

# Surviving sexual violence in war



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**PREŽIVJELIH!**

# Psychological profile of victims/survivors of wartime sexual violence

## Source of traumatization

- exposed to detention camps torture, home imprisonment, sexual slavery, taken as hostages between front lines, expelled from their homes
- survived multiple trauma: rape, detention camp torture, losses of family members, missing family members, expulsion, refugee survival, unstarted grieving processes related to missed members of family
- all pillars of identity influenced by trauma of sexual violence in war:
  - integrity and autonomy of body
  - psychological identity
  - social identity
  - occupational identity
- Diminished sources of support
- Refugee status – **social survival**
- **Resilience**
  - openness, warmth, moderate locus of control, optimism, sense of humor, religious beliefs, family support

## Transformation of traumatic experience

# Psychological trauma reactions

- Intensity of sexual, physical and psychological violence victims/survivors are suffering from fulfill criteria to diagnose psychological trauma and its consequences:
- exposure to threaten for a life
- brake down of trust and confidence in others

## Psychological traumatization causes serious consequences on the level of:

- physiological regulation of organism
- cognitive processes
- emotive plan
- behavior

# Psychological consequences of war rape

- **Short term consequences:**
- shock and withdrawal, state of being "frozen"
- panic and confusion
- intrusive re-experiencing of details of rape
- repetitive flash-backs
- sleep disorders, insomnia and night mares
- high arousal
- inappropriate steadiness and rationality
- feeling guilty and ashamed
- feeling dirty, obsessive washing, fear of sexually transmitted diseases
- physical injuries
- amenorrhea (lasting from a few months to more than one year)
- loss of appetite
- loss of weight

# Psychological consequences of war rape

- **Long- term consequences:**

- dramatic changes in moods
- repetitive memories of attack
- self-blaming and feeling of guilty
- constant fear
- feeling of deep emotional pain
- disturbances in confidence towards men
- sexual disorders
- poor concentration
- phobic fears (fear of uniform, fear of beard, fear of getting to open space, fear of dark)

# Hyper arousal reactions

- expecting dangerousness constantly
- directing vigilance to search signs of dangerousness form environment
- expecting attack of perpetrator and his aides
- intensive fear, the most often from perpetrator, fear that perpetrator shall find her/him, feeling of physical presence of perpetrator although observation shows the opposite, fear that perpetrator can hear what she is speaking, because of that often speaks quietly
- constant tension, sleep disorders including insomnia
- ticks and massive physiological reaction of organism on minor stimulus from environment
- impulsive and aggressive reactions and behavior
- disorganized behavior

# Intrusive pictures and memories

- traumatic memories are fragmented
- remembering functions by principle of similarity or contrast
- traumatic memory function by principle of trigger
- trigger could be a word, a sound, a smell, a movement, thing or a behavior which shall evoke a picture and a memory of traumatic event
- examples: fear of uniform or mens beard

## Reactions

- intrusive pictures and memories
- frightening dreams
- night mares
- flash backs: re-experiencing traumatic events

## Avoiding reactions

- dissociation as one among trauma responses (besides “fight” and “fly”) on threaten for a life in traumatic situation
- feeling of physical presence in the situation and psychological dissociation from it, protect organism and enable person to endure hard traumatic experience with feeling of being “frozen”, like seeing that somebody else is experiencing the traumatic event
- drug or alcohol abuse has the same effect

### **Victims /survivors very often:**

- avoid the spot of traumatic event
- avoid conversation about traumatic event
- avoid persons connected with traumatic event
- avoid new activities
- developing feeling of lack of perspective

# Trauma affects integrity, meaning and confidence

## Psychological trauma affects:

- physical, sexual, psychological and social integrity of victim/survivor
- physical and processed (psychological) boundaries
- feeling of safety
- predictability of events in our life
- feeling of control over own life
- feeling of trust and confidence in other persons

# Traumatic consequences which could influence the flow of interview

- lack of chronological order in trauma story
- repetitiveness of trauma story  
„Experienced for the second time releases you from the experience for the first time”
- respect of physical and process boundaries of victim/survivor

## Areas for interview:

- traumatic and violence events
- coping mechanisms
- personal resources/strengths
- support from the environment

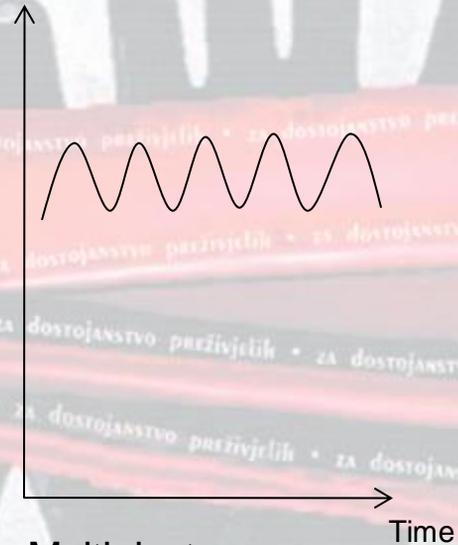
# One way trauma, multiple trauma, torture

Intensity of stress



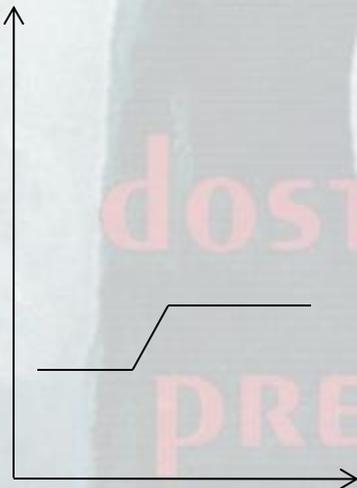
One way trauma

Intensity of stress



Multiple trauma

Intensity of stress



Torture

- Trafficking start to be recognized as a form of torture
- Human right defenders vs. neutral professionals

# Trauma interventions and assessment of psychological status of victim/survivor

- ventilation of emotions
- validation of experience
- normalization of symptoms

## Assessment of psychological status:

- general health condition
- elements of crisis reactions
- general and specific intellectual abilities
- personality structure and emotional status
- intensity of traumatic reactions and presence of PTSD symptoms
- presence of psychiatric disorders

# Treatment according to hierarchy of needs

- physical health
- establishing physical safety and daily routine
- stabilization of physiological function of sleeping and eating
- building relationship of safety and confidence with survivor
- detailed psychological assessment

## First psychological stabilization (reduction of PTSD symptoms) includes:

- building safety and confidence
- strengthening (regaining positive self-concept)
- working through traumatic experience
- integration, projection on future, reconnection

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- **1. NAIVE CONCEPT: "When IT happened"**
- In the beginning of our work our clients and therapists were scared to use word rape. Therapists tried to approach rape theme through themes of "love, marriage, sexuality".
- **2. "OLD INJURIES-NEW INJURIES,,**
- In the beginning of our work we didn't use word trauma. We used expression "old injuries" working with women and girls who survived rape six to twelve months ago. We also use expression "new injuries" working with rape survivors who passed through rape three to fifteen days ago.

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- **3. GENERAL-STRUCTURAL THERAPY MODEL**
- **TRANSACTIONAL-ANALYSIS**
- **LOGOTHERAPY BASED ON FRANCL'S BOOK: "WHY DIDN'T YOU KILL YOURSELF"**
- **VENTILATION OF EMOTION BASED ON JANOV'S BOOK "PRIMAL SCREAM"**

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- Because we were not introduced with theory of psychological trauma and PTSD concept we used therapy skills and knowledge we already have. In our initial work we used mainly transactional-analytical therapy approach.
- Some adapted concepts from transactional analysis were useful and applicable in the work with traumatized women, like:
  - working and restrictive contracts,
  - O. K. corral-life positions,
  - time structuring adapted in the terms of communication,
  - meta model about communication-neurolinguistic model.

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- Basic statements from Frankl's book "Why Didn't You Kill Yourself" were applicable. Some of them are:
- contrast (it is not the worst what happened to me),
- what did I lose what I can not have again,
- there are reason for hope for one who is still alive,
- everything can be repaired and achieved again,
- what we had to suffer could be useful in the future,
- future is uncertain, it can be good,
- joy of past, all what you experienced any force in the world can not take from you,
- possibility to fill your life with meaning,
- even lack of chances does not taking off the meaning,
- somebody expects from us (friend or a wife) that we suffer with dignity,
- sacrificing has the meaning.

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- **PROCESS OF HEALING**
- **BASED ON LAURA DAVIS AND ELLEN BASS BOOK "THE COURAGE TO HEAL", HELD THROUGH 15 STAGES AND 30 SESSIONS**
- a) Don't give up
- b) Process of healing is lasting for certain time
- c) Healing is not any coincidental process. It has its recognizable phases all survivors are passing through. These phases are overlapping.

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- Phases:

- 1. The Decision to heal
- 2. The Confusion
- 3. Remembering
- 4. Believing It Happened
- 5. Breaking Silence
- 6. Understanding That It Wasn't Your Fault

# PSYCHOTHERAPY MODELS APPLIED IN WORK WITH WAR RAPE SURVIVORS

- 8. Trusting Yourself
- 9. Pain and Sadness
- 10. Anger-The Backbone of Healing
- 11. Forgiveness? Forgiveness of the perpetrator is not an essential part of the healing process, although it tends to be the one most recommended. The only essential forgiveness is for yourself.
- 12. Faith and Spiritual Support
- 13. Resolution and Moving On

# War Rape Domestic Violence - Interconnection

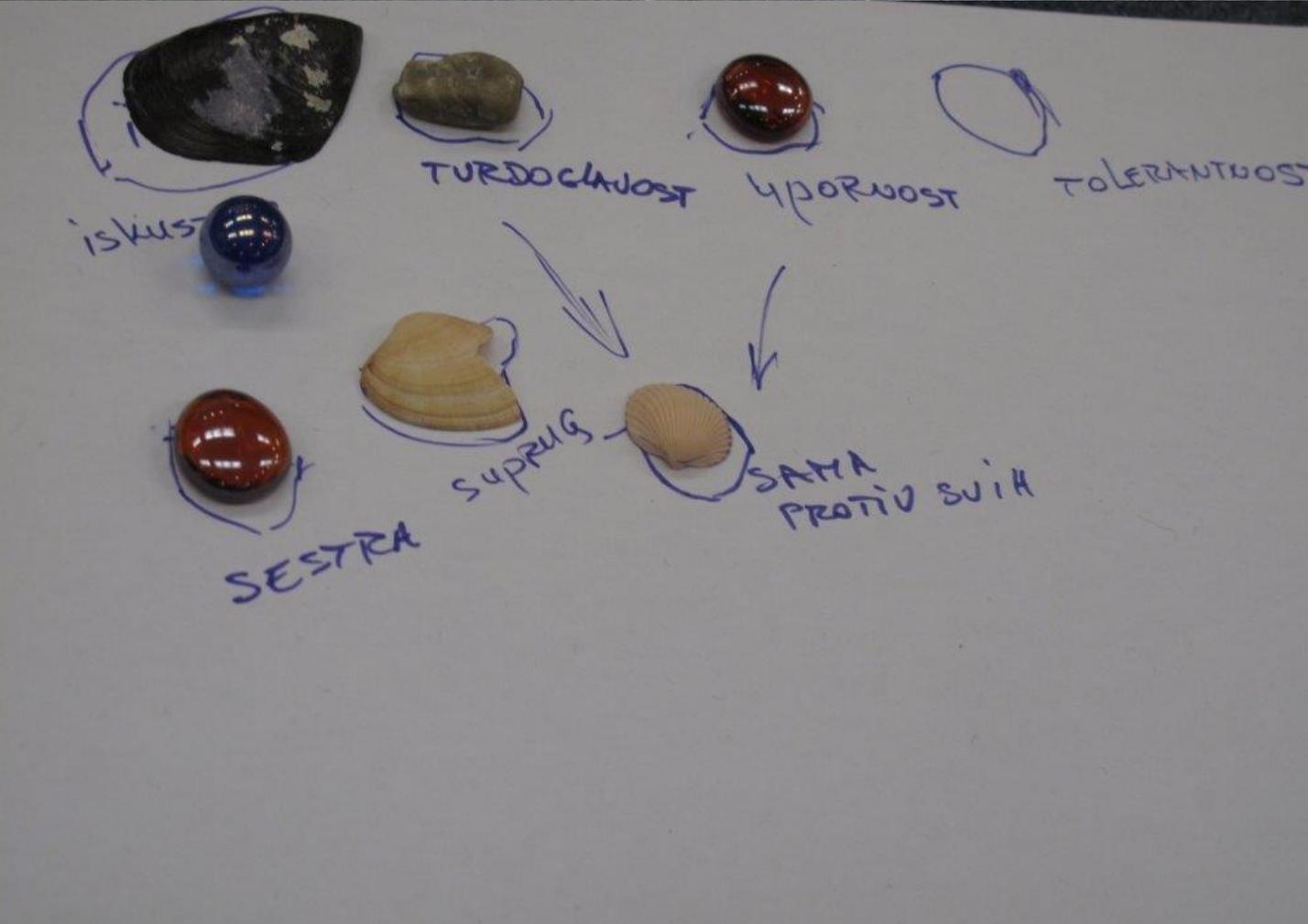
- Unresolved and unhealed war trauma
- lack of rehabilitation programs
- Trans-generational transmission of war trauma
- emotions learnt by modeling after parents
- Maladaptive family trauma models:
- Impulsive and aggressive reactions of husbands
- (combat veterans, released prisoners)
- Alcohol (and drugs) abuse

# War Rape Domestic Violence - Interconnection

- Society marginalization of combat veterans and other war trauma survivors
- War trauma as “river under the surface”
- Poverty as PTSD factor
- Basic social and economic rights are not executed
- Shifted gender roles in post-conflict societies
- Increase of violence in general in post-conflict societies
- domestic violence, community violence, street violence, peer violence, gender based violence (trafficking), femicide









## Criteria for trauma resolution

- Psychological symptoms of PTSD are in range in which person could cope with them
- Person is able to bear feelings connected with traumatic memories
- Person has power over his/her memories: he /she can chose to remember or to leave memories aside
- Traumatic memory has a form of coherent story connected with
- Re-established self-esteem affected by trauma
- Re-established relationships with significant others
- Reconstructed system of meaning and beleves which integrates trauma story

## Basic values

- we are all the same at existential level
- everybody is doing the best she/he can in particular moment and stage of development
- every sincere human engagement has its therapeutic value
- therapeutic effect and shared responsibility of all staff members
- levels of intervention (contain, calm down, refer to the professional support)
- healing relationship (traumatized person call for our humanity not only professionalism)
- implementation of the humanistic values on operational level
- permanent education (we are the limitations for our clients)

# Diagram - Care givers

## ACTIVE APPROACH

### Saving

- caregiver takes role of omnipotent savior
- helps even in matters which survivor is able to do herself
- takes complete responsibility for the case
- overprotect and look after traumatized person

### Withdrawal

- refer traumatized person to the other professional
- put “professional” mask
- categorizing, diagnosing
- behaves from position of professional power
- in order to emotionally survive caregiver intellectualize

## IDENTIFICATION

## AVOIDING

### Compassion

- caregiver is over emphatic
- identified to the extent that has a feeling that she is victim herself
- over engaged but activities are often inappropriate and confused
- intense feeling of helplessness which can cause stock in her work

### Diminishing and repressing

- in order to avoid overwhelming with emotions caregiver “do not see”, denying, or minimizing problem
- withdrawing and making distance
- direct feeling of guilt to the traumatized person

## PASIVE APPROACH

# RISCS FOR WITNESSING

- Fear of attack of perpetrator
- Fear of perpetrators revenge to the family members
- Lack of safety
- Lack of protection
- Lack of legal support
- Lack of psychological support
- Lack of financial support
- Lack of provision of basic human rights
- Retraumatization
- Fear of emotional brake down

# Collaboration with ICTY and domestic Courts

- **Tiered approach – 3 levels**
- Anonymous questionnaire – coded cases
- Giving testimony in the Centre
- Witnessing at ICTY in Den Hague
- Psychological support prior, during and after the witnessing
- Witnesses support network
- Data protection anonymous, profiled, strong policy with media involvement, data bases emergency plan, law profile attitude
- Submitting professional documentation
- **Domestic courts:** psychological and legal support to the witnesses, professional expertise, emotional support at the Court

# ADVOCATING FOR THE SURVIVOR'S RIGHTS

- Legacy of our region is visible in recognition of survivors of sexual violence in the war as civilian victims of the war within the **laws on social protection** in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2006) and Kosovo (2013).
- Step forward in this region is **Act on rights of victims of sexual violence in the war** in Croatia (2015), which besides monthly compensations, regulates one-way decent compensation and wide range of medical and psychosocial provisions for survivors. The strength of new Act lies in the proposed administrative proceeding for obtaining entitlement rights, based on victim's statement before committee for victims of sexual violence, without obtaining the medical opinion from disability commission, which lessened the burden of plea procedure for victims. Mandatory transfer of previous documentation on cases of sexual violence from the other state bodies facilitates procedure especially having in mind that sexual violence was committed more than 25 years ago. Considering necessary improvements, lesson learnt in Croatia which may contribute globally is to include sexual crime in the war equally as the war crimes, and exclude residency as the requirement for the obtaining status.
- **Transitional justice - WOMENS` COURT**
- Feminist approach to justice, besides sentencing the perpetrators, means recognition of suffering and caused damage and reparation and recovery for survivors. It should rebuilt the confidence and establish the hope for righteous peace.

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