

**The Psychological Well-being of Refugee Children: Research, Practice and Policy Issues**, M. McCallin (ed), International Catholic Child Bureau, Geneva, 1992 (352 pp). Contact ICCB, General Secretariat, 65 Rue de Lusanne, CH-1202, Geneva. No price listed.

Drawn from a collection of papers presented at a conference on the psychosocial needs of refugee children, and sponsored by the International Catholic Child Bureau in September 1991, this ambitious volume only partially succeeds in its attempt to address an area in pressing need of attention. Despite the volume's weaknesses, it offers many bright spots and will prove relevant to those directly involved in refugee-related work and also for those concerned with broader emergency relief programmes and community development efforts.

The volume's three sections are loosely organised around the following themes: (1) the context of intervention; (2) strategies of intervention; and (3) the response of the international community. Given the diversity and quality of the papers, including the conflicting points of view contained within them, an overview or preface to each section would have enhanced and strengthened the material's presentation. For example, one paper advocates a priority in "targeting" children, first and foremost when developing intervention strategies. In sharp contrast, another paper explicitly states "there is need to support mothers first". Missing is an attempt to articulate and synthesise such differing positions, which, at the field level, generate substantially different programme objectives and priorities.

Introductory remarks to each section would also allow for discussion of the liabilities inherent in generalising about "refugees" or "camps", etc, which appear in some of the papers. That there can be enormous diversity between refugee camps, even within the same camp over time, is well-established. Factors such as the make-up of a particular camp's refugee population (the degree of ethnic and cultural similarities or differences), the nature and conditions of refugee "flight" (anticipatory versus overt crisis), whether the camp is "open" or "closed", the style and approach to camp administration (eg trained social workers in Zimbabwe as contrasted to military and police personnel in Hong Kong), the availability of material resources, and the nature of the services and programmes offered by various organisations within the camp, are examples of the factors that contribute to such diversity. These factors should temper the tendency to generalise about "the refugee experience", etc.

The opening chapter, which is one of the strongest, provides a review of relevant information on child development, including the area of risk research. Issues such

as the impact of cumulative risk factors, the difference between being exposed to acute versus chronic danger, and the role of adaptive coping styles, as contrasted to those more maladaptive in nature, are well-presented. That the chapter draws upon general child development research and examines its implications for the refugee context is a salient point. It brings into clear view the paucity of original refugee research that has focused on the time frame prior to the stage of final, third country, resettlement. A more thorough review of the basic methodological problems in doing refugee research would also have been helpful, as such issues as sampling, language, instrumentation and the need to consider ethical problems (eg valid informed consent, confidentiality, etc) are not adequately considered.

The concerns noted above are illustrated by comparing a few findings on Mozambican children in two different papers in the volume. Specific to Mozambican children's exposure to violence, one author reports that up to 35% of children had either witnessed, or knew someone who had been murdered. In contrast, a second paper states that 77% of children had been witness to such atrocities. Similarly, the first paper states that up to 8.4% of children had been forced to be combatants, while the second paper provides a much higher figure of 28%. A more in-depth discussion highlighting the differences in methodology, including where and how the data was collected (a refugee camp in Zambia as contrasted to *deslocado* communities within Mozambique), the marked contrast in the findings, and how these differences impact on programme development would have been fascinating. One senses that a rich debate must have been generated by the paper presentations during the conference, a debate not reflected in the book.

In summary, this collection of papers as a whole strongly supports the position that the psychosocial needs of refugee children, in the context of their families and communities, are intrinsic to healthy growth and development. As fundamental needs, they require both clear articulation and a genuine programme response within large relief and emergency efforts that tend to focus too narrowly on the delivery of food, shelter and medicine, etc. The book also succeeds in emphasising the importance of understanding, supporting and building upon the strengths and inherent coping capacities already existing within the refugee community. Such a perspective naturally leads to a high degree of refugee participation in establishing both the priority areas to be addressed and, of equal importance, the nature of the programme delivery developed to meet expressed needs. The volume's flaws serve as a catalyst, helping point out the specific areas in need of applied research and more well-developed intervention strategies.

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