

*Psychodrama as the elective path for treating and preventing domestic violence**

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Summary. *In our introduction, we will present our long and rich experience in a First Aid Centre, “Centro di Pronto Intervento” (CIP), in Brescia. This center provides shelter for women, mothers (Italian and foreigners) children and victims of violence, abuse and negligence. In the CIP, the educational task is a really difficult and hard challenge. The operators themselves (all of whom are women) often go through intense traumatic experiences, which must be recognized, faced and elaborated (vicarious trauma). Our task is to help the educational group enhance its ability to listen to so many painful stories, the silence full of anger and desperation, and to conduct expressive psycho dramatic laboratories for the women and children hosted. Psychodrama has proven to be a very useful instrument not only in treating traumatized women and children but also for training and supervising operators working in these structures.*

Key words: *Women, violence, reception, group, creativity, complexity*

**Received: 14/07/2012 - Revision: 20/07/2012 - Accepted: 26/08/2012*

Self-declaration of compliance with ethical standards: 00/00/2012

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Interdisciplinary Journal of Family Studies, XVIII, 2/2012

The ancient abuse by man against woman has not disappeared, but has only become less noticeable.

Violence against women astounds because of its atrocious and undisputed ability to change personal destinies (Hirigoyen, 2006).

In Italy, one out of five women is victim of her partner's violence and the ascertained cases of violence are fewer than those actually committed because not all cases are reported due to fear, and the code of silence (Romito, 2000). Even the luckier women often encounter, in their everyday life, experience that have a violent flavour. Often the very experience of maternity can result in deep loneliness (Marinopoulos, 2006). All this involves a lot of work and leaves deep marks in the female identity (D'Ambrosio, 2001).

There are different aspects of violence: physical, sexual, psychological abuse, marginalization, exclusion, and subjugation. Violence is perceived and recognized only when it is extreme, but its origins are not accidental. It has its roots in normality, in culture, in tradition and, perhaps, in the history of all women (Ponzio, 2004).

In our introduction, we will present our long and rich experience in a First Aid Centre, "Centro di Pronto Intervento" (CIP), in Brescia. The center provides shelter for women, mothers (Italian and foreigners) children and victims of violence, abuse and negligence.

When women arrive in this "house", they need protection, support and care, in order to rebuild their identity, which has been shattered.

In the CIP, the educational task is a really difficult and hard one. The operators themselves (all of whom are women) often go through intense traumatic experiences, which must be recognized, faced and elaborated (vicarious trauma) (Sbattella, 2009; D'Ambrosio 2010).

On one hand, our task is to help the educational group enhance its ability to listen to so many painful stories, and the silences full of anger and desperation, and on the other hand, to conduct expressive psychodramatic laboratories for the women and children living in the shelter (Dotti, 1998; Ponzio, 2004).

In our experience, Psychodrama has proven to be a very useful instrument not only in treating traumatized women and children but also in training and supervising operators working in these structures (Dotti, 1998; Ponzio, 2004).

Within the group, psychodrama helps to cultivate respect, improve listening, cease judgement, enhance the creative force towards encounters, allow reflection of the self and mutual care of the wounds of the victims but also of the operators, who work in these places (Schucztzenberger, & Bissone Jeufroy, 2008; Schucztzenberger, 2010).

The drawings, collages, sculptures, stories and evidence “created” by the women and children in the psychodramatic/expressive laboratories have been arranged in an exhibition curated by the artist Gabriella Goffi.

Realisation of the exhibition is a very important step, in that it allows women and children to tell others, in a powerful and tactful way, through symbolic and creative language, about their experiences and give them the possibility of redemption.

Through the experience of the exhibition and related events (involvement of the shelter residents, of the institutions and of the press), the female victims of violence can test, on the “field”, an “inversion of roles”: from passive victims to protagonists of a formative path toward a new culture of respect (Boria, 2005; Dotti, 1998).

The exhibition was created as an incentive to promote psychodrama laboratories and to sensitize students from schools and universities. The meetings, conducted in an active modality, emphasized the transversal dimension of violence of gender to different cultures, classes and generations.

The young female students had the opportunity to tell their stories within the complexity of family and love relationships; the young male students had the opportunity to listen, speak and become attuned to an emotional language which could give way to a less stereotyped male (De Zulueta, 1999).

What the expressive-psycho dramatic laboratories offer women

Psychodramatic laboratories with women are places for sharing emotions and creativity, through the use of oral graphics and body language.

One can experience the possibility of taking care of each other’s difficulties, and to support each other in order to reinforce one’s identity and self-esteem.

Women can experience the cessation of judgement, of inter-subjectivity and the right to personal, social and cultural otherness (Boria, 2005).

The laboratories with children offer them the possibility (Dotti, 2002).

- c) to listen to fairy tales, stories, lullabies in a safe and nurturing environment;
- d) to play with colours and pictures and regain an often prematurely lost childhood;
- e) to build symbolic objects so as to connect their interior and exterior world;
- f) to regain the words for verbalizing fear, pain happiness and emotions arising from witnessing violence or from being victims of violence.

The psycho dramatic methodology, integrated with the expressive/artistic approach, has favoured the experience of reception as a fundamental dimension of the expression and treatment of wounds (Ponzio, 2004).

Being housed at the shelter means regaining protection, the nourishment that passes through rituals such as (food, lullabies, dance, fairy tales, cuddles) (Pinkola Estés, 1993).

In this setting, women and children regain contact with their frustrated needs and with the traumatic dimension experienced. The previously denied and split emotions are finally accepted through the acknowledgement of fear and pain, as well as the vital drive, it is possible to attain new and more spontaneous roles, the expression and prelude to new awareness (Foti, 2012).

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