

Is Naivete the Key Feature and Target of Improving Mental Health in Ageing Population?

Brodziak A^{1,2}, Zlotkowska R¹, Wolińska A² and Rozyk Myrta A²

¹Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Sosnowiec, Koscielna, Sosnowiec, Poland

²Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Applied Sciences, Armii Krajowej, Nysa, Poland

Abstract

The authors maintain that the poor state of public mental health is usually the result of attempts to implement an unfriendly political program. They define the features of an unfriendly political program on the basis of a recognized definition of the notion of mental health. The implementation of an unfriendly political program usually causes the occurrence of secondary irrational social phenomena such as populism, xenophobia and susceptibility to manipulation by mass media. These secondary adverse social phenomena are possible by reason of widespread credulity and even naiveté of a large part of society. This is exploited by persons who use social media platforms to disseminate particular ideologies. The authors, therefore, wonder whether it is possible to prevent widespread credulity and propose ways that are available nowadays.

Keywords: Mental health; Public mental health; Populism; Xenophobia; Manipulation; Fake-news; Naiveté, Credulity; Cognitive behavioral therapy; Positive psychology

Introduction

Recently some authors have considered how to improve population mental health [1-4]. Jonathan Purtle in his article entitled "Population mental health and community violence: advancing the role of local health departments" writes that "Mental health conditions increase the risk of injuries, physical health problems and premature death and can have a negative impact on the quality of life. As with physical health, patterns in population mental health are produced through a complex interplay of biological and social factors and can be improved by policy interventions that reduce exposure to stressors and cultivate resources that promote resilience" [1].

Kobau et al. postulate to improve population mental health through application of positive psychology on the community and country level [2]. Menear et al. consider the way to improve population mental health by integration of mental health care with primary care [3]. Mantoura et al. postulate a systematic approach for amelioration of the mental health of populations [4].

The concept of "population mental health" differs a little from the notion of "public mental health". Curle, who visited Yugoslavia in the years 1992-1995 wrote: "not all violence is physical; some is inner-directed and can lead to suicide. Some is inspired by genuine idealism but too often this degenerate into cruelty excused as a struggle with alleged evil" [5-7]. Recalling a convincing definition of public health will facilitate our considerations.

Manwell et al. promotes the formulation made by the Public Health Agency of Canada which states that: "Mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity" [8].

Because we are convinced that the sociological and political events accumulating in recent years in Europe and both Americas (including Hungary, Poland, Italy, Austria, USA, Venezuela, Mexico) have a very negative impact on the state of mental health, it is necessary to present new proposals, indicating the reasons for this phenomena and possible remedies. Because these phenomena occur at the interface

of several spheres of human activity, even an unusual, controversial argumentation is justified. In this work, we present such conclusions, which on the one hand are based on objective estimates made by a recognized institution and a reliable methodology of the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index [9], but on the other hand is based on subjective, investigative efforts to guess the most deep behavioral and psychological determinants of these processes.

Our subjective, original inquiries reach to the attempts to explain the observed and experienced events by psychological (or more precisely psychoanalytical) concepts, such as the average level of credulity, naivety, skepticism, hypocrisy. What is more, the pursuit of a coherent, comprehensible representation of causes and remedies prompted us to propose a new concept of the so-called social illness. We believe that such methodological approach allows us for better characterization of the contemporary issues of public mental health.

Literature Review

The concept of social disease

According to the documents of the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index a well-organized society are characterized by following parameters: 1. Compliance with the standards of democracy, 2. The level of corruption, 3. Transparency in governance, 4. The degree of respect for human rights, 6. Order and security 7. The effectiveness of legislation, 8. Civil (social) justice, 9. Judiciary (criminal) justice" [9]. We encourage those readers of this article to examine the multi-dimensional profiles of 113 countries. The enclosed Figures 1-4 enable to compare the diagrams for Germany, USA, Poland and Venezuela. The profiles for Venezuela, Turkey and Russia and many other countries managed by authoritarian regimes are twisted, shrunken and collapsed. One can say they they demonstrate a kind of "social

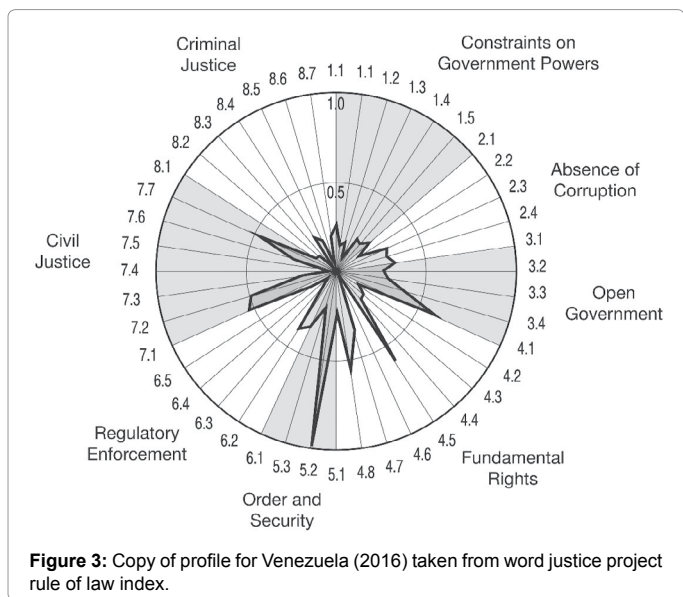
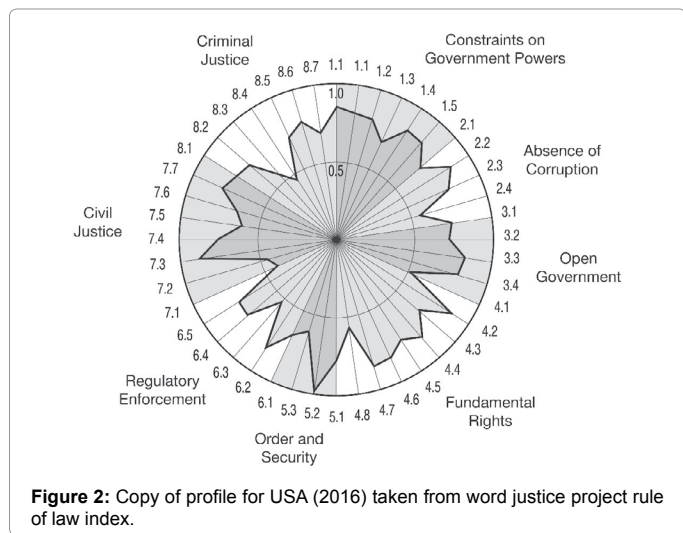
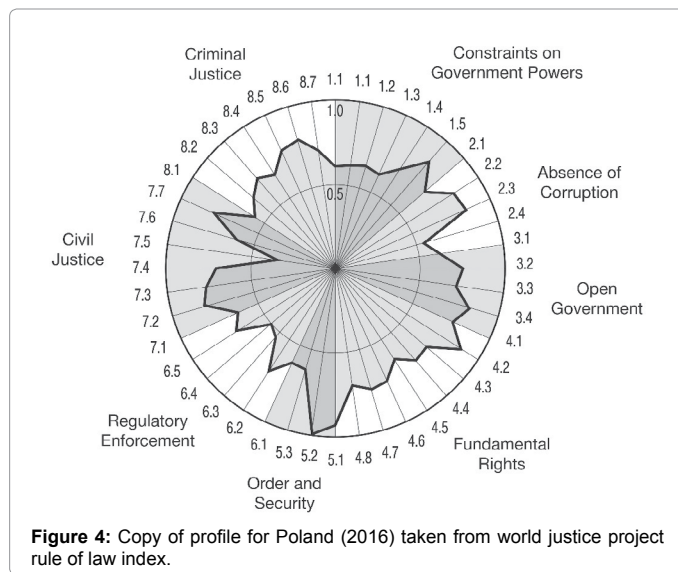
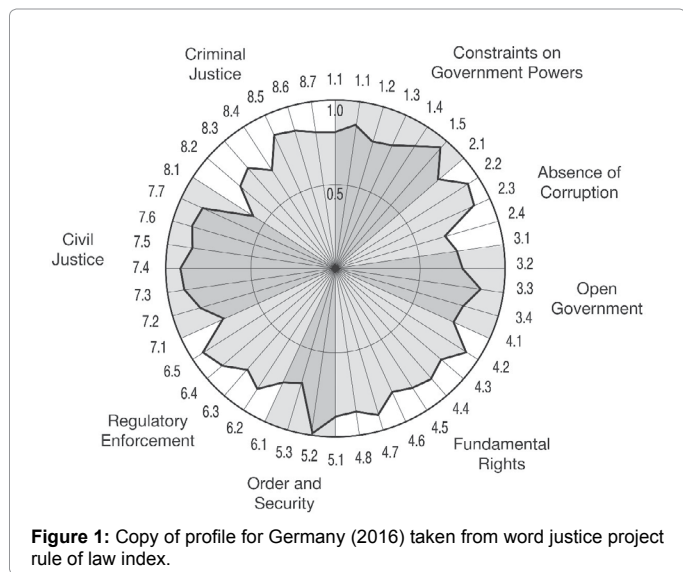
*Corresponding author: Professor Andrzej Brodziak, Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Koscielna St. 13, 41-200 Sosnowiec, Poland, Tel: +48 32 266 08 85; Fax: + 48 32 266 11 24; E-mail: andrzejbrodziak@wp.pl

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disease” that has affected these countries. These profiles however record only some manifestations facts but do not explain the cause of the disturbances (Figures 1-4).

In our view, it is possible to remark the origins of disadvantageous changes if one is sensitive to the appearance of an attempt to implement a political program that is not friendly to all major social groups. It can be said that the forced political and social program is not empathetic if it is contrary to the features indicated in the mentioned definition of mental health.

Discussion

The attempt to implement an unfriendly political program usually causes the occurrence of secondary irrational social phenomena. The authorities usually use populist arguments and promote xenophobic, nationalist and egocentric attitudes. They are signs of large scale manipulation by the dissemination of false, biased information, realized by mass media. Susceptibility to populist arguments speaks for that an increased number of people is naïve or at least gullible. Such susceptibility to naïveté emerges when criticism and skepticism are not respected values. Populist politicians who foster xenophobic and nationalist attitudes often try also to influence citizens through false appreciation of their superiority. The disadvantageous state of mind of a population causes also often an increase in controversy and even an ideological war between citizens of liberal and conservative points of view.

Apart from high rates on the scales of mentioned parameters formulated by World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, some other features of a society in a good state of “public mental health” can be enumerated. We propose to include: 1. Lack of an active and widespread populist movement, 2. Lack of intensified nationalistic, xenophobic and egocentric attitudes, 3. Low susceptibility to manipulation by politicians, journalists and mass media, resulting from good quality education and a low level of naïveté. The presence of reverse negative social transformations such as populism, nationalism and xenophobia, usually caused by an increased susceptibility to manipulation can be treated as the appearance of “social diseases” [10]. It is important, therefore to determine in an intuitive and easy-to-understand manner what is causing the emergence of these secondary irrational social phenomena.

Taking into account the considered observations of social behavior and state of mind in Poland, one of the countries affected by populism, nationalism and xenophobia, it seems to us that one such crucial factor is the naiveté (credulity and even gullibility) of members of the society.

Only when a large proportion of people in a given population are naive is it possible to efficiently use lies and manipulations during the election campaign. This propaganda is effective only if many people are prone to arguments that are untrue. Then it is possible to persuade citizens of a given country to populist promises and promote nationalist and xenophobic ideas. Such regularity is particularly important when the use of social media is widespread. It is known that these media often disseminate incorrect information (so-called fake news). The considerations in this article are devoted mainly to widespread credulity this singled out sociological phenomenon.

Is it possible to prevent widespread credulity or even counteract to naiveté?

Therefore, the question is: what can make people to be not credulous (naïve)? Almost every reader will probably admit that the protecting factor is the right dose of skepticism and good quality education.

Moreover, it is possible to enumerate possible actions focused on the attitude and behaviors of a particular person. In this case, one could recommend various tools developed within the domain of cognitive behavioral therapy [11] or positive psychology [12-18]. Apart from influences exerted by writers, publicists, teachers and therapists some software tools could be recommended [19-24].

It is difficult, however, to try to answer the question of whether there are ways to increase the level of skepticism, i.e., to reduce credulity in people on a major scale. In our opinion, this important issue requires research and discussion. It is necessary to determine the possible mass influences.

Of course, the most appropriate action would be to change the whole education system. Unfortunately, however, in countries where power is already in the hands of people heading towards authoritarian organization of the society, changes in education are no longer possible. Several authors have at least considered how to implement the principles of positive psychology in schools [25-27].

There are also some websites which promote the application of tools of positive psychology in relation to the entire population [28]. TED and the Institute of Art and Ideas can be examples of tools that promote criticism [29,30]. Robert T. Carroll's website "the Skeptic's Dictionary" presents valuable knowledge related to positive skepticism [31]. Still scarce data about the possibilities of assessing credulity discusses Alessandra Teunisse in her exceptional dissertation [32].

It is worth considering all the influences that affect millions of citizens. It is necessary to consider any modern mass media and contemporary cultural influences. Sometimes it happens that a novel or movie which fosters healthy skepticism reaches audiences of millions. Examples also include TV series such as *Star Trek*, *The Good Wife* or even series showing the opposite attitudes like *House of cards* or *Black Mirror*.

The recently published Dan Brown's bestseller entitled "Origin" is another example of the very popular message, which also promotes skepticism [33]. The known publicist Cass R. Sunstein wrote recently a book about the meaning of *Star Wars* films for shaping positive attitudes [34].

Recapitulation and Conclusion

The quality of public mental health in a given country depends on the extent to which it is possible to create a stable network of people concerned about the mental situation of contemporary societies in the Western world. The activities of these people can be spontaneous and rely on bottom-up activities. It is possible just by reason of the existence of social media platforms. Therefore, it seems to us that taking action to improve public mental health can be realized by any public health institution without looking at the actions of authorities that we have no influence on.

It seems to us that considering and analyzing the events in Poland and the US can be useful in search for appropriate tools, because in both countries, which had a favorable profile set by the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, there have recently shown signs of increased credulity of many citizens.

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