Classic Morenian Psychodrama as a therapeutic tool in support of women victims of violence and victims of trafficking in Albania and Bulgaria[*]

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Summary. *The article discusses the experiences of psycho drama therapeutic interventions that are part of the Daphne Empower Project and carried out in Albania and Bulgaria. We begin by outlining the feedback from the actor-therapists which includes a series of reflections on the psycho drama method and on the importance of creating a safe and comfortable work environment that can become a "container" for women that have been victims of violence. This environment facilitates the discovery of internal resources and 'self-perceived' new roles, that are able to support women in their journey of empowerment. We emphasize the importance of the group dimension and on the relationship with the other as the main factors of change, within which group participants can become therapeutic agents for the other; in this way restructuring more appropriate internal working models of attachment. Finally we outline the main findings of the intervention during the various phases, the old and new roles that emerged during the sessions, and the processes involved that allowed testing and access to internal 'self-empowering' resources that enabled the construction of alternative visions of the woman and her potential for self-assertion.*

Key words: *violence, Project Empower, psychodrama methods, support therapeutic interventions, self-empowering'.*

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The therapeutic interventions described in this article are part of the Empower Project and illustrate the experiences carried out in Albania and Bulgaria from the point of view of the actor-therapists. The main objective of the Empower international research project is to increase awareness among women about their responsibility in taking on the victim role and transmitting this to their daughters, to study this phenomena and test two research methods (ecological and psychodrama) to address this issue . Our goal was to take into account the persecutory internalized figures (and authorities) in order to recognize one's own imitative behavior, that was desired or implemented, with weaker (younger brothers/sisters, sons/daugh-ters and acquaintances in a position of weakness); consider a possible ambivalence of the women's role in violent relationships: the role of instigator and/or victim, due to the internalization of violence and the identification with the aggressor; work on raising women's awareness regarding the violence suffered in intergenera-tional relationships with parents and in the processes of primary socialization; and finally, promote the end of the generational mandate of women's subordination to violent relationships.

Albania: work context

From October 2011 to December 2011, a series of four intensive all day therapy sessions were held in Tirana, the capital of Albania, these interventions were designed to support battered women and led by a psycho dramatist a psychotherapist and an "I" auxiliary-professional psychologist. This work was part of the international research project 'Empower', led by the Faculty of Applied Psychology, at the University of Padua. Specifically, our subjects consisted of two groups of women victims of human trafficking and domestic violence: one of the groups was a real group of seven women living together for several months at a center run by the anti-violence 'Refleksione' in phase 1 recovery, and the other, was a group composed of six women in phase 2 re-entry assisted under the same association, and living in independent residences. The first group included women with an average age ranging from 16 to 20 years, the second group was made up of older women.

During every intensive therapy session (lasting the entire day), each group completed two sittings of Psychodrama lasting three hours each, during which we made use of an Albanian interpreter to communicate with the women being treated.

Methodology and context of action

The intervention focused on raising awareness of factors of co-responsibility on the part of women victims of violence with regard to the

history of their condition, namely the perpetuation of the role played by mothers in the daughter's willingness to accept the will and the violence of men. The methodology used combined therapeutic support work with the use of psychodrama and Morenian socio drama.

Since the very first session, it was critical for us to direct our energies to creating a welcoming group that could act as an effective "container" of emotions, roles and experiences for the women. Establishing an auxiliary 'good enough' group was really our first goal, creating a context in which the participants feel "safe", as well as giving them a role of *Director* and *auxiliary* I, capable of containing and becoming a "source of security" from which to begin, or return to during emotionally intense moments.

In order to act in a new group context and get involved, *Security* and *Trust* are presented as two indispensable elements for doing a good job and sharing with the others. Women are given an active role, particularly during the audience participation, where the focus is on the following questions: «Where is the individual participant going?», «Where is the group going?» We tried to encourage women with the following reflections: «These are our problems and our difficulties, but: What do we want to do? Where do we want to go?».

Within the group, important dynamics of sharing, research and discovery were activated in regards to individual and collective resources, the "feeling part of" creates a unique structure, and this is a necessary condition for creating a space for action 'inside which one can act spontaneously and creatively'. We tried to put women in a position to be able to observe and to act on old roles and build new alternatives, drawing on the shared group resources to educate and be educated in the development and creation of new roles by enabling new relational and communication connections.

As written by Lambrusco (2004): «We need to be able to relate to people, because only within a relationship that is more or less stable and steady, we can develop a sense of ourselves as stable and cohesive: without this possibility of putting an order in the world and in ourselves, we are not able to live because life is to know and to shape one's reality. Humans are able to acquire knowledge of themselves only through interacting with significant others in their environment, mutual recognition and differentiation become essential for life itself, from the earliest moments of life, the individual is in continuous interaction with significant others and their experience is made up by these interactions».

During the sessions, the women's needs and desires for supportive relationships and old fears that create anxiety about the future came up. One of the participants said: «*My fear is not to be appreciated for what I am, but for what people say about me, then there is loneliness, sometimes it hurts thinking that someday I could be alone*».

Another key aspect was to give each woman time and space for speaking and acting while being protected and safeguarded by the Director. In the

psychodrama groups, the "work" requires that each person can express themselves in the manner indicated by the Director. This allocation of time responds to a criteria that underlies all the group work: that is of *circularity*, in which everyone has a turn to express themselves. A Consequence of circularity is s*ymmetry*, that is, the fact of having enjoyed equal opportunities for expression (Boria, 2005).

To give all members an equal chance of expression and communication is a fundamental rule in psychodrama groups. It is the director that from the beginning with his behavior and through his words, must take care to provide and encourage the expression of each participant, to ensure, as Paola De Leonardis says, 'membership in equality' (De Leonardis, 1994). In the initial sessions, the focus was more on activities of 'group time', substantiated by activities within which each is assigned to a time for self-expression during which 'subjectivity' can expand while the other members of the group become elements of a context that facilitates this process of self expression (Boria, 2005). This condition was essential in order to circulate emotions and experiences by creating an atmosphere of respect and value for the past of every woman.

In this context, the fundamental respect for the 'supremacy of subjectivity' is always there: «The fundamental value of the particular and unique inner world of each individual, from which every mental content originates must be recognized and accepted for what it is, without opposition» (Boria, 2005). During the first meeting with both groups, a theme came up and was shared by all the participants, the theme of anger as an opportunity to express themselves in a new way. In addition, the figure of the mother came up, an inadequate mother, mostly unable to empathize, listen and share experiences with the child. The following are the words of a girl from the group that for us are very indicative of the presence-absence of the mother and of an auxiliary interior world where the mother's role is perceived as emotionally empty-distant and distrustful: «*I remember that I was a lonely child... My mother was not there ... she left a void ... I had a doll that for me represented my mother and when I was sad, I spoke with the doll. Now I have 7 soft toys that are my family and if I need to, I speak with them*». We worked on the *Tele* relationship of the participants, particularly in the real group of young women, where there was more difficulty in being with each other and where there was distrust in potentially positive and supportive relationships in the group. The *Tele* is «the primary structure of interpersonal communication, the cement that holds the group together, the main tool in the therapeutic process and of the meeting between people» (Boria, 2005).

The young women initially experienced greater inability to share their experiences than the latter group. Mistrust, fear of being judged or to be considered negatively by the other participants are aspects that progressively decreased during the sessions. According to Collishaw, «Almost half of individuals that report abuse in adulthood were found to have significant

anomalies in interactions with peers during adolescence. At the same time, peer relationships in adolescence emerged as the strongest predictors of resiliency in the abused group». (Collishaw et al., 2007). Resilience provides an important capability related to an ability to handle difficulties and vulnerabilities. It is essential that resilience is not perceived as "luck" due to random encounters, but rather as a constructive process which constantly nurtures the skills necessary to build, maintain and make use of nourishing and supportive interpersonal relationships.

The results of Collishaw's studies are consistent with this vision: «People with good relationship experiences in different contexts even in childhood, adolescence and adulthood, were particularly able to demonstrate resilience» (Collishaw et al., 2007).

Due to the peculiarities of the psycho dramatic method, it helped to unhinge the attitudes related to feelings of anxiety or emotional inhibition, allowing young women to access an area of expressive spontaneity where they can 'be' there emotionally and cognitively. In particular, our initial goal was to 'teach' them a state of 'creative spontaneity' and counteract the anxiety, the crystallized roles and the behavioral scripts. In order to succeed in this endeavor, we used special psycho dramatic techniques and chose activities that were going to undo as much as possible the emotional inhibition. Various studies suggest that there is a relationship between emotional and behavioral inhibition, and poor health (eg, Hirschfeld-Becker et al., 2008, Pennebaker, 1995). Pennebaker's theory, (1990) describes a process by which poor health results from the failure to deal with traumatic events. Consequently, feelings, behaviors and thoughts that have been blocked and inhibited for a long time, trigger physiological activity. Long-term inhibition is connected to an increase in stress, diseases and other disorders.

Psychodrama allows one to restructure situations that are emotionally crippling that prevent the person to respond appropriately to situations, or to get in touch with crystallized social roles that are emotionally crippling. As reported by Kipper (2009), psycho dramatic intervention reduces the negative effect of emotional inhibition. As supported by the work of Kipper, to teach patients role reversal, with timely involvement in the role, is a good way to train them for spontaneity.

Lowering anxiety, positive-tele, circularity and symmetry, role reversal and primacy of subjectivity are key aspects of the basic methodology useful for building a group 'container' that is safe, nourishing and capable of activating the processes necessary in order to change the processing and activation of a good dynamic between the I- actor and I-observer.

Roles, attachment and culture

During the second meeting, after having administered Moreno's Family

atom as the initial screening test, we found in the stories of the women the presence of very poor and inadequate primary attachment relationship, often in reference to both parents. To work on the construction of an auxiliary supportive group that was able to propose adequate internal working models related to attachment, was another of our main motives for allocating the necessary 'team time'.

Bowlby (Bowlby, 1988) states that the bond that a child develops initially with his / her parent or caregiver is predictive of how successful the individual will be in developing close personal relationships in adulthood. Evidence from several studies suggest that the difficulties in interpersonal interaction in abusive and neglectful families are the result of disturbing patterns of attachment (for example, Egeland et al, 1983; Kolko, 1992).

An article by Huefner (Huefner, Ringle, et al., 2007.), discussed a residential program for teens proving its effectiveness in contributing to help those at risk to avoid IPV situations (domestic violence) in adulthood. One possible explanation could be the nature of the intervention. The program is very focused on building and maintaining non-exploitative positive and healthy relationships.

Even in the psycho dramatic intervention as mentioned, the objective is to facilitate a caregiving context and especially not judgmental, in which the group dynamics are developed in the direction of respect, and mutual recognition. Within an auxiliary 'good enough' group the psychological "I" of the woman has a chance to be re-born and to begin again to think about herself and her ways of relating. An auxiliary unit is designed and conceptualized to be like a second family in which to merge and identify, growing as a 'person'. Moreno (1977) says 'every second experience frees the person from the first' a second family group experience in which to re-experience the bonds of attachment, can be an opportunity to remedy previous non-supportive family patterns, and therefore not adaptive.

This was made all the more true and important in working with the real group of teenagers: the problems of adolescence make their treatment much different from that of an adult or child (Cole & Putnam, 1992). Group therapy is considered an ideal way for young victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) because of the focus on adolescent relationships with peers in their struggle for the development of their identity (Corder, 2000).

Having a 'space for speaking and action' that is protected and secure facilitated the construction and expression of new roles where women often reported a prior passive role as a family woman where often silence and patience are accepted and recognized as positive traits in a relationship with persecutory figures.

Here is what some women said during the activities that we think seem to clearly exemplify certain family roles that emerged: «*I saw myself a lot in the representation because in my family my brothers and my father were very possessive and they used violence. They were very selfish*».

The recordings and verbalizations revealed a passive mother that as a way to resolve things adopts silence and patience by placing her hope in time and in prayer.

During sessions the difficulty of 'being' comes up: the girls share the importance of 'being seen' by the family. The members of the family do not seem to suspect the value of the resources of the women: from the verbalization of experiences, we can assume that this is also linked to a lack of a cultural habit of giving space to inner experiences.

In specific sessions, we chose role playing activities in which old perceived roles within the family systems of origin arose, paying particular attention to the maternal role: from these activities emerged a confused, helpless, resigned mother; characterized by feelings of guilt and hope. In a few instances, the mother appears passive and more attentive to what the rest of the family 'says and thinks' rather than to the experiences of her daughter.

During the sessions where the participants played and acted out different social roles it was very clear that «the possibility exists that any role, whether it is classified as psycho dramatic, or social, is crystallized in some initial form and initially proves beneficial, giving an aspect to action of repetition and stereotypy» (Boria, 2005).

The image of a woman is also associated with the concept of frailness; frail woman in the sense of delicate, someone that should be treated well and that sometimes must be 'suspended' (without her feet on the ground) so as not to suffer. Also arising from the conversations is the idea that delicacy is somehow associated with psychological and/or social weakness and therefore the inability of the female figure in dealing with practical things, like having power, making important decisions or providing material support (socially exclusive roles of men).

It seems that this liability is passed from woman to woman (mother-daughter, mother-in-law-wife, friend-friend) to the point that women doubt that there are alternatives for action in their female role and be considered as a unique resource that brings a cultural and ideological cohesion transmitted through the generations: The woman «*must be calm, without being nervous, bear and bring respect*», «*The woman should be devoted to the family, and work all the time for the children and for her husband and take care of them*». Some young women report that they have tried to tap into this role of Mother-Woman to become 'the women of today': «*The woman must be a 'girl' in the house, she must listen and do her work duties, and should behave well in the family*».

Overall it seems that in the women, there is partly an attitude of passive acceptance of the roles inherited from their family and social culture, and on the other hand, an increasing ability of the women to think and imagine themselves protagonists of their own lives.

Looking after themselves, internal resources and new roles

We began a journey into the 'Auxiliary World' of women group participants and the context in which we encounter our reality, which is formed by the others and the social world within which we act out our roles. Moreno called the 'Auxiliary World', an important part of this social sphere: and the first representative of this world is the maternal figure, and within which are also other significant individuals that in the course of that person's life have been sources of support, safety and nurturing. From the auxiliary world, the person derives the subjective perception of feeling full of 'essential functions offered by the other" that enrich, educate and contain the 'Sense of Self' (Boria, 2005).

We assume that the inner world of the participants contains role representations and unorganized 'internal spaces' which arise as new role opportunities. Within the mental representations of each person, there are role representations related to significant others, these are present in the inner world of each one of us, and around this, is an affective charge (of love or hate-attraction-repulsion) that contributes to the creation of a 'Sense of self' which lies «between the emotional center of integration-security-stability (expression of a sufficient experience of an auxiliary world) and disintegration, instability and anguish» (Boria, 2005).

In our work, we focused on the social roles of the mother, the father aggressor (in particular) and led the participants hand in hand inside their internal auxiliary world, developing through staging of significant social situations, content and internal experiences. Specifically during the sessions, we tried to act on the emotional charge organized around significant figures, trying to transform it and re-integrate it with an emotional charge that would be for the women as much as possible new, creative and inclusive. «*Yesterday when I spoke about women as fragile begins to be protected, I was referring to my mother because she is really very fragile, and has always loved me a lot, she should have taken care of herself*»

The participants were able to play and experiment with different roles and thanks to the reversal of roles there came into play an increasing reciprocal interplay between I-actor and I-observer, which is essential in order to change perspective and to accompany the person in building the self.

To observe the dynamics from different points of view allows one to feel the emotional charge of each role and to come to grips with it from the outside. The ability to enable this process and especially to share it with other women with similar experiences is, in our opinion, a key driver for increased feeling of self-efficacy and self-confidence.

Another key aspect is that these resources, thanks to the 'mirrors of the participants' can be socially recognized by other women, legitimized and validated and thus open the way to generalize the new roles experienced inside the group to the social world.

In a review of the results of studies from 1985 to 2005, there are only 10 studies on group therapy for sexually abused girls aged between 11 and 18 years. The groups were different in regards to length of treatment, treatment setting, and use of psychodrama – cognitive behavioral and psycho-educational, multidimensional and Rogersian/humanistic groups. The results show how the psychodrama models led to a reduction in depressive symptoms.

In the psychodrama model, described by Carbonell and Parteleno-Berehmi (1999), the girls are given the opportunity to create a new positive end to their story in the hope of restoring the person's sense of personal control. Options that were given to the patients in the moment a particular memory seemed to be too overwhelming. The research on the psychodrama group found a significant improvement in symptoms of anxiety compared to the control group. Of these studies, only the psychodrama group therapy (Carbonnell & Parteleno-Barehmi, 1999; MacKay et al., 1987) showed significant improvement in depression scores. MacKay et al's psychodrama group (1987), also showed improvements in depressive symptoms as highlighted by the pre-test and post-test, as measured by the average scores of members of the group using the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). During psychodrama, by enabling the girls to create a happy ending for themselves and the opportunity to process their traumas through all five senses, may be what contributes to a reduction in depressive symptoms (Avinger & Jones, 2007).

In another study, participants in psycho drama sessions (12 sessions) showed an improvement in self-understanding, in the development of intuition, in becoming aware of attachment styles, in having confidence in themselves, and in developing listening skills, empathy and the ability to face life with more optimism (Dogan, 2010). In fact, even in our work with very young Albanian women, we can say in reference to the discussions (audience participation) of the girls at the end of each session, it became clear that increased feelings of confidence arose for the group and for the work done.

From their final verbal testimony with respect to the experience, there seems to be a satisfaction relating to a greater awareness of their resources and ability to use them to improve their lives.

The inner ability to create and still desire, despite the disappointment, fear and resentment of the past, is essential to begin living again. In the group we re-constructed the possibility of a "inner future", the women re-gained, as they reported, the ability to dream, wish, to create something new and go against the «*soul murder*» (as they termed it) that seemed to have canceled their ability to «*be there at their own will*» and to have to live only following the 'intergenerational mandate'

We recovered and brought into the foreground individuals belonging to the 'auxiliary world' of the women, important people capable of showing feelings of love and support to the women who are the only and true protagonists of their lives and the promoters of new actions for the future.

The women also reported that they learned new strategies for solving problems and new, more constructive ways of relating

The Bulgaria Experience

Consultation and therapeutic work with abused women is of great importance in modern psycho-social practice. It's necessity relates to the increasing number of victims, direct consequence of the increasing complication of socio-economic conditions, pressures and demands of society, affected by socio-cultural models, norms and values.

Various factors contribute to the expression of violence; they can generally be differentiated as individual and social. (Ganeva, 2008) Individual factors relate to various psychological and personality characteristics; for instance, low frustration threshold and impulse control, increased tendency for aggression, lack of adequate self-evaluation and criticism of own behavior. Individual behavioral factors are also considered a result of traumatic experiences in the early stages of psychological development of children. They affect the psychological and emotional functioning of adult individuals.

Social factors are culturally determined and these norms, attitudes, values and stereotypes can be associated with violence. Social factors are modified in a specific way for each individual by their family environment, lifestyle and culture during the period of early development. They form certain patterns of behavior associated with tolerance or intolerance towards violence.

Consequences for victims of violence are severe psychological, adaptation and social problems. They have various effects on the ability for personal and professional realization and successful integration in society. In this regard conducting timely, focused and appropriate interventions with victims of violence can eliminate or reduce the effects of psychological trauma.

Within the framework of the current project, therapy was carried out with the first group of six women who are victims of violence. The project applied psychodrama methods. Therapeutic tasks were oriented towards the study of women's social roles within the family, communication strategies, socio-cultural patterns and attitudes related to violence and how they are transmitted through the mother-daughter relationship.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the therapy was made by administering tests for depression, anxiety and spontaneity - CORE-OM, BDI, and SAI-R. The tests were administered before the start of therapy and at the end of the therapy sessions to assess changes.

The first test group consisted of six women, victims of physical and mental abuse of varying duration and intensity. Four of the women had already left and divorced their husbands. One of them was mentally and physically harassed on a regular basis by her mother with whom she lived after her divorce. Another two were going through custody cases. The other

two women were still married and were still being abused by their partner and were still reporting incidents of physical and psychological violence. Five of all six women expressed that the physical violence started while they were pregnant and two of them said that they were also victims of sexual violence. Group participants came from different socio-economic background, education and age. All of them had one or two children of various ages and gender. Most of the children had witnessed their mother being abused; some of them were also abused by their fathers and had various types of emotional and behavioral problems.

The Psycho dramatists conducted introductory interviews with all group participants and presented goals and methods of psychosocial work according to the theoretical framework of the project. The psycho dramatists gathered information regarding group participants' family history of violence, current life situation, their emotional state and their expectations of upcoming interventions.

After the individual introductory interviews, regular twice a week, two-hour sessions were held with group participants. For the purposes of therapy, we used psychodrama techniques and methods, discussions, verbal analysis, and positive feedback. Art therapy techniques were also used, as they facilitate self-revelation in the initial stages of work. The therapeutic framework included exploration of the social context of each of the women, their family history, analysis of specific topics for each group participant and socio-cultural analysis of their role-playing repertory. Objectives of the interventions were as follows:

- to provide positive support;
- to create a sense of protection and security;
- to conduct a study on role models and communication strategies existing in the family and how they affect fulfillment of social roles and relations;
- to develop capacity for recognizing violence and cultivating an attitude of non- acceptance of violence;
- to research the relationship of domestic violence with socio-cultural attitudes that produce tolerance, and conversely, social sensitivity towards violence;
- to research and change negative behavioral maladaptive stereotypes associated with destructive behavior towards themselves or others;
- to enable participants to overcome the consequences of the violence experienced;
- to empower the group participants so that they can employ their personal resources and environmental resources;
- to enable participants to expand their repertory of roles and increase their social and behavioral competencies;
- to improve their skills in recognizing violence and form intolerance towards it;

- to explain situations of risk so that prevention and change of attitudes can occur without being pressed to take a decision;
- to research the model of mother-daughter relationships and the transmission of this model from generation to generation;
- to increase parental competence;
- to increase self-esteem and self-confidence;
- to develop skills for giving and receiving feedback.

The following psychodrama techniques were used: the technique of the empty chair, understudy, switching roles, vignettes, sociometry, fluid sculpture, mirror and sharing. Group participants had not previously participated in group therapeutic interventions and did not have prior knowledge of psychodrama as a therapeutic method before they took part in the current project.

Group dynamics (Platonovoi & Platonova, 2004), evolved through several stages:

1. Introductory stage – introduction to the psycho dramatists, methods, goals and tasks of group work and setting group rules and norms. The group work was introduced by demonstrating psychodrama techniques.

2. Interaction in the group - during this stage, group participants shared their traumatic experiences, mostly through verbalizing their experiences and emotions. They had difficulties representing these traumatic experiences through psychodrama techniques. Group participants required repeated demonstrations of techniques and specific role plays and exercises. Appropriate assistance was necessary to stimulate self-expression through action.

3. Encourage the provision of feedback through participants' own experience.

4. Acting on feelings – this stage encompassed working on experiences, stimulation of group support and sense of community. That was the longest stage during which group participants worked more openly and with increased trust. They were comparing experiences with each other and thus realizing that their traumatic experiences are not unique but are in fact similar to those of others. During this stage, group participants managed to a greater degree to use the psychodrama techniques introduced in group exercises, during role play as protagonists and as subsidiary selves in the work of other group members.

5. Stage of symptoms – discussions of unusual reactions (emotional, cognitive, and physical) which occur during post traumatic situations.

6. Searching for common traits among group participants, comparison of personal family experience, analysis of the social model of wife/partner, model of mother - daughter relationship and how they transferred those models to their families. Beliefs and "myths" discussions.

During this late stage the group reached a new level of understanding, maturity and support. Group participants initiated topics that were important to them more actively; also they were more open in applying psychodrama

methods. They shared a different level of perception, understanding and point of view achieved through working with those techniques.

7. Stage of rehabilitation – group participants actively discussed and planned their future, jointly with the psycho dramatists they identified strategies to overcome emotional and social consequences of the violence experienced. Through role play they practiced new behaviors, reactions and ways of coping. The group was moving towards closure of group work. Significant changes were discussed with each group participant; changes were related to their social environment which was described at the beginning of the project and now participants described the updated version at the end of the group work.

As a result of the work in groups the following results were reported:

Group participants improved their ability to recognize violence. During the course of group work, some of them realized for the first time that they are victims of violence. Relating their own traumatic experience and feelings with those of others, they realized that they are not alone in their situation which helped them to open up with the other group participants and to give and receive constructive feedback during the process of self-revelation.

By practicing alternative models of behavior and response through role play, they began to transfer those models to their real family and social situations. They increased their sensitivity towards unacceptable attitudes towards them; they increased their self-esteem and self-confidence and started overcoming their social isolation through focusing on job search and new social contacts. Some group participants succeeded in starting new jobs and relationships. They improved their models of parenting and realized that their children are also victims of violence to varying degrees.

The improvement in personality and social functioning of women at some point led to an increase in aggressive acts displayed against them or their children by their partners. Group participants recognized that fact and attributed it to the change in terms of their intolerance towards various forms of abuse and changed mode of reaction in those situations. They actively sought therapeutic assistance and support for their children's problems, realizing the impact of being raised in an atmosphere of violence and neglect.

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 partners. Some of them reported a lack of a close emotional bond with their mothers during their childhood and now, some of them discussed that their relationship with their mothers had improved. They examined their own model of parenting and attitudes towards their children. They improved their communication with their children, in order to seek closeness and support them.

The social environment described at the end of the sessions was expanded to include new people, activities and ideas. Group participants concluded

their participation in group work with improved personality and social competence and optimism.

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