

The Psychological and Social Impact over the Individual during the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: The spreading of the new SARS-COV-2 virus on the planet had a devastating impact on the everyday life of the population, with manifestation on several levels, from the economic, cultural and social areas to the very essence of a human being. The lack of experience shared by the authorities in such a scenario, alongside the accelerated growth of cases and the high number of deaths, caused the countries all around the world to implement very restrictive measures, some of these affecting the fundamental rights and liberties of the people. The current paperwork will analyze the consequences brought upon an ordinary person, on a psychological and social level, by the new regulations adopted within the states in order to fight and prevent the current global infection. A comparison will be made between the State of emergency and the normal day life, revealing the key factors in behavior change and reactions. As references, we will bring into attention the dispositions from the Constitution, the Civil Code, and the Criminal Code versus the legal norms adopted during these last four critical months in Romania. At the end of the article, the conclusions will summarize the most relevant elements which tie up the results of the impact to the adopted laws.

KEYWORDS: pandemic, psychology, legal, decree, restrictions, Civil Code, Criminal Code, rights and freedoms

The human, a social creature

Even if at the beginning, the human being took actions at an individual level, providing its necessary elements for survival on its own, defending himself against all the dangers, internal and external, present at that time, this state of loneliness could not be maintained forever.

Abraham Maslow, one of the most important characters in the domain of psychology, is remembered today due to the fact that he managed to create the main categories for human necessities. He realized a hierarchy, based on the psychological evolution of the human in a lifetime (Ionescu 1995, 85).

Only the first two levels have in their composition the material necessities which cover sustaining and development, the other three being made of the social ones, which represent the interaction with the other members of the species. In this manner, the satisfaction of the desire to be loved is realized through the social plan with cognitive interaction. In the absence of the direct manifestation of affective behavior, this desire could not be fully satisfied (Olga, Ignat and Timat-Balaş 2014, 206).

The same can be said for the social status of the individual, which also presumes interaction with others in order to create a relationship of collaboration and participation, for example we can look at the work environment with the social report worker-supervisor (Popoviciu 2013, 17).

The last category of human needs, as per Maslow, is represented by the spiritual ones, these being derived from the act of helping others, the participation at religious events based on the culture or tradition accepted. The interaction is mandatory in this case (Malim, Brich and Hayward 2000, 28)

The pyramid, as deduced by Maslow, requires to be completed in a natural order, from bottom to top, so that one may experience fulfillment and happiness, the absence of any of these elements having the potential to result in a state of sadness, depression, anxiety or any other cognitive-degenerated issues with generally low risk (Mook 2009, 54).

In this way, the human can be explained as a socially dependent organism, permanently requiring interaction with his kind for the development of our species, and also the assuring of means when it comes to staying safe. For one to be alive, he has to socialize (Zlate 2000, 138).

SARS-COV-2. Medical implications

The year 2020 made its debut in a negative manner because it brought a new type of virus, SARS-COV-2, which affected the entire global population, having a high rate of spreading, and also being part of the pathogens with the same name. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization announced that the coronavirus epidemic is officially a pandemic, given that COVID-19 viral disease has wreaked havoc in 150 countries and killed more than 4,000 people (Hegheş 2020a, 90).

The huge risk related to this virus is represented by the speed of its infection, a person being susceptible to it by air (sneezes, cough, long close discussions with patients) and by the simple act of touching another or a contaminated surface.

With reference to the symptoms, they are divided into two categories. Firstly, we have the ones infected but which do not manifest any external changes, the localization of the harmful microorganism being done by medical testing only. Secondly, there are people which show symptoms related to the flu, making their identification as carriers simpler.

The manifestation in the host is not something out of the ordinary, having the appearance of a normal cold (fever, headaches, dizziness, and sneezes). The risk is mainly represented by the fact that prior affections of the patient can be amplified due to the SARS-COV-2.

Based on the above data, the most vulnerable people are the old ones, because they generally had several health issues to begin with.

The young members of the community which present severe medical problems are also exposed. A notable consequence was the high number of deaths from one day to another since the virus began to show up. Interesting to note is that along the victims there were people with no medical history or any sever past issues. These special exceptions lead in part to the creation of a massive panic and frustration. At the moment when the situation became desperate and the number of cases started to grow fast, the medics and helping workforce proposed a series of recommendations to be able to handle the known cases.

One of the measures brought to attention was the implementation of social distancing as a way of separating the healthy from the asymptomatic. This generated problems in the social aspect of the everyday individual.

Another measure proposed and applied was the wearing of masks in order to limit the possible contact with the bacteria present on surfaces, clothes and so on.

A great accent was put on hygiene, transforming it into a more intense habit than before, so that the immune system would not have to enter into battle with the external dangerous microorganisms.

The leaders of nations had to resort to critical decisions, in order to defend the public health and the physical integrity of the citizens. Laws were adopted in accordance with the medical recommendations.

As shown in history, drastic times require drastic measures, so was the case of the Black Death in Medieval Europe, when the number of persons killed was so high, that the dead bodies had to be incinerated by the hundreds in the same time, without the possibility of a normal burial ceremony.

The state of alert and the state of emergency - legislation during the pandemic

In the conditions given by the pandemic, at an international level, restrictions were implemented in our daily life with the purpose of preventing future cases of SARS-COV-2. Next, every

country has adopted, particularly, a set of rules applied with the assistance of the coercive force of the state.

In Romania, the President released a decree by which the state of emergency became real in the entire country, and resuming in a restraint of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens (Presidential Decree no. 195, Article 2). Subsequently, the president extended this state of emergency by another 30 days, and then the state of alert was established (Hegheş 2020b, 116). For the reduction of the rights, as an explanation, constitutional rules which cover this topic were invoked.

These dispositions state that in the event of a threat to the entire country, the one acting as president can declare the state of emergency alongside the necessary measures for protection and prevention (Romanian Constitution, Article 93). In this manner, social distancing became a reality, the obligation for companies to provide a safe environment for working also came into play, and the limitation of human interactions was mandatory, as per the recommendations from the medical community.

Businesses had to close their activity during the pandemic, their employees being sent into technical unemployment, a form of income much smaller than a usual salary, provided by the state. Not only was the market affected in the state of emergency, but also the future cultural events. Courses could not be delivered in class, spectacles were suspended, the cinemas had to be closed, different sport related activities were cancelled and all the extracurricular activities done in the past by students were postponed. All the meetings of any nature were prohibited for groups bigger than three people, for a minimum social interaction.

In order for these restrictions to be followed, severe sanctions were also put into place, for example huge fines, several times higher than an average salary. Also, even being put into prison was a viable outcome for the person which was aware of her health issue, but continued to infect others. The time in jail could have been from 6 months to 2 years, depending on the severity of the crime (New Criminal Procedural Code, Article 352).

Even in this situation, the people managed to move almost all of their activities online, this being the reason younger generations could continue attending courses. Some cultural events were proceeded with together with other manifestations which the digital world could hold. In the economic sector, some companies, especially the shared-services centers, continued their activity with the work from home policy.

Since the 18th of May 2020 up until now, in Romania, the state of alert is being held in place. This transition meant a relaxation when it came to the restrictions. As proof, restaurants with outside space were opened. Also, people could start live interactions again, with some prevention measures to be followed.

Conclusions

The year 2020 is a difficult one for the entire population of our planet, due to the appearance of the SARS-COV-2 virus, which tends to manifest in a violent manner towards the health of the infected, aggravating previous problems, or in the event that the patient had no prior problems, to diminish the strength of their immune system, the end results being the possibility of death.

Because of the huge number of persons killed by the virus, the leaders of nations had to adopt drastic measures for the prevention and fight against the spreading. With this objective in place, and the support from the medical community, states had to restrict fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens for their own protection. The impact of these severe dispositions was felt in the economic, educational and social segments.

Man is a social being, and in order to live optimally he needs to interact with other humans to meet certain social needs. Thus, the psychological impact of the implementation of interpersonal interaction restrictions among the population also materialized psychologically through mild ailments such as asthenic depression, anxiety, involuntary irritation and other intrinsic manifestations with a low risk.

Not only were the social needs of man affected, but also the material ones, this being explained by sending into technical unemployment a very large number of employees. Economic activity, due to the restrictions and social distancing, could no longer be supported, which amplified the state of unhappiness at a general scale.

However, the measures adopted by the decision-makers of the states were absolutely necessary for the protection of the citizens, and in the cases when they were not respected, criminal sanctions were applied according to the laws in force.

The declaration of the state of alert, which meant the end of the emergency one, brought with it a social revival and a relaxation for both the restrictions at the community level.

At the moment, measures to restrict human fundamental freedoms continue to exist in most countries of the world, but they have acquired varying degrees of strictness, which can only bring hope in the near future for resuming our rights without any risk alongside all the social, cultural and economic activities.

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