

Psychodrama's intervention work in Bulgaria with women victims of domestic violence. Possibility for change in the trans-generational circle of violence^{18*}

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Summary. *Two types of psychosocial interventions were compared with respect to women victims of domestic violence: with two groups we applied individual ecological model (EM), and with two groups (PG) we applied psychodrama and playback theatre methods together with the ecological model. The women described "the old" and "the new" roles during the psychodrama sessions and the access to internal "self-empowerment" resources for the reconstruction of an alternative vision. Both methods utilized were effective and they supported women's 'abilities and potential. During the group work with psychodrama and sociodrama, we explored the mother/daughter relationships and the transgenerational transmission of the models of violence. We observed and described some cultural differences and specifics.*

Key words: *women victims of domestic violence, psychodrama, psychosocial interventions, social atom, mother-daughter relationship*

Consultation, psychosocial interventions and therapeutic work with women victims of violence are gaining greater attention in modern psychosocial practice. It is all the more necessary because of the growing number

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of victims, due to deteriorated socio-economic conditions, cultural models, norms and values.

«The classic Morenian psychodrama considered not just as psychotherapy but as the effective methodology to promote in people who have no self-determination power an empowering process» (Moita, 2011).

Within the framework of the project two types of psychosocial interventions were carried out with women, victims of violence – with two groups we applied individual ecological model (EM), and with two groups (PG) were applied the methods of psychodrama and playback theatre together with the ecological model. The Ecological model was carried out by two social workers, the psychodrama group work was directed by two psychodramatists – co-leaders. The working group met regularly for two-hour sessions twice a week. We worked for 25 sessions (50 hours) with the first group and 25 session (50 hours) with the second group. Each one of the two EM groups consisted of six women, the first psychodrama group had six members.

The second group started with six women. Compared with the first group, some of the women that were present since the beginning, left the group at different times and for different reasons. That urged us to take in other women periodically so that we follow the originally planned conceptual frame of the project in which the number of participants has to be six at least. Despite their declared wish NCFB11 and NCFB13 (this is the code of the participant in the research from NCF=Nadja Centre Foundation, B is the code for the participants in the PG groups, number is the serial number of the concrete woman) weren't able to take part in group work although that they initially confirmed their participation in the individual sessions and in spite of the fact that additional conversations had been carried out by the leaders. The women that were left – NCFB9, NCFB12, NCFB14, NCFB16 – concluded their group work reaching the end of the course consisting of 25 sessions. NCFB8 concluded her participation in eight sessions, NCFB10 in nine.

We used the Session guidelines – Psychodrama Manual Sessions (Moita, 2011) proposed in the Psychodrama training at the first Empower Meeting by Gabriela Moita. Psychodrama group interventions included exploration of the social atom of each of the women, their family history, analysis of specific topics for each group participant, socio-cultural analysis, analysis of the models of wife/husband and mother/daughter relationships and how they transferred those models to their families, beliefs and “myths” discussions. There were no therapeutic tasks in the project, but during the group work we observed some therapeutic effects.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of psychodrama method was done by administering tests – CORE-OM and SAY-R (Kipper, Davelaar, & Herst, 2009) – within the members of the all four groups. They were administered before the start of the psychosocial work and at the end of the sessions to assess changes. There were also comparison between the social atoms of each one of group members at the beginning and at the end of the group sessions.

The goal of the research project is to explore how effective the psychodrama method is in the psychosocial work with women, victims of domestic violence, and the possibility of working with this method.

An analysis and the commentaries of the graphs

First group: SWF DATA graphs about the aggressor

In the first group among aggressors there are even women: mothers, ex-mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law. During the first sessions work was focused on family dynamics. In January and February the sessions were aimed at going deeper into the mother-daughter relationship and on different aspects of motherhood.

Finally between the months of February and March during the psychodrama sessions themes arose about the women themselves and their ability to face problems supported by the group.

December's Report

Our Activity was based on the image of the perfect family. It could include real people or not from the family of origin. The male figure is marginal or not at all desired. Children are an integral part of their existence. Strong desire to live abroad and create a new life more in contact with nature (Sofia it's a big city).

March's Report

Last report. Atmosphere of great intimacy, participants discussed challenging issues during the sessions. They recognized they have learned from each other, and being able to share serious issues is significant (overcoming of some taboos and shame). Participants state they have finally found their place in the world («my space was here»), they can now think about a different future («open window to heaven»). They also state two important things: to have acquired power and possibility.

First Ecological Model Group Results

All six women, participants in the first ecological model group were victims of severe and complex domestic violence (psychological and physical violence) and their ages were between 22 and 61, with different educational and social backgrounds. Five of them were mothers, only one woman was single, half of them were employed and the rest were unemployed. Two social workers provided the women in the EM group with ten sessions in psychosocial support.

All women, participants in the first PG were strict visited and actively involved in the first and in the last sessions. There was open sharing of the negative experiences and discussions between the women during all psychodrama sessions. There appeared to be hope for change in their personal lives and some of them realized a real change in their families. The atmosphere of trust and the spirit of support were created as a result of the psychodrama work.

Second group: SWF DATA graphs about the aggressor

The aggressor is always the women's partner, in some cases he can be even the son of the woman or one of her relatives (mother in law, husband's sister). The violence incidence is very high.

The husband is described as having alcohol problems and sometimes he is also described as a drug addict. In one case, it is reported that the aggressor himself (husband) was abused during childhood.

Report 1

During the first meeting, participants shared their stories of suffering and domestic violence. This is a very important moment, the group atmosphere is favourable for sharing participants' existential condition. Some women have problems with their children (they are aggressive and drug addicted), some other women have violent husbands that physically and psychologically abuse them. In addition to sharing the women's history, participants state their will to change, their will to do something really crucial to improve their personal situation, for themselves and their children.

Report 2

The main theme of the session was about the role of the mother. Women were invited to express their feeling through a drawing and then they discussed it. Some women drew the image of a heart to express their being mother, another woman reported the image of a book, another the image of bees. The sentences accompanying the drawings show in most cases the women's awareness of life's problems («my life is not as I wished for myself») instead they expressed the great desire to change and do something for their children. The final sharing makes women closer to each other, they are aware of common feelings and this helped them to feel less alone. They want to become loving and understanding mothers, but also stronger and able to fight for their children.

Report 3

In the last meeting we asked the women to evaluate the group's changes during the psychodrama sessions, about future goals and what they have learned from the group. Central is the theme of personal strength. The group gave to the women the necessary strength to fight («for the good cause»), this strength is needed to stop feeling punished, and for accepting life with its suffering despite everything.

Participants also exchanged messages of mutual admiration and respect. The group was important for providing support and reciprocal understanding, but also for the dialogue, for learning to think-positively and for the feedback that they received. Above all it is important to know that there is someone who you can trust when you need to ask for advice. The group is important also because you don't feel alone when you face difficult situations.

Second Ecological Model Group Results

As in the first EM group, the participants in the second EM group were affected mostly by the complex domestic violence cases (psychological and physical violence). The ages of these six women were between 28 and 66, all of them had different educational and social backgrounds. Only three of them were employed, two of them were retired (one was retired due to a mental disease) and the rest were unemployed. Two social workers provided the women in the EM group with ten sessions of psychosocial support. One woman in this group was transferred to the second psychodrama group as per her wishes and after a re-assessment and approval by the psychodramatists. Another woman replaced her in the second EM group as an appropriate case.

The second PG started out with six women. Two of them were replaced by another appropriate cases and we added one case from the second EM group. Another two women left this group due to different reasons (changes in residence) after the minimum number of six sessions. The results of the psychodrama work with the second PG were very similar with the previous group.

Research questions

Is psycho/sociodrama an effective method in the psychosocial work with women victims of domestic violence?

Practicing alternative models of behaviour and response through role play they began to transfer those models to their real family and social situations.

They increased their self-esteem and self-confidence

NCFB4: «I was asked if that really happened, whether I had really been through all that and how I managed to survive. I was told that nothing showed that I had been through those terrible things», «Now I am older because I am free»;

NCFB 16: «My messages are awareness and creativity. These group sessions helped to realize what is happening in my live, indeed. Now I am sure that whatever has life in store for me, I can cope with it. I like the process of creating in art and in life too»;

NCFB 14: «My message is believing. In the beginning I was embarrassed and shy, now my life took course for the better and I believe it will be even better in the future»;

NCFB 9: «My messages are confidence and trust. Previously to my attending of this group I had lost a large part of my confidence and I thought that I will never regain it. Now I know that the main causes of it stand outside me. The thing I need now is to forgive myself».

They started overcoming their social isolation and enrich their social atoms through focusing on job search and new social contacts. From the first group two of the women succeeded in starting new employment, another two had applied for a job, and one started a new partner relationship. From the second group two had applied for a job, one of them started new partner relationships, two of them fled their homes where they were a subject of domestic violence.

NCFB14: «I left my family and children a week ago. I will fight for a change that will make it possible for me to go back home».

They improved their models of parenting

NCFB4: «I cannot find balance. I want to give both, raising and loving, I make mistakes which to give when, The mother/friend does not inspire respect»;

NCFB14: «Create boundaries, otherwise the child will not feel support»;

NCFB1: «You cannot give only love, other things are needed as well. There is no mother who mastered all roles. Each mother is learning from her mother»;

NCFB9: «I realized, that if I am happy, my daughter will be happy too»;

NCFB5: «Bozhidar also started telling me that he loved me since I started coming here for the sessions», «Maybe because I take strength from the sessions here, now my child wants to sleep with me and to hug me».

In the same time they realized that their children are also victims of violence in varying degrees

NCFB6: «I am constantly represented as a mother who does not take care of her children. There is no normal father who wants to leave his children without a mother»;

NCFB5: «My son insisted on playing with his father but he refused and kicked the child on the leg. He is rude with the child as well»;

NCFB4: «My eldest son started hugging me when I left my husband. He started telling me that he loved me».

Some of the women said, that they have changed their criteria of what constitutes psychological abuse. They became less tolerant of violence within and outside the family.

They shared that they have become more aware of relations involving manipulation and psychological abuse in current living situations within and outside the family.

NCFBF6: «I did not know that I am a victim of violence; the harassment I suffered was subtle. I thought that I could not live in that situation, but I did not know that was violence. Specialists helped me realize that».

Those who were still subjected to physical abuse (e.g. NCFB5)

They have decreased their limits of tolerance and sought alternative ways of avoiding and coping with their partner's aggression

Results

The changes in the women who participated in the group in which psychosocial work was done through psychodramatic methods has been demonstrated by the tests' results:

some of the parameters of SAI-R (Kipper, & Shemer, 2006) reflecting the level of satisfaction, pleasure, empowerment, success, self-control, spontaneity and creativity increased;

there was an increase in their social competence;

CORE-OM (Evans et al., 2000) parameters measuring the degree of anxiety, tension and irritability had decreased for most of the clients;

more distinct changes in the individual parameters were observed with women who are no longer in a situation of active violence. With the rest of

the women we see a change in personal maturity and self-evaluation even though there is no change in their situation.

Is it possible to change the transgenerational cycle of violence through the mother-daughter relationship?

Group participants succeeded in relating their current life situations to the social model of upbringing and parenting that they had received as daughters from their mothers and how they themselves had transferred that model to their families and partnerships (e.g. NCFB1: «I have analysed myself and how I behave with my daughters»).

Many of them shared that during their childhood they observed their mothers subordinated to their fathers. During the group sessions, all of the group members started taking care of themselves, supporting each other to stand up for their rights in their working places and society and teaching their daughters to do so (e.g.: NCFB9: «I drew myself as a heart to my daughter. Love – I want to show her that my life is not what has to be. Should be respected yourself, my parents criticized me for this»).

Some of them even shared that they learned this lesson from their daughters: (e.g.: NCFB1: «I feel as if I am the daughter and she is the mother»).

Some of them reported a lack of close emotional bond with their mothers during their childhood and now (e.g.: NCFB3: «I lost all connection with my mother»; NCFB5: «My mother never supported me»; «My mom did not want to take me home, I did not know where to go, there was nowhere to go»; NCFB4: «My mother did not support me either. If she has not supported you so far, she will not do it now or in the future», «I was pregnant when I left him and my mother did not want to take me home»).

Only three woman of the two groups shared a good model of relationship with her mother.

During the group work we recorded some specifics within traditional beliefs which are culturally conditioned and historically linked to the way of life of the Bulgarian woman.

The analysis of expressions related to a woman's position as a mother, daughter or wife, shared by the group participants, showed that most things mentioned were regarding the relationships between mother and daughter and not husband and wife:

- NCFB1: «Each mother is learning from her mother»;
- NCFB12: «My mother helped me to build a good value system, taught me how to care for my children»;

- NCFB9: «She taught me discipline and I tried not to disappoint her»;
- NCFB8: «I neglect myself because my mother never thought me how to respect the borders of my personality».

A lot of the expressions require the daughter's obedience and submission to the mother, but also many emphasize a mother's dedication and caring for her children too.

There were hardly any expressions advocating unconditional subordination of a wife to her husband. Even the opposite was observed: «The man is the head of the family, but the woman is the neck – she maneuvers the head around». This corresponds to the results of NCPOR's 2007 survey, according to which only 10% of the responses claim that the reason for domestic violence is «The position of inequality of women within the family».

Also, none of the participants in the two groups mentioned that her mother explicitly raised her to be unconditionally subordinate to her husband. This might be rooted in the emancipation of women during socialism. Or maybe even further back in history, when men were fighting at war, or formed rebel groups in the mountains against Turkish slavery, and women had to take on male roles and responsibilities. During the mens long absence they were empowered with the strength and became the pillar of the family.

At the same time nowadays the group members shared that in childhood they implicitly learned to be obedient, submissive and to be dedicated to the care for others, not for themselves (e.g.: NCFB8: «My mother teach me, to care more for the others, than for myself and now I can't protect my boundaries»).

Conclusions

As a result of applying the psychodrama intervention with women who have been victims of domestic violence we can conclude that psychodrama is a method that has a lot to offer within this context. Without setting any therapeutic aims, in only twenty-five psychodrama group sessions with these women, we enabled positive changes in their personal and social functioning. Psychodrama stimulates clients' spontaneity and creative potential with action, their ability to experiment with new models of behaviour, expanding their social atoms, enriching their role repertoire and increasing their social competence.

These conclusions lead us to believe that with longer and more systematic work, which the women clearly stated they needed, more significant changes could be achieved, both in personal and social context.

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