

Group psychotherapy for couples as an intervention model in a tertiary institute

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Original article

SUMMARY

At the National Institute of Perinatology, one line of psychological work on clinical research is the study and treatment of patients with couple relation problems, so as to generate strategies of intervention based on such research.

Objective

To identify risk indicators along the process of a psychotherapy group within the institution.

Material and method

The qualitative-interpretative method was followed. The sessions, in an open group form, had a weekly schedule and lasted two hours each. Attendance ranged between eight and twelve participants. Thirty five sessions were analyzed with the content analysis method.

Results

The mean age was 32.3 years for women and 35.1 for men. The information was systematized using some parts of the most significant stories. The indicators found among women were: feelings of powerlessness and seclusion, affective distancing from their couples, confusion about the origin of the relationship conflicts between external and internal sources, violent or confounding communication, submissive or explosive character, resentment due to the perceived indifference of their couples towards them, precedents of sexual abuse which preclude a satisfactory development of couple relationships, guilt and resentment or anger feelings aimed at their parents. The indicators in men were: feelings of powerlessness and seclusion due to the control exerted by their couples, violent behaviors in domestic environments, excessively demanding and persecution conducts, difficulties in the process of individualisation and unsettled conflicts with their primary figures which prevent a satisfactory relationship from developing.

Conclusions

Marital problems deeply disturb the affective life of people and have familial and social consequences. This paper renders an incursion into the comprehension of a few facts from this constellation, intent on attaining a more specific planning of the treatments for people who suffer from marital conflicts.

Key words: Couple problems, group psychotherapy, risk indicators.

RESUMEN

Una línea de investigación clínica de Psicología en el Instituto Nacional de Perinatología, es el estudio y atención a las pacientes con problema de pareja, para generar estrategias de intervención basadas en la investigación clínica.

Objetivo

Detectar indicadores de riesgo en un proceso de psicoterapia de grupo institucional.

Material y método

Se utilizó el método cualitativo-interpretativo. Las sesiones se llevan a cabo una vez a la semana, con dos horas de duración, en grupo abierto, con una fluctuación de entre ocho y 12 participantes. Se analizaron 35 sesiones con análisis de contenido.

Resultados

La edad promedio fue de 32.3 años para las mujeres y de 35.1 para los hombres, la sistematización de la información obtenida se realizó con las partes de los relatos más significativos. Algunos indicadores encontrados en las mujeres fueron: sensación de impotencia y atrapamiento, distanciamiento afectivo de su pareja, confusión al no ubicar si los conflictos en la relación son externos o internos, la comunicación es violenta o confusa, o son sumisas o son explosivas, hay resentimiento por percibir indiferencia de su pareja, hay relatos de abuso sexual que dificulta un desarrollo satisfactorio de la vida en pareja, culpa, resentimientos e ira hacia sus padres. En los hombres hay atrapamiento e impotencia por un control desmedido que ejerce su pareja hacia ellos, ejercen actos violentos en el ámbito doméstico, son muy exigentes y persecutorios, con dificultad en el proceso de individuación, conflictos no resueltos con sus figuras primarias, imposibilitan una relación satisfactoria.

Conclusiones

Los problemas maritales afectan profundamente la vida afectiva de las personas con consecuencias familiares y sociales. Este trabajo es una incursión para entender una pequeña parte de lo que incluye este universo y poder ser más específicos en los planes de tratamiento de las personas que sufren conflictos maritales.

Palabras clave: Problema de pareja, psicoterapia de grupo, indicadores de riesgo.

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INTRODUCTION

During the recent decades there has happened an undeniable development in the realm of Psychology and one of the major current issues is the implementation of clinical practice in accordance with the ensuing findings. The people that recur to non-psychiatric institutions for clinical care is by no means exempt from psychological ailments which may obstruct their treatment; thus, our proposal is to bestow comprehensive care upon the patients, according to the precise needs of the population being assisted in each institution.

This very proposal arose within the Department of Psychology at the National Perinatology Institute "Isidro Espinosa de los Reyes" (INPer). The Institute is devoted to the treatment of reproductive and perinatal problems. The psychological research conducted there aims, fundamentally, at the clinical care for those patients who should require it.

Medical care and clinical observation are the sources for the topics of research which will undergo development and upon whose findings new intervention techniques may be devised; this also allows for higher precision and quality in psychological care, given that the main objective of clinical investigation is the improvement of the quality in the interventions performed.

Throughout the programmes and research lines, couple and human sexuality problems are observed because of the great demand from patients who suffer from ailments belonging to this area. Work on this programme is covers two stages: The first consists in bestowing attention on all those patients who claim as their main psychological problem a couple issue. The second is having such care as the basis for investigation guidelines. The assistance for the patients, their partners or couples themselves consists of diagnosis and treatment planning; their admission into a psychotherapy group of the institution; the group is an open one and its labour is continuous. This is intended for patients who should require therapy, appart from the reproductive disorder which led them to the institute (INPer). The advances of Psychology in the field of health care have rendered the institutional group psychotherapy one of the most recurred forms of intervention for to settle psychological conflicts, which in turn may range from mild to severe and have an impact on the quality of their lives. It may be the case that the patient suffers from some mental or personality disorder, diagnosed according to the criteria established in the DSM-IV-TR,¹ and that they require a combined treatment (appart from group psychotherapy, another psychiatric or parallel treatment, as in the case of drug addictions). It is also one means of treatment for couples that display interaction and psychological problems, either caused or worsened by the physical ailment. The group of couples is useful for the analysis of the unsatisfying models which any of the members may have acquired in the past and how these latter interact across their current situation, thus obtaining unique characteristics.

OBJECTIVE

To identify risk indicators related to the presence of marital dissatisfaction, exhibited as couple problems during their taking part in a group psychotherapy process. This shall be an option of psychological treatment, at the Psychology service instance of INPer, for patients who may require it, besides their physical treatment.

The precise objectives are as follows:

1. To differentiate current indicators, either internal (arising from the inherent dynamics of the couple) and external (engendered by other familial systems) which influence the occurrence of couple problems.
2. To identify indicators of factors which determined the unsatisfactory development of their couple relationship.
3. To identify elements inside the nucleus of the familial dynamics of each one which affect their current life in couple.

It is relevant to define the field of health care psychology which is our basis for the assistance bestowed on whom-ever may require it; therefore we suggest this definition: It is a branch of Psychology which performs research, diagnosis and treatment on the psychological disorders related to the shaping of the psychical life of the person and their interaction with the social environment (subjectivity), which may show through processes that range from common emotional responses to psychopathological processes developed during the construction of their psychical life, since the early stages of life and not arising from physiological nor organic disturbances.²

EQUIPMENT AND METHOD

The qualitative-interpretative and exploratory method has been used for this instance. The qualitative studies are centred around the processes rather than the isolated behaviours; this perspective allows us to become aware of the complex interaction among cultural values, social norms and familial and individual experience inside the life of the couple.³

Contextual facts

The setting is the Gesell chamber of the Department of Psychology at INPer, a special facility of the Institute; this acomodates an open group of uninterrupted labour, given the demand of the patients. The group readily incorporates the new members into its functioning, thus fostering a better progress. The sessions were scheduled weekly, lasting two hours each one, and were conducted by a psychotherapist (whose labour within the Institution is to develop the Human Sexuality and Couple Programme in three levels: assistance -group therapy treatment-; teaching and research) with an attendance of between 10 and 14 participants.

Participants

The patients, some of them with their couples, are referred to the Psychology Service in three manners: first, on request by themselves; second, because the personnel in another area has detected some psychological ailment and third, because this latter has been identified through any protocol belonging to this programme and that, besides the participation of the patients during the reasearch, need clinical care. Every patient must fulfill the following criteria of admission:

1. Being patients registered into INPer, older than 22 years in age.
2. That the reason for referring them to the psychological service be, as the main psychical disorder, couple problems, notwithstanding the causes for them to have recurred to this institution.
3. That they bear, as a minimum, one full year into couple life, disregarding the marital status.
4. That, if she suffers from a grave personality disorder or mental disease, besides the couple problems, she must accept the complementary parts of an integral treatment by consultation at the Psychiatry or Neurology service instances or at a private institution.
5. Couples shall be admitted, though also shall be any patient who fulfills the criteria, even when, for any given circumstance or reason, their partner may not (or does not want to) attend the sessions.

Procedures

The Department of Psychology registers a clinical record, together with diagnosis, prognosis and treatment planning, referring the adequate patients to the psychotherapy group. The letter of informed consent is delivered to them, in accordance with the ethical requirements of the institution, and their approval is requested for the Geslel chamber observer to keep a written record of every session.

The patients (men and women) shall be nominated for the couple group considering their disposition toward psychotherapeutic work in which the framing and group techniques are combined.⁴

Psychotherapy in health care institutions

At INPer the treatment by means of group psychotherapy has proved to be efficient and practical; the choice of this model and its exploration is a consequence of several factors: the demand on the side of the patients, the timing of work inside the institution and the costs.⁵ The efficacy of group psychotherapy resides in the importance which the interpersonal relations bear for the psychical development.⁶ It is an efficacious instrument oriented toward the comprehension and correction of interpersonal distortions. It is also useful for the management of psychological conflict arisen

from the couple relation, considering results already obtained in investigations along these lines. The main objective is to deal with the elements of dissatisfaction that each member perceives and expounds, as well as some components acquired in the past which influence in some manner the current couple relation, therefore bearing unique traits which drive psychopathological processes (causes of pain and suffering), components of the interaction. The technique employed is the one of group psychotherapy, in which the group is pondered as a whole, without minimising the individual elements that must be considered for the process of the group and which shall be dealt with by the psychotherapist in their full liberty of individual intervention, keeping in sight the group process.^{7,8} The usage of this psychplogical instrument has permitted the care of patients with diverse ailments with a common trait: couple problems; though also exhibiting psychological conflicts and disturbances. The latter may have multiple manifestations and, in spite of seeming alike, they bear different etiologies. The intensity of the symptoms, as well as the duration and frequency may be different. These conflicts may have their source in the past or present time and may or may not be classified within mental or personality disorders. This is the point at which the therapeutic planning with combined treatments for some patients is pondered; they require, besides group psychotherapy, psychiatric or neurologic care, or group treatment, as for the case of addictions.

Axes of the therapeutic labour

The therapist's assessment, after tracing the conflict, is rendered in two levels:

1. It happens in the reality.
2. It is an interpretation of the reality.

The intervention unfolds at several levels:

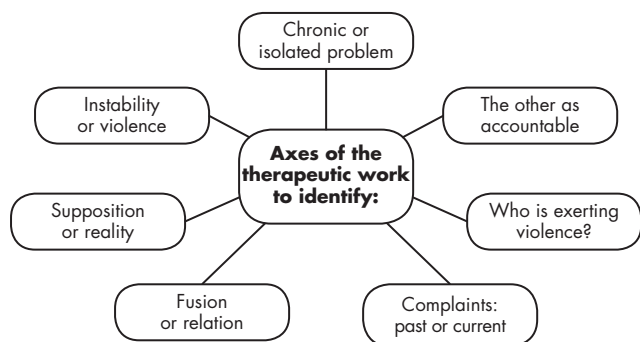
1. To define the structure of the couple.
2. To work on the dynamics of the couple.
3. To analyse each group session as a whole; yet, paying attention to the most significant foci among the patients.

Aim

To reintegrate the couple into their relation or attain a less destructive separation; to reach a clearer differentiation, a transit from blaming into reflection.

Methodological devices

35 group sessions were analysed, along a period of six months, through the content analysis method for the identification of indicators in each session, based on the thematic guide of the precise objectives, which are the outcome of the saturation of three aspects: the theoretical ones, detected through the systematised research of couple problems;⁹ the



ones observed during clinical practice and the repetition of indicators among the participants, from which the considered categories arose.

Planning of the information analysis

Content analysis was utilised with an empirical and exploratory approach to categorise what was most important and recurrent in each session. The strategy of the method was realised by establishing concepts and order among the ideas, which were organised by observing two basic guidelines:¹⁰ a) firstly, there is an open system of categories, a field text; b) a second text is rendered; directly from the evident content and in an inferred fashion from the latent one.

Systematising was achieved by dividing the units of analysis for each participant in the session and the parts of the most significant stories for each specific objective.

The categories were determined from the hierarchy which the participants devised in the group process, emphasizing the couple problems, what happens at present, what occurred during the shaping of their lives together and the influence of their nuclear family impact dynamics on their current life, in addition to the extraction of the stories within which confusion is greater and that may evince a problem from their inner realm displaced onto the couple rather than an actual one between the partners. The final analysis consisted in spotting the essential links to the object Of this study, differentiating the most relevant risk indicators.¹¹

RESULTS

Description of the participants

For the description of the sample of participants the social and demographic information of the attenders were considered for the stage of the group process, where all 35 sessions were assessed, given that this is an open group which labours continuously at INPer. The arithmetic mean of age was 32.3 for women and 35.1 for men. The attendance ranged between 10 and 14 patients; 60% were women and 40% were men (tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Cause of admission

| Referred via | Couple % |
|--------------|----------|
| Gynæcology | 47.0 |
| Climacteric | 23.6 |
| Obstetrics | 14.7 |
| Infertility | 14.7 |

Data gathering

First objective: Current internal and external indicators which influence the presence of couple problems (see APPENDIX 1)

Women

Throughout the diverse narrations, the prevalent factors were accusations against the partner; the complaint is constant and full of resentment and hatred. The feelings of powerlessness, seclusion and inability to find a manner to change the current state of the relation also prevail. These are narrations in which the emotional distancing that women perceive from their partners is shown and which has led gradually to the fracture of the relation without its causes being explained. Confusion is predominant as it is not possible to elucidate whether the conflicts are only external and provoked only by the couples themselves or whether there are internal factors in them which foster or entangle the situation; they feel immersed in a contradictory state, between the desire of leaving the partner, with fancied revenge, and not being able to actually leave him and their behavioural response, sometimes full of explosiveness, which is driven by this confusion. Another significant element is that the communication with the partner provokes greater confusion and stress because of a violent or confusing communication style,¹² full of resentment. This is established as a daily frame, almost turning into the only fashion for interaction, where the exception becomes the rule, thus becoming a constant threat to the psychical integrity of each partner and the children as well. A great part of their energies is consumed by the mere fact of living with that emotional burden, which in turn prevents them from having any aspects free of conflict; and if there are such, they are paralised and hidden, over all the ones having to do with personal development, for yet another factor repeatedly found is the obstruction of the women’s aims of development by the partners. They behave as if this desire put at risk the wellbeing and stability of the whole family, whereof women feel as being used by

Table 2. Education

| Education | Women | Men |
|----------------------|-------|-------|
| Primary | 2.9% | 8.3% |
| Secondary | 29.4% | 8.3% |
| Preparatory | 50.0% | 58.4% |
| Bachelor degree | 14.8% | 25.0% |
| Postgraduate studies | 2.9% | 0.0% |

them. In sight of this, their reactions are polarised: there are idleness and submission just as well as explosiveness; all of them are resources which are almost ineffectual to achieve any changes, sometimes because of the very polarisation and in other cases because they lack the necessary psychological resources. They exhibit dependence on this relation-fusion, an inability to differentiate themselves from the Other that has them eventually obliterated and the dissatisfaction situated in what the Other does not give as well as the perception of being manipulated through guilt.

Men

Polarisation is observed in their responses, though in a manner different from those of women's. The stories reveal seclusion and powerlessness feelings caused by the perception of excessive control exerted by their partners; recurrent plantives linked to explosive responses that lead them to recede emotionally and sexually,¹³ rendering parts of their lives unknown and inaccessible for the female partners. This is a fertile ground for fantasising and one consequence is the coining of suppositions that are taken for reality. There are also narrations where they claim to exert violence on their partners to dominate them lest they fear to lose control over them and their children, intent on restraining them to the limits of the household and showing their anxiety and uncertainty facing the possibility of the growth of the female partners outside of the home, which is experienced as a threat. There are personal dissatisfaction and frustration turned into rage and discharged against the partner, either ignoring or deriding, despising her.

Second objective: To identify indicators which have influenced the satisfying/unsatisfying development of their life as a couple
(see APPENDIX 2)

Women

Along the stories, a lack of disposition towards negotiation or modification of roles is observed; resentment has rendered them reluctant, they perceive indifference to their suffering from their partners, which fills them with anger for the type of life they have constructed. The conflicts have been gradually worsening given that, instead of trying to solve them as a couple, they recede from each other, as a means for protection from daily stress; or they quarrel, which increases the separation. They feel nullified and utilised; their form of communication has been violent and confusing. This cycle, in a transit from distancing to quarrelling, as a form of daily life, augments the emptiness and fosters suppositions, the interpretation of the Other's behaviour, taking for real what is fiction based on lack of knowledge; because there is no dialogue the presumptions lead to erratic behaviours that entangle the relation. One of the suppositions which are to be found is the certainty that, for the partner, neither the relation nor her feelings, nor her suffering, are important.

This unchains destructive and self-destructive conducts. There are instances in which they obliterate themselves facing the irrational domination of their partners; there are others where a third person is implied (recalling unfaithfulness, the continuing intrusion of a relative, etc.)¹⁴ thus initiating or intensifying the conflict. This signals, on one side, the fracture between them and, on the other, that this situation is used either to exclude them or to be hostile towards them.

Men

Embracing a different kind of life, when in a couple relation, implies for men a difficult renouncement to former lifestyles; whereof they try to mingle both states, married and single, which in turn leads to disorder. This impels their partners towards overt misinterpretation, jealousy and anger. Yet another element found is the usage of daily routine to harass their partners; this is a subtle usage of psychological violence: an irrational and excessive demand on them. Instead of doing, they demand continuously, therefore they become obsessed with persecution.

Third objective: To identify, within the dynamics of the nuclear family, elements which influenced or currently influence couple life
(see APPENDIX 3)

Women

The narrations show a high occurrence of sexual abuse during infancy and adolescence. As it may be, there are several types of sexual abuse, always exerted by someone with power over the child or adolescent and bearing effect on the psychical development. In order to be more precise, there are worse situations with greater risk; for instance, when the abuser is a friend or acquaintance of the family or even a relative, which may be the case of incest. It is even worse when the parents or familial authority have knowledge about the happenings and blame or ignore the victim or dismiss their claims, without ever doing anything to alleviate the situation; or they become accomplices of the abuser. One more complication is that it become a part of daily routine for a long time combined with physical violence. A repercussion in adult life is the presence of contradictory feelings which in many cases preclude the satisfying development of couple life, both in the sexual and emotional aspects, where they exhibit guilt for what happened, together with resentment and rage directed to their parental figures and commonly displaced over the current couple relation. Another element which was identified is the identification with the sufferings of the mother which impedes the development of their own lives; they deny themselves satisfactions, so as to abide to the mother's type of life. The need to quarrel may be observed, with endless arguments lacking real foundations, apparently aiming to expound their perspective and current necessities; there is an emotional overload which does not match the current facts; this obstructs the affective nearness and

the marital satisfaction. The motives for anger are vague or non-existent; it is just anything or nothing; confusing narrations that do not focus the conflict with the partner clearly; therefrom they suffocate the partners with harassment or "demonise" them, but do not truly relate; they nullify their virtues and only what is destructive exists; a relation which could be a source of pleasure and satisfaction is turned into one of suffering and frustration.

Men

There exist difficulties in the process of individuation that lead them to divide their world in two, where the higher hierarchy belongs to their natal family. Setbacks may be observed in the process of differentiation from the father, as well as fear to face him, to sustain the differences; individuation is inadequate. They have perceptions of violent fathers and notwithstanding that, they repeat the pattern in their current couple lives. The unsettled conflicts with their primary references preclude a satisfying relation with their partners; it also yields an uneasiness to show their feelings lest they may be abused. Control and abuse on the partner are the outcome of the damage which was originated within the primary familial nucleus.

CONCLUSIONS

There exist two main sets of conflicts. The first is originated in a failure of the structure of the couple, because of an unfinished individuation process or trouble arisen from the insertion of the couple within an already extant familial system, where the dynamics of this former complex overwhelm the couple, arresting the construction of their relation. Therefrom, the identification of their own conflicts and affection is contaminated by the extended family. The second set is conformed by the problems in the affective life of the very couple, the ones that integrate in the couple dynamics; in this instance the difference between internal realm conflicts and the ones that arise from the interaction of the partners must be established, to avoid that the prolongation of the conflicts pervade all aspects of life, arresting thereby their possibilities of personal change and growth.

It must be noticed that along the narrations of the men there are moments of reflection that allow them to avoid verbal outbursts and to criticise their inner perceptions, to acknowledge their errors and desire their amendment. It is also more frequent that men manifest anxiety through persecutory behaviours and that women do so by means of erratic or disorganised ones.

DISCUSSION

Throughout the construction of the couple relation, several realms are intermingled: individual, familial and the ones

arisen from the couple itself. Marital problems deeply modify the affective life of persons; besides, they bring about grave familial consequences which bear repercussions on the social realm. The venture into the understanding of this complex environment is an essential task of the health-care psychologist. This is an incursion into the realm of the couple aiming to understand a small part of it and to be able to be more precise in the planning of the treatments for persons who suffer from such marital conflicts. Disorder within the couple may be manifested through the inability to distinguish what is destructive or constructive, to recognise virtues or differentiate them from shortcomings, to distinguish between loving and caring and not loving and not caring; there is no more the difference between egotism and generosity, love and hatred, and so they become repositories of their own spectres.¹⁵ The couples recur to psychological assistance or psychotherapy for they know there are in trouble, but do not know how to settle that. They may confound themselves in a plentiful of plaintives with no distinction or hierarchy, nor a clear definition of the conflicts: where they reside, what unchained them, whether they belong to someone, both or anyone, if they come from outside or inside; if they belong to others.

There prevails confusion that leads them to feel secluded into the conflicts; it augments the anxiety and the disorder, besides decreasing their satisfaction, both marital and existential.

It is an important remark to say that this is a small sample of what is involved in a group whose priorities are couple problems; that is a limiting issue for this paper, given that the patients that recur to this institution bear specific characteristics which are representative solely of similar populations.

Another limitation is that not everyone attends together with their partner and, although the work within a group will influence the whole environment, the advancement in the very group would be greater if both members of a couple should attend. Even more, other countering factors are the problems derived from their health condition, since this institution admits patients in reproductive risk who, in many occasions, must interrupt their psychotherapy for the care of their physical ailments. The main advantage is that psychotherapy work within non-psychiatric institutions is an useful instrument, being an institutional proposal, to offer the patients a comprehensive attention.

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Declaration of conflict interest: None

APPENDIX 1**First objective: Current internal and external indicators which influence the presence of couple problems**

| Women | |
|--|--|
| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Failures in the integration of the couple, obliteration of the other | |
| Powerlessness, hopelessness | My husband always leaves things halfway; he never finishes anything; I am struggling, he just won't. All he does is watching T.V.; I see no changes coming. Sometimes the man has no sensitivity for the chores at home. |
| Powerlessness | Whenever there is trouble at home, my husband is helpless; I have to solve everything. |
| Emotional distancing | Our main setback is that we can't be a real couple; he is too distant; I can't find a way to approach him. I think the therapy has been useful, that is, individually; but as a couple there's a long way ahead. |
| Category 2. The relation as a form of seclusion | |
| Control and manipulation | I told him I wanted to work; he got very angry, then calmed down. Now he even does what I want him to; I have an allowance and he buys me everything I want. |
| Control | Yesterday, my partner tried to mistreat me; I said "to hell with you!" He doesn't want me to take the child to the day care. He thinks no one will take care of him as well as I do. |
| Contradictions, confusion, sexual and emotional aggression | Our relation is very good; but since the birth of the baby, things have changed. I had to quit my job; it was a real shock. Problems at work; money shortage; I was emotionally exhausted. To depend completely on a man affected me badly. My baby is everything, I cannot leave him alone. To ask him for money is humiliating to me. He gave me a venereal disease. I am quite anxious and over protective. Sexually, he has become uninterested in me. I am nauseated if he approaches me. |
| Distancing, seclusion, fears | We are numb about each other so we can't talk; we don't trust each other; it makes me weak. I asked him to go away he just won't listen. This distance scares me, makes me feel alone, too dependent. I stopped battering my son; but he seeks to engage me into it. I don't know if I am with him on dependence; two weeks ago I was struck by a deep depression; I thought of suicide again; not only me, but taking with me my son and my husband too. |
| Category 3. Violence as a style of life | |
| Manipulation and domination | I want to be independent; I know that I am not solvent and think that that is a way for him to control me. It is an unconscious way of hurting me, of showing me his power. He rules me with the money for medical consultation; I know how much he earns, though not quite on what he spends it. I've been thinking about it quite a lot, advantages and disadvantages, and I think we'd do better without him; anyway, the kids never get to see him and we don't fulfill the needs of each other anymore; we destroy each other. He just won't accept things; I feel a lot of resentment, anger. I don't want him to step on me; if he wants to hang around with girls and go to parties, I don't care. Even if I went with him, he wouldn't look at me. He blames me for everything. |
| Explosiveness, seclusion | The same happened to me with my partner; I always had to take care of the children; I told him and little by little he started getting it. Two weeks ago my son played a prank at my parents-in-law's and he said: "Close the door!" I got upset and packed to leave, not allowing his maltreatment; he got out of the car and I told him not to be childish in front of our girl. I had to be aggressive so he would listen. |
| Indifference, powerlessness, seclusion | He is too aggressive; I became indifferent. In december I made a stand instead of going along with him in the Christmas dinner. He started to drink, we arrived late, had a quarrel during the toast and the others started lecturing him [his brother] had a gun and I had not realised. He yelled at me insults and battered me; everyone was on my side; I fought him back. I am still with him; cannot leave him. |
| Explosiveness, sexual rejection | He stayed in the car because we had an argument along the way; there are no more beatings; but he keeps on being obscene; we argued because I didn't tell him where to park; then came insults and threats; he said he comes here only to help me, for I am a damned hysterical woman. About intimacy we are doing pretty bad; he thinks I have to seduce him. Problems have calmed down; but he blows up and gets mad. In the intimacy I feel rejected. |
| Confusion, ambiguity | He used to deride me; I thought of escaping; always wanted him to look for me. On coming back the situation was worse; I started beating back. He threatened to kill himself; I would always come back. |
| Desire of revenge | I've got a desire for revenge. I don't want to be anymore the overprotected girl of my family; we are not staying together; he says I am fat and ugly. |
| Category 4. Bonding through daily argument or quarrel | |
| Isolation, domination, subduing | I am told all of the time that I don't know how to do things, that I am untidy; he already secluded me from friends and relatives. For it is always me: lazy, filthy and I cannot talk to him: daily routine. Nowadays there came a problem with my son, who claims he wants to suicide. He is an average kid; but he [father] tells him he is a lazy and filthy boy; that I should impose limits on him; I see him as a normal boy. I suffer from economical violence in every way. A long time ago |

APPENDIX 1 (continuing)

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| | I wanted to kill myself and my two children. I just couldn't handle the situation and even thought that he was right about me. He is never pleased. Daily quarrels and constant complaints; daily arguments about limits; we're always fighting, and fighting, and fighting. |
| Category 5. Trespassing the thresholds; rupture of the couple | |
| Infidelity of man, provoking, escape | My husband has a cousin and she is always making advances on him; I am upset because they think they can cheat me blind; I am not jealous; I am angry because he won't leave me alone. He doesn't let me do anything, not even attending my courses. I depend on him because I have no family. When we fight, we beat each other; I tell him not to beat me on the face; wherever save for the face: It drives me outrageous. |
| Exclusion, infidelity of man | It was my husband's birthday and he asked me to prepare a meal. Friends arrived, he sent me away and attended the female assistant. Already drunk, he touched her aunt up and I found out; I got very angry. Since then I am nauseated; I don't want to be with him anymore. |
| Infidelity of the woman, shame | I am restless, can't sleep, can't leave my lover. My husband and I are sleeping alone and I lie to my kids as for apologising; we are a couple which is not such. |
| Category 6. Usage of sexual intercourse as a means of aggression | |
| Emotional distancing, sexual aggression, derision | If I don't seduce him, there is no intimacy; even if I make advances, he always has an excuse: he says I am sick of sex. If he doesn't come close, neither will I. He is stuck into business; no more friends. He is there, but there is no intercourse; though I ask him for it. He says I am sick; we have one every three months. I may not talk about it. He told me that, if I don't agree, I must not be so stupid and look for another man. |
| Category 7. Routine used as a form of violence | |
| Barriers against emotional nearness | I feel he is too obsessive about the house; everything must be tidy and if time should allow it, there would be time for us. Monday through Sunday it is all about the house. It is our conflict; he wants his home to be faultless. |
| Jealousy, persecution mania, dominance | He doesn't like anyone to be idle; I tell him to live and let live; this turns him aggressive against the others; the girl is aware; my eldest son fears him. He says I didn't consider him in separating the children in more bedrooms; it is for the relatives of both not to see an empty chamber. I am also bothered by his mistrust and insecurity. On Sunday he saw a man I dated with many years ago; he said nothing, but always takes advantage to say: "here comes your boyfriend". His unfounded jealousy causes me pain, unrest. |
| Dominance | I realised that I need him as friend and partner. In december, despite my mother's surgery, I attended the dinner at my mother-in-law's; I felt rage because he dominates me. This makes me think about where to this is leading and the damage we cause to each other. |
| Strategies of manipulation, dominance | Yesterday, I was talking to R. and they were telling me one piece of truth: that I had been raised that way; I always want to be right, to have my will; that I am always dramatic so the others will abide with me. This really froze me. |
| Necessity of being dominant | He is the one who oversees the schooling of my son; a short time ago I suggested that we both go the school, then we quarreled and he told me I did not trust him; and we continued. I sense he is into his "zone of comfort", does nothing and, if I mention it, we quarrel. I cook, wash, I do it gladly, because I have made every effort for my home and my children. He is unemployed and checks everything I do, as if a supervisor were present. We will be left with no family. |
| Category 8. Couple violence born on the children | |
| Emotional distancing, discrimination, subduing | I don't feel it is important to mention it, though it hurts me. My husband is white [Caucasian] and one of my children has my complexion; he is aggressive with him; we both fear him; it's been four years like this. My child has had the desire to live with his grandmother. |
| Idleness of the man, transfer onto the children | While I was changing the diaper of the baby he was delayed and I got upset: he arrived late. He said I only pissed him; his problem is his sluggishness. "You should be a man and fix this situation, not me!" In the morning I even discharged against my child. I blamed him; he said "don't lose your head". V. is intent on nothing, always evading the facts; his petty attitude. We have not had intimacy in two months; we are penniless and he earns nothing. |

Translation of the original version published in spanish in: Salud Mental 2013, Vol. 36 Issue No. 4.

APPENDIX 1 (continuing)

| Men | |
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| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Necessity of subduing the other | |
| Guilt and necessity of control | I feel bad when I hear that women work, I don't like to be commanded. |
| Necessity of control | Something I was recently made to be aware of, without it being said to me, is how oppressive I am. I abhor working women. I realise I exert submission upon my wife. |
| Category 2. Awareness of the authoritarian and dominant style of the other | |
| Excessive demand, harassment, derision | MI get angry because she does, the reason for the quarrel was the cap of the bottle. She exaggerates everything; saturates me, observes me so as to see what I do wrong; she says I am a brute, a stupid man. She is blunt, does not listen. I am not so rigid with rules. |
| Necessity of control | On Sunday we stepped out to buy shoes for our son; but we didn't agree so we didn't buy anything. She does not like my point of view; sometimes I feel commanded by her. |
| Imposition (of the female partner) | I didn't marry to be dominated by her impositions; I do not drink excessively anymore, nor come home late, because of reason and her petition. I've started to feel that I need to be with my son instead of being with friends; I do not come home stinking in alcohol. Her intent on changing me is an imposition; I deem her a permanent judge. Indeed I have been stubborn against order; I have indeed a double life: at work, at home; I don't like to tell her about my job because she questions my decisions. In my job my style is different. With her everything is imposition. I say nothing, I am sarcastic, hurting and many things I hide to avoid damage; when I blow up, everything breaks down. |
| Category 3. Chain of destructive and self-destructive behaviours | |
| Lack of self-care and care for the other | One day she asked me to help her with a design on the computer; then ensued a violent reaction and hurried upstairs to sleep; I said nothing. If I come home late, she says I have a mistress. The slightest detail will have her enraged; then I feel outrageous and lose my head. |
| Lack of self-care, misunderstanding | I don't accept what she tells me to do; for instance, going to the doctor, and I don't. It is quite probable that I suffer from diabetes. Either out of fear or destiny, I do not make my mind, I lose concentration in my marital situation; I've become distracted and so has she. We are never together, not even during meals, neither in the intimacy; we don't have intercourse as frequently as I would like, she says she is tired. Besides she suffers from depression and doesn't go to the doctor either; though when she was medicated she said she felt very fine. None of us agrees to integrate; I feel she doesn't want to be with me and neither do I. |
| Category 4. The other perceived as an enemy | |
| Derision/Insult | I feel pretty bad because I am doing everything I can and only listen from my wife that she is disappointed, that I am a hypocrite; thus I am a hypocrite to everybody and to myself. |
| Excessive demand | I don't like to speak badly about my woman; I feel stuck, I am not a man to knee down, can't say anything; yet, I sense that on turning around she thinks "I screwed you". She won't let me speak and I get dispaired; then follows the usual [insults]. |
| Regret, vengeance, derision | I begged her that at least she let me sleep by her side as a dog; it is degrading, I recognise my mistakes; she doesn't like me anymore, she doesn't love me anymore. |
| Powerlessness, abandonment, lack of understanding | We are into assisted reproduction; she blows up about the situation and I try to help her; I think this is not about guilt. I understand her but she isolates herself without knowing that I have to stand a lot; I think the problem is that she treats me as one of her siblings; she never considers my opinion. I am always pressured between my family and her. |

APPENDIX 2**Second objective: To identify indicators which have influenced the satisfying/unsatisfying development of their life as a couple**

| Women | |
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| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Chronification of the conflict | |
| Inequality | He should fix up his schedule; he should help me, out of his own will; I shouldn't be playing Father. When we married, you agreed to be responsible for the money and I, for the house and the children. From him there is no constant income and it upsets me to listen to his complaints because he claims it is "his" time; that money is intended for our home. |
| Inequality, nulity | He is careless, untidy, uncapable of order; I've got a lot of things to do. He's as self-concerned as ever; I don't know why he's got no time for his family ; I feel he doesn't love me, that I have no right to be upset because he would be twice as much so; there is no living together nor conversation between us. There is also trouble around our son's education: I set rules and he shatters them. |
| Affective distancing | This shielding of himself makes him inaccessible and that is frustrating. I may say I've got an excellent husband; I am untidy. What is destroying us is silence; he is mistrusting, at first he was kind, sweet and tender; then we drifted apart. He says things are just what they are and cannot be otherwise. Then I followed in, keeping silent; it becomes indifference to defend oneself. Physically, our intimacy is good; emotionally, it is not. |
| Dependence, isolation, obliteration of sexual life | I have always seen him as a brother. I have sometimes desired to end the relation; but he clings to me. I am afraid of separation because no one has ever loved me, he has never allowed me to be apart from him; now, the presence of our child makes it worse. I don't feel well with him, there is almost no sexual intercourse. I feel that, since I knew him, he's driven my friends away; I have always hated that and always feel that he is guilty for that. When I was about to marry him, I already didn't want to; but he made a scandal out of it; the child died. We are not husband and wife. |
| Category 2. Acute manifestations of the conflict | |
| Infidelity, seclusion | I found out that my husband has a daughter; my first thought was to be unfaithful to him; I felt as if losing my head. I decided to stay with him; I tried to overcome it, either to form a family or to leave him definitely. |
| Obliteration, derision, revenge | He forgot my existence, he used to spend the day drinking. Once he took me to my juice-serving stand; but he didn't come back; he came asking for his meal and his shirt had lipstick all over. I used to tolerate anything from him but not that; I lost my respect for him. I put a burden on him and since then I lost the way. I do whatever I want. I met this man, a suitor; he helped me a lot, he was supportive. My husband never cared; I told him I had a suitor because he always devaluated me; he was going to pay for that. That is why I haven't left home. |
| Category 3. Failures in the structure of the couple | |
| Utilisation, failures in the structure, abandonment | I think we need our own space, freedom; he always wants to go out on his own, hasn't realised that now he is part of a couple. No telephone calls, no warnings: he comes late; he thinks I want to dominate him. Whenever he is an adult, he wants to be independent; when he is in need, he is a kid or runs to his mother; he hurts me when he addresses me, he orders me to do things and utilises me. We've already been together for two years and one third of that has been all crying and fighting for me. |
| Derision, seclusion | My husband says I fake my illness; he pulled his faces, so I thought of leaving; it is {emotional} blackmailing and aggressions all of the time. He says it's been five years of troubles, that he is fed up with this situation; he enjoys some privileges, as going out to do exercise and says I don't deserve it. |
| Derision, lack of understanding | He rules me out of things and makes me feel guilty; he did not care about the former baby and after all he doesn't know how to manage the situation. He says that I didn't want to have a girl, but he did; that I am out of my mind. |
| Seclusion, loss of love | I can't get rid of this hatred; he has contributed a lot to it. He supports me; yet, I have always had these feelings: in daily life we are fine; but anything reminds me of the past, I can't forget it. We have been together for five years and still depend on my family; that upsets me. He manipulated me to stop going out; my friends began to leave me; he makes me feel as if had to get rid of him, because he took them away from me. |
| Category 4. Utilisation, violence and exclusion of the couple | |
| Emptiness, resentment | He has changed a lot his attitude towards me, he is very tender and that bothers me because I have hindsight about the time we spent arguing unnecessarily. I feel even worse during therapy because he shows himself as a good and sensible person; but he wasn't so with me; he made my life miserable and I've got resentment against myself for having let him do so; I think we lived like this for eighteen years; but now I've got my strength back and to respond to any situation I show my anger and shout at him; I think that hurts him very much. |
| Utilisation | Since we married what we had as engaged couple was lost; I perceive my sexuality is going wrong; I feel like a piece of furniture, without the will to step out of bed; if he said "I'm leaving", he would be free to do it. |

APPENDIX 2 (continuing)

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| Dependence, seclusion, lack of care, daily aggression | Formerly, I didn't care about my health; now I worry: my husband always complains about the expenses caused by my illnesses. I am being consumed. I cannot make any decisions. I depend on my husband. He is angry because the hardware store is not registered as his, but as mine. I don't know how to have a dialogue with him; the threshold has been exceeded and he always retaliates in aggression. |
| Emptiness, exploitation, scarce self-care | I am very upset; most painful for me is the lack of support of my partner and everybody realises, but me. He shows no affection for me; I've suffered from cramps for seven years, I cannot speak well, all my senses are numbed; he doesn't consider me. I did not want him to come back, we failed. We are starting to do well again; we are now renting a place. We started a small business in which I am employed as well as my mother. We earn no salary and there's no profit. He sees no gain in this and he is upset. If one day is fine he borrows all the money. For me it's hard not to be considered and I keep waiting; I don't know where my strength has gone, I'm afraid of his judging me. I am stuck. |
| Devaluation, utilisation, sexual object, isolation | I think since we were engaged, my self-esteem problems have worsened. He was always the handsome one, the man all the women wanted to be with. I had just been through a divorce and already had a daughter; I didn't fit into his type of woman. When I was pregnant of our first child and we lived together he said we were still friends. For me it was a dream-come-true to be with him and now it is a nightmare. In the intimacy he is also very selfish and I feel utilised many a time. I became surly, did not go out of my room because I felt sick; I used to spend the day crying because he gave me no affection. It is a torment to go out with him because he turns his head towards every woman; he doesn't admire me, doesn't see me. He says I am an average woman and that many others would like to be in my place. |
| Indifference, loss of love | I stopped fighting, became indifferent. I have always worked and he suggested that we set up an establishment; I said no. I have been working less for him to realise about the value of my work. I used to end up doing what he wanted; I told him: "you ruined me; but now I will look after myself". |
| Categoría 5. Distintos procesos destructivos | |
| Violence and submission | My husband comes and says hello; while he has his meal, one has to attend him quickly. I tell him: "do I serve now?" and he says "Damn, you know I don't like to eat when there are others around!"; my husband always shouts. On Thursday I began to feel sad; I always say: "you always mistreated me". I see all of this and I feel a lot of anger and resentment. I was unfaithful to my husband; but I told him "forgive me; it won't happen again". He says I am the worst, that I have no value. |
| Violence | He batters me; I told him the next time I would go to the police and sue him; he says I am out of my head. Formerly I used to keep silence. He threatened to kill me if I sue him. |
| Jealousy, failures in the structure of the couple | My problem is jealousy: it all started when he went away and rented a place on his own. My partner asked me to live with him; but I didn't because I wouldn't leave my son and he won't live with us; his cousins tell him I don't love him and he started to drink; he blames me for that. My jealousy arose when my husband left home; just to think he is alone makes me wonder about him. |
| Violence | He drove me mad and we came to slap each other's face; he looks after me and that bothers me; he spent thirteen years drinking and now he cares! That is hypocrisy; in September his oath will end and he will be back into the habit. He says if I leave I will do it bare empty-handed, for nothing is mine, everything is his. |
| Category 6. Emotional deprivation | |
| Existential emptiness, couple rupture, emotional distancing | I underwent a hysterectomy three years ago; I see my husband as my baby because I've got no one else to care for; I feel useless; I have to find myself useful again. My son is into behaviour problems. We looked for help and nowadays my husband is not attending. I feel very anxious; there's a lot of problems at home; about the education of our son, also. He contradicts me; he doesn't support my decisions. My complaint is that he had always been tender and he stopped being so; thus I turned my full attention onto my children. |
| Seclusion, failures in the structure, nullification of the other | Our financial situation is difficult because he earns nothing; it's been like this for years and recently I haven't been doing so well at selling clothes. I tell him I love him; but that I am not sure he loves me. I don't know what else he expects from me; he doesn't like responsibilities, anything about me bothers him, he is despotic; I am unnecessary. I don't want the baby to grow without a father. I think the only complaint he could pose about me is my explosive temper; I am making an effort in order to control my character. |

APPENDIX 2 (continuing)

| Men | |
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| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Failures in the structure of the couple and chronology of the conflict | |
| Incongruity, guilt, difficulties around lifestyle changes | The transition between single and married lives is far too complicated; when you marry everything changes. The habit of coming home early was unknown to me. That adjustment was especially hard for me; my freedom had been obstructed. I think I am still immature. |
| Nullification, failures in the structure of the couple | She helps me; but then she reproaches, about my family, for instance. Then again it's about her family: during Easter she went to her family's and I had to go because she took the boy with her. She goes above my head and I don't know how to set limits on her. She should have never married me; when the girl was born, we stayed for twenty days with her parents and she behaved like a child with her mother. We are two; she just won't put her trust in me at all. |
| Seclusion, powerlessness | Since my daughter was born, my life has changed completely. Many things bother her, she gets angry about anything. This makes me wonder what I must do. I think it is a matter of patience. |
| Problems with the process of individuation, demand, jealousy, possessiveness | I didn't want to lose my freedom because she wouldn't allow me any of it; she would be sad if I left her alone. She kept me from going when I was angriest, instead of letting me go; that made me blow up, she stopped me to keep complaining. The problem is driven by her jealousy and possessiveness; anything can be an excuse: I understand it because once there existed a hard problem around another woman. I cannot be at home; I'd rather take shelter in my job. She spends the day crying and doesn't allow me a moment on my own. |
| Lack of understanding, distancing | I also bear an explosive temper. We agreed on a system in which she pays for everything until I get paid; but when she gets angry, she reproaches me for everything. |
| Failures in the organisation, disorder | Last week we tried to schedule activities as a couple. We started well and then failed to keep doing so. Details get us despaired. If we quarrel about something at home, we try not to get entangled in it; when I am not right, I keep silence, which is hard for me. Maybe saying something like "it's my fault" will have her talking to me again. What I mean is that for her her job is above everything, especially my children; but she doesn't like to be kept within four walls, to work at home. I try to schedule time for the children. What happens is that it's hard for me to express what I feel; I feel upset. |
| Category 2. Daily manifestations of violence | |
| Revenge, symmetrically escalated violence | I came here because I had a problem with alcohol; for three years I mistreated my wife. She had a suitor and I've always been jealous for that. Once I came home with make-up on my shirt; she took revenge for three years. I work in security affairs. I quit drinking and now she is the drinker; she comes home completely drunk. I don't know if I am jealous; what bothers me now is her continuous hangover. |
| Devaluation, jealousy, destructive behaviour | Whenever there is aggression from me it is provoked by her; in the intimacy she has confounded me twice with the other man. She started to drink and I went away. When I met her I was fifteen; I found much peace in her; but then she started to feel old and since then, troubles haven't stopped. For her, everything I do is wrong; instead of mellow talk like before, now she suddenly attacks me; when this happens I start to get angry; before I beat back, I have already stood a lot; it hurt me very much when she took me for the other man. She is never tired of repeating this is the worst. |
| Reflection | I was very violent, too. Fortunately, I found art as an escape; if I don't transfer all this hatred I don't know what will happen. I wish that we could find in here a way to accept we are wrong. I'm doing all I can because I've got the need to be aggressive. I want to show her that I love her, that I need her; but I am quite stupid and don't know how. She has taught me to work. |
| Differences are conflicts | Shouting comes in extreme situations; times goes on and things remain unsolved; in some occasions they want us to be telepathic. What happens to me is known to everybody, I think: we have patterns that our partners don't like. |
| Violence, devaluation, abuse | We were joined by loneliness; then we married and thought of having a baby. Already married, she suggested that I live in my own house and she in hers; we would meet in certain occasions. I told her that was not a marriage and that we'd better separate. She told me that I would never be like the man she'd had before; I looked her straight in the eyes and told her that I need not be another person and kept walking; but she was getting angrier me and kept hitting me, so I lost my temper. I am all right! So, why is she beating me? Huh? So I said: "I am a man; but I am no fool!" There came a point at which I decided to use condoms; I am not having a baby with this woman. |

APPENDIX 3

Third objective: To identify, within the dynamics of the nuclear family, elements which influenced or currently influence couple life

| Women | |
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| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Sexual abuse during infancy, due to lack of familial observance | |
| Falta de protección y cuidado | One of my neighbours used to take off our underwear and touch up our genitalia. What upsets me is the attitude of my father when he found out, because he still says hello to him. Another neighbour showed me his penis and wanted me to kiss it. On my mother's side I did never feel unprotected; she was a hard-working woman, devoted to her family. My father was miserable; my mother was normal. |
| Sexual abuse, aggravated with incest | Today I want to speak my mind; in my family there were always quarrels, blows. My grandfather tried to abuse me, so I told my mother and all she did was telling me not to tell my father. I felt filthy and blamed myself. My grandfather had tried to do it with all my sisters; I thought that was normal and felt I was to blame. During my adolescence, I could not wear what I wanted because I looked filthy. When I had my second boyfriend my father told me I was a whore, though I behaved well. Then I thought: "a whore I will be" and had intercourse with the man who is currently my husband. I had no orgasm until two years after our marriage. By talking with my sister, I realise that this affected our sexuality, our married couple life. When my husband had difficulties with his family I used to get upset; that is because I wanted him to take care of me. I am now aware that I hate my mother and, even so, I am repeating her patterns; this is a very selfish behaviour. I remember her beating me and bearing on me the responsibility of taking care of my siblings. |
| Sexual abuse with repercussions in adult life | I was abused at the age of five by an uncle. Last week we had a familial reunion and my husband put our baby {girl} in this uncle's arms; that got me upset. I am afraid that my baby be in the arms of anybody but my husband. I always distrust everybody; the only one I feel comfortable with is my husband; but I sense we are not a couple anymore and I can't leave him. |
| Rape, fear, devaluation | I was raped when I was six or seven years old; a brother of my father. Since then I was being abused. I never told my mother and thought I'd never do out of shame. I thought that virginity was important and, as far as I was not a virgin, I believed I had to keep it to myself. I am the witch in this tale. |
| Sexual abuse, lack of familial care, violence | I was also raped when I was twelve years old by a friend of my brother and I got pregnant; he threatened me with a gun and that lasted for six months. I feel my mother didn't care enough for me and I'm afraid that is happening again with my eleven year old daughter. A doctor {female} told me that she had already been touched up. |
| Sexual abuse during infancy with repercussions in the current couple life | I was abused when I was seven by my sister's husband. My father was a drunkard, my mother was absent. He used to beat my sister. I found shelter in study and the church. I told my sister what had happened and she separated from him. I told all this to my husband; he beat me and insulted me; already pregnant, I thought "what to live for?". He kept drinking; I'm afraid of drunkards. Now I have imposed limits on my husband; he dared not to see me, to touch me. I left my job for him; he has grown responsible and nowadays he gets closer to me. |
| Sexual abuse, lack of familial care | My mother never payed attention to me. One of my brothers raped me; I've never been allowed to tell anyone; my father knows about it and it seems that he also tried to or actually abused my sister. My father shaved my sister's head as punishment; I was eight. They never considered, respected us as women. |
| Category 2. Affective deficiencies during infancy | |
| Rupture of hierarchies, alliances, manipulation | For my mother, it was easier to have me on her side than to face my father; I am hurt because she wanted us both to be my father's enemies. She fosters those conflicts among siblings by allowing things to happen and not setting limits. The more she suffered, the more her motherhood increased. |
| Activation within the couple relation | I had quite a difficult infancy; I was alone. Whenever he behaves as usual he makes me remember what I lived. I don't remember my mother caressing or hugging me. Now I intend to change and be with them {children}; I solve their problems. I have always felt quite alone and am afraid of having no one to keep me company, of having no tenderness for me. |
| Category 3. Nuclear family above the current one | |
| Failures in the hierarchy | He doesn't support me; he always defends his brother and his brother's wife. |
| Dependence on the family | We cannot separate from his family; we live upstairs from his parents. |
| Fracture of the couple | We attended a wedding from among his family; we quarreled because they would handle our baby with dirty hands; he has never solved a thing, never defended me, not even your own son. I have looked after our home because he has not a regular income. He takes my money; but his family is above ours; I am tired of it. "You always say that I am wrong, that I am crazy..." oh, he is always the sensible one. If am the crazy one, I'd rather leave. |
| Fracture of the couple, dependence on the family | He is not responsible nor a good provider; he says that what he earns is for his family, not for me. After the quarrel I wanted nothing from him, not even sexual intercourse. I sense that he has only used me as a sexual relief. I wish I had the strength to reject him; I am very afraid of being pregnant again. |

APPENDIX 3 (continuing)

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| Lack of comprehension | My family is very close to me and, good egotism as it may be, my husband is upset because I solve my siblings' problems. I think he is very selfish on that matter, because I haven't neglected our home. |
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| Men | |
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| Elements found | Units for analysis and narrations |
| Category 1. Violence within the primary nucleus and its repercussions in the current familial life | |
| Intrusion | When we were newly wed, I beat my father; there ensued troubles among my siblings; they beat her {wife} and I defended her; so we were expelled. I started drinking; he always helped me a lot. After that I kept in touch with him and begged his pardon. Recently I have been recalling him; the father is always important. |
| Familial violence | My father had a terrible temper; he was obsessive. During one part of my infancy I receded from him; didn't have that nearness; I got enraged when he beat my mother. My brother and I got hold of an empty piece of land where we built a hut; then my mother came in. Once he struck out at her head with a brick; I healed her and started to hate him; he expelled me from home. In recent times I have wanted to approach him. These are things that hurt me; I have always desired ideal things, calmed; peace and no aggression. I'm stubborn and don't understand what she says to me. I am not good in my marriage; for her I am the worst. |
| Existential emptiness | I feel quite bad; I lost my youth because I always had to play a secondary role which was not meant for me, looking after my mother; I've got no affection, I am an empty man; I'm afraid of solitude; I cannot live alone. I stood this all my life and thus turned myself into a pressure cooker. I feel cornered; I only ask for what I give. I depend on her; I need her. |
| Destructive process | Trying to find out why and how, I now understand that not to talk is a way of decreasing the pressure inside the couple; then it becomes a barrier so high as if saying: "you won't come in; there you came; but I frustrated you...". This is directed towards my wife; many a time I use her to get relieved of my former life; I don't want them to know how my life used to be. The gain when one frustrates the other is to feel superiority, besides believing it's real. |
| Category 2. Deficiencies during infancy and their repercussions in the current family | |
| Deficiencies during infancy | I feel alone. Nowadays I am an orphan; I provided for my mother and father. I never had a person to tell me: "you are working for the future, so as to have the necessary to achieve a good quality of life and then give it to your children" no one taught me about life. What upsets me the most is to quarrel in front of the children. My two and a half year old son starts to beat me when we quarrel to defend his mother. She doesn't like how I do things, how I get along. |
| Problems of the past | The arrival of the baby disturbs my realm because I've got a grave problem: my father abandoned my mother when she was pregnant and was carrying me. All this brings back the resentment towards my father the matter of infidelities affects me very much. The coming of the baby only brought back the former problems; when my other daughter was born I lost the relation with my wife; there is no couple life anymore. |
| Category 3. The past reenacted in the current life of the couple | |
| Unsettled problems of the past | Her father was an alcoholic and contributed nothing for the home; now she thinks that if I have a drink, I shall become an alcoholic. |

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