



NARRATIVE REPORT

7th International Conference for Health and Human Rights Resilience: Recovery: Reconstruction

2-5 February 2005
Vadodara
India

Preparation of the Conference

The 7th International Conference for Health and Human Rights, titled "Resilience: Recovery: Reconciliation" was planned and implemented by the local organizing committee. This committee, chaired by Dr. Vijay Shah and Organizing Secretary Dr Sandeep Shah worked collaboratively with the international program committee, chaired by Dr Nora Sveaass.

The planning of the conference began well in advance of its actual occurrence, in August, 2003. The conference was originally planned to be held in India in December, 2004 but was, for many reasons, shifted to the 1st week of February, 2005. The organizational office was set up at Brij Psychiatry Hospital, Jambubet, Dandia Bazaar, Vadodara 390001, INDIA and the conference communications center was established and well-equipped with all the tools required to make the conference successful. Our team, from the beginning, had one objective clearly in mind: To make the conference a success and a unique event so that all our delegates would carry memories of the conference with them for life.

Professor Dean Adjuovic and the scientific committee did an excellent job, selecting presentations from all the scientific contributions. They also did the editing and selection of the papers to be presented. It was widely agreed that he, and they, did an excellent job and that his support and dedication contributed to the high quality of scientific presentations. Unfortunately, Dr. Adjuovic was missed at the actual conference during the conference; he could not attend due to visa problems.

Around 68 abstracts were submitted and reviewed by the members of the scientific committee and 48 abstracts were accepted. Most abstracts concerned individual oral presentations, 11 symposia were presented, there was a round table on ` Spirituality & Healing ` every day, 2 video presentations and 5 posters were presented. Over and above this we had planet two pre conference workshops. Unfortunately only one could be held, as the delegates responsible for this workshop, Rosalia Chauca and Elsa Bustamente, both from REDINFA, Peru, were not able to attend due to visa problems. But the pre-conference workshop that was carried through was co-led by Nooria Mehraby and Mariano Coelho, both from The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).

Cultural programmes were organized for the delegates during the evenings. Each program had a different ethnic theme and was held at a different venue. Since the national airport is 20 minutes by car from the Conference venue, the Conference was relatively accessible for participants from all parts of the world.



The conference took place in Hotel Surya Palace, where most of the participants were accommodated. Hotel Surya Palace had adequate facilities and meeting rooms for international conferences and is situated in the center of the city of Vadodara.

The outline of the program of the Conference

The main aim of the Conference was to focus on and develop ways to address the **Resilience, Recovery and Reconciliation process by promoting human rights, integrity and social responsibility** in communities torn by war, victims of organized violence and torture and in work with traumatized refugees. Both the title and the focus of the Conference underline the shift in the professional paradigm from strengthening resources to emphasis on the healing process of individuals and communities.

A main focus at this present conference was directed towards the training health professionals in work with torture and violence, where emphasis was also given to building the well being of individuals and communities, learning from efforts and experiences from initiatives of reconciliation. A holistic approach to healing trauma was stressed, giving importance to the culture and tradition of the country where relief work is being done and to the necessity of developing community-based, culturally grounded programs of psychosocial support that link relief and development assistance to war-affected children, families and communities.

Keynote speakers

The keynote lecture on the first day of the conference, (February 2nd) was given by Derrick Silove, Professor of Psychiatry at Liverpool Hospital, attached to the University of New South Wales, and Director of the Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit, Sydney South Western Area Health Service. His lecture on 'Ecosocial and evolutionary frameworks for understanding posttraumatic stress' focused on PTSD as an evolutionarily-determined psychobiological survival mechanism triggered by moral threat. It also focused on the differences in PTSD trajectories associated with threatening as opposed to secure posttraumatic environments. The implications for assessing individual patients and the needs of trauma-affected populations as a whole were discussed in the context of approaches to intervention. The paper discussed, in a very interesting way, the theoretical and conceptualized models relevant to the field.

The second keynote lecture on 3rd February was given by Michael Wessells, Professor in Psychology at Randolph-Macon College. His presentation was called 'Building community resilience and hope following armed conflict : Culture, empowerment and peace building '. Michael Wessells gave us a strong and heartfelt lecture based on his broad professional experience in the field of children and war. He is a Senior Child Protection Specialist for Christian Children's Fund and a core member of the Mellon Foundation Psychosocial Working Group on Refugees, which defines a global framework and research agenda on research assistance and of the U.N. research network on Children and Armed Conflict. His current research on children and armed conflict examines child soldiers, displaced children, psychosocial assistance in emergencies, and post-conflict reconstruction for peace. His work focuses on how a holistic, culturally grounded approach to



community integration and peacebuilding strengthens community resilience and protects human rights following armed conflict. His approach to working in the native country with the resources provided by the western countries indicates a shift in the paradigm of the health workers and the efficacy of the method. In Africa, his organization's work respects and integrates the cultural resources such as local healing rituals as key psychosocial supports that aid community reintegration and resilience. Michael Wessells and his team are successfully achieving collective healing and resilience through community mobilization, holistic planning and action that restores a sense of self-efficacy, reduces discrimination, and enables physical improvements that reduce stresses, support the realization of people's rights and stimulate hope. His insights and experiences gave a new direction, meaning and approach to the participants of the conference, especially those, who would be working with the developing countries which are poor in terms of materialistic resources but have a rich cultural and traditional heritage.

The third keynote lecture was by Vikram Patel on 'Human Rights and Mental Health'. Vikram Patel is a Senior Lecturer at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, University of London, with extensive research within the fields of Reproductive Health, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health and health inequalities. His lecture dealt with the public health significance of mental illnesses in developing countries. It focused on how mental illnesses are amongst the most important global causes of sickness and disability. It focused on the stigma associated with mental disorders and low levels of mental health literacy leading to unparalleled levels of discrimination against the mentally ill. To focus on the lessons of successful advocacy campaigns in public health, for example the HIV / AIDS campaign and the effect of media activism, Vikram Patel had carefully compiled and enlightened us with many photographs from leading magazines and newspapers which told us about the stress levels of modern successful professionals and the victims of civil violence and displacement.

Also Camelia Doru, director of ICAR Foundation, Medical Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, Bucharest was invited to present a keynote lecture on 'Current development in prevention and treatment of torture'. Unfortunately, not even this important lecture could be held as Camelia Doru also faced visa problems.

Paper presentations, symposia and workshops (a brief glance)

One of the highlights of the conference was the paper presented by Abd-UI-Amir K. Al Ganimee on 'The Stain of Abuse in Psychiatric Services in Iraq during 1980s and 1990s'. It was a commendable achievement on the part of ISHHR to manage make his participation in the conference possible. It is a matter of courage and honesty to be able to stand among the people and relate what it was like to be one of the abusers, i.e., to be one of the many mental health professionals who were put to administrate the compulsory Iraqi military psychiatric services during that period. He made us aware of the roles of the abusers, the victims, the causes of abuse, and the patterns of abuse. What this should lead us to think about it is are some of these abusers themselves suffering from secondary trauma as their conscience might cause them grief also for the abusive acts they had to commit under orders? And now that the system which perpetrated this kind of abuse is not in power anymore, in keeping with the theme of this 7th



ISHHR conference what kind of paths to reconciliation are possible for these victims and abusers in Iraq as they live their daily life.

One of the oral presentations that has given us food for thought is the one presented by Prof. Miklos Biro from Serbia since it has given positive directions to the approach to Reconciliation in countries ravaged by their dictators, trauma, war, and also new insights on the nature of man. His project in former Yugoslavia was a survey conducted on Serbs and Bosniaks. In the context of this it was discovered that despite the high level of traumatic experience of the subjects, it had no correlation with the readiness for reconciliation, nor with the attitudes toward the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The best predictors for reconciliation were attitudes and values represented by the factors 'Non-Ethnocentric' and 'Non-Nationalistic/Xenophobic'. Also having friends among the 'opposing' nationality and having positive experiences with the members of the opposing national groups was found to be highly related to a readiness for reconciliation. His paper also had insights on the measures and strategies that could improve reconciliation among conflicting nations.

Serena Chaudhary's presentation traced the process of building community resilience over a year and half starting with discussions about entering into the community, building relationships, trust and a collaborative approach to community crises and concluding with discussion and analysis of challenges encountered and accomplishments made in collaboration, consortium building, sharing of resources and services provision. The organization she represented CPSI addresses the growing needs of West African immigrants, refugees and asylees in Staten Island, New York - which is one of the largest West African communities outside of Africa. They have an open approach and they involve the participation of the elders of the communities with which they work.

Another highlight of the conference was the paper presented by Prof. Jace Pillay which is based on his commendable approach to education in the Rand Afrikaans University, South Africa. He argues that values in education should be holistically integrated at all levels, namely, personal, inter-personal, institutional and cultural, for a shift from policy to actual practice in educational institutions, so that the roots of apartheid and racism can be healed at grass-root level. He spoke about how in the South African context, policies, anti-bias training, unlearning and relearning attitudes and behaviors, the involvement of all stakeholders and the integration of anti-racist practices as a component of the whole school development are needed to effectively combat racism. A successful achievement of this vision for his country, if applied elsewhere also in Africa could do wonders for this war-torn country.

A two-day workshop on 'The Embodiment of Resiliency : Somatic Approaches to Working with Survivors of Severe Trauma ' was conducted by Amber Elizabeth Lynn Gray. It explored how trauma invades the body, the psyche and the victim's very sense of being human. Torture and war induced trauma, in particular can destroy and individual's capacity to be in relationship with self, other and community. Amber practices Individual, Family and Group Psychotherapy along with dance and movement therapy. Her workshop was very well appreciated and attended. The participants came back on the second day also. Besides presenting her paper, at the end of each workshop, she demonstrated and taught the participants how to reconnect with their bodies, mind, heart and soul through



movement. We all stood in a large circle and repeated the graceful movements suggested by her or spontaneously depending on the instructions given by her. She also related cases of amazing recovery of severely traumatized and physically mutilated clients of hers who are now well on the path of recovery, the spirit shown by them and how such healing power of man inspires the professionals, healers, therapists themselves.

The Round Table on Spirituality and Healing was held from 3rd to 5th February for two hours per session. Dr. Sadutshang and Dr. John Van Eenwyk led the discussion. There were twenty participants in the round table and 10 members participated daily while the rest of the participants came as and when they could. The first day's discussion centered on the participants' understanding of spirituality, what it means in the context of their own lives and what they expected from our gathering. This discussion went round and round as the participants became more comfortable with themselves and with others, in their exploration of how religion influences healing and culture. For example, the Christian participants spoke about how they are called atheists because they do not go to the church regularly and our Australian colleagues were happily amazed to share our Indian insight on the matter, because Hindu Indians do not go to the temple on fixed days, and yet they are not labeled atheists, as the Australian colleagues, understand themselves to be. From this developed one of the major themes of the round-table namely, the differences between religion and spirituality.

Another major insights shared by participants in the Spirituality and Healing Roundtable was the signs that they look for while working with traumatized clients or the ones who have come to them for therapy, to know or detect that the process of transcending their pain, to identify when the grieving process has begun, and to facilitate greater awareness of spirituality in their lives. The discussion revolved around how the spiritual beliefs of the eastern world. Some discussion also involved defining Spirituality as universalistic, internal, spontaneous, affective and private whereas Religion is an organized social entity. Spirituality is an attribute of the individual. Religion is more about belonging rather than believing. Spirituality is more of believing rather than belonging.

The rest of the presented papers are enlisted in the program and an overview over all the presentations will be presented on www.ishhr.org very soon.

Delegates, countries and grants

The conference was happy to count ca 200 delegates. The delegates were from several different countries: Argentina, Brazil, Haiti, United States, South Africa, Lesotho, Australia, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, Netherlands, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Iraq, the Philippines, Bangladesh and course India. Unfortunately a number of delegates from Croatia, Romania, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Greece, Denmark, Sweden, Peru and Paraguay were unable to attend the conference due to visa problems.

Thanks to generous support, primarily from Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO) and the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, all delegates from Low Income Countries, who applied in advance, were able to



receive a travel grant. Without this important support, the representativity, the scope and the value of the conference would have been strongly limited.

Cultural aspects

The evenings of the conference were loaded with the cultural banquets which highlighted the different aspects of Indian culture. Day one highlighted the culture of the Southern India and was followed by dinner served of Southern Delicacies. On day two we had focused on the Gujarati Culture and we had excellent folk performances Gujarati from different tribes of Gujarat and it was followed up with dinner served of Gujarati delicacies.

On day three we had focused on the northern culture of India and the delegates enjoyed the folk performances of the Rajasthani folklore and this was followed by rajasthani delicacies served to our delegates.

All the delegates enjoyed the cultural performances greatly, we also included short talks on the special cultural rituals of India and this was done by specialist on this subjects speaking for a brief period before the cultural show begun.

Closing

The closing was highlighted by the summary of the conference, the closing ceremony wherein Dr Nora thanked all the local organizers and celebrated each volunteer with flowers, and also personally thanked the Organizing Secretary Dr Sandeep Shah and Chairman of the Local Organizing Body, Dr Vijay Shah, and praised their untiring efforts in making this conference a big success in all ways.