CRY FREEDOM: mental health and human rights

Professor Louise Newman AM
Monash University
Centre for Developmental Psychiatry and Psychology
REZA BERATI
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Manus Island
UN CONVENTION 1951

“ A well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality...political opinion, outside the country of his nationality...”
"for those who've come across the seas we've boundless plains to share..."

welcome to Australia
THE ASYLUM DEBATE

- Response to unauthorised arrivals
- Issues of control and regulation
- Cultural and historical anxiety
- Global vs local and regional issues
- Politicisation of the dispossessed
- Discussion of values and humanitarian response
CHILDREN IN DETENTION

This is me. That is my smile. That is April 23. It is my birthday. It is to. I am in grade 2. Those things are not about that. I want back to school.
AUSTRALIA where this baby is a political prisoner
Children in Detention Dec 2013

- 1170 in secure detention including 500 on CI, 70 on Nauru
- 1637 in community detention including unaccompanied minors
- 1765 in families on Bridging Visa with no rights to work or resettlement
50% are unaccompanied minors

Majority of these are from Afghanistan and Iran

Older adolescent and young adults from Sri Lanka
SEEKING ASYLUM

- Flight from massive trauma
- Search for a secure base and safety
- Need to process trauma and put in a narrative form
- Transgenerational repair and need to protect children and sustain culture and memory
Trauma and Recovery

- Vulnerability of refugee populations
- 30% depression and trauma related symptoms
- Little known about diverse models of psychological trauma and recovery
- Little evidence about effective interventions and cultural applicability
Government Response

- Policies of deterrence
- Remote processing
- Detention of families and children
- Removal of permanent resettlement
- Mandatory and indefinite detention
- Criminalisation of protest
- Detention of mentally ill
ROLE OF HEALTH/WELFARE PROFESSIONS

- Commitment to human rights/values
- Role of advocacy for vulnerable groups
- Ethical responsibility to oppose harmful policies regardless of political party
- Research and policy development
- Reflective practice
DEATH IN SRILANKA
JAIL IN INDONESIA
SHAME ON AUSTRALIA
RESEARCH CONTEXT

- Issues in IDC research and data – suicide and self harm
- Issues in following former detainees
- Issues in tracking impact of negative outcome and removal pathway
- Impact of temporary arrangements/bridging visa
PRIORITY ISSUES

- Impact of mandatory detention on mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Impact of remote processing and lack of permanent protection
- Concepts of adaptation, recovery and social inclusion
- Impact on children and young people including UAMS
PRIORITY ISSUES

- Identification of mental health and trauma related issues
- Understanding premigration, migration and settlement factors and mental health
- Intervention approaches for children and young people with trauma related issues
IMPACT OF TRAUMA

- Attack on attachment – loss of hearing other; loss of integrative function of narrative
- Breakdown of capacity to mourn
- Identification with destruction – new reality
- Breakdown of symbolic function – concrete reexperiencing
- Persistent symptoms
MASSIVE TRAUMA

- Fundamental alterations in identity, experience of reduction to a non-human life form
- Efforts at repair and mastery
- Shattered self is not reconstituted as the same – knowledge that Horror exists
CHILDREN IN DETENTION

- Alternate temporary detention includes justice facilities, hotels, motels, hospitals and health facilities
- Children are under guard, restricted movement. Limited access to recreation and education or psychological support
OFFSHORE PROCESSING

- Capacity and cost issues on Xmas Island
- Issues in provision of health and mental health services; Lack of community detention options
- Politics of the hard line and border protection vs international obligations
"for those who've come across the seas we've boundless plains to share..."

Welcome to Australia
ISOLATION
"HERE IS NOT FOR CHILDREN"

11 year old Thyrgan in Villawood detention centre

3360 children held under mandatory detention

Several for more than three years

Group born in detention
MENTAL DISORDER AND DETENTION

- PTSD and Depression 60-85%
- Physical Symptoms common
- Conversion Disorders
- Progressive deterioration related to length of detention
- Paranoia and psychotic symptoms
- Anger, self-harm and interpersonal conflict
EFFECTS OF DETENTION

1. Non Symptomatic Stage - SHOCK
2. Primary Depressive Stage - DEPRESSION
   - PTSD
3. Secondary depressive Stage – Major Depression and melancholia
4. Tertiary Depressive Stage - psychosis
REMOTE CENTRE STUDY
Steel, Silove, Newman et al, 2007

- Study of 11 families of single ethnic group in a remote facility – 22 children
- SCID-IV, K-SADS-PL
- All children symptomatic following traumatic exposure
- 21 children major depression, 50% PTSD, 50% Separation Anxiety
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REMOTE CENTRE STUDY

- All adults and children met diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder
- Children had a 10 fold increase in disorder subsequent to detention
- All adults and most children experienced traumatic symptoms related to detention experiences
MENTAL DISORDER IN DETAINEE CHILDREN

- High rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD
- Attachment disorders, withdrawal, developmental delay in young children
- Effects of exposure to riots, self-harm and adult distress
- Unmediated experiences of trauma
LONG TERM IMPACT OF DETENTION CENTRES

- Neurodevelopmental effects of trauma and neglect
- Attachment disorder and relationship disturbance
- Risk of chronic depression
- Ongoing anger and alienation
POLITICAL APPLICATION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

- Human rights commitment
- Commitment to rehabilitation
- Creation of containing structures, services
- Validation of experiences and survival
THERAPIST EXPERIENCE

- Reflection on own political position, culture, relationship to refugee experience
- Shame regarding host nation. Government policy, racism
- Risk of over identification, over responsibility or denial
THERAPIST EXPERIENCE

- Overwhelming grief, anger, outrage
- Sense of meaninglessness of anything other than trauma
- Managing the haunted – the terrible knowledge the refugee has about the human condition and the banality of evil
- Contagion of horror
EXPANDING THE BOUNDARIES OF THERAPEUTIC ACTION

- The therapeutic exists in a sociopolitical context and is shaped by and reflects predetermined values.
- Individualism of therapeutic models is problematised by massive traumas.
- Therapeutic neutrality is not possible in the context of human rights violations.
CLINICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN IDC

- Is treatment possible in this environment?
- Compromising of clinical standards and control of clinical decision making
- Human rights violations and responsibility of clinicians
STATE SPONSORED CHILD ABUSE AND MALTREATMENT

- Professional responsibility to oppose any policy which is traumatising, harmful and renders clinicians powerless in terms of healing role
- Lessons form history that medicine/psychiatry can be misused or coopted by political agendas in an unethical manner; collaboration may become collusion
BUILDING ON EVIDENCE

- Attempts to minimise impact of psychological evidence
- Attribution of all disorder to pre-migration trauma
- Need for adequate services for high-risk populations
- Comparison of community based asylum seekers and detainee groups
Suicidality and mass self-harm in IDCs represents a convergence of health, advocacy and human rights concerns.

These problems are directly related to the extremity of the detention environment and to the politics of detention.