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## Healing Trauma in War Torn Countries

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### Abstract

Women for Women International (WFWI) helps victims of war become self sufficient in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Sudan. WFWI conducts year-long programs for participants, providing financial aid, job training, rights awareness and leadership education. They also want to help participants deal with the often severe trauma they experience during war. I have adapted my Energy Psychology methodology called Clearing Limits Energetically with Acupressure Release (CLEAR™) so that it may be used in groups in short, onehour sessions as a part of WFWI's program. In July 2008, WFWI sent me to Nigeria to test CLEAR with its participants to see if it could translate into other cultures and to see if the women would accept it. In this article, I explain CLEAR and the pilot program in Nigeria with WFWI facilitators and participants.

### What is CLEAR?

CLEAR is a method for eliminating the negative effects of trauma. Trauma occurs from one or more past events that negatively influence behavior, thoughts and feelings. When we experience trauma, we don't like what we feel or think, so we try to block out or avoid our painful memories. This process of avoidance actually insures that the trauma will get stuck in the body because it is never fully processed and cleared. What we resist persists. CLEAR is a method for releasing the stuck trauma. It is also useful in relieving depression, anxiety and phobias, and it helps free individuals from blocks that impact their ability to move forward in life.

Example 1: One of my clients was depressed for twenty years every summer, following a rape in her home on a hot summer night. After six sessions using CLEAR, she was free of her depression.

Example 2: A client had a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from his experience in the military (a classified situation). He was on medications for anxiety and insomnia. After one session, he went off all of his medications because he was no longer anxious and could sleep. He reported, "I had been treated with anti-psychotic medication and traditional talk therapy from the Veterans Administration Hospital for nearly one year for PTSD. During my session

with Julie, I prepared to go back in time to the event in the military that was so painfully in the forefront of my memory. And I also experienced a memory from when I was a small child that I had forgotten when my father emotionally hurt me very badly. After that session, I began to taper off of the anti-psychotic medication and have been facing life and even sleeping without medications for eight months. I now enjoy being with my father and am finding myself making excuses to go visit him, when I used to make excuses to stay away.”

Results are often this impressive and they are permanent unless the person is re-traumatized.

CLEAR integrates a number of energy psychology methods. It uses acupressure point therapy, bilateral stimulation, somatic experiencing, clearing of blocking beliefs, and muscle testing. I will explain each of these below.

There are fourteen acupressure points on the body that correspond to various emotions (Roberts, 2007, pp 56-57). With CLEAR, after determining with muscle testing which points to clear on a particular issue, light pressure is then applied to each point successively while putting one's attention on the topic that is being addressed. (Some energy psychology methods tap on the points. I find light pressure is sufficient).

Brain scans show a significant clinical decrease in Generalized Anxiety Disorder after acupressure point treatment: “63% of the control group were judged as having improved; 90% of the experimental group were judged as having improved; 51% of the control group were judged as being symptom free; 76% of the experimental group were judged as being symptom free.” (Andrade and Feinstein, 2003; Pert and Feinstein 2004). The theory is that stimulation of the acupressure points actually changes the chemistry of the brain so that the alarm response is inhibited (Feinstein, Eden, et al, 2005). Going through this process naturally raises thoughts and memories associated with the trauma and it provides insight regarding how the trauma has impacted the person. “Analyzing” clients is not necessary; they naturally process and absorb what is necessary for healing to occur.

Bilateral stimulation (originated in Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) and systematically developed by Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) involves tapping alternately on right and left sides of the body while thinking of the issue being worked on.

Sometimes the acupressure points alone are not enough to clear the trauma, and bilateral stimulation is necessary. The theory here is that the trauma is “frozen in time” and is energetically stuck on one side of the body or the other and alternatively tapping on the body while thinking of the issue frees it up (Bartson, 2008).

Somatic Experiencing, developed by Peter Levine (1999), is a practice I use with both the acupressure point technique and bilateral stimulation. Levine developed Somatic Experiencing after watching animals in the wild experience trauma. He noticed that animals, when they can't fight or flee, go into immobility (which, he speculates, dulls the senses so they don't feel the pain if they are eaten). And if something scares away the animal that put them into this state, and they are not badly injured, they will lie there, presumably processing the trauma as the body twitches and eyes roll. They then get up and walk away.

Levine surmised that because humans think, we avoid this processing. We don't want to experience the feelings and sensations that usually accompany a trauma because they are unpleasant and they don't feel good. We think, “I don't want to feel that; I don't like that feeling. It is unpleasant and I won't be happy if I feel that. I want to get away from that feeling.” Our resistance to feeling is what gets trauma stuck because what we resist thinking about cannot be cleared and remains locked into our

memories. Using somatic experiencing, we are present in the body and allow feelings and sensations to surface to our awareness so that the trauma can be reprocessed and thus be freed.

Beliefs define who we are—they define what we think, how we behave and the actions we take. Blocking Beliefs are thoughts that prevent us from being who we want to be. Blocking beliefs are created when we experience trauma. For instance, we make decisions about ourselves and life when bad things happen to us as children. For example, if I experienced unhappy, angry parents as a child, I might decide that “I am unworthy (of their love); I am a bad person (or I would have gotten their love).” And perhaps I believe that “something is wrong with me” (to explain why I am unlovable). If I was hurt emotionally or physically, I may decide “I am not safe in the world,” or “the world is not safe.” These beliefs, like the traumas, also get stuck in the system. Untreated, they will impact much of what occurs in life. For how can I truly realize my potential if I feel unworthy, bad, unsafe, and as if something is wrong with me? But CLEAR frees these beliefs so desires may be achieved.

Muscle testing (also referred to as Applied Kinesiology) is a way to get feedback from the conscious and unconscious mind about what is going on in the body on physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual levels. When the body is in the presence of something negative to that body, muscles are weaker than when it is in the presence of something positive. There are many ways to test muscles, but the most common is to press down on an arm, which is held out parallel to the ground. The logical brain is by-passed to get a true reading of what is occurring in the body/mind – a response of muscle strength is a “yes” or positive, and muscle weakness is a “no” or a negative. Muscle testing is used to test for allergies, in assessing chiropractic problems, and sometimes by doctors to facilitate diagnosis and prescribing medication. In CLEAR, muscle testing is used to determine issues to clear, blocking beliefs, methods needed to clear, which acupuncture points are needed to clear the issue, and finally to see if the issue is indeed cleared. Muscle testing allows one to streamline the clearing process and only work on what the person’s muscle testing indicates is necessary to heal at that point in time. In the pilot program with WFWI, however, we did not use muscle testing because it would have been too time consuming. Instead of using muscle testing which isolates the particular points to clear, we used *all* of the points, bilateral stimulation, and clearing of beliefs.

### **The Nigerian pilot program**

The WFWI Pilot program was conducted in Jos, Nigeria. Initially, I trained ten facilitators in CLEAR for two days. The third day we practiced the simplified version (without the muscle testing) of CLEAR as it would be conducted for WFWI participants, and then the material was translated into Hausa (the local language in Jos). Then WFWI participants experienced two 90-minute sessions of CLEAR on two consecutive days.

The simplified version of CLEAR began with an introduction to explain the concepts of energy, CLEAR, trauma, and healing. We then defined blocking beliefs and had participants list and then clear blocking beliefs as a group. Next, each participant did bilateral stimulation on their particular issue. Then we walked through the acupuncture points and had each participant put light pressure on each of the acupuncture points on that same issue. We finished with question and answers.



The participants had experienced many different types of trauma. Three women had had polio and had no use of their legs; two of these women had children. A few were HIV positive. The husbands of a few had disappeared and left them alone to fend for four or five children. Some of the women were physically abused by their husbands, and one had seen her son and husband murdered in front of her.

At the beginning of the second session with the participants, we asked them for their impressions after the first session. Their comments included:

“At first I didn’t believe it.”

“I thought it was the white man bringing his rituals.”

“I thought it was child’s play, but now I see it can really help.”

At the end of the second session with the participants, the facilitators evaluated the sessions and wrote down what participants said because all but one were illiterate. One of the women who had had polio said that she did not normally sleep well, but the night after the first session she slept very well. One said, “The burden has come down.” The woman whose husband and son were murdered in front of her said that she could relax and smile for the first time in ten years. All of them said they felt better, and many said that they “felt calm.” A few asked about the best way to explain it to others so they could share it with family and friends. All of the participants agreed that they liked the process and would use it in the future on themselves and others.

Finally, the facilitators evaluated the program. All of them recommended that CLEAR be added to the WFWI manual, so that all of the countries use the process in future programs with women. They affirmed the positive results in themselves and in the women attending the program, and they felt it was important that CLEAR be added to the WFWI facilitator skills.

### **Comments on energy therapy from Jos, Nigeria - December, 2008**

Titi:-

Said she was very happy to have participated in the energy therapy sessions because since then it has been helping her to cope with the loss of her husband and son who were killed before her during the Jos crises

Rose:

She was discovered to have HIV before the energy therapy. Said the constant practice of the points has helped her to accept her present situation and live positively without much worry.

Ladi:

The energy therapy has made her to understand that no matter how big a challenge is one can cope with it since after the therapy she has learnt to touch the points anytime she finds herself in an unpleasant situation. Now she is gradually getting over the loss of her sister.

Ruth:

She had a problem with her son who was refusing to help in the home and also refused school, she said after a session with Dr Julia she has found a place in her heart to forgive him and to forgive herself as well. Now she is doing well and getting on well with her son.

Laraba:

She has learnt so much in the energy therapy and have learnt to use the points and she still practices the points and feels better.

The staff in Jos said they have not used it on other people but on themselves. Some found the sore spot and bilateral stimulation to be more effective.

Thanks.

Anthonia

Program Manager in Enugu, Nigeria

### **Conclusion**

The pilot program in Nigeria was a success. CLEAR was seen as very helpful to the participants. It helped them to feel calmer and more positive about their situations, and they said they would use it in the future. Facilitators reported in November, 2008 that they have trained ten more facilitators and are still using CLEAR and having positive results. I have been working with WFWI Headquarters (located in Washington DC) to add CLEAR to their manual. More facilitator trainings will occur in the spring of 2009. After the manual and facilitator trainings are finished, WFWI facilitators in ten countries will use CLEAR to help victims of war recover from their trauma. While it would be good to have long term followups, we have had no feedback yet from the traumatized people who were treated, other than general reports from the facilitators saying these people are still using CLEAR and that other facilitators there have been trained in the method.

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