




University of Messina

ISSN 2612-4033

Journal of Clinical & Developmental PsychologyJournal homepage: <http://cab.unime.it/journals/index.php/JCDP/index>**Climbing out of the abyss: a guide to healing from trauma**Scaramuzzino C.^{1*} 

¹ Department of Biomedical, Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina; Psychiatric unit Policlinico “G. Martino”

ABSTRACT

Introduction: To provide theoretical insights and practical tools for creating a safe environment, overcoming barriers to treating traumatised patients, and helping them to heal.

Methods: The authors analyzed Bethany Brand's book “Finding Solid Ground: Overcoming Obstacles in Trauma Treatment” and the Italian version titled “Costruire un terreno sicuro: Come superare gli ostacoli nel trattamento del trauma”, edited by Giunti Psicologia 2023.

Results: The book provides a deeper understanding of the psychological and physiological mechanisms underlying trauma. It helps to understand how trauma affects the mind and body, influencing behavior and emotions.

Conclusions: The vision of this book is useful for therapists and mental health professionals who work with traumatized patients. It offers theoretical insights and practical tools to create a safe environment, overcome obstacles in treatment, and facilitate the healing process.

Keywords: Trauma; Safe ground; Therapeutic relationship; Trauma therapy

* *Corresponding author:* Claudia Scaramuzzino, Department of Biomedical, Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina; Psychiatric unit Policlinico “G. Martino” via Consolare Valeria, 98125, Messina, Italy

E-mail address: claudiascaramuzzino@outlook.it

<https://doi.org/10.13129/2612-4033/0110-4206>

Introduction

The concept of trauma represents a crucial aspect in the field of mental health, defined as an experience or a series of extreme experiences that trigger a significant negative emotional response. These events can range from the loss of a loved one to traumatic experiences such as accidents, abuse, conflicts, or natural disasters. (Abuse, S. 2013). Trauma can leave a lasting imprint on the individual psyche, manifesting through a wide range of symptoms, including anxiety disorders, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment 2014). Understanding trauma is essential for providing effective support to those involved and promoting their psychological recovery. Specifically, facing a trauma poses a complex and delicate challenge, both for survivors and mental health professionals engaged in providing support and therapy. Within the vast landscape of psychological literature, few texts explore the process of trauma treatment with such depth and clarity as Bethany Brand's et al., (2023) "Finding Solid Ground: Overcoming Obstacles in Trauma Treatment" (*Bethany L. Brand, H. J. Schielke, Francesca Schiavone, Ruth A. Lanius, 2023*). Through a series of insightful and comprehensive chapters, the author delves into the myriad aspects of trauma treatment, providing a thorough overview of the theories, techniques, and challenges therapists may encounter along the path to healing. From establishing a safe therapeutic environment within the therapeutic relationship to utilizing the "Finding Solid Ground" program, Brand et al., (2023) aims to assist trauma survivors in gaining and perceiving greater security, beginning with acquiring healthy ways to manage relationships and trauma-related symptoms.

Treatment process

The book focuses on the crucial importance of creating a safe therapeutic environment for trauma survivors. Bethany Brand et al., (2023) explores the concept of "safe ground" as fundamental to effective trauma treatment, highlighting how the therapeutic relationship and empathic approach can serve as key elements in establishing this essential context. Additionally, the author within the first chapters, it explains what trauma is, how it manifests, and its long-term effects on the psyche and the body. It also analyzes the importance of building a safe and trusting therapeutic relationship as a foundation for trauma treatment; this helps to understand how the patient's traumatic history can be a necessary prerequisite for diagnosing trauma-related disorders (TRD) and planning effective treatment. There is a wide range of theoretical backgrounds and preferred models that therapists may adopt in interpreting and explaining TRD. Some of these models explicitly include the bodily aspect (Ogden et al., 2006; Van der Kolk, 2014), while others integrate neurobiological knowledge, fundamental to understanding trauma (Cozolino, 2017). However, there is a reaction to traumatic aspects called 'dissociativity', and the authors emphasize the effectiveness of the 'grounding' technique,

through a clinical example, which is useful for the emotional management of relational traumas and symptoms of hyperarousal and/or hypoarousal. Brand et al., (2023) provides strategies for working with dissociativity, including methods to enhance patient awareness and orientation during therapy sessions. Furthermore, the author analyzes how the quality of the therapeutic relationship can influence the treatment process and outcome, highlighting the crucial importance of relational functioning in trauma therapy. This analysis leads to the concept of countertransference, which helps understand how the therapist's feelings and reactions towards the patient can influence therapy, offering valuable insights. This underscores the crucial importance of the therapeutic relationship in trauma treatment. Understanding and addressing emotions related to trauma are fundamental to the healing process. Accurately identifying emotions, along with effective emotional regulation, can help patients overcome emotional hypersensitivity and overload often accompanying trauma treatment. However, it is important to recognize that the path to healing can be complex and that, in some cases, patients may experience dissociation episodes as a defense mechanism. Therefore, it is essential for therapists to be attentive and competent in managing these cases, providing support and guidance to the patient along the path of emotional healing (Freyd, 1996). The emotional pain caused by trauma is often expressed through a series of unhealthy risk-taking behaviors, including excessive substance use, alcohol abuse, non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), disordered eating, and a propensity to engage in and maintain unsafe interpersonal relationships (Ford and Gómez, 2015; Myrick et al., 2013; Najavits and Walsh, 2012; Webermann et al., 2017). The author clarifies how it is indispensable for the clinician to recognize and openly discuss how difficult it is to make the decision to develop healthy ways to address impulses and emotions that were previously perceived as catastrophic and endless.

Finding Solid Ground

An effective treatment in individual and group settings is the " Finding Solid Ground " program explored in depth in the final chapter, provides practical guidelines on how to implement the program in individual and group settings. The goal of the program is to strengthen the patient's self-compassion, which aims to strengthen the patient's self-compassion, helping them understand how these difficulties have valid reasons related to their traumatic past, and teaching them to help themselves and heal from trauma, starting with acquiring healthier ways to manage relationships and trauma-related symptoms. The program also focuses on improving tolerance for emotions, bodily sensations, and aspects of the self, including dissociated self-states (DSS). The way in which the program's structure is illustrated must involve a slow pace, as mentioned in Richard Kluff's text, which states, "The slower you go, the sooner you arrive at the

destination."

Conclusions

In clinical practice, the text proves valuable as it provides psychoeducational handouts along with practical and written exercises, which can be employed by clinicians, both in healthcare and non-healthcare settings, to enhance treatment effectiveness. These strategies promote patients' ability to remain focused on the present moment, regulate their emotions, and minimize the risk of excessive emotional burden. Within the clinical practice context, it equips therapists with the necessary skills to facilitate greater patient stabilization throughout the therapeutic journey. Overall, " Finding Solid Ground " offers a comprehensive and practical guide for mental health professionals working with trauma survivors. Through a combination of theory and clinical strategies, Brand et al., (2023) provides a comprehensive framework for trauma treatment and overcoming difficulties along the path to healing.

Acknowledgment: None

Declaration of Interest statement: None

References

- Abuse, S. (2013). Mental health services administration. Results from the, 2(013), 55-68.
- Brand, B. L., Schielke H.J., Schiavone F., Lanius R. A., (2023). Finding Solid Ground: Overcoming Obstacles in Trauma Treatment. Giunti Psicologia.IO.
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2014). Understanding the impact of trauma. In Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US).
- Cozolino L. (2017), The neuroscience of psychotherapy: Healing the social brain, W. W. Norton & Company (trad. it. Neuroscienze per clinici, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2021).
- Ford J. D., Gómez J. M. (2015), «The relationship of psychological trauma, and dissociative and post-traumatic stress disorders to non-suicidal self-injury and suicidality: A review», Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 16, 232-271. doi:10.1080/15299732.2015.989563
- Freyd J.J. (1996), Betrayal trauma: The logic of forgetting childhood abuse, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Myrick A. C., Brand B. L., Putnam F. W. (2013), «For better or worse: The role of revictimization and stress in the course of treatment for dissociative disorders», Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 14(4), 375-389.

- Najavits L. M., Walsh M. (2012), «Disso-ciation, PTSD, and substance abuse: An empirical study», *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 13 (1), 115-126.
- Ogden P., Minton K., Pain C. (2006a), *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*, W. W. Norton & Company.
- Van der Kolk B. (2014), *The body keeps the score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*, Penguin UK (trad. it. // *corpo accusa il col-po. Mente, corpo e cervello nell'elaborazione delle memorie traumatiche*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano,2015).
- Webermann A. R., Brand B. L., Schielke H. J., Kumar S., Myrick A. C. (2017), «Depression and culture in the TOP DD Network study: Assessing depressive symptoms, self-harm, and hospitalization among dissociative patients across four cultures», *Acta Psychopathologica*, 3, 39. doi: 10.4172/2469-6676.100111