

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CLIENTS WHO WERE TREATED WITH EMDR THERAPY IN HUMANITARIAN NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLD WIDE IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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SUMMARY

Introduction: Mental health services after the war 1992-1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B-H) are primarily reduced to the public care, though, there are not enough professionals in existing conditions, and they are not able to respond to cover all the cases. This leaves the room to non governmental organizations (NGO) and private mental health care professionals in providing psycho-social services to vulnerable populations. Islamic Relief World Wide (IRWW), United Kingdom (UK) based humanitarian organisation, whose personal working within Orphans department, took part in this mission to contribute B-H citizens wellbeing.

IRWW in B-H, since 2013 successfully provided psycho-social and EMDR psychotherapy services and help throughout its projects primarily designed for orphans, widows and socially endangered population. All EMDR therapies were delivered from the first author of this presentation.

Aim: Our aim is to present socio demographic characteristics of clients seeking psychological support and help in IR WW B-H who were treated with EMDR therapy.

Methods: We did overview of protocols for the clients to whom we helped by using standardised EMDR protocols.

Results: In the period from 2013 to 2017, we used EMDR protocols for 154 clients: 122 (79.2%) were females, 130 (84.4%) were adults (25- 56 years old), 21 (13.6%) adolescents (13-25 years) and 3 (1.95%) school children. In terms of their socio-economic status 54 (35.1%) clients were employed, 42 (27.3%) unemployed and 19 (12.3%) from socially endangered category. There were 30 (19.5%) university students, 55 (35.7%) were with university degree, 63 (40.9%) with high school education, 5 (3.3%) with primary school. Therapy type (completed, ongoing, incomplete), primary complains or reasons for seeking therapy, diagnoses and number of EMDR therapy sessions offered, will be addressed too.

Conclusion: Our results showed that EMDR therapy is very useful in helping to B-H population in very difficult post-war conditions for the wide varieties of clients.

Key words: Bosnia and Herzegovina - EMDR therapy - socio-demographic characteristics

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INTRODUCTION

The need for mental health care and support is growing as time passes in Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) thus it is a post war country facing new hardships on a daily basis, due to poverty, difficult economic and social development, unemployment, hopeless political situation, etc. Mental health services after the 1992-1995 war in B&H are primarily reduced to the public care, though, there is no enough professionals in existing conditions, and they are not able to respond to cover all the cases. Professional help in B&H is usually provided within mental health services (primarily covered by psychiatric care), which was used to be fairly developed before, (psychiatric hospitals and small neuropsychiatric wards within general hospitals) quite under the need of reconstruction now (Cerić et al. 2001). With joint forces after a number of local institutions and experts (B&H Ministry of health, Psychiatry clinic, mental health care centers) and international ones, such as World Health Organization (WHO), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Swedish East European Committee (SEEC), Health Net International

(Netherlands), engaged in mutual cooperation came to assist in reconstructing services and training professionals (Lagerkvist et al. 2013). Unfortunately, B&H still lacks systematic long term solution and support to resolve many problems which bother B&H society. Also, there is a lack of adequate projects and assistance that would monitor the long-term consequences of the war, especially if we consider possible war aftermath and a relatively small number of people seeking professional help. In terms of individuals suffering with war related traumas and PTSD, they can seek psychiatric help within public mental health care units. Although we do know exact number of people who need psycho-social assistance and support, considering all we assume large numbers. Public health care centers and professionals complain about the huge pressure and large number of patients they see daily and lack of adequate support to respond to all.

Even though there is significant number of different psychotherapy directions in B&H (Hasanović et al. 2017), there is room to nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and private mental health care professionals to provide psycho-social services to vulnerable popula-

tions. Islamic Relief World Wide (IRWW), United Kingdom (UK) based humanitarian organization, whose personnel is working with vulnerable and endangered populations, took part in this mission to contribute to B&H citizens' wellbeing. The idea of developing the specific project of psychological support „Pass it Forward” (PF) has emerged from field work. Cooperation between departments within Islamic Relief (IR) Bosnia has enabled a new quality of insight into the reality of lives of the most vulnerable categories of Bosnian society. Orphan department data base, with more than 1400 orphan families, gave us insight into the real problems and issues this population is facing. PF is a project developed to enable people from lower and middle classes to access mental health care services, otherwise very expensive for them, completely pro bono or to donate to humanitarian organization as much as they can afford. With primary aim to help individuals with psychosocial disturbances and difficulties to recover and restore their coping capacity; get back to their families, workplaces and wider society as effective and functional individuals.

AIM

The aim of this study is to present socio demographic characteristics of clients seeking psychological support and help in IR WW B&H who were treated with EMDR therapy.

METHODS

Analysis and overview of protocols of client's who sought treatment in IRWW, who we helped, using standardized EMDR protocols.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the period from 2013 to 2017, 154 clients of different socio-demographic background came to seek help and assistance, offered in IRWW „Pass it forward” project. Although, the project itself was primarily designed for endangered population (operational definition of endangered population, as primary IRWW beneficiary, means, socially disadvantaged, unemployed, disabled, below the poverty line, orphans, widows, war veterans or any war related victim/survivor), whose monthly income does not exceed 370 KM. Having in mind not so bright current situation in B&H (Hasanović et al. 2006, Hasanović & Herenda 2008, Hasanović 2011), high divorce rate (Draganović 2015); IRWW is actively working towards reaching to divorcees and incomplete families. However, primary targeted clients were difficult to motivate to come for therapy and psychological help, even though they seek IRWW B&H support through other project, this project did not appeal to them that much, due to various reasons.

Table 1. Frequency of clients (n=154) who were treated with EMDR therapy according to socio-demographic categories

Category	Number	%
Gender		
Females	122	79.20
Males	32	20.80
Age		
Children	3	0.95
Adolescents	25	3.60
Adults	126	84.40
Current status		
Employed	66	27.30
Unemployed	52	72.70
Students/pupils	35	19.50
Educational Level		
No education	0	0.00
Primary sch.	7	3.30
High sch.	81	55.80
Faculty/master/PhD	66	40.90
Social category		
Endangered	19	12.30
Others	135	87.70

On one hand, there is a lack of mental health knowledge, awareness and strongly rooted and present stigma towards seeking psychological assistance. On the other hand, the same arguments and reasons which targeted IRWW “Pass it forward” project population used in order to avoid seeking help, the ones that did, actually used to do so. Mainly, IRWW, as humanitarian organization, offers private, away from official mental health care centers, which are primarily diagnostic, testing and overcrowded places (too many patients in a day), offering them feelings of strong privacy and quality individual, respecting care, in terms of the approach itself as well as the therapy session time. At the same time, private psychological services are not affordable, not only to the socially endangered population but neither to working people or students. Table 1, shows basic socio demographic data of clients who came for EMDR therapy to IRWW within „Pass it forward” project.

As we can see from the table above, out of total 154 clients: 122 (79.2%) were females, 130 (84.4%) were adults (25- 56 years old), 21 (3.6%) adolescents (13-25 years) and 3 (0.95%) school children. In terms of their socio-economic status 54 (35.1%) clients were employed, 42 (27.3%) unemployed and 19 (12.3%) of the clients come from socially endangered category. Looking from the point of educational level 30 (19.5%) clients are currently students/pupils, 55 (35.7%) were with university degree, 63 (40.9%) with high school education, 5 (3.3%) with primary school.

In terms of the therapy type (completed, ongoing, incomplete), most of the clients (48.7%) fully and successfully completed therapy process. The table 2 will show detailed picture of therapy type.

Table 2. Frequency of clients who were treated with EMDR therapy according the level of completion

Therapy type	Number of clients	%
Completed	75	48.7
Ongoing	33	21.4
Partially completed	28	1.9
Not completed	18	11.7

As we can see from the Table 2, there are 33 clients who are still receiving EMDR therapy. Some of them are in the therapy process for years due to the complexity of the problems for which they seek the treatment. Because, the nature of their problems necessitates long term therapy, and the Project, offers them exactly that. Meaning, considering all the already mentioned, as well as therapy costs in B&H, they would not otherwise be regular and persistent in therapy, which is necessary condition for successful therapy outcome (treatment and cure). Regarding partially completed therapy, although a small number (1.9%) of them, stopped coming to therapy after a session or two, it is important to explain the reasons behind. Some of the clients, whom we found not motivated, perhaps were wrongly assessed by the therapist. Some of them initially came out of curiosity, or false belief that their issues will be resolved mostly by the therapist herself, after a session or two, or become frightened by severity of emotional pain they experience. And some of them gave up therapy after experiencing inevitable initial symptoms' relief (emotionally or otherwise), or when they face difficulty and complexity of their deeply rooted issues. However, some return after symptoms reappear again or after a while, when they realize, that one or two therapy sessions (history taking, safe place or recourse installing) were beneficial to them. More or less the same can be stated for the category of „not completed” therapy clients. However, we did not investigate their reasons behind these decisions.

Fortunately, a significant number of clients successfully and fully completed EMDR therapy. This means, their symptoms were completely relieved and they are now fully recovered and functioning members of their families and B&H society.

It is important to highlight though, that this project leaves an opportunity to all clients who finished therapy process, to return again (if necessary) for support by all means whether it be EMDR psychotherapy or counseling.

In terms of the most common reasons the client's stated for seeking therapy, the spectrum is very wide, starting from apparently common physical complaints such as headaches and pains, through marital and relationship issues, to serious psychological disorders and suicidal thoughts and attempts. However, during the therapy process, therapist diagnosed more deeper and complex issues underlying client's reasons for symptoms development. Based on the experience, we came to

conclusion that the underlying problems are mostly concentrated around early childhood trauma and attachment issues, dysfunctional parents, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

All EMDR therapies were delivered by the first author of this article.

CONCLUSION

Our results showed that EMDR therapy may be very useful in helping B&H citizens in very difficult post-war conditions to the wide varieties of clients. The activities of the PF Project were planned to give focus on orphans, their families, socially endangered population which are target group of Islamic Reliefs' general activities and projects. However due to strongly present stigma related to mental health and lack of basic mental health knowledge, psychological disorders and possible other reasons, targeted population was not motivated enough to participate and follow up therapy process. Unexpectedly, the Project was supportive to beneficiaries from other, less-vulnerable layers of society who sought therapy and counseling.

Still present unresolved war related traumas (ongoing without treatment for decades) and current bad socio-political and economic conditions in B&H and region continue to deepen the problems in B&H society (Trans-generational and complex traumas). This article demonstrates the need for EMDR as, not only effective and intensive therapy method but also an affordable one, which is effective therapy treatment for trauma related disorders and providing hope for the better future.

Regardless, the absence of reported war related issues among our clients, we think they could possibly be present in a form of clients somatic complaints, or clients find it too painful so they avoid even remembering and talking about the war, or their defense mechanisms are strong, or clients simply have “it is over, I am OK now, I am not crazy” attitude towards war related problems.

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Contribution of individual authors:

All authors contributed equally to this manuscript.

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