

## **Generational Impact of Mass Trauma: The Post-Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians**

Dr. Anie Kalayjian and Ms. Marian Weisberg

The attempted destruction of the Armenian people by the Ottoman Turkish Government from 1895-1915 not only cost one-and-a half million Armenian lives but created massive trauma for many of those who survived. This chapter explores the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual impact of Genocide on the offspring of survivors. Concomitantly, the authors utilize therapeutic modalities to work with this form of generational transmission of mass trauma.

### **Introduction**

Articles addressing the generational transmission of the Genocide of the Armenians began to be published in early 1980s. In about two decades there have been only a handful of research articles addressing this transmission. By contrast, over the past three decades, several hundred articles and dozens of doctoral dissertations have been written and published on the transmission of the effects of the Holocaust on further generations.

This chapter presents a review of the findings of an exploratory study conducted by the authors with second and third generation survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians living on the East Coast of the United States of America.

Since the Armenian plight is not well known to many, the authors will present a historical background cited from both Armenian and non-Armenian perspectives, in an attempt to provide a balanced review.

## **Historical Background**

Armenia is an ancient nation which occupied the region of historic Armenia, including what is now northeastern Turkey, from before 500 B.C.E. until their attempted annihilation in 1915 (Walker, 1991). Armenia was the first nation to accept Christianity as its state religion in 301 C.E., while the surrounding Ottoman nation accepted Islam around 648 C.E.

Armenia was one of many nations conquered by what was eventually consolidated as the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Turks considered Armenians, the non-Muslim minority, as second-class citizens and for centuries subjected them to oppression. For example, Armenians and other Christians had to pay special taxes, including child levies (Housepian, 1971; Hovannisian, 1985; Reid, 1984), and were forced to give Muslims and their herds free room and board for up to 6 months under the hospitality taxes (Housepian, 1971). In some areas, Armenians were barred from speaking Armenian except when praying (Hovannisian, 1985), and the first author researching the survivors of the Genocide interviewed a woman who had known Armenian men in her village whose tongues had been cut out for speaking in Armenian. Armenians were subjected to forced migration, enslavement (Reid, 1984), and repeated massacres (Dadrian, 1995; Lidgett, 1897). Armenians were also barred from giving legal testimony or bearing arms, leaving them no legal recourse or self-defense against gun-bearing Muslim neighbors (Hovannisian, 1985; Kalfaian, 1982).

When Sultan Abdul-Hamid II, known in history as the Damned or the Bloody Sultan, came to the throne in 1876, he created the Hamidiye, an irregular cavalry modeled after the Russian Cossacks, to carry out pogroms against the Armenians just as the Tsar used his irregulars to persecute the Jews. Hamit massacred hundreds of thousands of Armenians during his reign, in 1894 in the Sassun villages, in 1895-1896 throughout the Turkish Empire, in 1904

again in Sassun, and there is suspicion that he was behind the 1909 massacre in Adana and Cilicia, which coincided with the attempted coup d'état in Constantinople (Istanbul) (Papazian, 1993).

Enlightened Turks were distressed by the misrule of Abdul-Hamid, as were the Armenians or the European powers. These Turkish patriots began to organize a revolutionary movement called the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). This group was well known in Europe and America as the Young Turks. These Young Turks were successful in seizing the Sultan's power by revolution and reinstating the liberal constitution of 1876. Having managed a successful revolt against the Sultan, the Young Turks then turned on the Armenians, claiming Turkey for the Turks. The new implication of the racist policy was that the minorities, especially the Armenians, had to be eradicated (Papazian, 1993).

Lord Bryce's "Blue Book," *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, edited by Arnold Toynbee, is one of the most damning single early sources of the eyewitness accounts of the Genocide of the Armenians, 1915-1916. According to Toynbee (1916), in the Genocide of the Armenians the criminals had been members of the Committee of Union and Progress, above all, perhaps Talaat, the most intelligent of the ruling triumvirs. In the course of the seven years spanning 1909-15, the leaders of the CUP had apparently degraded from idealists into ogres. How was one to account for this sinister metamorphosis? According to Toynbee, the deportations of the Armenians had been carried out by orders from the Government in Istanbul. The Turkish gendarmes and soldiers executed these orders without having any personal connections with the localities.

Exploiting the international confusion created by World War I (1914-18), the Turkish authorities declared the native minority Armenians as Christians and therefore enemies of the

Ottoman Empire (Kazanjian, 1989). Adult males, especially those identified as potential leaders, were arrested, escorted to desolate spots, and shot (Krieger, 1989). This process was designed to deprive Armenians of leadership and representation so that forced deportations might proceed with less resistance (Kuper, 1981). Henry Morgenthau, the American Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from November 27, 1913-February 1, 1916, provides detailed descriptions of the forced marches, rapes, pillaging, and destruction of life. Morgenthau writes that “I called on Talaat, I argued in all sorts of ways with him but he said that there was no use; that they [the Turks] had already disposed of three-fourths of them [the Armenians], that there were none left in Bitlis, Van, Erzeroum, and the hatred was so intense now that they have to finish it. He said that he wanted to treat the Armenian like we treat the Negroes, I think he meant like the Indians. I told him three times that they were making a serious mistake and would regret it. He said we know we have made mistakes, but we never regret” (Journal entry of August 8, 1915, in Lowry, 1990).

Missionary reports all tell the same general story: Armenians all over Anatolia were expelled from their homes, slaughtered and massacred, and the remnant driven into the Syrian Desert to die. Thousands of these reports are on file in the archives of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which are now deposited in the Houghton Library at Harvard University and open to scholars (Papazian, 1993). According to Papazian (1993), American Consul Leslie Davis of Kharpert wrote on July 11, 1915 that the entire movement seemed to be the most thoroughly organized and effective massacre Turkey had ever seen. Davis wrote dozens of reports to Morgenthau telling essentially the same story of mass murder on a horrifying scale (Papazian, 1993). Davis’s report to the State Department detailed how few localities could be better suited to the fiendish purposes of the Turks in their plan to exterminate

the Armenian population than the peaceful lake Goeljuk in the interior of Asiatic Turkey. That which took place around beautiful Lake Goeljuk in the summer of 1915 was almost inconceivable. Thousands and thousands of Armenians, mostly innocent and helpless women and children, were butchered on its shores and barbarously mutilated (Davis, 1915).

The Genocide was planned and premeditated by the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress; and was carried out by a covert and secret Special Organization (Teskilati Mahsusa) established by the CUP. German officials stationed in Turkey reported that the campaign had killed 1.5 million Armenians, including 98% of the Armenian male population and 80-90% of the total Armenian population of Turkey (Compiled in English in Dadrian, 1994).

The Armenian presence in Asia Minor has been recorded over three Millennia. Armenians, Ottomans, Persians, Greeks and Arabs lived there, side-by-side. Although there were many stories of neighborly collaboration, love, and sharing, politically, there was a constant struggle for dominance. There were many relatively minor campaigns by the Ottomans to destroy Armenians, but none as vast and heinous as the systematically planned and executed Genocide of 1915.

Immediately prior to World War I, Armenians comprised the elite in Anatolia. Armenians were the educated physicians, attorneys, architects, and even numbered among the high-ranking Ottoman Empire officials. In 1915, during World War I, as the Ottoman Empire was on the brink of disintegration, there was overwhelming fear and hysteria in the land. In that panic, the Ottomans needed to identify an enemy. Armenians were the easy targets right in their backyards; especially since Armenians were Christians, and for Turks, all those who are not Muslims are not to be trusted, and are called “gavour,” meaning “faithless.”

Feelings of inadequacy, rivalry, and therefore anger increased among the Ottomans. Armenians were the ones going to Europe and receiving higher education, and coming back home with a new philosophy of democracy and human rights. So long as the Turks remained dependent on the Armenians they were filled with a sense of inadequacy and rage.

The Turks assaulted the Armenian intelligentsia first, rounding them up and summarily executing them. Then they destroyed the churches, schools, and educational centers. Then they collected all weapons that Armenians might use to defend themselves. And lastly, they raped the women, killed the children, and drove the rest out of their homes and into forced death marches.

Common to most cases of genocide is the projection of a perpetrator's own intentions onto the group targeted for genocide. In this case, the Ottomans claimed that the Armenians would be siding with Russia and taking over the Ottoman Empire, just as Hitler claimed that the Jews were out to rule the world, when he was planning his own world conquest.

### **Armenians in Diaspora**

The surviving remnants of the Armenians were scattered throughout the globe after World War I, to whatever countries would accept refugees. Outside the Middle East or Russian Armenia, these refugees were often the first and only Armenians, and even there, the pre-existing community's resources were vastly overwhelmed by the survivors' extraordinary destitution (Kupelian, Kalayjian & Kassabian, 1998).

In the United States, these new immigrants frequently settled in tight-knit urban communities (Mirak, 1983). Their world was starkly split between the outside world of strangers and their inner, shared world of intimate community. Their American neighbors were asked to bring in a nickel per person to help the starving Armenians without knowing why they were

starving. The Great Depression and the new horrors of World War II followed, which relegated the Genocide of the Armenians to historical obscurity, and swept up the traumatized remnants of the Armenian people with everyone else. Frequent denial of their plight surrounded Armenians with mixed feelings: indifference vs. over involvement, and anger and rage vs. peaceful interventions.

Currently, there are approximately one million Armenians living in the United States of America, with the majority settled on the West Coast; 90% of those who did not migrate from previously Soviet Armenia are offspring of the Genocide survivors.

### **Purposes of the Study**

Whereas research focusing on the survivors of the Holocaust of the Jews is vast, very few studies have been conducted to explore the impact of the Genocide of the Armenians on its survivors and their descendents. The descendants of the Genocide survivors have only recently turned to conducting studies relevant to understanding intergenerational issues. When Armenians first emerged from their catastrophic trauma after World War I, psychology was in its infancy; there was world silence around this issue, and there was no impetus for collecting this group's personal data, in contrast to the reparation requirements that produced much of the early literature on Holocaust survivors (Kupelian, Kalayjian & Kassabian, 1998).

The purposes of this study are to explore: (1) the intergenerational impact of the Genocide on the Armenian offspring, (2) the physical, emotional and spiritual effects of the Genocide on the offspring, (3) how participants dealt with their emotions, re. the Genocide, and (4) the effectiveness of group techniques in facilitating the processing and integration of those feelings.

## Study Method

The Armenian American Society for Studies on Stress & Genocide (AASSSG) organized a workshop for the children and grandchildren of survivors of the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenians. This workshop was open to all those whose lives had been directly or indirectly impacted by the collective trauma of the Genocide. Participants were given two questionnaires: the first 18-item questionnaire elicited demographic information. The second 8-item pre-workshop questionnaire elicited specific emotional reactions, ways used to cope with those reactions, feelings, and reactions regarding the Turkish denial and involvement in the Armenian-American community. At the end of the workshop the participants were retested with the same questionnaire to elicit the impact of the workshop.

Announcements regarding this workshop were placed in Armenian-American newspapers, as well as on websites. Interested participants were encouraged to register. There were no fees charged to register. There were approximately eighteen telephone inquiries; and eight people participated in the workshop. The workshop took place at a University in New York City. It was a full day workshop. Workshop facilitators were experienced group leaders, who had worked in the field of Genocide and trauma studies for over a decade. They were both offspring of the Genocide and Holocaust survivors. Adjunctively, a chiropractor who specialized in psychosomatic manifestations and non-verbal body language was invited to assist the participants in gaining a greater awareness of how emotions effect body sensations. He too was a child of a Genocide survivor. Kalayjian's six-step Bio-Psychosocial and Spiritual model was utilized. The following are the six-steps of this model: 1) assessment, 2) expression of feelings, 3) empathy and validation, 3) discovery of positive meaning, 4) information dissemination, 5) diaphragmatic breathing exercises and being mindful of the body. These different steps address

the mind-body-spirit continuum and several aspects of the traumatic event. The model attempts to assess, validate, empathize, inform, and engage in a discussion of rediscovery of meaning, and provides physical relaxation (Kowalski & Kalayjian, 2001).

Style of leadership included self-disclosure with the intention of providing positive role modeling. At the conclusion of each step, the facilitators offered ego-supportive strategies, when deemed appropriate.

The facilitators and body specialist reviewed the results of each question to identify categories of themes for developing a method for content analysis.

## **Study Results**

### **Part 1: Sociodemographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents**

Respondents ranged in age from twenty-two to seventy-eight. There were two males and six females. Educational background included a minimum of a Bachelors degree with one in progress. Three were children of survivors, the remaining five were the grandchildren of at least one survivor grandparent. Five of the participants were born in the United States, two in Lebanon, another in Iran. For those who were born outside of the US, the year of entry ranged from 1946 to 1997.

Four of the participants were single, two widowed, one divorced, and one married. Three of the participants were college students, three were retired, two employed.

### **Part 2: Pre-Workshop Questionnaire**

In response to the first question, eliciting the earliest history or a picture regarding the Genocide, each participant recalled stories of their traumatized and wounded parents or grandparents, including physical scars from being shot while attempting to escape. There were also psychological wounds from the massive loss of family members. The feelings characterizing

these memories were combinations of anxiety, confusion, and curiosity. In recalling these memories, participants expressed deep sadness, helplessness, a sense of being overwhelmed, paralyzed, and experienced intense psychic pain.

When asked about the ancestors involved in the Genocide, responses ranged from eleven siblings of their mother to parents and grandparents. All of the participants recalled a memory of the murder of a primary family member.

When asked how their own memories affected them personally, responses ranged from such violence being a major factor in shaping their identity, to making them cynically angry, and intensely curious about the tragic past. In addition they expressed mixed feelings, re. their relationship to the larger Armenian community. On the one hand they felt closer to the Armenian-American community, hoping to keep the memories alive; on the other hand there were feelings of being burdened and wishing to distance themselves from the community.

In response to the impact of the Genocide on the survivors, responses ranged from it having a devastating effect on their ability to live a normal emotional life, burdening them with sadness, being forced to live in the past, to living in a continuous state of trauma. In response to the impact of the Genocide on the Armenian people in general, responses included protracted suffering, deep sadness, and distrust of outsiders, especially in light of the continued world denial of the Genocide.

One participant observed that there is a connection between the legacy of survivorship and their relationship to food and starvation. She recalled experiences with her own father who was a survivor, expressing extreme disturbance when there was food uneaten. It was defined as a sin. The first author recalled one of her American professors stating that while she was growing up in the 1930s she was told to bring in a nickel for the starving Armenians, never knowing what

caused their starving. The second author recalled similar issues around food with Holocaust survivors in concentration camps.

When asked if there were things they did or avoided doing regarding the Genocide, the following was expressed: there was general paralysis and a deep sense of helplessness, especially in regard to the Turkish denial, and the search for finding a proactive stance. When asked with whom they have spoken about their memories of the Genocide, fifty percent had spoken to no one before the workshop, and most were surprised at how strongly they felt about this topic without having verbalized it before. Three spoke with friends, one person spoke with her mother and grandmother, and another with a therapist.

Regarding the ongoing Turkish denial of the Genocide, all participants expressed experiencing feeling an attack on their personhood, feeling like a non-person. Others voiced generalized pain and confusion. One participant suggested that perhaps Armenians were not strong enough to unite and counter this denial in an appropriate fashion.

With regard to the meaning of Turkish acknowledgment of culpability for the Genocide, participants expressed the following: the need to foster a historical identity, to experience psychological relaxation, to receive compensation after an admission of the truth, and the ending of all Genocide.

When asked what would be considered an adequate compensation for their family losses and sufferings, the following reactions were expressed: two-thirds of the participants indicated that acknowledgment of the truth and a return of Armenian lands was important. One person expressed hopelessness as exemplified by the following statement: “past losses cannot be made up; they can’t bring all my relatives back; we need a long time for rehabilitation.” Another pointed out the importance of compensation as well as improved political relationships of the

two countries.

In response to their experiences with the Armenian-American community there were mixed but strong feelings ranging from over-involvement, on the one hand, to negative feelings and withdrawal on the other. A few respondents stated their skepticism, re. parochialism. A few others expressed how different these Armenian communities were depending on the host country, i.e., Lebanon, Syria, Iran and the United States. Two others expressed anger at not being accepted by the Armenian-American community due to their lack of proficiency in the Armenian language, or their mixed ethnic family background.

### **Part 3: Facilitators' Observations**

The facilitators observed that participants maintained some level of distancing as evidenced by their coolness and resistance. For example, group members did not console or reach out to one other when given an opportunity to do so. Participants did not interact cohesively. The facilitators speculated that, contributing to this lack of cohesion were: (1) diversity of age, resulting in two generations represented in the group (2) diversity of birthplace, as the group consisted of both foreign born and native born, and (3) diversity in ethnicity, resulting in two members with mixed Armenian and non-Armenian parentage.

For example, connectedness between group members through eye contact was fair but not well-sustained or continuous. Male participants would look at objects around the facilitation space without looking at the others. Female participants usually looked at the facilitators or down at a table. Sustained visual contact with slow and well-paced speech suggested emotional responses of anger or sorrow in most participants. Some spoke quickly as if they were reporting a story without any emotional response.

Initially, participants had difficulty in establishing rapport with one another. This

improved throughout the day. Body posture and eye contact were noticeably improved as participants listened to each other's tragic stories and shared their own feelings. Facilitators noticed an undertone of anger, which was displaced and projected at certain emotional points. One intervention was shifting awareness to feelings and thereby assisting participants in expressing those feelings, through emotional openness, acknowledgement, and finally through tears.

At the end of the workshop, members of the group expressed appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to participate. They also expressed how instrumental the workshop had been in assisting them in talking about difficult issues that most of them had not shared with others previously. They concluded by asking for future similar opportunities.

#### **Part 4: Results of Post-Workshop Questionnaire**

In response to question one, related to the earliest memory regarding the Genocide, although participants expressed having some of the same memories, they reported a change in their feelings and attitudes associated with those memories. One respondent stated that she was more conscious of feelings that she had not acknowledged before. The feelings included sadness, helplessness and anger. Another respondent, who had not been able to recall a picture, was then able to for the first time. The picture was of her father's obsession with finding family members, since he was taken away from them and forced on the death march. A third participant stated that his confusion cleared up after the workshop, but he kept his pride associated with his identity as an Armenian. His confusion was related to his belonging to a hated Christian minority. A fourth respondent expressed being much more connected to the memories of the Genocide. She described a sense of awareness which was absent beforehand. She also expressed feelings of

guilt at being safe, secure, and economically stable, while at the same time carrying around these Genocide memories.

When asked what effects they thought the Genocide had on them, most of the respondents were consistent with the expressions of the pre-workshop questionnaire. One respondent had yet an additional memory of being seven years of age and torn over her feelings of love for a Turkish classmate, whom she found defined as the enemy. Another respondent expressed a sense of purpose, which was missing in his pre-workshop response.

When asked if there was anything the participant did or did not do regarding the Genocide, the majority did not express excessive concern. One respondent was plagued by her feelings about death as she raised questions regarding her wish to make up for the lives of the ten people who were taken away from her family during the Genocide. When asked about the continuing Turkish denial, all respondents expressed sadness, hurt, anger, and helplessness.

In response to what they considered adequate compensation, most of the participants still felt that no one could compensate for the loss of their family members and loved ones, yet at the same time there were strong ideas about the following possible options: an offer of an apology, normalization of relations with the Republic of Armenia, restoration of all Armenian monuments in Turkey, payment of compensation, and removal of the blockade. Two strongly stated the necessity to return lands taken.

In response to their experiences with the Armenian-American community the majority expressed a degree of involvement, ranging from low to high commitment. Some noted the fragmentation of the Armenian community, attributing it to cultural differences in different parts of the Diaspora.

## Discussion and Analysis

According to Niederland (1981), the physical and psychological trauma of persons brutally persecuted, incarcerated, and tortured, rarely heal. Shoshan (1989) confirms that children of survivors react to the lack of memories and absence of dead family members. This was a problem to a few of the participants in this research, where they stated feeling like orphans: no roots, no relatives, no uncles and great aunts—not by choice, but by force.

The majority of the respondents in this study expressed feeling burdened by having to carry emotional memories of previous generations. They were thus saddled with a sense of forced responsibility for carrying the memories and helping their ancestors. Most of these participants felt this was an infringement on their freedom, and some second-generation respondents reported resentment. This is consistent with the reflections of Aaron Hass, a child of Holocaust survivors. According to Hass (1990), the most important event in his life occurred before he was born. Others of second generations report being drawn to memories and descriptions of genocide and therefore expressing their parents' unexpressed sadness and rage. This confirms Israeli Psychologist Shoshan's (1989) assertions, after studying Holocaust survivors and their children, that longing and mourning are transmitted from generation to generation. This sense of being burdened is also found as one reaction to the magnitude of the survivor's loss, leading to the tremendous onus of expectation on the children of the Holocaust survivors. The parents often looked to the children as magical reincarnations of their lost worlds (Freyberg, 1980; Kestenberg, 1972; Sigal, 1971).

Among the workshop participants, some expressed this sense of oppressive burden forced upon them and responded by cutting their ties to the Armenian-American community, which they described as a sense of obligation; while forcing involvement, others get over-involved with

their community. This latter group attempted to sublimate their negative feelings into positive actions as reflected in their careers, i.e. studying Armenian Literature, making Armenian movies, participation in their community through volunteering, lobbying, and transcending the traumatic sequelae. This was consistent with the study by Boyajian and Grigorian (1982) of the children of the Armenian survivors.

Distrustfulness was another major theme expressed by those who were told not to trust anyone outside their own families. This is consistent with some post-Holocaust families (Hass, 1990). According to Hass, for the children of survivors the world is hostile, as their parents impart to listeners firsthand observations of man's savagery. Historically, the message given was that the outside world is not to be trusted. Post-Genocide Armenian families continued living in fear of the outside world, since the threat to their lives continued due to geographically widespread Ottoman oppression even in those countries where they took refuge. According to Epstein (1979), children of Holocaust survivors also share varying degrees of over-responsibility to their parents, and distrust the world.

Participants expressed deep and intense feelings of helplessness on many levels: personal, collective, and global. Most of this helplessness centered on the persistent Turkish denial of the Genocide. This is consistent with research findings of Kalayjian and Shahinian (1998), where 39% of the Armenian survivors reasserted the evidence that they had witnessed the Genocide. When asked to express their feelings about the Turkish denial, typical responses included: "I saw with my own two eyes how hundreds of people were placed in a big hole in the ground and burned to death." "What then happened to my clan? Out of 90 relatives, only three have survived." "What of my sister who was raped by a group of Turkish Gendarmes and then set on fire in front of my eyes?" According to Kalayjian (1995), other offspring of the Genocide

survivors—who also experienced the 1988 earthquake in Armenia—also reported having nightmares involving similar images of the Ottoman-Turkish atrocities. This helplessness was also expressed in anger. Feelings of anger were turned both inward and outward. Anger turned inward was expressed in self-criticism. This was apparent in the workshop, as participants struggled with an object for their anger, and a means by which they could work it through. Workshop facilitators became increasingly aware that initially, participants had no mechanisms to process their anger. This was interpreted as complex anger, as part of it was no doubt inherited from their parents and grandparents who survived the Genocide.

Anger that was not expressed internally was expressed horizontally: toward one another, to other Armenians, toward the facilitators in the workshop. According to Kalayjian (1999), this is a common phenomenon when Armenians as oppressed people, failing to process their inherited anger, therefore, cope by displacing it horizontally onto their fellow Armenians.

In response to communicating these feelings with others, over fifty percent of the participants expressed problems with communication. This is consistent with some findings in post-Holocaust Jewish families, where some parents did not talk so as to protect their children. According to Danieli (1985) and Peskan et al. (1997), the issue of communication (literally knowing another and ultimately knowing oneself) thus becomes a focal theme for many children of survivors. This is also consistent with research findings by Kalayjian et al. (1996), who found that three out of four Armenian survivors interviewed asserted that they did not talk to anyone about their experiences of the Genocide. Most of these survivors did not communicate for fear of continued persecution and with the overhanging threat of death to self and the remaining loved ones. This general lack of communication suggests their traumas were not resolved (Kalayjian et al., 1996).

Cahn (1987) has found a correlation between the ability of Holocaust survivors to communicate/symbolize their experiences of traumatic events and their posttraumatic health. Her work suggests that in order to cope with an affectively intense experience such as genocide in the healthiest possible manner, one would need to modulate affect with cognition by talking about the experiences. The review of the Holocaust literature confirms that those parents who refrained from ever mentioning their Holocaust experiences (usually in an attempt to shield their children from the pain), reported more disturbances in their children (Epstein, 1979; Kestenberg, 1982; Link, Victor, & Binder, 1985). One hypothesis is that a lack of actual information leaves a vacuum filled by horrifying fantasies, and because the horror is not grounded in history, it is experienced as part of the child's self (Lipkowitz, 1973). Those parents who are able to share their history with appropriate affect, and in controlled doses, do not seem to harm their children (Kupelian, 1991). These parents have likely integrated their experiences more effectively, and their stories are told with sensitivity to the listeners. These findings are in line with a study by Rosenheck (1986), which found that children of World War II combat veterans with chronic longstanding PTSD were adversely affected by too much or too little discussion of their father's war experiences, while those who discussed it in controlled doses were not adversely affected.

Cultural differences account for some varied responses in the two groups of Holocaust and Genocide survivors. For example, survivor guilt has been described as a major manifestation of the survivor syndrome among Jewish survivors of the Holocaust (Krystal & Niederland, 1968; Niederland, 1981). Danieli (1985) has described various defensive and coping functions of survivor guilt for this population, including a commemorative function. In this function, guilt serves to maintain a connection and a bridge of loyalty to those who perished, and to metaphorically provide the respectful regard of a cemetery that these victims were denied.

However, this guilt experience is not documented in the Armenians. According to Kalayjian, et al. (1996), survivors did not express feelings of guilt for survival. This accords with a study done by Boyajian and Grigorian (1982), which found that only a few respondents talked about guilt, which was associated with duties to the living (i.e., not having done enough for the Armenian community), and, among the second generation, not having done enough for their survivor parents. In this current study, only one participant expressed guilt over leaving, being economically stable, and living in a democratic country, while her ancestors suffered persecution.

Although scholarship in this area places emphasis on the importance of not generalizing survivorship, the authors are recommending here not to generalize nor pathologize generational transmission as well.

## **Conclusion**

This study began with a group of second and third generation Armenian-American survivors of the Ottoman-Turkish Genocide. Participants were frozen and non-cohesive at first and grew into a cohesive group whose members were able to not only process their own unexpressed feelings, but also to support one another.

According to Courtois (2001), working with the psychosocial impact of trauma through the group medium offers an opportunity to restore a sense of reality, a catalyst and context for the exploration of feelings, and a challenge to one's emotions and beliefs. Groups give an opportunity to talk about and bear witness to the trauma, to grieve, to restructure the assumptive world, and to restore trust.

This is consistent with the observations of the facilitators that the group was instrumental in reaffirming one's identity, as well as providing an opportunity to collectively explore ways of

coping. According to Yalom (1985), the group is a social support for exchange between members, offering catharsis, hope, and an examination of life's existential factors. Yalom also notes the existential factors that group members address collectively: recognizing that life is at times unfair and unjust. There is no escape from life's pain, and fearing the basic issues allows living life more honestly.

Research indicates that mental and emotional stresses are felt and held in the body (van der Kolk, 1992). Assessment of the body revealed tension and sadness in their neck and shoulders as well as their voices. Attentive and gentle work with body awareness techniques opened opportunities for healing conflictual mental and emotional stresses and transmitted traumas. Thus, through the utilization of body messages one may accelerate the healing process and free the individual of long held tensions.

As the facilitators measured the impact of the group process, they noted that the group struggled with the existential question of rapprochement with the Turkish perpetrators of the genocide, their current offspring. The group also struggled with the current refusal of the Turks to acknowledge that the Genocide occurred. A particular anger, similar to that of the second generation of the Jewish Holocaust, is generated by this question, as members brought out their frustrations about unwanted victimization. The anger is an outcome of feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.

Compared to the German Government, which made reparations, the Turks have not evidenced any admission of culpability. They repeatedly blame their atrocities on the Armenians themselves. The sting of this anger appears to move the group process to a type of hopelessness and melancholy. This discussion at the same moment increased group cohesion, since all members shared a similar outrage, and were able to validate one another. Yalom (1985) confirms

the curative factors of this cohesiveness, where individuals no longer feel alone. Also cited by Courtois (2001), the joint sharing of trauma tends to most closely approximate group catharsis. Catharsis can relieve long held anger, which this group addressed in this first meeting. According to Sullivan (1953), validation of a traumatic experience is an essential step toward resolution and closure. In addition to such group validation, the group decided that an explicit expression of remorse by a perpetrator, or the next generation, would have enormous healing value, as was reinforced by Staub (1990).

### **Recommendations**

The authors recommend further research to explore feelings of generational transmission of trauma in Armenians as well as non-Armenian offspring of mass trauma. In this group, the opportunity to process feelings was well utilized when the group melancholy was transformed into hope, as expressed by the wish for further workshops. According to Yalom (1985), groups can instill hope by seeing how others can get better and solve similar issues. By the end of the workshop, the group interacted with hope, which facilitators attributed to the release of sadness shared so that their individual isolation was dismantled. One example is the South African Truth Commissions, where by the acknowledgement of crimes against humanity, the world witnessed and therefore validated the fact that an injustice had been perpetrated. Henceforth was the beginning of an attempt at reconciliation and healing.

When the trauma is properly processed emotionally there is a cathartic effect. When the facilitators can validate each participant's feelings, and offer empathy, this will help reintegrate the trauma into one's personality in a more effective, therapeutic, healthy, and meaningful way.

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