

Recensión

***Sarajevo 2000: The Psychosocial Consequences of War by
Powell and Durakovic-Belko***
Sarajevo 2000: Las Consecuencias Psicosociales de la Guerra según Powell y Durakovic-Belko

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Research on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and especially research on PTSD developed as a consequence of war originates largely from the USA, Northern Europe and Israel. Research authored in other regions is quite rare. The war in the region of former Yugoslavia is in this regard special since there was quite a large number of local psychologists and psychiatrists working there who carried out considerable amounts of research about the effects of war on their own populations, during and immediately after the war.

This book contains the proceedings of a conference held in Sarajevo in the summer of 2000 on the consequences of war. This conference was the first post-war meeting of professionals after the violence (the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted from 1991-1995 and the war in Kosovo and the NATO bombardment of Serbia took place in 1999) at which contributions were made by professionals - psychologists, psycho-pedagogues and psychiatrists - from nearly all of the countries which had been at war. Many of the contributors had known each other well before the war and had been on opposing sides during the war. Papers focusing on the effects of the massacre of Srebrenica in which Bosnian Muslims were killed by Bosnian Serbs were presented alongside papers on the effects of the NATO bombing of Serbian towns. The organizers of the conference succeeded in establishing a professional approach in which political opinions were sidelined without denying the emotional involvement of most of the individual contributors in their subject matter. The conference succeeded in its aim of answering important questions about the effects of war in the light of empirical research done during and after the wars in former Yugoslavia.

In 2002 the organizers published the proceedings of the conference - in book form in English and Bosnian as well as free of charge in pdf format on the internet (www.psih.org). Nearly all of those who had contributed to the conference resubmitted a shortened form of their presentation, and the organizers included a few additional papers from persons who were not able to participate at the conference but who were known to have done substantial research. Thus the book provides a thorough overview of research conducted during and after the war. As only few of the presentations were published in international journals before or since [for an exception see *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2003, 59(1)] the book provides in many cases the only way of accessing these results from outside the borders of former Yugoslavia. In contrast to most published conference proceedings, each individual paper follows a strict outline, a fact which contributes enormously to the readability of the book.

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The book is divided in two main sections: One section focuses on adults and the other on children and adolescents. Within each section the editors differentiated between papers on epidemiology, risk and protective factors, and treatment. Both main sections are introduced by papers providing a knowledgeable overview of research on adults and children and adolescents respectively. Browsing through the section on adults, the reader is surprised by the considerable breadth of papers, which specialized journals rarely offer. As there are so many contributions (65 in total and 16 alone in the section on epidemiology on adults) I will describe only a small selection of papers in more detail. For example the first section starts with two papers on PTSD, anxiety and depression in women surviving Srebrenica (Bell, Bergeret, & Oruc, 2002; Bell, Oruc, & Bergeret, 2002). The name of this town Srebrenica stands for one of the most prominent massacres of civilians since World War II. These two papers are special in having a focus on females (a largely neglected group of war participants) and an additional focus on refugee status. The second of the two papers is connected with the consequences of forced migration, which can be seen on the one hand as a war related stressor but on the other hand also as a continuing post-war stressor. This latter aspect is discussed in several other papers. Thus one paper examines the relationship between the five-factor personality model and chronic PTSD in refugees (Savjak, 2002) and another paper focuses on the problem of incomplete families (Bobovic, 2002). Other papers look at aspects of refugee life outside of former Yugoslavia, such as the problems of cultural adaptation of refugees in Austria (Kucera & Lueger-Schuster, 2002).

Many treatment programs were implemented out in former Yugoslavia. Some treatments were directed towards education about PTSD, whereas other approaches dealt with providing general psychosocial support. While many of the papers in this section just describe their programs, other papers give detailed information about treatment effects. Considering the difficulties of carrying out research in a post-war society the study by Mooren, Kleber, de Jong, Ruvic and Kulenovic (2002) deserves special mention. The authors report the results of a mental health project run by Medecins sans Frontieres and Health Net International between 1994 and 1999. From a sample of more than 20 000 people visiting the counselling centres two subsamples of 3,926 and 2,113 clients were drawn. Interestingly the intake scores increased during the years rather than decreasing as one might expect after the end of the war. Furthermore the comparison of pre- and post intervention measurements showed highly significant effects. Apart from general effectiveness, other papers report on specific questions, which mainly arise in the aftermath of war, such as

the psychological aspects of amputation in different age groups (Lipnicevic Radic, 2002).

The section on children and adolescents starts with a substantiated introduction by Gavranidou (2002), which summarizes most of papers and puts them into the context of other research on traumatized children all over the world. Again most of the papers focus on rates of PTSD in children and adolescents in the region of former Yugoslavia, mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Husain (2002) estimated the prevalence for PTSD symptoms and found – in contrast to other published studies - no differences in symptoms for the age groups below 13 and older than 13. Females showed more PTSD-symptoms than males and amongst the many different traumatic events experienced during the war, only losing an immediate family member and deprivation of food and shelter were connected with higher numbers of symptoms. Another paper (Danes, 2002) compares the prevalence of disorders during the war and the post-war period. Interestingly the rates for psychotic disorders and developmental disorders dropped at the beginning of the war, only to increase again after the war to a level which is higher than the pre-war level. PTSD occurred less often than expected and was overshadowed by somatic problems or difficulties in school. A longitudinal approach was followed by Dapic and Stuvland (2002), who followed a group of children from the beginning of the war until two years after the end of the war, showing that although rates for stress reactions decreased a high number of children still suffered from PTSD and depression. Other papers focus on the mediating role of maternal reaction on the psychological adjustment of children (Smith, 2002) or the differential effects of loss or separation from fathers on younger children (Zvizdic & Butollo, 2002). Contrasting with the results of these studies is a study from Slovenia (Slodonjak, 2002) in which refugee children from Bosnia-Herzegovina were compared with Slovenian children without trauma and Slovenian children who survived a school bus accident. The refugee children as well as those who experienced the bus accident showed PTSD symptoms, but the refugee children exhibited no more severe symptoms than those involved in the bus accident and they did not perform worse in school than the Slovenian controls.

In the section on treatment for children, an array of different approaches such as PTSD-specific interventions, broad interventions for children and parents or school-based interventions as well as interventions designed to facilitate integration of refugee children are described. From 14 papers on intervention I would like to highlight only a few, although most of them would warrant attention. Kapor-Stanulovic and Zotovic evaluated a very intense disorder-specific program including art therapeutic, projective and library modules as well as debriefing employed with particularly traumatized children and adolescents. The authors demonstrated a reduction of

PTSD-related problems but no improvement in other problem fields. Gavranidou, Cehic, Powell and Pasic (2002) evaluated the differential effects of a reintegration program for returnee children and showed that younger children particularly profited from the program. Sestan (2002) compared a treatment program consisting of social support for displaced preschoolers and their mothers in three groups. One group received treatment and the children visited kindergarten, in the second group children visited kindergarten and had no group treatment and the control group neither participated in groups nor visited the kindergarten. As expected the children receiving social support treatment showed fewer problems and symptoms than the group without social support treatment and kindergarten. Apart from those specific papers, several papers focus on the evaluation of interventions sponsored or initialised by UNICEF such as Yule and Smith (2002) or Dapic and Stuvland (2002).

In summary the book provides a thorough overview of the studies done during and after the war and demonstrates that up to now the effects of war on a civilian population in general and children in particular have never been so intensively studied as in the region of former Yugoslavia. On the other hand when one compares the research published in internationally available journals it becomes clear that almost only research done together with international scholars crosses the borders of former Yugoslavia. In this sense the book opens up a very special forum.

Yet the overview enables the reader to see specific weaknesses of the field as well. Most of the research focuses on PTSD and therefore neglects other stress reactions and other factors of war and post-war adaptation. In particular, it may be that idiosyncratic reactions or culture-bound syndromes are overlooked or, as one of the editors, Steve Powell, puts it: "Psychologically very relevant issues of guilt, perpetration and revenge were largely sidelined, at least in official program plans, being replaced above all by the colossus of posttraumatic stress disorder, which is a highly medicalised model of one kind of human response to what happens in wartime" (Powell & Durakovic-Belko, 2002, p.23). In this sense, it remains important to remember that if one cannot prevent war (which seems very unlikely), war-related research and intervention has to focus on a variety of different kinds of stress reactions and explore a correspondingly wide range of interventions. And perhaps make more effort to bring politically sensitive issues such as revenge and guilt into focus.

Reference

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