THERAPEUTIC CARE OF SEPARATED CHILDREN SEEKING ASYLUM

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Working with trauma

- Bracken, Giller & Summerfield (1995) – Psychological responses to war and atrocity:
  ‘..the fact that symptoms and signs can be reliably identified in different settings is no guarantee that they mean the same thing in those settings’.

- Western beliefs: the person as a distinct and independent individual capable of self-transformation in relative isolation from social contexts.

- Western models of trauma – focus on intra-psychic events, psychological and neurological processing.
Bracken, Giller & Summerfield (1995) Social, political and cultural realities

- **Social**: family circumstances, available social networks, economic position and employment status
- **Political**: engagement in a political movement, social position defined by gender, class, ethnicity etc., victims of organised violence.
- **Cultural**: spiritual beliefs, language, concepts of self, community & illness, ontological beliefs
Specific challenges faced by separated children seeking asylum

- Witnessing trauma in home country
- Loss of family and home
- Traumatic journey to the UK
- Settling in a new country without the support of family
- Facing ‘negative identity definitions’
‘Negative identity definitions’

Psychological well being & functioning

IDENTITY

Stories lived & told
Stories told about separated children seeking asylum and by them

• Foucault (1980) – social discourses shape our relationships with each other, and the rules governing social behaviour (legal system, govt. policy).

• Negative discourses about refugees become ‘internalised’ (White & Epston, 1990)
Context creates negative definitions of identity:

- Right to be in UK being questioned
- Not being believed in court
- Re-telling traumatic stories, ‘victim’ identity
- Public discourses ‘bogus asylum seekers’ ‘dole scroungers’
Approaching 18….

Loss of aspects reinforcing positive identity:

• Loss of hopes for the future - access to education, future career
• Loss of foster families
• Loss of social support networks – child services, school friends & teachers.
• Potential loss of British identity and friends
How to respond?

Focus on *vulnerability* or *resilience*?
How to respond? Narrative approaches

• Create a ‘safe place to stand’ – the riverbank metaphor.
• Put people in touch with hopes, aspirations, values for living.
• Emphasise ‘subjugated narratives’ (White, 2005), stories of survival.
• Audience for preferred stories - ‘spreading the news’, (Freedman & Combs, 1996)
How to respond? Liberation Practices

• Witness, name, and highlight injustice, (Martín-Baró, 1996) - place distress in context to avoid ‘internalising discourses’

• ‘Community resilience’ and ‘cultural virtues’ – how do people practice resilience and how developed in context of history & culture (Afuape & Hughes, 2016)

• Coming alongside people, holding our expertise lightly (Hughes & Bisimwa, 2016)
How to respond? Community Psychology

• Bring people together, create connections
• Social action psychotherapy (Holland, 1992)
• Re-position people as having something to contribute, eg. Richmond Park project, letters to Calais migrant camp
• Use of creative media to facilitate ways of sharing preferred stories (Clayton & Hughes, 2016)
Group for Afghani young people
(separated adolescents seeking asylum)

‘Tree of Life’ narrative metaphor
(Ncube & Denborough, 2008)

Hopes and aspirations (branches),
resilience/abilities (trunk),
social and cultural history of these (roots)
Comments from young people who attended the narrative group

• Before, I was hopeless and now I am thinking ‘yes, I can do it!’
• The best thing was it gave me encouragement to carry on and not give up
• It felt good to share ideas with others about hopes for the future
• It gave me hope meeting others in the same position
Richmond Park

- Young people create their own story
- Shared experience
- Fun (picnic, football)
- A document to share with others – ‘spreading the news’ (Freedman & Combs, 1996)
- Hand held cameras, prompts
Film made by the young people
What the day enabled

‘Richmond Park was fantastic, fantastic….’

- Gave the young people a voice
- Environment that connected them with home
- Fun, created sense of community
- Re-positioned them as having something to contribute
Summary of guiding principles

- Focus on resilience before addressing vulnerability - ‘a safe place to stand’
- Identify preferred views of self, rooted in community, culture and social history
- Hold expertise lightly – coming alongside people
- Create connections, audiences for preferred stories,
- Emphasise social, political and cultural contexts
- Focus on community (community resilience)
- Re-position people as having valuable knowledge to share.
References


References cont.


