

PEACE-BUILDING AND PROTECTION
OF VULNERABLE GROUPS
– Introduction

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1. Background¹

Peace-building and protection of vulnerable groups are closely related as many of the traits found in more peaceful societies are linked to the protection of civil and social human right for all citizens. As human rights are vulnerable to disasters – as the social fabric may break down and the capacity of governmental institutions may be exceeded or insufficient to respond adequately to the needs.

Within the field of psychology the understanding of peace-building and prevention of man-made disasters is partly covered by peace-psychology. Here we will provide a brief overview of peace-psychology followed by an overview of how most current disaster response, recovery programmes, and risk reduction programmes include psychosocial components informed by a human rights perspective. The articles in this issue of the journal cover peace-building, human rights based interventions, and protection of vulnerable groups as part of building societies and communities that are more preventive of and resilient to man-made disasters (including climate change related disasters, industrial disasters, and organised violence).

1 This issue of *Psyke & Logos* is based on presentations and reflections at the conference with the same title – in February 2009. The conference was organised and sponsored by the University of Copenhagen, Institute of Psychology, Centre for Multi-Ethnic Trauma Research (MET), International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support, Paamiut Asasara & Bikuben Foundation, Save the Children DK and the Master of Disaster Management at the University of Copenhagen and Lund University, Sweden.

2. Peace Psychology

Peace psychology is a relatively new psychological sub discipline. It started to distinguish itself from the more general social psychology in the late 80s, and was institutionalised in the early 90s (Christie, Wagner & Winter, 2001). Psychologists occupying themselves with questions related to peace, how to attain it, and how to avoid war, are on the other hand not a new phenomenon. William James (1910/1995) has often been called the first peace psychologist after he argued that to end wars, societies must find the »moral equivalent of war«; nonviolent alternatives to the functions and virtues inherent in war and militarism. Later, after World War II, a group of thirteen well-known American psychologists circulated a *Psychologists' Manifesto: Human Nature and the Peace: A Statement by Psychologists*. Here it was argued that war can be avoided and that humans are not inherently warlike (Christie, Tint, Wagner & Winter, 2008). There was at the time also a great interest in trying to understand and explain how war and its accompanying atrocities can occur. For several decades, social psychologists accrued insight into personal and situational parameters conducive to conflict. Some of social psychology's most seminal experiments, the Milgram studies on obedience to authority and the Stanford Prison Experiment were conducted for this purpose (Houghton, 2009). But it was not only the roots of conflict that were investigated, many psychologists also examined how situations might be altered and manipulated so as to avoid conflict and create peaceful relations. For example, Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis postulated that contact between conflicting groups is important for the reduction of enmity and prejudice, while Sherif (1988), through the Robbers Cave experiments and functional theory of intergroup behaviour, examined how superordinate goals, under certain circumstances, can create positive interdependence between groups, and thus turn an intergroup conflict into cooperation.

During the 1960s and 1970s a number of peace research centres was established together with a number of peace research journals. Peace psychology as such did not exist yet, but the development of peace psychology was closely related to what happened within peace research.

During the cold war, the arms race created excessive stockpiles of nuclear arms while policies of deterrence assured mutual destruction. As a way of avoiding nuclear war, the superpowers turned to proxy wars. All the while, hostile rhetoric flourished on both sides of the conflict, as did enemy images. It was in this context that peace psychology began to emerge and distinguish itself from social psychology in general. Research on topics like human survival and well being in the nuclear age, conflict resolution, and the psychology of nuclear war began to emerge. Moreover, in the late eighties several works related to the promotion of peace were released, such as White (1986) and Wagner, de Rivera & Watkins (1988). It was through this body of work that the emerging field of peace psychology began to take

form, often characterised by the conceptualisation of peace as an active construct dependent upon interpersonal and international cooperation and the satisfaction of human needs (Christie, 2006). However, it was not until after the end of the Cold War that peace psychology came of age as it tried to adapt to the challenges of the new world order. New threats to peace and human well being began to emerge such as environmental deterioration and an increase in interstate conflict and low intensity warfare. There was also a renewed focus on terrorism (Mack, 2006, Wallensteen, 2003). In this new context, a systemic approach to violent conflicts has emerged, emphasising, among other things, how violent conflicts are related to direct and structural violence, unequal distribution of goods and power, and severe human rights violations.

Given the scope of the challenges peace psychologists face, it is somewhat reassuring to see that there has been an increase in literature related to peace psychology. Blumberg, Hare and Costin (2006) has shown a significant increase between the 1970s and the 1980s, and a further significant but smaller increase after the 1990s. Vollhardt & Bilali (2008) have examined five social psychological journals for articles related to social psychological peace research and found that approximately 10% of the articles dealt with peace psychology, which, in light of the broad range of topics covered in social psychology, is a substantial amount. It is worth noting that this review searched for social psychological peace research (SPPR), which is closely related to but not the same as peace psychology. SPPR is defined more narrowly, which meant that only 35% of the articles in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, the sixth, and only peace psychology journal in the review, was recognised as fulfilling the SPPR criteria. Therefore, it is probably safe to assume that their estimate is a conservative one, further supporting their contention that »SPPR is...an integral part of mainstream social psychology« (p. 20).

Peace psychology is closely related to peace research, which can be characterised by seven features (Rogers & Ramsbotham, 1999:741):

- A concern to address the root causes of direct violence and to explore ways of overcoming structural violence and promoting equitable and cooperative relations between and within human collectives.
- The realisation that an interdisciplinary response is required.
- A search for peaceful ways to settle disputes and to promote non-violent transformations of potentially or actually violent situations.
- The espousal of a multi-level analysis at individual, group, state and interstate levels.
- The adoption of a global and multi-cultural approach, which would locate sources of violence globally, regionally, and locally, in addition to drawing on conceptions of peace and non-violent social transformations from all cultures.

- An understanding that peace research is both an analytic and a normative enterprise.
- An acknowledgement of the need for a close relationship between theory and practice.

Since peace psychology is a specialised field of peace research, these characteristics are also inherent to peace psychology. The overall objective peace psychology is »to develop theories and practices aimed at the prevention and mitigation of direct and structural violence. Framed positively, peace psychology promotes the nonviolent management of conflict and the pursuit of social justice« (Christie et al., 2001:13). According to the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence, peace psychology aims to »increase and apply psychological knowledge in the pursuit of peace...[including] both the absence of destructive conflict and the creation of positive social condition which minimize destructiveness and promote human well being« (quoted in Christie et al., 2008:540). Here we see that both the prevention of violence and the pursuit of social justice are stated goals. Furthermore, we see that it addresses two types of violence, namely direct and structural violence. Thus, peace psychology has a reactive and a proactive focus. The former is aimed at what is already here, i.e. violent conflicts, wars and different forms of oppression, and is closely related to conflict resolution, peacekeeping, social recovery, and rehabilitation. The latter is concerned with the creation of equitable and peaceful societies, or cultures of peace, by satisfying basic human needs and rights. It is related to, among other things, peace-building, social transformation and peace education. However, this distinction is mostly theoretical, as you cannot have one without the other, especially if sustainable peace is the goal. Nor is there a clear dividing line between the two. Nonetheless, the distinction is useful to clarify the conceptual nature of peace psychology. These approaches have, both on a theoretical and practical level, been further developed and operationalised for the practitioner in the comprehensive and informative *Handbook on building Cultures of Peace* (de Rivera, 2008).

3. Resilience promoting human rights-based psychosocial programmes

In the re-active perspective, resilience towards the impact of organised violence has been associated with strengthening the social fabric so that it provides social support. At the individual level, the concept of *sense of belonging* covers an important component of social support. In 1988 House, Landis & Umberson reviewed research on social support and health. The research showed that socially isolated individuals are less healthy, psychologically and physically. A number of large scale epidemiological studies

from the 1960s through the 1980s demonstrated that the detrimental consequences of social isolation were most remarkably found in men in urban environments.

In the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC, 2005:1) guidelines for psycho-social support in emergencies it is stated that, *armed conflicts and natural disasters cause significant psychological and social suffering to affected populations. The psychological and social impacts of emergencies may be acute in the short term, but they can also undermine the long-term mental health and psychosocial well-being of the affected population. These impacts may threaten peace, human rights and development. One of the priorities in emergencies is thus to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being.*

Disasters are related to violations of basic civil and social human rights in numerous ways: *Human rights violations are pervasive in most emergencies. Many of the defining features of emergencies – displacement, breakdown in family and social structures, lack of humanitarian access, erosion of traditional value systems, a culture of violence, weak governance, absence of accountability and a lack of access to health services – entail violations of human rights. The disregard of international human rights standards is often among the root causes and consequences of armed conflict. Also, human rights violations and poor governance can exacerbate the impact of natural disasters* (IASC, 2005:50).

Furthermore, it is emphasised that the impact of armed conflicts and natural disasters differs accordingly to the level of vulnerability of particular groups. In the IASC guideline the following groups of people are mentioned as those, who frequently have been shown to be at increased risk of various problems in diverse emergencies:

- *Women (e.g. pregnant women, mothers, single mothers, widows and, in some cultures, unmarried adult women and teenage girls);*
- *Men (e.g. ex-combatants, idle men who have lost the means to take care of their families, young men at risk of detention, abduction or being targets of violence);*
- *Children (from newborn infants to young people 18 years of age), such as separated or unaccompanied children (including orphans), children recruited or used by armed forces or groups, trafficked children, children in conflict with the law, children engaged in dangerous labour, children who live or work on the streets and undernourished/understimulated children;*
- *Elderly people (especially when they have lost family members who were care-givers);*
- *Extremely poor people;*
- *Refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and migrants in irregular situations (especially trafficked women and children without identification papers);*

- *People who have been exposed to extremely stressful events/trauma (e.g. people who have lost close family members or their entire livelihoods, rape and torture survivors, witnesses of atrocities, etc.);*
- *People in the community with pre-existing, severe physical, neurological or mental disabilities or disorders;*
- *People in institutions (orphans, elderly people, people with neurological/mental disabilities or disorders);*
- *People experiencing severe social stigma (e.g. untouchables/dalit, commercial sex workers, people with severe mental disorders, survivors of sexual violence);*
- *People at specific risk of human rights violations (e.g. political activists, ethnic or linguistic minorities, people in institutions or detention, people already exposed to human rights violations).*

The aim to protect particular vulnerable groups is a core concern for a large number of humanitarian aid and human rights organisations. In the Danish Red Cross' Sub-strategy for Advocacy (DRC, 2003:4) it is mentioned that advocacy for humanitarian action and the legal protection of victims have always been essential elements of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. It began with the efforts of Henry Dunant to advocate for the creation and recognition of neutral and impartial organizations to assist war wounded, and led to the establishment of the Geneva Conventions. Save the Children (<http://www.savethechildren.org/emergencies/protection/protecting-children-in.html>) recognizes that all children are particularly vulnerable to a range of risks: family separation, recruitment into armed forces, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence including rape. On this background, Save the Children works to promote protective factors for children in emergencies including family unity, community involvement and positive opportunities.

Studies on children exposed to war fully substantiate and support the need of protection of children. Jensen and Shaw's (1993) review of solid research on the existence, frequency, and type of social, emotional, and behavioural problems in children exposed to war concluded that massive exposure to wartime trauma seems likely to overwhelm most children's coping capacity and resilience. In 2003 Joshi & O'Donnell made a review of the relevant research and concluded that children's reactions to organised violence are a result of their social-emotional and cognitive development and the critical incidents they are exposed to, including loss of loved ones, displacement, lack of educational structures, and far-reaching changes in daily routine and community values. Boyden et al. (2006) made an overview of current knowledge on children affected by organised violence and found that six areas will be of particular challenge to the development of the child: (1) social disruption, (2) loss of service access, (3) impoverishment, (4) civil and political violations, (5) threats to physical integrity, and (6) transforma-

tions in roles and responsibilities. A concrete example can be found in Baker (2006:163): *»..in the evacuation centres, children, particularly the younger ones, become preoccupied and anxious about potential illness for themselves and their families. Many start having trouble sleeping, and fretting about their homes, their possessions, the life they left behind, and friends who were not with them in the same evacuation center. Older children, while sharing some of these concerns, were more preoccupied with the family's financial concerns and showed general anxiety about the future«.*

Another example can be found in Berliner & de Casas (2009) on vulnerability in relation to the H1N1 virus in Mexico: *Poor people are in general considered to be more vulnerable to infectious diseases as they have less access to sanitation (app. 1/5 of the population does not have easy access to sanitation) and in most places water from the tap needs to be boiled before it is potable. The more poor people will often be exposed to dangerous environment and to less health care. The most vulnerable groups are poor single mothers (including a high number of teenage mothers), poor children and poor elderly or disabled people. The rural population is in average the poorest. There are a growing number of single mothers as many men migrate for work in the US or in the cities. A high level of violence against women may lower their resiliency to adversities. The family is the main provider of social security and social support for most people. The strength of the family is a very important component in the resilience of the community in cases of disaster. But this family-based support system is vulnerable to the loss of key persons, i.e. the provider or the main resource of caring and upbringing of the children. In cases where the influenza caused the loss of a key person, there is a need for support for the family, especially for minors or elderly people living in the family.*

IASC (2005:5) argues that awareness of basic human rights will reduce the risks to those affected by disaster and that humanitarian assistance helps people to realise numerous rights and can reduce human rights violations. As an example, it is mentioned that *access to housing or water and sanitation increases at-risk-groups' chances of being included in food distributions, improves their health and reduces their risks of discrimination and abuse. Also, providing psychosocial support, including life skills and livelihoods support, to women and girls may reduce their risk of having to adopt survival strategies such as prostitution that expose them to additional risks of human rights violations.*

The interplay between climate change related disasters, organised violence and natural disasters are of growing concern. But in all kinds of disasters, including war and other forms of organised violence, there is an intimate relationship between the promotion of mental health and psychosocial well-being and protection and promotion of human rights (IASC 2005: 50). In the IASC guideline it is concluded, that taking steps to promote and protect human rights will reduce the risks to those affected by an emergency.

4. This issue of Psyke & Logos

This issue of Psyke & Logos presents articles on measuring the culture of peace, peace-building, protection of vulnerable groups and human rights based psychosocial support for people impacted by disaster. The articles cover a wide range of geographical areas and particular groups – but they all focus on risk reduction, emergency response and recovery in relation to challenges emerging from structural or direct violence.

To promote social and civil human rights can lead to more peaceful societies and communities. Psychosocial support aiming at increasing resiliency in large population groups, communities, families, and individuals plays a core part in the promotion of more peaceful communities.

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