square test was used for hypothesis testing.

Initially, a hypothesis test was performed between the variables lifelong learning contribution to a subjects personality and the variables (a) lifelong learning importance, (b) lifelong learning allows individuals to take life in to their own live, and (c) lifelong learning helps individuals to cope with the rapid changes of the community. The chi-square test revealed a statistical significant relation between lifelong learning contribution to the personality and all three other the variables. The chi-square test index, confirmed the relation at a 99% confidence level.

Next a hypothesis test was carried out between the variable lifelong learning contributes to the entry in the labor market and the variables (a) lifelong learning is important in the sense that it improves life quality of social vulnerable groups, and (b) lifelong learning helps individuals to cope with the rapid changes of the community. The chi-square test revealed a statistical significant relation between lifelong learning contribution to labor market entry with both the other variables. The chi-square confirmed the relation at a 99% confidence level.

Finally, a hypothesis test examined the relationship between, lifelong learning contributes to job efficacy and also contributes to maintaining the job and (a) lifelong learning is important in the sense that it improves life quality of social vulnerable groups, (b) lifelong learning allows individuals to take life in to their own lives, (c) lifelong learning helps individuals to cope with the rapid changes of the community, and (d) lifelong learning has a significant impact on the subject's income. The chi-square test resulted to a p-value <0.01; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative one was confirmed leading to a statistical significant relation for the four tests conducted.

4. Conclusions

The research results show that almost half of the participants have started or repeated an education or training program during the last year. The participants views on how an individual is able to acquire knowledge utilizing formal, non-formal and informal learning, school or university, educational seminars, training programs, the workplace learning, and their interaction with other people is evaluated. Our results are

compatible with Sabates (2008) who argues that training related to work can have a significant impact improving people's skills and so the prospect of wages in the labor market. UNICE (2000) states that companies are increasingly looking to introduce flexible work organization models. Companies are willing to maximize and develop the skills of their workforce. Training should therefore be provided in a flexible way, integrating different forms (on the job training, informal learning, use of new technologies, etc.). So it is priority that the training investment should keep pace with the needs of the company as part of an overall strategy.

Hypotheses tests showed a significant correlation between lifelong learning and the formation of the personality of the people in this case studies, as all three research hypotheses rejected the null hypothesis and confirmed the alternative ones. The results are similar to the findings of Feinstein et al. (2008), who states that the benefits of lifelong learning can be traced to the formation of one's personality and in particular to its toughness, social and communication skills, self-concept and self-efficacy, which can be defined as a person's confidence on its ability to solve a problem or perform a task. It was also clear that there is significant statistical correlation between lifelong learning and entry into labor market, as three research hypotheses rejected the null hypothesis and confirmed the alternative one. Sabates (2008) also states that the benefits of learning in employment have been proved, both for obtaining qualifications and basic skills improvement. He also states that lifelong learning has an important role in: (a) maintaining the skills of the workforce, (b) upgrading the skills of people with the greatest need to increase their employability and (c) reinforcing adults to acquire new skills to find job in other fields. These statements should be taken into account as human resource plays an important role in modern firms' performance (Skordoulis et al., 2015). Finally, hypotheses tests showed a significant statistical correlation between the impact of lifelong learning on job efficiency and maintaining this job position. UNICE (2000), argues that lifelong learning must be oriented to the needs of the companies. This means that employees must be equipped with a range of qualifications and skills that are parallel to the needs of employers. It should also be mentioned that this research could be continued by including a larger sample and other therapeutic frameworks and models.

Taking into account the dynamics of lifelong learning process, a repetition of the investigation is proposed, collecting data that will show the evolution of these results or simply verify them. In addition to this, it is necessary to carry out similar research on other groups that are also at a risk of social exclusion such as ex-convicts and immigrants, to identify and record the needs and conditions under which they live. Finally, it is important to take into consideration the patient's satisfaction from the programs they take part, as their satisfaction measurement is fundamental for the improvement of the services provided to them (Pothos et al., 2014; Drosos et al., 2015).

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