

# Group Treatment at the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture:

## Rationale, Processes and Development

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# Types of Groups Currently Offered at PSOT

- Psycho-Educational Orientation Groups
  - (French, Tibetan, English)
- Sexual Orientation Group
- English Speaking Group (Geographically Diverse)
- English Speaking Group (African men)
- Two Tibetan Groups
- Francophone African Support Group
- Workshop Series

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# RATIONALE



- Reduction of isolation –  
“I’m not alone”
- Empowerment of clients –  
“Not just needy, but  
needed”
- Culturally appropriate coping  
mechanisms  
i.e. African extended  
family

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# Treatment Goals

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

# 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

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# Heterogeneous Population

- Males/Females – Tibetan, Francophone, LGBT, and Orientation groups
- Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous Religions in African groups
- 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

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# Group Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

- No suicidal or homicidal ideation
- 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 psychotic symptoms or thought processes



# Group Processes and Development

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

# Group Content

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

# Coping Mechanisms – Engagement in Treatment

Ex. Francophone African Support Group (in press)

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:  $p = .084$

# Group Themes



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

# Orientation Groups at PSOT

Providing Information, Coping Skills, and Connections

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## The Goals of the PSOT Orientation Groups include:

**Increasing participants' knowledge about trauma;**

**Introducing cognitive and behavioral strategies that will serve to decrease individuals' symptoms.**

**Fostering a sense of belonging, to normalize individuals' experiences, and decrease feelings of isolation.**

**Screening, triaging, and preparing individuals for further PSOT services;**

**Describing PSOT services and how to access them.**

## Orientation Group Supervision

Supervisors are licensed clinicians (psychologists, social workers and psychiatrists) with a minimum of four years experience working with tortured and/or traumatized populations.

Trainee led groups – will receive weekly group supervision from a licensed supervisor

Trainee and senior clinician led groups – the treating senior clinician also serves as supervisor

# Orientation Group: Session 1

Introduction of staff and participants

Group rules and expectations

Overview

Ice-breaker: Commonalities/Hopes/Expectations

Earth, Wind, Water and Fire bracelets



# Orientation Group: Session 2

Common Reactions to Trauma:

Common Depressive and PTSD symptoms  
(provide and elicit responses)

De-mystifying Psychopharmacological Treatment

Introduce the thoughts-feelings-behavior paradigm

# Orientation Group: Session 3

## Asylum/Immigration Process Overview

Review of previous coping mechanisms

More coping strategies and techniques

Provision of pertinent immigration information – referrals?

# Orientation Group: Session 4

Termination – Review of Coping Strategies (further triage)

Revisit Earth, Wind, Water and Fire interventions

Meaning of group/community – how would one have coped at home?

Next steps at PSOT?

Ongoing group presentations

# 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

# 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

# Food for Thought



## Some Insights from Group Discussions

- Survivor Guilt in Context
- Fear v. Wariness
- Circumstances v. Character
- Forgiveness v. Forgetting
- Saying a positive “au revoir”
- “Wisdom, Courage, and Hope”

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# Refugee Services

National Partnership  
for Community Training

Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services

**For more technical assistance  
information, please contact:**

National Partnership for Community  
Training

(T) 305.805.5060

(E) [partnership@gcjfcs.org](mailto:partnership@gcjfcs.org)

In partnership with Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (HPRT) and the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture, National Partnership for Community Training (NPCT), is a program of Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services.