

Book/article reviews

Eisenbruch, M., J.T.V.M. de Jong, W. van der Put. Bringing order out of chaos: A culturally competent approach to managing the problems of refugees and victims of organized violence. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 17, No. 2, 2004

Few things are as difficult as the attempts to alleviate mental suffering amongst the millions of victims of violence, refugees and displaced persons in our world. Even apart from the size of the potential target populations, the practical and theoretical problems are multitude. The literature of the past decades demonstrates the complexity, difficulties and pitfalls of this recent form of humanitarian aid. Problems concern the diagnostics and interventions, in sometimes highly different communities and cultures. Sustainability and integration of psychosocial and mental health care programs are yet another problem. And those are only a few of the fields that require constant learning, flexibility, criticism and thorough monitoring. Years of experience, in combination with monitoring and research, of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), have led to the development of a nine-step model that presently underlies TPO's projects. Given time and critical evaluations, the authors hope that their model may serve as a blueprint for future programs. The diversity and complexity of problems and circumstances are the chaos the authors refer to in the title. Their model may indeed contain the ingredients of some crucial order.

Adaptation to local settings and circumstances is inherent to the model. The authors further argue that the model is sufficiently multidisciplinary, culturally sensitive, and sustainable and has a strong capacity building element.

The program endeavours to develop culturally appropriate diagnostic classifications and clinical management. As far as possible the TPO model strives to combine traditional, local and Western healing practices. It integrates insights and methods of public health, psychology, anthropology and psychiatry to facilitate the identification of practical solutions to the often complicated problems of cross-cultural diagnosis, interventions and overall management. To promote sustainability and capacity-building, the program underlines community participation, training and supervision, and the use of community resources. Monitoring and research are part of the protocol as well. In their article the authors define and elaborate this model. The description of two of their current programs, one in Northern Uganda and one in Cambodia, is added to demonstrate that this one model may well serve as a project blueprint in various, even quite dissimilar populations and circumstances. The authors describe the model as follows:

- 1 Selection of participating area including a matching control group
- 2 Identification of psychosocial problems, stress responses and trauma, cultural validation of instruments
- 3 Pilot multi-centre training program and pilot psychosocial interventions
- 4 Pilot testing structured interviews, sample selection, culturally informed epidemiological survey
- 5 Design of a monitoring system
- 6 Modify psychosocial intervention program, stimulate rural development initiatives
- 7 Optional studies
- 8 Evaluation of the pilot phase
- 9 Transferring the program through training and evaluation

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This nine-step model as quoted above, does not give the reader the impression of something new and special. In the past decade many programs have included most if not all of these steps. Many of them have failed to reach their targets. However, the elaboration of this model gives evidence of thorough thinking and working. For instance, it is TPO's common practice to work on invitation only and to associate with at least one governmental department and with local organizations. This is not mentioned in the nine-step model.

The model emphasizes proper understanding and interventions for various psychosocial problems and mental disorders. Furthermore, the integration and spin-off within the community is given ample consideration. The identification and assessment of mental health and psychosocial problems takes place by means of a multi-method approach which combines ethnographic and epidemiological methods. The interviews that render the ethnographic data help to elicit indigenous coping strategies and protective factors as well a local perceptions of (the causes) of mental health problems. The data also yield priority problems. Interventions and training materials are based on the result of these assessments, and refined after evaluation. Key persons in the community are trained and contribute to the overall program.

Self-management and self-help activities are promoted. Sessions with trainees produce culturally relevant material on grief, trauma and coping and are used to upgrade training manuals, and to design preventive interventions. On average training comprises an introduction to counselling, stress and psycho trauma. Furthermore, the trainees learn the nature of common stress responses and how to deal with them. They acquire group and individual counselling techniques while prac-

ticating with each other and dealing with their own traumas. Participants also receive training on the treatment of the mentally ill and on integration of mental health into their primary health care facilities or practices. Basic forms of registration, supervision and monitoring are part of the training. Supervision continues after the courses. In order to support the sustainability and integration of relief programs a selection of trained counsellors design and implement training and education to various relevant professionals in the region, such as psychiatric nurses, healers, physicians and teachers. In addition they give brief workshops to leaders, camp administrators and development workers. Engaging and employing local staff as early and fully as possible, should make them ready to further develop and take over the program.

The authors conclude that in the case of both Cambodia and Northern Cambodia the model was adapted to the local circumstances. It explored and integrated local cultural assumptions beliefs and traditions and an emphasis was put on local participation. Based on their experience, they recommend studying the culture and context of the population and on an individual level. They further recommend avoiding the use of exclusively Western classification measures. Finally, given major changes of groups of victims, they recommend that the intended outcome of programs should not be inflexibly laid down in the original design. The program is still in evolution. For instance, it will need to pay greater attention to culturally appropriate trauma treatment for children, and vary the starting point for trauma therapy in men and women, refine interventions for particular traumatic experiences and the cultural validity of research instruments. Questions also remain concerning the spin off, integration and general acceptance of the

TPO programs. Although the nine-step TPO model is still in evolution, it contains many insights and practices that have proven to be of value. Its inherent adaptability is promising.

Reviewed by Petra Aarts, researcher and consultant in the field of traumatic stress

J. Boyden & J. de Berry (Eds.) *Review of Children and youth on the front line: Ethnography, armed conflict and displacement*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

This year, 'Children and youth on the front line' has been published as part of the series on studies in forced migration, an initiative of the (amongst others) Refugees Studies Centre, University of Oxford. It is a collection of contributions by different authors, all of whom clearly support the notion that a contextual approach to understanding consequences of the turmoil of war that so many children and adolescents in the world are confronted with, is important. Fifteen authors contributed to the thirteen chapters of the book, most of them being anthropologists who had spent time in a variety of war-stricken regions. The introductory chapter outlines the main principles throughout the book. The attempt has been to devote attention to the situation of children and youth in war-circumstances around the world. Secondly, it is being stressed that a contextual, ethnographic perspective is favoured as opposed to the more individualistic and medical perspective of consequences in terms of posttraumatic stress disorder as the sole outcome of war-experiences. Thirdly, and in line with the last notion, the meaning assigned to the experiences is highly contextually determined. The definition of a child for instance, may be different in welfare

Western countries than in developmental regions. With regard to the perspective on child soldiers this is highly relevant. Fourthly, resilience is being emphasized. The focus is not as much on pathology as on resilience. It should be worthwhile to study the narratives of children themselves in order to learn more from the perspective of these generations subjected to the disruption of war. The chapters have been organized in four parts. The first part deals with 'the contexts of war'. The first of two chapters focus on the experiences of separation from parents and families experienced by so many children. The authors underline the fact that the interpretation of a child as dependent upon parental care until the age of 18 years is very Western and different from the attitude towards children in Mozambique. Here, children as young as 6, 7 years have tasks in the household and the care of their younger siblings. The second chapter describes the war-situation in Mozambique as well. It elaborates on the increased rates of infant-death after the war. It seems that rituals prescribing marital and sexual behaviour have changed due to the war, causing the time between births of children to be shortened. As a consequence, the period of breast-feeding the infant is significantly reduced, heightening the risk of illness and death.

The second part of the book consists of two chapters addressing the vulnerability and resilience among adolescent girls. In chapter three, an ethnographic study among girls in Uganda is being described. A comparable study among adolescent girls was undertaken in Kosovo in 1999 (Chapter four). Rape may have drastic implications for role-taking and identity in the lives of young women. Both these chapters illuminate how adolescent girls felt trapped by the (memory of the) threat of capture or capture itself.

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Part three tries to find an answer to the question: "What is a child?". Chapter 5 as well as 6 challenge the widespread belief that children have been assembled in fighting parties (such as Renamo and Frelimo) solely by force and violence. The argument is that many children had been living independently for some part of their lives before they joined the armed forces. Chapter 7 debates the grey field of being victims and perpetrators. Children may have been less innocent from the start than sometimes seems to be assumed. The crucial point here is to re-evaluate 'the' definition of a child. Incorporating the narratives of children themselves in research is useful in this regard.

Children's narratives are being taken as the focus in the next part of the book. The scope shifts from the Holocaust, to Guatemala and to the Palestinian refugee children in Jordan. The chapters examine the way meaning is assigned to the experiences of children in war and suppression. Stories by children themselves reveal attributions (the war in general, government) to causes that help them in the coping process. The creation of narratives is subjected to outside, political influences at the same time, as the situation of Palestinian children clearly shows.

The last part consists of three chapters all dealing with research methodology and methods. Again distance is being taken from the methods, using questionnaires counting PTSD symptoms while observation and interviewing are being favoured. More than one difficulty can be acknowledged however in conducting research in the field. Personal safety is one issue. Next, trust has to be acquired and this may be difficult in communities whose trust has been betrayed in often horrific ways.

Overall, the book is worthwhile reading. The situation of war-stricken children and adolescents is not well-known. Again and again, this conclusion has been drawn. Why

is it that no extensive effort is being put into the systematic study of war-stricken children and youngsters? They are the next generations to (re-)build communities with peace and safety. Most of the chapters describe war-stricken regions in Africa, such as Mozambique, Uganda, Angola. Conclusions can be drawn from these studies that, presumably, apply to other regions around the world as well. Firstly, children are resilient; they develop adequate coping strategies to deal with crisis of and during war. The book is convincing in this regard. However, in the post war period, these mechanisms often lose their functional qualities and children and youngsters are left empty-handed to deal with the newly circumstances. Next, children develop significant relationships outside family systems, for example within the peer group. Mann as well as Schafer convincingly describe the reconstruction of social relations and hierarchy in the absence of parents for example. Nevertheless, the long-term consequences have so far been unknown. No long-term studies on early separation in African countries are known to me. Thirdly, the involvement of children in studies has been stressed repeatedly. However, most studies succeeded in working with adolescents; while the younger children (for instance aged 4-8) have received little attention.

All together, I would recommend the book to anyone who would like to think more about the perspective of children subjected to war-experiences. Furthermore, the book provides some historical data on the conflicts, particularly in different regions of Africa; those readers interested in these circumstances could take advantage of this book as well.

Reviewed by Trudy Mooren, clinical psychologist at Centrum 45, Leiden, The Netherlands.