

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Essex</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 23 – Sociology</p>
<p>Title of case study: Changing the practice of organisations that work with vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Essex research on understanding the vulnerability of displaced persons has changed the practice of organisations that work with asylum seekers and refugees. Professor Renos Papadopoulos’ research has focused on the resilience and strengths of the individual, rather than seeing him/her as a passive ‘victim’. This approach has informed two instruments that are used to assess vulnerability: the Trauma Grid and ASPIS. These instruments have been adopted by a number of organisations throughout the world and Papadopoulos has produced a training manual and provided training programmes for frontline and management staff. The examples provided here document his work with organisations based in the UK, Greece, Colombia and Sudan.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research by Papadopoulos developed a new theoretical framework and a new approach—‘Psychosocial Perspectives on Human Rights’—to account for the uniqueness of the experience of being a refugee or asylum seeker. He has also developed new instruments to assess the vulnerability of asylum seekers. Papadopoulos’ research is premised on the insight that in understanding trauma the person must not be overlooked and treated simply as a product of the trauma. Instead of over-emphasising the trauma, his approach is to consider the whole person, including his/her strengths and potential.</p> <p>The research developed the concept of ‘Nostalgic Disorientation’ (Papadopoulos, 2002) as a generic (non-psychiatric) condition that asylum seekers develop. It is defined as disorientation that activates the yearning for one specific and tangible state of home and belonging. The research also introduced a specific definition of ‘Resilience’, which refers to the individual’s ability to maintain his/her existing qualities, despite the experience of trauma (Papadopoulos, 2007). Papadopoulos’ key research finding is that vulnerability of refugees cannot be understood as an absolute but depends entirely on the given environment, especially the services that are available. For example, a refugee with a disability is not vulnerable because of the disability per se, but may become vulnerable if his/her disability restricts his/her opportunities.</p> <p>Papadopoulos’ ideas were operationalised through his development of an instrument to assess vulnerability, the Trauma Grid (Papadopoulos, 2007). This provides a comprehensive framework to map out the wide range of refugees’ responses to adversity that includes not only the pathological but also positive ones. The unique aspect of this approach is that the existing strengths of the individual are taken into account, and it also, more controversially, considers Adversity Activated Development where it is acknowledged that exposure to adversity may have positive effects for the individual.</p> <p>The need to measure vulnerability was demonstrated by the 2007 European Commission <i>Green Paper on the Future Common European Asylum System</i>, which, <i>inter alia</i>, stressed the need for Member States to have procedures in place to identify vulnerable asylum seekers. Following the Green Paper, Professor Papadopoulos was approached by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and asked to lead a four-country project to address the issue of defining vulnerability in asylum seekers: Enhancing Vulnerable Asylum Seekers’ Protection (EVASP). Their</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

request was based on their familiarity with his research, including the Trauma Grid. As part of the EVASP project, Papadopoulos produced an EVASP Trainers' Handbook to be used by any suitably qualified individual. The aim of this manual is to equip facilitators with the appropriate knowledge and techniques for providing training to organisations that provide services for vulnerable asylum seekers.

Papadopoulos thus engaged in further research as part of the EVASP project, which involved drawing on his theoretical ideas in order to meet the specific task of producing further tools for assessing vulnerability that could be employed in the field and be used by various organisations and agencies working with refugees. This led him to develop the Asylum Seekers Protection Indices (ASPIS), which constitute a comprehensive means of assessing vulnerability by addressing various facets of the individual's life. Ten dimensions are used in order to indicate the vulnerable position of the individual in regard to the environment that he or she inhabits; however, positive factors of each dimension are included alongside these vulnerable positions. The ultimate purpose of this is the protection of the individual.

3. References to the research

- Papadopoulos, R. K. (2002) Refugees, home and trauma. In R. K. Papadopoulos (ed.) *Therapeutic care for refugees: No place like home*. London: Karnac. Tavistock Clinic Series. ISBN 1855752832
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- Papadopoulos, R. K. (2009) Extending Jungian psychology: Working with survivors of political upheavals. In G. Heuer (ed.) *Sacral revolutions: Reflecting on the work of Andrew Samuels. Cutting edges in psychoanalysis and Jungian analysis*. London: Routledge. ISBN 0415554616
- Papadopoulos, R. K. (2010) Working with refugee and asylum seeking families. In R. Singh and S. Dutta (eds.) *"Race" and culture. Tools, techniques and trainings: A manual for professionals*. London: Karnac. ISBN 1855757710
- Papadopoulos, R. K. (2011) The *Umwelt* and networks of archetypal images: A Jungian approach to therapeutic encounters in humanitarian contexts. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 9 (3): 212-231. DOI: 10.1002/ppi.252

Research funding

Papadopoulos, R. K. *Enhancing Vulnerable Asylum Seekers' Protection (EVASP)*. International Organisation for Migration, 01.01.09 to 31.08.10, £60,545.

4. Details of the impact

The research carried out by Papadopoulos, especially the development of the Trauma Grid and ASPIS, has had impact throughout the world. Papadopoulos has provided training and influenced the practice of organisations that work with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK, Greece, Sudan, and Colombia.

Impact in Europe

Refugee Council

Papadopoulos has worked with the Refugee Council's Therapeutic Casework Unit (TCU) since

Impact case study (REF3b)

2011 and a Cooperation Agreement was signed between the Refugee Council and the University of Essex in 2013 [corroborating source 1]. Papadopoulos has collaborated closely with the TCU, sharing the findings of his research and providing training for staff. A member of the TCU team has stated that the Trauma Grid “provides the best framework for adopting a holistic perspective to working with refugees” [corroborating source 2]. She adds that the TCU has adopted Papadopoulos’ thinking on Resilience and Adversity-Activated Development and has recognised that his thinking “enables a tangible shift away from pathologising ordinary distressful experiences that were the result of extraordinary experiences” [2]. Further to this, she states that “the ASPIS instrument that he developed from his EVASP research is a most useful instrument that we use in order to ascertain the degree of vulnerability in our clients” [2]. Papadopoulos’ research has proved fundamental to the practice of the TCU:

“In short, the way TCU is currently practicing is essentially based on Professor Papadopoulos’s research findings. All members of TCU and the Refugee Council who have attended his trainings and are familiar with his work are impressed and feel that their grasp of their work has been deepened and their expertise has been increased” [2].

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The project manager of the UNHCR’s Response to Vulnerability in Asylum (RVA) project met with Papadopoulos in November 2012 to discuss the EVASP project [3]. This was part of the process of information gathering for the RVA project, which focuses on the response to vulnerable asylum seekers in Central Europe. The research conducted by the UNHCR as part of the RVA project found that the ASPIS tool developed by Papadopoulos had been adopted by two organisations in the UK that work with asylum seekers [3]: the Scottish Refugee Council and Asylum Link Merseyside. Papadopoulos was invited to speak at the RVA project’s mid-term conference in Prague in April 2013 – an event that brought together government stakeholders and external experts to discuss the initial findings of the project and look at practical ways of identifying and supporting vulnerable asylum seekers [3]. In addition, he has spoken at two joint conferences organised by UNHCR: ‘No Place Like Home: The refugee experience from dislocation to relocation’ (June 2010) and ‘Vulnerability or Resilience’ (November 2011) [4].

The Day Centre Babel, Greece

The Greek mental health unit, the Day Centre Babel, which works with refugees and immigrants in Athens and is part of the Ministry of Health’s Psychargos programme, has adopted Papadopoulos’ approach and supplied training to other organisations in Greece. Papadopoulos has provided ongoing supervision and consultation to Babel and was twice (in May 2012 and April 2013) invited to Greece to provide training – this involved 25 members of Babel staff and 70 participants from other organisations [5]. Babel’s Director has stated that “the impact of Professor Papadopoulos’ work has been decisive on the way Babel operates. The therapeutic approach we follow (and the one we train others to follow) is based on Professor Papadopoulos’ ‘Trauma Grid’ and ASPIS, both from the EVASP research project” [5]. Babel have used Papadopoulos’ approach to train staff in other partner organisations (including KETHEA-Mosaic, Medical Intervention, and Arsis) and have drawn on the EVASP trainers’ manual to do so, which they have translated into Greek [5].

Global impact

Unidad para las Víctimas, Colombia

The Unidad para las Víctimas is a Bogota-based government agency that works with the victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia. Papadopoulos visited the newly-established Unidad in August 2012 and gave a series of seminars to members of staff who were in the process of

Impact case study (REF3b)

defining the guidelines for its programmes and policies [6]. His visit had two major impacts. Firstly, in working with the Psychosocial Group at the Unidad he shed new light on the concept of victim. The Director of the Unidad writes,

“His work made us rethink the way in which we were conceiving of victims. We learnt they are not—and cannot be—passive individuals in their own rights restitution processes. On the contrary, as active agents, the empowerment derived from the victims’ actions creates capacities for the individuals and for the community as a whole. These capacities allow victims to take hold of their own reparation processes and make them sustainable over time” [6].

The second main impact of Papadopoulos’ visit was to prepare the facilitators that would go on to provide a training programme in psycho-social skills for 300 staff from Unidad and other similar institutions. This training programme took place in October 2012 [6].

AHFAD Trauma Treatment and Training Centre, Sudan

The AHFAD University for Women in Sudan formed the ‘AHFAD Trauma Treatment and Training Centre’ (ATTTC) in Khartoum in 2012 and asked Papadopoulos (through the War Trauma Foundation) to develop the training programme for its staff and associates and deliver part of the training himself. 22 professionals have participated in the training that Papadopoulos has provided (in May 2012, October 2012 and July 2013) [7]. He was invited to train staff at ATTTC due to his research on trauma – an approach that the Director of ATTTC describes as “unique in the professional world and is expressed in the ‘Trauma Grid’”. She goes on to say, writing in July 2013, “The ‘Trauma Grid’ has become the main framework of all our work at ATTTC and this is clearly expressed in the Training and Practice Manual that we are in the process of writing now” [7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All documents are available from HEI on request.

[1] Cooperation Agreement between the University of Essex and the Refugee Council, signed February 2013.

[2] Therapeutic Casework Services Manager, Refugee Council.

[3] Senior Regional Protection Officer, UNHCR.

[4] Details of the UNHCR-organised ‘No Place Like Home: The refugee experience from dislocation to relocation’ and ‘Vulnerability or Resilience’ conferences:

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/events/previous-events.html>

[5] Director of the Day Centre Babel.

[6] General Director of Unidad para las Víctimas

[7] Director of AHFAD Trauma Treatment and Training Centre.