

*Section: Theoretical reviews and researches in PPT***WORKING WITH TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN POSITIVE AND  
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**Abstract**

The entire history of both humanity and an individual is a series of traumatic events, each of which leaves its mark on the psyche of a person and society. The article describes modern approaches to the definition of transgenerational trauma, how it is formed in the past generation and transmitted to the next.

Currently, positive and transcultural psychotherapy requires more research on the impact of macrotraumatic events as is transmitted through generations. In this study, we present the author's theoretical model of transgenerational traumatic experience transmission in the framework of Positive Psychotherapy and propose the definition of basic transgenerational conflict as a type of basic conflict in Positive Psychotherapy.

**Keywords:** trauma, transgenerational trauma, family system, basic conflict, basic transgenerational conflict, Positive Psychotherapy

**Introduction**

The impact of transgenerational trauma has been studied for over 50 years. Although the first references to the concept that the traumatic experience of previous generations does not disappear without a trace, but affects the next generations, appeared in the works of Freud. A

detailed study of this phenomenon only began in the 1960s, after Canadian clinicians Rakoff, V, Sigal, J. J., and Epstein, N. B. (1966) found that existing approaches to psychotherapy for depression, grief, and trauma reactions did not help Holocaust survivors. From that moment on, a long journey was undertaken to study the

impact of the events of World War II and the trauma of the Holocaust on survivors and their children, as well as society and the world at large. Theoretical developments began to be implemented in psychotherapeutic practice.

Research on transgenerational trauma entered psychoanalysis primarily through the work of Fraiberg, S., Adelson, E., and Shapiro, V. (1975), who emphasized that every child's room has ghosts who are visitors from the monologue of parents which the children do not remember. Most early research focused on the claim that trauma transmission occurs exclusively within the "psychoanalytic family": maternal dyads and oedipal triangles. The view of three generations began with Faimberg's (1988, 2005) idea of "intergenerational telescoping", which, through narcissistic identifications, connects at least three generations. The study of the problem of the impact of traumatic events that occurred in the past on the personality of the future generation is the subject of research by such scientists as Abraham N., Torok M., Volkan V., Danieli Y., Yehuda R., Kellermann N., Schutzenberger A., Hollis J., Apprey M., Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., Faimberg H.

Transgenerational trauma is a phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced horrific traumatic events demonstrate unfavorable emotional and behavioral reactions similar to those of their ancestors. We can say that there is a transmission of traumatic experience, behavior, and emotional wounds from one generation to the next. As noted by Boessmann, U., Remmers, A. (2024) "It is conceptually more understandable to discuss traumatic experience, its processing and the consequences of trauma afterwards". Therefore, in our study, when discussing transgenerational trauma, we focus on such aspects as traumatic experience, its transmission (as a result of a failed attempt to process traumatic experience) and consequences for the next generations.

### Methodology: theory review

According to Danieli, Y. et al (2016), in the process of transgenerational transmission, an immediate reaction to trauma is transformed into a chronic one. This is due to the formation of extreme survival strategies that form new ways of life and become post-traumatic adaptation styles. As a result of the influence of

these adaptation styles, the victims' further family life, their children's upbringing, their emotional development, and identity are shaped and this generates new beliefs about themselves, the role of family and others, society and the world. Parental fixations become the child's psychobiopsychosocial environment.

The children of survivors develop through the negative and sudden experience of survival that their progenitors experienced as helplessness, terror, and intense fear. The encounter with an extraordinary threat (physical or social death) and the resources that made it possible to survive this encounter are passed down through generations, consciously or unconsciously. The transgenerational transmission of traumatic experiences becomes a kind of attempt to pass on adaptation mechanisms to future generations so that they can survive when they face similar experiences in the future.

Not every trauma becomes transgenerational; researchers cite various risk factors. For example, T. Bako, K. Zana (2020) identify the following factors: the inability to share traumatic experiences, either because the severity of the trauma is questioned or the trauma is silenced at the societal level; lack of people who are going through the same experience; lack of a safe environment where trauma can be processed; lack of opportunity to make life history a story that can be told; damage to the grieving process.

Volkan, V. (2012) believes that mass trauma or disasters on a societal scale lead to four types of reactions in society as a whole: new social fears may arise, existing cultural practices may be modified, monuments or memorials may be built as common bonding objects, or the trauma caused by such events will be passed on to the next generations. The latter occurs when members of a traumatized society find themselves unable to fully perform necessary psychological tasks, such as mourning their losses, so they "pass them on" to the next generation so that their descendants can complete these tasks for them. These children have to reverse helplessness, shame and humiliation, turn passivity into activity and self-confidence, and complete the grieving process by building a symbolic or real memorial.

In addition, in order to understand the nature of the mechanism of transgenerational transmission of trauma, it is necessary to understand that this is a process influenced by

several factors. For example, Kellermann, N. (2001) identified four ways of transgenerational traumatic experience transmission through unconscious repressed parental emotions (psychodynamic approach), through parenting and role models (sociocultural approach), through excessively close, intricate relationships between family members when individual boundaries become unclear or lost and contacts outside the family are limited (family systems model), and the biological approach when, as a result of changes at the genetic level, hereditary vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychopathology is transmitted. Hanna D. et al (2012), studying the impact of the traumatic experience of communities in Northern Ireland, described the total impact of such factors in the transgenerational transmission of trauma through identification mechanisms, through the transmission of narratives about the traumatic event, through disruption of normal family interaction and the biological factor. Weingarten, K. (2004) identifies an additional factor as a "social mechanism" that can result from both family rules about what is and is not discussed about the past and, on a more general level, refers to the silence of communities of people and state policies of silence.

Descriptions of transgenerational trauma in the psychodynamic literature metaphorically attempt to describe the nature of intergenerational space and the transmission of trauma between generations; they speak of a place inhabited by Ghosts or Phantoms (Fraiberg, S., Adelson, E., and Shapiro, V. 1975, Abraham, N. 1994, Kraemer, S., Steinberg, Z., 2016), Witnesses (Benjamin, J. 2011, Gerson, S. 2009), Others (Grand, S. 2000) who generate a "sense of emptiness" (Laub, D. 1998), "the constant presence of absence" (Gerson, S. 2016,) in our consciousness, which is the main legacy of massive ancestral trauma.

Apprey, M. (2016) described the phenomenon of transgenerational haunting, stating that we are not haunted by the dead, but by the gaps left inside us by the secrets of others. What lies in the realm of these eerie entities can be described as a difficulty of understanding. In our psyche, our lives, and our global politics, we fight or flee from the war of our ancestors, fulfilling their transgenerational errands.

Thus, the transgenerational traumatic experience is transmitted through generations

and there are two main ways: direct, when such experience is comprehended and talked about, and when trauma is transmitted through silence and displacement from consciousness (Schutzenberger, A. (1998), Hollis, J. (2013), Apprey, M. (2014) and others).

### Discussion: transgenerational trauma in Positive Psychotherapy concepts

Since 1977, when Nossrat Peseschkian first formulated the foundations of Positive Psychotherapy, much attention has been paid to the study of how traumatic events affect a person's life. Within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy, the traumatic experience faced by a person is viewed as an Actual Conflict, which, due to a macro-traumatic event, leads to a disruption in the interaction between actual abilities. Remmers, A. (2023) notes that as a result of a traumatic experience, a person's sense of security is disrupted or destroyed, resulting in structural changes in such actual capacities as trust, acceptance, love, patience, and tenderness. Such structural changes in a person's primary abilities affect his or her parenting and the formation of primary experience in the early stages of child development. Thus, the traumatic experience of parents that could not be processed due to its devastating power remains fixed (frozen) both in the area of localization and in the area of processing. In the case of collective, cultural, and historical events, the sphere of meanings and fantasies will be involved in the conflict dynamics. As a result of the inability to process and integrate this traumatic experience, a bloody wound is formed in the sphere of meanings, when instead of an element being uprooted, an alien one was inserted, which will continue to exist there, without the hope of ever being integrated.

In the concepts of Positive Psychotherapy, if the traumatic experience has been processed and integrated as a result of exposure to a marker-traumatic event, it is passed on to the next generation through the Dimensions Model in the form of concepts, family stories, and myths. Remmers, A., Peseschkian, H. (2022) also point out that through the sphere of Primal-We, the following is revealed: "As the relationship of the parents with the culture, world, spirituality, and life philosophy (close objects with the

invisible objects). This was a new construction from Peseschkian; it may be influenced by Frankl, Jung (religion, culture, and meaningfulness of the parents), and Adler (style of the parents)".

Thus, in cases when the traumatic experience was not processed, silenced and the grieving for the loss was not completed, a Ghost (invisible object) is formed in the Primal-We sphere as a psychic object associated with the traumatic experience, full of fantasies, with certain manifestations in the physical and emotional spheres, which will be unconsciously passed on to the next generations in the hope that they will be able to complete the processing of the trauma. It is impossible to verbalize this emotional traumatic experience, there are no words for concepts or narratives, and without special processing (culture, religion, psychotherapy, etc.), symbolization, which would lead to the creation of collective myths or fairy tales, is also impossible. Thus, this invisible Ghost in the unconscious will generate conflict dynamics, the content of which may be different from the classical basic and internal conflicts.

Thus, in a person who is a descendant of those who have experienced transgenerational trauma that has not been processed, in addition to the basic internal conflict, there may be another basic conflict, one that is related to the impact of transgenerational trauma – the **basic transgenerational conflict**.

*By **basic transgenerational conflict**, we mean a **type of basic conflict** – an unconscious internal conflict that has arisen as a result of the indirect transmission of survival/adaptation strategies after an uncontrolled, sudden experience of facing an extraordinary threat of physical or social death of representatives of past generations without the opportunity to complete the process of mourning, grieving and processing the consequences of such events.*

In Positive Psychotherapy, we work with four conflicts: actual, basic, internal, and core. According to Werringloer, R.-C. (2023), basic conflict consists of subconscious or pre-conscious concepts acquired in childhood that no longer fulfill their tasks because of their conflictual content. Internal conflict occurs when a basic conflict learned in childhood is combined with a series of microtraumatic events or a global life event (macrotrauma). According to

Boessmann, U., Remmers, A. (2024), in basic conflict, the child's primary needs are met only if social norms are met, and the child accepts this compromise, developing certain secondary abilities and forming concepts that will express them.

In our opinion, basic transgenerational conflict is a type of basic conflict in which the parents' reaction to a familiar action of the child does not follow the usual patterns of the classical basic conflict, when, through interaction with parents, a child learns stable, predictable, understandable social norms of the environment in which he or she will be accepted. Thus, the impossibility of verbalization and any explanation, the specific and incomprehensible emotional reaction of the parents, gives rise to incomprehensible fantasies and undifferentiated emotions in the child's psyche, and all this remains impossible to express in words. In the therapeutic process, we can observe this place not through concepts and narrative, as in the case of a basic conflict, but as a spontaneous emotional reaction, metaphors, dreams, fantasies, etc.

When faced with a series of micro-traumatic events or a global life event (macro-trauma), both basic internal conflict and basic transgenerational conflict can be activated in the current situation, the content of which may be different in terms of needs, resources, and coping strategies, including the opposite. In the absence of activation, the level of basic transgenerational trauma corresponds to the level of micro-trauma, when a person develops secondary abilities to compensate for underdeveloped or blocked primary relevant abilities. The basic transgenerational conflict is manifested not only in the actual conflict, but also in the lifestyle, character, way of responding to stressful situations, etc.

In the psychotherapy of transgenerational trauma, many researchers support the view formulated by Peseschkian N. (1987) that the family is the primary carrier of conscious and unconscious values, myths, fantasies and beliefs. Culture is another significant transmitter, storage, and healer, but the knowledge we receive in the primary family will always play a crucial role, even if it is not shared by the majority in the community or culture.

In Positive Psychotherapy, we also talk about the function of the symptom, both personal and family, around which a family narrative (myth)

was built over several generations. By understanding the function of the symptom, we realize the unique significance of trauma for the individual and the entire family system.

Metaphorically, the process of transgenerational trauma therapy can be compared to the process of restoring a broken picture, the parts of which cannot be accurately matched to get a complete image. What we have can only serve as a form, a support, and this picture will never be complete without the integration of emotional experience. The exchange of feelings and the reorganization of emotional experience can be metaphorically compared to glue that holds broken pieces together to form a complete image again. Psychotherapy of the consequences of transgenerational experience allows the patient to feel himself in history and history in his life. The psychotherapist facilitates the unfolding of the story and reorganization of the emotional transgenerational experience, connects the affective and cognitive aspects of the impact of this experience on the present, and integrates fantasies and traumatic memories into a coherent family myth. In the history of violence rewritten by descendants, there is hope that the silence that symbolized death was interrupted by a word spoken aloud.

## Conclusions

The uniqueness of Positive Psychotherapy in dealing with the impact of transgenerational trauma is that, on the one hand, we take into account the current situation and the current conflict that was activated in a person by his or her basic transgenerational conflict, and on the other hand, we rebuild and restore the client's internal relationship with the Primal-We sphere, where what a person believes in is more important than the authentic historical context. The Dimensions Model becomes a kind of tool with which we can measure and evaluate what a person's inner family treasure consists of, and, delving deeper into this research, we can come across a secret shelf where, behind an ordinary fact that contradicts the family narrative, a Ghost will be hiding behind a dream or a fairy tale written by the client.

From the perspective of Positive Psychotherapy, based on the principle of transculturality, we can use not only historical or archival documents, but also other materials

(myths, fairy tales, songs, etc.) to find the pieces that will help restore the integrity of the missing object in the psyche.

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