

HELPING WORKERS IN COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

Danieli, Yael (Ed.). (2002).

Sharing the frontline and the back hills: Peacekeepers, humanitarian aid workers and the media in the midst of crisis. New York: Baywood. Hardback. 429 pp. ISBN 0-89503-000-0.

Reviewed by Kelly O'Donnell

Yael Danieli is a clinical psychologist specializing in victimology and traumatology. Her broad international involvement is reflected in her recent work as a consultant to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and to the Rwandan government on reparations for victims. Dr. Danieli has been the Senior Representative to the United Nations for the World Federation for Mental Health and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies. She is also Director of Psychological Services for the Center for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims, and Adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine at Seton Hall University School of Graduate Education in New Jersey. Other books she has edited include International Responses to Traumatic Stress (Baywood) and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond (Baywood).

This book is an exceptional resource which focuses on the adjustment challenges of "international protectors and international providers." In the past, the blue letters of the United Nations and the Red Cross/Red Crescent provided protection to workers who served in stressful and often hazardous assignments; increasingly they designate targets for torture, kidnap, and death. Such workers and their families, as the editor and authors frequently point out, are paying a high price for their efforts on behalf of others.

This book covers new, interdisciplinary ground by its inclusion of material on military peacekeepers and media personnel, along with its primary emphasis on aid personnel. The editor goes to great length to include open discussions and frank disclosures about life in complex humanitarian emergencies (CHEs). I have found it to be timely, refreshing, sobering, and very relevant for my work with Christian aid/mission personnel.

The book begins with a thoughtful foreword by Kofi Annan, the General-Secretary of the United Nations, about the need to ensure the safety and well-being of United Nations staff. This is followed by 36 chapters on adjustment issues for the three types of helping personnel mentioned in the subtitle. There are some excellent studies and reviews of stress factors for military peacekeepers and aid workers. There are also important chapters on organizational approaches to stress management, human resource development, and supporting these workers via training and counseling services. Danieli's concluding chapter pulls the book together, elaborating on policy and program recommendations.

One of the most helpful aspects of the book is the "Voices" sections that are interlaced throughout the chapters. These are short accounts of personnel describing their pains and

joys as they live and work in crisis settings. Their “voices” validate what so many experience in such settings. I can see sharing many of these accounts with clients and mission personnel as a way to encourage them to know that others are also going through similar experiences, and growing through them.

Another timely aspect is the attention given to the challenges of national/local staff, a topic which needs much additional emphasis within the mission/aid community. International staff often get a flow of care while national staff receive a flow of crumbs. As Danieli rightfully says (p. 386): “National staff do not receive the security and support afforded their international colleagues, including remuneration and insurance, nor are they respected for their credentials, experience, and knowledge of local culture. Most of all, when missions leave or evacuate, they stay, often in danger to themselves and their families.”

Still another feature that I appreciate in the book is that there is no overly “religious” talk in it. By that I mean there is no spiritualization of problems and no use of spiritual terms that can sometimes interfere with getting at what is really going on for people and communities. On the other hand, this helpful aspect of the book is also a limitation. There is a dearth of material on the spiritual struggles and interventions that are core parts of the lives of both service receivers and service providers. This absence strikes me as being incongruent with the majority of the world's populations and CHE settings where spiritual and existential cries for help also need to be sensitively addressed.

The only other drawback to point out is the cost. I believe that authors/editors and publishers deserve the financial fruit of their labors. The tricky part comes though when the people we are trying to “feed” via our books cannot enjoy the fruits of our labor too. At \$59 a copy, the pricing is prohibitive to many of the people who really need this book—namely the aid workers/organizations from the developing world. I sincerely hope that a special arrangement will be made to help this growing group of international protectors and providers access this valuable resource.

In many ways I see this book complimenting previous books in the missionary care field. The latest book, *Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from Around the World* (2002) for example, explores adjustment issues among the “faith-based community” working in mission and aid contexts. Danieli’s book is a secular resource, focusing on the “non-faith-based community. I highly commend her book, and see it as a core part of a missionary/aid worker care library. I regularly refer to it as I teach and write.

Reviewer

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