



Approaches to address trauma in women in post-conflict and migration



**Are all these
women and girls
really migrants?**

**Do they choose to
leave but are
protected at home?
Do they have no
options at home?**



With migrants we must
presume
grave human rights violations:

Rape and torture

Forcefully displaced

Trafficked for
prostitution or
other forms of
sexual exploitation

Seeking asylum or is
a refugee

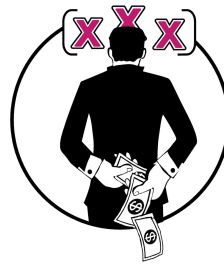
Structural Causes of victimization – CEDAW GR 38



A. Socio-economic Injustice



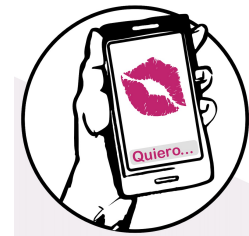
B. Discrimination in migration & asylum regimes



C. Demand that fosters exploitation and leads to trafficking



D. Situations of conflict and humanitarian emergencies



E. The use of digital technology in trafficking

Most vulnerable women and girls are VICTIMS



Indigenous
and ethnic
minorities
communities



Migrants,
stateless
women,
refugees and
asylum
seekers



Women and
girls with
disabilities, or
without care



Women and
girls living in
rural and
remote areas



Displaced or
living in
conflict or
postconflict

Trauma



- Trauma is a function that reorganizes brain & organisms perceptions in order to survive (fight, flight, freeze).
- It helps people to be rapidly conscious of potential dangers.

Most likely they have suffered from traumatization

Traumatization



- Traumatization is a process in which emotional, cognitive, autonomic and somatosensorial components experimented during the traumatic event are codified permanently in the neural tissue of the brain.
- Trauma which is re-experimented will be more fixed in the brain.

Traumatization



**Complex (Post) Traumatic
Stress Disorder (PTSD)**



**Perpetuating Traumatic
Stress Defense***



* Proposed definition for PTSD

Elements of traumatization

1. An event

2. A meaning

3. Brain Panorama

4. Perception of impossibility to escape.



Elements of traumatization

1. An event: be a part, witness, or someone tells us about a traumatic event.

2. A meaning:
innate or learnt by the person,
and generates an emotional
response.

The meaning depends on our level
of attachment or threat of loss.



Possible loss includes:

A. Physical: life, mental or physical health, losing
and organ or part of body.

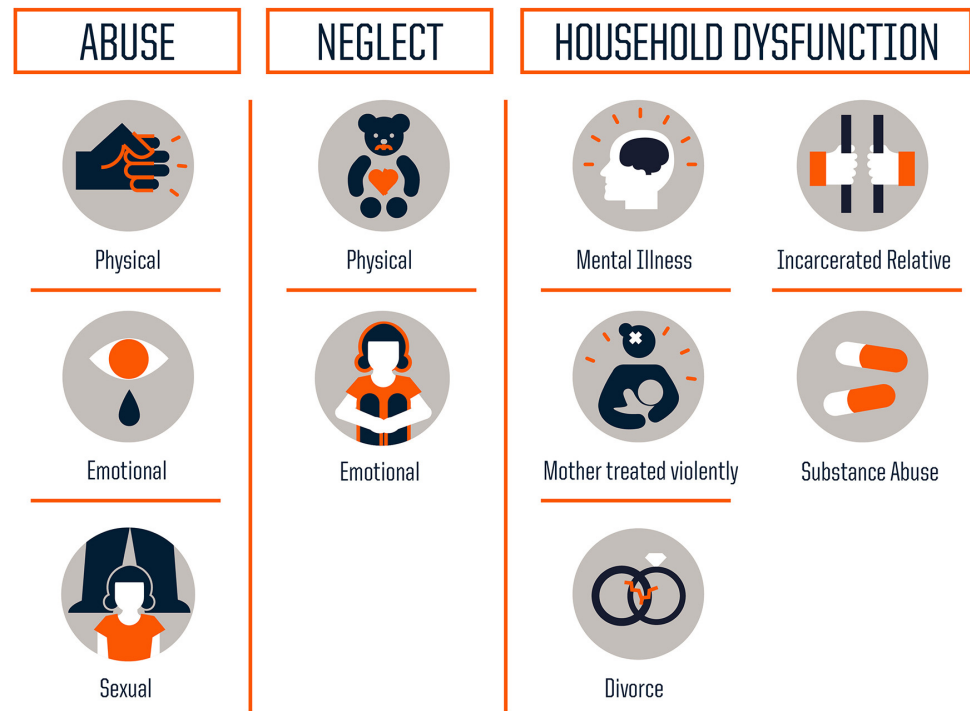
B. Personal: family unit, friendship, relatives,
work companions, religion, possessions, mascots,
combat unit.

C. Public: Prestige, cultural identity, reputation, country.

Elements of traumatization

3. Brain panorama:

It is the sum of inherent temperament, sensitivity towards stress generators and previous and current experiences.



Adverse childhood experiences (ACE)

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/riskprotectivefactors.html>



Vulnerable

- Excessive empathy
- Low self esteem
- Difficulties with emotional regulation
- Acute stress: Work related, school, worries, relationships.
- Chronic stress: poverty, disability, illness, pain
- Context stress: Lack of education, adverse experiences at childhood.

Brain panorama can be:



Resilient

- Good intellectual functioning, regulates emotional reactions
- Adequate attachment behaviors
 - Active problem resolution
- Sensation of being under control: moderate needs and desires

4. Perception that it is impossible to escape

- Overwhelming
- Incredible
- Unbearable
- Trapped
- Unbearable
- Unexplainable
- Trapped
- Powerless
- Unsecure
- Lost
- Abandoned



Elements of traumatization

How is it experienced?



- Dissociation or disconnection of body and mind (protection mechanism)
- Compulsion to repeat, trying to get a different result and dominate situation.
- Phobias, somatization, chronic pain, panic attacks, depression, inherited disorders, pathological emotions, substance abuse and addictions.

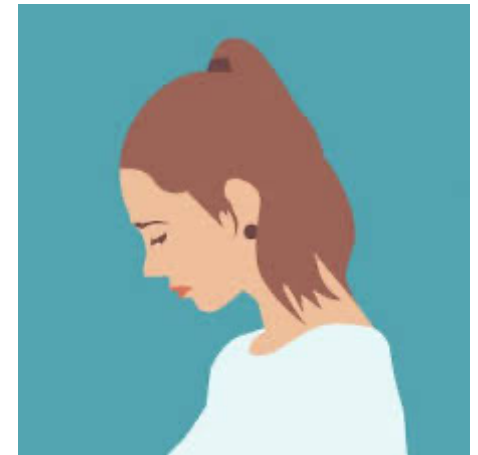
**Defensive and irritable,
energized with risk.**



**Anesthesia or emotional
paralysis.**

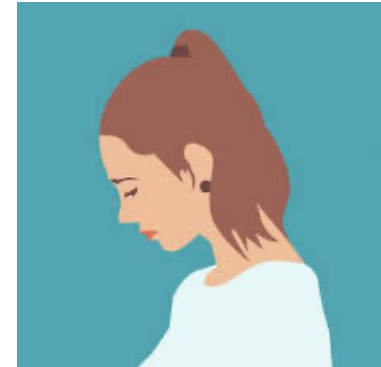
- Generating exaggerated emotional and physical protection (stress hormones) and hypervigilance.
- Energy is focused in suppressing internal chaos and fear, in maintaining control.
- Physical exhaustion (fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, autoimmune illnesses, headaches, muscle ache, constipation)
- Protection from flashbacks and triggers by taking risks, or feeling energized with panic attacks, or exhausting themselves, feeling depressed or hiding from themselves.

Reactions



Challenges

- Difficulty to communicate what happens to her. Helplessness, fear of fear.
- Difficulty to concentrate or execute tasks, distinguishing between danger and no danger.
- Loss of capacity to love and other feelings such as feeling pleasure, imagine, plan, play, learn and think of other peoples needs.
- Difficulty to integrate new experiences in their lives and develop.
- Loss of the sense of life and purpose, cant take decisions because sensations are overwhelming.



- Emotional abuse and neglect in early childhood is as traumatic as physical and sexual violence.
- Children learn that nothing that they do (express terror, cry, beg) will register in their caretakers (distant mothers) and will bring them attention or help.
- They are being conditioned to give up later in life.
- They lose their capacity to synchronize socially and regulate their feelings (with family, friends, work).
- Suicide attempts and harm to themselves.

Additional difficulties:
Neglect and abandonment
in childhood



Effects of traumatization

It interferes in all the basic functions of a human being:

1. Generate internal signals to register what the body needs:
Food, rest, protection, sex, shelter.
2. Create a map of the world to signal how to solve these needs.
3. Generate the energy and actions needed to get them solved.
4. Warn on dangers and opportunities on the way
5. Adjust actions based on the requirements of the moment





Pimps – Traffickers

Mind Control Techniques

- Social isolation
- Social deprivation/torture
- Deliberately induced exhaustion and physical debilitation
- Threats to oneself and to one's family
- Occasional reprieves and indulgences
- Posturing as omnipotent, degradation, enforcing capricious rules
- Deliberate creation of dissociated parts of the self who happily and willingly prostitute
- Induced drugging and forced addiction
- Forced pregnancy

Prostitutional System



Demand: Sex buyers



Supply: Women & Girls



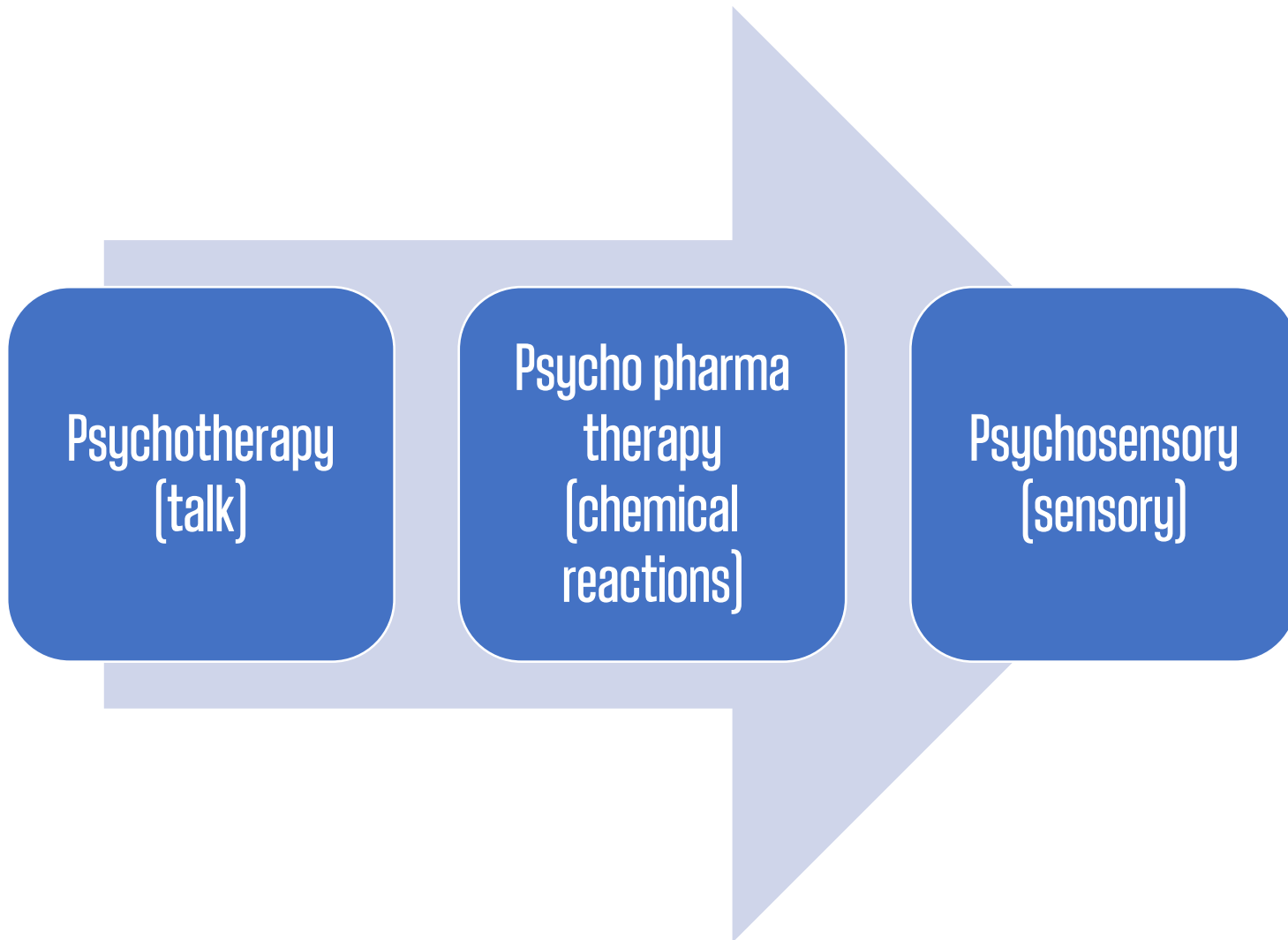
Pimps and traffickers are experts in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and make themselves indispensable to profit from it

Lessons from science



- Neuroscience: impact of trauma in the brain, reaction of the amygdala.
- Epigenetics: intergenerational trauma (predisposition)
- Pharmacology: blocks the dopamine system and interferes in some feelings, does not solve the underlying causes.
- Psychotherapy: limitations and retraumatization if not in a safe place.

Lessons from science





**The challenge is not do accept
terrible events,
but to dominate internal
and overwhelming
sensations and emotions.**

Important!



Women must participate in their own healing process.



If the mother heals, she can protect and heal her children

Many cultures have developed techniques to strengthen physical, mental and emotional resilience.

Others, are being designed and practiced recently.



Psychosensory techniques teach self regulation and the capacity to observe oneself serenely and then integrate traumatic memories.

1. Find a way to be serene and focused.
2. Be calm when thoughts, sounds, images and physical sensations which remind the past.
3. Find a way to be ALIVE in the present and connect to those around.
4. Not keep secrets from oneself, including those which allowed for survival.
5. Confront them later, in a safe place.



Learn to feel the wide variety of emotions

Traumatized women only feel fear (to protect themselves) and anger (to cope)

NON Specific Psychosensory Techniques



- 1. Movement and representation:** Rhythm, song, dance, theatre, art therapy, tai chi, qigong, martial arts. They stimulate connection with oneself and others, social synchrony, communal rhythms, happiness, exploration and reciprocity.
- 2. Yoga and meditation:** They stimulate and regulate breathing and heart beats, capacity to manage tension and relaxation, listen to the body, look within, feel changes in the body as transitory experiences.
- 3. Positive programming:** Neurofeedback, havening, mindfulness and others help program positive thoughts, resilience, install optimism and hope.

Specific Psychosensory Techniques



- 1. Physical therapies:** Massages (Tibetan, Ayurvedic, Chinese), craniosacral therapy, Feldenkrais, acupuncture, reflexology, emotional freedom technique, reiki, aromatherapy, grounding. They stimulate the connection with oneself, experience relaxation, reduce somatization of trauma and pain, release, reduce inflammation.
- 2. EMDR and TFT Tapping:** It allows to observe experiences and reorganize those which have not been processed, in order to interpret reality. It takes care of irrelevant material, phobias, as REM sleep does.
- 3. Havening Techniques:** Simple firm and maternal contact that produces delta waves which alter the chemistry of the brain, cutting the connection between emotions and triggers, from the traumatic memory.

Other key holistic practices



- **Strengthening the health of the brain:** Sleep well, eat well, complement with vitamins and minerals, good physical activity to balance the brain and burn toxins. Reception of delta (healing) waves present in nature, music, art and fun activities.
- **Spiritual and social strengthening:** Spiritual practices offer a feeling of belonging and purpose of life, and creates a network of support.
- **Empowerment** derived political advocacy and networking helps give a meaning to suffering and the possibility to help others a sense of purpose.



- The more techniques, the better
- Some healing techniques are more effective in some women than others
- Each woman is a whole new world
- A network of support is better

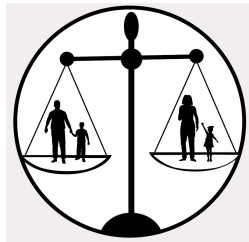
Hypothesis:
Concentrating on healing
traumatization will improve
all other initiatives to lead
a life away from the
prostitutional system and
further victimization



Challenges are enormous:

- Leaving the prostitutorial-debt system (rescuing them from criminal networks)
- Disconnecting from their families which are part of the prostitutorial system
- Leaving the apparent "ego" retributions of sex buyer attention
- Having a safe space
- Living in uncertainty and/or living with other women
- Having a committed and emotionally strong team to work with them
- Prioritizing and meeting all their external needs (children also)
- Trusting themselves (they deserve to heal) to start new ways to live
- Understanding how to protect their children

In paralel we must work against structural causes



A. Socioeconomic justice



B. Promotion of Safe migration framework



C. Discourage the demand



D. Confront conflict and humanitarian crisis situations



E. Combat the use of digital technology in trafficking

To reduce victimization and need for healing...

Sources

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