

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

TRAINING GROUP FOR OPERATORS IN VIOLENT CONTEXTS

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Resumen

Con un enfoque humanístico-existencial, se llevó a cabo una experiencia de orientación en situaciones de *violencia* en el ámbito de educación universitaria. La misma tuvo lugar durante tres años y estuvo dirigida a profesionales universitarios del ámbito de la salud, la educación, las leyes y el servicio social. Se organizaron seminarios y talleres interactivos para 150 profesionales, quienes advirtiendo la insuficiencia de recursos habilitantes para la prevención y tratamiento de los comportamientos violentos, solicitaron una capacitación específica en este tema. En los talleres interactivos se utilizaron recursos expresivos no convencionales, tales como el tallado de materiales duros y el juego con máscaras, los que posibilitaron una elaboración conceptual articulada con la experiencia de los participantes, los recursos y las estrategias a desarrollar en la práctica laboral. Los resultados obtenidos fueron ampliamente satisfactorios, sobre todo en lo relativo a la concientización de las posibilidades que a nivel personal y grupal pueden hallarse para enfrentar y orientar el tema en cuestión. Esta experiencia de orientación confirmó la hipótesis: es esencial capacitar y cuidar a aquellos profesionales que tienen a su vez, el rol de orientadores.

Palabras clave: Violencia - grupo de entrenamiento - operadores.

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Abstract

A *training group* on management of violent situations (based on existentialism perspective) had taken place at university context. It was organized for 150 professionals (belonging to health, law and educational services). These professionals, noting the insufficiency of their violent behavior management skills, asked for specific training in order to prevent, and treat violent situations. The training groups were developed using a method of interactive seminars in which were used non-conventional expressive techniques, as hard materials carving, and games with masks. The purpose was to enable a conceptual working through related to direct experience of students, finding new strategies for violent work situations.

Key words: Violence - training group - operators.

Introduction

The Training Group for Operators in Violent Contexts had taken place at university context. During 1997, 1998 and 1999, seminars on Family Violence and Tenderness, Violence and Tenderness in the Educational Area and a Training Group for Operators in Violence Situations (at the First Workshop 'Childhood and Youth in Situations of Danger') have been organized by the Facultad de Psicología y Psicopedagogía of the Universidad del Salvador (Buenos Aires - Argentina). Seminars and training group were provided for 150 professionals (belonging to health, law, and educational services). This educational courses for professionals have had an existentialism theoretical perspective (Buber, 1995; Dörr Zegers, 1996; Frankl, 1982; Fromm, 1933; Lersch, 1951; Maslow, 1971; Rof Carballo, 1966; Sauri, 1989), which offers a concept of the individual as a free, and responsible human being, who needs to find a sense for his existence. On the contrary, violence refers to existential nonsense.

The students themselves have shown, and noted insufficient coping abilities related to their professional profile.

Students' essential professional goal was the possibility to create in their own team-works conditions for the promotion of practical skills, and the development of personal resources (fully functioning person), through a creative social adaptation.

The opportunity to reach successfully this goal is made difficult or completely canceled by violence situations. Aggression, and violence have been found throughout human being history; they have shown changes just on their space-time way of expression.

At the end of the millennium, the presence of violent experiences, and self-destructive or hetero-destructive behaviors, is among the most urgent problems that humanity has to deal with. Necessary resources to social agents awareness regarding violence problem, its destructive potentiality, the development of working-through skills related to and the constructive reframing of it, were provided by the training group.

Theoretical foundations

Current presence of self-aggressive, and hetero-aggressive behaviors, it could be considered as one of the most alarming social topics.

The importance of the problem, its multi-causality, and the need of giving answers at the different social agencies, and institutions regarding prevention as well as diagnosis and treatment, have found coincidence among several humanistic approach specialists (sociologists, psychologists, social psychologists, anthropologists, educators).

Purpose of the *training group* was to work on some of the conditions that cause violent behavior, which implies centering on the responsible factors. Responsibility that leads into the study of the answers which are given to the problem.

Research, and questions about sense and nonsense of current violence, investigation regarding new approaching strategies to such a complex topic, have been developed by specialized professionals in order to cope with in a more competent way.

The need of orientation, and training is expressed by responsible professionals that search more practical resources.

This training program was especially organized for giving responses to this professional demand of orientation, and training; it was made for every social agent that will deal with, and within violence problem.

Professional working areas could vary: Hospital (Mental Health Department, Emergency, Traumatology, Pediatrics), School or Juvenile

Court. Anyhow, 'Helping people that help' has become the horizon sought by the program.

The effect that this program, training oriented, has had regarding professional identity improvement was investigated.

Furthermore, as training group was developed, the program effects over professionals personalities as well as on indirectly involved individuals (patients, students, etc.) were examined.

Purposes of training group

General purposes

- a.- The ones giving the orientation act as identification models to the ones being oriented. The development of not violent behavior among the ones oriented is stimulated by training on learning of adaptative patterns.
- b.- Other social interaction areas (family, friendship, school, club, etc.) are influenced (on short, medium or long term) by changes within professional interaction area.

Specific purposes

- a.- Supporting of beliefs, values, and attitudes with respect to firmness and tenderness of the professional role, promoting adaptative, and social integrating behaviors.
- b.- Training of skills, and resources regarding prevention, and approach to violence.
- c.- Awareness referred to importance of working within systems of social support, and orientation.

Method

Subjects

Most of participants were psychologists, psychopedagogists, and elementary, secondary, and university educators. Moreover, social workers, lawyers, and physicians. Among the three groups have participated nearly 200 subjects.

Procedure

An important training group goal was building a dynamic, and personal interaction of the participants related to a personal involving cognoscitive experience related to violence world. Participants reflection about this problem was oriented towards enhancement of knowledge, and alternative attitudes. Which means that method, and techniques have been selected under *helping people that help* criterion.

That is why theoretical one-way exposition was avoided as a perspective that does not stimulate participation.

Use of two non-conventional resources was selected: hard material carving, and game with masks and role-playing. These are the foundations of this selection:

Hard material carving provides a direct experience related to the one dealing with violence problem. This is a hard reality that offers resistance to our approach and penetrativeness. Furthermore, if the carving instrument materia is not griped strongly, it could become slippery, and fall, or just stub the material superficies, which means not carving it. If movement is a too incisive, and penetrating one, and does not proceed gradually, can break the carving instrument or carved material, which implies not to reach the searched goal. Furthermore, every individual has a style of approaching to the material that reveals his personal style (Pérez Jáuregui, 1998). This is an important information for the operator about himself, useful, and necessary for his professional praxis within violent contexts.

Therefore, hard material carving experience has allowed:

- 1.- Having a personal involving experience about contact with toughness world and own working style related to, being aware of personal potentiality, and limits.
- 2.- Enriching this complex perspective with the other training group participants' experience, who has contributed with their reflections.
- 3.- Discovering more efficient ways of working with hard material.

The carving experience has had interesting, and stimulative effects with respect to transfer its sense to violence world: the word is the professional most competent instrument, and the violent experience, and behavior, the hard situation. The professional personality, its personal evolution and feelings, get involved: that is why the awareness of the implications is

essential in order to reach an adequate differentiation between operator, and patient, student, violence actor or victim of violence.

Masks and role-playing representative of violent world are provided: threat, fear, surprise, ambiguity, seduction, omnipotency. Two operations have been proposed to subjects:

1.- Taking possession of a mask, to play with it taking spontaneous postures, feelings, actions and words, and play -from that role- a game with another participant, who has also a mask chosen by himself (and has had to identify the same items).

2.- Taking off the mask and working through the process constructed in order to be aware about presence of violence inside us, and others, its ways of expression, and solving alternatives.

Goal searched through this expressive techniques is working on self of operator and violent actors. So long as identity has two aspects (Dörr Zegers, 1996), the inner one (self identity), and the external one (role identity), from this double access essential feelings, and behaviors can be identified, and adequate prevention, diagnosis, and treatment resources development can be searched. Therefore, the following program stages have been developed:

a.- *Motivational*: Participants' gradual interest on activities provided by the training group has been motivated by violent situation presentation, described by video images or role-playing (started through everyday situations, and gradually approached to participants violent working context).

b.- *Personal involvement regarding violence situation*: Participants slowly get more involved into images suggested by violent world experience, personal and others' typical attitudes associated to, and coping skills, using non-conventional expressive techniques as hard material carving, and games with masks. Participants awareness implied a better knowledge about themselves, and others, leading to the following stage.

c.- *Working-through of personal experience*: Different thoughts have been motivated by experience of violent world involvement shared by participants. Knowing the other student's personal experience, and

feelings has allowed enriching the own as well as the other personal experience. Free choosing enhancement regarding more effective coping strategies has been caused by the awareness about different ways of perception, meaning, and coping related to common situations of violence within professional role.

d.- *Conceptual development*: Classic works about violence, neglect, and abuse were useful in order to transfer this theoretical body (concepts related to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment produced by psychology, social psychology, and psychopathology) to the participants, enhancing performance of their prevention, diagnosis, and treatment resources.

e.- *Testing of results*: A special instance was destined to test experimentally the effectiveness of learned coping strategies (through role-playing or film discussion as well as examination of observed direct effects on participant's professional working areas). Testing has functioned as an effective feedback to learning process, supporting successful behaviors, and correcting the inadequate ones (not oriented to aimed goals).

At the end of each seminar, testing was effected by the whole group together with trainers, as well as the Training Group responsible team, during regular meetings organized for that purpose.

Results and discussion

Satisfactory results have been obtained, especially regarding awareness about personal, and group coping possibilities related to situations of violence.

Belief that nothing can be done against violence, paralyzing fear and seduction caused by the ambiguity that violent individual can express (fascination; on the other hand: violence), which could victimize the social operators too, has become gradually certitude about existence of resources, whenever attitude towards violence is not a submissive one, the hopeless one becomes a hopeful one, individual goodwill meets another one, and they build together a realistic way of thinking, and acting, through clear firm goals, and attitudes.

Key strategies in order to develop feelings, and behaviors not submissive to violence were found by the participants whenever individuals have

been able to construct a common project, a social network, a place where support their identities. A perspective that deals with the conditions that causes violence implies a preventive, and therapeutic action.

Violence is produced by suffering, by pain of having been first a victim of some kind of violence, by lack of hope regarding finding of values in the world or the others.

Every human being needs to belong in the society in order to feel himself considered. If he does not reach this horizon, if society does not accept him, or the subject does not find the way to become a member of it, he could choose the violent behavior. The impotence often leads into omnipotence masks; if these masks fell they would show inner poverty, and emptiness.

If trainers feel impotence or lack of coping resources regarding this situation, if they feel themselves in an one-down position or fighting against a stronger, and more effective opponent, they can not act as models of not submission, capable to reflect about the violent impulsive behavior.

First the trainers have to be able to take charge of their behaviors, and responsibilities -attitude that abusing (or abused) subjects often can not assume effectively- then could have a firm attitude towards this pathology.

Caring for them, and being responsible implies an individual that can learn to care for himself and to be responsible of himself.

Such an important problem claims energetic, and realistic coping strategies.

In the violence topic, a caring for people that care for others orientation creates the foundations, and conditions for a coherent, and firm approach capable of deal with such a hard and serious problem.

The hypothesis about the importance of training, and caring for professionals who act as trainers has been supported by this training group.

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