

## Volume 2, Number 2

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## Introduction

The practical experiences of fieldwork are an important source of knowledge for people working with victims of armed conflict, and many of the articles in this issue of *Intervention* relate to specific interventions. These articles illustrate how theoretical debates, sometimes viewed as mainly of academic interest, can be central in evaluating knowledge about what constitutes good and effective practice in the field.

The opening article by Michael Kamau et al. is a research report from a Kenyan refugee camp. Based on data from a psychiatric nurse's case logbook, the article suggests that there is a role for small mental health services in African refugee camps to deal with psychiatric disorders. What is also demonstrated is that simple record-keeping procedures may be useful in generating information and questions about the appropriateness of an intervention.

The article written by Lamaro Onyut et al. also is based on experience in a refugee camp. It makes a case for a cross-culturally applicable process of diagnosis and treatment of PTSD, providing a detailed account of a process of epidemiological study, training of practitioners and ongoing treatment outcome research. Claiming high standards of scientific rigour, the approach explicitly challenges the argument that the concept of PTSD developed within a Western cultural context may not be valid as a basis for defining suffering, informing treatment methods and evaluating the effectiveness of assistance in non-Western situations. We recognise that the issues raises again a major unresolved debate in the field of psychosocial intervention with war-affected communities that has to do with which types of knowledge are universally applicable and which are

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culture-bound. Together with the article on "Narrative Exposure Therapy" published in the previous issue of *Intervention* (2004, Vol. 2 (1) pp. 18-32), this submission presents a strong assertion of the universal relevance of the PTSD concept and related treatments. In a context of a field urgently seeking consensus on best practices and clear measures of effectiveness, these articles represent powerful claims. In the spirit of stimulating constructive and critical debate, we invite readers in the field to respond to and comment on this article and its implications for providing quality services to refugees throughout the world.

Like Onyut et al., Gaithri Fernando argues for the relevance of Western psychological expertise in other cultural contexts. Using Sri Lanka as a case study, she suggests that clinical psychologists may play valuable roles as assessors and diagnosticians, as therapists, educators, supervisors or trainers. However, in her exploration of the possibilities for integrating a Western individualistic model of assessment and treatment into a conflict area where the culture is predominantly collectivistic, Fernando invokes a more culturally-inflected approach and a broader range of 'therapeutic' options for intervention. She stresses the necessity of being aware of, and incorporating into practice the culturally specific ways in which people in non-Western collectivistic cultures express and cope with the distress caused by armed conflict and the culturally unique and effective treatments for mental and behavioural disorders that may exist.

Jo de Berry's field report on "Community Psychosocial Support in Afghanistan" provides an interesting counterpoint to the approach described by Onyut et al. in this issue. She describes a broad community-based strategy, followed by Save the Children and UNICEF in their support to

Afghan children, to address the suffering of a large vulnerable section of the population with impaired coping resources rather than the (perceived) smaller group who may require expert mental health care for their severe problems. This strategy was based on pragmatic considerations within the Afghan context, as well as on a view that valuable resources exist in Afghan social and cultural life that could be mobilised to facilitate coping and recovery. The article also provides a description of how indigenous knowledge on good mental health and protective factors were elicited through consultation with local communities and incorporated into a range of interventions.

Clinical supervision, one of the tasks suggested by Fernando for psychologists, is the central topic of the contribution from Guus van der Veer et al. This article is based on the experiences of western authors while supervising counsellors with limited professional education in non-Western situations of armed conflict. It offers simple models and practical steps that may be useful in introducing and developing supervisory practice in contexts where professionalized services are not yet available.

Practitioners working with persons affected by armed conflict often require the assistance of interpreters to communicate with service users who belong to other language groups. These interpreters have a difficult task that is often underestimated within a field that places great emphasis on the role of the primary 'therapeutic' worker. The article by Rachel Tribe and Jean Morrissey provides suggestions for good practice in working with interpreters either in situations of ongoing-armed conflict or with asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced people who have fled from areas of armed conflict. It also raises some fundamental issues about the challenges involved

in interpretation - as translating between languages can, in effect, mean translating between two very different worldviews.

Of the books reviewed in this issue, Craig Higson-Smith's deserves special mention. Higson-Smith describes his experience as a director of a programme for survivors of violence in South Africa. The programme is aimed at empowering victims and helping them in reversing the process of fragmentation within their communities, and presents an interesting example of local practitioners attempting to develop theoretical and practical approaches appropriate to their particular situation.

This issue closes with a Letter to the Editor, in which one of our readers reacts to an arti-

cle by Anica Mikuš Kos & Vahida Huzejrović on "Volunteers as helpers in war-related distress" published in *Intervention* (2003, Vol. 1 (2) pp 50-56). This letter, written by a psychotherapist with experience of work with war victims, raises concerns that Kos and Huzejrović's article may (unintentionally) imply a 'trivialization' of the long-term psychological consequences of severe traumatisation, and offers reflections on a number of points made in the article. The Editorial Board hopes that readers will continue to send in their reactions to articles published in *Intervention*.

*Ananda Galappatti & Guus van der Veer*