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POSSIBLE APPLICATION OF YOGA IN VICTIMOLOGY

***Summary.** The paper tends to explore possibilities of application of yoga in victimology as a science on crime victims, in general, and in particular in relation to the following aspects: support to crime victims, including victims of war, during recovery process, prevention of burn-out of those who are delivering services to victims as well as of researchers who conduct interviews with especially vulnerable categories of victims; prevention of victimisation; in facilitating processes of facing the past and reconciliation within postconflict societies.*

Bearing in mind the scarce literature and research in this aspect of yoga connection with science, the paper is primarily based on the analyses of my personal experience of conducting victimological surveys, supporting victims and on reconciliation and the experiences of others.

Keywords: *yoga, victimology, victims, support, reconciliation*

Introduction

Victimology, as the study of victims (victima (Latin) - victim and logia (Greek) - knowledge, learning, science), deals with various aspects of people suffering - through the research of various forms of suffering, as well as through assistance and protection of victims and prevention of primary and secondary victimization and re-victimization. Victimology is a relatively young academic discipline. It was founded shortly after World War II, largely influenced by the suffering of people in it. In Serbia, victimology began to develop during the 1970s, but its development has been particularly intensified during and after the wars in the 1990s, especially after the establishment of the Victimology Society of Serbia in 1997.

Among the victimologists there are differences in views regarding the definition of its subject. On the one hand, there is a broader view, according to which victimology needs to deal with all the victims, regardless of what is the cause of their suffering (eg, crime victims, victims of natural disasters, accidents at work, etc...). On the other hand, the supporters of the narrower view, which is dominant in our country, believe that it should focus only on the victims of crime (Konstantinović-Vilić, Nikolić-Ristanović, Kostić, 2009). This view will be accepted in this paper.

This paper aims to examine the possibilities of applying yoga in victimology, seen as the science on crime victims - in general as well as related to the specific aspects of dealing with victims, as follows:

- support and assistance to victims during the recovery from victimization,
- prevention of victimization and re-victimization,
- prevention of burn-out of
 - providers of services to victims
 - researchers who interview vulnerable categories of victims
- facilitating the process of dealing with the past and reconciliation in post-conflict society.

Before I point to the possible application forms of yoga in victimology, I will define the basic concepts of victimology and provide basic information regarding the development of victimology.

On victimization and victimology

Victimization is a process through which someone becomes a victim, whereas the condition of someone becoming a victim is called „being victimised“. Primary victimization refers to becoming a victim of criminal conduct, while the repeated victimization or re-victimization means that a person has become a victim of the same criminal conduct two or more times. In addition to the primary, victims often suffer from secondary victimization. Secondary victimization is the intensification of primary victimization by the negative reaction of social environment and by inadequate or even incorrect response of the law enforcement bodies (Schneider, 1975). Categories of victims which are particularly exposed to secondary victimization are the ones who are considered especially vulnerable because of their age, psychological-physical characteristics or the nature of the crimes which they are exposed to (children, the elderly, mentally ill and disabled persons, victims of sexual offenses, domestic violence, trafficking and war crimes).

In the development of victimology, considering the focus of its interest, there can be seen the following two periods: the period of the so-called first victimology and the period of the second victimology (Gassin, 2007). The first period is the period from its creation to the end of the 1970s, which was characterized mainly by dealing with issues related to the determination of the role of victims in the genesis of crime, therefore, dealing with issues of victims in order to explain criminal behavior. In the 1970s there was a partial move from the questions regarding the role of victims. Instead, victimologists' attention started to concentrate on the problems of victims, regardless of their role in the genesis of crime and regardless of the delinquent. Dealing with the victims becomes dealing with their suffering by finding the best ways to help them. This is the second victimology, which mainly deals with issues of victim assistance, its position in the criminal proceedings, compensation and treatment, and in recent times also with the position of victims during mediation between the perpetrator and the victim and in the processes of reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Possible forms of yoga application in victimology

Assistance and victim support

Modern victimology, therefore, puts an emphasis on the support and assistance to victims in order for them to recover from the consequences of victimization, and to help them to re-establish the disturbed control over their own lives. The consequences of victimization can be both physical and psychological, material and social. In addition, psychological effects, of smaller or greater intensity, and of shorter or longer duration, accompany each victimization, regardless of what is the type of crime in question. Here we can discern the first possibility of application of yoga in victimology: the use of yoga as a way of empowering the victims during the process of recovery. In this sense, yoga influences physical stability and fitness as well as the mental stability and self-control, and has an effect on strengthening the feeling of security and satisfaction with oneself and thus enables faster recovery from the consequences of victimization, including post-traumatic stress disorder¹. Therefore, it is not surprising that yoga is used in the treatment of very severe traumatic experiences such as those that occur in victims of torture (Franklin, 2001), the harshest war rape victims (eg. in Rwanda)², or while providing support to victims of

¹ Kersten Wills, D., <http://www.yogajournal.com/health/2532>, Retrieved on August 26th, 2010.

² Experiment with the application of yoga in the treatment of rape victims in Rwanda, which was conducted in the last two years received the support of the United Nations. Organization Project Air, which is in charge of the project is hoping that yoga can also be applied in the same manner in the war-affected areas of Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza and Afghanistan. - Nelson, S. Rape Victims For Healing Yoga Taught In Rwanda, http://www.causecast.org/news_items/9358-rape-victims-taught-yoga-for-healing, Retrieved on August 26th, 2010.

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trafficking³. Also, the experiences of application of yoga in working with prison inmates (who are also in different ways victimized) indicate its very good effects on their emotional state, reduction of aggression and their general behavior (Saraswati, 1990; Rucker, 2005)⁴.

Prevention of victimization

The successful recovery of the victim has a preventive effect. Namely, repeated victimization is often closely related to the absence of adequate assistance and support to victims. In other words, the appropriate protection, assistance and support, which empower and strengthen self-esteem and self-control of the victim can prevent the repeated victimization by the same or different criminal behavior. Also, it is known that people who are concentrated, stable and calm are less likely to become victims of crime in comparison to people who are afraid, not concentrated and suffering from feeling of helplessness. Therefore, the practice of yoga can be considered as one of the possible ways to prevent individual victimization.

Prevention of burn-out

In close connection with the provision of assistance to victims is the issue of impact of working with victims on service providers that help them. Working with victims of crime is one of the potential drivers of burning-out and yoga appears here as a possible way to prevent or eliminate the consequences of burning-out of professionals and volunteers who work with victims. Yoga could have a similar effect on researchers who explore the extent and consequences of victimization and the needs of victims, and who are in a position to lead a large number of interviews with traumatized people, and to analyze these experiences later. In addition, one should bear in mind the character of most victimology action research, which, given the nature of the case studies and the vulnerability of the respondents, inevitably involve the provision of the most basic forms of assistance, such as active and emphatic listening or giving information. One of my many experiences of this kind, relating to research in Serbia immediately after the NATO bombing, I described in my book "Surviving the transition: the daily life and violence in a post-communist and post-war society" (Nikolić-Ristanović, 2008).

Based on the analysis and comparison of my personal experiences as a researcher and a provider of support to victims of various forms of violence and victims of war, from the period before and after starting to practice yoga, I can observe the following positive effects:

- easier to cope with the experiences of victims,
- ability to facilitate the perception of the traumatic experience in the context of a broader life experience,
- easier distancing from the experiences of victims, with concurrent easier establishment of communication and expression of empathy,
- the absence of signs of burning-out.

Yoga, then, apparently, has a positive effect on the quality of the overall relationship with the victim and the provided support, while simultaneously reducing the negative effects on researchers, and providers of assistance.

³ http://www.astra.org.rs/?page_id=29, Retrieved on August 1st, 2010.

⁴ For some newer experiences see: <http://www.alternativesmagazine.com/47/marsh.html>

Dealing with the past and reconciliation

In a post-conflict society, such as ours, much of the population, if not all, are in some way victims of war. Therefore, all the aforementioned related to victim support and the prevention of victimization and the possible application of yoga, can be applied more broadly, concerning the consequences of war. In the so-called process of dealing with the past, yoga should have an important place in dealing with psychological and psychosomatic consequences of the war, especially with those persons who were most directly affected by it or participated in it as soldiers. But besides that, dealing with the past involves opening of serious topics, starting conversations about the crimes and their victims, and efforts toward reconciliation between parties in conflict.

Working most directly on the latter aspect of dealing with the past, I have found that following factors have a negative impact on talks about the past and the possibility of reconciliation: unfinished recovery process of a large number of people who are differently affected by war, lack of attention to our own psychophysical health and spirituality, and perhaps even the considering dealing with oneself as a luxury or selfishness. The consequences of this attitude are visible every day, and are manifested as a widespread intolerance, especially towards different people. Unfortunately, the consequences are especially visible in discussions about the past that, very often, instead of reconciliation, lead to deepening of existing or even opening new conflicts.

Taking into account my own experiences and experiences of colleagues from other countries (eg. Northern Ireland), I believe that yoga should find an important place in the context of constructive opening of discussions about the past and the processes that lead to reconciliation. In addition, it may be of particular importance in the part related to one aspect of reconciliation that involves restoring self-esteem, on one hand, and renewal of trust in others, on the other (Srna, 2005). To modern man in general, and especially one that, like the citizens of our country, is going through dramatic changes and has accumulated various traumatic experiences in a relatively short period of time, the hardest things are dormancy and dealing with oneself. However, when accepting the challenge, the results are inevitable. In this sense, a good illustration could be an example of the colleague from Northern Ireland, a former soldier of one of the warring parties, and today a yoga instructor and a peace activist, who is, by talking about his transformation, helping others to learn about themselves, regain lost self-respect, understand each other and reconcile⁵. Also, the calming effect of yoga is noted in the work with the former soldiers, including the participants of the war in Iraq, in the United States⁶.

Conclusion

Possibility of application of yoga in victimology is evident. The goals of yoga and victimology are similar because they are both focused on supporting people to solve problems they face and establish control over their lives. Both yoga and victimology are interested in the (mental, spiritual) strengthening of people to establish a balance between their inner and outer life, and that really is the most important link between yoga and victimology. Just keeping this in mind, I believe that the possibilities for cooperation between these two disciplines are very broad and significant.

The application of yoga could significantly improve various aspects of working with victims, but also contribute to the prevention of suffering of people by various forms of violence and other criminal behavior. In addition, for the prevention of crime working with people who have problems with aggression, as well as with inmates is of great importance. Also, the popularization and spreading of the practice of yoga can favorably affect the overall recovery of war-affected societies, as well as the process of reconciliation. Connecting yoga with restorative approaches to tackling crime and reconciliation in a

⁵ I met him at the International Summer School of the Institute of INCORE, in Derry (Northern Ireland), in which he was one of the trainers on the course of interpersonal reconciliation.

⁶ Kersten Wills, D. <http://www.yogajournal.com/health/2532>, Retrieved on August 26th, 2010.

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post-war society is especially worth considering⁷. However, to propose more specific recommendations detailed studies and monitoring of the effects of yoga in various fields of victimology are necessary.

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⁷ On the relationship of restorative justice and yoga see: Rucker, L. 2005. On the Joint Action for Truth and Reconciliation initiative, as a form of application of restorative justice in dealing with the past in Serbia, that could be more effective if it was connected with yoga, see: Nikolić-Ristanović, Srna, 2010.