

Review

Good Practice in Promoting Recovery and Healing for Abused Adults
edited by Jacki Pritchard, **Good Practice in Health, Social Care and
Criminal Justice series, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013, 256 pages
(ISBN 978-1-84905-372-3)**

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In Australia in recent years, there has been recognition that abuse of children and young people, by the very institutions charged with their care, is endemic. While society failed to listen to the voices of those abused as children, in adulthood courageous survivors have spoken out in ways that have challenged us to overcome our reluctance to face the grim reality and shocking prevalence of violence against children in many 'care' settings. Validation that harm was done, and that the victim is not to blame, is at the heart of recovery from the trauma of abuse and violation (Herman 1992). The current Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, together with previous inquiries into the abuse of children in the care of the state (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2004) and the 'Stolen Generations' of Indigenous children (HREOC 1997), publicly challenge the community silence and denial that have condemned many victims to painful secrecy. These inquiries have the potential to hold the perpetrators of abuse accountable, lifting the misplaced guilt and self-blame that burden many victims.

In this context, the release of this edited collection of approaches to practice with adults who have been abused is timely. Authored primarily by practitioners, the chapters cover diverse groups of victims/survivors: men and women; victims of sexual assault and domestic abuse; victims with intellectual disabilities and those presenting to mental health and homelessness services; older and young people; Holocaust survivors; and those who have been exploited through sex trafficking. Similarly, the types of interventions described are diverse and include: psychodynamic psychotherapy; art therapy; housing support; and group work. 'Good practice points' highlight key issues in each chapter, providing practical guidance for working with survivors.

A key strength of the book is that it is grounded in the experiences of survivors. The editor draws on her learning from the participants in groups that she has facilitated, with a commitment to 'giving voice' (p 10) to survivors. Based on the views of group members, she argues that 'healing' and 'recovery' can be differentiated: healing occurs in the short-term and is physical; while recovery is a longer process, with a focus on emotional issues (p 11). This framework underpins the various contributions to the book.

This book describes practice approaches within the United Kingdom. This makes some chapters, such as the one on specialist sexual services (Chapter 3), of limited relevance to Australia, where there are a variety of well-developed local service models across various states and territories. Other chapters, in contrast, are of relevance across national contexts.

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For example, Sanderson's chapter on complex trauma (Chapter 2) provides a clear explanation of the effects of ongoing abuse in contexts marked by dependent relationships between abuser and victim, such as families and other institutions. This chapter is essential reading for anyone working with survivors of abuse, not just those in a therapeutic role. Those supporting survivors through legal processes can learn much from this chapter about behaviours that may be confusing and about how to create safety for survivors as they navigate complex legal and administrative processes. Similarly, Hassan's chapter on working with survivors of the Holocaust (Chapter 10) has relevance beyond the immediate context.

Other strong chapters are those that highlight the ways in which survivors of complex trauma are present within a range of human service organisations, such as mental health and homelessness services. Sadly, the research on male survivors' experiences of mental health services found that: survivors were not asked about experiences of sexual assault; survivors were disbelieved when they disclosed such experiences; and the effects of the abuse on survivors' lives and mental health were downplayed by mental health workers. In contrast, the chapter on a young women's supported housing project (Chapter 8) provides a compelling and practical account of providing a trauma-informed service for young survivors. This chapter grapples with confronting and challenging effects of abuse, such as self-harming behaviours, and provides guidance on providing services for a group that too frequently falls through the gaps of service provision.

The framework of healing and recovery that runs through the various contributions locates the book's approach within a medical, rather than a social justice, framework. The focus is on the individual and efforts to overcome the effects of abuse. This limits its ability to look beyond the effects of abuse on individuals to the broader social structures that have both facilitated and obscured the abuse of children in many and diverse institutions, from families to churches. An exception is Hassan's chapter on work with Holocaust survivors, which acknowledges the healing power of justice through activism that holds perpetrators accountable for their abusive behaviours.

From this reader's perspective, the failure to acknowledge the contribution of feminist social action and therapy was surprising, despite the influence of these approaches in the practices described. While the therapeutic components of feminist psychiatrist Judith Herman's (1992) ground-breaking work on trauma are reflected in the contributions, the equal importance that she places on social movements was absent. Just as the social movement of second-wave feminism provided a context in which violence against women and children in familial contexts could be named, the survivor movements that have pressed governments to name and examine abuse within other institutions is not encompassed by the psychodynamic perspective underpinning this book. Silence about this aspect of justice and its role in recovery limits the book, particularly in the current context in which survivors of abuse have bravely 'broken the silence' about the violation of children's human rights by those charged with their care.

References

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