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Introduction

This first issue of the *International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict* opens with an article on *Collective Trauma*. Daya Somasundaram from the University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka describes the devastating consequences of the civil war in his country for the community. He also discusses the kind of aid that is needed, and gives a clear warning about the destructive side effects that well-meant but inadequate aid may have for the local culture.

Aid programs aimed at promoting mental health and countering the mental health problems caused by the war should, according to Somasundaram, be community based: they should try to involve the local communities and connect with indigenous coping strategies.

The article written by De Jong, Kleber & Puratic on *Mental health programs in areas of armed conflict* describes such a community based mental health program. The program in question was carried out in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The authors present both the theoretical base of this program and a description of how their theoretical views were put into practice.

De Jong, Kleber & Puratic agree with Somasundaram about the point that cultural sensitivity is important. But they underline the fact that any intervention done by outsiders implicates a meeting and therefore a confrontation of two different cultural worlds. Inevitably there will be, to a certain extent, an imposition of Western principles upon the local culture. The amount of people benefiting from the program could be

seen as an indication for the relevance of the Western principles that were introduced.

The project described by De Jong, Kleber & Puratic included the training of local counsellors. Van der Veer's article on *Training counsellors in areas of armed conflict* provides a theoretical basis for such training. According to Van der Veer, such training can only be effective if the trainer assesses the personal backgrounds and needs of the participants and adapts his approach accordingly; that includes cultural sensitivity. Counselling training in areas of armed conflict should not only include transfer knowledge, skills and a therapeutic attitude; the training also should incorporate some form of support for the participants in dealing with the consequences of painful experiences in their own lives.

Of course, counselling is not the only way of dealing with the psychosocial consequences of armed conflict. Practical experience during the last decade has taught us that effective psychosocial interventions come in many other forms. The article by Sithampanathan on *Interventions and methods of the Theatre Action Group* shows how dance and drama can help children, their parents and their teachers. The article also illustrates that basic principles of counselling can be helpful to understand how other psychosocial interventions work. A brief description of one approach as offered in this article may give us insight into common themes; therefore we hope that many readers will feel challenged to describe their 'own' psychosocial interventions for future issues of this journal.

This issue concludes with a contribution by Eveline Lindner. In her article on *Humiliation and dignity: regional conflicts in the global village*, she attempts to put regional armed conflicts into the perspective of the globalisation processes of which this new journal is also a product. Lindner makes a remark that brings us back to the matter of introducing (or imposing) western principles into (or upon) non western communities.

There is nothing wrong with introducing 'new' ideas, it's the way in which it is done that is crucial. Cultural differences do not create rifts by themselves; on the contrary, diversity can be a source of mutual enrichment. But diversity is enriching only as long as it is embedded within relationships that are characterised by respect. It is when respect and recognition are failing, that those who feel victimised are prone to highlight differences in order to "justify" rifts that were caused. These rifts however were not caused by differences, but by something else, namely by humiliation.

Guus van der Veer