

Postmodern Anomic Disorder* (PAD): Understanding Gang Behavior and the London Riots

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The College of Mental Health Counseling presents an understanding of youth gangs, the London riots, Islamic terrorism, aboriginal suicide and other similar phenomena as possible effects of Postmodern Anomic Disorder* identified here for the first time.

Postmodern Anomic Disorder*

Anomie or Postmodern Anomic Disorder* occurs when the individual experiences the loss of identity and a sense of fundamental realities of existence within the social and cultural context, which can also be referred to as an existential crisis. This may coincide with an emotional and psychological detachment from physical community facilitated by technological involvement such as excessive internet use. Family breakdown, poverty, war and violence may be associated contributing factors for some individuals.

In postmodern secular society, a social shift is occurring from traditional values and definitions of marriage, family, sexuality, gender roles, God, and religion. For example, scientists Richard Dawkins and Stephen Hawking and others are saying the universe and the human species developed by natural processes alone, without divine involvement. When this view is adopted by individuals from a religious background, a shift in fundamental beliefs can occur and anomie may result.

Youth are Vulnerable

Youth are especially vulnerable because the search for identity is a common feature of adolescent development. Through the internet, the media, and public education, youths encounter views and implications at variance with their traditional upbringing and become participants in postmodern social shifts and the associated breakdown of traditional values and norms. The individual loses both a sense of identity and confidence in the reality of existential certainty or that intangible truth can be known.

The sense of loss of meaning and purpose may increase to the point of crisis and desperation resulting in depression, anxiety, and violence to self or others, observed in gang and criminal behaviour and suicide as predictable outcomes of extreme anomie.

Examples of anomie may be seen in youth gangs, the London riots, aboriginal suicide, and depression and suicide of second-generation immigrants from East Indian cultures. Individuals vulnerable to gang involvement are those suffering from anomie resulting from a loss of identity and an attempt through gang involvement to reconstruct a sense of identity. Islamic suicide bombing and terrorism can also be understood as desperate efforts to preserve identity and resist the changes of postmodern secularism, accompanied by the sense of anomie.

The experience of postmodern anomie and the pain of Postmodern Anomic Disorder* may be far more widespread and pervasive in the general population than recognized by the professional and scientific

community. Based on understanding this condition, assessment and treatment approaches can be identified and described.

Treatment of Postmodern Anomic Disorder*

Mental health practitioners and counselors are now faced with this growing challenge: how to help those suffering from anomie or Postmodern Anomic Disorder.* The College of Mental Health Counseling suggests the following summary of steps:

1. Identify the presence of Postmodern Anomic Disorder* by asking, "What are your spiritual views and beliefs and how has this changed since childhood?"

2. Then ask, "Do you feel more or less confident about your beliefs than you did when you were younger?"

3. Ask questions such as:

What is your identity? If I were to ask, "Who are you," how would you respond?

Do you think humans are special? Say more.

Do you think you are special? Say more.

Do you think life has purpose and meaning? Say more.

What is the meaning or purpose of your life?

What are your goals in life?

What do you believe about marriage?

What do you believe is true about right and wrong? Give an example of something that you think is definitely wrong.

Remember that the fundamental goal of treating Postmodern Anomic Disorder* is to help the individual develop a sense of identity and an increased sense of certainty about fundamental intangible realities of life. As this confidence in existential certainty is increased or restored, the individual will feel more hope and less anxious and depressed.

An adjunct to treatment is connecting the individual to a group of others who share the same goal and who can support and strengthen confidence in existential certainty replacing the sense of void, crisis, meaninglessness, and despair.

*Although anomic disorder has been identified in other contexts, this is the first use and identification in literature of the condition "Postmodern Anomic Disorder" as a social and cultural phenomenon and as a mental health issue or condition.

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