

Workshop

Voices of Trauma: on contextual thinking in intercultural treatment of complex posttraumatic damage

Although modern psychiatry, based on the science of the western world has many universal values, it can show serious gaps and problems when practised in situations where helpers and victims are of different cultural backgrounds. Societies shape the self and self-schemas of individuals in different ways. Because of this, the conceptualisation of experienced traumatic reactions can differ according to a cultural background of a victim, as can expectations of how the most adequate healing process should look like.

Contextual thinking offers an appropriate paradigm for intercultural trauma treatment. In treating psychological sequels of trauma, one should acknowledge the necessity of focussing both on the intrapsychic and biological dimensions of traumatic experience, and on the interpersonal, and the socio-political/cultural dimensions. In addition, it is sometimes necessary to bring into account transgenerationally transmitted experiences, myths, or stories from the past that shape worldviews, and a formation of basic assumptions of an individual.

The healing process is a balancing act. The recovery occurs when a “new” balance between resiliency and damage emerges, a balance that enriches survivor’s quality of life. In all cases, it is of crucial importance to be aware of the different levels of human existence that trauma impacts and destroys, to assess them and to focus interventions on. The ability to shift back and forth between these levels in the course of treatment is an important skill, too. The mapping of the survivor’ problems, psychological, social and economic damage, and the available sources of resilience, together with their interpretation within the contexts of the victims’ past, present, and future outlooks, and the planning of interventions, makes the contextual view necessary and unavoidable.

This session will focus on the application of contextual thinking in intercultural trauma treatment. Both, theoretical backgrounds and clinical experiences are going to be discussed with the audience.