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Επιστημονική Έκδοση του Συνδέσμου Κοινωνικών
Λειτουργών Ελλάδος ΝΠΔΔ ΣΚΛΕ

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Αγαπητές Αναγνώστριες και Αγαπητοί Αναγνώστες,

Με ιδιαίτερη χαρά σας καλωσορίζουμε στο τρίτο και τελευταίο τεύχος του έτους 2025 του **Περιοδικού Κοινωνική Εργασία - Επιθεώρηση Κοινωνικών Επιστημών**, το οποίο αφορά στους μήνες **Σεπτέμβριο – Δεκέμβριο 2025**.

Όπως κάθε τεύχος, έτσι και το παρόν αποσκοπεί στη συμβολή στον ευρύτερο επιστημονικό διάλογο γύρω από σύγχρονα ζητήματα θεωρητικού και εφαρμοσμένου προβληματισμού. Οι εργασίες και οι βιβλιοπαρουσιάσεις που θα μελετήσετε συγκροτούν ένα πεδίο γόνιμου επιστημονικού διαλόγου, αναδεικνύοντας τόσο τις τρέχουσες προκλήσεις όσο και διαχρονικά ερευνητικά και μεθοδολογικά ερωτήματα επάνω σε αυτές. Μέσα από τεκμηριωμένες προσεγγίσεις, η ύλη του τεύχους επιδιώκει να ενισχύσει την κριτική σκέψη και να διευρύνει τη συζήτηση γύρω από θεματικές σύγχρονης προβληματικής.

Το πρώτο άρθρο, με τίτλο «**The interplay of religion, spirituality, and attitudes towards trans and bisexual identities: Insights from health and social science students**», του Pentaris, εστιάζει στην περίπλοκη σχέση μεταξύ θρησκείας, πνευματικότητας και ατόμων που αυτοπροσδιορίζονται ως τρανς ή αμφιφυλόφιλοι. Η μελέτη του Pentari διερευνά σε ποιο βαθμό η θρησκεία, η θρησκευτικότητα και η πνευματικότητα προβλέπουν αρνητικές στάσεις απέναντι στις τρανς ταυτότητες και την αμφιφυλοφιλία.

Το δεύτερο άρθρο, με τίτλο **«Migration, refugeeness and old age: Intergenerationality and social support as factors of cultural adaptation»**, των Kolokythas, Dritsas, Mentis, και Nikolaou, εξετάζει τον ρόλο της διαγενεακότητας και της κοινωνικής υποστήριξης στην πολιτισμική προσαρμογή των ηλικιωμένων προσφύγων και μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα. Τα εν λόγω άτομα συχνά αντιμετωπίζουν πολλαπλές προκλήσεις, ενώ τα ευρήματα της έρευνας υπογραμμίζουν τη σημασία της βελτίωσης των συνθηκών διαβίωσης και της κοινωνικής συμμετοχής τους, υποδηλώνοντας ότι η ποιότητα ζωής είναι το κλειδί για την επιτυχή πολιτισμική προσαρμογή.

Τέλος το τρίτο άρθρο με τίτλο **«Enhancing intercultural interactions in primary schools: An ecosystemic School Social Work intervention with Roma and non-Roma students»**, αφορά στη μελέτη της Mitropoulou, η οποία διερευνά την επίδραση ενός πολυεπίπεδου, οικοσυστημικού προγράμματος παρέμβασης, που σχεδιάστηκε με στόχο την ενίσχυση των διαπολιτισμικών σχέσεων και τη μείωση της κοινωνικής απόστασης μεταξύ μαθητών Ρομά και μη στο δημοτικό σχολείο. Τα ευρήματα καταδεικνύουν ότι οι δομημένες οικοσυστημικές παρεμβάσεις, όπως υλοποιούνται μέσω της σχολικής κοινωνικής εργασίας, μπορούν να ενισχύσουν ουσιαστικά τη διαπολιτισμική επικοινωνία, την ενσυναίσθηση και τη συνεργασία σε πολυπολιτισμικά μαθησιακά περιβάλλοντα.

Το τεύχος πλαισιώνεται, επίσης, από τρεις βιβλιοπαρουσιάσεις που εστιάζουν σε θεματικές αιχμής στην Κοινωνική Εργασία και στον χώρο των κοινωνικών επιστημών ευρύτερα.

Αρχικά **το βιβλίο της Αναπληρώτριας Καθηγήτριας Ε. Κατσαμά,** *«Κοινωνική εργασία με ομάδες στο σχολείο»*, παρουσιάζεται από την κ. Σμάρω Μάρκου, Κοινωνική Λειτουργό και

Οικογενειακή Θεραπεύτρια. Το βιβλίο καλύπτει το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο της κοινωνικής εργασίας με ομάδες και επιδιώκει να συνεισφέρει στον σχεδιασμό και την εφαρμογή ομαδικών παρεμβάσεων στον χώρο της εκπαίδευσης, οι οποίες θα αποκρίνονται με επάρκεια σε ανάγκες πρόληψης και έγκαιρης αντιμετώπισης ιδιαίτερων γεγονότων και δυσκολιών. Επιπλέον καταδεικνύει την αναπόσπαστη σχέση θεωρίας και πράξης, ενώ η παρουσίαση παραδειγμάτων ενισχύει σημαντικά τις γνώσεις αναφορικά με τη λειτουργία των ομάδων και τη διαδικασία μέσα από την οποία τα μέλη υιοθετούν συγκεκριμένους ρόλους, προτείνοντας λειτουργικούς τρόπους διαχείρισης.

Κατσαμά, Ε. (2024). Κοινωνική εργασία με ομάδες στο σχολείο. Τόπος.

Για το βιβλίο του Brian Watermeyer «Αναπλαισιώνοντας την Ψυχολογία του Μισαναπηρισμού», ο κ. Θεολόγος Χατζηπέμου, Επίκουρος Καθηγητής στο Τμήμα Κοινωνικής Εργασίας του Πανεπιστημίου Δυτικής Αττικής, παρουσιάζει μια τεκμηριωμένη βιβλιοπαρουσίαση, αναδεικνύοντας τη θεωρητική συμβολή του έργου στην κριτική κατανόηση του μισαναπηρισμού και στη σύνδεσή του με τις σύγχρονες προσεγγίσεις για τα ανθρώπινα δικαιώματα, την κοινωνική ένταξη και την αποδόμηση των στερεοτύπων στον εκπαιδευτικό και κοινωνικό χώρο. Το βιβλίο, στην ελληνική του έκδοση σε επιμέλεια των Μπίμπου και Κουγιουμουτζάκη, αποτελεί μία από τις πιο ριζοσπαστικές απόπειρες αποδόμησης της κυρίαρχης παραδοσιακής ματιάς πάνω στην αναπηρία.

Watermeyer, B. (2023). Αναπλαισιώνοντας την Ψυχολογία του Μισαναπηρισμού. Routledge.

Τέλος, στο τεύχος θα βρείτε βιβλιοπαρουσίαση και για το βιβλίο της Nancy Boyd Webb, «Εφαρμογές Κοινωνικής Εργασίας σε Παιδιά», σε επιμέλεια του Επίκουρου Καθηγητή του Τμήματος Επιστημών της Εκπαίδευσης και Κοινωνικής Εργασίας του Παν/μίου Πατρών, Μ. Μέντη. Την βιβλιοπαρουσίαση κάνει ο κ. Τόγκας Κωνσταντίνος, Συντάκτης του Περιοδικού. Το εν λόγω σύγγραμμα προσφέρει έναν πρακτικό οδηγό που ενδυναμώνει τις/τους επαγγελματίες να ανταποκριθούν αποτελεσματικά στις σύνθετες και διαρκώς εξελισσόμενες ανάγκες των παιδιών, αφού πραγματεύεται ένα ολιστικό πλαίσιο κατανόησης και παρέμβασης στην εργασία με παιδιά, δίνοντας ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στην πρόληψη της παιδικής κακοποίησης, με την ανάδειξη των προστατευτικών παραγόντων και την προώθηση της ενεργούς υποστήριξης των οικογενειών.

Boyd Webb, N. (2025). Εφαρμογές Κοινωνικής Εργασίας σε Παιδιά (Μ. Μέντης, Επιμ.). Gotsis.

Πριν από την ολοκλήρωση του παρόντος προλογικού σημειώματος, κρίνεται απαραίτητη η αναφορά σε μία ιδιαίτερης σημασίας και ευρείας απήχησης εκδήλωση, η οποία πραγματοποιήθηκε τον Νοέμβριο και ήταν αφιερωμένη στο Περιοδικό μας. Η εκδήλωση, με τίτλο «Διαδρομές Θεωρίας, Έρευνας & Πρακτικής», ανέδειξε, μέσα από τη συμμετοχή διακεκριμένων ομιλητών και ομιλητριών, τη διαχρονική πορεία και εξέλιξη του Περιοδικού, από την έκδοση του πρώτου τεύχους έως τη σύγχρονη φάση της δυναμικής ψηφιακής του παρουσίας. Παράλληλα, αποδόθηκε τιμή στους/στις κοινωνικούς/ές λειτουργούς, μέλη του

ΣΚΛΕ, οι οποίοι/ες, με αφοσίωση και όραμα, συνέβαλαν καθοριστικά στη διάδοση, τη θεμελίωση και την επιστημονική κατοχύρωση της Κοινωνικής Εργασίας σε μια περίοδο κατά την οποία το πεδίο συγκροτούνταν τόσο ως επιστημονικός κλάδος όσο και ως επαγγελματική πρακτική στη χώρα μας. Η εκδήλωση αυτή δεν αποτέλεσε απλώς έναν αναστοχασμό του παρελθόντος, αλλά μια δημιουργική συνάντηση γενεών, η οποία ενίσχυσε τη συλλογική επαγγελματική ταυτότητα και ανανέωσε το κοινό όραμα για τη συνεχή εξέλιξη της επιστήμης και του επαγγέλματος της Κοινωνικής Εργασίας.

Κλείνοντας, το Περιοδικό μας ολοκληρώνει για ακόμη μία χρονιά έναν δημιουργικό κύκλο εκδόσεων, επιβεβαιώνοντας τη σταθερή και δυναμική του πορεία στη διακίνηση της επιστημονικής γνώσης και στον γόνιμο δημόσιο διάλογο. Η συνέχιση αυτού του έργου δεν θα ήταν δυνατή χωρίς τη συμβολή του εκδότη, των συντακτών/τριών, των συγγραφέων και φυσικά των αναγνωστών/τριών μας, τους/τις οποίους/οποίες θερμά ευχαριστούμε για τη διαρκή εμπιστοσύνη και υποστήριξή τους.

Με τη σκέψη στραμμένη στις προκλήσεις και τις προοπτικές της νέας χρονιάς, ευχόμαστε ολόψυχα Καλά Χριστούγεννα και ένα δημιουργικό, ειρηνικό και ελπιδοφόρο Νέο Έτος, με υγεία, συλλογικότητα και επιστημονική έμπνευση για όλους/όλες. Ευχόμαστε το νέο έτος να αποτελέσει αφετηρία νέων ιδεών, γόνιμων συνεργασιών και ουσιαστικής προόδου για την επιστημονική κοινότητα και το Περιοδικό μας.

Με εκτίμηση,
Η Διευθύντρια Σύνταξης
Κωνσταντίνα Σκλάβου

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The interplay of religion, spirituality, and attitudes towards trans and bisexual identities: insights from health and social science students

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ABSTRACT

The relationship of religion, spirituality and individuals self-identifying as transgender or bisexual is a complicated one, while religious beliefs tend to inform attitudes towards trans identities and bisexuality. This study takes the latter as its starting point and explores the extent to which religion, religiosity and spirituality predict negative attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality. With a probability sampling technique, 597 health and social science students were recruited. The hierarchical regression analysis of the data showed that religious attitudes, age, and political opinion have a significant predicting effect on attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality, as well as indirect effects of attitudes towards trans and bisexual identities. The study also showed that the effect of religion and religiosity on the attitudes toward trans identities also affects the attitudes toward bisexuality, and vice versa. These findings add to the current body of literature but separate trans identities and bisexuality as worthy areas of direct exploration and not categories merged with the overall umbrella of gender and sexual diversity, commonly referred to by the variations of the acronym LGBTQIA+.

Key-words: bisexual, transgender, gender and sexual diversity, religion, politics

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Background

Literature has at large articulated the many and complicated ways in which LGBTQIA+-identified individuals pursue their religious identities (e.g. Kidd & Witten, 2008); manage the contradictions between gender and/or sexual, and religious identities of their own (e.g. Levy & Lo, 2013); and make use of their religious identities as coping mechanisms to overcome difficulties and challenges associated with socio-political and psycho-emotional impacts of how societies respond to their gender and/or sexual identity (e.g. Levy & Lo, 2013). Research has also highlighted that religion and faith, when essentialist in nature, often predicts negative views towards LGBTQIA+ people (e.g. Compare et al., 2024).

Kidd and Witten (2008) found that female-to-male transgender individuals express religion, religiosity, and spirituality differently from their counterparts. This study highlights the need to recognise the variability in understanding faith and beliefs and advocates for belief-specific examinations. It challenges normative views and explores the intersection of faith, sexuality and gender diversity. Transgender, transexual, or gender queer individuals identifying as Christian face unique challenges in integrating their faith and gender (Ghazzawi et al., 2020; Levy & Lo, 2013). Levy and Lo (2013) and Couch (2021) suggested these individuals often reconceptualise their faith through their gender identity, recognising a fluid relationship between the two. Their experiences with socialisation and defiance of gender norms are key in their dual identity as transgender and Christian. Current research acknowledges that these experiences are influenced by socio-political environment that either support or hinder the balance between identities.

Etengoff and Rodriguez (2020) argued that transgender Muslims often experience multiple forms of minority stress, including religious, gender and ethnic minority identities. However, they also found that religion and spirituality serve as coping mechanisms for these individuals. Lefevor et al. (2023) reported that sexual minorities from conservative religious backgrounds experience significant distress and difficulty integrating their faith with their gender or sexual identity. There is limited information on the origins of these difficulties, but existing knowledge about the global disenfranchisement of LGBTQIA+ and reports of hate crimes, such as the 2016 Pulse nightclub massacre, suggest that internalised homophobia and fear exacerbate his distress.

Attitudes by religion

In geographies with a more radical socio-political context, like Iran, the tensions between traditional faith and gender identity are heightened. Najmabadi (2011) examined the varied attitudes toward sexuality and transgender people in Iran, and concluded with an acknowledgment that Islam and transsexuality, as well as trans identities are incompatible when the former is perceived in its traditional and non-conforming form.

Not dissimilar, Rosenkrantz et al. (2020) report on a study about the association of cognitive-effective experiences and religious values with parental responses to a child's non-heteronormative and/or non-gendernormative identity, inclusive of transgender and bisexual. The study found, among other results, that lower levels of religious fundamentalism and religiosity are positively correlated with higher levels of acceptance of children's identities that do not fit in normative standards. A link is drawn here between religious fundamentalism and conspiracy theories (Bronstein et al., 2019), based on which, we can hypothesise that heightened conspiracy theories might lead to higher levels of negative attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality.

In a cross-cultural analysis, Elischberger et al. (2018) found that political views and religious beliefs are directly linked with people's attitudes toward transgender-identified individuals. Yet, whether the attitudes are negative or positive depends on the cultural context in which they are found. In particular, Elischberger et al. found that the contrast between Westernised and non-Westernised countries is bold, and religious and political conservatism are more intense in the former.

A recent and most telling literature review by Campbell et al. (2019) shed further light in the correlations between religion, religiosity and transgender, as well as gender-variant people. This review revealed that identities such as 'religious', 'Christian', and rarely 'Muslim' are associated with transprejudice. Similarly, forms of religiosity like religious fundamentalism, church attendance and literal

interpretations from the bible associate with negative views of and attitudes toward transgender people.

Research has already shown us that specific religious groups, such as evangelical Christians, view transgender-identified individuals of lower class than all others in society (Kanamori et al., 2019). Such findings are widespread in literature and often challenge the tendencies to avoid generalisations. Primarily, evidence in this area comes to challenge, in this case, evangelical Christian principles like that of human dignity. In their study, Kanamori et al. (2019) attempt to understand the disconnect between the two (i.e. principles of human dignity and view that transgender people are lower class citizens). Similar to previously mentioned studies, religious fundamentalism and traditionalism were linked with negative attitudes, while women appeared to show more compassion toward transgender-identified individuals.

Religiosity, political beliefs and feminist views also predict negative attitudes toward LGBTQIA+-identified people (Worthen, et al., 2017) and at times associated with service delivery, like healthcare (Roe et al., 2022). De Bruin and Arndt (2010) also found increased negative attitudes toward bisexuality based on religiosity and religious beliefs. Similarly, Hertlein et al. (2016) opined that heterosexuality and conservatively religious views are predictors of prejudice and biases towards bisexuality.

At large, literature is highlighting the undeniable links between religiosity, religious identity and attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality. Of course, we cannot claim abundant research in this area as research with transgender and bisexual individuals is only a recent achievement. The disenfranchisement of such identities, which changes from place to place, has not allowed for many explorations, while the beginning of those was neither critical social research nor empowerment research. To be precise, when the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto started researching into trans identities, in 1993, the main concern was to find out 'what makes people transgender'. Similarly, the psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1975) set the tone for exploring sex and gender through a heteronormative and pathologizing lens. Only in the last two decades have we seen more work that is not built on pre-conceived stereotypes or essentialist views.

Even though this study is not concerned with essentialist beliefs, it is worth noting the following, given the frequency by which religious views are associated with essentialist beliefs (Prothero, 2020). A recent study (Hubbard & de Visser, 2015) found that heterosexual-identified individuals, lesbians and gay men viewed bisexuality to be somewhat of an unstable state. The same study found that heterosexual-identified persons hold the essentialist view of discreteness about all sexual minorities or minoritized groups. The connections between essentialist beliefs and negative attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality are evident, while the links with religious beliefs (Prothero, 2020) and/or conspiracy theories (Bilewicz et al., 2015; Van Prooijen, 2018) are uncanny not to consider.

Religious fundamentalism, gender and sexuality essentialism, conspiracy theories, and the politics of religion are interrelated phenomena that often reinforce each other. Religious fundamentalism highlights adherence to specific doctrines, often rejecting modernism and promoting traditional gender roles and sexual norms, for example. This rigidity aligns with gender and sexual essentialism, which posits that gender and sexual identities are biologically determined (Wood & Eagly, 2015). Both perspectives resist social change and the acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities altogether, thus fostering environments where these identities are marginalised. Furthermore, conspiracy theories often thrive in fundamentalist contexts, as both involve a distrust of mainstream narratives and institutions (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Such theories further entrench essentialist views of gender and sexuality by presenting them as under threat from external enemies.

The politics of religion plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Political actors may exploit religious fundamentalism and essentialist ideologies to gain support, framing themselves as defenders of traditional values against perceived threats (Appleby, 2003). This interplay between religion and politics can institutionalise discriminatory practices and policies, further marginalising non-conforming gender and sexual identities (Green, 2007).

This study considers conspiracy theories and the politics of religion to add to the current body of literature that explores how religiosity and belief influence attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality. No distinction is made between inner and outer group attitudes. The main research question

of this study is whether religiosity, religious views and beliefs predict attitudes towards transgender and bisexual identities. Specifically:

1. Do religiosity and religious beliefs predict attitudes towards transgender and bisexual identities?
2. Do spiritual beliefs predict attitudes towards transgender and bisexual identities?
3. Do religiosity, religious and spiritual views in the context of far-right politics predict negative attitudes towards transgender and bisexual identities?

New knowledge is important in these areas to help us better appreciate diversity and associated socio-cultural challenges, as well as understand how intersected identities in this area, filtered through cultural and social factors like conspiracy theories, complicate people's experiences. For the purposes of transparency, this study approaches 'religion' as the institutionalised set of traditions and practices that influence once belief system, 'faith' as a more personalised concept including subjective interpretation of religious teachings (Possamai & Blasi, 2020), and 'political views' as the set of beliefs on issues managed by governments and relevant to political action (Heywood & Chin, 2023). The study's aim is the exploration of the relationship of religion, belief, political views, and transgender and bisexual identities, while examining the prediction of attitudes towards the latter.

Method

Participants and procedure

Five hundred and ninety-seven (597) participants (Mage = 36, SDage = 6.14, 440 women; 144 men; 13 other) were recruited in the United Kingdom. The average age was 36, with 24 the youngest and 58 the oldest participant (SD: 6.2). The majority of the participants identified as White (n=401) and Black (n=124). Further, most of the participants identified as cisgender (n=543) and heterosexual (n=524), while 54 identified as non-binary or transgender, and 73 as gay, lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. Following the exclusion criteria (failing a seriousness check, Aust et al., 2013; failing an attention check, Niessen et al., 2016; reporting being clearly disturbed during the study), three participants were excluded from the initial sample size of 600 participants.

Participants were recruited via Prolific Academic (i.e., an electronic participant tool for research), compensated with £1.20 for their time to complete the survey. A random probability sampling strategy was applied for participants' recruitment. Prior to recruiting the random probability sample of university students of health and social sciences, it was ensured that the random probability sample satisfied two criteria: (a) every health or social science student registered on a programme in the country has a chance of being selected for the sample of this study; (b) the probability of selection for any health and social science student is known and can be calculated (Daniel et al., 2008). Ethical approval was granted by the University of Greenwich Research Ethics Committee in June 2020.

Sample size was calculated bearing in mind the estimation of the levels of precision and risk; the margin error (levels of precision) and levels of confidence, as well as the estimation of variance/heterogeneity of the population (Taherdoost, 2017). Additionally, the appropriate sample sizes were double checked, in order for correlations to be stabilised (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). All independent and dependent variables and measures as well as the raw data and the SPSS syntaxes can be found there. Data collection took place between July and August 2020.

Measures

Gender conspiracy beliefs scale (Marchlewska et al., 2014): This is a 3-item scale using items like "Gender ideologies were created in order to destroy the Christian tradition". Participants had to evaluate these statements on a 7-point Likert scale (from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree). Reliability of the scale in this study was good (Cronbach's a = .76).

Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (Bruder et al., 2013): This is a 5-item scale measuring participants' general tendency to believe in conspiracy theories as a consequence of their broader conspiracy mentality, using items like "Events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities". Participants had to evaluate these statements in terms of the extent to

which they believe these statements are true in a scale rating from 0% (certainly not) to 100% (certain). Reliability of the questionnaire in this study was very good (Cronbach's a=.86).

Attitudes toward religion (Joseph & DiDuca, 2007): This is a 19-item scale using items like "Everything that happens to me reminds me of God", exploring perspectives and beliefs toward religion. Participants had to evaluate these statements on a 5-point scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Reliability of the scale in this study was very good (Cronbach's a=.96).

Attitudes toward transgenderism (Walch et al., 2012): This is a 17-item scale using items like "Transgendered individuals should be accepted completely into our society". Participants had to evaluate these statements on a 7-point scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Reliability of the scale in this study was good (Cronbach's a = .79).

Attitudes toward bisexuality (Dodge et al., 2016): This is a 10-item scale (5 items first refer to women and then the same items refer to men next) using items like "I think bisexuality is just a phase for women/men". Participants had to evaluate these statements on a 7-point scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Reliability of the scale in this study was very good (Cronbach's a=.94).

Demographic information: Beyond the dependent measures described above, participants were also asked to provide information regarding their age, gender, highest educational level at the time of completion of the survey, as well as their political orientation, such as left-wing and right-wing perspectives.

Analysis

SPSS Statistics 22.0 was used for the data analysis. Descriptive analyses were performed for all variables. Zero-order correlations were performed between dependent variables to explore the link between gender conspiracy belief, religiosity, and attitudes toward transgenderism and bisexuality. To identify factors that predict attitudes toward transgender and bisexual identities, hierarchical multiple regressions were used, and the models considered gender conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy mentality as the context for the analyses.

Results

Descriptive statistics
Zero-order correlations between the dependent variables are presented in the table below.

Table 1.
Zero-order correlations between gender conspiracy theories, conspiracy mentality, attitudes toward religion, attitudes toward trans identities and attitudes toward bisexuality

	Mean	St.Deviation	1	2	3	4	5
(N = 597)							
1.Gender conspiracy beliefs	4.58	.62	1	**.18**	**.09**	-.06	.07
2.Conspiracy mentality	8.01	1.64		1	**.14**	-.05	.01
3.Attitudes toward religion	2.98	1.46			1	**.12**	**.42**
4.Attitudes toward transgenderism	3.71	.33				1	**.16**
5. Attitudes toward bisexuality	1.56	.92					1

The next two sections present results of the two hierarchical multiple regressions, where the study tested whether attitudes toward religion predict attitudes toward bisexuality (Table 2) and attitudes toward trans identities (Table 3) via gender conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy mentality in both regressions and via attitudes towards trans identities/bisexuality in the respective regression analysis.

Table 2.

Attitudes toward religion predict attitudes toward bisexuality via gender conspiracy theories, conspiracy mentality and attitudes toward trans identities

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Political orientation	.37	9.71	.01	.32	.01	.45
Age	.08	2.20	.05	1.85	.04	1.77
Attitudes toward religion			.14	4.73	.14	4.78
Attitudes toward transgenderism			.67	-	-20.6	-.67	-20.5
Gender conspiracy beliefs					-.02	-.99
Conspiracy mentality					-.01	-.48
F-change	50.71		285.33		.72	
R	.38		.75		.75	
R^2	.14		.56		.56	
R$^2\Delta$	.14		.56		.56	

Political orientation and age significantly contributed to the regression model, F (2,590) =50.17, p<.001 and R2=.14, while adding attitudes toward religion and attitudes toward trans identities led to a statistically significant increase in R2, F (2,588) =285.33, p<.001 and R2=.56. Adding gender conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy mentality in the regression model did not change R2, F (2,586) =.72, p=.48 and R2=.56. When all dependent variables were included in stage 3 of the regression model, attitudes toward religion were a significant predictor of attitudes toward bisexuality (β=-.14, t=4.78, and p<.001), as well as attitudes toward trans identities (β=-.67, t=-20.59, and p<.001). However, gender conspiracy beliefs (β=-.02, t=-.90, p=.32) and conspiracy mentality (β=-.01, t=-.48, p=.63) were not found to be significant predictors of attitudes toward bisexuality. Significant indirect effects on the relationship between attitudes toward religion and attitudes toward bisexuality were found of attitudes toward trans identities (b=.11, SE=.10, p<.05), but not of gender conspiracy beliefs (b=-.05, SE=.05, p=16), nor of conspiracy mentality (b=-.04, SE=.02, p=.25). Indirect effects can be calculated via bootstrapped mediations, and in this case, three paths were followed to calculate those. First, the measurement of the effects of the predictor (religion) on the mediator (transgender identities). Next, the effects of the mediator (transgender identities) on the outcome (bisexuality), and last, calculating the significance via the standard error and p value. These are very common techniques in calculating indirect effects with hierarchical regression.

Table 3.

Attitudes toward religion predict attitudes toward trans identities via gender conspiracy theories, conspiracy mentality and attitudes toward bisexuality

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	β	t	β	t	β	t
Political orientation	-.47	-12.9	-.21	-7.47	-.20	-7.16
Age	-.05	-1.57	-.008	-.30	-.009	-.32
Attitudes toward religion			-.08	-2.89	-.08	-2.84
Attitudes toward bisexuality					-.62	-20.5
Gender conspiracy beliefs					-.04	-1.80
Conspiracy mentality					.01	.46
F-change	86.09		271.99		1.64	
R	.47		.77		.77	
R²	.22		.59		.60	
R²Δ	.22		.59		.59	

Political orientation and age significantly contributed to the regression model, F (2,590) =86.09, p<.001 and R2=.22, while adding attitudes toward religion and attitudes toward bisexuality led to a statistically significant increase in R2, F (2,588) =271.99, p<.001 and R2=.59. Adding gender conspiracy beliefs and conspiracy mentality in the regression model led to an increase in R2, which however was not statistically significant, F (2,586) =1.64, p=.19 and R2=.60. When all dependent variables were included in stage 3 of the regression model, attitudes toward religion was a significant predictor of attitudes toward trans identities (β=-.08, t=-2.84, and p<.05), as well as attitudes toward bisexuality (β=-.62, t=-20.5, and p<.001) and marginally gender conspiracy beliefs (β=-.04, t=-1.80, p=.07), but not conspiracy mentality (β=.01, t=.46, p=.64). Significant indirect effects on the relationship between attitudes toward religion and attitudes toward trans identities were found of attitudes toward bisexuality (b=.13, SE=.01, p<.05) and marginally of gender conspiracy beliefs (b=-.07, SE=.02, p=06), but not of conspiracy mentality (b=-.05, SE=.008, p=.16). Indirect effects can be calculated via bootstrapped mediations, and in this case the measurement of the effects of the predictor (religion) on the mediator (bisexual identities, mental health and conspiracy), as well as the effects of the mediator (bisexual identities, mental health and conspiracy) on the outcome (transgender identities). The indirect significance was calculated via the standard error and p value.

Discussion

This study used regression models to explore the extent to which religion, religiosity and spirituality predict negative attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality, but considering conspiracy theories and political views and the way those inform such opinions or tendencies. Some of the findings align with previous work, but the data presented here add to the current literature by highlighting the interconnectedness of religious views, political views, and attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality. In addition to that, this study adds to the limited body of knowledge in this area and specifically about attitudes toward trans identities and bisexuality, which often is by proxy included in research about LGBTQIA+ identities, or gay men, or lesbian women.

The findings showed that attitudes toward religion, religiosity and religiously fundamental views are predictive factors for attitudes toward bisexuality and trans identities. A few studies have focused on this relationship before and tried to explore how discriminatory views against trans individuals and

bisexual people are fuelled by religious traditions, practices and beliefs. Campbell et al. (2019) reviewed systematically 28 papers exploring this very question. Their review and meta-synthesis found that there is a further variation based on the religious denomination or affiliation of those with religious views that needs to be further considered. For example, their review showed that people identifying as 'religious' or 'Christian' presented with increased transprejudice compared to those identifying as 'nonreligious'.

Furthermore, Worthen (2013) explored the dearth of information about attitudes and views toward the different groups of people included in the categorisations of LGBTQIA+, arguing that studies primarily homogenise those experiences without a fair separation of the data between these groups. Worthen's work draws on the evidence reporting on the positive relationship between religious fundamentalism, religiosity, and transphobia (Nagoshi et al., 2008) and biphobia (Herek, 2002). Similarly, this paper reports on data highlighting that this positive relationship feeds into transphobia and biphobia respectively, showing that the two go together. In other words, religiosity is positively correlated with biphobia, and this relationship has an indirect effect on attitudes toward trans people, as well, and vice versa.

Another interesting finding in this study is that of how political views and age are indicators of heightened religiosity and negative attitudes toward bisexuality. Malka et al. (2012), helpfully, set out to explore the determinant factor in the relationship between politically conservative views and religious identities, concluding that in fact it is the degree of engagement in public and private discourses about those views which emphasises the relationship with one's religiosity, which thereafter affects other views and attitudes. To complicate this more, Cohen et al. (2008) have found that race can be used as a moderator to measure the connections between conservative views, religious fundamentalism, and religiosity, highlighting that White counterparts present a much stronger relationship between their religious and political views, which appear aligned. On the other hand, Willmott (2014) found that the stronger the religious affiliation, and especially Christian views, the higher the likelihood for negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and the same was found in relation to age; the older the individual, the more likely to perceive homosexuality as something wrong. The present study adds to this literature by providing empirical evidence of the relationship both of political views and age with attitudes toward bisexuality.

What is also important to recognise is that the study's findings did not show any connections between conspiracy mentality and attitudes toward religion, religiosity, trans people, and bisexuality.

Conclusion

The relationship between religion, religiosity and homosexuality have been explored in research, in the last fifteen years, but not extensively, while the risk of homogenising experiences and new knowledge across the GSD population and placed outside of context is not mitigated. Research primarily reports on evidence relevant to gay men and lesbian women, but rarely in relation to trans identities and bisexuality. This study has added to the current body of knowledge with findings about the predictors for negative attitudes toward bisexuality and trans identities, while it found that a similar tendency is presented between the two when religious views and political opinions interject. This study lends more insights to those shaping policies and practices in order to facilitate safer spaces across sectors for GSD people, but without recommending that religion or political opinion are the cause of the negative attitudes and exclusion faced by trans and bisexual individuals. These findings open up the space for exploration in future research about how religious and political views can be negotiated without a negative impact on GSD individuals and their experiences.

Limitations

No study is free from limitations, and it is important that evidence is always received and applied with caution of its implications. The participants of this study identified primarily as women with a large number identifying as men and a small portion as 'other'. This should be taken into consideration if we are to have a robust view of the predictors of attitudes toward bisexuality and trans identities. Furthermore, the use of random probability sampling has positive impact on a randomised and unbiased

recruitment of participants. Yet, such sampling techniques may be criticised for not being able to ensure representation of the wider population, thus further studies should employ a mix of sampling techniques to ensure better representation. Lastly, this study focused on religion and religiosity but did not consider different religious affiliation to draw comparisons. Thus, the data should be received with the intent to explore further and across religious groups, affiliations and/or denominations, to increase the external validity of the study.

Data availability

All research materials have been uploaded to the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/hnxgj/?view_only=336e50e0818140feb2dabe587f9226ee).

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Η αλληλεπίδραση θρησκείας, πνευματικότητας και στάσεων απέναντι στις τρανς και αμφιφυλόφιλες ταυτότητες: επιστημονικές ενδείξεις από φοιτητές υγείας και κοινωνικών επιστημών

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η σχέση μεταξύ θρησκείας, πνευματικότητας και ατόμων που αυτοπροσδιορίζονται ως τρανς ή αμφιφυλόφιλοι είναι περίπλοκη, καθώς οι θρησκευτικές πεποιθήσεις τείνουν να επηρεάζουν τις στάσεις απέναντι στις τρανς ταυτότητες και την αμφιφυλοφιλία. Η παρούσα μελέτη διερευνά σε ποιο βαθμό η θρησκεία, θρησκευτικότητα και η πνευματικότητα προβλέπουν αρνητικές στάσεις απέναντι στις τρανς ταυτότητες και την αμφιφυλοφιλία. Με τη χρήση τεχνικής δειγματοληψίας πιθανότητας, στρατολογήθηκαν 597 φοιτητές/φοιτήτριες/φοιτητά υγείας και κοινωνικών επιστημών. Η ιεραρχική ανάλυση παλινδρόμησης των δεδομένων έδειξε ότι οι θρησκευτικές στάσεις, η ηλικία και οι πολιτικές απόψεις έχουν σημαντική προβλεπτική επίδραση στις στάσεις απέναντι στις τρανς ταυτότητες και την αμφιφυλοφιλία, καθώς και τις έμμεσες επιδράσεις μεταξύ των στάσεων αυτών. Η μελέτη έδειξε επίσης ότι η επίδραση της θρησκείας και της θρησκευτικότητας στις στάσεις απέναντι στις τρανς ταυτότητες επηρεάζει και τις στάσεις απέναντι στην αμφιφυλοφιλία, και το αντίστροφο. Τα ευρήματα αυτά εμπλουτίζουν τη σύγχρονη βιβλιογραφία, διαχωρίζοντας τις τρανς ταυτότητες και την αμφιφυλοφιλία ως πεδία άμεσης διερεύνησης και όχι ως κατηγορίες ενταγμένες κάτω από την ευρύτερη ομπρέλα της έμφυλης και σεξουαλικής ποικιλομορφίας, όπως συχνά αναφέρεται με τις παραλλαγές του ακρωνυμίου ΛΟΑΤΚΙ+.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: αμφιφυλοφιλία, τρανς, ένφυλη και σεξουαλική ποικιλομορφία, θρησκεία, πολιτική

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Migration, refugeeness and old age: Intergenerationality and social support as factors of cultural adaptation

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ABSTRACT

Migration and refugeehood are defining social phenomena that profoundly affect vulnerable populations. Elderly refugees and migrants face overlapping challenges, including unfamiliar language environments, social isolation, loss of cultural identity, and limited access to healthcare. This study investigates the role of intergenerational relationships and social support in the cultural adaptation of elderly refugees and migrants living in Greece. Drawing on both international and national research, it underscores the significance of family bonds and community networks in fostering psychological resilience and a sense of belonging. The sample comprised 100 older adults with refugee or migrant backgrounds (aged 60–84 years; 53% women, 47% men) who had resided in Greece for an average of fifteen years. The Cultural Adjustment Scale, MSPSS, and WHOQOL-OLD were administered, demonstrating high internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .831–.883). Tests of normality indicated that cultural adaptation and social support did not follow a normal distribution ($p < .01$), whereas quality of life was normally distributed ($p = .883$). Spearman's rank-order correlations showed no significant associations between social support and either cultural adaptation [$r_s(98) = -.10$, $p = .307$] or quality of life [$r_s(98) = -.07$, $p = .480$]. Multiple regression analysis revealed that quality of life was a strong and significant predictor of cultural adaptation ($\beta = .742$, $p < .001$), whereas social support was not ($\beta = -.049$, $p = .472$). Overall, the findings highlight the importance of enhancing living conditions and promoting social participation among elderly refugees and migrants.

Key-words: Migration, Old age, Social support, Cultural adaptation

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Introduction

Societies and communities are affected at multiple levels by migration and refugee movements, which occur across most parts of the world. Their increasing frequency and recurrence in recent years are directly related to political, economic, social, and environmental transformations, thus demonstrating their complex and dynamic nature (Castles et al., 2014; O'Rourke, 2019). According to data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, by mid-2024 122.6 million people had been recorded as forcibly displaced—the highest number in history (UNHCR, 2024). Within this total, older refugees, a subgroup with specific needs, accounted for 6.4% of the displaced population, representing approximately 7.8 million individuals worldwide.

Older people participating in migration and refugee flows face numerous difficulties. They often have limited access to healthcare services, experience social marginalization, lose their familiar cultural environment, and feel particularly vulnerable (Abou Saleh & Christodoulou, 2016; Lewis, 2009). In addition, displacement separates them from traditional family and community structures, depriving them of long-standing support networks and exposing them to heightened risks of psychological and social distress (Lin et al., 2020).

Cultural adaptation is a central construct for understanding the experiences of older refugees and migrants. Following Berry's acculturation model (1997), adaptation is not conceived as total assimilation but as a dynamic balance between maintaining one's cultural identity and integrating into the host society. However, the application of this model among older adults is limited due to the fragile circumstances and distinct challenges they encounter (Kuo, 2014).

Intergenerationality emerges as a decisive factor in understanding the adaptation process. Interactions between individuals of different generations provide a framework for strengthening resilience and a sense of continuity, thus facilitating social integration (Daniel et al., 2020; Palmberger, 2017). At the same time, social support—whether derived from family, community, or institutional structures—serves as a protective buffer against psychological symptoms and anxiety, which are frequently observed among refugees (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Zhang & Dong, 2023).

International research underscores the importance of social support in improving living conditions among migrant and refugee populations; however, there remains a notable gap in similar studies focusing on older adults. More specifically, the interplay between cultural adaptation, social support, and intergenerational relationships has not been sufficiently examined (Hynie, 2018). This gap hinders the development of evidence-based policies and interventions capable of addressing the needs of older refugees and migrants (Abdoli et al., 2024).

There is often conceptual confusion regarding the terms migration and refugee status, despite their clear distinction. Migration refers to the voluntary or involuntary movement of populations between countries, typically aiming for resettlement and social integration (Castles et al., 2014). In contrast, refugeehood denotes forced displacement due to persecution, war, or natural disasters, resulting in loss of homeland and disruption of social cohesion (UNHCR, 2024).

A more recent concept gaining prominence in migration studies is refugeeness, which captures the lived and experiential dimensions of displacement. In this study, refugeeness denotes the subjective, multidimensional experience of being a refugee, encompassing psychological, social, and cultural processes that accompany forced migration. It moves beyond the legal definition, emphasizing identity transformation, belonging, and reintegration through displacement and resettlement (Malkki, 1995; Papadopoulos, 2002).

According to the World Health Organization, individuals aged 60 and over are considered to be in

the third age (WHO, 2015). This population group is particularly vulnerable in contexts of refugeehood and migration due to biological, cultural, and social factors (Abou Saleh & Christodoulou, 2016).

Intergenerationality refers to the interaction between different generations within family and community contexts. In the context of migration, such interactions directly influence the adaptation process, as acculturation rates differ between younger and older generations (Treas & Mazumdar, 2002).

Social support is defined as the set of material and psychosocial resources available to an individual or social network that provide reinforcement during stressful or adverse life situations (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985). For elderly refugees, social support can become a critical determinant of resilience and well-being (Stewart et al., 2008).

The most widely accepted theoretical framework of cultural adaptation remains Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, which identifies four strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. For older individuals, this process is particularly complex, as it often coincides with role loss, declining health, and limited access to support structures (Kuo, 2014).

With regard to cultural adaptation, this process extends beyond institutional structures and is embedded in everyday life, encompassing language use, preservation of traditions, and engagement in new social contexts. Research indicates that the ability to balance cultural continuity with social integration plays a pivotal role in successful adaptation (Choi et al., 2019).

In the Greek context, cultural adaptation is closely associated with educational and social strategies that address cultural diversity. Nikolaou (2008) emphasizes that intercultural education and training extend beyond the school environment, functioning as broader mechanisms for promoting equality and social cohesion. This approach is especially relevant for older refugees and migrants, whose adaptation depends not only on personal choices but also on political and institutional initiatives supporting cultural diversity and social participation.

Social support constitutes a key determinant of psychological well-being in older refugees. Cobb (1976) highlighted the importance of perceived support as a stress-buffering mechanism, while Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed the buffering model, wherein social support mitigates the negative effects of stress.

Evidence shows that among elderly populations, the presence of family ties, community networks, and institutional support is associated with higher quality of life and fewer psychological difficulties (Lin et al., 2020; Zhang & Dong, 2023). Conversely, lack of social support correlates with isolation, depression, and deterioration in physical health (Virgincar et al., 2016).

Despite the growing body of research on migration and refugeehood, studies focusing exclusively on older adults remain limited. The interrelationship between cultural adaptation, intergenerationality, and social support has not been sufficiently explored within European—and particularly Greek—contexts (Hynie, 2018; Palmberger, 2017). In Greece, there are contradictions in the field of refugee social support: while strong family cohesion serves as a protective factor, structural deficiencies in welfare systems—exacerbated by the economic crisis—limit effective assistance (Riza et al., 2020).

Social workers, as the primary professionals involved, are called upon to bridge institutional gaps and promote community engagement for older refugees and migrants. Understanding these factors is essential for designing evidence-based social policies that respond to the real needs of this population. Social work, through its human-centered and multi-level approach, can bridge the gap between theory and practice (Abdoli et al., 2024).

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationships among social support, cultural adaptation, intergenerational relationships, and quality of life among elderly refugees and migrants in

Greece. By exploring how these factors interact, the study seeks to enhance understanding of the mechanisms that shape adaptation and well-being in this vulnerable population.

Based on the theoretical framework and research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1 : There is a statistically significant correlation between perceived social support and the cultural adaptation of elderly refugees and immigrants.

Hypothesis 2 : There is a statistically significant correlation between perceived social support and the quality of life of elderly refugees and immigrants.

Hypothesis 3 : There are statistically significant differences in cultural adaptation according to the level of perceived social support (low, moderate, high).

Hypothesis 4 : Cultural adaptation of elderly refugees and immigrants is significantly predicted by quality of life and perceived social support.

Methodology

Type and design of research

The study employed a descriptive, cross-sectional research design aimed at examining the relationships among cultural adaptation, perceived social support, intergenerational relationships, and quality of life among older refugees and migrants residing in Greece. This design was chosen because it enables the investigation of associations among psychosocial variables without inferring causality. The research sought to identify interaction patterns and assess the degree to which social and cultural factors influence adaptation and well-being in the context of migration. Data were collected using individually administered self-report questionnaires, conducted under conditions that ensured anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent.

Population – Sample & sampling method

The total sample consisted of 100 older adults with a migrant or refugee background, aged between 60 and 84 ($M = 68.78$, $SD = 6.15$). Women represented 53% of the sample, while men accounted for 47%. Participants were primarily of Afghan (16%), Iraqi (20%), and Syrian (18%) origin, whereas 42% were Greek nationals and 4% identified as belonging to other nationalities. The mean duration of residence in Greece was 14.62 years ($SD = 4.86$). The sampling method was purposive, involving individuals who met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study objectives.

The inclusion criteria were:
  (a) age 60 years or older,
  (b) recognized refugee, asylum seeker, or legally residing migrant status in Greece,
  (c) permanent residence in Greece for at least one year at the time of the study,
  (d) adequate knowledge of the questionnaire language (Greek) or ability to respond with the assistance of a qualified interpreter, and
  (e) sufficient cognitive capacity to understand and provide consistent responses to the questionnaire items.

Exclusion criteria included:
  (a) diagnosis of severe psychiatric disorders (e.g., schizophrenia, major depression, dementia),
  (b) neurological conditions or cognitive impairments that interfered with comprehension,

(c) physical health limitations that prevented or significantly hindered participation in the data collection process, and

(d) refusal or inability to provide informed consent.

These criteria were established to ensure data validity, response reliability, and adherence to ethical standards in research involving vulnerable populations.

Measures

Demographic information. In the demographics section, participants were asked to provide information regarding sex, date of birth, country of birth, nationality, mother tongue, marital status, educational level, current residence, duration of stay in Greece, financial status, employment status before displacement, current employment status, number of family members living with them, residence status, and self-reported health condition. In addition, the following standardized instruments were administered to collect quantitative data:

Cultural Adjustment Scale. It was developed specifically for the purposes of this study to assess the degree of sociocultural and psychological integration among older refugees and migrants. The instrument consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree* to *5 = strongly agree*). The items are organized into six subscales, each comprising two items: (a) Emotional Security (Q1–Q2), (b) Cultural Understanding (Q3–Q4), (c) Functional Autonomy (Q5–Q6), (d) Social Support (Q7–Q8), (e) Psychological Well-being (Q9–Q10), and (f) Economic Stability (Q11–Q12). The total score is calculated by summing all responses, ranging from 12 to 60, with higher scores indicating greater cultural adaptation.

Content validity was established through theoretical grounding in Berry's (1997) acculturation model and expert review. A panel of psychologists, gerontology specialists, and professionals experienced in refugee integration evaluated the relevance, clarity, and conceptual adequacy of the items. This procedure followed the content-oriented validation framework proposed by Haynes et al. (1995). The scale was validated using the study's Greek sample (*N* = 100), which served as the reference group for psychometric evaluation. Participants were refugees aged 60 years and older who had been residing in Greece for more than one year. Raw scores were converted into standardized *T*-scores (*M* = 50, *SD* = 10) to enable comparative interpretation. Based on these *T*-scores, participants were classified into four levels of cultural adaptation: low (*T* < 40), moderate (40–49), good (50–59), and high (≥ 60).

The instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's α = .99 for the total scale and α = .91 for each subscale. These findings support the Cultural Adjustment Scale as a psychometrically robust and preliminarily standardized instrument for evaluating the cultural adaptation of older refugees within the Greek context.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). It is a 12-item self-report instrument designed to assess perceived social support from three distinct sources: Family, Friends, and Significant Others (Zimet et al., 1988). Each subscale consists of four items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *1 (strongly disagree)* to *7 (strongly agree)*, with higher scores indicating greater perceived social support.

For the present study, the Greek version of the MSPSS (Theofilou, 2015) was used. Although this version has been linguistically adapted and approved for use in Greek populations, a complete

psychometric normalization has not yet been published. Therefore, its internal consistency was examined within the current sample of older refugees. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory to high reliability, with Cronbach's α = .82 for the *Significant Others* subscale, Cronbach's α = .88 for the *Family* subscale, Cronbach's α = .79 for the *Friends* subscale, and Cronbach's α = .88 for the total scale, confirming its suitability for use with this population.

WHOQOL-OLD. The WHOQOL-OLD module, developed by the World Health Organization (Power et al., 2005), is a quality-of-life instrument specifically designed for use with older adults. It extends the WHOQOL-BREF by incorporating aspects of life that are particularly relevant to aging populations. The scale consists of 24 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = not at all* to *5 = extremely*). The instrument assesses quality of life across six domains: (a) Sensory Abilities, (b) Autonomy, (c) Past–Present–Future Activities, (d) Social Participation, (e) Death and Dying, and (f) Intimacy, with four items per domain.

Although a fully standardized Greek validation study has not yet been published, the official Greek translation provided by the WHO was employed. In the present study, the instrument was psychometrically evaluated in a Greek sample of older refugees (N = 100). Internal consistency was satisfactory for the total scale (*Cronbach's α* = .83) and excellent across subscales (α = .89–.97). Furthermore, raw scores were standardized using *T*-scores (M = 50, SD = 10), and participants were classified into four quality-of-life categories: low (T < 40), moderate (40–49), good (50–59), and high ($\geq$ 60). The current sample served as the Greek normative group for preliminary standardization.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted between February and April 2025 using a mixed strategy:

    (a) In person, in the Patras area, with the assistance of local social services and community agencies. Printed questionnaires were administered in the presence of the researcher after obtaining informed consent, and a translator was available when necessary.

    (b) Remotely, via the Zoom conferencing platform, with instructions provided by the researcher (either orally or through an electronic link) and with the option of interpreter assistance, when deemed necessary and following consent.

Respondents were able to choose their preferred language, and language support was provided throughout the process to ensure full comprehension of both the questionnaires and the study procedures.

Data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software, with the significance level set at p < .05. Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Inferential analyses included Spearman's correlation coefficients, Kruskal–Wallis H tests, and multiple regression analyses.

The normality of distributions was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk and Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests. Results indicated that:

- **Cultural Adaptation:** p < .001 → non-normal distribution
- **Social Support (MSPSS):** p = .002 → non-normal distribution
- **Quality of Life (WHOQOL-OLD):** p = .883 → normal distribution

Given that the variable "cultural adaptation" did not follow a normal distribution, the nonparametric

Kruskal–Wallis *H* test was applied to compare mean ranks across the three perceived social support groups (low, moderate, high). To examine the relationship between perceived social support and cultural adaptation among older refugees and migrants, Spearman's nonparametric correlation coefficient (ρ) was used, as the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were not met. Similarly, Spearman's ρ was employed to assess the association between perceived social support and quality of life among participants aged 60 years and older.

Results

H$_1$: Correlation between social support and cultural adaptation.
There was no statistically significant correlation between the two variables, $r_s(98) = -.10$, $p = .307$. The correlation was negative, indicating that as social support increases, cultural adaptation slightly decreases. However, the relationship was weak and not statistically significant, according to Cohen's (1988) effect size criteria. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) was not rejected, and it can be concluded that social support is not significantly related to cultural adaptation in the present sample.

H$_2$: Correlation between social support and quality of life.
There was no statistically significant correlation between the two variables, $r_s(98) = -.07$, $p = .480$. The correlation was negative, weak, and nonsignificant, indicating that social support is not related to perceived quality of life among participants.

H$_3$: Differences in cultural adaptation depending on levels of social support
There was no statistically significant difference in cultural adaptation between the three levels of perceived social support, $H(2) = 0.41$, $p = .816$. Considering that the *p*-value was greater than the predetermined significance level ($\alpha = .05$), the null hypothesis was not rejected. Consequently, the cultural adaptation of older refugees and migrants does not appear to be influenced by the level of perceived social support. No statistically significant differences were observed among the low, moderate, and high social support groups.

H$_4$: Predictors of cultural adaptation
A multiple linear regression analysis was performed, with cultural adaptation as the dependent variable and perceived social support and quality of life as independent variables.

Prior to conducting the regression, the assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were examined. The multicollinearity check ($VIF \approx 1$) did not reveal any issues, indicating that the model was reliable (see Table 1).

Overall, the findings showed that quality of life was a strong and statistically significant predictor of cultural adaptation among older refugees and migrants, whereas perceived social support did not significantly predict this outcome.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 97) = 61.23$, $p < .001$, indicating that at least one of the independent variables significantly predicted cultural adaptation. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .56$) showed that 55.8% of the variance in cultural adaptation was explained by the two predictors (see Tables 2 and 3).

Regarding the individual predictors (see Table 4):
- Quality of life was a statistically significant and positive predictor of cultural adaptation ($\beta = .74$, $t = 10.96$, $p < .001$).
- Perceived social support was not a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = -.05$, $t = -0.72$, $p = .472$).

Table 1.

Collinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	ConditionIndex	Variance Proportions (Constant)	MSPSS Total Score	WHOQOL-OLD total score
1	1	2.957	1.000	.00	.01	.00
	2	.036	9.041	.02	.82	.12
	3	.007	20.918	.98	.17	.87

*Note

The collinearity diagnostics indicated no multicollinearity issues, as all condition indices were below 30 and variance proportions were within acceptable limits.

Table 2.

Regression Model Summary (Model Summary)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.747[a]	.558	.549	.57566	.558	61.233	2	97	< .001

*Note

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 97) = 61.23$, $p < .001$, explaining 55.8% of the variance in cultural adaptation ($R² = .558$). Quality of life (*WHOQOL_total*) was a significant predictor, whereas social support (*MSPSS_total*) was not.

Table 3.

Analysis of Variance for Linear Regression (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	40.583	2	20.292	61.233	< .001
Residual	32.144	97	.331		
Total	72.728	99			

*Note

The ANOVA indicated that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 97) = 61.23$, $p < .001$, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in cultural adaptation (*adapt_total*).

Table 4.
Regression Coefficients for Cultural Adaptation (Coefficients)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	−1.586	.547	—	−2.902	.005	—	—
MSPSS Total Score	−.044	.061	−.049	−.723	.472	.994	1.006
WHOQOL-OLD total score	1.539	.140	.742	10.958	< .001	.994	1.006

Note
Quality of life (*WHOQOL_total*) was a strong and statistically significant predictor of cultural adaptation (β = .74, p < .001), whereas social support (*MSPSS_total*) was not significant (β = −.05, p = .472).

Discussion

This study provides valuable evidence on the relationship between cultural adaptation, social support, and quality of life, contributing to a broader understanding of the living conditions of older refugees and migrants in Greece.

The main results showed that no statistically significant relationship was found between perceived social support and either cultural adaptation or quality of life. However, quality of life emerged as a strong and statistically significant predictor of cultural adaptation, whereas social support did not show predictive value. These findings highlight that the adaptation of older refugees and migrants depends more on overall living conditions and quality of life than on perceived social support.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, no significant correlation was found between perceived social support and cultural adaptation. This finding contradicts much of the international literature, which suggests that social support contributes to cultural integration and psychosocial adaptation (Cobb, 1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Stewart et al., 2008). One possible explanation is that the elderly participants in this study may receive support primarily within practical or family contexts, which do not necessarily extend to broader social integration structures.

In Hypothesis 2, the results again showed no statistically significant relationship between quality of life and social support. Although international studies generally report positive associations (Choi et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020), the findings of this study may indicate that quality of life is influenced by exogenous factors—such as economic conditions, health coverage, or access to welfare services—rather than by perceived social support alone.

For Hypothesis 3, no differences in cultural adaptation were observed among groups with different levels of social support. This reinforces the idea that social support is not an autonomous key factor in adaptation but must function in conjunction with institutional policies and community interventions.

The clearest finding emerged in Hypothesis 4. Multiple regression analysis confirmed that quality of life was a strong and statistically significant predictor of cultural adaptation (β = .74, p < .001), while social support was not significant (β = −.05, p = .472). This suggests that improving living conditions—

including access to healthcare, housing, and opportunities for social participation—is a crucial lever for enhancing cultural adaptation among older refugees and migrants.

The examination of this issue within the Greek context is particularly important. As Nikolaou (2008) noted, the management of cultural diversity is not merely an educational issue but a broader socio-political challenge. Through an intercultural approach, social work frameworks can support development policies and methodological practices that promote social cohesion and integration of older refugees and migrants.

The findings underscore the importance of improving living conditions and strengthening social and intergenerational networks for elderly refugees and migrants. Based on these results, the following recommendations for social work practice are proposed to promote culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches:

1. Development of culturally sensitive services: Social workers should integrate intercultural principles (Nikolaou, 2008) into their work with older adults, recognizing their specific needs and life experiences.
2. Improving quality of life: Policies and programs supporting housing, health coverage, and social participation can substantially enhance adaptation.
3. Collaboration with local communities: Strengthening intergenerational and community relationships contributes to the psychosocial well-being of older individuals.
4. Further research: Additional studies should be conducted in Greece, as older refugees and migrants remain an underexplored population in both national and international literature.

Overall, these recommendations emphasize the need for social work to move beyond individual-level interventions and adopt a holistic, culturally responsive framework that addresses both personal and structural dimensions of adaptation. By promoting inclusive practices, strengthening intergenerational ties, and enhancing quality of life, social work can play a pivotal role in fostering integration, dignity, and social cohesion within host communities.

As with any empirical research, this study presents certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was purposively selected, limiting the generalizability of the results. Participants were concentrated in areas with established refugee infrastructures or ethnic communities, which may have influenced adaptation patterns. Second, despite careful efforts to ensure linguistic and cultural equivalence of the instruments, the possibility of semantic or cultural misinterpretation cannot be excluded—especially for abstract constructs such as "quality of life" and "social support." Third, while the use of validated instruments (MSPSS and WHOQOL-OLD) and a newly developed Cultural Adaptation Scale allowed for comparative analyses, these tools may not fully capture complex psychosocial experiences such as trauma, displacement, or cultural bereavement. Finally, as a cross-sectional design, the study can only identify associations rather than causal relationships among variables.

Although this study relied primarily on quantitative methods, incorporating qualitative approaches—such as life narratives or ethnographic observation—could provide a richer understanding of the aging and adaptation experiences of older refugees and migrants in Greece. Future research may thus adopt mixed-methods designs to deepen insights into the cultural and psychosocial processes that shape adaptation in later life.

Conclusions

This study examined the interrelationships between cultural adaptation, social support, and quality of life among older refugees and migrants in Greece. The findings indicated that no statistically significant relationships were found between perceived social support and either cultural adaptation or quality of life. Furthermore, levels of cultural adaptation did not differ significantly according to the degree of perceived social support.

In contrast, quality of life emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor of cultural adaptation, whereas social support showed no predictive value. These results suggest that the integration and adaptation of older adults with refugee and migrant backgrounds depend not only on subjective support networks but primarily on the improvement of overall living conditions—including housing, health services, and opportunities for social participation.

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Μετανάστευση, Προσφυγοποίηση και Τρίτη Ηλικία: Η Διαγενεακή Σχέση και η Κοινωνική Υποστήριξη ως Παράγοντες Πολιτισμικής Προσαρμογής

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η μετανάστευση και η προσφυγιά αποτελούν κοινωνικά φαινόμενα που επηρεάζουν ευάλωτες πληθυσμιακές ομάδες. Οι ηλικιωμένοι πρόσφυγες και μετανάστες αντιμετωπίζουν δυσκολίες, όπως την εξοικείωση με νέα γλωσσική πραγματικότητα, την κοινωνική απομόνωση, την απώλεια πολιτισμικής ταυτότητας και την πρόσβαση σε υπηρεσίες υγείας. Διερευνάται ο ρόλος των διαγενεακών σχέσεων και της κοινωνικής υποστήριξης στη προσαρμογής των ηλικιωμένων προσφύγων και μεταναστών που διαμένουν στην Ελλάδα. Βασιζόμενη σε έρευνες, αναδεικνύει τη σημασία των οικογενειακών δεσμών και των κοινοτικών δικτύων για την ενίσχυση της ψυχολογικής ανθεκτικότητας και του αισθήματος του ανήκειν. Το δείγμα αποτέλεσαν 100 άτομα τρίτης ηλικίας με προσφυγικό ή μεταναστευτικό υπόβαθρο (60–84 ετών· 53% γυναίκες, 47% άνδρες), με μέση παραμονής στην Ελλάδα δεκαπέντε έτη. Χρησιμοποιήθηκαν οι κλίμακες Cultural Adjustment Scale, MSPSS και WHOQOL-OLD, οι οποίες παρουσίασαν υψηλή εσωτερική αξιοπιστία (Cronbach's α = .831–.883). Οι έλεγχοι κανονικότητας έδειξαν ότι η πολιτισμική προσαρμογή και η κοινωνική υποστήριξη δεν ακολουθούσαν κανονική κατανομή (p < .01), ενώ η ποιότητα ζωής παρουσίασε (p = .883). Οι συσχετίσεις Spearman δεν ανέδειξαν στατιστικά σημαντική σχέση μεταξύ κοινωνικής υποστήριξης και πολιτισμικής προσαρμογής ($r_s(98) = -.10$, p = .307) ή ποιότητας ζωής ($r_s(98) = -.07$, p = .480). Η ανάλυση πολλαπλής παλινδρόμησης έδειξε ότι η ποιότητα ζωής αποτελεί ισχυρό και στατιστικά σημαντικό προβλεπτικό παράγοντα της πολιτισμικής προσαρμογής (β = .742, p < .001), ενώ η κοινωνική υποστήριξη δεν παρουσίασε στατιστικά σημαντική προβλεπτική αξία (β = –.049, p = .472). Τα αποτελέσματα υπογραμμίζουν τη σημασία της βελτίωσης των συνθηκών διαβίωσης και της ενίσχυσης της κοινωνικής συμμετοχής των ηλικιωμένων προσφύγων και μεταναστών.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Μετανάστευση, Τρίτη ηλικία, Κοινωνική υποστήριξη, Πολιτισμική προσαρμογή

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Enhancing intercultural interactions in primary schools: An ecosystemic School Social Work intervention with Roma and non-Roma students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of a multi-level, ecosystemic intervention program designed to enhance intercultural relationships and reduce social distance between Roma and non-Roma students in a Greek primary school classroom. Based on School Social Work (SSW) principles and ecosystemic approach, the intervention program simultaneously engaged students, teachers, and parents through experiential learning, professional development, and family collaboration. Using a quantitative single-case pretest–follow-up design, data were collected through a sociometric test that mapped and analysed students' cooperative relationships before and after the intervention. Pre-intervention results revealed strong ethnic and gender-based clustering, limited inter-ethnic interaction, and particularly weak ties between Roma and non-Roma students. Following the thirty-four hours intervention, the overall mean relationship score increased and strong inter-ethnic ties rose. The analysis of relationships showed, also, stronger connectivity and the development of inter-group ties, indicating greater classroom cohesion. The findings confirm that structured, ecosystemic interventions implemented through SSW can foster intercultural communication, empathy, and collaboration in diverse classrooms in Greece. However, the persistence of group clustering underscores the need for long-term and repeating application of such programs, ideally beginning earlier in primary education, to achieve sustainable intercultural education in schools.

Key-words: Intercultural Interactions, School Social Work, Ecosystemic Approach, Roma, Sociometric Test.

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1. Introduction

Globally, schools serve as the primary public institutions responsible for preparing and equipping students with the skills, knowledge, values, and principles necessary for their adult lives and for their future roles as citizens within increasingly intercultural societies (Katsama, 2014). By fostering intercultural competence and understanding, education contributes to reducing cultural, social, and ethnic misconceptions that often manifest as racism, poverty, and social exclusion. At the same time, it enhances opportunities for positive intercultural interaction and communication (Banks, 2015; Kapari & Stavrou, 2010; Nikolaou, 2011).

In this context, SSW plays a vital role as a bridge between education, family, and community, promoting students' psychosocial well-being and inclusive participation in school life. Rooted in the principles of human rights, social justice, and respect for diversity, SSW provides a holistic support addressing students' academic, emotional, and social needs. School social workers collaborate with teachers and families through counselling, mediation, and empowerment processes to promote positive school climates and prevent exclusion, particularly among culturally diverse and vulnerable groups (Allen-Meares, 2014; Constable, 2008; Farmakopoulou et al, 2025; Katsama, 2014; Katsama, 2024).

Despite the emphasis of European educational policy on promoting equality and inclusion for all students, available data show that the outcomes for one of the oldest and largest culturally distinct groups in Greece and Europe -the Romani people, or the Roma- continue to fall significantly short of the intended objectives (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2021; Council of Europe, 2023). Although numerous initiatives and programs have been implemented over the years, the rates of early school leaving, often before completing the nine-year compulsory education cycle, and the social exclusion of Roma students remain persistently high across many European countries. Overall, the findings of several EU surveys indicate a significant gap between Roma and non-Roma children in terms of school attendance and reveal that Roma children continue to lag behind in terms of educational performance (Council of Europe, 2023; Fox & Vidra, 2012; FRA, 2021; Messing, 2017).

Several factors contribute to the limited effectiveness of these policies, including the lack of systematic implementation measures, delayed school entry, limited participation of Roma communities in educational policy design, ongoing discrimination and prejudice within schools, low expectations from both families and educators, insufficient school–family communication, and broader socioeconomic inequalities. A further, often overlooked factor is the absence of structured education in intercultural communication and relationship-building within the classroom, both in Greece and internationally. Although the importance of intercultural communication is widely acknowledged at the theoretical level, in practice, students are not consistently provided with opportunities to develop collaboration and conflict-resolution skills with peers from different cultural backgrounds within everyday school life (Banks, 2015; Kavasakalis et al, 2023; Nikolaou, 2011; Nieto, 2009).

This critical gap, frequently, results in the persistence of stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, and social distance among students, thereby limiting opportunities for holistic inclusion and meaningful participation (Council of Europe, 2025; Matsaggouras, 2006). Fundamentally, there can be no interaction without communication, as *intercultural communication* is the core process through which intercultural interactions are built. Consequently, without effective strategies to enhance these interactions, the school environment fails to move beyond mere co-existence and towards true educational and social inclusion for all students.

The need for action stems from the recognition that school, as the primary social environment after the family, is the place where children learn -or fail- to interact effectively with culturally diverse peers. The development of intercultural skills and the cultivation of positive attitudes are not innate abilities but learning processes that require systematic support through educational practice (Banks, 2015; Barrett, 2018; Nieto et al, 2017). Consequently, the present study introduces a classroom-level intervention program, based on the framework of SSW and ecosystemic approach, designed to strengthen intercultural relationships between Roma and non-Roma students, with the active participation of teachers and parents as key components of the social ecosystem.

2. Aim and Research Questions

Building on the issues discussed above, the idea of developing a multilevel intervention program emerged as a necessity for the effective management of multiculturalism within the school environment (Banks, 2015). The intervention was grounded in the ecosystemic framework, which views the school as an interconnected system, where changes in one subsystem (students, teachers, or families) can influence and reinforce changes in others. Consequently, this multi-level approach directly addresses the complexity of social relationships, underscoring that enhancing intercultural interactions requires coordinated action across the entire school ecosystem (Allen-Meares, 2014; Nikolaou, 2011; Vassallo, 2014).

The primary aim of the study was to strengthen positive intercultural interactions and to reduce social distance between Roma and non-Roma students. The intervention engaged the three main subsystems of students' school life: *the students*, through experiential learning activities that promote trust and acceptance; *the teachers*, through professional development focused on inclusive education and effective communication; and *the parents*, through activities promoting meaningful family engagement. The design, which addressed each group through specialized activities, is analysed in the following section on the Intervention Program.

More precisely, based on this aim, the following research questions were developed:
1. What were the relationships in the classroom before the intervention, particularly regarding ethnic and gender-based patterns of interaction?
2. How did the intervention affect the structure of students' relationships, in terms of mean relationship scores, strength of ties, and improvements in ethnic and gender relationships?
3. Did the sociometric analysis reveal changes in students' network positions after the intervention, indicating greater cohesion or centrality?

3. Methodology

The present study used a *single-case pretest – follow-up design* with a quantitative approach to data analysis. This design was specifically chosen to examine the impact of the intervention by measuring the change in interpersonal relationships and cooperation patterns among Roma and non-Roma students in a single 6th-grade primary school classroom in a semi-urban area of Achaia, Greece. Single-case research designs are recognized in Social Work education and practice as crucial tools for practitioners to rigorously evaluate their own interventions (Bloom et al, 2009). Focusing exclusively on a custom-made sociometric test and sociogram, this methodology allowed for the initial and final mapping and quantitative

analysis of social interactions within the classroom before and after the implementation of the program.

The study sample consisted of all 22 students in the selected classroom. This age group was considered suitable due to their cognitive and emotional capacity to meaningfully engage in collaborative activities and reflect upon their experiences. The class was characterized by a diverse ethnic and gender composition: there were 7 female students, all of whom were non-Roma. Among the 15 male students, 6 were Roma and 9 were non-Roma. Overall, Roma students comprised 25% of the total class population.

The sociometric tool was designed based on Moreno's principles (1953), combining structured quantitative measures with visual sociograms to represent the intensity and quality of interactions. Data collection occurred in two phases: before and after the school-year-long intervention. Students assessed their cooperative relationships with each one of their classmates using a five-point Likert scale (1 = almost none, 5 = very strong). Cooperation was previously defined as discussing, helping, and working together to achieve a shared goal.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the sociometric tool, a pilot administration was conducted with a comparable student group to confirm clarity of instructions and item comprehension. During the main data collection, the researcher verified participants' understanding of the scale descriptors and questionnaire items, thereby minimizing response bias and enhancing measurement accuracy.

To analyse students' relationships before and after the intervention, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to assess statistical differences. This non-parametric paired test is appropriate for small, dependent samples and for Likert-scale data, which are ordinal and may not follow a normal distribution (Field, 2018). A p-value below 0.05 was considered statistically significant, indicating that observed changes were likely due to the intervention (Creswell, 2014). To quantify the magnitude and direction of change, the rank-biserial correlation (r) was computed as an effect-size measure derived from the signed ranks of the Wilcoxon test (Fritz et al., 2012). The coefficient r ranges from −1 to +1, with positive values indicating improvement and negative values indicating decline; conventional benchmarks are r ≈ 0.1 (small), r ≈ 0.3 (medium), and r ≈ 0.5 (large). In addition, the proportion of "strong ties" (relationship strength ≥ 4) was compared before and after the intervention to illustrate practical changes in robust social connections.

The sociometric data were collected through the sociometric test and analyzed in *Python 3.9*. Data handling and statistical computations were performed using the *NumPy*, *Pandas*, and *SciPy* libraries. The *NetworkX* package was used to construct and visualize undirected sociograms, in which each edge represents the average reported relationship strength between two students. These graphs illustrated students' collaboration networks, allowing the identification of central and marginalized participants and changes in network structure following the intervention (Hagberg et al., 2008).

All procedures adhered to ethical and deontological standards for research with minors. The study received approval from the competent educational authority, and written parental consent was obtained for all student participants. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any point, ensuring voluntary and informed participation.

4. Intervention Program

The intervention program was designed as a comprehensive, multi-level educational initiative aimed at promoting social cohesion and enhancing intercultural interactions in a culturally

diverse classroom setting with Roma and non-Roma students. The program was grounded in three key core theoretical principles: *inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), *intercultural communication* (Nikolaou, 2011; Banks, 2015), and *experiential learning* (Kolb, 2015). Drawing from the ecosystemic approach and the principles of SSW, the intervention was structured across three interconnected subsystems (students, teachers, and parents) recognizing that meaningful social change requires the holistic activation and coordination of all key components within the child's educational environment. This multi-level approach addresses the complexity of social relationships, moving beyond mere coexistence to facilitate constructive interaction and cooperation across the entire school ecosystem (Allen-Meares, 2014; Nikolaou, 2011; Vassallo, 2014).

4.1 Student Program

The "*student part*" of the intervention, titled "*Learning to communicate interculturally: From coexistence to interaction*", consisted of eight two-hour sessions implemented during the school program in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The main aim was to cultivate mutual understanding, reduce social distance, and strengthen positive interaction between Roma and non-Roma students. The structure of the program followed five successive steps:
1. Recognition of cultural diversity as a natural and valuable social characteristic.
2. Exploration of personal and cultural identity to enhance self-awareness and acceptance.
3. Development of empathy and respect, in order to strengthen the emotional connection and respect for culturally different students.
4. Critical reflection on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination to challenge discriminatory thinking patterns.
5. Strengthening intercultural communication skills through a practical interaction toolkit.

Experiential methods such as role-playing, storytelling, simulations, cooperative games, visual creations, and thematic discussions were employed. These encouraged active participation, emotional expression, and positive peer relationships. The student program was intentionally structured to foster a safe and inclusive classroom climate, enabling students to experience diversity not as a source of conflict but as an opportunity for social and emotional growth (Mitropoulou, 2025; Mitropoulou & Nikolaou, 2023).

4.2 Teacher Training Program

The "*teacher training program*" aimed to reinforce the teachers' pedagogical capacity to manage cultural diversity and support intercultural dialogue in the classroom. It included three four-hour experiential professional development sessions based on reflective practice. According to contemporary research, teacher training is a key factor in developing inclusive educational environments (Arampatzi, 2013; Magos & Simopoulos, 2016; Vassalo, 2014). The training program focused on:
1. Reflecting on personal cultural identity and implicit biases.
2. Identifying and preventing discriminatory behaviours in classroom practice.
3. Developing strategies to manage intercultural conflicts and promote inclusive pedagogic methods.

Teachers engaged in self-reflection activities, case study analysis, experiential activities, and collaborative problem-solving activities. Practical guidelines and tools were introduced for integrating intercultural values into daily classroom routines.

4.3 Parental Involvement Program

Recognizing the essential role of families in student development, the "*parental involvement program*" included three two-hour sessions with the parents of both Roma and non-Roma students. Parental involvement has been shown to significantly enhance students' educational outcomes (Dafermos, 2013; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Sheldon & Epstein, 2010). The sessions focused on:

1. Building trust and familiarizing parents with the goals of the program.
2. Discussing cultural identity, tolerance, and addressing stereotypes.
3. Reflecting on progress and co-designing future actions to sustain cooperation.

Interactive discussion, role-playing, storytelling, collaborative activities, and visual materials were used to foster engagement. The meetings promoted dialogue between Roma and non-Roma families and strengthened parental involvement in school processes.

5. Results

5.1 Pre-Intervention Results

The sociometric test conducted *before* the implementation of the intervention program, and shown in Tab. 1, revealed strong social distances within the classroom, both at the ethnic and gender level. The five-point Likert results showed that overall relationships in the classroom were rather weak (M = 2.82 ± 1.48), reflecting a fragmented social network.

Table 1.
Pre-intervention relationship strengths by group

Relationship Directions	Mean ± Std. [*]	Strong Ties (≥4)	Nr. of Relationships
Non-Roma → Roma	1.34 ± 0.77	3%	96
Roma → Non-Roma	2.01 ± 0.10	0%	96
Roma → Roma	4.83 ± 0.38	100%	30
Non-Roma → Non-Roma	3.48 ± 1.37	60%	240
Inter-ethnic	1.68 ± 0.64	2%	192
Total	2.82 ± 1.48	38%	462
Boys → Boys	2.94 ± 1.48	40%	210
Girls → Girls	4.19 ± 1.09	79%	42
Boys → Girls	2.30 ± 0.98	16%	105
Girls → Boys	2.54 ± 1.65	40%	105
Inter-gender	2.42 ± 1.36	28%	210
Non-Roma Boys → Roma Boys	1.56 ± 0.95	6%	54
Roma Boys → Non-Roma Boys	2.02 ± 0.14	0%	54
Non-Roma Girls → Roma Boys	1.07 ± 0.26	0%	42
Roma Boys → Non-Roma Girls	2.00 ± 0.00	0%	42

[*] *Note.* Mean values and standard deviations relate to a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost none, 5 = very strong).

In particular, inter-ethnic relationships between Roma and non-Roma students were extremely limited. The average rating of relationships from non-Roma to Roma students was only 1.34, with a standard deviation of ± 0.77, while mutual evaluations from Roma to non-Roma were slightly higher but still weak (M = 2.01 ± 0.10). Strong ties (scores ≥ 4) were almost absent in both directions (3% and 0% respectively), clearly indicating minimal interaction and

social distance between the two ethnic groups. In contrast, intra-group relationships among Roma students were extremely strong (M = 4.83 ± 0.38), with 100% of them classified as strong, indicating high intra-group cohesion and social grouping. Relationships among non-Roma students were of moderate intensity (M = 3.48 ± 1.37), although the high standard deviation suggests variability in the quality of their connections with their peers.

Gender also emerged as an important factor structuring peer relationships. Girls formed stronger internal networks (M = 4.19 ± 1.09, 79% strong ties), while boys reported weaker internal cohesion (M = 2.94 ± 1.48). Inter-gender ties were generally weak (M = 2.42 ± 1.36), reflecting limited cooperation between boys and girls. When ethnicity and gender were examined simultaneously, Roma boys appeared to be the most socially isolated subgroup, especially from non-Roma girls (M = 1.07 ± 0.26).

The undirected sociogram shown in Fig. 1 visually confirmed these findings, depicting a clear ethnic grouping, limited interaction between groups, and peripheral placement of Roma students in the classroom network. The use of the undirected sociogram highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the classroom's social network, as well as the groups of students exhibiting greater cohesion or isolation. Overall, the pre-intervention sociometric mapping revealed strong intra-group engagement but weak interactions between the groups, justifying the need for an intervention focused on improving intercultural relationships, collaboration, and communication.

Figure 1.
Pre-Intervention undirected sociogram of cooperative relationships depicting the average relationship score between every pair of students, irrespective of the relationship's direction
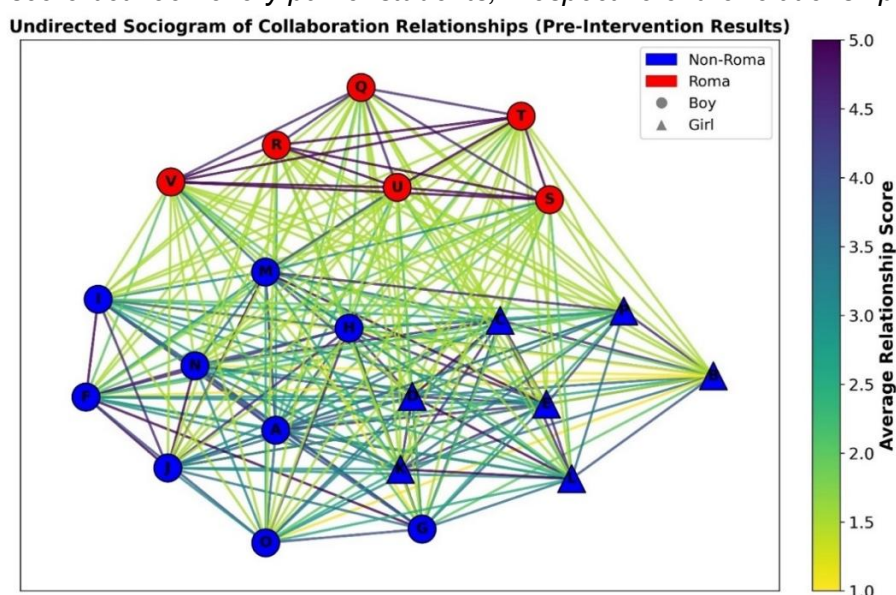
5.2 Post-Intervention Results

Three months after the completion of the classroom intervention program, the analysis of the sociometric data revealed substantial improvements in the structure and quality of peer relationships. Overall, the mean score of all recorded relationships, as shown in Tab. 2, increased from 2.82 to 3.13 (+0.31), a statistically significant change (p = 2.0×10⁻⁸) with a moderate to large effect size (r = +0.44). The percentage of strong ties (ratings ≥ 4) also rose from 38% to 44%, indicating an overall strengthening of cooperative interactions among students.

Table 2.
Ethnic relationship results after the intervention.

Relationship Directions	Mean ± Std. [*]	Strong Ties (≥4)	Mean Change	p-value [**]	Rank-biserial (r)	Nr. of Relations
Non-Roma → Roma	1.78 ± 1.06	8%	+0.44	**$7.0×10^{-6}$**	+0.82	96
Roma → Non-Roma	2.44 ± 1.19	20%	+0.43	**$4.6×10^{-4}$**	+0.65	96
Roma → Roma	4.47 ± 0.94	83%	-0.37	$2.4×10^{-2}$	-0.78	30
Non-Roma → Non-Roma	3.78 ± 1.17	64%	+0.30	**$1.6×10^{-4}$**	+0.38	240
Inter-ethnic	2.11 ± 1.17	14%	+0.43	**$1.2×10^{-7}$**	+0.69	192
Total	3.13 ± 1.45	44%	+0.31	**$2.0×10^{-8}$**	+0.44	462

[*] *Note.* Mean values and standard deviations relate to a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost none, 5 = very strong).

[**] *Note.* Boldface values indicate statistically significant differences (p < .05). p values refer to Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.

At the ethnic-group level, Fig. 2 and Tab. 2 show that inter-ethnic relationships between Roma and non-Roma students demonstrated clear positive development. The mean score for relationships directed from non-Roma to Roma increased from 1.34 to 1.78 (p = $7.0×10^{-6}$, r = +0.82), while Roma students' ratings towards non-Roma rose from 2.01 to 2.44 (p = $4.6×10^{-4}$, r = +0.65). The vertical error bars indicate the standard deviation of the relationship scores, reflecting the variability within each group. Importantly, the proportion of strong inter-ethnic ties increased notably -especially from Roma to non-Roma students (0% → 20%). Inter-ethnic cohesion therefore improved significantly, although ethnic clustering was not completely eliminated. Intra-group ties among Roma remained strong but showed a slight decline (4.83 → 4.47), suggesting increased openness to external peer connections.

Figure 2.
Average inter-ethnic relationship scores (1-5) before and after the intervention
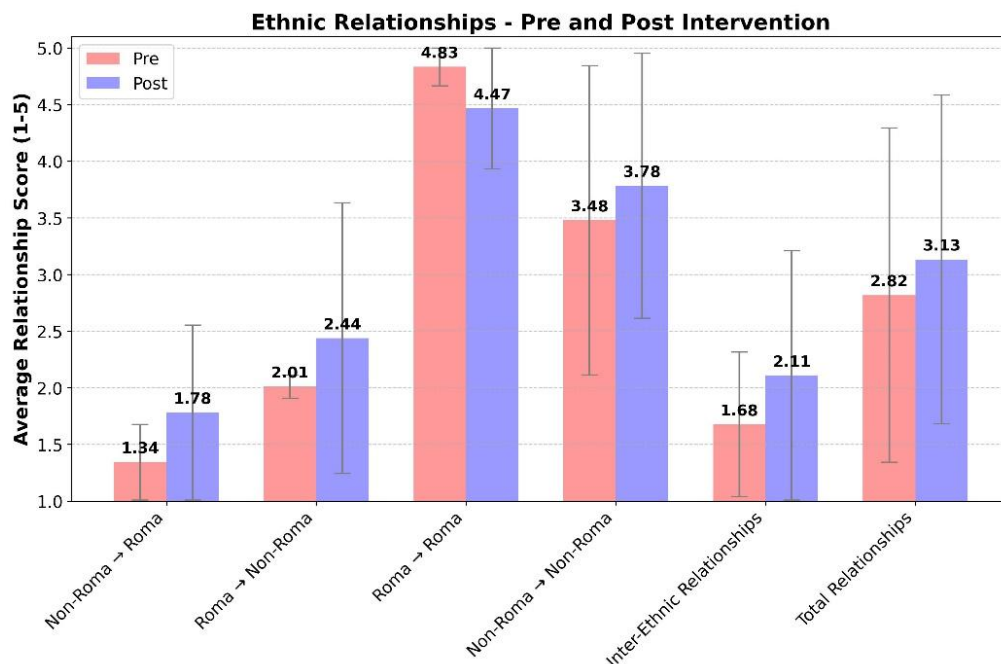
* *Note.* The vertical error bars indicate the standard deviation of the relationship scores, reflecting the variability within each group.

Regarding gender, the results shown in Fig. 3, and Tab. 3, both intra-gender and inter-gender relationships improved. Boys strengthened their internal connections ($2.94 \rightarrow 3.27$, $p = 1.5 \times 10^{-4}$), while interactions from boys to girls also improved ($2.30 \rightarrow 2.76$, $p = 3.1 \times 10^{-4}$). Inter-gender relationships overall increased by $+0.34$ ($p = 3.6 \times 10^{-5}$). Relationships among girls remained consistently high (4.31), reflecting an already cohesive subgroup.

Table 3.

Gender relationship results after the intervention.

Relationship Directions	Mean ± Std. *	Strong Ties (≥4)	Mean Change	p-value**	Rank-biserial (r)	Nr. of Relationships
Boys → Boys	3.27 ± 1.52	50%	+0.33	**1.5×10^{-4}**	+0.45	96
Girls → Girls	4.31 ± 1.09	83%	+0.12	3.7×10^{-1}	+0.27	96
Boys → Girls	2.76 ± 1.21	30%	+0.46	**3.1×10^{-4}**	+0.57	30
Girls → Boys	2.76 ± 1.36	32%	+0.22	**2.8×10^{-2}**	+0.32	240
Inter-gender	2.76 ± 1.29	31%	+0.34	**3.6×10^{-5}**	+0.45	192

* *Note.* Mean values and standard deviations relate to a 5-point Likert scale (1 = almost none, 5 = very strong).

** *Note.* Boldface values indicate statistically significant differences ($p < .05$). p values refer to Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.

Figure 3.

Average intra-gender and inter-gender relationship scores (1-5) pre and post intervention
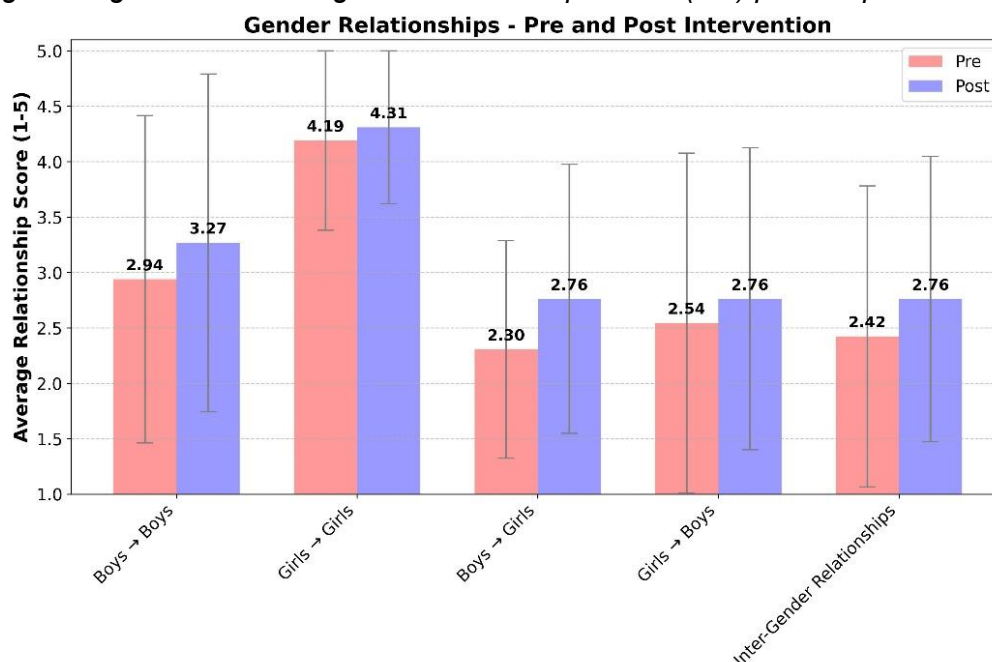

* *Note.* The vertical error bars indicate the standard deviation of the relationship scores, reflecting the variability within each group.

As shown in Fig. 4, individual student data reveal a pervasive positive trend: almost all students (21 out of 22) showed an increase in their mean *received* relationship score after the intervention, indicating a notable overall strengthening of the classroom social network. These scores represent the average strength of relationships received by each student. The

difference in scores before and after the intervention highlights the change in how students are perceived by their peers. Notably, five out of six Roma students (red bars) exhibited positive gains, which supports the conclusion that the intervention effectively reduced social isolation and improved the social status of this less-included subgroup.

Figure 4.
Change in average peer relationship scores (post – pre) for each student
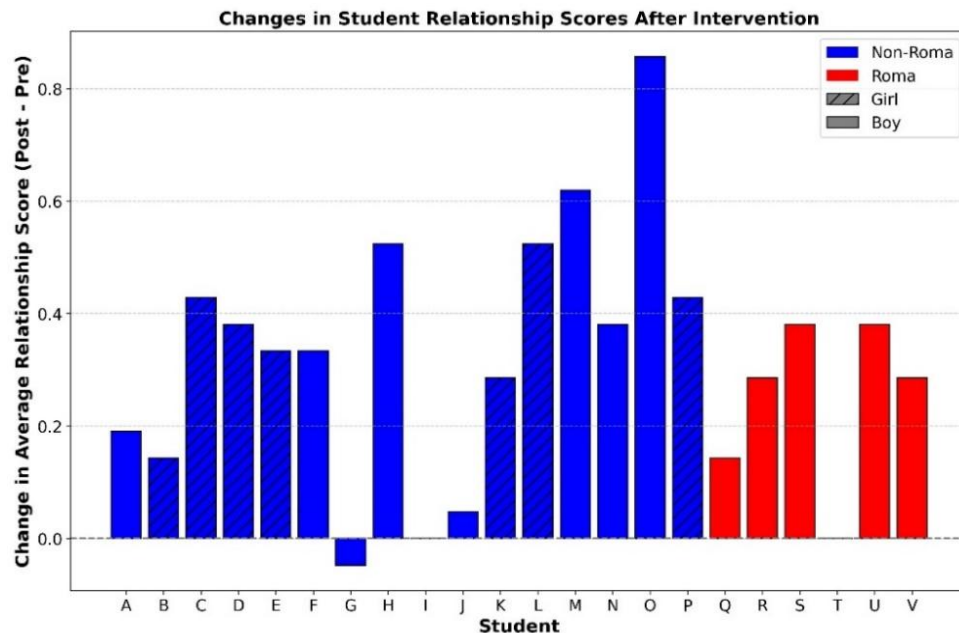
Finally, the post-intervention sociogram (Fig. 5) confirmed a denser and more integrated classroom network compared to Fig. 1, corresponding to pre-intervention, with reduced social isolation and more students acting as bridges between the groups. These results provide additional strong evidence that the intervention enhanced social cohesion and promoted more inclusive peer relations in the classroom.

Figure 5.
Post-intervention undirected sociogram of cooperative relationships
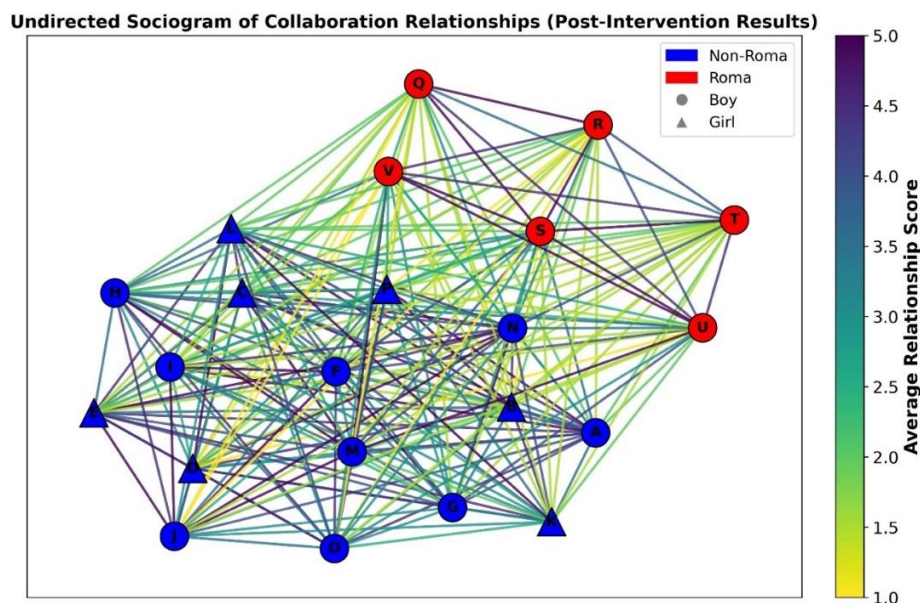
6. Discussion

Although the intervention program included components addressed to teachers and parents, the present study systematically evaluated only the student-focused part of the intervention. Due to time constraints and the design of the research, no quantitative data were collected on the outcomes of the teacher training sessions or the parental involvement program. Nevertheless, observational field notes suggested positive engagement from both groups, indicating potential areas for future systematic evaluation.

The findings of this work highlight the critical role of SSW within educational ecosystems. Specifically, school social workers, operating from an interdisciplinary orientation and applying systemic and strength-based approaches, can facilitate communication and cooperation among culturally diverse students, teachers, and families (Allen-Meares, 2014; Constable, 2016; Farmakopoulou, 2025). The holistic interventions of SSW in preventive and intervention initiatives are crucial for sustaining the positive outcomes of classroom interventions, such as the one implemented in the present study.

More precisely, the results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of an ecosystemic and multicultural intervention led to measurable improvements in peer relationships between Roma and non-Roma students. The post-intervention sociometric results revealed an increase in the overall mean score of all recorded relationships from 2.82 to 3.13 and a significant rise in strong inter-ethnic ties (ratings ≥4), especially from Roma to Non-Roma students (from 0% to 20%) within the classroom network. Relationship ratings from non-Roma to Roma students increased from 1.34 to 1.78, while those from Roma to non-Roma rose from 2.02 to 2.44. These findings align with previous research suggesting that structured interactions combined with experiential learning can promote inter-group contacts and reduce prejudice in school environments (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2018).

Although strong intra-group bonds among Roma students remained strong (M=4.47), the post-intervention sociometric network (Figs. 1 and 6) showed stronger overall connectivity and the emergence of intergroup bridges, which is a crucial factor for enhancing the social well-being and social inclusion of all students (Reysen et al, 2016). The gradual shift of Roma students from peripheral to more central social positions within the classroom network suggests an increased sense of belonging and reduced social marginalization. This change is particularly significant given that Roma students frequently experience exclusion and stereotyping in mainstream school settings (FRA, 2021).

Furthermore, Figure 4 illustrates that nearly all students (21 of 22) showed positive gains in their average relationship scores after the intervention, with Roma students demonstrating particularly strong improvements that indicate enhanced social inclusion. The intervention also positively affected gender-based interactions, notably strengthening internal cohesion among boys (from 2.94 to 3.27) and improving inter-gender ties (+31%).

However, despite the improvement in inter-ethnic interactions, the persistence of group clustering indicates that intercultural transformation is gradual and requires sustained effort. Short-term interventions, while beneficial, may not fully overcome deeply rooted social boundaries. Sustained practices promoting intercultural dialogue and empathy within the school microsystem are therefore essential for long-term social inclusion.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This study based on a pretest–follow-up design, provided evidence that SSW interventions, with an ecosystem approach, can effectively enhance intercultural interactions between Roma and non-Roma students by promoting intercultural communication and collaborative learning. The sociometric analysis confirmed a reduction in social isolation, and an increase in intergroup connections between Roma and non-Roma students within the classroom network.

Despite its encouraging outcomes, the study has certain limitations. It was implemented in a single school with a small sample size, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the absence of Roma girls from the participant group represents a significant limitation, as it prevents a gender-balanced understanding of social inclusion processes within Roma communities. Additionally, the study evaluated only the student component of the multi-level intervention, as no measurable data were collected for the teacher and parent components, limiting conclusions regarding the full implementation of the ecosystemic model.

Future research should expand the intervention to more schools and diverse geographical areas in order to test its applicability and effectiveness across different educational and cultural contexts. It is also recommended that similar programs begin earlier in primary education (e.g., Grades 2 or 3), allowing more time for the development of interaction relationships. Increasing the duration and number of sessions may strengthen the impact, as participants expressed a desire for longer engagement.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of holistic, systemic approaches that address intercultural relationships at multiple levels of the school community. With further refinement and broader application, such programs have the potential to contribute to the social inclusion of vulnerable students and promote equitable education environments.

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Ενίσχυση των διαπολιτισμικών αλληλεπιδράσεων στην πρωτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση: μια οικοσυστημική παρέμβαση σχολικής κοινωνικής εργασίας με μαθητές/τριες Ρομά και μη

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει τον αντίκτυπο ενός πολυεπίπεδου, οικοσυστημικού προγράμματος παρέμβασης, σχεδιασμένου για την ενίσχυση των διαπολιτισμικών σχέσεων και τη μείωση της κοινωνικής απόστασης μεταξύ μαθητών/τριων Ρομά και μη σε μια τάξη δημοτικού σχολείου στην Ελλάδα. Με βάση τις αρχές της Σχολικής Κοινωνικής Εργασίας (ΣΚΕ) και την οικοσυστημική προσέγγιση, το πρόγραμμα παρέμβασης απευθύνθηκε ταυτόχρονα σε μαθητές/τριες, εκπαιδευτικούς και γονείς. Χρησιμοποιώντας pre-test και follow-up μετρήσεις σε μία τάξη, συλλέχθηκαν δεδομένα μέσω ενός κοινωνιομετρικού τεστ, το οποίο κατέγραψε και ανέλυσε τις συνεργατικές σχέσεις των μαθητών/τριων πριν και μετά την παρέμβαση. Τα αποτελέσματα της μέτρησης στην αρχική φάση, πριν την έναρξη του προγράμματος, αποκάλυψαν έντονη ομαδοποίηση βάσει εθνότητας και φύλου και ιδιαίτερα αδύναμους δεσμούς μεταξύ μαθητών/τριων Ρομά και μη. Μετά την παρέμβαση των τριάντα τεσσάρων ωρών, ο συνολικός μέσος βαθμός σχέσεων αυξήθηκε και οι δια-εθνοτικοί δεσμοί ενισχύθηκαν. Η ανάλυση των σχέσεων έδειξε, επίσης, ισχυρότερη συνδεσιμότητα και ανάπτυξη δεσμών μεταξύ των ομάδων με βάση το φύλο, γεγονός που υποδηλώνει μεγαλύτερη συνοχή στην τάξη. Τα ευρήματα επιβεβαιώνουν ότι οι οικοσυστημικές παρεμβάσεις που εφαρμόζονται μέσω της ΣΚΕ μπορούν να προωθήσουν τη διαπολιτισμική επικοινωνία, την ενσυναίσθηση και τη συνεργασία σε πολυπολιτισμικές τάξεις. Ωστόσο, η διατήρηση της ομαδοποίησης ως προς το φύλο και την εθνότητα υπογραμμίζει την ανάγκη για μακροπρόθεσμη και επαναλαμβανόμενη εφαρμογή τέτοιων προγραμμάτων, ιδανικά ξεκινώντας νωρίτερα στην πρωτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση, προκειμένου να διασφαλίζονται διαπολιτισμικά περιβάλλοντα ισότιμης εκπαίδευσης.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: Διαπολιτισμικές Αλληλεπιδράσεις, Σχολική Κοινωνική Εργασία, Οικοσυστημική Προσέγγιση, Ρομά, Κοινωνιομετρικό Τεστ

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Ειρήνη Κατσαμά
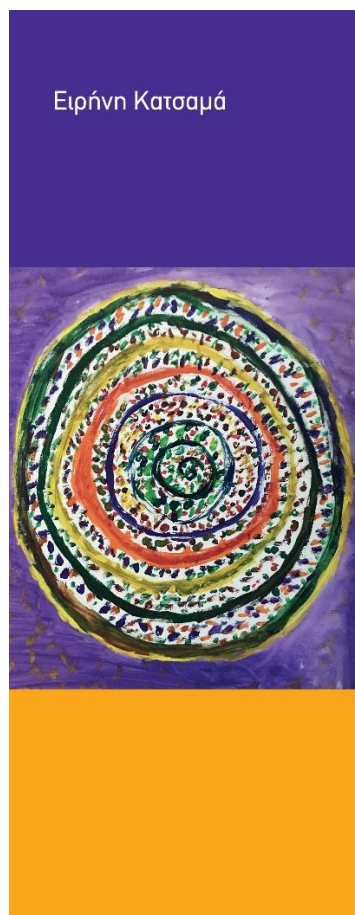
ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ ΜΕ ΟΜΑΔΕΣ ΣΤΟ ΣΧΟΛΕΙΟ

Σπουδαστήριο Κοινωνικής και Κοινοτικής Εργασίας
Διεύθυνση: Θεανώ Καλλινικάκη & Αγάπη Κανδυλάκη

Το βιβλίο αυτό καλύπτει το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο της κοινωνικής εργασίας με ομάδες και επιδιώκει να συνεισφέρει στον σχεδιασμό και την εφαρμογή ομαδικών παρεμβάσεων στον χώρο της εκπαίδευσης που να αποκρίνονται με επάρκεια σε ανάγκες πρόληψης και έγκαιρης αντιμετώπισης ιδιαίτερων γεγονότων και δυσκολιών.

Περιγράφονται και αναλύονται όροι που αποσκοπούν να συμβάλουν στην αντίληψη της ομάδας. Στην αναγνώριση και κατανόηση της δυναμικής ως έννοιας και ως διαδικασίας, η οποία επιδρά καταλυτικά στην επίτευξη των στόχων μιας ομάδας. Καταδεικνύει την αναπόσπαστη σχέση μεταξύ θεωρίας και πράξης, ενώ οι έννοιες και οι αρχές της πρακτικής απεικονίζονται με παραδείγματα από διαφορετικές ομάδες μαθητών/τριών σε διαφορετικά σχολικά περιβάλλοντα. Η παρουσίαση παραδειγμάτων ενισχύει σημαντικά τις γνώσεις αναφορικά με τη λειτουργία των ομάδων, τη διαδικασία μέσα από την οποία τα μέλη υιοθετούν συγκεκριμένους ρόλους, προτείνοντας λειτουργικούς τρόπους διαχείρισης.

Απευθύνεται σε προπτυχιακούς/ές και μεταπτυχιακούς/ές φοιτητές και φοιτήτριες κοινωνικής εργασίας, σε σχολικούς/ές κοινωνικούς/ές λειτουργούς, σε εκπαιδευτικούς που δεν σταματούν να αναζητούν τρόπους προσέγγισης των μαθητών και μαθητριών τους, αλλά και σε γονείς που αναζητούν αδιάκοπα ευκαιρίες να μαθαίνουν μαζί με τα παιδιά τους.

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Κοινωνική Λειτουργός, Οικογενειακή Θεραπεύτρια, Επόπτρια και Εκπαιδεύτρια*

Διαβάζοντας το βιβλίο "Κοινωνική Εργασία με Ομάδες στο Σχολείο" ξαναγύρισα στην εποχή της εκπαίδευσης μου στην Κοινωνική Εργασία, δηλαδή στο μακρινό 1964. Σκέφτομαι τους σημερινούς φοιτητές και φοιτήτριες που έχουν στα χέρια τους μια τόσο ολοκληρωμένη δουλειά, αλλά και τους κοινωνικούς λειτουργούς που εργάζονται με νέους ανθρώπους και τις οικογένειες τους σε σχολεία, σε φορείς φροντίδας μεταναστών, σε θεραπευτικές κοινότητες και στους Δήμους στην πρώτη γραμμή, πόσο χρήσιμο και ανακουφιστικό είναι να έχουν τεκμηριωμένες κατευθυντήριες γραμμές για να οργανώνουν τις δράσεις τους.

Στο βιβλίο αυτό υπάρχει μια πολύ γερή και σύγχρονη θεωρητική βάση που προσφέρει το αναγκαίο πλαίσιο κάθε δράσης ενός επαγγελματία, δίνοντας παράλληλα τη δομή, τη μέθοδο

και τις τεχνικές.

Το θέμα του βιβλίου, η κοινωνική εργασία με ομάδες στο σχολείο, μας μεταφέρει σε μια ευαίσθητη και κρίσιμη περιοχή της ζωής των παιδιών και των νέων ανθρώπων της χώρας μας, που καλούνται να κατανοήσουν και να αποδώσουν νόημα σε συνθήκες σύγχυσης, ανασφάλειας και πολλαπλών μεταβάσεων, καθώς ταυτόχρονα βρίσκονται στην αναζήτηση προοπτικών για το μέλλον τους. Γονείς και εκπαιδευτικοί προσπαθούν να πλαισιώσουν και να στηρίξουν τα παιδιά, ενώ και οι ίδιοι χρειάζονται να διαχειριστούν και να αντέξουν την αβεβαιότητα.

Το βιβλίο τονίζει πως μέσα από την συμμετοχή σε ομάδες, ενισχύεται η προσωπική ανάπτυξη και ενδυναμώνονται οι προσωπικοί στόχοι. Στις ομάδες, καλλιεργείται βιωματικά η αξία της συλλογικότητας, αλλά και η ταυτότητα. Η αίσθηση του Εαυτού δημιουργείται στις ομάδες που ο άνθρωπος γεννιέται και μεγαλώνει, εκεί όπου δημιουργεί τον εαυτό του καθώς επεξεργάζεται την ομοιότητα και την ετερότητα με τα άλλα μέλη. Κάτω από αυτό το πρίσμα, η ετερότητα αποτελεί πηγή εμπλουτισμού, μάθησης και γνώσης, γεγονός που επηρεάζει αργότερα τις σχέσεις με κάθε τι "ξένο" ως οικείο και όχι ως απειλητικό.

Η βιωματική μάθηση της ομαδικότητας ως τρόπος συνύπαρξης, έρχεται σε αντίθεση με το ατομοκεντρικό μοντέλο συνύπαρξης που επιφέρει ανταγωνισμό, ματαιοδοξία, απληστία και μοναξιά, ενοχοποιείται δε ως ένας παράγοντας που συμβάλει στο φαινόμενο του εκφοβισμού.

Επιστρέφοντας στο μυθικό 1964 των σπουδών μου, βρήκα μέσα στο βιβλίο το νήμα που με συνδέει με την κοινωνική εργασία του σήμερα - ξαναβρήκα την έμπνευση που δίνει η πίστη στους ανθρώπους και στις δυνάμεις που διαθέτουν για αλλαγή της ζωής τους, το πάθος για μια δίκαιη κοινωνία φροντίδας και ισοτιμίας και την αξία της συλλογικότητας που δίνει ελπίδα για το μέλλον.

«Αναπλαισιώνοντας την Ψυχολογία του Μισαναπηρισμού» του Brian Watermeyer
(2012/2023. Εκδόσεις Routledge/
Γράφημα, επιστημονική επιμέλεια των
Α. Μπίμπου και Φ. Κουγιουμουτζάκη)
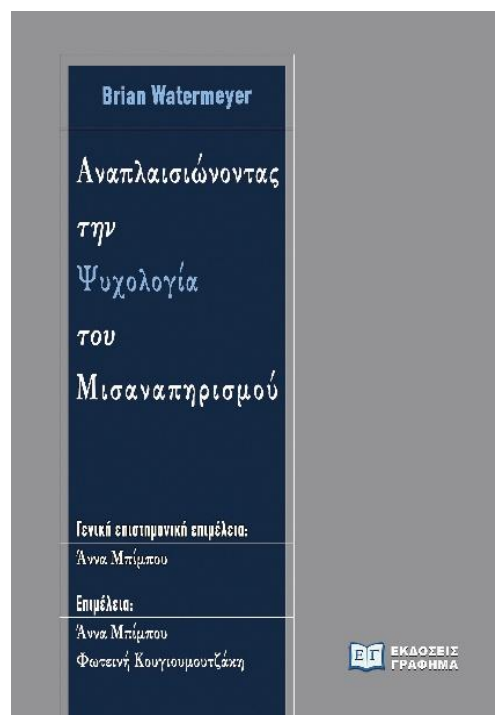
Μια κριτική ψυχαναλυτική συνεισφορά στην πολιτική της αναπηρίας

Γράφει ο Θεολόγος Χατζηπέμου, Επίκουρος Καθηγητής Σχολικής Κοινωνικής Εργασίας στο Τμήμα Κοινωνική Εργασίας του Πα.Δ.Α.

Η αναπηρία ως ψυχική και πολιτική αντίσταση στον λόγο του μισαναπηρισμού

Το βιβλίο του Brian Watermeyer *«Αναπλαισιώνοντας την Ψυχολογία του Μισαναπηρισμού»*, όπως παρουσιάζεται στην ελληνική του έκδοση, αποτελεί μία από τις πιο ριζοσπαστικές απόπειρες αποδόμησης της κυρίαρχης παραδοσιακής ματιάς πάνω στην αναπηρία. Ο συγγραφέας, ακτιβιστής με προσωπική εμπειρία αναπηρίας, ψυχολόγος και ερευνητής με καταγωγή από τη Νότια Αφρική, προσεγγίζει την αναπηρία όχι ως ιατρική ή παθολογική κατάσταση, αλλά ως **πολιτικό, πολιτισμικό, ψυχικό και κοινωνικό γεγονός**. Στόχος του δεν είναι να ενσωματώσει την αναπηρία στο υπάρχον κανονιστικό σύστημα, αλλά να το αποδομήσει εκ θεμελίων.

Η έννοια του «μισαναπηρισμού» (disablism), που διατρέχει ολόκληρο το έργο, ορίζεται όχι μόνο ως προκατάληψη ή διάκριση, αλλά ως ένας βαθιά εγγεγραμμένος, **συστημικός μηχανισμός αορατοποίησης** της ανάπηρης εμπειρίας. Πρόκειται για αλληλοπλοκή θεσμικών, πολιτισμικών και ψυχικών δομών που συγκροτούν την αναπηρία ως «ετερότητα», ως κάτι ανεπιθύμητο, τρομακτικό ή ανεξέλεγκτο. Ο Watermeyer επιχειρεί να απογυμνώσει την παραδοσιακή ψυχολογική προσέγγιση από την επίφαση ουδετερότητας, υποστηρίζοντας πως μια αντίστοιχη επεξεργασία, συχνά, καταλήγει να λειτουργεί ως εργαλείο αναπαραγωγής των κανονιστικών προτύπων.

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Αντλώντας από τη βιβλιογραφία και την πρακτική του κοινωνικού μοντέλου, καθώς και την προσωπική του εμπειρία ως ανάπηρο άτομο που ζει και εργάζεται σε μια μετααποικιοκρατική κοινωνία, ο συγγραφέας συνδέει το τραύμα της αναπηρίας με το συλλογικό τραύμα του ρατσισμού, της φτώχειας και της πολιτικής βίας. Το ανάπηρο σώμα, με βάση τη συστηματική του ανάλυση, δεν αφορά ή δεν ανάγεται σε μια βιολογική πραγματικότητα· είναι **χώρος προβολής των φόβων της κοινωνίας, πεδίο επίθεσης και ταυτόχρονα αντίστασης**. Η συμβολή του Watermeyer έγκειται στο γεγονός ότι δίνει φωνή σε αυτή την εμπειρία, μετατρέποντας τη σιωπή σε λόγο, το προσωπικό σε πολιτικό.

Η προσέγγιση αυτή, σε αντίθεση με τις παραδοσιακές ψυχολογικές θεωρίες που παθολογικοποιούν τη διαφορά, υποστηρίζει την ανάγκη για **μια νέα μορφή κριτικής ψυχολογίας**. Αναζητά μια ψυχολογία που δεν αρνείται ή δεν υποβαθμίζει τον ψυχικό πόνο, αλλά τον εντάσσει στο ευρύτερο πλέγμα των πολιτικών για την αναπηρία, των κοινωνικών σχέσεων και των σχεσιακών πρακτικών, όπως αυτές διαμορφώνονται, απέχοντας από ερμηνείες των αναπήρων ως «ασθενών». Αξιοποιεί και μεταδομικές προσεγγίσεις, όπως είναι η δυναμική της επιτελεστικότητας, ώστε να διερευνήσει το πώς η έννοια της αναπηρίας συγκροτείται ενεργά μέσα από τους λόγους, τις πρακτικές και τις καθημερινές σχέσεις εξουσίας.

Η Κριτική Ψυχανάλυση και η Πολιτική της Υποκειμενικότητας

Η προσέγγιση του Watermeyer εδράζεται σε ένα **πολυεπίπεδο ψυχαναλυτικό πλαίσιο**, επηρεασμένο τόσο από τη φροϋδική όσο και από τη λακανική θεωρία, τις οποίες επεκτείνει μέσω της φεμινιστικής και μετααποικιακής κριτικής. Ο συγγραφέας - και πάντα, υιοθετώντας μια μαρξιστική προσέγγιση, επιδιώκει να εμπλουτίσει το πολιτικό πρόταγμα του κοινωνικού μοντέλου της αναπηρίας - αναδεικνύει πως η απόρριψη της αναπηρίας δεν είναι μόνο κοινωνικό, αλλά και **βαθιά ψυχικό αντανακλαστικό**. Η αναπηρία – και κατ' επέκταση το ανάπηρο σώμα – τείνει να απωθείται από το συνειδητό, με τον ίδιο τρόπο που όλοι/-ες μας απωθούμε τις πανανθρώπινες συνθήκες αδυναμίας, εξάρτησης ή απώλειας.

Σύμφωνα με τον Watermeyer, η ψυχολογία έχει συμβάλει - συχνά άθελά της - στην παγίωση ενός φαντασιακού, όπου το ανάπηρο υποκείμενο θεωρείται ελλιπές, ανίκανο ή ανώριμο. Με όρους ψυχανάλυσης, η «κανονικότητα» εγκαθίσταται ως **φαντασιακή άμυνα απέναντι στο τραύμα της διαφοράς**, και ο αποκλεισμός των ανάπηρων σωμάτων ενισχύει την ψευδαίσθηση της αυτάρκειας ενός «κανονικοποιητικού» εαυτού.

Το βιβλίο ασκεί κριτική στα κυρίαρχα θεραπευτικά μοντέλα, στον τρόπο με τον οποίο **η ψυχοθεραπεία συχνά λειτουργεί κανονιστικά**, ενισχύοντας πρότυπα προσαρμογής που προϋποθέτουν την εγκατάλειψη της ανάπηρης ταυτότητας. Ο Watermeyer αντιπροτείνει μια ψυχοθεραπεία ριζικά διαφορετική, βασισμένη στην **ενσώματη κατανόηση, την αποδοχή της έλλειψης και την αμοιβαιότητα**. Η έννοια της «ενσυναισθητικής φροντίδας» επανανοηματοδοτείται: δεν αφορά απλώς τη συμπόνια, αλλά τη βαθιά αναγνώριση της ετερότητας του άλλου που δεν επιδιώκει με βίαση την εξομοίωση ή την αποκατάσταση.

Μία από τις πιο καινοτόμες πτυχές του έργου είναι η ανάλυση της θεραπευτικής σχέσης ως **σχέσης εξουσίας και σημασιοδότησης**. Δεν πρόκειται απλώς για διάλογο ανάμεσα σε έναν ειδικό και έναν ασθενή, αλλά για ένα συμβολικό πεδίο όπου συγκρούονται επιθυμίες, φαντασιώσεις και κοινωνικές αναπαραστάσεις.

Το ανάπηρο υποκείμενο παρουσιάζεται όχι ως «αντικείμενο παρέμβασης», αλλά ως **φορέας γνώσης, εμπειρίας και ιστορικής μνήμης**. Ο Watermeyer δεν ζητά ούτε λύπηση ούτε εξιδανίκευση. Ζητά την

αναγνώριση μιας υπαρξιακής και πολιτικής κατάστασης στο πλαίσιο της οποίας αξίζει να γίνει αντικείμενο σκέψης, διαλόγου και αντίστασης.

Πέρα από τα Μοντέλα: Διαθεματική Ανάγνωση και Πολιτική Δράση

Το κοινωνικό μοντέλο της αναπηρίας - που αναπτύχθηκε από το αναπηρικό κίνημα στο Ηνωμένο Βασίλειο τις δεκαετίες του 1970 και του 1980 - επέφερε μια απαραίτητη μετατόπιση: από την ιατρική ατομική προσέγγιση στη θεώρηση της αναπηρίας ως προϊόντος κοινωνικών φραγμών. Ωστόσο, όπως επισημαίνει ο Watermeyer, το μοντέλο αυτό, παρά την προοδευτική του πρόθεση, **αποκλείει συχνά την ψυχική διάσταση** της εμπειρίας, αφήνοντας αδιερεύνητο το εσωτερικευμένο τραύμα, την επιθυμία, αλλά και τον εσωτερικό αγώνα αποδοχής.

Η εμμονή με τις εξωτερικές μορφές αποκλεισμού μπορεί να οδηγήσει σε μια **πραγματολογική προσέγγιση**, όπου το υποκείμενο παρουσιάζεται παθητικά, ως προϊόν καταπίεσης, χωρίς ευθύνη ή συνδιαμόρφωση της ταυτότητάς του. Ο Watermeyer τονίζει πως ακόμη και η «κανονικότητα» **δεν επιβάλλεται μόνο εξωτερικά**, αλλά και εσωτερικεύεται μέσω ψυχικών μηχανισμών. Ο μισαναπηρισμός δεν είναι μόνο κοινωνικός, είναι και **ενδοψυχικός**: ζει στο βλέμμα που στρέφουμε στον εαυτό μας.

Η συμβολή του Watermeyer έγκειται στην ανάπτυξη ενός συγκερασμένου θεωρητικού μοντέλου, το οποίο «παντρεύει» την κριτική θεωρία με τη βιωματική αφήγηση, ενσωματώνει την κριτική προσέγγιση με τη διαθεματική ανάλυση και συνδέει την έννοια του τραύματος με την πολιτική. Οι αναφορές του για την ανάδειξη της εμπειρίας της αναπηρίας στη Νότια Αφρική σε ένα ιστορικό και αποικιακό πλαίσιο, καταδεικνύουν τις αλληλοδράσεις της καταπίεσης με την ταξική, έμφυλη και φυλετική αδικία. Η αναπηρία - σε αυτό το πλαίσιο - παύει να είναι «ιδιαίτερη περίπτωση» και καθίσταται σημείο σύνδεσης ανάμεσα σε διαφορετικές μορφές βίας και αποκλεισμού.

Η ελληνική μετάφραση του βιβλίου εγκαινιάζει νέους επιστημονικούς και κοινωνικούς διαλόγους, προσφέροντας τη δυνατότητα αναστοχασμού και επαναξιολόγησης της εγχώριας ψυχολογικής και θεσμικής προσέγγισης της αναπηρίας. Οι επιμελήτριες Μπίμπου και Κουγιουμουτζάκη φροντίζουν ώστε το έργο να διατηρεί τη θεωρητική του πολυπλοκότητα και ταυτόχρονα να παραμένει προσβάσιμο και επίκαιρο για τον ελληνικό ακαδημαϊκό και θεραπευτικό χώρο.

Τελικά, το βιβλίο του Watermeyer συνιστά ένα **κάλεσμα προς επαναπροσδιορισμό**: τόσο της ψυχολογίας ως επιστημονικού πεδίου όσο και της ίδιας της κοινωνικοπολιτικής θέσης της αναπηρίας. Υπενθυμίζει ότι η πολιτική αλλαγή δεν είναι εφικτή χωρίς ψυχική επεξεργασία και πως καμία απελευθερωτική διαδικασία δεν μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ολοκληρωμένη, αν αγνοεί το σώμα, το τραύμα και το συναίσθημα.

Εφαρμογές Κοινωνικής Εργασίας σε παιδιά
Τέταρτη Έκδοση
Επιστημονική Επιμέλεια:
Θεώνη Μαυρόγιαννη, Μανόλης Μέντης
Συγγραφέας: Nancy Boyd Webb
Εκδόσεις: Gotsis

Το βιβλίο της NancyBoydWebb, *«Εφαρμογές Κοινωνικής Εργασίας σε Παιδιά»*, αποτελεί ένα ιδιαίτερα επίκαιρο και ουσιαστικό εγχειρίδιο για φοιτήτριες/τές Κοινωνικής Εργασίας, καθώς και για επαγγελματίες κοινωνικές/ούς λειτουργούς που δραστηριοποιούνται στον χώρο της παιδικής προστασίας και της υποστήριξης παιδιών και οικογενειών.

Η Webb δεν περιορίζεται σε μια θεωρητική προσέγγιση, αλλά προσφέρει έναν πρακτικό οδηγό που ενδυναμώνει τις/τους επαγγελματίες να ανταποκριθούν αποτελεσματικά στις σύνθετες και διαρκώς εξελισσόμενες ανάγκες των παιδιών. Συνδυάζοντας διαχρονικές αρχές της Κοινωνικής Εργασίας με τις σύγχρονες κοινωνικοπολιτισμικές προκλήσεις, η συγγραφέας παρέχει ένα ολιστικό πλαίσιο κατανόησης και παρέμβασης. Ιδιαίτερη έμφαση δίνεται στην πρόληψη της παιδικής κακοποίησης, με την ανάδειξη των προστατευτικών παραγόντων και την προώθηση της ενεργούς υποστήριξης των οικογενειών.

Η Webb διερευνά τα πολυεπίπεδα αίτια της κακοποίησης –όπως η ανεργία, η φτώχεια, οι ψυχικές διαταραχές– και προτείνει ολιστικές στρατηγικές παρέμβασης που λειτουργούν σε ατομικό, οικογενειακό και κοινωνικό επίπεδο, βασισμένες στο οικολογικό και βιοψυχοκοινωνικό μοντέλο.

Το βιβλίο εξετάζει καταστάσεις όπως η κακοποίηση, η παραμέληση, η προσφυγιά, το τραύμα και το πένθος που ενσωματώνουν την ενσυναίσθηση, την οικοδόμηση σχέσης εμπιστοσύνης, τον αναστοχασμό και τη διεπιστημονική συνεργασία. Μέσα από μελέτες περίπτωσης, ζωγραφιές, σενάρια ρόλων και ερωτήσεις για συζήτηση, το έργο αποκτά βιωματικό χαρακτήρα και λειτουργεί ως εργαλείο ενίσχυσης της πρακτικής εφαρμογής των παρεμβάσεων. Η σταθερή παρότρυνση για επαγγελματική αυτοπαρατήρηση και αναστοχασμό συμβάλλει ουσιαστικά στην προσωπική και επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη της/του κοινωνικής/ού λειτουργού.

ΕΦΑΡΜΟΓΕΣ ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑΣ ΣΕ ΠΑΙΔΙΑ

ΤΕΤΑΡΤΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

Nancy Boyd Webb

Το βιβλίο αυτό γράφτηκε από τη Nancy Boyd Webb, διακεκριμένη Καθηγήτρια Κοινωνικής Εργασίας στο Graduate School of Social Service του Πανεπιστημίου Fordham των Η.Π.Α. και με μεγάλη εμπειρία στην Παιγνιοθεραπεία. Η τεράστια κλινική της εμπειρία με παιδιά και οικογένειες αντανακλάται στις περιπτώσεις που αναλύονται και είναι πολύτιμη, όχι μόνο για τις/τους Κοινωνικές/ούς Λειτουργούς, αλλά για το σύνολο των επαγγελματιών που ασχολούνται με παιδιά, καθώς και για τις/τους ψυχοθεραπεύτριες/ψυχοθεραπευτές. Συνεπώς, το βιβλίο αυτό αποτελεί ένα απαραίτητο εργαλείο για το σύνολο των παραπάνω επαγγελματιών και επιστημόνων. Επιπλέον, όμως το σύγγραμμα αυτό υπενθυμίζει στην/στον εκάστοτε αναγνώστρια/αναγνώστη ορισμένα χρήσιμα συμπεράσματα:

➤ Τα παιδιά ως ωφελούμενα των υπηρεσιών θα πρέπει να βρίσκονται στο επίκεντρο του ενδιαφέροντος των επαγγελματιών ανεξάρτητα από τη σχολή σκέψης τους, οι οποίες/οι κάθε φορά οφείλουν να αξιοποιούν τη βέλτιστη θεραπεία που ταιριάζει καλύτερα σε κάθε παιδί και κάθε οικογένεια.

➤ Τα προβλήματα των παιδιών είναι πλέον «παγκοσμιοποιημένα», τουλάχιστον στον λεγόμενο αναπτυγμένο Δυτικό κόσμο. Οι όποιες διαφορές σχετίζονται με την οργάνωση των υπηρεσιών και των προγραμμάτων, που με τη σειρά τους σχετίζονται με τις δυνατότητες χρηματοδότησης από την εκάστοτε Πολιτεία, αλλά και από την εκπαίδευση και τη συνακόλουθη κουλτούρα των επαγγελματιών.

➤ Η φτώχεια είναι τις περισσότερες φορές ο κοινός παρονομαστής για φαινόμενα παιδικής κακοποίησης και παραμέλησης και η παροχή από την Πολιτεία των αναγκαίων υλικών και άυλων πόρων (υπηρεσίες) είναι όρος sine qua non για μια πολιτική αντιστάθμισης με όραμα την κοινωνική ένταξη και την ευκαιρία για μια Ποιότητα Ζωής και για αυτά τα παιδιά και τις οικογένειές τους.

➤ Τα παιδιά δεν μπορεί να προσεγγίζονται έξω από το οικογενειακό σύστημα και το πολιτισμικό τους πλαίσιο.

➤ Η θεραπευτική δουλειά με παιδιά απαιτεί αναλυτική σκέψη, τεκμηριωμένη γνώση με αξιοποίηση εργαλείων και τεχνικών, διεπιστημονική προσέγγιση και «συμμαχία» με το οικογενειακό σύστημα. Η Dr. Webb απλόχερα μοιράζεται με τις/τους αναγνώστριες/αναγνώστες τόσο τις τεχνικές όσο και τα μεθοδολογικά εργαλεία για μια αποτελεσματική θεραπευτική σχέση και αυτό αποτελεί ένα επιπρόσθετο κίνητρο για τη μελέτη αυτού του βιβλίου.

Τέλος, μολονότι το βιβλίο αυτό γράφτηκε στις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 2020 λειτουργεί προφητικά επισημαίνοντας τους κινδύνους για το σύνολο της υφιστάμενης Κοινωνικής Πολιτικής, καθώς οι πολιτικές εξελίξεις στις Η.Π.Α. οδηγούν την ανθρωπότητα και το σύνολο των κοινωνικών θεσμών σε μια νέα περίοδο αβεβαιότητας, επιζήμιας τόσο για τα παιδιά όσο και για τις οικογένειες, που ως τώρα ανεξάρτητα από τις μορφές της αποτέλεσαν μαζί με το Σχολείο «τα βασικά εργαλεία κοινωνικοποίησης».