

## *Psychodrama and sociometric work with women victims of trafficking in The Netherlands\**

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**Summary.** *This paper explores how Psychodrama and Sociodrama exercises with women victims of human trafficking, is fundamental for the recovery process allowing to build relational networks. According to Moreno (1953) each person lives in a Social Atom, that it is the smallest social unit. The social atom is composed by all the people (real of fantasized) that are essential for one's person life. Based on this concept, Sociodrama techniques are used to work in groups with traumatized and isolated people. Several other psychodrama techniques have proven their positive therapeutic effect in the work with trafficked women.*

**Key words:** *trauma, trafficking in human beings, psychodrama, sociodrama*

Sociodrama can be defined as a dramatic play in which several individuals with assigned roles act out with the purpose to analyze and

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remedy problems in group or in collective relationships. Sociodrama focuses on individuals in the process of interaction while psychodrama focuses on the internal interactions of one person.

Moreno (1953) defines sociodrama as a deep action method dealing with group relationships. Moreno explains that sociodrama is based on the assumption that the group formed by the audience is already organized by social and cultural roles. The group in sociodrama corresponds to the individual in psychodrama. Psychodrama deals with personal problems and personal catharsis. Sociodrama approaches social problems within the group and aims at social catharsis (Moreno, 1953). Both psychodrama and sociodrama focus on spontaneity which operates in the present moment. The individual and group are leads toward an adequate response to a new situation or a new response to an old situation.

Sociodrama is particularly useful in dealing with traumatic events, or social critical experiences, with political change and social disintegration but also with social diversity (Kellerman, 2002).

This paper is about sociodrama's work with trafficked women.

The central element in the therapeutic work with women victims of human trafficking is the focus on the interpersonal support and sharing.

It is essential that clients are at first supported in their emotional equilibrium and that a balance is achieved between the arousal and the state of emotional stability. The challenge is to find a suitable combination between support and confrontation. We focus on the psychodrama work with trafficked people and on the 'corrective' emotional experience within the group, stimulated by appropriate psychodrama and sociometric works.

By this we mean that our therapeutic intention is to produce a system that promotes an understanding, and also fosters functional interpersonal interactions. According to Moreno's theory we think that trauma affects not only individuals, but also their social networks, and because of this, it requires a broader systematic approach. By 'healing the group', we are also healing the individuals.

## **Sociodrama techniques**

A lot of group-centred work has been done and sociometry (Moreno, 1955) exercises (like making sociometric choices, choosing together a name for the group, drawing the group and one's place in it, group atoms, regularly exploring the level of trust in the group, making together the

decision of new members to join the group) turned out to have very positive effects.

Sociometry, by definition, measures the “socius” – the interpersonal connection between two people (Moreno, 1951): one of our main goals within therapy groups has been to foster interpersonal support. Doubling is referred to provide a ‘double’ (Hudgins & Drucker, 1998) of another person in the group which plays her/his role. In this way people get in touch with their feelings, they can rename and express emotions which seem for them unbearable or that have been denied. The doubling technique helps clients to offer recognition in the form of advising learning (Hudgins & Drucker, 1998) the supportive way of making relations for themselves and for others.

Another adaptation from the psychodrama technique in the therapy group concerns the use of role reversal.

Particularly important when working with traumatized people is the ability to ‘role-differentiate’. Moreno states about the role-theory: «role playing is prior to the self. Roles do not emerge from the self, but the self emerges from roles» (Moreno, 1964, p. 157). Many of our clients have very limited role repertoires and tend to get fixated in the role of the victim. By reversing roles with others, and thus exploring a wider reality, they become better able to recapture their own authentic selves along with learning from inside about the experiences of others and shared feelings.

Because of the importance of using relational approaches in treating women victims of human trafficking (Kellerman & Hudgins, 2000) the ‘social atom’ is an ideal tool in the treatment of these clients’ groups.

In the therapy groups women victims of human trafficking are asked to draw an atom-style diagram of their present-day relationships. Usually these maps are not crowded which means their lack of social networks. Additionally, therapists ask to place on the map all significant relationships, even when some of those people are missing (for example, they can be living in the country of origin), or have passed away. This is necessary because such situations represent most of the cases of these clients’ groups: women have irregular contact with their family members, but still they find the relationships with them very significant and the theme of the relationship with these missing people is emotionally laden and important.

## **The relational network**

Through this exercise, the client and therapist gain information and insights into the clients' relational network. The accent lays on the supportive relationships; but conflicts are also explored. Common themes in these explorations are: the feeling of guilt, the shame, the need for acceptance and understanding, the longing for feeling connected, and the need to belong. There is a focus on how trauma affects interpersonal relations (Kellerman, 2007) and on means to prevent the feeling of isolation.

We make use of corrective (wishful) social atoms, and explore them on the base of questions and sociodrama's actions. In the corrective social atom, the client draws her social atom as she would like it to look. This is useful because this allows her to experience, through the role-playing, her wishes-for life. It offers to the clients a psychic map to follow in getting their lives to move closer to their goals. We focus on the strong feelings of connection, on the clients' place in their network, on the supportive nature of the relationships, on the development of different roles. This is usually the point when clients experiment role reversals.

With similar success, we introduced the exercise 'Magic Shop' (Kellerman, 1992). Clients easily warm up to it and very spontaneously explore, with its help, their inner needs and their personal development's goals. The exercise asks the clients to decide on what they mostly need and to bargain for it with an imaginative seller who asks them to pay back what they get with something personal, i.e. a quality, a memory, personality trait. While playing, clients get closer to the essence of the transformational process.

## **Conclusion**

While trauma therapy generally tries to understand the past, and to explore the trauma itself, we choose to focus on the present and on the future, to assist clients in raising their spontaneity level, and in developing new roles. Psychodrama is an optimistic form of therapy. It looks for resources within the client (Moreno, Blomkvist & Rutzel, 2000), instead of focusing on pathology, and introduces the dimension of hope in the process of psychotherapy. Moreno's philosophy of spontaneity and creativity

(Moreno, 1955) focuses on the importance of living in the 'here and now' and suggests that we have the power and magic within ourselves to change our lives.

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