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## VOICES OF DOCTORS AND PATIENTS

### The excluded

**Marcela Granados-Shiroma\***

Research and Development Center in Health Sciences, UANL, Ministry of Health of the State of Nuevo León, Opción Retorno A.C., Mesa de Paz, Monterrey N.L., México

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*"Nobody is excluded for what he is, but for the way others treat him. Maybe there is no excluded individual but only individuals who exclude."*

Alberto Senante Carrau<sup>1</sup>

There are "diseases" and events which affect family dynamics and have a large impact on health, stability, communication and relationships within and outside, crossing domestic boundaries into the community; "diseases" and events that stigmatize and marginalize those who suffer them, *excluding* them from the possibility of a second chance.

#### Who are the excluded?

In the social concept, when we talk about social exclusion, we generally think of people or populations entirely lacking social support, this is *the forgotten*, mistakenly associated with almost one single concept: "misery".

Social exclusion supposes the denial of someone's right to be a person. The socially excluded are not granted the most basic rights, because society does not recognize them and he/she is not able and/or does not know how to reclaim them.

Throughout time, different groups have been *excluded*. History does not remember them, among these groups there are: Jews, left-handed people, the mentally-ill, gypsies, artists, poets and painters, people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

(AIDS), people suffering from tuberculosis, leprosy, or a disability; homosexuals, drug addicts, delinquents and gang members suffer from this as well.

Gandhi Peace Foundation's President Radha Baht, on her visit to Monterrey, Mexico in December 2011, after spending time with some gangs, made the following statement:

*"In Christ's time the socially displaced were the lepers, who were not allowed to live in cities or towns; in Ghandi's time, the Pariahs or casteless were the socially relegated; in Monterrey yesterday I saw the socially rejected, I saw young gang members. Just as in past times, these young people are chased, labeled and marginalized from society."*

#### Exclusive societies vs. positive social reinsertion

The degree of vulnerability and risk of relapse that people have after being released from prison or rehabilitation centers for addictions has been addressed in different forums, when they do not get to a place or environment or people that may generate and reinforce their wishes to make a positive change towards a free and productive life.

International experience acknowledges that making rehabilitation policies available to citizens gives positive results, not only in terms of reducing stigmatization among this population (an essential condition for rehabilitation) but also through the resources that may be attracted through different mechanisms where civil organizations play an important role.

\* Corresponding author: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo en Ciencias de la Salud (CIDICS), Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Av. Carlos Canseco s/n y Av. Gonzalitos, Mitras Centro, 64460, Monterrey, N.L., México. Email address: marcela.granados.shiroma@gmail.com (Marcela Granados-Shiroma).

The story of Antonio is one of many; he gives a testimony of a positive social reinsertion, this is, the possibility to reinsert in society, to live with other individuals, respecting their rights as the main objective.

Antonio was part of a neighborhood gang since he was 8 years old; being a gang member, he took part in all sorts of activities within and outside the law. Fights with other gangs were part of his daily routine; the many scars on his body speak for themselves. He was involved in small robberies all the way up to car theft, which were at first without violence but resorted to violence later, and on top of this, alcohol and drug consumption. Antonio was arrested and held in the Center for Young Offenders, and later jail; because of his behavior, he was in solitary confinement for long periods of time, until one day he had a conversation with a person from a civil association, who invited him to participate in a rehabilitation program. Antonio recalls: *"I had two options, if I accepted integration with that group, I would be out of solitary. If I said no, well I would be still in it. Without having the least interest in rehabilitation, I went to the group. I had my ups and downs, but they never left me. I felt they cared about me"*. Antonio moved forward in his rehabilitation, completed his sentence, finished high school and got a Psychology degree; he is currently studying his Master's degree abroad. He has participated as a speaker in various national and international seminars and congresses. Whenever he gets an opportunity to come, he incorporates different activities and workshops, 1@1 Peace, Peace talks or Alternatives for a life free of Addictions and Violence, where he shares his knowledge, happiness and vision of an inclusive society.

Ivan is another young man who tells his testimony *"I remember as a kid I used to watch airplanes and I would think I would never have the opportunity to ride one. I used to live in a neighborhood where drugs, violence, prostitution and crime were around me, they were part of my environment"*. He recalls that when he was a kid, his father bought him a small toy accordion that he loved to play; he also liked going outside to play with the other kids from down the street. His mom and dad used to encourage him to play his accordion. He comments *"One day I was outside my grandmother's house with my dad, playing my accordion. I was about 13 years old, and a kid around my age walked in front of the house, he was playing the trumpet, he moved on, but then he came back, talked to my dad, and asked him for permission to play with me. From that moment on a great friendship with Erick began, a friendship that is strong to this day"*. *"While we talked"*, Ivan remembers, *"one day I was playing with a group of friends, Erick was singing, and a person approached us and after talking for a while, he invited us to go to a 1@1 Peace meeting, a civil association which works exclusively with teenagers. We liked it, we still participate"*. Ivan and Erick received help to enter the Faculty of Music of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, Mexico. Ivan has perfected the craft of the accordion and Erick of singing, creating "Vallenato" -a musical group-; they have participated in various domestic and international contests. After 3 participations, they won 1<sup>st</sup> place in the "Festival de la Leyenda Vallenata" in Valledupar, Colombia; they have participated in other festivals in New York and Argentina, in addition to being invited to play with world-renowned groups at several festivals. Currently

they teach music and signing and are looking to get funds to formalize a civil organization called "Chords for Peace" where they help children, kids, and teenagers find an alternative to a life of violence and addiction through music and singing, developing skills and integrating them into their life plan.

Irene shares her experience. At age 9, she and her 3 younger brothers were taken to the Integral Development of the Family (DIF), because of abuses and violence from their father and mother. *"Mom used to hit us with a belt, a broom or a tube for any reason or pretext. She treated me as her slave. Dad did love me, but if he ever treated me nicely or bought me something, mom would get mad at him, she would say mean things to him and then, after he left the house, she would hit me or lock me up, she would call me a slut, at that age I did not quite understand what was going on. I remember mom and dad consuming alcohol until they passed out, and since I was very little, around 7 years old, I would drink what was left in the bottles of beer and wine. After they took us to the DIF, I escaped. I was all over the place, at 11 years old I prostituted myself; I needed to stay drunk. At 12 years of age I started using drugs"*. She sadly recalls that time of excess, violence and abandonment. Some relatives placed her in a rehabilitation center; she relapsed 6 times. The last time she was in rehab, she heard about a civil association which helps people like her, people who come out of a rehabilitation center and do not have anywhere to go. She called them and was accepted by *Opción Retorno A.C.*, where she currently lives; she has not relapsed in over a year, the longest time, she mentions. She restarted her studies, she works and does not miss her therapies; her dream is to have a nice place to live, and the necessary income to request full custody of her little brothers.

Paraphrasing Alberto Senante in relation to *The Excluded*, we know that by nature, the human species tends to try to live in a group. If a group does not accept a person or a group of people, they seek for another group which accepts them. Therefore, there are no excluded people; there are excluding groups or societies. So the question is: Which groups are those people we exclude from joining our groups or society? People we exclude based on stereotypes of any nature or prejudice like ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, disability, social, cultural or economic condition, health, pregnancy, language, religion, opinions, sexual preferences, marital status, clothing, tattoos, or any other condition that we label as unacceptable or intolerable.

This is a very serious problem in Mexico and even more serious in Nuevo León, so serious that we are suffering its consequences in general and in particular. The National Discrimination Poll (ENADIS, by its Spanish acronym) 2010, conducted by the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED, by its Spanish acronym) reports that Nuevo León is the state with the highest segregation levels by gender, sexual preferences, skin tone and ideology. The results of the study are shown under the name "Nuevo León, leader in discrimination". The main goal of this study is to obtain statistical data on the dimension of the discrimination problem in our country by entity, taking into account populations such as the handicapped, ethnic and religious groups, women and children, homosexuals, people with HIV/AIDS and addicts, among others.



**Figure 1** It symbolizes the insertion of Prof. Vladimir Firpo.

With the topic “Racism and every other form of discrimination and intolerance in Mexico”, several documents about this situation are available; in fact, the Permanent Counsel

of the Organization of American States, through the Commission of Jurisdictional and Political Affairs, issued recommendations to the government of Mexico on November 16, 2005, referring to *exclusion* as a serious problem and as a priority, which must be attended urgently so that the Rule of Law prevails.

We hope this space serves to reflect on what we are doing as doctors and health professionals; moreover, we are a part of a University Community. There is a lot to be done to stop being exclusive and become true promoters of positive social reinsertion in all areas in which we interact.

Prevention is the inclusion that makes us open and lets us see a world with better possibilities (Fig. 1).

And you... how do you wish to join?

## Reference

1. Accessed in March 2014. <http://www.buzoncatolico.es/formacion/solidaridad/sensibilizacion/excluidos-sociales-son-invisibles.html>