

A systemic dialogue on family- and youth-related public concerns as projected in front-line news

Reported by Mina Polemi-Todoulou, chair of HELASYTH

In Greece, during 2006, newspaper headlines and breaking news on TV were dominated by incidents of violence among youth and by the upheaval and protest related to school reform. All this ‘upheaval’ manifested itself in two very **critical events**: one leading to the death of a boy in the spring, and the other to the videotaped rape of a girl by her classmates inside the school context during a ‘sit-in protest’, in the autumn. Both events happened in small towns, and involved factors and dynamics of: social changes in family life; social conditions in areas with high immigration; multi-cultural schools and neighborhoods; racism; exploitation of technology for violation of privacy (eg photographs on cell phones, blackmail through posting them on the internet, etc.); attitudes of children, parents, and teachers towards each other and school; decision-making of school boards; and views on these matters by political parties, legal associations, religious groups, environmental groups, etc.

The incidents became a subject of discussion among the general public, led to intense and at times violent reactions of action groups, entered our therapy rooms in many different ways and left an intense trace on public memory.

In December 2006, as the Hellenic Association for Systemic Therapy (HELASYTH), we organized a scientific one-day event titled: **“Breaking News 2006: a systemic approach to media-projected concerns and issues relevant to families and youth”**. The event offered a context for dialogue among family and systems therapists on important societal and family changes as they are reflected in critical events that reach front line news and become the focus of public discourse for substantial periods of time. We also involved groups of parents, teachers and teenagers in the meeting, and gave them the opportunity to voice their views and share their experiences.

As a stimulus for discussion we presented two short videos which we created for this event: The first “traveled” the participants to front-line news throughout the year, concentrating on the “critical incidents” and the views of involved persons, commentators and popular journalists. The second video consisted of taped discussions of two teenage groups, -14 yr and 17 yr olds - on four questions: a) how do you feel having become (as an age-group) the focus of public attention during this year? b) how do you understand and what is the influence of these incidents on you? c) what message would you like to send to psychotherapists? and d) what are your hopes and fears for the future?

Invited panelists - university professors, mental health center directors and researchers- shared their comments, relating the events to research findings on the attitudes toward the immigrant child and the changed social conditions of areas with a high percent of immigrants, to the psychotherapeutic experience that some of them had with afflicted children and their families, to the simplified and polarized thinking promoted by the media, to the passive non-interventive attitude of society, or to the arising culture of uniformity that cultivates intolerance to differences.

Participants –professionals and non-professionals- held discussions in small groups, formed according to the point of view of the role they wanted to explore: ‘the father’, ‘the mother’, ‘the adolescent’, ‘the teacher’, ‘the therapist’, ‘the legal or local authority’.

The event succeeded in bringing together different points of view in a constructive dialogue, and a rich and positive feedback came from the participants answering an evaluation at the end of the meeting.

We are about to publish this presentation material, comments and discussion in an **annual journal**, dedicated to **connecting our professional community to current societal developments** as they are presented in the media.

The next event in this series of “systemic dialogues on family- and youth-related public concerns as projected in front line news” will be devoted to **work-related issues**, especially to the rise in unemployment among young professionals, and the uncertainty created by [dismissals](#) of 40-year-olds – issues that make young people hesitate to undertake the responsibility of creating a family.