

Book review

Trauma and Recovery on War's Border. A Guide for Global Health Workers. Kathleen Allden and Nancy Murakami editors, Dartmouth College Press, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2015 (330 pages). ISBN-10: 1611686954

When I opened the book, my first thought was that I knew very little about the described region of Myanmar/Burma and that the book might be less interesting for me and for readers not familiar with the region than I assumed. But, on the contrary, it is a most interesting, intriguing and educative book about providing psychosocial assistance to people affected by war, organised violence, poverty, forced migration, trauma and loss.

As written in the first chapter, the book describes efforts among the helping professions to contribute to the process of healing, post conflict reconstruction and peace building through mental health interventions and psychosocial assistance. The outstanding quality of the book is that it informs us how this broad and systemic aim is actually put into practice. Therefore, it is not just about principles. It is about doing it within the context.

Although we find the word '*trauma*' in the title, the book is dealing with the large spectrum of suffering of persons affected by armed conflict. The authors acknowledge and respect the suffering of people, but they also underline the capacity of self-protection of the majority of people affected by war. The philosophy and described psychosocial activities are strength oriented.

The book offers a comprehensive and realistic overview of the state of art of the

field of psychosocial assistance. There are many fresh ideas and questions requiring reflection. Among them is certainly the socio systemic and political perspective of mental health problems and provided assistance treated in the last chapter of the book (K. Ohmar and M. O'Kane: The Other Side of Political Trauma – Protest, Empowerment, and Transformation) discussing a delicate and neglected topic in the psychosocial literature.

The authors demonstrate how the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2007) pyramid of psychosocial protection of war affected populations could be put into practice at different levels. Examples of good practices are described in an inspiring way, such as psychosocial interventions for children and youth within a migrant community. When reading the book, you get the desire and energy to continue. I know this is not a very scientific judgment of the quality of the book – but for field worker the message is of importance.

Nowadays we speak a lot about community based, school based, primary health care based psychosocial activities, assessment of needs and resources in the community, about culturally appropriate programmes, respect for existing local resources, outreach activities, use of local indigenous strategies from the community for coping and recovery, activating resources in the refugee community, connecting western and indigenous values, wisdom and knowledge, involvement of lay psychosocial helpers, local capacity building, empowerment and active participation of the local people and communities in psychosocial activities. But, such a convincing presentation of the realisation of these principles and inter-relations

among activities is rarely presented. Good examples are paragraphs speaking about building partnership or the calls for culturally appropriate evaluation processes and tools.

Without theorising a lot, the book is a guide for the systemic approach to mental health protection in areas affected by armed conflict. It is linking individual mental health and psychosocial wellbeing to negative and positive processes and resources in the community, and presenting interconnected layers and sectors of assistance. The book could be used in education as an excellent example of applying the eco-social paradigm in real life.

An extensive list of notes and bibliography connects the content of the book and authors' messages with relevant published papers and incorporates the book into the recent global picture of concepts and activities in the psychosocial field.

The book could be of benefit to various readers. Students, beginners in the field, experienced field workers, decision makers,

researchers and scholars can all find useful and important topics. And, my very personal reflection: when you read the book, its earthly wisdom, realistic examples of activities and descriptions of encountered challenges, you feel the belief of the authors in the presented philosophy and models of realisation, and you feel encouraged to join them in their effort, no matter in which part of the world affected by organised violence and deprivation you are working.

Reference

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). (2007). *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*. Geneva: IASC

*Anica Mikuš Kos is consultant child psychiatrist and president of Slovene Philanthropy.
email: kos.a@siol.net*

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