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Complexity of Therapist's Feelings in the Work with War-Traumatized Patients

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Aim. To present the complexity of therapist's feelings and emotions in the work with war-traumatized persons and the importance of psychological mechanisms taking place in such circumstances.

Methods. The method of psychoanalytical psychotherapy was used, adapted to the work with war-traumatized persons. The therapy sessions were held once a week and lasted for 50 minutes. The patients were given transference interpretations differing from customary transference interpretations. They were modified to provide support, aiming at overcoming of the feelings overwhelming each patient.

Results. The diversity of the therapist's feelings amalgamated into countertransference was one of the most important psychological mechanisms in the therapy procedures, and served as an indicator of the patient's feelings in the procedure. It was related to the processes of projective identification as a framework of the complex patient-therapist relationship.

Conclusion. In the work with a war-traumatized patient, it is inevitable that the patient's feelings are partly shared by the therapist through projective identification. This can lead to the "burnout" syndrome and threaten the boundaries of the therapist's psychological system. The role of the therapist includes not only knowledge but also the personal experience of work on himself. Through the process of therapy and by using interpretations as the powerful tool, the therapist is capable to accept such traumatic feelings and help the patient overcome them, but also to remain within the framework of his role.

Key words: Croatia; defense mechanisms; ethnic groups; psychoanalytic therapy; psychotrauma; war; Yugoslavia