Chapter 13
The Puzzle on Unemployment Factors and the Welfare State Role in Greece: What University Students Believe

Argyris Kyridis
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Maria Pavlis Korres
General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning, Greece & Hellenic Open University, Greece

Christos Dimitrios Tourtouras
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Nikos Fotopoulos
University of Western Macedonia, Greece

Christos Zagkos
Center of Educational Policy Development (KANEP/GSEE), Greece

ABSTRACT

In an era of major technological, digital and scientific achievement, in the modern post-industrial globalized society of great contradictions, problems and conflicts, the unemployment phenomenon, which affects young people to a greater extent, is exacerbated. Greece is the country that was affected more than any other country in southern Europe by the multiple effects of the economic crisis, which among others catapulted youth unemployment to unprecedented levels. This chapter presents a research on views and attitudes analysis of male and female students of higher education in Greece towards unemployment as a social phenomenon, towards stereotypical attitudes on unemployment, as well as towards the ways and forms of the research phenomenon configuration. Subsequently, this research attempts to record, analyze and interpret the students’ views and attitudes towards the Greek welfare state, thoroughly studying the correlations of all the above data.

INTRODUCTION

According to Eurostat, unemployment rate for each country is considered the labor force percentage at the age of 15-74 years that do not work, even though they are available, and they were either looking for work during the last month or were about to start work in the next three months. Employees are defined
persons at the age of 15 years and over who have either worked on remuneration lately, for at least one hour or have not worked due to leave, whereas economically inactive are defined all other persons who are neither employed nor unemployed.

The lack of a clear policy created severe unemployment problems for young people. The incapacity to provide the necessary services to youth has been documented over and over again and each failure of social programs makes the problem seem much greater (Riessman, 1967; English, 1970). The various youth programs have only dealt with the symptoms, and the rate of youth unemployment will not be reduced until there are changes in the economic and social policies of the countries involved (Fyfe, 1978; Gordon, 1979). Youth unemployment rates across the world are more than double compared to those of adults, which is often interpreted as a lack of decent work opportunities for youth (ILO, 2008).

Work is undoubtedly a fundamental and inalienable social right, won through labor and political struggles, as well as class and social conflicts. The modern bourgeois state, especially in its post-war version - period of the welfare state establishment - has institutionally undertaken to defend the right to work, in an attempt to mediate between the opposing forces of capital and labor – trade union movement. Thus, the unemployed pin their hopes for employment recovery and living conditions improvement on the welfare state, which ought to do what it takes to defend this specific (individual) right of every citizen. However, nowadays, modern states, under the umbrella of neoliberalism, insist on the deregulation strategy of the labor market or on its adjustment and settlement for the benefit of the dominant bourgeois class, which intends to maximize profit through crises creation and “unemployed tanks” augmentation.

Unemployment does not just constitute a macro-economic aggregate, unilaterally determined by the economic conditions on a national or international level. On the contrary, as a socio-economical phenomenon, it is a social malaise indicator, a social cohesion indicator and at the same time a social stratification indicator established in a country. Besides, it is a macro-economic variable which defines the (lower or higher) degree of class conflicts, the reproduction of social classes, the nature of the social division of labor and the welfare indicators we ought to observe in any social formation (Machin & Manning, 1998). Unemployment, at the same time, contains the inherent characteristic of personal and social experience, due to the fact that it is a social phenomenon and not only a generalized and abstract social problem, but it is internalized both individually and by broad social masses, directly affected by the unemployment experience and impact (Dooley & Praise, 2004). Additionally, unemployment causes a wide range of effects, not only economic but also social (Wilson, 1996), psychological (McKee-Ryan, 2005), spiritual (Borrero, 2014; Murphy & Athanasou, 1999;) or even on health (Burgard, Brand, & House, 2007; Kessler et al. 1987).

Unemployment, despite the fact that it influences the entire population spectrum, mainly and almost uncontrollably affects vulnerable social groups that directly or indirectly experience its consequences with great intensity (Smith, 1980). Social vulnerability combined with unemployment creates an explosive social mixture, which deepens recession and paralyzes the social system, thus sharpening social disorganization and pathology. Additionally, they intensify the existing cultural and social classification even more, increasing the symptoms of social pathology phenomena (Smith, 1974). Furthermore, unemployment and especially long-term unemployment leads to brutal social exclusion phenomena (Lawless, Martin, & Hardy, 1998), probably to extreme social differentiation phenomena (Fevre, 1984; Clark & Drinkwater, 2007), as well as antisocial and psychopathological ones which directly affect social cohesion and the sense of social solidarity.

But, how is the unemployment phenomenon linked to the increasing social vulnerability and social exclusion phenomena? It is known that social vulnerability is the obvious result of social and economic