Poster presentation

Social representations of mental illness in Leros Island

V Valma*, A Tempeli, E Sakellari, V Langari, A Loretzou, M Tsafou and G Konstantakopoulos

Address: KLIMAKA – Department of Research and Development
* Corresponding author

Background
The social representation functions like an interpretative system of the reality and rules the relations of people with their physical and social environment. The representation is an action guide that directs behaviors and practices. Future workers of Klimaka's boarding houses were trained for two weeks at the Psychiatric Hospital of Leros. During this period they contacted a research trying to investigate how the residents feel about all those changes that occurred at the hospital during de-institulization and how they feel about the reality that patients live now among them in the community. One additional aim of this research was to place these future workers in a research activity and to make them think about possible problems they may have to face when they go to work.

Material and Methods
The main instrument for this research was a very simple questionnaire. Particularly for the study of social representation there was an open question in the questionnaire of free associations. Subjects were asked "what comes in your mind when you hear about mental illness". This method allows the emersions of unsaid elements, which may be obscured behind verbal derivations that arise from discussions. The analysis is based on Verges (1987) methodology that uses three indicators to decide for the core and the peripheral elements of the social representation: the frequency of a topic in the population, the appearance order in the free association, and its importance for the asked subjects.

Results
In the core of the representation we found the elements: Psychiatric Hospital, problem, medication and fear.

Peripheral elements are: need for care, love, fear, madness, sickness, sadness, schizophrenia, sorrow and others that appeared less frequent in these free associations. The core elements are the most stable and tough elements of the representation, the ones that assure its duration when the representation stands in moving and evolutionary frames. The core elements are purely social and connected with historical, sociological and ideological assumptions. The peripheral elements are the main content of the representation, the most accessible part, the most vivid and most specific.

Discussion
These elements contain gathered informations, selected and interpreted, formed judgments about the object and its context, stereotypes and reliance. First of all they are behavioral ethics and attitudes of the subject.