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Contents

Page 1 From the Editor

Reviewed articles

Page 4 Developing culturally relevant indicators of reintegration for girls formerly associated with armed groups in Sierra Leone using a participative ranking methodology
Lindsay Stark, Alastair Ager, Mike Wessells & Neil Boothby

Page 17 Resiliency of children in child-headed households in Rwanda: implications for community-based psychosocial interventions
Laura May Ward & Carola Eyber

Page 34 Iraqi refugees in Jordan research their own living conditions: *'We only have our faith and families to hold on to'*
Josi Salem-Pickartz

Field reports

Page 50 Power and ethics in psychosocial counselling: reflections on the experience of an international NGO providing services for Iraqi refugees in Jordan
Jane Gilbert

Page 61 Ex-combatants in South Africa: how to address their needs
Monica Bandeira

Book reviews

Page 67 Resistencias contra el olvido. Trabajo psicosocial en procesos de exhumaciones. Edited by Pau Pérez-Sales & Susana Navarro García
Ria Stiefelhagen

Page 69 A world turned upside down. Social Ecological Approaches to Children in War Zones. Edited by N. Boothby, A. Strang & M. Wessels
Guus van der Veer

Summaries

Page 72 Summaries in Arabic, French, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish and Tamil

From the Editor

One of *Intervention's* main goals is to make a link between research and practice. Therefore, I am happy that all of the articles in this issue describe research done within the context of existing mental health and psychosocial support projects. Too often, research findings are detached from the reality lived by the participants and contribute far too little to improve interventions. One important question is: how can we know that an intervention is satisfactory? Another is: how can we appropriately measure outcomes?

Of course, outsiders can formulate criteria, but how relevant are those indicators to the people involved - the so-called *'beneficiaries'*? How can concepts such as *'reintegration'*, *'well-being'*, and *'social functioning'* be made meaningful in non Western, conflict affected contexts?

Lindsay Stark and her colleagues explore new territory in their article. They present a method to develop locally relevant indicators of reintegration and adjustment for girls formerly associated with armed groups in Sierra Leone. Some of the locally

relevant indicators of successful reintegration may not be surprising, for example: 'being engaged in income generating activities', or 'being invited to weddings and naming ceremonies'. While others, such as 'being included in *bondu*', the women's secret society, may be unexpected to those unfamiliar with the cultural context of Sierra Leone. The participatory ranking method used in this research, combining focus group discussions and techniques for participatory rural appraisal, is a good example of how local perspectives can be incorporated in the construction of research instruments. With this approach we can ensure that selected indicators are meaningful to local stakeholders and reflect what they themselves find important.

Laura May Ward and Carola Eyber highlight *resiliency*, a concept that is often talked and theorized about, but is not so easy to operationalize. Their paper situates resiliency, vulnerability and coping strategies within a particular context: that of Rwandan children living in child headed households. Again, their research was done in the context of an intervention project and the results suggest ways that programmes can be tailored to the needs of the children themselves. This article attempts to provide a voice from the children and explores their views on issues of strengths, vulnerability and support. It also makes clear that many children have not only coped with adversity, but have also exhibited considerable strength in dealing with the challenges they face.

Josi Salem-Pickartz reports the results of a survey that describes the living conditions of Iraqi refugees in Amman, from a community mental health perspective, and to identify resources that can contribute to community development initiatives. This survey was conducted by what Salem

calls 'peer researchers'. The interviewers were Iraqi refugees themselves, and the research questionnaire was constructed in close collaboration with these peer researchers. While this research provides useful information on general psychological distress, coping mechanisms, support needs and resources of the Iraqis in Jordan, it did not give definite answers on the reality of gender based violence in the Iraqi refugee community. Salem writes that it 'proved to be difficult to achieve a common understanding of abuse and violence, as most researchers had little awareness of these issues in the beginning of the training.' This shows how thin the line between 'intervention' and 'research' can be. Was Salem's project a research project, or an intervention in itself?

The field report by Monica Bandeira focuses on ex-combatants in South Africa. She highlights interventions by organizations that work with this group, and sketches the perspectives of both ex-combatants and organisation members. The paper concludes that much more effort is needed in terms of successful reintegration. She also emphasizes that ex-combatants have a great deal to contribute to society if they are provided with the opportunities to do so.

The articles by Stark et al., Ward & Eyber, Salem-Pickartz and Bandeira show the strengths and limitations of the methods used. For this journal, it is important to document how organizations and researchers collaborate to make research useful. Needs assessments and outcome evaluations can provide a wealth of relevant data. In practice, however, too often these assessments and evaluations are done in ways that are not feeding into the actual project cycle, and do not sufficiently incorporate the views of local stakeholders.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage our readers to submit

manuscripts that explicitly address how they attempt to use participatory ways of research and assessment to improve their interventions.

Finally, *Jane Gilbert*, in her beautiful report on *‘psychosocial counsellors’* in Jordan, deconstructs the difficulties and contradictions in the work of the counsellors. This paper is important because she focuses on the helpers themselves. The article describes the ambiguities and dilemmas’ of the workers on the ground. The counsellors are very committed to helping refugees, but

much, maybe too much, is being asked of them. Many experienced distress at the helplessness of the refugees, and at not being able to offer more help. This is neither new nor surprising. Still, it is rarely explicitly addressed in the literature. We hope that Gilberts’ piece will inspire *‘helpers’* in post conflict settings to reflect on their work, their tasks and their dilemma’s.

Please write to us with your feedback!

Peter Ventevogel,
Editor-in-chief