

Book Review

Tratando... violencia de género desde las terapias contextuales **[Addressing... gender-based violence through contextual therapies]**

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Pirámide (2024)

The book begins by briefly describing the stories of four women who participated in the group intervention program described. This opening provides a human face, emotional depth, and context to the circumstances faced by women who experience gender-based violence in their intimate relationships. These four stories gradually reveal common characteristics such as isolation linked to shame, a lack of economic, educational, and social resources, and the complicity of those around them who are aware of what is happening in the private sphere. What stands out are the problems of anxiety, deep depression, medication, dissociative and even depersonalization symptoms, lack of self-confidence, and a long list of other difficulties in leading a dignified life. What stands out is that they are neither able nor fully fit to behave as wives or mothers.

After introducing the four women and their stories of abuse, Chapter 2 presents an introduction that outlines the regulatory evolution in the consideration of gender-based violence (GBV) as a distinct form of violence, and then describes the various manifestations of such violence. As befits a rigorous approach, the consequences of gender-based violence on the victims are briefly addressed, as well as some conceptual models that seek to explain the phenomenon at hand. It examines everything from strictly psychological postulates—which point to biographical variables (childhood abuse, personality disorders, paternal models of violence, impulse control problems, etc.)—to political-cultural theories such as the “power and control wheel” model, which intensifies during periods when there is a risk of losing control over the woman. All of this is consistent with a broader sociocultural and feminist perspective in which cultural norms establish gender roles and social structures that foster stereotypes and legitimize the use of violence.

Chapter Two also reviews psychological interventions for women who are victims of GBV, developed mainly through cognitive behavioral therapy, with generally positive results at both the individual and group levels, sometimes adapting interventions designed for post-traumatic stress disorder along with cognitive restructuring. There are also studies on the application of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), as well as the combination of elements from different contextual therapies (ACT, functional analytic psychotherapy [FAP], and/or behavioral activation [BA] or mindfulness).

Chapter 3 delves into the rationale and description of the various contextual therapies. This chapter deserves special

attention for those who are not very familiar with this approach to conceptualizing and conducting psychological therapy. Its transdiagnostic approach is justified by highlighting experiential avoidance, hyperreflexivity, disturbances of the self, and fear of intimacy as relevant dimensions in psychological problems in general and in the problems experienced by victims of GBV in particular, which can manifest as a wide range of symptoms. From there, the therapeutic principles and characteristics of FAP, ACT, DBT, and BA are described with extraordinary clarity, highlighting their distinct emphases and their utility in addressing the problems of victims of violence.

Chapter 4 outlines the program implemented—the ultimate focus of this book—as a treatment guide that incorporates elements from the various contextual therapies mentioned. The program is described in meticulous detail, allowing for its replication and adaptation to diverse contexts. We find relevant information on participation criteria, the number of women per group, session frequency, evaluation, and the phases of the intervention. All of this precedes the detailed description of each session, which incorporates ACT components such as metaphors and values, the identification of clinically relevant behaviors and in-session shaping from FAP, DBT validation, and strategies for managing depression from BA. In the first phase, the goal is for women to identify the socio-verbal context in which they live, filled with beliefs and behavioral norms that shape the context in which intimate relationships are formed and that allows for violence. In phase two, the therapeutic work focuses on developing personal autonomy in different life areas. This process identifies the costs of the intimate relationship in which the women have lived, the harm caused by violence, and forms of protection, as threats and risks may still be present. Personal values are explored, along with ways to manage depression and detect the self-esteem trap as a condition for making decisions and moving forward. Anxiety—what it is and how it functions—is also addressed, ultimately shaping a new concept of love. In summary, the program charts a path toward autonomy and self-care, enabling the women participating to become aware of their experiences, break down the psychological barriers that prevent them from moving forward, and make decisions and take action toward a dignified life.

Chapter 5 presents the results of implementing the program with 13 groups of women in the province of Cádiz. The data are

presented both quantitatively and qualitatively, focusing on the changes and the evaluations by the women, some of whose stories were shared at the beginning of the book. Reference is also made to the dropout rate, and the life stories of women who stopped attending the sessions are included in order to identify some of the factors that keep them trapped in the cycle of abuse. Finally, Chapter 6 presents adaptations of the program for populations of young women or adolescents, with a special emphasis on violence in virtual environments. References are included to the adaptation of the program for women who are victims of sexual exploitation, both Spanish nationals and migrant women.

In short, GBV is a paradigmatic example of the contextual origins of psychological problems—socio-historical, political, and biographical. Furthermore, the scarcity of academic research on GBV and the psychological consequences of such violence (in all its forms) on the victims—women, mothers, sons, and daughters—is strikingly evident. For all these reasons, the book presented here is a rigorous, useful, and necessary work that will serve as a guide for contextual intervention in GBV.

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