

Trauma Rehabilitation after War and Conflict: Community and Individual Perspectives

Erin Martz, Editor (2010)

Book Review

Adela-Mihaela Militaru⁸⁰

Adela Militaru, 27, from Bucharest, Romania, is currently a final-year student in the International Development graduate program of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. In 2010, she obtained her BA degree in Psychology, and has since graduated from an M.A. in Counseling and Educational Psychology at the University of Bucharest. In 2013, she turned her attention to the field of Development Studies after spending some time in South Africa and more recently, India. Her professional interests encompass the fields of facilitation and capacity building in intercultural settings, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, personal coaching, and global education. At the moment, Adela is a free-lance professional looking at innovative ways of bringing Psychological science into Development, and has recently joined the Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development (ARCADIA), to further pursue her passion for Global Education, and capacity building in developing country contexts.

Key words: Community, development, mental health intervention, post-conflict, post-war, reconstruction, rehabilitation, trauma.

⁸⁰ Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communications Sciences, M.A. in International Development.

The book edited by Erin Martz, *Trauma Rehabilitation after War and Conflict: Community and Individual Perspectives*, addresses a very relevant issue in post-war reconstruction, building on interdisciplinary perspectives, with growing implications for development professionals. Specifically, the authors' main purpose is to examine the human dimension in the aftermath of war and armed conflict, by looking at evidence-based interventions, tackling psychological and physical distress, as well as recovery from social and economic stress. Such complementary perspectives on human livelihoods in post-conflict contexts equip the readers with tools for establishing community support structures and enhancing individual coping mechanisms in the process of rehabilitation.

The strength of *Trauma Rehabilitation after War and Conflict* is that it examines not only the psychological and social impact of traumatic stress reactions to armed conflict at individual level, but also the necessity of promoting adaptive coping and building stability at the level of affected communities, in order to prevent future conflict. This, in turn, requires the thoughtful examination of alterations in individual- and community-level awareness, self-perception, emotional bonds, trust and relationships, as well as inevitable alterations of life philosophy of affected individuals and communities. Covering these topics comprehensively throughout the sixteen chapters of the book, the authors succeed in persuading readers to consider the fundamental role of mental health interventions in post-conflict areas.

Nonetheless, despite highlighting solid evidence from relevant literature, from a stylistic perspective the book seems rather disadvantaged by the specialized terminology it uses, narrowing the audience to academics and professionals. The book seems clearly targeted at an audience that is interested in a comprehensive description of long-term approaches to post-war rehabilitation. Even though it does offer valid approaches to building resilience of individuals and groups in war-affected areas, the book proposes a clear-cut, structured approach, leaving little space for constructive interdisciplinary arguments or creative interpretations. However, readers from multiple backgrounds would clearly benefit from the solid basis of information provided by the authors.

Overall, *Trauma Rehabilitation after War and Conflict* provides an overview of available rehabilitation services in the process of reconstructing identities after war and armed conflict on psychological, vocational and social levels. As useful as this may prove for early-career professionals, it appears to lack the innovative perspective and refinement that senior expert readers would benefit from. However, the book indeed provides a useful framework for addressing community resources that may complement the relevant interventions needed to address sustainable rehabilitation after individual and social trauma. For professionals working in war-affected areas, where a thorough understanding of quality research on trauma and psychological disequilibrium is essential, this book may serve several interrelated fields such as emergency intervention, public policy, diplomacy, international relations, public health, development work, and humanitarian aid.

To conclude, I would strongly advise this book to emerging development practitioners and professionals already working on the ground in war-affected areas as well as other social and political scientists interested in the psychological and social mechanisms of rehabilitation in post-war contexts. In addition, policy makers and professionals engaged with “hard” aspects of post-war rehabilitation could also largely benefit from this reading. In turn, despite its early

publication date (2010), I believe this book may help us advance a more balanced vision of post-war reconstruction, and shift from predominantly economic rehabilitation towards a more human dimension. The work of Erin Martz and her co-authors can help more professionals engage with sustainable, highly qualitative development planning in post-war recovery.