

# DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE\*

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The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops are personal experiential learning processes aimed at participant's accepting of a non-violent style of life. All AVP workshops have four basic goals: affirmation, community building, communication and conflict resolution skills. The Advanced AVP workshops include stimulation of skills for group agreements, skills for verbal and nonverbal consensus, use of brainstorming techniques etc. The main exercises in the workshops are concentrated on affirmation, stimulation of empathy, communication skills, cooperation, conflict resolution and transformation, consensus and decision-making, community building, etc. This paper presents the results of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in the Republic of Macedonia collected from 11 Basic and 10 Advanced Workshops undertaken in the period October 2001 – April 2002. The results of the research are based on a survey of the participants at the workshops, the total number being 224 (98 students of psychology and 105 students of pedagogy with approximate age of 20; 21 students undertaking a master's degree for peace and development, and non-formal women's studies ages from 25 to 50 years). 200 (89%) of the participants are women and 24 (11%) are men. 203 (91%) are under 25, and 21 (9%) of the participants are up to 25 years. The results from all groups prove that AVP, especially Basic session, develop more constructive styles for conflict resolution ("transformer", "resolver" etc.) and at the same time decrease the use of non-effective and violent styles for conflict resolution ("escaper", "controller" etc.); they demonstrate a tendency for biggest decrease of the non-affirmative approach, than for the increase of affirmation, and this is for all groups. Our experience shows that only one participant is sufficient to decrease the readiness for cooperation of the others. As far as we concern the empathy skills, the results show that Basic AVP workshop stimulates empathic fantasy and perspective taking and Advance AVP workshop decrease personal distress. Before the start of AVP we recommend that the abilities for empathy, readiness for cooperation, level of affirmation and the styles for conflict resolution of participants to be assessed. The results would be an indication whether to put more workshops for more effective development of alternative to violence approaches and on which problems to put more accents.

**Key words:** alternatives to violence, conflict resolution styles, affirmation, readiness for cooperation, empathic skills.

This paper presents the results of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in the Republic of Macedonia collected from 11 Basic and 10 Advanced Workshops undertaken in the period October 2001 – April 2002 (21 weekends, starting Friday afternoon, and proceeding Saturday and Sunday). Fourteen AVP volunteers located at the Balkan Peace Studies Center, Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje, led these workshops.

The results of the research are based on a survey of the participants at the workshops, the total number being 224 (98 students of psychology and 105 students of pedagogy with approximate age of 20; 21 students undertaking a master's degree for peace and development, and non-formal women's studies ages from 25 to 50 years). 200 (89%) of the participants are women and 24 (11) are men. 203 (91%) are under 25, and 21 (9%) of the participants are up to 25 years.

The AVP workshops are personal experiential learning processes aimed at participants' accepting of a non-violent style of life. All AVP workshops have four basic goals: affirmation, community building, communication and conflict resolution skills. Affirmation is a powerful way for development of self-respect and respect for the others. Community and cooperation, mutual trust

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\* Professors Ted Herman and Olga Murdzeva-Skarik initiated AVP in the R. of Macedonia. The first Macedonian team of AVP trainers was trained thanks to the competency and great enthusiasm of Andrew Rose which led the first AVP workshops in Macedonia in 1999, and by the support of the Friends Community from USA. All materials and manuals for AVP trainings are translated in Macedonian.

(confidence) and positive atmosphere are the best precondition for community building based on mutual respect. Development of communication skills leads to a more sophisticated approach to conflict resolution and transformation. The Advanced AVP workshops include stimulation of skills for group agreements, skills for verbal and nonverbal consensus, use of brainstorming techniques, etc. The main exercises in the workshops are concentrated on affirmation, stimulation of empathy, communication skills, cooperation, conflict resolution and transformation, consensus and decision-making, community building, etc.

From the hugeness of the development effects stimulated by Basic and Advanced AVP Workshops, we will present statistical data from the results collected through appropriated instruments before and after the two “treatments”, in connection with the following dependent variables:

Styles for conflict resolution (evaluated by a Questionnaire for the styles of conflict resolution and transformation);

Adoption of affirmative approach for oneself and the others (estimated by the numbers of affirmative and non-affirmative messages addressed from the important other persons);

Readiness for cooperation (evaluated by a scale for readiness for cooperation); and

Development of skills for empathy (evaluated by the Index of the inter-personal reactivity).

Independent variables in this research are the professional kind of education (branch of science), sex and age.

Statistical elaboration of the results was undertaken by computer program SPSS (8.0). The sum of the statistical significances of the differences of the results of evaluation before and after the two “treatments” for the three independent variables (education, sex and age) will be presented in this paper. The main results indicate positive effects from the implementation of the Alternatives to Violence Project.

## **I. Influence of AVP on the styles for conflict resolution**

Everyone has his/her own (often unconscious) specific approach or style for conflict resolution. In our presentation we differentiated between persons resolving problems, compromisers, persons adapting to the conflict (adapters), controllers, escapers, and transformers of the conflict. The outcome of conflict resolution is already hidden in the process, and the process chosen depends on the outcome wanted in a conflict.

1) “**Transformer**” of the conflict, selected as a first style for conflict resolution, was selected before, and persisted as first after the Basic and Advanced level of AVP workshops. To be the transformer in conflict resolution and transformation is to have the highest level of skills for dealing with conflicts. To be transformer means to use the transcend method which is “biased” in favour of transcendence as a basic outcome, trying to go beyond, “disembedding” the conflict from where it is located, and “embedding” it elsewhere. The **transcendence as an outcome** is possible by using the **dialogue as process**.

52% of the 224 participants selected the “transformer” as a first style of conflict resolution. After Basic AVP, the percentage increased to 56%, and after the Advanced AVP it amounted to the 59% from 224 participants, which selected transformer as a first style for conflict resolution.

How to explain the choice of transformer as a first style for conflict resolution in our group of students, which is estimated as a very high level of style for dealing with conflict? It may be a result of the socialisation practice in this culture, or perhaps is more a product of the very complex situation in which students are pressed from all sides (war, poverty, international military presence

and international traffic with drugs, people, weapons)? In deep-rooted conflicts, with which we are faced in the Balkans, the compromise or the withdrawal is not solutions. To prevail over the others is based on violence or on adjudication as conflict processes, and in chronic/deep rooted conflict experience show that these approaches are not efficient.

To select, as first, the style of transformer of conflict does not mean that the selector is skilled in using dialogue and other prerequisites for successful transformation of deep-rooted conflict. We have just a sign of awareness that, between the other styles for conflict resolution, to be transformer is the best choice for the students. To become active and efficient transformer of conflict presupposes deep and integral approach to conflict, i.e. an ability to resolve and to reconcile. The transformer is supposed to take an affirmative approach to oneself and to the others, to cooperate, and be empathic. The level of these three skills will be presented below in this text, after the indication of the changes in the other styles after the two AVP workshops.

The style of a **transformer has a tendency to increase in both age groups**, and after the Advanced AVP workshops the style of transformer in both age groups was more often selected than before the training (level of statistical difference 0,01).

**2. The style of a “compromiser”** supposes that through the **negotiation process** it is possible to reach compromise as an outcome of the conflict. The sides in the conflict are partly satisfied with the results.

The “Compromiser” as a first choice for resolving conflict was selected by 19% from 224 participants before the treatment, and dropped on 12% after the two workshops.

**3. The style of a “Resolver”** of the conflict takes care for the interpersonal relations, and enables all sides in the conflict to satisfy the personal goals and interests through the **process of cooperation**.

The “Resolver” as a first choice was selected by 17% from 224 participants before the workshops, and increased on 23% after the first Basic AVP workshop.

**4. An “Adapter”** in conflict resolution is a person concerned especially for the maintenance of the interpersonal relationships at any price, with less or without consideration of the personal interests of the sides in conflict. **To give in demands of the other, reconciliation or escaping from the conflict are the processes** for maintaining of the relationships.

The “Adapter” was selected as first style for conflict resolution by 4% from 224 participants and increased on 8% after the two treatments.

**5. The style of an “Escaper”** is characterised by considering the conflict as a hopeless event, frustration for all included, without a possibility for satisfaction of the personal interests. Interpersonal relationships cannot be maintained, and the escaper, by using the **process of prevarication** (evasive reply), **withdraws** and loses permitting the other side to win.

Only 2 (0,89%) from 224 participants selected the “Escaper” of the conflict as a first choice. After the treatments, only one participant or 0,45% preferred to be an escaper than to accept another of the styles for conflict resolution.

**Basic and Advanced AVP workshops have not stimulated statistically significant changes in the transformer, compromiser, resolver, adapter and escaper as a first choice of style for conflict resolution.**

**6. For “the Controller”** in conflict resolution it is possible either to win or to lose! The Controller is oriented to prevail by power, uses all kinds of forces to arrive to certain position, and is not

concerned about the consequences of the relationships. “Controller” uses the **process of adjudication, or violence**.

The controller as first choice was selected by 13% from 224 participants before the treatment, and dropped on 5% after the two AVP workshops. After the Basic AVP workshops the choice of the controller as first style for conflict resolution diminished and the difference is statistically significant on the level 0,05. After the Advanced AVP workshops the controller was more abandoned as a first style and the differences are statistically significant at the level 0,01 comparing the results with the initial data.

**The results of the sex differences in the styles for conflict resolution** is statistically important in the less selection of controller by women after training (significant on the level of 0,05). There is a tendency for men to select more “the controller” style than women. The tendency for decreasing the selection of a controller style after the training appeared also for men.

**The results of the age differences (group over 25 and group under 25 years) in the styles for conflict resolution** indicate that there is a tendency for both age groups for decreasing of the style of a controller. The group **over 25**, before the beginning of the AVP training, **selected less the style of a controller** (statistical level of significance 0,05), and after the Advanced AVP this diminishing of the style of a controller was more significant (statistical level 0,01).

A **comparison** of the selection of the styles for conflict resolution and transformation **between the groups of different kind of education** (undergraduate students of the first and of the second year of Pedagogy, second year of Psychology, the postgraduate students for peace and development, and non-formal women studies) was also carried out.

The students of Psychology-second year changed the selection of the first style for conflict resolution especially after the Basic AVP: on one hand, the selection of the compromiser decreased (statistical significance at the level 0,01), and there is a tendency to decrease the selection of a controller and an escaper as styles; on the other hand, there is a tendency to increase the selection of “transformer” and “resolver” as styles.

The students of Pedagogy-second year, after the Advanced AVP, decreased the selection of a controller (statistical significance at the level of 0,05), and increased the selection of an adapter (statistical significance at the level of 0,01).

The students of the master’s degree on peace and development, and students on non-formal women’s studies, decreased the compromiser as a first style on one hand, demonstrated the biggest tendency to increase the selection of resolver, and the transformer after Advanced AVP increased significantly (on the level 0,01) as a first selection for conflict resolution on the other.

The students of Pedagogy-first year, after the Basic AVP, increased the tendency for selection of the resolver and transformer, and for the style of an “adapter” this augmentation was with statistical significance at the level of 0,05. After the Basic AVP the selection of the style of compromiser (significance on the level 0,05) decreased, and there is a tendency to have less selection of the style of a controller in the group of the students of Pedagogy-first year.

**The results from all groups prove that AVP, especially Basic session, develop more constructive styles for conflict resolution, and at the same time decrease the use of non-effective and violent styles for conflict resolution.**

Nevertheless, we are concerned with the results of the group of undergraduate students on Pedagogy –first year: the style of a controller was selected more (statistical significance) than from the all other groups with different kinds of education before the training; after the two trainings, especially after the first training session (Basic AVP) in all other groups the style of a controller had an with apparent tendency of diminishing. Only for the students of the Pedagogy-first year, the change was irrelevant. The students of Pedagogy-second year started to abandon the style of a controller after the Basic AVP, and after Advanced AVP they become less controllers (statistical significance of the differences at the level 0,05). This is a sign that not all students of Pedagogy, but only these of the first year, show signs which alarmed us to take care of the problems of new students (freshmen/freshwomen). Maybe this is especially because they are from the cohort of young people, which started the primary school, and continued for the secondary school, in a tumultuous time of changes in the socio/ economic/ political/ and system of values. More than that: the preparation and taking of the final examination in the secondary school was the year after NATO air attack on Yugoslavia (March – June 1999) when R. of Macedonia became a transit zone and base for the military forces of NATO; and in the moment when they had to pass entrance examination for the University, there was a war with the Albanian extremists (terrorists) in West and North-West part in Macedonia and in Skopje, in places only several kilometres away from the University.

The students of Pedagogy-first year selected also more the style of an escaper for conflict resolution than students of Pedagogy-second year and student of Psychology-second year (statistical significance on the level 0,01). This combination of the prevalence of a controller and an escaper (non-effective way of conflict resolution) with the less selection of the transformer than the other groups (statistical significance at the level 0,01), especially after Advanced AVP training, is an alarming sign for organizing more workshops for younger generation, especially in the secondary school, for stimulation of alternatives to violence skills. This is the main recommendation for the future resulting from the less capability (competency) for effective positive approaches to conflict resolution, on one side, and because AVP (especially Basic training) stimulated positive development of the students of the first year of Pedagogy, on the other.

## **II. Influence of AVP on adoption of an affirmative approach for oneself and towards others**

One of the goals of AVP is to increase the affirmative messages, and decrease the non-affirmative ones.

Affirmation for oneself and for the others, after the Basic and Advanced AVP, increased (especially in the group of students of Psychology and women's studies), and decreased in the group of Pedagogy – first year.

**Women demonstrated tendency to be more affirmative before and after the Basic AVP, and after the Advanced AVP** affirmation increased at the level of 0,05 as statistical difference.

The age (up and less than 25) did not demonstrate influence of the training on adopting an affirmative approach.

The evaluation shows tendency to decrease non-affirmative messages after the trainings.

The results demonstrate a tendency for **biggest decrease of the non-affirmative approach, than for the increase of affirmation**, and this is for all groups of education, sex and age.

## **III. Influence of AVP on Readiness for cooperation**

**Readiness for cooperation** means openness for relation with others for realisation of a common goal. It is connected with the ability for negotiation and the respect for the others.

Readiness for cooperation **increased after the Basic AVP** (statistical significance at the level 0,05), **and after Advanced AVP** (statistical significance of the difference at the level 0,01).

The comparison between the different groups of education shows that students of Pedagogy – first year are less ready for cooperation than other groups of students (statistical significance on the level 0,05), and trainings do not increase the readiness for cooperation in this group.

The readiness for cooperation in comparison with the other groups of students was with tendency for biggest increase in the group of master degree students for peace and development after the Basic AVP, and with biggest decrease after the Advanced AVP. Why this contradiction in the results? Maybe the participants in the group influence the readiness for cooperation. Namely, there was a change in the group: the participants in the Basic AVP stimulated more cooperation in the first group. The absence from Advanced AVP session of a few but the more cooperative participants, and the confrontation of the points of view of only two participants, produced non-cooperation in the group. Our experiences show that only one participant is sufficient to decrease the readiness for cooperation of the others!

The evaluation does not demonstrate differences between sex in readiness for cooperation before and after two training sessions.

More cooperation was evaluated before and after Basic in up to 25 years group (statistical significance at the level 0,01).

#### **IV. Influence of AVP on abilities for empathy**

**Abilities for empathy** were evaluated by the multidimensional approach including four subscales:

- 1) **Fantasy scale (FS)**, connected with the tendency to enter in the feelings and the activities of the virtual characters in the books, films, etc.;
- 2) **Empathy concern (Ec)**, is related with the tendency to be concerned and in compassion with the troubles of the others;
- 3) **Perspective taking (Pt)**, means to have tendency for spontaneous acceptance of the perspective of the others in the ordinary (everyday) life; and
- 4) **Personal distress (Pd)**, is a kind of unpleasant emotional reaction such as anxiety and suffering, which is reaction on the suffering of the others and tensions in the inter-relationships. Persons with the high level of empathic ability often demonstrated Personal distress dimension.

##### **1. Results on the Fantasy Scale (FS)**

The two training sessions – Basic and Advanced AVP – do not stimulated differences between the groups with different kinds of education in the ability for imaginative introduction of emotion and activity in the virtual images (characters in the books, films).

Before the training, women demonstrated more FS (more imagination) than men (statistical significance of the differences on the level 0,05), and this difference persisted after the Basic AVP. After the Advanced AVP, men become imaginative on the same level as women, and this indicates that the social experience (training) is the factor stimulating development of FS.

Before the training, participants aged less than 25 years were with more FS than these up to 25 (statistical significance of the differences at the level 0,05). After the Advanced AVP, the two age groups arrived at the same level of FS, and this means that adults up to 25 through the training developed capability for FS that have been less developed (maybe because of lack of social stimulation in previous period of development, but also maybe adults inhibited the use of FS estimating that this is non-appropriated ability for “serious people”!).

The conclusion is that **AVP stimulates development of FS especially in the participants with lower level of development of this ability.**

## **2. Results on the Empathy Concern (Ec) dimension**

Basic and Advanced AVP trainings did not stimulate differences between the different kinds of education groups, and between two ages groups in the ability for Ec.

After the Basic and Advanced AVP training, women demonstrated more Ec than man (statistical significance of the differences on the level 0,05). These results indicate that women have greater ability for empathy with the suffering people, demonstrate more concern and compassion with the people in trouble.

## **3. Results on the Perspective taking (Pt) dimension**

Ability for perspective taking of the other in everyday life, before the training was more developed in the groups of students of Psychology – second year and students of Pedagogy – second year than in the group of student of Pedagogy- first year (statistical significance at the level 0,01).

After the Basic AVP, students of Psychology and Pedagogy (first and second year) demonstrated more ability for Pt than master's degree students on peace and development (statistical significance at the level 0,01).

After Advance AVP, students of Psychology and Pedagogy (second year) were more able (significance at the level 0,05), and student of Pedagogy-first year (significance at the level 0,01) than master degree students on peace and development in Pt.

Students on master's degree on peace and development demonstrated low level of ability for perspective taking (Pt) and this is an indication that for preparing peace workers is important to stimulate development of this dimension of empathy.

Students on non-formal women's studies demonstrated the highest degree of Pt compared with the other groups of education (significance at the level 0,01).

Before the training, women were better on Pt (significance at the level 0,05) than man. After the two training these differences increased: women became better than man (significance at the level 0,01)

The students up to 25 demonstrated tendency for development of Pt after the Advanced AVP.

## **4. Results on the Personal distress (Pd) dimension**

Before the training students on the non-formal women's studies group demonstrated more Pd than students of Psychology and Pedagogy – second year (significance at the level 0,05), and Pedagogy-first year (significance at the level 0,01). After Basic AVP, there were not statistically significant differences between the groups of different kinds of education.

In the group of all participants (N=224), after Basic AVP, Pd increased significantly (at the level 0,01). The tendency to increase Pd was demonstrated in all groups.

After Advanced AVP students on women's studies demonstrated less Pd than the students from the all other groups (significance at the level 0,01). This means that Pd decreased significantly in the group of participants of the women's studies, and if we compare this result with the increase of the Pt in the same group, the conclusion is that AVP training produced the best positive effect on empathic ability for the students on women's studies: they became more Pt and less Pd.

Before the training and after Basic AVP, the participants up to 25 years demonstrated more Pd than the participants less than 25 years (significance at the level 0,01). After the Advanced AVP

results in Pd become inverse: participants up to 25 become less Pd than these under 25 (significant at the level 0,01). This indicates that **AVP stimulated distressed adults to calm down.**

## **V. Conclusions**

**5.1. Conclusive remarks for the changes in the styles for conflict resolution and transformation** are that:

1) Basic and Advanced AVP for the whole group (N=224) stimulated tendency to **increase the positive approach** (selection of the styles resolver, adapter and transformer of conflicts), and to **reduce the non-effective approaches** (compromiser, escaper, and particularly – with statistical importance of differences on the level 0,05 - diminished the style of controller);

2) The main and essential changes in the selection of the first style for conflict resolution and transformation are produced **through the Basic AVP**;

3) For developing in wide population the alternatives to violence skills, non-violent and more effective approaches for conflict resolution, is more productive to **include more different groups in the Basic AVP workshops**. Advanced AVP workshops are better to be designated for groups with special interest and for the preparation of the future trainers;

4) There are indications for an urgent **need to organize Basic AVP for the secondary school students**;

5) After the training **women decreased more the selection of controller** as a first style for conflict resolution than man (statistical significance of the difference at the level 0,05). A tendency for decreasing the selection of a controller style after the training appeared also for men, and all these results indicate that **more men need to be included in training of AVP**.

6) **Students from both age groups (up to 25 and under 25 years) demonstrated wish and capability, readiness and aptitude to change and to develop more constructive ways for conflict resolution, and to decrease and abandon the use of non-effective and violent approaches to conflict resolution.**

### **5.2. Necessity for stimulation of an affirmative approach**

6. **AVP trainings provoked biggest decrease of the non-affirmative approaches than the increase of affirmative.** For more affirmative society building it is necessary to organize stimulation of affirmative atmosphere in everyday practice inside the family, kindergartens, schools, universities, work places etc.

7. The less affirmative approach of the men indicate that in the socialization and training process **men need to be exposed and to be stimulated for acceptance of the affirmation attitude.**

### **5.3. AVP stimulate development of the readiness for cooperation**

8. Because the non-cooperation of the only one participant is sufficient to destroy or to decrease the readiness for cooperation, it is nice **to find constructive solutions how to transform “troublers” in co-operators.**

### **5.4. AVP stimulate development of abilities for empathy**

9. The lesser abilities for empathy of the **men need to be transformed** by trainings and the change of the socialization practice into more empathy, especially **for more ability for perspective taking and compassion with the others.**

**5.5. Before the start of AVP we recommend that the abilities for empathy, readiness for cooperation, level of affirmation, and the styles for conflict resolution of the participants be assessed. The results would be an indication whether to put more workshops for more effective development of alternatives to violence approaches.**

**Note: In the Appendix will be incorporated 14 graphic presentations of the results.**