

## DIGNITY THERAPY: PREVENTION OF SUICIDAL RISK IN THE PENITENTIARY AREA

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### SUMMARY

Dignity therapy was administered to ten prisoners in a detention center. The Beck Depression Inventory was administered before and after the intervention. The results obtained from the Beck Depression Inventory have highlighted dimensional changes in all the prisoners. There was a significant improvement in relational abilities and the disappearance of self-harming thoughts.

**Key words:** dignity therapy – depression - suicide risk - prisoners

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### INTRODUCTION

From clinical practice and daily observation of prisoners, it emerges that within the prison, the person loses autonomy, identity, values, the success of one's existential project, the desire for self realization. The most frequently observed psychiatric symptoms are depression, tendency to isolation, adaptation disorders, blame, and self-injurious gestures (Ferraro 2001).

### AIM

The aim of the project was the administration of a protocol of dignity therapy in a detention center, to assess whether the preservation of dignity and relationships, which is one of the goals of the treatment of dignity (Mai et al. 2018), can affect the improvement of the observed depressive symptoms, guilt, self-injurious gesture, suicidal thoughts. Dignity Therapy (DT) is a multi-dimensional, brief and individualized psychotherapeutic intervention, that aims to relieve psychological and existential distress in patients living with life-threatening behavior or life-limiting diseases (Chochinov et al. 2005). Originally, it was conceived for terminal or cancer patients, but some research has begun to highlight its importance in a population of non-cancer patients (Chochinov et al. 2016). Dignity Therapy can represent an ethical will, a life review, a personal narrative; it may promote spiritual and psychological well-being (Boyken et al. 2015), it may give meaning and hope and improve life experience of people subject to restraint.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

Dignity Therapy was offered to prisoners in the Bellizzi Irpino (AV), Italy, a detention center, throughout a guided interview based on standardized thematic questions and other reinforcement sub-themes. Before the Dignity interview, the Beck Depression Inventory was administered to each prisoner in pre and post-test phases

to evaluate the effect of the narrative of important life issues and the consequences on depressive symptoms. The selected prisoners were 10 aged between 18 and 60 years (8 M - 2F), with different lives and detention histories.

### RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

In this experimental study, it has emerged that the prisoners first have accepted and listened to this therapy, and then they applied the narratives and this led to a reworking of their personal experience which enabled them to accept themselves better as people. The results obtained from the Beck Depression Inventory have highlighted dimensional changes in all the prisoners. There was a significant improvement in relational abilities and the disappearance of self-harming thoughts.

Three people show deep changes in the range of mood.

In particular, the following cases are highlighted:

- In R.D., 57-year-old drug-addicted who had anxious and depressive symptoms has gone from a moderate depression state to one of mild depression. After the interview, his relational skills increase, the ability to enjoy things as in the past increases and self-harming thoughts do not emerge;
- In C.G., 68-year-old, already diagnosed with depressed mood and resulting with a slight depression in the first administration of the Beck test, after the interview, depressive symptoms do not appear, mood generally improves, relational skills improve;
- In M.E., 33-year-old sentenced to life in prison, resulting with a slight depression in the first administration of the Beck test, after the delivery of the document, depressive symptoms, pessimistic thoughts about the future and self-destructive behavior disappear.

Three people show deep changes in the range of mood. Restoration of dignity was the common element of the different interviews.

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