

“I am Unique, Beautiful, and Exceptional”: on Self-Esteem Among Young Women

„Jestem niepowtarzalna, piękna i wyjątkowa”, czyli o poczuciu własnej wartości u młodych kobiet

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to present the impact of the sociotherapeutic program “I am unique, beautiful, and special” on the self-esteem of young women in early adulthood. The program was designed to support participants in building a positive self-image, developing self-acceptance, and strengthening their ability to cope with social pressure. The theoretical section discusses the importance of self-esteem and its role in psychosocial development. The research project was conducted using the pedagogical experiment method in a one-group design. This approach allows for the evaluation of changes in the studied variable (self-esteem), thereby enabling verification of the program’s effectiveness. The program involved six students of pedagogy and political science from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, and one cosmetology student from the Olsztyn School of Higher Education. It lasted six weeks, with weekly meetings of varying duration. Empirical data were collected through interviews and observation techniques. The analysis revealed positive changes in self-acceptance, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships. Participants reported increased emotional openness, better emotion management, and a greater readiness to take on challenges.

Keywords: self-esteem, self-assessment, woman, youth, sociotherapy

Abstrakt: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wpływu programu socjoterapeutycznego „Jestem niepowtarzalna, piękna i wyjątkowa” na poczucie własnej wartości młodych kobiet we wczesnej dorosłości. Program miał wspierać uczestniczki w budowaniu pozytywnego obrazu siebie, rozwijaniu samoakceptacji oraz umiejętności radzenia sobie z presją społeczną. W części teoretycznej omówiono znaczenie poczucia własnej wartości i jego rolę w rozwoju psychospołecznym. Projekt badawczy został przeprowadzony z wykorzystaniem metody eksperymentu pedagogicznego w układzie jednej grupy. Taki układ pozwala na ocenę zmian, jakie zaszły w zakresie analizowanej zmiennej (poczucie własnej wartości), a tym samym umożliwia weryfikację skuteczności programu, w którym wzięło udział sześć studentek pedagogiki i politologii Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie oraz jedna studentka kosmetologii Olsztyńskiej Szkoły Wyższej. Program trwał sześć tygodni, spotkania odbywały się raz w tygodniu, a czas ich trwania był bardzo zróżnicowany. Materiał empiryczny pozyskano za pomocą techniki wywiadu i obserwacji. Analiza wykazała pozytywne zmiany w zakresie samoakceptacji, pewności siebie i relacji interpersonalnych. Uczestniczki deklarowały większą otwartość emocjonalną, lepsze zarządzanie emocjami i gotowość do podejmowania wyzwań.

Słowa kluczowe: poczucie własnej wartości, samoocena, kobieta, młodość, socjoterapia



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INTRODUCTION

The modern world is full of contradictions, constant change, and an increasing number of threats to both human life and safety. People are facing increasingly complex and difficult situations on everyday basis. Said issues include physical and psychological dangers, disturbances, overloads, as well as emotional deprivation. The loss of the sense of security, lowered self-esteem, lack of supportive individuals in one's life, and the disturbed sense of purpose are just among some of problems faced by today's children, adolescents, and adults (Rozłucka 2022, 26). Individuals characterized by less developed personality traits or character are considered to be more susceptible to negative influences manifesting themselves within the scope of their immediate environment. An increasing number of them require the assistance of specialists, namely – professional sociotherapists. Participation in a sociotherapeutic group allows for the development of proper social relations and bonds, helps restore and improve self-esteem, as well as makes it possible to cope with shyness. Sociotherapy is a specific form of psychopedagogical assistance, oriented towards treating psychosocial and emotional disorders and directed at individuals belonging to high-risk groups (Sikorski 2014, 7).

The matter of self-image is discussed within the framework of numerous academic works and psychological studies. Anna Brzezińska (1973, 87-97) defines self-image, or the image of the “self”, as the structure responsible for how one perceives oneself. Essentially, it is a way a person “looks” at himself or herself. Said system includes one's knowledge of one's abilities, skills, and traits. Self-image incorporates various components, such as perceptions of one's body and psychological characteristics. The content and its significance change depending on both psychological and social conditions. A person not only constantly discovers and gets to know himself or herself, but also actively shapes his or her self-image (Kon 1987, 37). “Nowadays, the image of oneself is a commonly understood concept of the ‘self’, a subject of knowledge just like physical objects, biological world, and other people. Through self-observation and self-reflection, a person gathers knowledge about ‘self’, including intelligence, motivation, and social development” (Napora 1999, 13). The presented theory essentially assumes that one needs to thoroughly understand oneself, focus on oneself, and create one's own image basing on the self-assessment of intelligence, motivation, social development, physical appearance, and life achievements (Napora 1999, 13).

One should keep in mind that the formation of a proper self-image begins at birth. In the course of an early childhood, a person evaluates himself or herself basing on pleasant and unpleasant stimuli. These factors overlap, creating a sense of chaos. Through the perception of said stimuli, a child learns about itself. It learns how others, especially parents and close relatives, respond to its body and behavioral patterns (Siek 1993, 296). The next stage when it comes to developing one's self-image is early school age, which is crucial for creating a positive self-image and improving self-esteem. Upon starting a particular school, a child begins to seek answers to important questions, such as: Who am I? What do I mean to others? How do others see me? Who am I important to? Most significant sources of opinions about oneself are family and peer groups. The

child receives feedback from said two groups, compares himself or herself to others, as well as forms judgments and beliefs about himself or herself (Lewandowska-Kidoń 2015, 9). Yet another crucial developmental period is adolescence, a key time for emotional development, during which individuals are especially sensitive to external influencing factors (Biernat and Bąk-Sosnowska 2020, 52). Young people often compare their appearance to that of their peers and to media-created beauty ideals. Girls tend to exhibit greater instability regarding their self-esteem and body image than boys. It is largely caused by the societal evaluation of women, primarily through the lens of physical attractiveness, whereas men are judged basing on physical capabilities (Malinowska 2016, 14-18). The pressure on women to meet appearance-specific standards and constantly compare themselves to various ideals can lead to detrimental changes regarding self-esteem and - consequently - to mood disorders, psychological suffering, depression, as well as eating disorders (Biernat and Bąk-Sosnowska 2020, 52). During the middle school period, there is a significant interest in one's inner experiences and the self as the reflection of the need to understand and evaluate oneself (Kulas 1986, 50-51). Towards the end of adolescence, self-esteem becomes more mature, especially during late adolescence (ages from 16 to 18). Self-esteem is to a significant extent shaped by peer group engagement, integration into social life, adoption of new social roles, and the fulfillment of developmental tasks. Rapid internal changes and increased social demands during early adulthood contribute to the crystallization of personal identity and influence the maturity of self-esteem (Kulas 1986, 65-66). During adulthood, self-esteem gradually improves. Young adults tend to have higher self-esteem than adolescents, which is attributed to growing economic stability (and sometimes – higher professional status), familial stability, maturity, adaptability, as well as emotional stability (Trześniewski et al. 2004, 163-185).

"Self-esteem is one of main regulators of human behavior, influencing individual's attitude toward himself or herself, others, and the surrounding world" (Lewandowska-Kidoń 2015, 13). A key element when it comes to discovering the truth about oneself is undergoing the process of understanding one's "self." The longer we live, the more experience we accumulate. Through observing our behaviors and reactions to various situations in everyday life, we develop self-knowledge, allowing us to self-assess and accept ourselves (Lewandowska-Kidoń 2015, 13-14).

The predominant focus of this article is to showcase changes that have occurred when it comes to the provision of sociotherapeutic support for women in early adulthood who struggle with building a positive self-image and experience low self-esteem. The "I am unique, beautiful, and exceptional" program was developed for women who find it difficult to form close relationships, recognize their strengths, and appreciate themselves. During sociotherapeutic sessions, participants were expected to undergo specific transformations through their social experiences. Those were mainly meant to be changes in perceiving reality, behavioral adjustments, as well as emotional release (Strzemieczny 1988, 18). The participation in the program provided the women in question with the opportunity to improve their self-esteem, self-perception, and interpersonal relationships.

1. SELF-ESTEEM BUILDING PROCESS AND GROUP WORK IN SOCIOTHERAPY

Self-image is considered to be the perception of oneself in words and images. It is a specific image we hold at a specific moment in time. It includes the description of our physical characteristics, as well as our abilities, attitudes, and beliefs (Plummer 2007, 15). Self-esteem is closely linked to our assessment of this self-image. One's specific self-image is formed basing on information from two sources. The first one consists of one's own experiences acquired through activity, which serve as the foundation of self-knowledge. The second one incorporates opinions of other people encountered in daily life (Borecka-Biernat 2006, 79-81).

Self-worth disorders and self-esteem issues that are closely related to said phenomenon are fields of sociotherapeutic work. Experiences that have negatively affected one's self-esteem may be of various nature, but their common features are deep and constantly increase the sense of one's helplessness, lack of ability to impact certain issues, or considering oneself as the cause of all the problems and troubles emerging in life. Societal reality is treated by individuals with low self-esteem as the sole outcome of their undertakings. Such people are convinced that everything happening around them is connected to them and is a direct response to their actions (Szczepanik and Jaros 2016, 33). Interventions in this regard are predominantly oriented towards the notable improvement of participants' overall functioning, mainly by means of supporting personal and social growth by creating more suitable conditions allowing for the fulfillment of their own needs, while at the same time making it possible for them to adjust to and meet societal requirements. Change in participants' functioning is predominantly related to psychosocial sphere of life, which is then visible while interacting with other people. Any changes in terms of personality or mental structures are in the discussed scenario the outcome of reacting to societal conditions. They are indirect in nature, but in favorable conditions, they are the desired outcome of carried out sociotherapy-oriented undertakings (Jankowiak and Soroko 2021, 131).

Improving the overall self-esteem of sociotherapeutic workshop participants is the key element of therapeutic work. It affects their ability to cope with issues and establish new, meaningful relations. The mood that is conducive when it comes to cooperation, self-awareness development, as well as the improvement of strictly social skills is advantageous when it comes to building one's self-worth and boosting one's self-esteem (Jankowiak and Soroko 2021, 140).

2. SOCIOTHERAPEUTIC PROGRAM AND ITS PARTICIPANTS

The way we perceive selves and others is, to a great extent, determined by both cultural and strictly historical factors (Dillon and Benson 2007, 16). Women and girls are frequently being taught to be good at establishing and maintaining relations with others. In some scenarios, the excessive focus on relations, while at the same time failing to develop strong and authentic "I", may be detrimental to women, leading to the feeling of emptiness and being hurt. Yet another aspect deciding who a woman

is and how she is perceived culturally is her appearance. Cultural norms and beauty standards are created in a highly artificial manner, but once they are accepted and adopted, they become affecting women in a very real manner (Dillon and Benson 2007, 17). The "I am unique, beautiful, and exceptional" sociotherapeutic workshop program was designed for women being in their early adulthood, who experience difficulties when it comes to creating a positive self-image and dealing with low self-esteem. Its predominant goal was to make it apparent to young women that self-esteem may impact emotions felt both towards themselves and towards the world they live in on everyday basis. During the aforementioned workshops, women were granted the opportunity of familiarizing themselves with self-esteem elements, ways of affecting their self-esteem, and methods of developing a remarkably high self-esteem, resulting in a higher level of satisfaction pertaining to themselves and their lives. It was also supposed to result in inner peace, greater ability to truly experience the moment, as well as more sturdiness and real passion. Some participants of the program were members of dysfunctional families. Below, the specificity of the participants is presented, together with their key everyday life-related problems.

Paulina

Paulina is a 21-year-old preschool and early school pedagogy student. She was raised in a large, full family. It is also worth mentioning that she was the oldest of five children. She spent her early childhood supporting her mother in taking care of her younger brothers. Said fact directly translated into her remarkable sense of responsibility. However, she had also been struggling with the feeling that the needs of others had been more important than her own. Paulina had often denied herself certain pleasant things and activities, spending money on the family.

The woman in question had a low self-esteem, perceived herself as an unattractive person, and had had significant issues with establishing and maintaining romantic relationships. Even though she had frequently been cheerful and happy, her lowered self-esteem had made it difficult for her to become open to new relations.

Ola

Ola is a 23-year-old pedagogy student, raised as an only child. During her childhood, she had a rather poor contact with her father, who had been spending a lot of time abroad working. The model of a strong, independent woman adopted from her mother became her natural state of being, but had also been the cause of her various problems. Ola had been of the opinion that she could not express any form of weakness. She had refrained from showing emotions and trusting others. What is more, her social life had been almost non-existent. She had been dealing with a highly critical approach towards herself. Each and every mistake had been perceived as a failure, leading to self-esteem lowering. Professional life and achieving remarkable successes had been her priorities, resulting in the imbalance between work and personal life.

Kasia

Kasia is a 23-year-old pedagogy student, raised in a full family, living with her grandparents. Negative experiences related to her two failed romantic relationships

caused her to be disappointed with the opposite sex, leading to replacing the willingness to form stable relations with short-lived ones. Kasia had been dealing with low self-esteem, being the result of school-related experiences, such as mocking and critical remarks of her mother pertaining to her appearance and weight. She had had serious issues with accepting her body. At the time of the workshop organization, her relations with her mother were tense, further decreasing her self-confidence. Kasia would like to fulfill her ambitious goals, but she had not had enough courage to face serious challenges.

Ania

Ania is a 22-year-old pedagogy student, raised in a full family, together with two older siblings. She can be characterized as an outgoing, ambitious person, seemingly happy and carefree. Nevertheless, she has a serious problem when it comes to establishing and maintaining close relations. Fear of closeness caused her to avoid physical contact, which may point to certain difficulties in accepting own emotions. Ania had often been struggling with uncertainty about her abilities, fear of new challenges, as well as with anxiety pertaining to being compared to others. She had also shown difficulties in fully accepting herself. It translated directly into issues with making difficult life-oriented decisions.

Natalia

Natalia is a 24-year-old cosmetology student. She was raised in a full family, together with a younger sister. She can be perceived as an outgoing and energetic person dealing with the issue of accepting her own appearance. Despite having numerous relations throughout her life, most of them had been short-lived, pointing to uneasiness when it comes to establishing more long-lasting bonds. Her lifestyle, filled to the brim with parties and social outings, had been causing issues at work and had led to difficulties in Natalia being truly and fully engaged in her duties. She had been constantly comparing herself to others, which had only strengthened her sense of insufficient worth.

Klaudia

Klaudia is a 22-year-old pedagogy student. She is an only child raised in a full family. She can be described as a calm and ambitious woman. However, she had had difficulties with appreciating herself and her achievements. She had been frequently comparing herself to others, which had typically led to the feeling of being insufficient and to frustration, especially while analyzing successes of her peers.

Klaudia has some friends, but her calm and reserved personality makes it difficult for her to engage in truly meaningful relations. She had been exceptionally critical towards herself and had the tendency to set excessive challenges for herself, leading to exhaustion and the lack of free time.

Agnieszka

Agnieszka is a 25-year-old political science student having three siblings. She was raised in a full family. She seems to be an outgoing person, having a lot of enthusiasm and being surrounded with numerous friends. However, her true self is marked by numerous complexes pertaining to her appearance and life-oriented

achievements. She had been constantly comparing herself to others, which had only strengthened her view of being worse than others around her. It had resulted in a low self-esteem.

Diagnosis in the case of sociotherapy, as pointed out by Jarosław Jagieła (2009, 60-61), is both: "objective (specifying the type of trauma the child/adult has experienced, manifestations of disturbed behavior, and progress in the child's/adult's functioning), and subjective (child/adult exploring relations by interacting with a given therapist and a therapy group) in character." The proper diagnosis makes it possible to plan sociotherapeutic workshops being adjusted to the needs and requirements of the participants.

Table 1. Simplified participant diagnoses

	I-I	I-PEERS	I-ADULTS	I-TASKS
Paulina	Low self-esteem, issues with accepting own appearance, works on thinking positively and accepting herself.	Has limited relations, but keeps some close ones. She is rather open and kind.	She respects elders and finds it easier to establish relations with them than with her peers.	She is afraid of changes, but is also conscientious and task-oriented.
Ola	She is extremely critical towards herself and cannot accept words of kindness. She suppresses her emotions.	She is likely to isolate herself from others, avoiding relations with peers. Critical towards her peers.	Her relations are formal in character. She engages in various support-oriented undertakings, but fails to establish long-lasting bonds.	She is a perfectionist that is overwhelmed with her duties. She likes being appreciated and punishes herself for mistakes made.
Kasia	She has low self-esteem and does not accept her body. However, she tries her best to think positively.	She has numerous friends, but finds it difficult to trust others. She avoids men.	She prefers older individuals. She especially respects her father.	She is a hard-working and engaged person, but is also overwhelmed with duties.
Ania	She seems to have a positive self-perception, but is rather afraid to open up to others.	She is outgoing, but avoids close relations and keeps distance.	She has good relations with older people and has been involved in a number of societal undertakings.	She has been engaged in numerous activities, but is frequently impulsive in nature.
Natalia	She works on accepting herself, but frequently compares herself to others.	She likes to be accompanied by her peers, as she feels that she is being accepted by them.	She respect older people and has a strong bond with her mother.	She tries to perform her duties meticulously, but she is not always capable of doing so.
Klaudia	She expects a lot of herself, but has been learning how to like herself for who she is.	She feels good while being accompanied by others, but she is constantly comparing herself with other peers.	She has good relations with older people and respects them.	She is ambitious, strives for perfection, and is critical towards her own achievements.
Agnieszka	She has certain complexes and fails to accept her appearance.	She is outgoing, supporting, and likes being accompanied by others.	She is empathetic and has good relations with older people.	She is efficient when it comes to dealing with her duties.

Source: own work.

3. RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research project discussed has been carried out using the pedagogical experiment method in a single group design. It has followed the path of pretest – sociotherapeutic program – posttest. Said design allows for assessing changes that have occurred in the analyzed variable (self-esteem). Thanks to that, it allows for the verification of the effectiveness of the program. The research has been aimed at assessing the overall efficiency of the proprietary “I am unique, beautiful, and exceptional” sociotherapeutic workshop with regard to shaping positive self-image and developing self-worth in young women. The predominant advantage of the presented research model is the capability of capturing difference between the starting and end point in the context of undertakings carried out within the scope of the program. The research group has included seven women being pedagogy and political science students, studying at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. One participant has been a cosmetology student studying at the European University of Applied Medical and Social Sciences. The most crucial qualification criteria have been observed or declared low-esteem and emotional issues regarding self-acceptance, societal relations, as well as dealing with life-oriented challenges. The participants have been chosen basing on a prior psychopedagogical diagnosis, pointing to difficulties faced. Workshops were organized in a cyclical manner for the period of 6 weeks at the UWM’s Faculty of Social Sciences. They took place once a week and had the form of meetings lasting from 90 to 120 minutes (there were two sessions lasting 180 minutes as well). The program was organized at the end of 2022/2023 summer term. The utilized research techniques involved: in-depth interviews conducted twice, namely – before the start of the program and after its completion (as the form of diagnosis and evaluation), participant observation during sociotherapeutic workshops, narrative analysis of participants’ statements, as well as self-diagnosis and self-reflection in the form of short written summaries produced by the participants at the end of the cycle.

The gathered qualitative data have allowed for the comparison of the level of self-worth and methods of creating self-image both before and after the program. What is more, the analysis of change dynamics has also been done. Despite the lack of standardized psychometric tool utilization, program-specific results have been assessed basing on consistent and repeating spheres clearly pointing to improvement in terms of self-acceptance, self-confidence, and interpersonal functioning of the participants. The group was uniform in character when it comes to development and both societal and cultural aspects, which has allowed for the proper analysis of program outcomes. To ensure the proper anonymity of the participants, pieces of information pertaining to them have been anonymized. Each of the women has received a fictional name and their factual data have not been disclosed anywhere. The participants granted their written consent for their participation in the study and for research outcome publication after the completion of their education course.

4. ANALYSIS OF SOCIOTHERAPEUTIC PROGRAM RESULTS

The predominant goal of the discussed sociotherapeutic program was to increase the level of self-confidence and help developing it in the period of early adulthood. Women participating in the workshops were active and open to new experiences. All the meetings were considered to be valuable and required experiences. Each and every woman took part in all the proposed forms of activeness with remarkable engagement. The initial task of sociotherapeutic program realization was to establish a safe space for the participants to be able to share their thoughts, emotions, and experiences in. The host tried to moderate the work of the group and support the participants in building trust and communicating openly. Yet another step was to define specific fields, in which the participants experienced difficulties pertaining to creating a positive self-image. The goal was to understand underlying causes of such issues and focus on individual needs of all the women. During sociotherapeutic sessions, self-acceptance and positive thinking development techniques were discussed. Practical exercises and role-playing allowed the participants to experiment with new behavioral patterns and reactions. With time, participants started sharing their successes with the host and supported each other in difficult moments. The women realized how important the way of treating themselves every day was. If one takes care of oneself every day and strives to satisfy one's true needs or fulfill certain hidden desires, one has a chance to be happy and feel good about oneself. Both our needs and emotions change, so it is important to be constantly present and attentive to what is happening inside us. During the workshops, the women were taught that self-esteem could be shaped and it was worth striving for that.

Conclusions drawn from the sociotherapeutic program organized for women with lowered self-esteem pointed to crucial tangent points with effects similar to outcomes observed in the case of different programs having similar goals, yet aimed at other age groups. The program organized and developed by Anna Łuszczak (2016), carried out among children aged 11 and 12, focused on developing self-worth basing on six spheres of self-worth proposed by Nataniel Branden. The author highlighted that the participation in workshops allowed children to not only notice and appreciate their strong feats, but also – to understand that one does not have to be ideal to deserve respect and acceptance. A similar process could be observed while working with adult women. They also started noticing value in themselves, which was earlier not manifested or neglected, frequently due to destructive assumptions having their roots in the past. The program developed by Aleksandra Kin (2019), aimed at teens, focused on the role of positive self-image and personal development as elements leading to change in patterns and increasing internal motivation level. Similarly to the proprietary program, in the case of the Kin's one, key role was played by activation-oriented methods, group work, and exercises oriented towards reflection on self-identity and one's future. In both cases, the participants started talking about themselves in a more positive

manner, expressed a greater awareness of own emotions and needs, as well as showed openness to building social relations. Even though target groups of both programs differed in terms of age, societal context and life-oriented experiences, their common denominator was the need to regain contact with one's own worth and rebuild self-trust. Children, teenagers, and adult women required safe spaces, in the case of which they could experience authentic contact, acceptance, and understanding. The key effects of all three programs were the increase of self-awareness, boost of internal motivation to change, and real improvement in both emotional and societal functioning.

A healthy sense of own worth may help achieving a satisfying life. Participation in sociotherapeutic workshops positively affected the participating women, in the case of whom there was the attempt to improve self-worth, create positive self-esteem, create the opportunity release emotional tensions, as well as externalize own emotions and experiences. Below, changes in reality perceptions of the participants that appeared as a result of carrying out the discussed sociotherapeutic program are presented:

Paulina

Before the program: Paulina had been struggling with low self-esteem and the lack of acceptance of own appearance, which had made it difficult for her to maintain and establish relations, especially with men. She had frequently felt anxiety and avoided direct contacts, finding comfort in online-based relations.

During the program: She slowly opened up to the group, willingly sharing her thoughts with others. The key moment was the reflection pertaining to the image of own body and positive feedback received from participants.

After the program completion: Paulina started taking care of her needs, accepted her look, as well as was more eager to engage in both societal and educational activities. She became more self-confident, less concerned about the opinion of others, and more eager to establish new relations.

Ola

Before the program: Ola had been a perfectionist with extremely low self-esteem. She had been critical towards herself, as well as closed to emotions and relations. She had avoided societal contacts, focusing on outcomes achieved and the approval of others.

During the program: She started talking about her own emotions and confessing to difficulties faced. The key moment was naming her needs and abandoning the need to be the best.

After the program completion: She became calmer and more balanced. She started taking care of maintaining a proper balance between work and relax. She established new relations, started dealing with criticism better, and set boundaries.

Kasia

Before the program: Kasia had had a very low self-esteem and suffered from issues connected with body acceptance. She had frequently felt worse than others and avoided confrontation.

During the program: She opened to a group, as well as attempted to talk honestly with her mother. The support of other participants helped her identify improper beliefs about herself.

After the program completion: She was more open and bolder when it comes to relations, as well as was dealing with emotions better. She became aware of the need to relax and take care of a healthy balance between duties and regeneration.

Ania

Before the program: Ania had had a positive self-image, but she had avoided emotional closeness. She had found it hard to talk about emotions, yet she had maintained outgoing and happy demeanor.

During the program: She started confessing to the anxiety related to emotional intimacy. There was a breakthrough when she started talking about her needs and feelings while addressing the group.

After the program completion: She started to be more aware of her emotions and opened to contacts. She started showing initiative more frequently, as well as taking new challenges and developing professionally with increased self-confidence.

Natalia

Before the program: Natalia had had mood swings, difficulties accepting her appearance and tendency to go to parties often, which had negatively impacted her professional functioning.

During the program: She opened to lifestyle-related reflection. The breakthrough was noticing the connection between her mood and self-care.

After the program completion: She stabilized her functioning, changed her eating habits, as well as limited partying. She became more effective at work, started caring about her work, her health, and accepted herself to a greater extent.

Klaudia

Before the program: Klaudia had been very critical towards herself. She had found it difficult to notice her own achievements. She had been comparing herself to others, which had impacted her relations and mood.

During the program: She started learning self-acceptance. The key was to understand that failures were a part of the developmental process.

After the program completion: She became more opened, her attitude changed to a more positive one, as well as she stopped comparing herself to others. She started learning how to relax, appreciate her successes, and become distanced with regard to her failures.

Agnieszka

Before the program: Agnieszka had struggled with the lack of acceptance and numerous complexes. She had been comparing herself to others, as she had felt inferior.

During the program: She opened up to the participants of the group and started talking about her difficulties. There was a breakthrough when she heard from others that she was a valuable and warm person.

After the program completion: She started assessing herself better and functioning more maturely in terms of emotions. She became empathetic, reliable, willing to manage her time better, and more motivated to create relations with the environment.

The major success of the discussed sociotherapeutic program was the increase of the level of knowledge of the participants pertaining to self-worth. The carried out program was met with a remarkable approval from the participants, who were more than willing to engage in workshops, as well as positively assessed the meetings after their conclusion. Basing on observations and the analysis of participant claims, the program resulted in: increase in self-confidence and internal motivation, improved functioning in interpersonal relations, better organization of time, improved efficiency of dealing with various duties, as well as improved readiness to take up new roles and challenges. The course of the program covered several key stages that resulted in increased self-confidence and improved well-being of the participants. During the initial session, it was possible to create the mood of trust and open communication, which was fundamental to further individual work. The identification of specific difficult aspects made it possible to personalize therapeutic approach, adjusting it to individual needs of each and every participant. Mutual success sharing and feedback had a notable impact on building a positive environment, fostering the development of participants. In practical terms, program outcomes have been in line with conclusions drawn from examinations by Leary and MacDonald (2003), who proved that the feeling of self-worth increases as the result of feeling of belonging and societal approval.

CONCLUSIONS

The sociotherapeutic program successfully supported women in overcoming challenges connected with low self-worth. The participants experienced important changes in perceiving themselves, which resulted in increased self-confidence and improved societal relations.

The sociotherapeutic program carried out in the group of seven women characterized by lowered self-worth pointed to numerous key mechanisms and dynamics occurring in the course of group work. The mood of acceptance allowed the participants to open up. However, they initially were rather anxious and stressed. Simple, symbolic tools, such as memory cards, turned out to be extremely efficient when it comes to initiating self-reflection and starting internal work on oneself. When it comes to the context of working on self-worth, there were strong emotions. Some women understood for the first time how they had perceived themselves. At the same time, there was a potential for group therapy. Empathy, understanding, and initial forms of emotional support started occurring. The key moment was the exercise pertaining to accepting kind words. It showed how difficult it was for some women to accept the positive image of themselves in the eyes of others. During the sixth session, there was a notable breakthrough. The participants were

more willing and motivated to talk about themselves, their successes, resources, and the need for recognition. Writing letters to self and creating jewelry having a symbolic meaning allowed them to see themselves from a new perspective. They started considering themselves to be valuable individuals, worthy of warmth, attention, and affirmation. Said exercise had a strong strengthening effect. The discussed process showed that the sociotherapeutic group can become a space for transformation – not through rapid breakthroughs, but rather by systematically building relations, authenticity, and the willingness to be seen and heard. The most important effect was not only the improvement of self-esteem of the participants, but also – training the skill of perceiving individual strength, which had been muted by years of experiences, assessments, and internal criticism.

From the scientific perspective, it is worth continuing examinations on the efficiency of sociotherapy in various age groups, with the focus being put on varying societal status. It is also important to compare the efficiency of this form of support with other psychopedagogical approaches. The development of this trend may factually translate into improved quality of life, mental well-being, and the feeling of belonging in groups characterized by a higher exclusion and mental exhaustion risk.

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