PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY - CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES

SECURITATEA PSIHOLOGICĂ- ABORDĂRI CONCEPTUALE

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Abstract

The article tries to define the concept of psychological security by generalizing the concepts from the specialized literature. The analysis of the literature highlighted the psychological security as a determining factor of good performance in the daily activities of individuals, whether we mention the family nucleus or the professional, respectively educational sphere, all these stages that people go through, can cause syncope in the development of the individual's personality. We revealed that the emotional sphere of psychological security becomes the most impacted aspect of the transition from one age stage to another, which reminds development specialists to focus their professional activity in this field, poorly stored in the collective consciousness, but also in specialized studies.

Keywords: psychological and emotional security, attachment, educational environment.

Rezumat

În articol se încearcă definirea conceptului de securitate psihologică generalizând conceptele din literatura de specialitate. Analiza literaturii a scos în evidență securitatea psihologică ca un factor determinant al bunei desfășurări a activităților cotidiene ale indivizilor, fie că menționăm nucleul familial sau sfera profesională, respectiv educațională, toate aceste etape prin care oamenii trec, pot determina sincope în dezvoltarea personalității individului. Am relevat că sfera emoțională a securității psihologice devine cel mai impactat aspect al trecerii de la o etapă de vârstă la alta, ceea ce reamintește specialiștilor din domeniul dezvoltării să își concentreze activitatea profesională și în acest domeniu, slab înmagazinat în conștiința colectivă, dar și în studiile de specialitate.

Cuvinte - cheie: securitate psihologică și emoțională, atașament, mediul educațional.

The etymology of the term „security" is deeply intertwined with the historical evolution of every nation that has governed various regions across the globe. Yet, when we delve into the realm of literature, it becomes evident that security assumes a distinct and subjective character for each individual. According to the Explanatory

Dictionary of the Romanian Language, security refers to a „feeling of confidence and tranquillity that the absence of any danger gives to someone" [2]. The affiliation of the explanation that security is a „feeling" can become an exponential problem of demonstrating it as one, but it becomes an experience that can involve several aspects related to the personality of each individual. As mentioned earlier, security can often belong to and be affiliated with the institutions of the leadership of countries, as their main activity is to ensure individual, collective, economic, political, religious, historical, and in some cases, even geographical comfort to the population.

Highlighting the connection between „security" and „safety" is of utmost importance in the context of psychological approaches to this subject, as existing literature clearly establishes a strong correlation between these two terms. Appealing in this context to the origin of the word „safety", „the feeling of peace and confidence that comes from knowing that one is safe from danger". Thus, the direct proportionality of the definition of the two words can be seen from the outset. The state of security-insecurity can be defined by knowing the vulnerabilities, risks, threats, and aversions to which the person is exposed. According to Zubenschi E and Zubenschi M, vulnerability (from vulnérabilité), is an outward characteristic of security, showing harm, injury, and mental fragility" [4, p.108].

There exist specific conditions under an individual can establish their psychological security perimeter. It was mentioned by Lazorko and his collaborators as „conformity between needs, values, capabilities of the reflected one, characteristics of reality, a high level of ergonomics of arbitrary processes, corporate culture, as well as personal qualities of the subject: assertiveness, risk, social and professional activity, as well as adequate perception of reality" [18, p. 457].

The purpose of this article is to highlight the evolution and impact of psychological safety within various work environments and its potential effects on individual personality development, doing an analysis of the specialized literature

The context of the last two years, particularly those related to the Covid-19 pandemic, have demonstrated over time the fragility and susceptibility of human beings to live their lives in optimal and even normal parameters. The freedom perceived by individuals as infinite in certain social contexts appeared to be truncated by the impact of the disease resulting in the loss of complex social contacts in everyday life, especially face-to-face contacts. The literature has provided „a wide range of perspectives on the trade-offs between security and freedom, but also on the effects of different policies on well-being and behaviour" [8, p.1025]. The closeness between people, being radically restricted during the pandemic, produced certain deficits in meeting the basic needs of belonging and maintaining constant social contact. This precarious and transformative period of syncope in many areas of harmonious individual and societal development highlighted the uncertainty and lack of security present in everyday activities shaped by the pandemic.

According to Jakubiak B and Feeney B, „attachment theory posits that individuals are motivated to form and maintain

close relationships throughout life" [16, p. 745] to leverage the advantage of being able to be with someone in order to survive, ask for and maintain immediate help in various cases. Types of attachment highlight the essence of human relationship dynamics, especially in the family nucleus regarding the safety of the secure behaviour that everyone wants and seeks. Moreover, Kural A and Kovacs M believed that „attachment security mitigates the need for relational security and distracts from the need to belong" [17, p. 1].

The basis of psychological security starts from the early years of an individual's life, the needs of the child from the earliest stages of development are imperative to be met by his parents. The attachment theory developed by Bowlby „provides a sound basis for recognizing the need for relational security through one of the attachment orientations" namely anxious attachment [17, p. 1]. Observing the dynamics of a couple involved in a loving relationship, the exaggerated tendency of some strategies of permanent attention-seeking and care demands from the partner leads to the optimal emotional regulation mechanism. These insistent requests for attention from the partner, but also from people close to them, could often be evidenced in situations where the psychological security of the person was affected. People's comfort zones becoming increasingly shaky and lacking validation and satisfaction of needs has caused the human psyche to take on an anxious role in the search for relationships.

According to Babula M and his collaborators, „the nature and influence of security needs were addressed by Abraham Maslow, who analytically positioned them in a hierarchical motivational framework as material needs" [7, p. 177]. These needs determine how individuals live their lives and beyond. However, Poston B postulates that Maslow made a substantial contribution to his theory over time, pointing out that „safety needs may be different for each person, depending on where they are in life" [21, p. 350]. So, security is a subjective aspect that depends solely on the period people are going through. Economic and political problems, the impact of family life, the lack of a stable job, as well as the disproportionality of social roles, can lead to a strong psychological insecurity that is visible to the viewer.

The levels of human needs in terms of their degree of importance are: basic needs, the need for security, the need for belonging, the need for esteem and the need for self-actualisation or self-fulfilment.

This theory suggests that individuals are advised to prioritize their needs from lower to higher in order to confer comfort and maintain good security. After fulfilling the needs of the lower level, one can move on to the higher ones, focusing on the self and progressing to a more effective individual version in line with the requirements of one's family, workplace and society. When there is a situation of uncertainty generated by the external environment, and the individual is psychologically insecure, there is a possibility that the stressors of the situation in which he finds himself, generate enough anxiety, becoming incompatible with the situation, but this is the unconscious response of the psyche, being suppressed by the personality of the individual.

The emotional perspective of psychological security is also the basis for the har-

monious development of the individual. Consequently, a psychologically insecure individual is primarily affected emotionally. Effective management of emotions and the ability to handle stressful situations constructively, can greatly influence an individual's successful development in society. Moreover, the ability of people to adapt in different contexts and to different problems, just like the Covid-19 pandemic situation, could be an impetus or even a challenge for introspection in the context of prioritizing safety needs, but also maintaining a comfort zone in the face of uncertainties that may arise in life.

Psychological security can be formulated by ВЕРБИНА Г as a state of social consciousness in which society as a whole and each individual forming it perceive the quality of their lives as adequate" [24, p. 196]. Thus, „security becomes a condition of a person's ability to satisfy basic needs for self-preservation and the perception of being safe in society" [23, p. 1]. This aspect favours certain conditions of interaction, but also knowledge of the psycho-socio-emotional level of the other participants in the interaction. It was noted by Харламенкова Н that „in the public mind, the term security is associated both with the absence of threat and with certain states, feelings and experiences of people" [25, p. 27].

Healthy relationships with others can enhance and become essential in maintaining the psychological safety of individuals. It also gives them stability and security in the emotional sphere, which leads to trust and open communication with others. The emotional sphere of psychological safety also involves communication performance, so that people with this qua-

lity can express healthily and effectively what they feel and what they need without repressing or hyperventilating emotions in a deficient way.

Stress management is an extremely important coping mechanism when coupled with the term psychological security, because external pressure can lead to new ways of making one's behaviour, thinking or emotional states more effective in relation to the individual who may face less pleasant situations that may affect or threaten psychological security. Moreover, it is imperative to mention the degree of autonomy that a person has in dealing with stressors, the emotions that they manifest in different contexts and the social pressure that arises in various situations. Being autonomous, or a person's degree of autonomy, helps him or her by the independence with which he or she can express himself or herself, behave, show eloquent decision-making capacity and monitor his or her own choices about the pressures or situations to which he or she is subjected. Deng Y and his collaborators stipulated that „autonomy satisfaction refers to a sense of psychological freedom and an experience of integrity of one's actions, thoughts and feelings." [9]. Thus, the psychological freedom that a person can have depends exclusively on the level of autonomy through which we can fulfill our basic needs. However, this specificity of the person's level of autonomy presents the individual's motivational basis, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, making a significant contribution to its manifestation through other personality traits such as temperament and character.

Well-being and mental health are given in addition to the personality charac-

teristics of people by the psychological security that can be improved, developed and monitored through self-awareness, by external factors that can question the security of one's existence in the face of events that are not related to the person, and in certain contexts it can be valued and explored with the help of personal development.

Psychological safety is primarily contingent upon the specific context in which an individual finds themselves, while situational factors can influence the perception of the individual who may have certain attitudes and behaviours towards the action taken in its vicinity, which determines the position of the person to attack or flee, i.e. the safe or uncertain environment.

The affective sphere of psychological security is mentioned in the literature and also studied by Schudlich T and his collaborators, through the prism of interpersonal processes that comprise three important components: the „regulation of conflict exposure, emotional reactivity and internal representations of the marital relationship" [22, p. 42]. Security has its origins in attachment theory, with its inflections in Maslow's pyramid system, studies often focus on the family and the interaction between its members, especially the parents of the child who is in the process of forming psychological security during childhood and adolescence.

Adjusting the child's exposure to family conflict can impact how the child's perceives both parents, as well as their subsequent views about their parents' relationship with one another. Thus, the child may feel psychologically insecure leading to the destabilization of their established

comfort zone due to these conflicts. The adjustment of conflict exposure primarily centers on enhancing family communication and refining the family's interactions with the child, enhancing well-being and the effectiveness of the educational model they follow. Conflict mediation, adding assertive communication, empathy, increased level of understanding towards the interlocutor, calmness and the ability to form certain limits of the conflict can facilitate its resolution, but also an effective way of regulating conflict exposure outside the presence of the child.

Emotional reactivity refers according to Förster K and his collaborators to „the initial emotional response, which develops spontaneously, to internal or external stimuli" [13, p. 12]. Also, the emotional accumulation exhibited by the actors of the conflict is manifested as exacerbated in the early stages of the development of the exchange, later the ability to return to the initial state of calm of individuals becomes a consequence of emotional reactivity. Thus, in a situation where the child or adolescent is subjected to a conflict between members of his/her family, subsequent emotional management is necessary, both for the partners, in order to ventilate the emotional situation and to bring the negative event to an early stage, and to assure the child/adolescent that the event consumed does not affect his/her emotional and psychological security. Moreover, this important component of psychological security from an emotional point of view also affects the main actors of the conflict, being important awareness, acceptance, adaptability, but also self-reflection of the persons involved, in order to regulate the affective-cognitive manifestations that

have entered into the conflict. Emotional reactivity can vary from person to person and can be influenced by life experiences, education and personal development.

The concept of resilience can become a factor and a consequence of the emotional reactivity manifested by individuals in various unpredictable situations affecting individual psychological security. Resilience and emotional security are closely related concepts, but they have different approaches. Both are essential for mental well-being and the ability to cope with life's stresses and difficulties but focus on distinct aspects of a person's psychological abilities and traits. Emotional security can contribute to the development of resilience, as a person who feels emotionally secure will have more self-confidence and a solid foundation for dealing with difficulties.

Children and adolescents face many challenges in today's ever-changing society, constantly having to overcome increasing levels of adversity to achieve success. The emotional difficulties they face at home, at school and in the social environment, which hinder their development, have a negative impact on them. According to Leuțanu G and Cucer A, „the provision of a secure base by both parents ensures the fulfillment of the first function of attachment, that of security, and is a prerequisite for the second, namely socialisation" [3, p. 26]. The consequences of bullying at school, at home or in the social group can cause profound emotional changes in their developmental stage, so that their security is affected, and the main consequence can be the presence of pathologies that can appear as early as their school years. Thus, Gabriellli S and his collaborators come up with the idea that „improving young people's ability to cope with adversity by developing resilience skills has become the focus of many interventions and programs in recent years" [14, p. 1]. Also, the ability to be able to manage daily activities and to be resilient in the face of situations that may cause failure or even adversity increases people's productivity, awareness and motivation to learn from negative experiences and develop, responding to higher levels of individual needs.

As mentioned at the outset, security is acquired primarily in the family environment. Early childhood experiences underlie individual experiences of relationships with others [19]. Researchers such as Eisenberg N and Fletcher J have noted that early childhood experiences bring about changes in adulthood both in perceptual levels of interaction and interpersonal relationships and in personality development [10], [12]. The ability to maintain and manifest a secure environment within the family by all members in order to meet basic needs and harmonious individual development is formed over time by fostering empathy, assertive communication, autonomy, and the highlighting of positive emotions which can also help to increase people's self-esteem as well as an increased level of resilience. According to Ardenghi S and collaborators, „attachment security is a key but understudied dispositional component" [6, p. 2881] that can lead to poorly functioning empathic behavior. Although empathy is a concept often found in the literature and associated with different terms, its essence comes from securing the parents' attachment to the child.

Moreover, it has been shown in the literature according to Ercengiz M and

researchers that in the family context and the child's educational process, emotional psychological security plays an important role, being closely related to happiness and forgiveness, as well as a mediator of these two concepts [11]. Emotional security can only contribute to happiness when a person feels emotionally secure and confident in their ability to cope with challenges. Emotional security can reduce anxiety and stress, allowing positive emotions to flourish for psychological well-being and quality of life.

The organisational domain or environment in which individuals work is the main factor influencing psychological security in the individual's adulthood. Organisational climate includes the atmosphere in the organisation generated by employees, but also the values, culture and practices that are implemented in the organisational structure. Thus, research on individual as well as group psychological safety in organizations by Morton L and colleagues focuses on „the process of risk assessment in interpersonal relationships and professional environments" [20, p. 5]. Often, the issue of job safety can be a determining factor for the subject who engages in the work of that job, which generates his motivation towards „the safe performance of work, the motivation of reasonable behavior, as well as social positioning within the organization, regarding the job" [18, p. 456]. Most workplaces also contribute to individual engagement through the emotional sphere, adding an emotional charge to tasks undertaken within the organization, which according to Hemsey D and Dahling J „organizational expectations prescribe what emotions should be suppressed or expressed when there is interaction with

other co-workers" [15, p. 1].

Moreover, there may also be external factors other than the individual's personality that affect the maintenance of psychological safety in the organisational environment. These could be: resources and support provided to employees to manage stress and pressure, leadership and management styles, recognition and reward for effort and work done, and the absence of harassment and discrimination in the organisation.

In order to promote and maintain psychological safety in the organisational environment, it may be useful to support a working environment where employees feel accepted, understood, supported and valued. This may involve a programme to develop policies and practices that promote mental well-being, as well as training managers to recognise and manage issues that employees may face. So by creating a healthy work environment that promotes employee well-being, organisations can achieve significant benefits in terms of employee engagement, productivity and consistency, and longevity.

As far as the educational context is concerned, psychological safety is a key element for the proper conduct of educational activities taking place in educational institutions, so it is necessary to train teaching staff, auxiliary staff and parents on safety in educational institutions where children are enrolled. The first aspect that can reveal and maintain the psychological safety of students pertains to their physical security, which educational institutions should prioritize through the implementation of internal regulations and the supervision of teachers or other forms of student interaction. It is imperative to curb school violence, abuse, and other potential

hazards within educational settings. This is essential not only for preserving the individual psychological safety of students but also for fostering the well-rounded development of their personalities, including the well-being of teachers in certain situations.

Adequate school resources are also provided by the program implemented by the Ministry of Education, according to Abramenkova V and Minyaev A, which refers to the technical equipment of schools (safety buttons, video surveillance system, etc.), while the psychological aspects of the problem (e.g. mobilization of a child in case of emergency and the problem of management of an emergency in school by the whole community) do not receive due attention [5, p. 423]. The psychological aspects are not sufficiently proportionate to the technical support that schools receive, due to the acute lack of qualified staff who could at least closely observe the interactions that in certain contexts become deficient. However, the presence of more specialists in the field of psychology, as well as the continuous training of teachers on good conflict management and ensuring well-being in the educational environment could change and even decrease the number of abuses that are carried out in schools.

In a survey conducted by Save the Children, in 2022 „almost 50% of students have been victims of bullying in schools, 27% admit to being bullies, and 8 out of 10 students have witnessed bullying at school" [1]. The above-mentioned statistics show alarming figures on the manifestation of bullying in educational institutions, which demonstrates the importance of awareness of the consequences of these acts, but also of the syncopations in the educational sphere, which favour the impact of psychological security. The manifestation of abuse of any kind can have serious effects on the psychological state of students, so the importance of programs to prevent bullying, resolve conflicts or other situations that may interfere with the harmonious development of students is imperative.

The responsibility for maintaining psychological safety in the educational environment lies with each individual institution, teachers, support staff and students, in order to collaborate effectively and create a positive environment that favours and focuses on both the instructional process and the harmonious development of personality.

In conclusion, psychological security, both in people's fields of activity and in the family system, is and remains a challenge for each individual, in terms of how to effectively manage this state, but also in terms of awareness in each situation that may disturb it, regarding the smooth running of daily activities. Moreover, the support offered by the family and the good knowledge of oneself can determine and impact the proportionality of security and insecurity at the individual level.

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