Measured Impact Webinar

Group work with survivors of Torture: Engaging Communities

July 19, 2017

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National Capacity Building Project

Presenters

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Group Work with Survivors of Torture: Engaging Communities

Insights from Treatment Centers and Impacted Communities

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Objectives

• Identify potential benefits associated with engaging community-based organizations and interventions in their group work with survivors of torture
• Cite key points and best practices in providing group work to survivors of torture
• Identify the essential components of distance supervision

Types of Groups Currently Offered at PSOT

• Psycho-Educational Orientation Groups – (French, Tibetan, English)
• LGBTQ Group
• English Speaking Group (Geographically Diverse)
• English Speaking Group (African men)
• Two Tibetan Groups
• Francophone African Support Group
• Workshop Series
• Art therapy
• Yoga

Rationale

• Reduction of isolation – “I’m not alone”
• Culturally appropriate coping mechanisms
  • e.g., African extended family
• Empowerment of clients – “Not just needy, but needed”
Emotional Empowerment – Telling Our Story

The power of the narrative and oral history
Helping the voiceless to find their voice
Being part of someone else’s healing process

Treatment Goals

• Information
• Attending to Current Life Issues
• Coping/Adaptation
• Reduction of isolation
• Normalization
• Affect Regulation Techniques
• Multidirectional Empowerment

“You should have seen me when I first got home...”
Group and Cultural Contexts

- Importance of social and collateral ties
- Importance of the extended family network
- Hospitality and openness valued
- Feelings of isolation in this “cold” society
- Potential stigma associated with mental health services

Heterogeneous Population

- Males/Females - Tibetan, Francophone, LGBTQ, and Orientation groups
- Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous Religions in African groups
- Ethnic Tibetans and Nepalese in Tibetan group
- Varying social classes and levels of education
- Amount of time in the US

Shared Experiences

- Massive losses
- Trauma and Abuse
- Recurrent Stressors of Resettlement
**Group Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**

- Motivated for treatment
- Experiencing current psychological distress
- Not a perpetrator of human rights abuses
- Having positive expectations of being aided by group treatment
- Willing to attend sessions regularly
- Having adequate language skills
  - *No suicidal or homicidal ideation*
  - *No psychotic symptoms or thought processes*

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**Group Processes and Development**

- Notion of “family”
- Contacts outside of group
- Phone numbers exchanged
  - Social support (e.g. jobs, housing, etc.)
  - Confidentiality
  - Safety issues

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**Group Content**

- Subject matter not pre-determined by staff
  - Adaptation / Logistical Support
  - Philosophical
  - Supportive
  - Trauma Focused
Group Themes

- Loss
- Asylum Process
- Cultural Adaptation
- Grief and Mourning
- Anger/Frustration
- Role of Faith/Religion
- Coping Mechanisms
- Psycho-education

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Coping Mechanisms – Engagement in Treatment


Matching group participants and non-participants from January 1, 2008 – January 1, 2010 (age, gender, religion, time in US, language capacity, immigration status)

Francophone Group members accessed:

Significant:
- More psychiatric services: p = .015
- More individual therapy sessions: p = .034

Trending toward significance:
- More social services: p = .055
- More legal services: p = .084

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Roles of Facilitator

- Creating environment conducive for sharing
- Facilitating discussion among members while maintaining safe, respectful environment
- Identifying and verbalizing central themes put forth by group members
- Calling attention to pertinent group processes
- Ensuring that members leave with a sense of shared growth and progress

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Challenges for Facilitators

- Maintaining flexibility
- Being knowledgeable about the multifaceted effects of torture and refugee trauma
- Ability to work with co-facilitators
- Maintaining individual patient confidentiality
- Avoiding secondary trauma and burnout

Community-based group Interventions

Collaborative Approach
Co-creation of:
Areas of focus/need
Rules/norms/expectations

Logistical considerations
- Transportation
- Childcare
- Scheduling
- Resources
- Food?

Distance Supervision/Consultation

Task Sharing/Capacity Building
- Consistency
- Supervisory Support
  - Readings
  - Psychoeducation
  - Best Practices
- Oversight and communication
  - Group Facilitators – Direct Supervisors
  - Direct Supervisors to Consultant
  - Group Facilitators with Consultant
- Challenges
  - Logistics
  - Resources
  - IT infrastructure

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How does one change (or at least survive) the world?

“Wisdom, Courage, and Hope”