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

Rationale, Processes and Development

Hawthorne E. Smith, Ph.D.
Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture
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

Hawthorne E. Smith, Ph.D.
Bellevue/NYU PSOT
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

Hawthorne E. Smith, Ph.D.
Bellevue/NYU PSOT
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
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

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Bellevue/NYU PSOT
Shared Experiences

- Massive losses
- Trauma and Abuse
- Recurrent Stressors of Resettlement

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Bellevue/NYU PSOT
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


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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Bellevue/NYU PSOT
Group Themes

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

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Bellevue/NYU PSOT
Orientation Groups at PSOT

Providing Information, Coping Skills, and Connections

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Bellevue/NYU PSOT
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

Hawthorne E. Smith, Ph.D.
Bellevue/NYU PSOT
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?
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”

Hawthorne E. Smith, Ph.D.
Bellevue/NYU PSOT
For more technical assistance information, please contact:

National Partnership for Community Training
(T) 305.805.5060
(E) 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.