

DEAPS international congress, Zlatibor (Serbia)

An urgent perspective into the future of youth mental health

The Serbian association for child and adolescent psychiatry (DEAPS) was about to announce its fourth international congress when the killing of so many innocent people in Paris shocked the world. The motto of the May 2016 conference was: 'Mental health of children and adolescents – a look into the future'.



Stephan Eliez: "attachment is essential". Milica Pejovic: "shocking how human cruelty can devastate life."

The Parisian crimes have put this congress theme in an extremely urgent perspective: what could youth psychiatry have done to prevent this tragedy? "These days are very sad for all people who believe in peace, justice, prosperity. It is shocking how human cruelty can devastate life; I do not want to believe in Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilization, but this is horror. Do we need to apologize that we have not done enough to prevent these criminals to kill innocent people, to educate, to advocate and to struggle against all misuse of religions and other values to justify killing or violence? Words are not enough and will not change the reality of having lost all those innocent people. I wish that we could have done more", says ESCAP board member Milica Pejovic Milovancevic.

Great and dramatic changes

Professor Aneta Lakic, president of DEAPS, explains the intended context of the conference as follows: "We are contemporaries of great (and dramatic) changes on the global level which inevitably (to a greater or lesser extent) affect all the people of our planet as well as all aspects of our lives; changes which we will have to, more or less successfully, overcome. At the same time this is a challenge for all the professionals working in child and adolescent mental health protection. Children and adolescents are developmentally the most vulnerable part of the population but also the part with the greatest creative potential, which in fact makes them the future of any society. All

children and adolescent mental health professionals contribute to making them the future; the roads to assistance for children and adolescents are in a wide spectrum of preventative, therapeutic and rehabilitative modalities – from everyday clinical psychological, psychiatric, neurological, pediatric practice, speech therapists' work, social workers' and pedagogues' work to neuroscience research and social protection.”

Urgency

Tragically, this congress theme became more urgent than anyone could have imagined. In the last minutes before the congress, the organizers have incorporated this urgency in the programming, to make the event as relevant as possible for all mental health workers. “The way escalating tension and violence in the world and in Europe contribute to the fact that children are more abandoned to themselves, to their own world of peers and exposed to potentially traumatizing or de-mentalizing experiences”, says professor Stephan Eliez, president of ESCAP. “Politicians propose to protect them by increasing security and control. This could represent an expensive solution for some aspects of the problem, but as child psychiatrists we do know that attachment is essential for the development of a harmonious personality and that solitude, exposure to traumatizing experiences – real or virtual –, poor education, chronic stress and poor nutrition are damageable for the development of children and compromise the possibility for them to become balanced and productive adults.”

Stand up for the children

Eliez says to be “personally convinced that ESCAP has a role to play in conveying a message of awareness for the children of Europe. In my perspective, child psychiatrists, psychologists as well as our association are probably in the best position to stand up for these children. We surely intend to include some of these themes and discussions in the organization of our next 2017 ESCAP congress.”