Economic pressure and social exclusion in Europe

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Abstract

This study examines people's perceptions of poverty and social exclusion in 12 countries in Europe: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Data come from the 1993 Euro-barometer and a model of the dynamics among feelings of social exclusion, community poverty and social exclusion, and economic pressure was tested for the goodness-of-fit using structural equation models (AMOS 4.0) techniques by the method of maximum likelihood. The goodness-of-fit provided evidence that the hypothesized model was stable. The results also showed significant differences in the attitudes toward poverty and social exclusion according to country of residence, gender, and age of the participants.

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1. Introduction

Poverty and social exclusion are important issues in the contemporary international debates. In the past two decades, poverty appears to have become more difficult to escape, being more chronic and less transitory (Rodgers & Rodgers, 1993). Persistent poverty is more deleterious to children's development and home environments than is transitory poverty and research indicated that neighborhood poverty has adverse effects on children's functioning, independent of family level poverty (Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). There is also a remarkable little consensus among social scientists, politicians or lay people about the nature, causes, or future course of poverty (Jordan, 1996).

Social exclusion is a term frequently used in the recent political vocabulary referring to a wide range of social situations and processes, like rupture of social bonds or generalized disadvantage (Dean, 1991). The impact of exclusion from social integration has also negative consequences on individual and family development since an array of psychological problems

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such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, isolation accompanies this process (Goodban, 1985). The purposes of this study are to examine Europeans' opinions on the causes of poverty, their subjective appraisals of poverty and social exclusion, and the dynamics between these processes.

1.1. Poverty: definitions and measures

The definitions of poverty are crucial because they allow comparisons of economic well being across different groups and across time (Abrahamson, 1995). Social science scholars (Hagenaars & de Vos, 1988; Strobel, 1996) elaborated three definitions of poverty: absolute poverty, relative poverty, and subjective poverty. Absolute poverty is having less than an objectively defined, absolute minimum required for basic needs (Hagenaars & de Vos, 1988). Absolute poverty is the focal construct in intervention and policy studies and the most common measure of it is the cash income using the "official" federal poverty index as a marker (McLoyd, 1998). Governments' poverty index should be corrected because it determines the size and characteristics of the poor population and therefore influences public attitudes about poverty, types of antipoverty policies and programs that should be implemented (Vaughan, 1993). Townsend (1993) pointed out that individuals cannot be reduced to energy-consuming organisms and that even basic physiological needs are socially determined.

Relative poverty is having less compared to others in the society, lacking certain commodities that are common in a community (Hagenaars & de Vos, 1988). In this case, poverty is not defined in absolute terms but in relation to the "average" living conditions of a given society (Strobel, 1996). It focuses on the multidimensional nature of poverty, taking into account all living conditions and emphasizes the fundamentally social character of poverty because living conditions are not limited to material factors (housing, food, income) but include social relations, access to employment, and health care (Strobel, 1996).

Subjective poverty refers to people's feeling that they do not have enough to get along (Hagenaars & de Vos, 1988). Two individuals or households with the same resources and living conditions may experience the situation differently and assess differently the difficulties they have making ends meet (Strobel, 1996). Asking households about their perceptions of their situation makes it possible to define subjective poverty indicators. Economic pressure is an individual's appraisal of economic circumstances, and it is often more important to his/her functioning than is his/her objective economic condition (Conger et al., 1993). Research showed that objective economic measures of economic problems (e.g., debts-to-asset ratio, income, and unemployment) have indirect effects on individuals and family processes through the intervening variable of economic pressure (Conger & Elder, 1994; Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994). This subjective appraisal of economic difficulties impacts individual and family functioning variables like mental health (depression), marital quality, parenting process, and child development (Conger et al., 1993). The present study examines economic pressure (the subjective evaluation of poverty) and how it is perceived by residents of different countries in Europe. This research also analyzes the dynamics between economic pressure and social exclusion.
1.2. Social exclusion

The social exclusion debate originated in France and draws specifically on the French tradition of integration and social solidarity (Haan & Maxwell, 1998). The concept “social exclusion” has been defined in different ways. In the official, French definition, social exclusion is “a rupture of social bonds, a process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they live” (European Foundation, 1995, p. 4). Exclusion has also been defined to cover both subjective and objective features of people’s lives, and as description of individual disadvantage, as well as of attributes of societies (IILS, 1996). Room (1990) characterized social exclusion as a situation where (a) individuals suffer generalized disadvantage in terms of education, training, employment, housing, financial resources, etc; (b) individuals’ chances of gaining access to the major social institutions which distribute these life chances are substantially less than those of the rest of the population; (c) these disadvantages persist over time.

Social exclusion is the opposite of social integration, which reflects the perceived importance of being part of society and being integrated. It is a multidimensional concept and focuses on deprivation in different areas: economic, social, political (poor people usually suffer from multiple disadvantages like precariousness of work, low income) and on the processes and mechanisms that exclude people (Haan, 1998). Similarly, Commins (1993) presented four dimensions of social exclusion: exclusion from civic integration—a failure of democratic and legal system; exclusion from the labor market; exclusion from welfare state provision; and exclusion from family and community. Social exclusion is thus loaded with numerous “economic, social, political, and cultural connotations and dimensions” (Silver, 1994, p. 536) and is dynamic in character (Evans, 1998). In this paper, social exclusion is understood as respondents’ appraisals of being left out of society and feeling that the society was unfair to them. The article is assessing Europeans’ perspectives on social exclusion from the society and the impact of this on the economic pressure that people experience.

This study is also examining social exclusion at the community level and the impact of living among other poor and socially excluded individuals. People who cannot afford residing in the “communities of choice” (among mainstream households) have to live in “communities of fate” among other poor and excluded (Hirst, 1994). Social exclusion through residential polarization is reinforced by exclusion from good education, health, and welfare-systems (Jordan, 1996). The residents of deprived districts are forced to rely more on public agencies to meet their everyday needs, and thus, the lower the quality services from these agencies and the bigger the likelihood to be excluded from any access to the goods supplied by these services, the greater their risks and problems and hence the costs that they will impose on national and local budgets (Jordan, 1996). All of these interactions generate higher social costs because they give rise to the resistance practices by which poor people compensate themselves for exclusion from more desirable areas and from the social interaction that constitutes mainstream activity in prosperous societies (Jordan, 1996).
1.3. Linkage between poverty and social exclusion

There is disagreement over the way social exclusion is defined vis-a-vis poverty. On one hand, social exclusion was defined as responsible for poverty (Jordan, 1996) and on the other, poverty was described as an element of social exclusion (Haan, 1998) or as an alternative concept (e.g., Abrahamson, 1995).

This study uses Jordan’s (1996) theory on poverty and social exclusion. Jordan (1996) considers that individuals are most vulnerable when they have fewest personal capacities and material resources (e.g., hazards of childhood, old age, sickness, disability, or handicap) but that none of these deficits and risks necessarily threatens their survival as long as they enjoy the protections afforded by membership of an inclusive group that cooperates productively. Jordan (1996) affirmed that any theory that seeks to explain the relationship between individual need and social exclusion must necessary analyze the economics of human collectivities, assessing how people interact in relation to their economic risks, capacities, and resources, and particularly how they organize themselves in groups to include members and exclude nonmembers. According to Jordan’s theory, individuals “become vulnerable to poverty when they are excluded from access to certain goods that members of such groups supply to each other through collective action, and when processes of allocation are influenced by the actions of successfully organized interests, which they cannot join” (p. 48). Using the above-mentioned theory, this research hypotheses that the social exclusion will impact participants’ appraisal of their economic pressure.

Jordan (1996) also talked about the necessity to take into account the enormous significance of citizenship in determining an individual’s level of resources, since membership of a rich, developed country alone guarantees an income beyond the dreams of the vast majority of citizens of less developed economies. This study examines differences (depending on country of residence) in respondents’ perspectives on economic pressure and social exclusion.

One important dimension where poverty and social exclusion are not necessarily related to the economic potentialities and vulnerabilities of individuals is gender (Jordan, 1996). There is a growing literature that analyzes the ways in which material disadvantage in the advanced industrialized countries is concentrated among women (Glendinning & Millar, 1991). Therefore, this research is also assessing differences between men and women on poverty and social exclusion.

Cross-national survey research showed that people from different countries have different attitudes towards poor and social excluded persons based on their values and ideological commitments. Thus, for example, Americans, relative to people from other Western industrialized countries have less positive attitudes toward social welfare, stronger preference for individualistic explanations of economic inequalities attributing poverty to individual deficits such as insufficient motivation, and greater tendency to perceive current social and economic conditions as equitable (e.g., Smith, 1990). One of the purposes of this study is to examine differences in perspectives of residents’ of different countries in Europe on the causes of poverty in their societies and in their feelings of being socially excluded and confronted with economic pressure.

Income tested programs overtly and intentionally stigmatize, isolate, and pathologize the poor discouraging people who are eligible to apply for their benefits (Goodban, 1985). The
established link between attributional bias and psychological well being suggests that blaming the poor for their plight will exacerbate their psychological problems (Belle, 1984). Negative stereotypes have unfavorable effects on the behavior of individuals who are the objects of stereotypes. Members of stigmatized groups typically buffer their self-esteem from the prejudice of others through a variety of social and psychological mechanisms. In their literature review, Crocker and Major (1989) enumerated three self-protective mechanisms: (a) attributing negative feedback to prejudice against members of a stigmatized group; (b) selectively comparing their outcomes with those of members of their own group; and (c) selectively devaluing those attributes on which their group typically fares poorly and valuing those attributes on which their group excels. Although these self-protective mechanisms have positive consequences for self-esteem, each of them may undermine motivation to improve one's individual performance in areas where one's group is disadvantaged. Ultimately, the performance level of the stigmatized group may lag behind that of a nonstigmatized group even when individual capabilities do not warrant these differences (Brantlinger, 1991). There is a need for research on people's feelings of social exclusion because they affect individual and family functioning. This study compared Europeans' perceptions of social exclusion, and also examined if gender and age alter these views.

Another research goal was to assess the links between Europeans' economic pressure, living in a poor community and feelings of social exclusion. Although there is literature on poverty and social exclusion in Europe (e.g., Abrahamson, 1995; Strobel, 1996), research on people's subjective appraisal of these issues is lacking. Human ecology theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979) was the second theoretical perspectives used in conducting this research in order to examine how culture/environment informs people's perspectives of their lives. In the present study, the focus is on the macrosystem level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. Macrosystem refers to "consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). According to ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) cultures are expected to differ from each other in different aspects. Previous research showed that Europeans' opinions about family issues are differing depending on the country of residence (Jones & Brayfield, 1997).

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

Data for this analysis come from the 1993 Euro-barometer 40.0: Poverty and Social Exclusion (Reif & Melich, 1997) conducted by INRA (Europe). INRA is a company which has been conducting the Euro-barometer public opinion survey on behalf of the European Commission for 12 years. This continuous survey covers the 15 member states. The Euro-barometer provides accurate data on a wide range of topics, e.g., public opinion towards the European integration, the Euro, consumer protection, quality labels, the environment, etc. This survey is the product of a unique program of cross-national social science research. The questions are
relevant to all countries and are expressed in an equivalent manner in all languages. Multistage national probability sampling techniques were used to gather the participants.

This Euro-barometer survey (40.0) focused on poverty and social exclusion, examining the extent and immediacy of these problems for respondents. Data sources consist in personal interviews. Items covered whether the respondent’s family or friends were experiencing poverty or social exclusion, how often the respondent saw instances of poverty and social exclusion, and whether the respondent believed that people had a chance of rising out of these circumstances. Respondents were also asked about the main reasons for poverty and social exclusion, the best ways to combat these conditions. Respondents were asked to compare the current general economic and employment situations in their countries, the financial situation of their households, and their job situations with those of 12 months ago. Participants were also asked to rate various aspects of their everyday life, including housing, income, work, social entitlements, and health. Demographic and other background information was gathered on number of people residing in the home, size of locality, home ownership, region of residence, as well as the respondent’s age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, work sector, religion.

A sample of 13,800 participants (51% female) 18–75 years old was selected from an initial sample of 15,073 respondents. People younger than 18 were dropped out of the analysis because the study focuses on adults’ perspectives. Respondents older than 75 were also dropped from the analysis due to the very limited number of people in this category. Participants belong to 12 European countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Because the cases had fewer than 5% missing values on the variables used in the analysis, the means were substituted for the missing.

2.2. The model

The structural equation model used is showed in Fig. 1. Social exclusion latent variable was based on two observed indicators, one asking respondents if they felt that “the society was unfair” to them and another one asking if they felt “left out of society” (response options varied from 1 = no, not at all, to 3 = yes, completely). Community poverty and exclusion is a latent variable based on two indicators: an index with 4 items asking participants if there are many “poor and socially excluded people in the area where they live” and 1 item asking respondents if there are “poor and socially excluded people in their immediate circle of family or friends.” Economic pressure is a latent variable based on three indicators, the first one being an index of 16 items asking people if they afford certain aspects of a standard of living (e.g., indoor toilet, having a car, a healthy diet). The second indicator was a scale of 9 items ($\alpha = .85$) examining respondents’ satisfaction with certain areas of their life (e.g., income, area where they live, their house) (response options ranged from 1 = very good to 4 = very bad). All these items loaded on a single factor (with maximum likelihood extraction method) which suggests that they measure participants’ satisfaction with their economic level. The third indicator was based on a single observed variable asking about respondent’s general satisfaction with life (response options varied from 1 = very satisfied to 4 = not at all satisfied).
2.3. Analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Frequencies were run to examine people's opinions about the causes of poverty and economic inequalities in the modern world. In order to assess the differences among countries regarding respondents' economic pressure one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc multiple comparison using Scheffe test was performed. Scheffe test simultaneously compares all pairs of means on a single variable. It is the most conservative multiple comparisons test because it requires larger differences between pairs of means to achieve statistical significance at the .05 level (Jones & Brayfield, 1997). ANOVA was also used to examine if the appraisal of economic pressure and the feelings of social exclusion varied significantly according to respon-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood poverty &amp; exclusion</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor &amp; excluded friends</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unfair society</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left out of society</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affording things</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with economic level</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with life</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.74</td>
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Note: Sample size is 13,800.
The second goal of the study was to develop and test a structural equation model of economic pressure, living in a poor community, and social exclusion. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the measurement model and path analyses were conducted to demonstrate the statistically separate effects of the predictors. The model was estimated via maximum likelihood using the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS 4.0; Arbuckle, 1999). One of the advantages of using structural equation modeling techniques to test complex models is that it allows one to account for measurement error, correlated measurement error, and nonrecursive pathways (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Structural equation modeling is particularly suited to testing mediators because it permits the simultaneous estimation of direct and indirect paths. It analyzes each path after the effects of all other paths are accounted for and provides fit indices that facilitate comparison of saturated and parsimonious models using maximum likelihood estimates (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996).

The fit of the model was evaluated against the following criteria: chi-square and the degree of freedom ($\chi^2$; d.f.) the goodness-of-fit (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The chi-square index assesses the degree of nonfit between the estimated and observed covariance matrices and should have a small value. However, with big sample size (above 200) the chi-square test has a tendency to indicate a significant probability level. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) are two measures of the fit between theoretical model and the data. They vary from zero to one, and values larger than .90 indicate a good fit of the model. The adjusted goodness-of-fit index adjusts the GFI for the degree of freedom of a model relative to the number of variables. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is a measure of fit that takes into account the error of approximation in the population. A value of .05 or lower shows a close fit.

3. Results

Descriptive data are presented in Table 1. Correlations among variables are presented in Table 2. They indicate that satisfaction with life and economic level correlates negatively with feelings of exclusion and unfairness.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Correlations between variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Neighborhood poverty &amp; exclusion</td>
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<td>2. Poor &amp; excluded friends</td>
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<td>3. Unfair society</td>
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<td>.17*</td>
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<td>4. Left out of society</td>
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<td>.13*</td>
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<td>5. Affording things</td>
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<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Satisfaction with economic level</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
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<td>7. Satisfaction with life</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
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* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).
Fourteen percent of respondents considered that people live in poverty because they have been unlucky, 13% said that this is due to laziness and lack of willpower, 40% of participants affirmed that poverty is due to the injustice from the society, and 28% considered that poverty is an inevitable consequence of the "way the modern world is going." When asked about the inequalities existent in the society, 84% of the respondents considered that, in their societies, "the rich get richer," while only 16% said that "there is less difference in income between the rich and the poor."

ANOVA was conducted to assess differences regarding satisfaction with economic achievement among Europeans ($F(14, 13,785) = 188.824, p < .001$). The results for Scheffe test showed significant differences among people from different countries (lower scores indicated a higher satisfaction and a lower economic pressure). Thus, the findings showed that residents from Denmark ($M = 1.40$) expressed the highest satisfaction, while participants from Greece ($M = 2.54$), Portugal ($M = 2.38$), and France ($M = 2.26$) expressed the lowest satisfaction and the highest economic pressure (the other countries were in between these two groups). This is consistent with the values of Gini Index in these countries. The Gini Index, the standard measure of inequality, has values between 0 = perfect equality and 100 = perfect inequality. Thus, in Denmark, Gini Index was 24.7 in 1992 (CIA, 2003), while in Greece was 32.7 (in 1993), in Portugal 35.6 (1995), and in France 32.7 (in 1995) (CIA, 2003). This indicates that people reported more economic pressure in countries with higher Gini Index indicating higher economic inequality.

There were no differences in the appraisal economic pressure based on gender. ANOVA also indicated ($F(5, 13,794) = 8.431, p < .001$) that younger people, 18–24 years old ($M = 1.95$), 25–34 ($M = 1.96$), 35–44 ($M = 1.99$), and the oldest ones, aged 65 and more ($M = 1.99$) are the participants most satisfied with the economic level, significantly different than the middle adulthood respondents, 45–54 years old ($M = 2.05$), 55–65 ($M = 2.07$) who were the least satisfied with the life they lead and indicated the highest economic pressure.

Regarding people’s attitudes towards social exclusion, there were no significant differences based on age. $t$ test ($t = 2.18, p < .05$) showed significant differences between men ($M = 2.39$) and women ($M = 2.36$) with men considering more that society was unfair to them than women (the mean difference is very close, however). ANOVA also showed ($F(14, 13,785) = 74,131, p < .001$) that participants from Italy ($M = 2.07$) and France ($M = 2.08$) were the ones who indicated the least that the society was unfair to them, while those from Ireland ($M = 2.71$) and Denmark ($M = 2.79$) considered the most that their societies were unfair to them (the other countries were between these two groups with very close mean differences).

### 3.1. Measurement model

Prior to estimating the structural model, the three-factor measurement model was tested for its goodness-of-fit using a maximum-likelihood confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA on the covariance for the set of variables was carried out using AMOS 4.0 (Arbuckle, 1999). The results were $\chi^2 = 249.24$ (d.f. = 11), GFI = .99, AGFI = .98, RMSEA = .04. The goodness-of-fit provided evidence that the hypothesized model was stable, suggesting good support for all three variables. The factor loadings were high for each variable; therefore, all the variables were kept in the model as it was hypothesized.
Fig. 2. Structural equation results for the model (standardized regression coefficients; critical ratio in parenthesis).

3.2. Structural model

The structural equation results show (see Fig. 2) that people who feel social excluded are more likely to live in communities with dense poor and socially excluded residents. These people are also confronted with economic pressure not being satisfied with their economic achievement. Critical ratio (CR), which is obtained by dividing the regression coefficients to standard error, is significant when exceeds 1.96 in magnitude (using a significance level of .05) (Arbuckle, 1999). The results indicate that the people who feel more socially excluded report also more community poverty and community exclusion \((\beta = .43; CR = 22.69)\) and higher economic pressure \((\beta = .65; CR = 27.84)\). Higher community poverty and exclusion is also associated with higher economic pressure \((\beta = .22; CR = 11.62)\).

4. Discussions

The purposes of this study were to examine Europeans’ opinions on the causes of poverty, their subjective appraisals of the economic standard and feelings of social exclusion and the dynamics between these concepts. The fact that almost half of the participants considered that people live in poverty due to the injustice existing in modern society is consistent with previous research (e.g., Smith, 1990). This finding suggests that the national and international organisms should pay more attention to the social policies and to design strategies and programs that could effectively solve social injustices.

The results showed differences among people from various countries perspectives on poverty and social exclusion, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Jones & Brayfield, 1997). They are also consistent with the ecological theory used (Brofenbrenner, 1979), which suggests that people are informed in their appraisals by their culture. Respondents from the North part of Europe (Denmark, Netherlands) expressed the highest satisfaction with their economic achievement (lowest economic pressure) among the all European Community, while respondents from the South and Central part of Europe (Greece, Portugal, France) indicated the highest economic pressure. This finding might encourage policies makers to focus their efforts on countries where people feel an increased economic pressure and are less satisfied with their economic achievements. The results also evidenced that the younger people (18–44) and the oldest ones (65 and older) are more satisfied with the economic standard they have than the middle adulthood respondents (45–65 years old), which might be due to struggles the
middle age people experience, being caught between the necessity of taking care of their adult children and of their older parents.

Knowing people’s perspectives on poverty and social exclusion is important because the subjective evaluation of these issues has a significant impact on the individual functioning (Conger et al., 1993). The structural model suggests that there is a significant relationship between participants’ feelings of social exclusion and economic pressure. This is consistent with Jordan’s (1996) theory on poverty and social exclusion, which states that social exclusion is responsible for poverty. Feeling “left out of the society” and that “the society was unfair to them” increases chances that people would live in communities where there are many other poor and socially excluded individuals. The costs produced by residential polarization could be reduced by including the members of deprived neighborhoods into heterogeneous and pluralistic communities whose mainstream services contain a mixture of members with the full range of needs and abilities (Jordan, 1996). Due to the effects of stigmatization and isolation on individuals and families psychological and social functioning (e.g., depression, low self-esteem, anxiety) (Brantlinger, 1991) efforts to reframe these negative stereotypes produced by social exclusion have to be undertaken.

People who live in a community where other individuals experience poverty and social exclusion, and feel themselves socially excluded indicate a higher economic pressure and a lower satisfaction with their economic achievements (e.g., affording certain commodities that are common in the society). The present era of expanding transnational exchanges and globalization has also seen a reduction in the ability of nation states to protect their citizens from economic risks (Held & McGrew, 1994).

In the advanced capitalist economies of Europe inequalities in income have tended to increase since early 1990s, and more individuals and households have fallen through the various systems of social security designed to protect them and into social assistance. New social institutions would have to move away from compulsory inclusion, expert intervention and corrective enforcement, towards educative and supportive initiatives (Jordan, 1996). These programs have to be sustained by systems that address the fundamental causes of poverty and social exclusion by redistributing income in ways that guaranteed the basic security and opportunity of members (Jordan, 1996).

The study presented here makes a significant contribution to the literature on economic pressure and social exclusion in Europe. Results from this cross-national sample show a relatively strong evidence of the link between social exclusion and economic pressure. The study contains several limitations, however. One of them is that, like all generalizations, these results support group patterns with a limited understanding of individual variations. In depth research in each of these countries and in other European countries not included in this database are necessary in order to fully understand the dynamics between poverty and social exclusion, which accompany socio-economical and political transitions in this part of the world. Another limitation is that this data set was based on a single informant.

The literature on how poverty and social exclusion impact Europeans’ functioning is limited. It is important to conduct cross-cultural research in European Community because of the interest of unifying the social policies, which requires information on similarities and differences existing among the countries members of the Union. Cultural studies, focused on the causes of these differences, could bring even more insight in the way people from these countries
understand their lives. Ideally, these studies would include multiple informants and multiple methods.

References


