




A study on Anomie and Neoliberalism: the Role of Social Disconnection on Well-being

Un estudio sobre la anomia y el neoliberalismo: el papel de la desconexión social en el bienestar

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Abstract

This study analyses whether the levels of anomie and social disconnection as consequences of the perceived implementation of neoliberal economic measures have a negative influence on the well-being of individuals. The study sample consisted of 334 Spanish participants residing in the city and province of Malaga, Spain (201 women and 133 men). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 80 years ($M = 33.22$, $SD = 15.35$). The results obtained in our research showed that anomie and social disconnection exert a serial mediation on the relationship between perceived neoliberalism and well-being. It was obtained that perceived neoliberalism had a positive effect on anomie and that anomie had a positive effect on social disengagement, while pointing to social disengagement having a negative effect on well-being. The results are interpreted from the perspective of social identity, assuming that a society as being in a state of anomie fails to satisfy important psychological needs. This anomie causes individuals to perceive themselves as more disconnected, and as such not benefiting from the potential positive effects of group membership and social identification.

Keywords: anomie, economic inequality, neoliberalism, social disconnection, well-being

Resumen

Este estudio analiza si los niveles de anomia y desconexión social como consecuencias de la percepción de la aplicación de medidas económicas neoliberales influyen negativamente en el bienestar de los individuos. La muestra del estudio estuvo compuesta por 334 participantes españoles residentes en la ciudad y provincia de Málaga, España (201 mujeres y 133 hombres). La edad de los participantes oscilaba entre los 18 y los 80 años ($M = 33,22$, $DT = 15,35$). Los resultados obtenidos mostraron que la anomia y la desconexión social ejercen una mediación en serie sobre la relación entre el neoliberalismo percibido y el bienestar. Se obtuvo que el neoliberalismo percibido tuvo un efecto positivo sobre la anomia y que la anomia tuvo un efecto positivo sobre la desconexión social, mientras que se señaló que la desconexión social tuvo un efecto negativo sobre el bienestar. Los resultados se interpretan desde la perspectiva de la identidad social, asumiendo que una sociedad en estado de anomia no satisface necesidades psicológicas importantes. Esta anomia hace que los individuos se perciban a sí mismos como más desconectados y, como tales, no se beneficien de los posibles efectos positivos de la pertenencia a un grupo y de la identificación social.

Palabras clave: anomia, desigualdad económica, neoliberalismo, desconexión social, bienestar

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Introduction

More than a century ago, sociological literature introduced the concept of anomie to reflect the process of instability and disintegration that could occur in countries and societies as a result of events such as the threat of war, long periods of armed conflict, brusque political changes, economic crises, etc. (Passas, 1995; Abercrombie et al., 2006; Heydari et al., 2014). In particular, Durkheim (1897/1987), at the end of the 19th century, held that anomie occurs when a society loses regulatory power over its members due to rapid and brusque social changes. These changes lead to the breakdown of moral standards due to the lack of effective leadership. In analysing and describing anomie, some authors have focused their attention of the characteristics of the social context that foment it (understanding anomie as a *state of society*; Durkheim, 1897/1987; Merton, 1938), while other scholars have highlighted the state of mind of individuals undergoing a process of anomie, characterised by feelings of impotence, helplessness, despair and disconnection from others, etc. (Srole, 1956; McClosky & Schaar, 1965; Fischer, 1973; Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2004; Konty, 2005).

From a psycho-social perspective, Teymoori et al., (2017) have proposed a definition of anomie that, based on Durkheim's approach (1897/1987), conceives of it as a *shared perception of the state of the society*. These authors distinguish between the perceptions of society (on the one hand), and the individual and group manifestations that could arise in response to these perceptions (on the other). Specifically, Teymoori et al., (2017) maintain that a society is in a state of anomie when its members observe the breakdown of social integration and the loss of societal regulation. This implies that they perceive that: a) there is a generalised normlessness and that the social fabric is breaking down to the point that the social groups pertaining to the community do not stay united due to lack of trust and not accepting a common moral standard (*social disintegration*); and b) that leaders do not distribute resources equally among their followers and are not considered true representatives of their group (*social deregulation*). According to these authors, when conceptualizing anomie as a *perceived state of society*, anomie must be considered as a social perception, since, although there are structural factors propitiating it, its existence depends on how such factors are perceived together by a wide sector of the population. Anomie must be considered the result of a shared perception among distinct members of a society that observe and interpret in a social way the breakdown of social fabric and leadership. Accordingly, this implies that any analysis of a situation of anomie must consider the collective perceptions and interpretations of social events, such as the responses from the members of society in the face of these events. Individuals with distinct levels of influence, but upon interacting with one another, each from their own sphere of influence, construct a shared perception on the anomic state of a society.

Several research studies have revealed that anomie leads to a decrease in psychological well-being in the individuals are experiencing it. Worthy of note is the pioneering work of Durkheim (1897/1987) that linked anomie with rates of suicide (see Heydari et al., 2014). More recent studies (carried out at the end of the last century and the beginning of the 21st century) have demonstrated that anomie negatively affects the well-being and life satisfaction of individuals perceiving it (Blanco & Díaz, 2007) and results in an increase in the levels of depression suffered by the subjects (Lantz & Harper, 1990). When the degree of trust between the group members declines and consensus regarding the effectiveness of leadership and group efficacy erodes, it results in an increase in levels of stress and depression (Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Haslam et al., 2011). Further studies have shown that if the social fabric breaks down (raising the level of social disconnection), the rate of depression increases and it brings about a decline in well-being (Cruwys et al., 2014; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). If individuals observe a disintegrated and deregulated society, with high levels of anomie, these individuals could believe that society is failing to satisfy basic human needs (the need for meaning, the need for self-esteem, the need for belonging and connection with others; Teymoori et al., 2017), and the need for control and personal and group security. (Greenaway et al., 2016; Williams, 2009). As such, it could be expected that as a society is perceived as more anomic, it would lead to lower well-being among the population and greater levels of social disconnection among its members. Along these lines, the breakdown and erosion of social integration and social regulation diminishes trust among individuals and increases social disconnection (Teymoori et al., 2017). The need to belong and the need for trust are two of the most important universal social motives for human beings (Fiske, 2004).

Anomie, economic inequality and neoliberalism

Although from a psycho-social perspective, as commented earlier, anomie is considered a *shared perception of the state of society* (Teymoori et al., 2017), it must be kept in mind that there are a number of structural factors that can constitute the bases for which a society is perceived by its members as anomic, since individuals experience agitation and instability as a consequence of profound and brusque changes brought about by events such as wars, revolutions, economic crises, etc. (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2001). In the first half of the 20th century, Merton (1938) pointed out that the existence of high levels of economic inequality (even in prosperous societies such as western ones) could be a factor triggering anomie. For this author, a reason why societies scan become perceived as anomic is because they subscribe to aspirations that are unreachable for most of the population. This can occur in societies that pursue neoliberal policies since, on one hand, individuals influenced by neoliberal ideology base themselves on the idea that self-esteem, personal growth and happiness depend on economic success achieved by one's own efforts without any social factor (meritocracy), and, at the same time (in real contexts), economic success is extremely difficult to achieve

for the immense majority of the population. Furthermore, it can be confirmed that the level of economic inequality resulting from neoliberal practices is increasingly high (Piketty, 2015), which can produce a sense of anomie in a large part of the population (Nachtwey, 2016).

In addition to considering neoliberalism an organizational form of the dominant economy in capitalist societies that value the free market overall, neoliberalism should also be considered an ideology that governs economic policies and social relations. It is an ideology that places competition and individualism at the core of human relations, shaping individual life and group life (Teo, 2018). Neoliberalism offers a specific conception of the nature of human beings (which emphasises individualism), upholds the commodification of human relations, and has significant impact on well-being since its implementation has created unfavorable social conditions for a large part of the population (Harvey, 2005; Piketty, 2015). In the economic sphere, the rise of neoliberalism has brought about increased disparity in wealth, hoarded by the economically elite and defended and maneuvered by various neoliberal governments to lower job quality, eliminate worker and union rights, and carry out cuts in social security and social benefits (Owen, 2011). This has brought about profound changes that have undermined social trust, cohesion and stability within societies (Beattie, 2019; Hartwich & Becker, 2019).

It is a well-known fact that economic inequality has increased in most countries since the 1980's (Alvaredo *et al.*, 2017) as a consequence, to a large extent, of the implementation of neoliberal policies (Piketty, 2015). In the case of Spain (the fourth economy in the European Union), it is one of the EU member states with the highest levels of inequality, with a significant part of its population experiencing economic difficulties and a high rate of unemployment compared to the European average (EUROSTAT, 2020). According to European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN-ES, 2023), the poverty risk rate was 24,4% of the population and the economic inequality rate reflected by the Gini index (index that goes from "0" = maximum equality to "100" = maximum inequality) was 32. Specifically, the richest 20% of the population earns 5,6 times more than the poorest 20% of the population. In 2021 the Gini index for the EU was 30.10 and Spain was the fifth most economically unequal country after Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania (EUROSTAT, 2020). Economic inequality has risen in the past decades and Spain was one of the countries that suffered most from the consequences of the 2007 economic crisis (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística* - Spanish Statistical Office, 2019). These effects have been exacerbated by the global repercussions of the humanitarian crisis brought about by the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, declared in February 2022, strongly impacting both developed and developing countries worldwide (Ruiz, 2022).

Numerous research studies have observed that the increase in economic inequality among the population leads to a rise in certain illnesses and deterioration of physical and mental health (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; 2019; Beattie, 2019; Jetten & Peters, 2019). The negative consequences of economic inequality also result in social and community deterioration, as there is a decline in social cohesion and trust among the members of population (Gustavsson & Jordahl, 2008), along with a rise in violence and social unrest (d'Hombres *et al.*, 2012). Hartwich and Becker (2019) have affirmed that high inequality causes a "deterioration in the social fabric by making people perceive their societies as lacking in fairness and solidarity" (p. 116), leading to people living in separate worlds with sharp intergroup divisions, eroding social ties, trust and prosocial attitudes (Buttrick *et al.*, 2017) along with the sense of a shared fate (Rothstein & Uslander, 2005).

Neoliberalism, by placing competition and individualism as essential elements in human relations, impedes people from being able to access the positive and beneficial aspects of social connection and group belonging and identification (Haslam *et al.*, 2018), since neoliberalism foments social disconnection and rivalry between individuals. Prioritizing competition between individuals together with commodification of social relations, provokes a decline in relationships of solidarity for which social support is key; this leads to feelings of loneliness, insecurity, anxiety and stress, with negative repercussions on psychological well-being (Teo, 2018; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). According to the perspective of social identity (Haslam *et al.*, 2018), group belonging and social identification with the groups to one belongs channels the satisfaction of psychological needs (Greenaway *et al.*, 2016), which provide psycho-social resources that have positive repercussions on individuals' physical and mental health. Becker *et al.*, (2021), in studies carried out from the perspective of social identity in several developed countries (Germany, United Kingdom, and United States), obtained results revealing that perception of an increasingly neoliberal society had a negative effect on well-being. This was due to the increased feeling of loneliness of the participants upon perceiving they had a lower degree of social connection and feeling that they were in a state of permanent competition. Thus, it could be expected that the more a society is perceived as being governed by neoliberal policies and practice, the greater the perception of anomie would be (Merton, 1938; 1968) and the greater the sense of social disconnection experienced by individuals will be (Becker *et al.*, 2021). Along these same lines, it could be expected that a perceived increase in the implementation of neoliberal economic policies will have a negative effect on well-being mediated via perception of anomie and the perception of social disconnection. The present study aims to demonstrate this mediation, analyzing the possibility that these variables have a serial correlation. Thus, we propose that the increase in perceived implementation of neoliberal postulates contributes to higher level of anomie and this brings about an increase in social disconnection and consequently a decrease in well-being.

Objectives and hypotheses

The objectives of the present study were: a) to analyse if the perception of a society increasingly governed by neoliberal policies, the perception of anomie and social disconnection negatively affect well-being, as well as, b) to evaluate if the level of anomie and social disconnection plays a serial mediating role in the effect of perceived liberalism on the well-being that individuals experience.

We formulated the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Perceived neoliberalism correlates positively with anomie (Hypothesis 1a) and with social disconnection (Hypothesis 1b), but negatively with well-being (Hypothesis 1c).

Hypothesis 2. Anomie correlates negatively with well-being (Hypothesis 2a) and positively with social disconnection (Hypothesis 2b).

Hypothesis 3. Social disconnection correlates negatively with well-being.

Hypothesis 4. Anomie and social disconnection sequentially mediate the relationship between perceived liberalism and well-being.

Method

Participants

A total of 356 participants agreed to take part and complete the questionnaires. Of those, 22 were then excluded for not having answered the questionnaires completely, resulting in 334 valid ones (201 women and 133 men). All the participants surveyed were Spanish citizens, ranging in age between 18 and 80 ($M = 35.22$; $SD = 15.35$). Among the participants, 39 (11.67%) did not have any studies, 107 (32.03%) had basic studies and 188 (56.28%) had university studies. At the same time, 31 (9.28%) were unemployed, 93 (27.84%) were students, 14 (4.19%) were free-lance or business owners, 160 (47.90%) were salaried workers, 23 (6.88%) were civil servants and 13 (3.89%) were retired.

Instruments

The participants responded to the following in the questionnaires:

Sociodemographic data: after signing the informed consent on the first page, the study's participants had to indicate their gender, nationality, work status and level of studies (primary, secondary or higher education).

Perceived neoliberalism. This was assessed with ten items developed by the study's authors, based on Becker et al., (2021; Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$). These items assess the three dimensions of perceived neoliberalism: freedom from economic restrictions (for example, "our society highly values individual success") and social inequality (for example, "in our society, jobs and housing are assigned based on capacity and not on need"). The responses range between 1 = *don't agree at all* and 6 = *I totally agree*. The Cronbach's α obtained in the present study was .76.

Anomie was assessed with the Perception of Anomie Scale (PAS; Teymoori et al., 2016; Cronbach alpha coefficient = .79). This scale is composed of twelve items (for example: "People think that there are no clear moral standards to follow", "The government is illegitimate"). The responses range between 1 = *I don't agree at all* and 6 = *I totally agree*. The Cronbach's α obtained in the present study was .72.

Social disconnection was measured with seven items based on Becker et al., (2021; Cronbach alpha coefficient = .90; for example: "I don't have a sense of belonging", "I feel disconnected from others", "I don't feel supported by my social group", etc.). The responses range between 1 = *I don't agree at all* and 6 = *I totally agree*. The Cronbach's α obtained in the present study was .79.

Well-being was measured according to Becker et al., (2021). In this scale, well-being was assessed with three items related to physical health (for example, "I often have symptoms like a headache") and two items related to psychological health (for example, "I often feel exhausted"; Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$). The response range was from *I don't agree at all* to 6 = *I totally agree*. The items were recodified for the statistical analysis. A higher score indicated a greater degree of well-being. The Cronbach's α obtained in the present study was .73.

Procedure

Data was gathered between September and October 2022 in the city of Malaga, Spain. A non-probability snow-ball sampling was carried out, following a lineal sampling strategy with first year Psychology students at the University of Malaga (Surhone et al., 2010). Accordingly, each student had to locate four people, who, complying with requisites for participation, had to fill out a self-report survey. Participants were required to be over 18 years old. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Research at the Universidad de Malaga (Spain; CEUMA: 92-2022-H). All participants signed a consent form in which they accepted the conditions of the study, and at the same time were informed of its objectives and the anonymity and confidentiality of the research questionnaire data.

Data analysis

All analyses applied were conducted with *IBM SPSS* (Ver. 26) (IBM Corp. Released 2019). Univariate analyses were conducted to describe participants' sociodemographic characteristics. Pearson correlations were run to explore the relation between the variables involved in this study. Harman's single-factor test was applied to check for possible common method bias resulting from self-reported data sets (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To test possible multi-collinearity, the variance inflation factor (*VIF*) was applied through a linear regression analysis (Hair et al., 2013). The SPSS PROCESS macro (model 6) was applied for serial mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017). All effects (direct and indirect) were reported using 95% confidence intervals. Robustness of the mediating effects was tested using a bootstrapping method (with 10,000 resamples).

Testing for common method bias

Harman's single-factor test extracted five factors with eigenvalues greater than one. The first factor extracted explained 13.65 % of the total variance, which is clearly below the recommended limit of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Shiau & Luo, 2012). This result allows us to conclude that common method bias does not affect this research.

Testing for multi-collinearity

The multi-collinearity test returned a *VIF* for perceived neoliberalism, anomie and social disconnection were 1.01, 1.05 and 1.03, respectively. This is below the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2013) indicating that multi-collinearity is not affecting these estimates.

Preliminary analyses

The means, standard deviations and correlations for each variable in the study can be seen in Table 1. Perceived neoliberalism correlated positively and significantly with anomie ($r = .10$; $p = .045$) and with social disconnection ($r = .11$; $p = .041$). Perceived neoliberalism correlated significantly and negatively with well-being ($r = -.12$, $p = .024$). Anomie correlated positively with social disconnection ($r = .14$; $p = .007$) and negatively with well-being ($r = -.11$; $p = .045$). The negative correlation between social disconnection and well-being was significant ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$).

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables ($N = 334$)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Neoliberalism	4.00	1.12	1			
2. Anomie	4.59	0.84	.10*	1		
3. Disconnection	2.92	1.52	.11*	.14**	1	
4. Well-being	3.41	1.30	-.12*	-.11*	-.32**	1

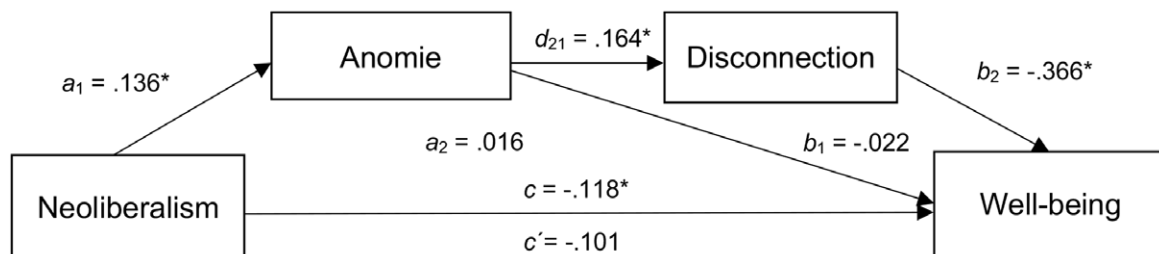
Note: *M*, means; *SD*, standard deviation. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$

Testing of serial mediation model

Model 6 of the SPSS PROCESS macro was used to test the effect of serial mediation (Hypothesis 4). The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 2. As can be observed, perceived neoliberalism was positively associated with anomie ($a_1 = .136$, $p < .05$) and was not directly associated with well-being ($b_1 = -.101$, $p > .05$). Perceived neoliberalism was not associated with social disconnection ($a_2 = .016$, $p > .05$), which, at the same time, was negatively associated with well-being ($b_2 = -.366$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, anomie was positively associated with social disconnection ($d_{21} = .164$, $p < .05$), forming a serial mediating effect (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The proposed serial mediation model effects.



Note: Effects were reported as unstandardized values. * $p < .05$

Table 2
Regression-based results in the serial mediation analysis (N = 334)

Criterion	Predictors	R	R ²	F	B	SE	t	95% C.I.	p
Anomie	Neoliberalism	.131	.017	5.77	.136	.056	2.40	[.024, .246]	.017
Desconexión		.179	.032	5.49					.005
	Neoliberalism				.016	.052	0.311	[-.087, .119]	.756
	Anomie				.164	.051	3.232	[.064, .263]	.001
Well-being		.349	.122	15.22					.001
	Neoliberalism				-.101	.056	-1.808	[-.211, .009]	.072
	Anomie				-.022	.054	-.402	[-.130, .086]	.688
	Disconnection				-.366	.059	-6.230	[-.482, -.251]	.001

Bootstrap method of mediating effect

To examine the statistical significance of the indirect effects, the bootstrap method was used with the generation of c 10,000 subsamples with bias correction. As can be seen in Table 3, the total indirect effect of perceived neoliberalism via anomie and social disconnection was not significant ($B = -0.017$; $SE = 0.022$; IC of 95%: -0.064 to 0.024). However, the indirect effect of perceived neoliberalism on well-being through the serial mediation of the variables anomie and social disconnection was significant ($B = -0.008$, $SE = 0.005$, 95% CI : -0.020 to -0.001 , $p < .05$). Nevertheless, the indirect effects through simple mediation of the variable anomie ($B = -0.003$, $SE = 0.009$, 95% CI : -0.024 to 0.014 , $p > .05$) as well as social disconnection were not significant ($B = -0.0488$, $SE = 0.032$, 95% CI : -0.020 to -0.001 , $p > .05$).

Table 3
Total, direct and indirect effects of neoliberalism on well-being (N = 334)

Effect	B	SE	95% C.I.	p
Total effect	-.118	.059	[-.233, -.003]	.045
Direct effect	-.101	.059	[-.218, .009]	.072
Total indirect effect	-.017	.022	[-.064, .024]	> .05
Indirect effect (X → M ₁ → Y)	-.003	.009	[-.024, .014]	> .05
Indirect effect (X → M ₂ → Y)	-.006	.020	[-.048, .032]	> .05
Indirect effect (X → M ₁ → M ₂ → Y)	-.008	.005	[-.020, -.001]	< .05

Note: Based on 10,000 bootstrap samples; Total, direct, and indirect effects of neoliberalism (X) on well-being (Y) through anomie (M₁), and social disconnection (M₂); SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

Discussion

Empirical evidence obtained in diverse research studies has reflected the detrimental effects that implementation of neoliberal policies has on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals (Becker et al., 2021). Neoliberalism (understood as the latest form of capitalism and as an ideological framework) has a series of defining features (Piketty, 2015; 2020): it denies economic inequality contributing to social factors, it seeks elimination of government regulation in economic policies, it supports the dictates of the free market, and defends the loss workers' rights and union rights for the working class, as well as commodification and extreme competitiveness as motors in all spheres of life, and the fomenting of economic growth. Empirical evidence has shed light on the fact that staunch defense of competitiveness and economic inequality (as efficient tools for advancing the economy) erodes social and group ties, isolates individuals by elevating levels of loneliness and precludes the possible beneficial effects of the psycho-social resources from group life (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; 2019; Becker et al., 2021). The increase in economic inequality that characterizes neoliberal economies, according to Merton (1938; 1968), can lead to deterioration in the social fabric, which is a defining feature of anomie (Teymoori et al., 2017).

Since Durkheim's (1897/1987) classic contribution that linked anomie to suicide rates, there has been empirical evidence on the negative influence of anomie on the health and well-being of individuals (Teymoori et al., 2017). When social fabric breaks down and there is a deterioration in leadership in a society (since a minimum amount of trust is necessary to maintain cohesion among the society's different groups; standard social norms are not considered valid and social leaders are perceived as ineffective and illegitimate), a weakening of social connections is produced, along with diminished social cohesion and group actions that work towards a common good because of a lack of a shared social identity (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Uslaner, 2002). Anomie causes deterioration in well-being not only because of the damaging effects of economic inequality for individuals and societies (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; 2019), but also because of the society's difficulty in satisfying psychological needs (Greenaway et al., 2016; Teymoori et al., 2017) with the breakdown of community ties in the social fabric, and the lack of the positive socio-psychological resources from group interaction (Cruwys et al., 2014; Haslam et al., 2018).

Our study has obtained that the more individuals perceive society to be increasingly governed by neoliberal policies, the lower the level of well-being they experience. Specifically, perceived neoliberalism correlates negatively with well-being (Hypothesis 1c) and correlates positively with anomie (Hypothesis 1a) as well as social disconnection (Hypothesis 1b). At the same time anomie correlates negatively with well-being (Hypothesis 2a) and positively with social disconnection (Hypothesis 2b). The latter correlates negatively with well-being (Hypothesis 3). Likewise, it was found that the effect of neoliberalism on well-being is serially mediated by anomie and social disconnection (Hypothesis 4).

Among the multiple factors that could influence the emergence of anomie (Abercrombie et al., 2006), certain features of neoliberal policies can have an impact. Along these lines, this study has obtained a relationship between perceived neoliberalism and anomie. This can be explained by the fact that the economic inequality inherent in neoliberalism (Piketty, 2015) can lead to the perception that there is a problem of availability of means for the population to be able to achieve the economic goals that neoliberalism culturally defines and promotes (Merton, 1938; 1968). At an ideological level, neoliberalism upholds the myth of meritocracy, while at the same time, in practice, concentration of wealth in the hands of a few can be observed. This leads to high levels of economic inequality as well as elevated status anxiety among persons in the higher social classes as well in the middle and lower classes (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Thus, the consequences of putting into practice neoliberal policies have psychological effects on individuals (Teo, 2018) and in the way that they perceive society and how it responds to their psychosocial needs. These policies imply economic deregulation and erosion of the welfare society. This leads to an elevated number of persons perceiving society as a place where the social fabric has broken down and the legitimacy and effectiveness of leaders has been widely called into question. For this reason, according to the findings of Becker et al., (2021), a high degree of competition and social disconnection arising from implementation of neoliberal policies impacts the level of loneliness and this, negatively, affects well-being.

Our study has found that one of the ways in which anomie impacts the well-being of individuals is through increased social disconnection. Since the mid-1950s, several research studies have focused on the psychological state brought about by perception of anomie, highlighting feelings of impotence, helplessness, despair and social disconnection (Srole, 1956; McClosky & Schaar, 1965, etc.). When interpersonal and intergroup ties weaken, mutual trust and any other sense of a shared social identity disappears. When that occurs, people become isolated and cease to receive the positive effects produced by identification with social groups, such as receiving social support, fulfilling the need to belong and connection with others, the need to have a sense of purpose, etc. (Greenaway et al., 2016). Data from research by Becker et al., (2021) has shown the negative influence of perceived neoliberalism on well-being through an increased feeling of loneliness. In our study we have found that social disconnection related to anomie produced by neoliberal societies negatively impacts the well-being of individuals.

Limitations and future research

In this study a negative effect of anomie and social disconnection on well-being has been observed with the participants perceiving that society is increasingly governed by economic practices of a neoliberal nature. It has found that anomie and social disconnection mediate the relationship between perceived neoliberalism and well-being. In our study, it would have been important to have considered, in addition to social disconnection, other psychological needs that could be affected by the social erosion and the social deregulation that define anomie, such as the need for a sense of purpose, the need for self-esteem and the need to have a sense of control and personal and group security (Greenaway et al., 2016; Teymoori et al., 2017). Furthermore, future research could analyse how each of the components of anomie (social disintegration and social deregulation) could independently affect the afore mentioned psychological needs. At the same time, it would be of interest to examine more specifically how perceived neoliberalism and anomie affect psychological well-being, as well as individuals' physical and mental health. Future research studies should also take into account, in their analysis, how these variables, which reflect structural aspects in the society (perceived neoliberalism and anomie), differentially affect psychological well-being as well as physical and mental health. In future studies it would be convenient to incorporate objective measures of the structural variables used in our study and to analyze the relationship between these objective measures and the subjective perception of them.

In addition to anomie, perceived liberalism also impacts well-being through its influence on the level of status anxiety (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; 2019). Future research could investigate how status anxiety is related to the perception of anomie and how both variables affect not only the well-being and health of individuals, but also aspects and dimensions of a community nature and the choice of political options of an authoritarian and antidemocratic type (Hartwich & Becker, 2019; Ionescu et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Previous studies have demonstrated the negative effect that perceived implementation of neoliberal policies has on individuals' well-being (Becker et al., 2021). These authors contend that this effect is due to the loneliness arising from high levels of competition and social disconnection that result from perceived neoliberalism. In our study, the negative effect of perceived neoliberalism on individuals' well-being has been further revealed. This negative effect is because perceiving that a society is increasingly governed by economic policies of a neoliberal nature leads individuals to perceive society as more and more deregulated and disintegrated (anomie), making individuals disconnect

more socially and feel they have worse well-being. Neoliberal practices, by fomenting competition and individualisms as basic values governing human relations as well as economic ones, give rise to the isolation of individuals and the loss of positive effects from group relationships and the enhancement of social identities (Greenaway et al., 2016).

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