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From the editor . . . a *Special Section* complete with dilemma

Intervention is very pleased to present our third *Special Section* this year, focussing on the rehabilitation processes of former child soldiers from around the globe (Columbia, Uganda, Liberia and Burundi, and Nepal). Last issue (*Intervention* 12.2), working with *Guest Editors*, we presented a discussion around one form of therapy.

This issue, working in collaboration with *Guest Editors: Ilse Derluyn* (Department of Social Welfare Studies & Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations, Ghent University), *Lucia De Haene* (Education, Culture & Society, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, & Centre for Children in Vulnerable Situations, University of Leuven), *Wouter Vandenhole* (Chair of Human Rights, UNICEF Chair in Children's Rights, Faculty of Law, Law and Development Research Group, University of Antwerp) and *Relinde Reijfers* (War Trauma Foundation), we present one topic, viewed through many different lenses and raising many issues for debate.

Special Section: reintegration processes

This is not the first time we have focussed on this issue that impacts so many children, for so long and in so many places. In 2006, *Intervention* (4.3) was a *Special Issue*, focussed on the experiences of reintegration processes and examined how psychological, social and relational aspects influence the interconnectedness between the former child soldiers and their social environment.

This issue of *Intervention*, we felt it was important to return, because although extensive support has been offered to children in conflict areas who have been (sometimes forcibly) conscripted as child

soldiers into armed groups, few programmes focus on long term reintegration difficulties. In the *Introduction* of this *Special Section*, the *Guest Editors* describe reintegration as a long transformational process, for the reintegration community and the individual reintegrating. They plea, therefore, for long term engagement with individuals and communities in post conflict areas if we really want to support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of former child soldiers and their communities, and restore the social fabric.

Closing the gap: restorative justice

Although within the international non governmental organisation (NGO) world, former child soldiers are mainly considered 'victims', the members of the reintegration community can hold them accountable for suffering the community endured. Therefore, restorative justice should be part of any reintegration process.

By publishing this *Special Section*, we hope to contribute to closing the gap between *theory, policy and implementation, and between humanitarian interventions, development cooperation and aid*. Donor agencies, policy makers, governments, as well as civil society organisations should recognise the necessity of long term and sustainable interventions for the reintegration of former child soldiers. The five contributions included in this *Special Section* will be discussed in detail in the *Introduction* to the *Section*.

That dilemma: labels and the power to harm

Before I go on to discuss the other wonderful contributions to this very packed issue,

I would like to share an editorial dilemma with our readers, in the hope that it will spark as much debate (and potentially change) with them, as it did internally with the editors.

It is about the power of words and labels to harm, and whether by using them in our pages, we contribute to the harm? In two of the five contributions in our *Special Section* (*Both & Reis* and *Angucia*), former child soldiers discuss their ambiguity and difficulties with the stamp of a being a *'former child soldier'*. Both & Reis state that it has *'far reaching consequences for their perception of self'* and *'the label identifies them as helpless victims'*. Ironically, they are forced to hold on to a label they reject in the hopes of receiving long awaited support.

Angucia presents many abducted children in her research that also reject the identification of child soldiers. The children viewed themselves as *'prisoners'* and the rebel commanders as *'soldiers'*. They are focussed on how they make sense of their involvement in conflict and on the future. For communities where these children return, it is important to see them as *'children'*, and they are sensitive to the power and implications inherent in the label *'former soldiers'*.

This label, used by all NGOs, governments and other agencies, has a harming effect. The question in my head encompasses issues of *'doing no harm'* and *'transformative justice'*: should we continue to give these boys, girls, men and women a label that negatively affects self-perception and provides them a separate status in the community that might hamper their reintegration?

In the end, we choose to publish with respect to the authors and their use of the term *'former child soldier'*. I sincerely hope this dilemma we have shared may create some debate and change where it is most needed.

Other contributions to this issue of *Intervention*

Many of the articles in the *Special Section* touch on the issue of the need for

interconnectedness. Important elements of social connection are: a level of collective identification and moments of emotional and cognitive similarities between people or groups of people (Scheff, 2006, p 144). This is a thread that runs through the first two articles in our *Other contributions*, in very different circumstances, but sharing the connection of the ongoing, lasting impact of war and conflict.

In the article by *Jemma Hogwood, Carl Auerbach, Sam Munderere & Emilienne Kambibi* a small effect study was conducted with a group counselling programme for women who had been raped during the genocide in Rwanda. Even now, 20 years later, it is profound how experiences of war rape still influences the daily lives of these women. They do not dare to share their experiences, not only for the stigma, but also they fear they are the only one still suffering. Due to this shame and fear, these women are deprived of one of the most essential, if least acknowledged, need of all humans: the feeling of being connected to other people (Weil, 1952 in Jackson, 2006, p 12). The biggest outcome is that these groups meetings create new social relationships, within a society where the social fabric is so extremely damaged.

Creating new social relationships and connection is also an important element of the article of *Régine Uwibereyeho King*. She presents a qualitative research on a programme, called Healing of Life Wounds, in which members of the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups are brought together for mutual healing and community rebuilding. The emphasis is on intergroup dialogue through story telling. Her study focuses on the factors that facilitate the sharing of personal stories of participants. She shows that the general sense of vulnerability had silenced personal experiences of genocide for both groups, and that individuals did not realise that they all suffer in isolation.

Further, in *Other contributions*, *Marlene Goodfriend, Rachel ter Horst, Giovanni Pintaldi, Anja Junker, Helena Frielingsdorf, Joelle Depeyrot,*

Lea Matasci, Claudio Moroni, Abdou Musengetsi & Leslie Shanks describe the experience of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) on inclusion of emergency psychiatric treatment as part of a medical programme in North Kivu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They show that with limited, but sustained, interventions it is possible to provide treatment of patients with severe psychiatric disorders within humanitarian settings. Even during periods when teams were withdrawn due to safety issues, remaining local doctors were able to supply the required medication to the psychiatric patients.

Debbie Landis & Lindsay Stark plea, in their article, for a need to strengthen existing programme evaluation efforts in order to examine the impact of the intervention of programmes that aim to reduce sexual violence among youth in Liberia. Material from programmes was examined and representatives from government ministries, United Nation agencies and NGOs were interviewed. Landis & Stark conclude that a low number of interventions demonstrated measurable change and highlight the need for evaluation efforts to be able to identify the effect of the programmes.

The field report of an *Anonymous* author highlights other challenges to programme evaluation; the challenge to show the donor psychosocial programmes and approaches were effective. This is a highly sensitive area for discussion, and as such, the author

preferred to remain anonymous to prevent unintentional effects of this contribution on the programme that was evaluated. This contribution is a continuation of another field report by the same author in the July issue in 2013 and shows that finding verifiable indicators of positive impact of an intervention on a psychosocial problem is not easy. Together with the workers in the field, the author has developed a list with psychosocial problems that can be used as a monitoring tool.

So, I am very proud to present this very packed issue, complete with a *Special Section*, dilemmas, debates, discussions and a new monitoring tool, with much food for thought for us all.

Feel free to let us know your thoughts on any questions or issues we have raised throughout this issue of *Intervention*.

Marian Tankink,
Editor in chief, Intervention

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