

**Chiara Antico** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2907-708X>**Università degli Studi di Milano****Bicocca**

## “THE WISDOM OF TRAUMA”

### **Abstract**

Psychological reflections based on the film “The Wisdom of Trauma” directed by Maurizio Benazzo and Zaya Benazzo and released in 2021. The story presented in the documentary shows the fragility of a person’s life with the experience of trauma. Professionals working with addicts explain what the wisdom of trauma is, how people and their bodies cope with traumatic experiences, and what suffering brings to the lives of those in need of support.

**Keywords:** trauma, social work, violence

To begin with, I can state that I am satisfied with the documentary, since I had no expectations, and I was just curious to watch it and find out what it was about. The first scene showed pictures of people in the background who gave me the impression that they felt very bad about themselves and their lives. Indeed, those people gave me a sense of sadness, and anxiety. Even if I had no idea about the main topic of the movie yet, I felt empathetic towards them, I just wondered what it might be like to be like them, how much pain they must have experienced – or still experience – in their life, and how they can bear this pain.

The movie was about trauma, particularly how childhood trauma can affect one’s individual life, our society, and the community where we live. In addition, trauma might also have a connection with physical illness, for example cancer. In this regard, Doctor Gabor Maté interviewed a man who had prostate cancer, who was told that the main reason for his disease was because of a trauma he had; indeed, even though he had his prostate removed, the cancer did not disappear from his organism.

At first, I felt compassion for this man, then I realised that these people do not need others to feel pity for them; hence I felt angry because I thought about people who complain about little things, when other are ill, homeless, unemployed or traumatised by their childhood, etc.

On the other hand, there are people who live in very bad conditions, and nobody knows why. During a scene, the doctor talked about how to have a complete overview

of the patient's situation, he pronounced some words that stuck in my mind: "Why this illness? Why this person? Why now?" This sentence made me think that in order to help people in need it is necessary to help them reflect about their life: how they are living it and how to increase the quality of it. Instead, trying to change people who suffer, are ill, or addicted will only make them feel guilty and turn their situations into something worse. These people will start to consider themselves as a failure and grow negative emotions such as depression, sense of abandonment, isolation, anger, sadness, and disappointment.

Listening to the stories in the movie made me realise how lucky I am for the life I am living, mostly because I never experienced all those sufferings a person can feel in his/her life. Still, even though I am young, I had some dark moments in my life, but these cannot be compared to the situations of the protagonists of the movie.

According to me, people in need break down more and more every day, they are overwhelmed by their feelings, but they constantly try to cope with them in order to survive and be considered 'normal' by those who do not understand what they face, as they live in better conditions. This movie made me reflect on one's behaviour toward people in need, mine included: sometimes we have to take into account that something really bad can occur in our life, not because we want it, but just because it happens and no one/nothing can do anything to prevent it. Instead of thinking that it is always the fault of one person that one lives in such situation because of one's choice, we should focus on how that person can feel better thanks to us, thanks to a small act of love, a smile, a coin or a hot meal. For example, sometimes I avoid looking at the eyes of homeless people either because I have something to offer or because I do not want to. Still, I feel ashamed for my behaviour or I wonder what a person would use the coin I give him/her for, and this makes me reflect about which act could be the best thing to help this person and not to feel guilty for a potential improper use of it.

However, sometimes I felt close to these people and decided to offer them something to eat. I think this is an appropriate way to behave if we do not have other information about their story or if we do not want to give them coins. Unfortunately, I never got in touch neither with a person with mental or physical illnesses or with a person with addictions, but I think I would try my best to make them feel as comfortable as possible with me and not to make them feel different from the others, because they are not.

Another part of the movie that deeply impressed me is the one in which I became aware that addictions are a response to the trauma suffered and experienced. Addictions give people a sense of augmented aliveness, self-esteem and completion. Even though I consider myself an open-minded person, I never really thought about the connection between trauma—any kind in any period of life—addictions, mental and physical illness; this is the reason why this documentary opened my mind even more. I learned what it means to suffer deeply, not to be loved, appreciated and supported, and this upset me a lot because I could never think of a life, e.g., without the love of my family. I often feel alone, but my family is always ready to help me and support me. My family is my

safety. For this reason, I am extremely sorry when I hear people say that they have never received the love of their parents’ at all.

In addition, a story that totally shocked me was about a girl who was raped when she was young. She then told her parents, who did not care and her father even hit her with a bell. A similar situation happened to another boy whose mother hit him with a whip when he was a child, while telling him she loved him. In my opinion, this is ridiculous, if a parent tells you that he/she loves you, he/she should give you love, warmth, kindness, safety. The fact that the girl’s parents did not care for her at all, but they even made her situation worse, shocked me. Furthermore, I believe that parents who behave like this are not really bad parents, but they experienced bad situations in their lives and these will be reflected in the lives of their children. Therefore, this is a vicious circle that never dies, unless a person goes to a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker to get help, assuming that the worker is able to help this person in a proper way.

When I had to decide which path to take after my degree, I chose to study psychology only out of curiosity, but then I realised that this is the perfect choice for me. I am very interested in this field of study; I really want to know how our brain works and behaves in one situation rather than another situation and how it reacts to specific circumstances. From my point of view, there is an increasing need for people specialized in these areas, especially in the difficult historical period we are going through today, in which people can experience hardships in any field, such as the social one.

In conclusion, even if trauma can be considered as something causing mental or physical pain, it can also really be the way to escape it. For instance, when we are in a situation of chaos, confusion, in a group, this can certainly be disturbing, bothering, or even suffered, but it can also be a source of vitality and freedom, an incentive for all of us to fight together against the difficulties life has in store for us, to find a path to live more freely with ourselves and the others.