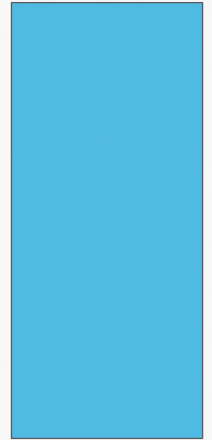


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Mental distress and economic crisis in Greece:  
An empirical community study

Anastasia Zissi, Michalis Poulimas, George Stalidis



# RATIONALE

- Economic change and especially recession affects people's lives, behaviour and mental health (Brenner, 1969. Pierce, 1967).
- Association among life events and multiple economic predictors (Catalano & Dooley, 1977).

# RATIONALE

- Study by Hamilton et al. (1990)
- Investigation of the initial effects of plant closing on autoworkers' mental health.
- Differential vulnerability to job loss depending mostly on socio- demographic characteristics: less educated of ethnic minorities were mostly affected (p. 123).

# RESEARCH AIMS

The investigation of the associations among:

- Material adversities (low to poor income), poor housing (material disorganization and social disruption)
- Negative life events
- Resources (individual coping strategies, social networks both informal and institutional, social cohesion)
- Mental health

# HYPOTHESIS

- *Hypothesis 1*: The socially differentiated life conditions in combination with the socially differentiated access to resources have significant effects on people's mental health.
- *Hypothesis 2*: Chronic stressors and adversities of life, some of which are associated to negative life events, in combination with the inability to access material, social or other resources, lead to socially differentiated mental distress.

# RESEARCH DESIGN

- Comparative, community research design

# RESEARCH DESIGN

- Three areas of the city of Thessaloniki
- The contrast between wealthy and impoverished areas offers the opportunity to control for occupational structure as well as factors that might influence life conditions and social environment.
- As a result three study areas were selected: a wealthy, an impoverished and an intermediate.
- Overall, 300 interviews were conducted.

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the association between residential area, socio- demographic characteristics and mental health.
- To study the association among social class and mental health.
- To assess the longitudinal effects of chronic stress on mental health by examining the interrelations among social class, stress and mental health.



# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Consistent findings on the existence of an association between conventional indexes of socio-economic status/ class (income level, educational background and hierarchy in the workforce) and mental health (Eaton & Mutaner, 1999).
- People from low socio- economic strata suffer more often and over longer periods of time from serious mental health problems.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Traditions of research locating psychological experience in social structures:

- Psychosocial model- explaining mental health inequalities by reduced social cohesion and by perceptions of disadvantage in the social hierarchy.
- Neo material model- explaining mental health inequalities by a combination of exposures to environmental risks and lack of resources people hold.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Habitus as an analytic guide to better understand differentiated practices enacted by social groups of different socio- economic class across different social fields or domains of daily life that lead to different degrees for access to resources.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- The utilization of qualitative, open-ended questions allowed for the detection of the complexities of social life through which particular groups are marginalized and excluded.
- Social support resources were linked to social capital in order to explore how resources of support may be differentially distributed among social groups.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Social capital covers informal social networks, social bonds and participation in formal social organizations.
- Little attention has been paid to the class distribution of the social capital.

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- Social capital as a marker of social inequality.
- Cultural capital as a type of resource that relates to people's understandings, meanings, coping strategies and explanations.
- Social variations in cultural capital are expected to be translated to socially differentiated coping strategies and practices.

# METHOD

- Structured interview
- Quantitative and qualitative information was collected on participants' life conditions, life events and chronic adversities, relationships, personal and social life, access to resources, coping strategies.
- Participants were asked to evaluate their mental health status and their quality of life overall.



# METHOD

Statistical analysis performed in three steps:

- analysis of the main features of social classes in contemporary Greece and the relations between mental health, socio-demographics and social class
- analysis of chronic stress factors and their association with mental health
- overall analysis of the complex relations between social class, stress factors and mental health.



# METHOD

Statistical analysis:

- Descriptive statistics
- Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Benzecri, 1992)

# DATA COLLECTION

- Door to door method in every block of the selected areas from July 2013 to November 2013
- Interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes
- In the impoverished study areas researchers confronted extreme conditions of poverty as they were reported in housing and borderline living conditions.

# DATA ANALYSIS

- Participants were stratified in social classes by gender and residence area on the basis of the theoretical and empirical plan of Erik Olin Wright (*Classes*, 1985).
- The typology that emerged offers evidence on the current social structure of Greece.
- The typology was enriched through the formulation of case vignettes that were based on qualitative data analysis.

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- 45% middle aged (36- 50 y.o.)
- 29% older people (51- 70 y.o.)
- 22% younger (26- 35 y.o.)

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- 38% university graduates
- 26% graduates of secondary education
- 17% holders of postgraduate or doctorate title

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- 78% working status
- 14% unemployed
- 8% economically inactive

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

- 2/3 of the sample reported that they barely get along with their finances
- 14% stated that they experience great difficulties

# AREA CHARACTERISTICS

- Wealthy areas (32% of the participants)

Middle aged individuals, married, owners of their residence, very good housing conditions, finances were assessed more positively.



# AREA CHARACTERISTICS

- Impoverished areas (36% of the participants)

Divorced or single individuals, tenants or owners on a housing loan, problematic housing conditions, environment acceptable to impoverished.

# AREA CHARACTERISTICS

- Intermediate area (31% of the participants)

Mostly young people (25- 35 y.o.), mostly singles, low percentages of owners on a housing loan, increased percentages of hosted residents, acceptable living conditions.

# RESULTS

## Social class, socio- demographics and mental health

Statistically significant relations were found between:

- social class and gender (Cramer's  $V=0.336$ ,  $p<0.001$ ),
- age (Cramer's  $V=0.221$ ,  $p=0.006$ ),
- residence area (Cramer's  $V=0.427$ ,  $p<0.001$ )
- financial status (Cramer's  $V=0.294$ ,  $p<0.001$ )

# RESULTS

## Social class, socio- demographics and mental health

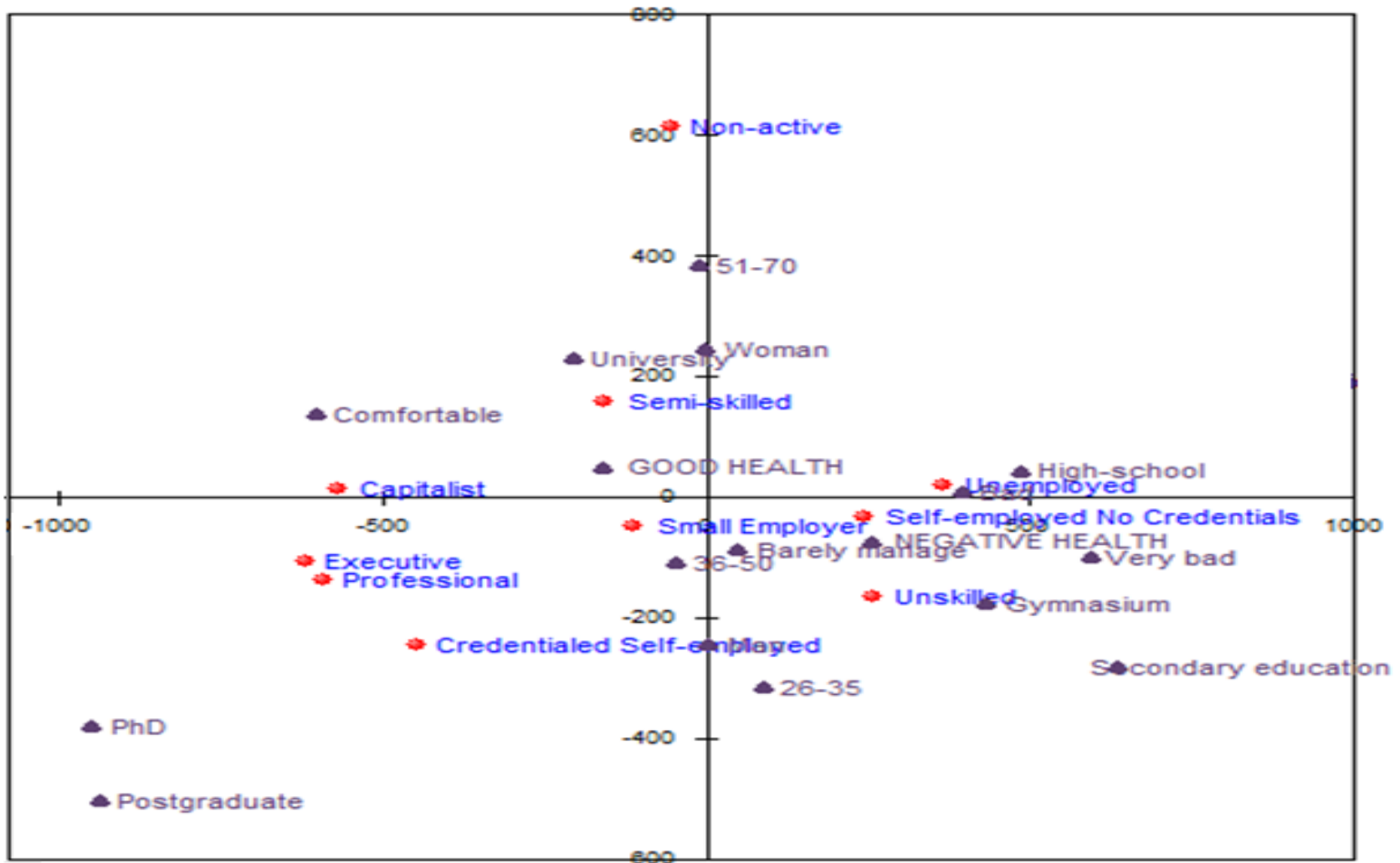
- 38% of the sample exceeded the threshold of the GHQ- 28 index

Statistically significant relations among:

- mental health and residence area (Kruskal Wallis  $\chi^2=15.11$ ,  $p=0.001$ )
- mental health and social class (Kruskal Wallis  $\chi^2=33.7$ ,  $p<0.001$ )

# RESULTS

Social class, socio- demographics and mental health



# RESULTS

## Chronic stressors

The under study stressors were grouped into types:

- Economic
- Occupational
- Personal
- Parental
- Residential

# RESULTS

## Chronic stressors

- Economic:

56% of the respondents suffering from severe economic problems

- Personal:

14% facing very serious problems in their intimate relations

# RESULTS

## Chronic stressors

- Occupational:

44% facing high stress, anxiety, fatigue and full lack of perspectives

11% expressing dissatisfaction concerning their current job

- Parental:

14% feeling stressed about their children

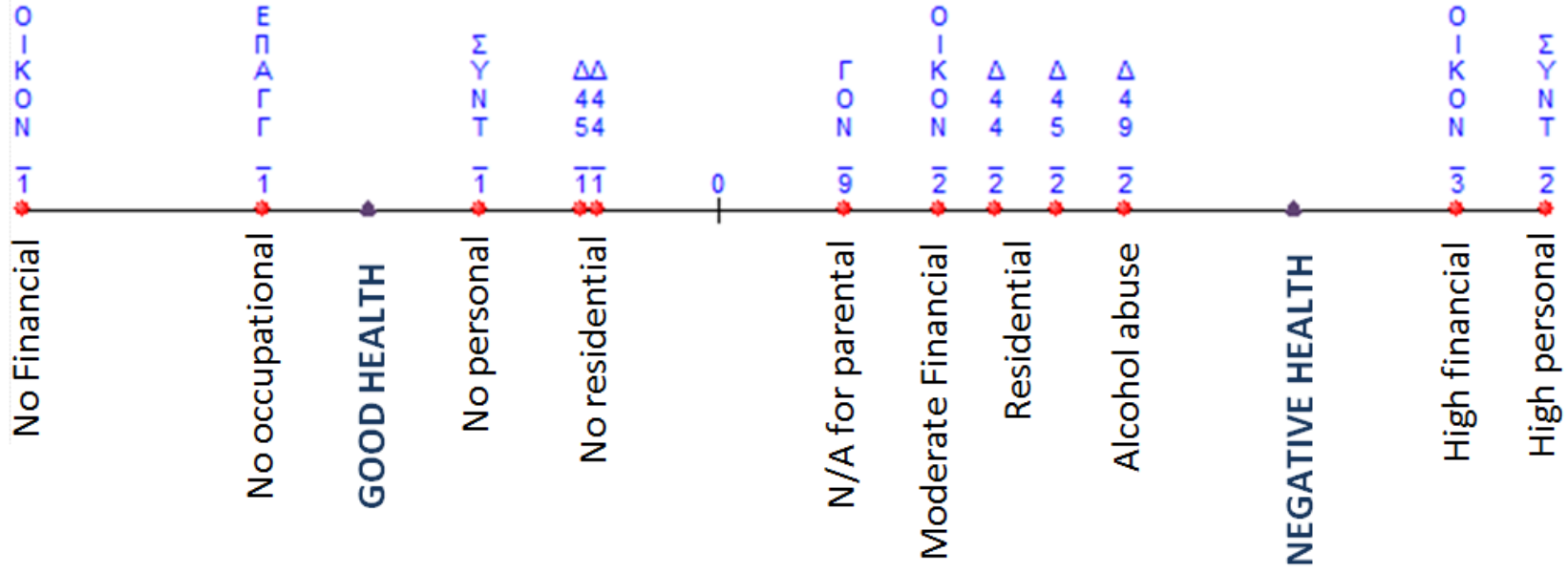
- Residential:

33% having residential problems



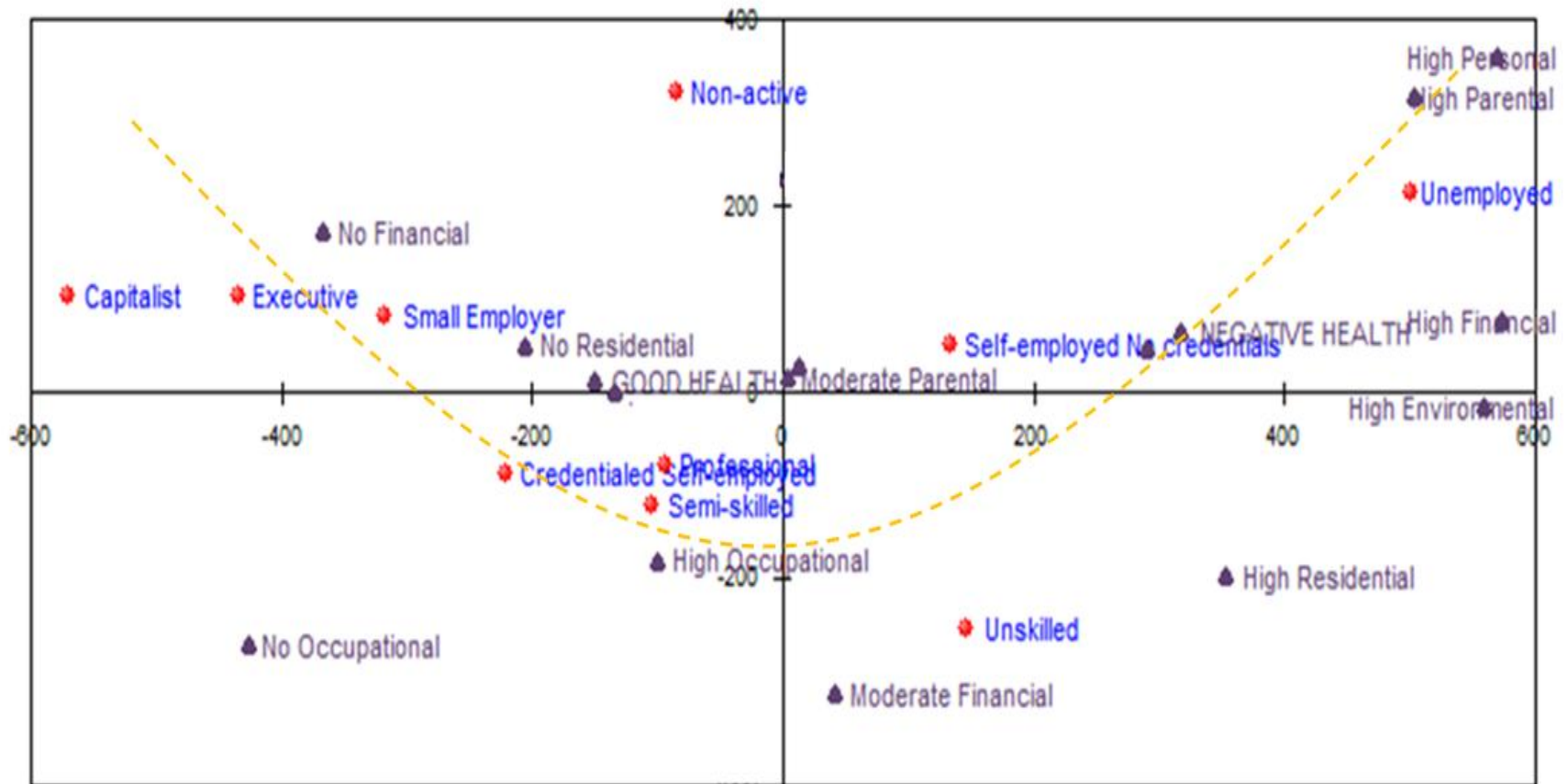
# RESULTS

## Chronic stressors



# RESULTS

The overall associations among social class, chronic stress factors and mental health



# CONCLUSIONS

- Mental health significantly differentiated in each social class and in each residential area.
- Unemployed and unskilled workers as the more vulnerable groups in terms of psychological health.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Chronic stress associated to low marital quality, intense economic burden and impoverished housing conditions.
- Chronic stress as a risk factor for poor mental health outcomes.

# CONCLUSIONS

The class composition of the privileged areas:

- small employers, expert managers and professionals
- expert managers occupy posts of high responsibility in public sectors
- their work was reported to be a source of contentment and gratification
- overall they assessed their life in positive terms

# CONCLUSIONS

The class composition of the impoverished areas:

- working class proletarians, self employed with no credentials, unemployed, under- paid workers in informal jobs and bankrupt people
- consider themselves or family members as suffering from health problems
- adverse working conditions
- their job as a source of livelihood from which they derive little or no satisfaction
- feeling tremendous pressure due to financial hardships

# CONCLUSIONS

The class composition of the impoverished areas:

- Almost all proletarian respondents mentioned the presence of chronic adversities, mainly financial difficulties and inability to meet the financial demands of their children.

# CONCLUSIONS

- The country's economic crisis affected all social groups, but mostly those on the lower end of the socioeconomic position.
- The effects of the crisis are catholic, especially for those who were known as petit bourgeoisie.