

Women Victims of Trafficking: theoretical overview and exploratory study on the phenomenon. Attachment and emotional-relational functioning

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Abstract

Within the theoretical and clinical framework of Attachment theory, the present pilot study aims to assess whether and how potentially traumatic experiences suffered by women victims of trafficking may have negative consequences on emotional-relational functioning and intends to consider the role of mediation of attachment assessed by using the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI). The groups consisted of 5 women victims of trafficking and 5 women matched by age who were randomly selected in a non clinical population.

The phenomenon is considered from a clinical, sociological and legal perspective, in order to collect data and information to suggest and implement intervention programs aimed at the recovery of the person. In accordance with the international literature, data obtained after administration of the assessment protocol in the group of women victims of trafficking have shown a prevalence of insecure attachment patterns and, in comparison with the control group, a reduced capacity for empathy by the young women victims of abuse, a lower ability to recognize and represent their emotional states, a prevalence of negative affective states.

Keywords: trauma, attachment, trafficking of women

Introduction

This paper originates from the experience of work in a House for mothers and children that shelters young women who have experienced trauma, psychological and physical abuse. At the moment, a group of five mothers between 17 and 33 years of age is present with their children.

Although the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings is extensively present in our country and around the world, there is little literature that addresses its consequences on emotional health.

Trafficking in human beings is a phenomenon experienced as highly traumatic by women, especially by younger ones, which can have severe consequences on the lives on both practical and emotional level. They, as well as having to live in fear of being subjected to repeated abuse and neglect, must face the tragic realities to which they are exposed in isolation and loneliness, without being able to count on the support of significant figures. Sexual abuse, mistreatment, serious deprivation, rape and torture, because of their pervasiveness and being the consequence of a deliberate action of another human being, often lead the victim to "define" herself almost exclusively on the basis of traumatic experience, and paradoxically it is precisely through these traumatic experiences that women find confirmation and motivation of belonging to the reality. This way, they can develop a sense of identity based on perceptions of themselves as dirty, helpless, guilty, inhuman and unlovable, while

others are perceived as dangerous, unpredictable and unreliable and the world in general is represented as unfair, chaotic, unmanageable, based not on shared social rules but on the violent will of some individuals (Conway, 2005). According to scientific intentional literature, the experiences of victims of trafficking and sexual and physical abuse are devastating and pervasive to the integrity of one's self and symptoms of post-traumatic stress are frequent, although the response to stressful situations is extremely variable from one woman to another as it varies depending on the specific personal resilience owned (van der Kolk, 1989). In women who have been abused may also be present more complex psychopathological features, such as disorders in eating behaviour, relational life, sexual behaviour and emotional development, self image and sense of self, and finally, severe personality disorders (e.g. borderline personality disorder, depression) (Koziol-McLain et al., 2006).

As suggested by the recent literature, also, those individuals who have suffered in childhood and / or adolescence, as frequently happens to the victims of trafficking, from abusive behaviour and rejection by family members and adults in general, can bring to the emergence of antisocial behaviour in adulthood and prelude to the development of moral disengagement. Hyde, and Moilanem Shaw (2010) have noted that traumatic experiences such as having been (or have witnessed) violence and brutal treatment may be related to subsequent problems of emotional regulation and externalizing symptoms.

The loss of identity, the identification with the aggressor, the continuous control by pimps who do not leave room for any kind of personal freedom, create a complex picture of this phenomenon that is difficult to manage, and to this end several associations were born, that are now involved in studying and implementing projects to support these victims of trauma in order to create the container that Bion (1973) considered the key-point in which you can pour any content, which allows the container trade transformative; in this standpoint it is deemed appropriate to illustrate the main associations in Italy and to make clear the objectives of their work, such as the construction of a homogeneous group) that offers the ability to transform into words the pain and suffering associated with traumatic experiences within a relational container that promotes the maintenance of the continuity of the self and the modulation of emotions (Izzo, 1998).

Operators of shelters report that often these young women describe difficult family situations; often in order to survive they had to "create themselves" in their childhood and had been exposed to frequent episodes of deprivation, suffering and abuse by their family which have structured complex defence strategies.

In order to organize specific intervention strategies to prevent and counteract the negative consequences on the emotional health of women victims of trafficking, we conducted an exploratory study of 10 women (5 women and 5 of trafficking victims Italian) hosted in a family home. The objective of this study is to assess the attachment models of women, the psychological profiles and personality characteristics.

Definition of the phenomenon

From 1990 onwards, in Europe, but also in other countries of the world, we observed an explosion of human trafficking and prostitution in particular the prostitution considered "economic" that is exercised on the streets by young non-EU women, conducted into our country by foreign criminal networks, in order to be exploited. Prostitution is indeed the best-known form of trade related to "trade", the protagonists are mostly women, it is not uncommon to find even children from the so call third world countries, or persons belonging to vulnerable groups in Western Europe countries.

It's important to emphasize that trafficking is not limited to sexual exploitation, it's possible to find a real market of organs which exploits children in particular. It is necessary to talk about of drudgery, weapons and drugs trafficking which instead, involves, primarily young men. According to Logan's study (2007), children can be sold by their families to cover the disastrous economic situation allowing them to pay its debts. The reasons to leave the homeland are numerous: poverty, unemployment, war, inequality, environmental disasters, family breakdown, discrimination and violence of all kinds, but also the desire of a better quality of life.

It is common to find stories of domestic violence and sexual abuse among the girls, often are the male members of family that sell them to "pimps"; in this way it is easy to think that their problems begin inside their own family and all the trauma they suffered at home; this could be the background on which starts a state of emotional fragility that makes these girls more vulnerable to dangerous relationships.

From a psychological point of view in the personality these "little women" it is possible to find a self-blame, a state of confusion, apathy, anger (Logan, Walker, Hunt, 2008). This psychological framework of reference associated to the great poverty of the countries of origin characterized by gender discrimination, government corruption, lack of laws to protect the human rights, can make it easier to understand the reasons that push people leave their countries looking for a better life.

Victims of trafficking choose the country of destination based on "myths and false stories" about the Western countries, presented by their media as easily accessible and emancipated, where dreams and desires are easy and affordable for all; gradually this information builds the illusion of improving their social and economic conditions and greater respect for themselves and for their families (Pozzi, Bonetti, 2010).

Most women do not have a specific project, so they take the risk of fall on the trap of the "hands" of mafia-type criminal groups that recruit girls or women in their homeland in order to be sent to a destination country. Sometimes these girls are kidnapped, raped, abused and then brought away in other countries by their exploiters against their will.

One thing is common to all types of exploitation (Nigerian, Brazilian, Chinese, Slovenian, etc.): the different "professional" figures involved in these criminal organizations who work in the country of origin. There are, on one side, recruiters man or women (called mamon) that choose the most vulnerable and needy girls, those who aspire to a better life or have very high expectations, promising them easy money or playing along with promises of getting a good job in the show business. Using this arguments they convince them to leave everything and host them in

"transit homes", called ware house, until the day of the departure, in addition to these "recruiters" there are cashiers, document forgers, corrupt police officers and people that had received the charged to threaten and intimidate the families of origin.

The girls are accompanied through the entire journey, from those who should deliver them into the hands of the exploiter called, by women themselves, "customer-boyfriend". Once they arrive they are deprived of all documents. Many organizations (like the Nigerian one), at this point, require restitution in the short term, of the money of the debt acquired at the time of departure and which usually amounts 15 000 euros, a sum that forces women to sell their bodies that becomes, in this way a true commodity market .

Even in the country of destination, the roles of people involved are varied: we find the companion that has the duty to take women to the "workplace", controllers, cashiers, the responsible for the daily care, owners of the house that host the women. All together weave a dense and intricate network of "partners" that, in this traffic find a big source of income and that represents a real "trap" in which victims are prisoners without hope of escape. Women trafficking is therefore a criminal phenomenon that violates the fundamental human rights and totally destroys the victim's life, especially if they are minor, in addition, they must live in fear. To survive they have to identify themselves with the aggressor. The identification is <<the psychological process by which a person assimilates an aspect or attribute of another person and becomes the model of the latter >> (Ferenczi, 2004). During this process the subject assimilates other people like them in the way of thinking, behaving and feeling. The violence causes suffering in these young people, especially sexual abuse, mistreatment, torture and raping, which, because of their pervasiveness, lead them to define their own personality almost exclusively by the traumatic experience, developing an identity perceived as dirtiness, helplessness, often guiltiness, without the possibility to be loved, while the people are perceived as dangerous, unpredictable, unreliable (Ferenczi, 2004).

There are many reasons to remain trapped in this kind of slavery and they depend on various factors. As an example could be mentioned the terror of both physical violence or to be in jail or having to deal with legal issues related to criminal activity in which they are involved without their will. Another reason is the lack of knowledge of alternative options, they have no idea of the services offered by the government of the country they live and "work" and do not even realize that what they are experiencing is actually against human rights and that it is also a crime. Isolation of the rest of the world makes them remain trapped in these situations, the isolation indeed is a method used by traffickers to control victims. It is easier to control a person totally isolated from the family, from the homeland and from the rest of the world. They are forced to live only in a degraded and degrading reality without being able to compare their way of living with the normal life (Logan, Walker, Hunt, 2008).

All this situation leads these women to live again and again traumatic situations and makes it difficult for them to break free from this form of slavery which, besides the fact that it is crude and real, is also psychologically devastating. Obviously they have

the need to implement defensive strategies. Fear is the emotion more frequent, they are continuously terrified by the threats against their families, they feel fear of torture, fear of being disfigured or terror to suffer permanent physical damage. All these factors contribute to change the way of thinking and force to misperceive the reality. This is why they hardly ever consider the possibility of escape although there is no lack of opportunities.

Italian legislation in comparison with the rest of the world

As mentioned before prostitution violates basic human rights such as individual freedom and autonomy, for this reason in Italy the law is very complex and articulated.

With regard to women trafficking for sexual exploitation, it is not possible to obtain reliable data because of the clandestine nature of the phenomenon, but the number of victims is estimated between 19,000 and 26,000 and the area with the larger number of victims is Lombardy, with about 4,000 cases of sexual exploitation. It is evident how big and complex is the phenomenon and the difficulties that the government have to face in order to eradicate it. An important step done by the Merlin Law (n.75 of 1958). With this law were repealed previous legislations which imposed two things: the practice of prostitution in suitable authorized brothels and health controls for prostitutes. With the Merlin Law were introduced rules to protect the person "who practice prostitution" and to contrast the exploitation and in order to discourage abetting prostitution.

The objective of this Law was to contrast all forms of prostitution specially the most visible form: on the street. Nevertheless the Law does not attack the roots of the problem, that is, the complex and articulated organization which lies behind this phenomenon. In this way, for the associations that protect these women becomes even more difficult to rescue them from racketeering, since they are obliged to hide and isolate themselves from the rest of the world.

In our country mainly there are two laws that govern the phenomenon of trafficking: the 18th article of the " Consolidated Law of Immigration"; this article forbids violence and exploitation of immigrants. If the offended report such violence, that article also provides for the issuance of the VISA for six months in cases of particular risk, as well as social reintegration through one of the associations that deal with this problem.

The second law: "Rules against trafficking in persons"; is the 13rd article of the 228th Law of 2003. This law get near to solving the crime of enslavement with the purpose of sexual exploitation. This article leaves three options to the victim. The first one is the compulsory expulsion with forced repatriation; the second consists on providing financial assistance for voluntary repatriation and for reintegration projects in the home country; the third possibility is the re-integration into Italian society issuing the VISA for social reasons (Article 18) (Pozzi, Bonetti, 2010).

The legislation against trafficking in persons in the rest of the world is very complex, it is not uniform in all countries and it is often absent. In some countries like Spain and France where, as in Italy, the phenomenon of trafficking for sexual purposes is

considered an offence and the exploiters are punished with imprisonment for two or four years, but the victims are not punished and they have the option to stay in the country or to return to their homeland. As in Italy they can use the facilities and structures allocated on the territory to fight this form of exploitation. The prostitution, however, contrary to what happens in Italy, is regulated by the nationalization of brothels or with the approval of red light districts, and only in some cases, there are laws that punish the recruiters or punish the crime of "induction to prostitution".

In Netherlands the situation is completely different, in this country prostitution is considered a legal profession and prostitutes must pay taxes and can form syndicates. There are many ways in which this phenomenon takes form: from the "private house" to the "prostitution window", but there is also the "street walking". One of the ways to combat this phenomenon is, for instance, the OSCE, a organization for the security and cooperation in Europe, which offers housing, emotional support to the victims and that also works with local law to prevent and eradicate exploitation and women trafficking.

In Austria the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation is illegal and punishable with imprisonment from six months to ten years. Prostitution, here as in many other countries is legal, is practiced mostly in brothels or in coffee bars (Galiana C, 2000). The 104th article of the "Austrian Criminal Code" punishes all forms of exploitation and the government encourages victims to cooperate with the police to denounce the traffickers, ensures proper care for women who remain in the country and provides them a temporary VISA. There are also organizations that assist victims ensuring a safe return to the native land. Victims are also provided of a monthly salary and a health insurance.

In Ukraine the situation is really different compared to European countries. Here prostitution is not regulated and therefore not a punishable crime; this is why it is very difficult to get information about it and it can be said that Ukraine could be the epicentre, together with other countries, of the global market in trafficking of women and children. This is a transit country more than a destination for victims of trafficking. From here this "new slaves" are carried to the countries of destination, in first place, to Russia and the Soviet Union (Kloer, 2010).

In Brazil and Costa Rica prostitution is legal, there are penalties only for those who had an income on the prostitution of other people (Smyth, 2008). In these two countries there aren't laws to punish the traffickers and for this reason it is difficult to obtain data about the number of exploited women.

Like Ukraine, Nigeria is also one of the countries in which this phenomenon is present. This is because there aren't laws to protect human rights and there is no regulation against the "trafficking of women". Although the country have laws against prostitution, the reason to practice it may lie on the great poverty that afflicts the population and also the corruption, gender discrimination and criminal organizations. All these factors are the basis for human "trafficking". In an extremely poor country where the government does not takes care of such problems and where there are constant wars that involve the country, Nigerian women find themselves

pushed away or almost forced to accept the offer to leave the homeland, having no idea of what they will be forced to live (Gargano, 2010).

Finally, it is interesting to say a word about the situation in the United States, where unfortunately the data on the "human trafficking" remain unknown because of their multifactorial nature. However it is possible to list some information in regard to prostitution (from 23% to 66%), houseworking (from 7% to 45%), working in restaurants (from 9% to 33%) are just some of the wide extent of the phenomenon (Logan, Walker, Hunt, 2008).

Associations

It is essential, in order to offer effective help to a woman who have experienced trauma and sexual abuse with psychological and physical violence, the cooperation of the large network of associations, organizations and communities which deal with this problem and that share the same objective: to take out the girls from the street or from various traumatic situations in order to give them a chance to redeem their own life.

In Italy the associations that fight against this phenomenon work in different levels. There are special structures to offer asylum to the victims, therapeutic communities, low-threshold services, etc. The initial contact is made by the unity of the street which in a second moment send the girls who desire to leave this way of life to the available structures. Some of these centres are easy to reach by victims, they facilitate the access helping victims to be free from danger. These places provide medical care, psychological support, information, etc. There are also counselling centers and toll-free numbers that provide first aid providing information of the main structures for the first aid and permanent admission. These houses provide a place to sleep, eat and hospitality useful help so that the victim could start then with programs of social reintegration.

The work of the associations is very complex and respectful since working with this kind of victims is essential to follow guidelines such as "prudence and respect" because of the diffidence of the victims. When you talk to these girls, you can see how difficult is for them to gain confidence in other people. For many of them it is really difficult to talk about themselves and they tend to remain isolated, trying to hide everything about their lives. This is people who may live forever in the shadows of terror and fear. Sometimes they tell their stories emotionlessly, with coldness and without emphasis, "vomiting" all the violence and all the abuses they have suffered. The verbalization of their own history and of the feelings remains a crucial step in order to reconstruct a personality full of love. In order to achieve this ambitious goal is important to have a dense support network that work together to eradicate this phenomenon.

It is usual to find, inside the recovery communities, psychotherapy or therapeutic assistance or support groups, so that women can compare their experiences and start to alleviate their loneliness helping them to find a path to reconstruct a life and, at the same time, being a support for other girls in similar situations. Group therapy seems particularly indicated in cases of sexual abuse, because it encourages the sharing of

feelings and pain caused by violence, leading to acquire greater personal security and could help to prevent further abuses. In this way the group is perceived as a “container” in which they can leave their feelings, tensions, emotions, pains, etc.

The article written by Logan, Walker, Hunt (2008) describes in exhaustive detail the barriers of the various associations and organizations that works with victims of trafficking in the United States. Integrating the perspectives of five major studies, is possible to notice that in all five studies, the respondents reported that the resources in the area are not adequate such as the economical resources. They indicate also that there are huge problems with communication. At the end three of the five studies have shown that coordination and cooperation between the various local associations, although crucial, are inadequate and negatively valued.

The consequences of trauma on emotional health of victims of trafficking

According to the international scientific literature, trafficking in human beings involves mainly children and young women who are placed in environments associated with the criminal sexual exploitation and who may suffer from symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Woodland, Burgner, Paxton and Zwi, 2010). According to van der Kolk (2004) the exposure to stressful and traumatic situations may have extreme consequences of different levels of functioning of the individual, the somatic level to the emotional, behavioural and character development.

Finkelhor and Browne (1986) have theorized that the long-term effects of such experiences on mental health may be located in six different areas and can compromise: 1) the ability to modulate emotions (feel and express), (2) self-perception (of his body and the representation of identity), (3) physical integrity, (4) the sexual sphere (5) the relational-emotional functioning, and (6) social functioning. These effects on mental health status of victims of trafficking, as well as hinder the experience of everyday life, make difficult to break free from the condition in which they lay and to reintegrate into the social structure. The victims often forced into prostitution through intimidation, threats, mistreatments, isolation and frequent sexual abuses. Because of these traumatic experiences victims may show severe difficulties in the modulation of emotion, with moments of sudden episodes of uncontrolled anger and self-mutilation (Briere & Gil, 1998), concentration difficulties, suicide attempts (Zlotnick, Donaldson, Spirit, Pearlstein , 1997). Where victims suffer abuse in childhood and / or adolescence, this can be a very high risk factor for subsequent development of severe emotional distress as the post-traumatic stress disorder and also act on the structure of personality, predisposing the subject to the Borderline Personality Disorder (Putnam, 1989). The long-term effects of trauma may also include generalized hyperactivity, social withdrawal, difficulty in modulating impulses, loss of confidence, increased fragmentation of thought and of narrative coherence, dissociative experiences. In cases of PTSD, victims can suffer from frequent nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, and dissociative states may be used to make these experiences less painful through the abuse of alcohol and drugs. From a behavioural point of view, it has been observed an increased propensity for

risk behaviour (Feeny, Foa, Treadwell & March, 2004). It was also shown that extreme traumatic experiences, especially experienced in childhood and adolescence, and repeated in early adulthood, may also have consequences on the physiological regulation of the victims (Putman, 1997), compromising their ability to modulate responses to stimuli, whether threatening or harmless, placing them in a constant state of hyper-arousal.

It has been shown that being exposed to severely dysfunctional interactions, such as maltreatment or abuse, but also a marked emotional dis-harmony with the significant figures and attachment during development can adversely affect the maturation of brain structures. According to some authors, the lack of emotional connection with the caregiver (or significant others in general) generates in the child (and / or adolescents) a sense of shame (Schore, 1997). This emotion, however, is not in itself negative but, in normal conditions, helps to activate the dyad intersubjectively to restore the attuning. But when the mismatch of emotional experiences is repeated over time, not repaired and it is accompanied by the caregiver with manifestations of anger, it may cause in children and adolescents a sense of humiliation. The dysfunctional attachment relationships and processes of non-attune seem to have a direct impact on the activities of the orbitofrontal cortex that mediate and modulate the states of physiological arousal, reducing adults' ability to flexibly respond to the environment. In a defensive attempt to maintain good relations with the significant figures such persons may operate a vertical "splitting" to keep separate the intact self from the abused one.

Herman (2003) also theorized the possibility of a symptomatic picture called "Complex PTSD" that includes all the features of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (such as dissociative symptoms, intrusive thoughts, hyper-arousal, etc.) but also includes changes in modulation of affect, impaired reality testing, reduced sense of self (the perception of body boundaries, for example) and compromised ability to make sense of experiences. Victims of trafficking often come from abusive families or abusive environments. Theoretically, the social environment in which the child is placed should provide predictable and recurring moments of play, comfort, nourishment and build these interactional patterns on emotional exchanges and looks. This should allow the child to gradually modulate his or her emotions and cope with their emotional experiences (Finkelhor and Browne, 1984). In addition, Sroufe and Fleeson (1986), suggested that these interactions are characterized by inter-syntonic, and mutual consistency between the child and significant figures and are the basis for the development of secure attachment patterns in children. The security of attachment, in turn, appears to be related and the emergence of empathising and understanding of their emotional states and others.

However, in the case of children or adolescents who have experienced trauma or abuse, both within the family of origin and outside of it, these processes do not occur or are very damaged. According to Stern (1985) the caregiver plays a key role to modulate and balance moments of comfort and stimulation for the child by harmonizing the affection between him and those who care about him (or her). Individuals who have been abused in childhood or have been placed in the context of

particular caregiver rejecting or neglecting emotional patterns may become disorganized or disoriented adults experiencing emotional and intense social difficulties.

Cole and Putnam (1992) argued that as a result of extreme traumatic experiences, even the image of the self is altered with possible disturbances of the sense of self, loss of autobiographical memories, and disturbances of body image. This is especially true when taking into account not only psychological consequences of traumatic experiences related to trafficking in human beings, but also the outcomes on the physical / tangible level. The victims of trafficking, in fact, may be at risk of sexually transmissible diseases (AIDS / HIV), are subject to trauma or injury to the genitals, may be obliged to have a pregnancy or terminate it and can suffer the consequences of unsafe abortions in unhealthy environments, made through unscientific methods. Moreover, the poor sanitary conditions in which they often are, can increase the risk of contracting tuberculosis, hepatitis and other diseases (Chi-Ying Chung, 2006). It has been noted that women victims of violence often experience a "reparative" desire to become pregnant and have children. According to Welldon (1999), this experience originates from the search of reassurance with respect to a preserved reproductive function, often threatened by mistreatment. Also, having a child might be the only way for these women to communicate and express their emotional needs, which were not accepted and recognized within the family of origin, which is frequently an abusive environment. They can also experience insecurity, suspicion, lack of intimacy and isolation. In consequence of these dynamics, the subject can implement impulsive behaviour, and violent expressions of anger or the opposite, showing a particularly mild, timid mood and withdrawn.

The perspective of the Theory of Attachment

From the point of view of Attachment Theory, George and Solomon (1996) have emphasized that a system of dysfunctional caregiving, such as the one that often seems to be establishing among women victims of trafficking and their mothers, may negatively affect the development of children and adolescents with severe consequences in adulthood.

In particular, these authors suggested that the above maladaptive outcomes may be related not only to intense traumatic experiences repeated and severe ill treatment and abuse (sexual and / or physical), but also to situations of emotional neglect and lack of protection by the mother or attachment figures, and environmental and traumatic events have brought to the term "abdication of the role of caregiver" to define situations in which the mother or the father to give up the task of protecting and emotional healing that theoretically should exercise this power over children, according to the theoretical framework of attachment (Bowlby, 1988). It was hypothesized that the difficulties of caregivers to take and maintain their role may be related to traumatic experiences and unresolved absorbing the parents in a state of concentration on their emotional difficulties and do not let them take care of those of their child (Hesse and Main, 2006).

A recent meta-analysis conducted by Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn (2009) on a total of more than 10,500 adult attachment interviews (Adult Attachment Interview - AAI) has shown interesting data on the prevalence of attachment in samples at risk. In particular, in samples at risk for having been abused, the authors have tested a specific distribution of attachment patterns in interviewees: in case of violence within the family, the subjects showed patterns of attachment representations characterized mainly by enmeshed / preoccupied (E) with a percentage of more than 50% of the sample, while in the case of violence or mistreatment outside the home, the models of attachment most represented were distancing (DS) with a percentage of approximately 54%. The diagnosis of PTSD, the study said, was frequently associated with stories of mistreatment and abuse, and unresolved attachment patterns (U) or unclassifiable (CC).

In the case of individuals characterized by patterns of anxious attachment (E), the emotional and physical intrusiveness experienced by the significant figures or adults in general seem to have caused feelings of extreme vulnerability for the constant fear of losing touch with themselves and with the other (Siegel, 2001). In an attempt to avoid these painful, disconnected, states, preoccupied / enmeshed individuals can trigger defensive responses characterized by anger or fear that may be accompanied by perceptual distortions, and take to the misinterpretation of the intentions of others that lead to moments of dyadic dysregulation.

Even those subjects with dismissive attachment pattern seem to have experienced inconsistent significant relationships and can activate defensive processes such as denial or projection, while in some cases can use more mature defences such as sublimation.

Unresolved attached individuals for loss or trauma (U) can experience severe difficulties in the modulation of affective states and flexibility of responses to environmental stimuli related to the inability to give meaning to painful experiences of the past and build a coherent narrative of his life story.

According to some authors it is also appropriate to consider the mechanisms of trans-generational transmission of attachment patterns, also in reference to the clinical research and intervention programs. It has been theorized that the transmission of secure attachment is based primarily on the ability shown by the parent to understand and respond to the syntonic emotional experiences and the experiences of the inner child (Slade, 2005). In the case of mothers who have been raped or physically abused by their parents or family figures, the transmission model of a secure attachment to their children is hampered not only because they have probably suffered a traumatic occurrence and deficient, but have mainly experienced emotional inaccessibility of their parents, especially their mothers, and the feeling of not being heard and understood emotionally.

It should also be noted that in the life stories of these women are often found not only abuse first-hand, but also frequent opportunities of exposure to mistreatment of other family members or acquaintances. The international literature has shown that bear witness to the abuse inflicted on others can have the same traumatic effect of put up with them in person (Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins, Marcus, 1997).

The exploratory study

In trying to understand the experiences, histories and subjective characteristics to be considered in the intervention and in the care of such extreme and difficult situations, we conducted a preliminary study of 5 women by comparing with other 5 women without experience of abuse and randomly selected in a normal sample. The 'age of the sample is between 17 and 26 years (women victims of trafficking: mean age 20.6 sd. 3.6, women with no experience of abuse: mean age 21.4 sd. 3.4). The objectives were:

- 1) to know the history of life of women who have suffered potentially traumatic experiences;
- 2) to assess their patterns of attachment;
- 3) to investigate the differences with respect to individual characteristics (eg, affective states, empathy and interpersonal efficacy beliefs, access to the mental state of others).

In all the study participants was fully guaranteed confidentiality on the contents emerged and personal data.

The group of women in the House Family: Stories of Life

Below are summarized the life stories of these women told during a meeting with members of the family home.

A. is a young woman with a history of violence and abuse that begins in childhood and reaches up to now, the first suffered by the mother and in post-adolescence by her boyfriend, the father of her son. During the relationship with these, A. is forced into prostitution through violence and is in contact with very dangerous criminal environments. Upon arrival at the Family House, his emotional difficulties necessitate the intervention of both the psychiatrist and psychologist A. receives a diagnosis of PTSD. Moreover, the suffered experiences seem to have hampered the possibility of establishing links and relationships based on mutual trust. A. often shows aggressive and self-and hetero-destructive behaviour because of which receives the indication for medication mood stabilizers. The diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is added to Borderline Personality Disorder with sudden changes of mood.

B. is a woman of about 25 years of age. Her relationship with her mother was complex and difficult, and in her childhood she suffered from eating disorders and she reported the same empty feeling derived from the relationship with a distant and neglectful mother, too busy to work and almost always absent. After leaving the original family she has established a relationship with an abusive man, from whom she had children. Given the difficult relationships with family of origin, B. did not feel they can get help with it and broke the relationship with her partner. Shortly after, she was accepted into the structure together with her children.

The appalling conditions in which B. and the children were accustomed to live (with the absence of social rules and sanitation) have made it very difficult the inclusion in the Family House. She started a psychotherapy but it is studded with constant interruptions in which B. does not attend the meetings. A diagnosis has not been made yet, but clinicians argue a PTSD and mild mental retardation.

C. is a young woman arrived in the family home when she was not yet of age, was a victim of trafficking and has suffered abuse and mistreatment of whom understandably prefer not to tell the details but that shows how brutal and shocking. She does not tell of being subjected to violence within the family of origin with which, however, no relationship for a long time. The day of his eighteenth birthday she has fled away, probably returning to live on the road. Therefore no psychotherapy has began and no diagnosis has been made.

D. lived a very tough childhood, punctuated by abuse and mistreatment by family members in general and of his father, an alcoholic, who during her adolescence, "sold" her and forced her to have relations with strangers. After this period, she also met an abusive man, with whom she had a child and who has, however, introduced her into drug addiction and forced her into prostitution. Even during pregnancy the woman has continued to use heroin and cocaine. Upon entering into the Family House D. became very weak and fragile physically, so as to suffer repeated hospitalizations, and had frequent moments of uncontrollable rage which often stemmed from self harm acted. She received a diagnosis of PTSD and in this moment is followed in psychotherapy, her condition seems to improve slightly, and D. is learning to adjust the intense emotions of anger and control access.

E. is a young woman of 19 with a history of repeated harassment and abuse within the family of origin, either by the father or cousins.

The relationship with her mother has been difficult and neglectful, despite E. stories of having sought support and comfort in the mother figure, she reported to have received reject and coldness.

Her adolescence was marked by further abuse by men with whom she had brief relationships and that have often forced her into prostitution. In the structure that now houses her, E. is following a course of psychotherapy without the help of medications with the goal of learning to regulate emotions and intense moments of despair that frequently indulges.

Models of attachment

To assess the models of attachment of the subjects of the samples it has been used the Adult Attachment Interview (Main and Goldwyn, 1984-2002), a semi-structured interview lasting about an hour, that consists of 18 questions and explores the memories and childhood experiences. The AAI is based on the codification of narrative script and evaluates the likely state of mind of the subject with respect to attachment by focusing on individual characteristics of the relationship-attachment

figures in childhood and at the present time. The interview also includes questions on the experience of loss of significant figures and the irresolution of these losses is coded on a 9-point Likert scale based on specific indicators that identify lapses in monitoring of reasoning and discourse.

From the analysis of profiles important differences emerge between women victims of trafficking and other study participants.

Patterns of attachment of the control sample and women victims of trafficking: The control group showed in all subjects models of secure attachment, and specifically:

Case 1: F2 (Somewhat dismissing or restricting of attachment); case 2: F3 (Secure Prototypically) case 3: F1/F3 (Some setting aside of attachment - Secure Prototypically); case 4: F3 (Prototypically Secure), Case 5 : Ph4b (Mild unfortunate preoccupation with parenting Experiences).

The group of women victims of trafficking has shown the following models of attachment:

Case A: E3a (Confused, Overwhelmed by fearful and traumatic / frightening Experiences), Case B: Ds2/Ds3 (Devaluing of Attachment - Restricted in Feelings), Case C: Ds1 (dismissing of Attachment); case 4: E2 / U (Angry / conflicted - Unresolved) Case 5: F1a (Re-evaluation and re-direction of personal life as the successor to a harsh childhood - earned secure).

Individual Characteristics

To investigate the characteristics, problems and vulnerabilities of women victims of trafficking by comparing them with those who did not undergo this type of experience, we used the following tools:

Achenbach Adult Self-Report (Achenbach, Rescorla, 2003) self-report questionnaire composed of 123 items to assess psychological problems related to two major dimensions: internalizing (withdrawal, somatic complaints, anxiety / depression) and externalizing (aggressive and antisocial behaviour). Moreover, other aspects are investigated such as problems of thought, attention problems and intrusive thoughts.

Big Five Questionnaire (Caprara, Barbaranelli and Burgundians, 1993) consists of 132 item self-report questionnaire to measure the Big Five factors, namely the energy (e.g. a tendency to be active and assertive), the Agreeableness (e.g. the tendency to be sensitive and kind to others), Conscientiousness (e.g. a tendency to be reliable and specific), Emotional Stability (e.g. a tendency to be able to manage negative emotional states) and Openness (e.g. tend to be interested in the world and what's new).

Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1988) self-report questionnaire consists of 20 items to measure the mood, or the Positive Affect (interest, strength, enthusiasm, pride, activities, etc..) and 'Negative Affect (anxiety, confusion, fear, shame, agitation, nervousness).

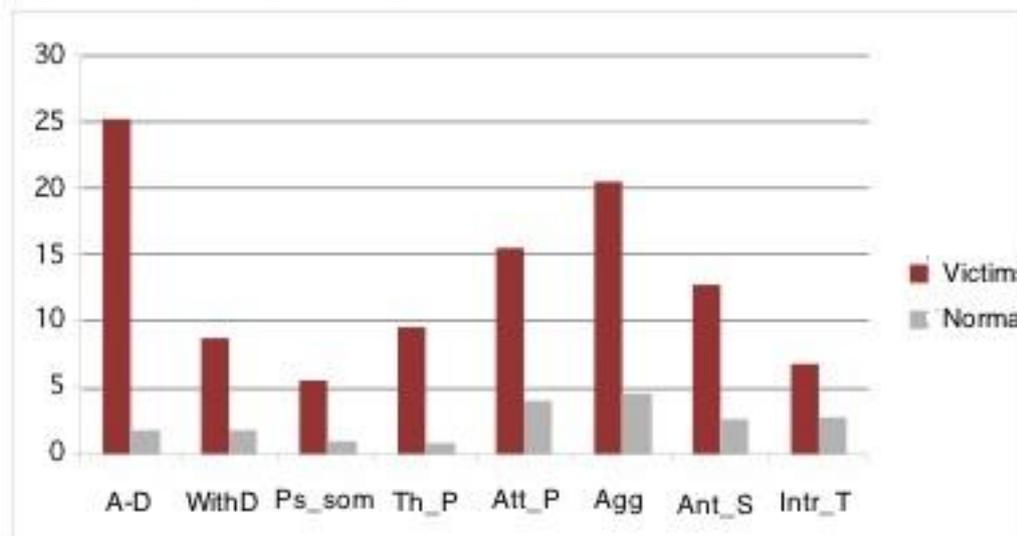
Feels Emotional and Interpersonal self-efficacy (Caprara and Gerbino, 2002; Caprara, Gerbino and Delle Fratte, 2002)) self-report questionnaire consists of 24 items to

measure beliefs related to their ability 'to recognize the feelings, emotions and needs' of others (Empathic self-efficacy), to adequately regulate negative emotions (self-efficacy in managing negative emotions) and knowing how to express positive emotions (self-efficacy in expressing positive emotions).

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) self-report questionnaire comprising 28 items to measure the tendency to adopt the views of others (Perspective taking), to experience feelings of compassion for others (Empathic Concern), and feelings of anxiety or personal discomfort (Personal Distress).

Results indicate that women trafficked show much higher values (and significantly different) of the other both as regards the size externalization that the internalisation. By examining in detail the different sub-dimensions is observed that all the spheres of adaptive functioning is severely compromised (Figure 1). In particular, women victims of trafficking are much more anxious, depressed and withdrawn, making greater use of aggressive and transgressive behaviour, and have more attention problems.

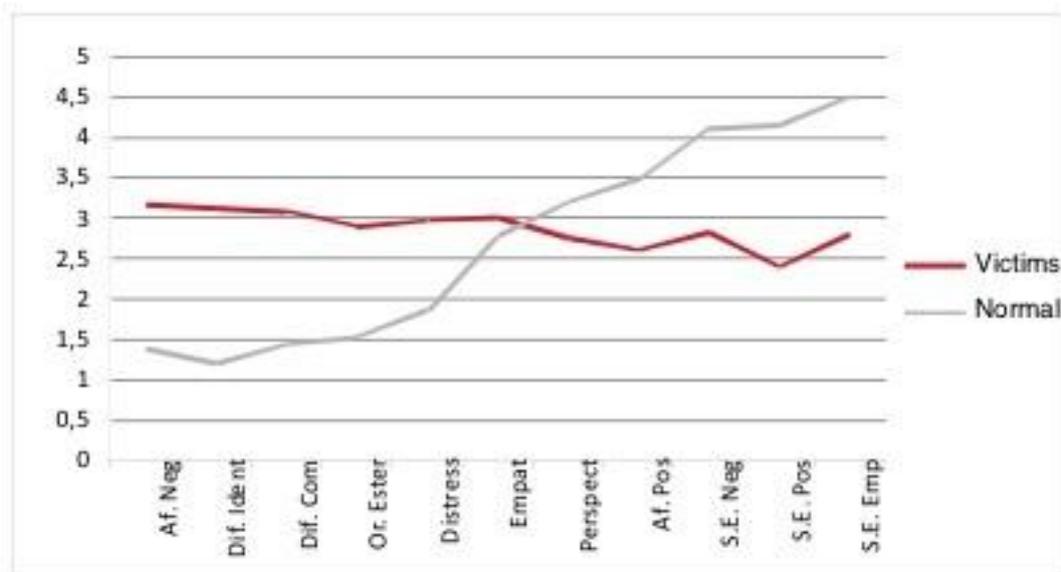
Figure 1. Psychopathological Profile



A_D: Anxiety/Depression; WithD: Withdrawn; Ps_som: Psychosomatic Disorders; Th_P: Thought Disorders; Att_P: Attention problems; Agg: Aggressive Behaviours; Ant_S: Antisocial Behaviours; Intr_T: Intrusive Behaviours .

With regard to personality characteristics, they show significant differences only with respect to emotional stability and openness: the victims of trafficking experience negative emotions more often and intensely and show a lower interest in the world and new experiences. Finally, as regards the dimensions are more closely related to the relational and affective functioning, as can be seen in Figure 2, the victims of trafficking have more vulnerability and susceptibility to negative emotions of others and they have scarce individual resources in the management of such experiences.

Figure 2. Vulnerability Profile and affective resilience



Af. Neg: Negative affect; Dif. Ident: Difficulty in Identifying Emotions; Diff.Com: Difficulty Communicate Emotions; Or.Ester: External Orientation; Distress: Personal Distress; Empat: Empathy; Perspect: Perspective Taking; Af.Pos: Positive affect; S.E. Neg: Self-Efficacy in coping with negative emotions; S.E. Emp: Empathic Self-Efficacy.

Specifically, women victims of trafficking are more alexithymic or have a lower recognition of their emotions, greater difficulty in communicating their affective states and a greater orientation toward the outside. Moreover, they experience more intensely and frequently than the control group anxiety and negative affectivity and feel less able to manage their negative emotions, to express the positive ones and to manage the discomfort of others. Finally, facing the discomfort of others, women victims of trafficking more than others tend to experience feelings of anxiety and personal distress. Otherwise, they do not differ as to the levels of empathic concern and the ability to take other's point of view.

From a qualitative stand point, the present exploratory study showed some interesting features in trafficked women that are associated with different patterns of attachment. Women with dismissive attachment showed high scores of Anxiety and Depression scores and low intrusive thoughts and transgression. They scored high on Alexithymia and specifically in the difficulty to identify their physical sensations. In assessing the capacity for empathy, dismissing women showed high levels of distress.

Women victims of trafficking with Entangled / Concerned attachment scored medium to high in almost all dimensions considered in the psychopathological profile and particularly in issues of attention and transgression.

The only person in the group of women victims of trafficking who have received a coding of secure attachment showed a balance in the general hedonic tone, with scores substantially equivalent in affectivity positive and negative. This woman also scored lowest in the evaluation of Alexithymia and size of the Retreat in the psychopathological profile.

Discussion and conclusions

This article has attempted to provide an overview of the phenomenon of trafficking of women in Italy and around the world and to define its characteristics, the laws standards and some intervention strategies, starting from the experience of acceptance and clinical work with women victims of trafficking in a structure of the territory of Rome. We conducted an exploratory study with the aim of identifying specific personality traits and psychopathological profiles in these women investigating the role of attachment variables as risk or vulnerability in a confrontation with a group of women in the normal population. The results of this preliminary study provide some interesting insights that are consistent with recent international research on the subject.

The adaptive-emotional functioning of women victims of trauma related to physical or sexual abuse in our sample, who recounted difficult stories of abuse and traumatic experiences in childhood and adolescence, is significantly compromised, with high scores in the dimensions of depressive symptoms and anxiety and withdrawal. These women also show frequent aggressive behaviour and transgressive of social norms and have more attention problems.

This finding is in agreement with the studies by Pearlman and Courtois (2005) who have stressed that the association between these symptomatic pictures and significant relationships between the subjects and their caregivers, characterized by violence and incoherence. Allen (2001) and Shore (2003) have described these features as elements of "relational" potentially traumatic. Traumatic situations experienced during development and adulthood can lead to a reduced ability to identify and modulate their emotions and recognize them in others, as in the case of women in our sample.

These women also showed reduced openness to novelty and to encounter the other: this result is consistent with the studies of Fonagy and Target (1997) according to which victims of abuse and maltreatment are scarcely able to experience trust, intimacy and emotional closeness. The life stories of women of our exploratory research are particularly problematic, and studded with repeated episodes of violence and severe emotional neglect. Listening to their stories it captures the almost total lack of repair compared with frequent moments of potentially traumatic events. Interestingly, this aspect seems to have made it dominant in the lives of these women's feelings of pain, fear, anger and shame that have not been balanced and / or modulated by positive feelings and support from significant figures causing a widespread sense of despair (Fosha, 2000).

In our work, women victims of trafficking and abuse outside the family of origin have mostly shown a pattern of insecure attachment and distancing with high scores of Depression Anxiety and difficulty to identify their physical sensations, but high levels of distress in perceiving painful emotional states in others. According to Bowlby (1980) individuals who are victims of violence, particularly when experienced early in life often seem characterized by a "no conscious pain " when in fact they carry a deep pain. Some studies, consistent with our preliminary data

showed a close correlation between abuse, emotional abuse and neglect in childhood and adolescence and Alexithymia in adulthood (Bagby and Taylor, 2004). A very interesting study of Aust, Alkan Hartwig, Bajbouj and Heuser (2012) suggested that their emotional neglect, as well as the mere physical or sexual abuse, can predict alexithimic characteristics, as seems to have happened in our sample, in which young women could not count on significant figures, which functioned as alternative positive swab compared to the emotional neglect of their parents because the families (including extended) characters of the stories told by the subjects seem to have been pervasively neglecting. Even Pearlman and Courtois (2005) have identified these distancing characteristics in people victims of abuse in childhood and adulthood, and showed, in line with our results for women victims of trafficking and abuse within the family of origin, behaviour and risk of non compliance with social rules, subject enmeshed / Worried and victims of abuse.

The only person in the group of women victims of trafficking who have received a coding of secure attachment showed a balance in the general of hedonic tone, with scores substantially equivalent in positive and negative affectivity. This woman also scored lowest in the evaluation of Alexithymia and size of the Retreat in the psychopathological profile. Most women in our clinical sample, however, seems to have a value point of view of Bion (1970) argument that people who can not stand (or keep at a distance) painful sensations are not even able of "suffering the pleasure." The results related to empathy in women victims of trafficking are consistent with the recent scientific literature has shown that insecure attachment patterns are closely correlated with a reduced ability to resonate with the emotional states of others in emotionally intense relationships and each other (Sroufe and Fleeson, 1986). The ability to activate a process of empathy has also been associated with a proper meta-cognitive skills. This ability is very often deficient in people with insecure attachment (Hoffman, 2000). As mentioned, women victims of trafficking in our sample also showed difficulties in complying with social rules and have received high scores for antisocial behaviour. This finding is in line with the studies of de Waal (2008) who correlated low levels of empathy to poor capacity of following the rules and cooperating in a shared group.

Allan Shore (2003) has recently emphasized that the motivation for the construction and maintenance of attachment bonds with significant figures in childhood and adulthood is sustained and nurtured by a mechanism that tends to generate intersubjective intense positive emotions, emotional sharing and attunement. In the case of women victims of trafficking and abuse, this mechanism, that several authors theorizes as phylogenetically evolved and tended to the construction of a "relational mind" (Siegel, 2001), could not be realized.

The results of coding the transcripts of the interviews on attachment suggest that the majority of these women are not able to integrate in their mind the difficult aspects of traumatic experiences and they do not reach a sufficient level of narrative coherence, also because of the impossibility of rely in their lives on significant figures of care with which co-construct a story and a meaning of their traumatic stories. Ferenczi (1931) pointed out that what is truly traumatic is not the trauma itself but the reaction

of the environment to the event. As written by Villa (2005) "... [the individuals victims of trauma and abuse] ... have already fallen off the minds of mothers before birth, have always been accustomed to a family atmosphere of neglect and oppression of the weak and do not seem to know or be able recognize that there had been a before that was better than the present". Hopefully this will be possible for the group of women victims of trafficking due to the therapeutic work done in the family home, which gives them a "space" to represent their sufferings and a climate of emotional closeness that can strengthen the ability of describe themselves in a coherent and integrated way.

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