

Book review

Mental Health Guidelines. A handbook for implementing mental health programmes in areas of mass violence (2005). K. de Jong, et al. Amsterdam: Médecins sans Frontières. (*Freely downloadable from the internet: contactinfo@amsterdam.msf.org*)

Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) had been setting up mental health and psychosocial programmes in conflict areas since the early 1990s. Throughout this period of time, MSF has developed a variety of methods for dealing with the psychological impact of armed conflict and disasters. Their experiences are now written down as guidelines in this free handbook.

The first part of the handbook covers and explains the general concepts of trauma, and its consequences, on various aspects of health. A model for intervention is introduced.

The second part of the handbook focuses on programming details. Components of a psychosocial intervention, such as individual and community support, are described. Mental and physical health are regarded as inseparable entities. Therefore, an integrated approach in dealing with various chronic illnesses and health problems is presented. There is also attention to aspects of advocacy.

The third part of the handbook describes specific topics, such as: assessment, mental health, psychosocial intervention in an acute emergency as well as in chronic crises and post-crisis situations, psychosocial training, monitoring and evaluation, staff recruitment, and staff support. A list with relevant websites is included.

This manual is designed for a wide range of mental health and psychosocial expatriates, as well as medical and general humanitarian aid managers faced with communities under great stress. It can be used in areas of man-made mass violence, but is also useful in reactions to natural disasters. This handbook can prepare people for a field mission, or can be used during work in the field.

This handbook is intended to offer an intervention model to humanitarian workers to help them approach psychosocial and mental health problems. It does not offer a profound reflection on the content and methods of an intervention. It is assumed that the mental health specialist already has these skills and knowledge before departure. Furthermore, most of the interventions mentioned in the manual, are linked to, or embedded in medical structures.

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