

A PRELIMINARY PROGRAM FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE:
“ *A TRUCE FOR VENEZUELAN* ”

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ABSTRACT

A framework for the prevention of violence in Caracas, Venezuela is described using behavioral-cognitive interventions and social learning approaches was applied to a large group setting. A survey study, which measured mood and behavior with a 10 items questionnaire indicates symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder and depression.

Intervention strategies included workshops on *Progressive Muscular Relaxation; Assertion Training; Anger Control* and *Self-efficacy*. Information for the consumer in these workshops was supported by four (4) respective 30” television spots, 2’minute radio spots and frequent interviews with the local press, the radio and television talk shows.

This preliminary Venezuelan violence project has implications not only for the need of disseminating evidence based strategies, but also on the study for future work to be delineated both in research and practice of behavioral and cognitive psychotherapy.

Keywords: Behavioral and cognitive psychotherapy, social learning theories, violence, evidence based strategies, television, radio, press.

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More than 80% of violence is learned behavior and it can be unlearned; we learn angry behavior by observation and imitation, therefore it is preventable. (Bandura, 1997)

Likewise anger behaviors can be learned by direct reinforcement; imitation of models anti-heroes, movies, video games; psychosocial factors such as low self-esteem low parental rejection, inefficient parent discipline, physical punishment, academic failure (Kort, 2007)

We watch, read and navigate in the social media a parade of bizarre, extreme acts serial killings, celebrity assassinations, genocidal wars but failing to notice the widespread of behavioral disorders, addictions and inequities that are the real news.

Although we know that change of this state of affairs is needed prevention efforts are still far too weak.

Violence begins with insolent language and offensive gestures, threats follow, maltreatment escalates and individual or collective homicides are the verdict. Just as in physics energy is the center, in violence power is core in detriment against the will of the other.

Violence instigates violence. It is a contagious and contaminant public epidemic which respects no borders, no occupations, no cultures, no incomes.

Procedures and Results

- 1) A brief psychological survey to assess psychological wellbeing and emotional symptoms . A questionnaire with 8 items is divided as follows: two questions each which measure anxiety, depression, and anger symptoms respectively, then one measures levels of happiness, and one measures expectations in respect to the future of Venezuela.

N = 880 Female 67.5%; Male 31.59% - Results of the survey revealed some distinctive features: 62% reported ignoring conflicts ; common responses are : leaving the country, having no interest in politics, and avoiding reading, watching or listening to the news.: 38% report

worries; 20% physical malaise; and 20% psychological tension. On the other hand 52% report general happiness compared with 89% of happiness.

2) Distribution of 80,000 flyers (*see appendix*) which describe behavioral and cognitive interventions for behavior change . Contents of the flyers are the same behavioral strategies to be used in the workshops.

Distribution includes subway exits, psychiatric/mental health centers, and locations where the four workshops are held. Focus groups in the poor housing areas of Caracas confirmed the easy text contents of the flyers.

3) Likewise 1500 posters are distributed in strategic points of the city. Contents of the posters is the same as the flyers in order to maintain familiarization with interventions : *Relaxation, Assertion Training, Anger Management, and Self-Efficacy* . Allocation of posters is in public areas such as shopping malls, museums, theaters and subway entrances.

4) During 6 months 80 workshops with 323 participants are held throughout Caracas's community. Duration of workshops is 3 hours and leaders are the author and three licenced psychologists trained in behavioral and cognitive psychotherapy.

Participants are mostly residents of the areas in which workshops are taking place.

Method

Behavioral and cognitive interventions at the workshops is composed of:

a. *Progressive Muscle Relaxation* with theory and “in vivo” practice accompanied by a relaxation CD which describes muscle relaxation, differential relaxation and pleasant visualization (Kort, 2007) Anxiety levels are measured pre and post, with 80% of participants reporting improved relaxation.

b. *Assertion Training* following Salter's theory and practice of role playing (Salter, A 1949)

c. *Anger Management* uses the treatment guide book on “Anger Management (Kassinove and Tafrate , 2002)

d. *Self-efficacy* is presented with emphasis on collective efficacy. (Bandura, 1997)

Media

Exceptionally the grant approves the production of four (4) 30-second television spots to be presented in six television channels in Caracas and two television channels in two other cities of Venezuela: Porlamar and Barquisimeto. Topics are the same as the workshops and flyers,: “Relajación” “Comunicación” “Ira” “Autoeficacia” (www.felicitaskort.com) The objective is to reinforce information, to facilitate observational learning of interventions which show how to cope with anger management , therefore, mental health. Positive responses and feedback to these television spots can be measured by numerous interviews in press, radio, television and phone calls inquiring about the project.

A weekly one hour long radio program entitled “Habits and Inhabitants”aired for 12 weeks at prime time. Target audience is the general public i.e. workers and housewives who travel home in peak hour traffic hours. Prevention of violence is discussed in the radio program together with other NGO’s who run non behavioral programs on the prevention of violence. It included extended interviews with policy makers and leaders of the venezuelan community.

Discussion

Violence prevention is most successful if scientifically based.

Behavioral and cognitive strategies (Novaco, 1979; Feindler, E, 1995) teach Anger Control Training through self-assessment and role playing; thus adolescents can learn to negotiate conflict constructively and extend it to real life situations.

Undoubtedly collective efficacy (Bandura, 1997) via soap operas, social media and collective actions are tools to reduce glorification of violence, in hand with public discourses describing images and graphic stories of non-violent heroes .

All of the above can help transform the culture of death to the culture of care.

It is clear that inaction and silence of today will rebound in attitudes and violent behaviors of tomorrow.

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Flyers A Truce for Venezuelans

Front: Communication

Comunicación

¡Cualquier persona con la que te encuentres ahora puedes convertirla en un libro de Sabiduría y conocimiento!

CON TRES ACCIONES CLARAS Y PRECISAS:

- 1 ¡ESCUCHAR!** De la misma forma en que te permites leer algo para conocer y aprender de lo que allí está escrito, "Escuchar" a alguien es el primer paso para el "comunicar", ya que eso nos permitirá "conocer" a esa persona y así tenernos de nuevas ideas que no sean sólo las nuestras.
- 2 ¡HABLAR!** Hablar es un don exclusivo y excepcional, ya que los animales no hablan, así que sería horrible desperdiciar las palabras, teniendo el privilegio de tenerlas. Así que cuando hablamos debemos estar "Alertas" porque estamos haciendo uso de un "Don" que no todos los seres tienen. Por eso "Hablar", debe ser una acto de "placer" y "alegría", lleno además de una profunda satisfacción. Yyyyyy.....
- 3 ¡COMPRENDER!** En la medida en que escuchemos y hablemos, "Comprendiendo" al otro, sin interrumpir, sin juzgar y entendiendo que lo que le sucede ahora a esa persona puede sucederme a mí mañana, hace que la comunicación exista. Ponerse en el lugar del otro es ideal para ser abierto en lo que "Escuchas" y en lo que "Hablas". Porque la Libertad de Pensamiento es lo más sano que puede existir entre dos personas.

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Asociación Venezolana para el Avance de la Ciencia de Comportamiento

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convierte tu alrededor y tu interior en un sitio **Muy Agradable**

Relajación

¡Cualquier lugar en el que te encuentres ahora puedes convertirlo en un espacio agradable y placentero!

la Tolerancia detiene la Ira

¡Cualquier situación que te moleste, puedes convertirla en un maravilloso acto de comprensión!

Auto Eficacia

¡Cualquier duda que tengas de tí mismo y tus capacidades ,puedes convertirla en un reto fuerte y poderoso para superarte!

Same flyer (back) Relaxaiton Tolerance stops anger Self-efficacy