

DUBROVNIK: CONCLUSIONS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PSYCHO- SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF WAR



WORLD VETERANS FEDERATION (WVF)

The First International Conference on Psycho-social Consequences of War, organized by the World Veterans Federation, held under the auspices of the European Society of Traumatic Stress Studies, and sponsored by the Government of Croatia, met in Dubrovnik, from 26 to 30 April 1998. It brought together scientist, practitioners, decision-makers and war veterans.

The main objectives of the Conference were:

- To broaden international understanding of psycho-social problems concerning war veterans and victims of war;
- To review current knowledge and new developments on PTSD and other psycho-social sequelae of war and war-like situations, as well as to identify new areas of research in this field;
- To stimulate the development of adequate social and health services, legislation and rehabilitation programs, based on research;
- To determine the role of organizations of war veterans and victims of war especially with regard to relationship problems between former conflicting parties.

The Conference worked in plenary sessions and in smaller groups. Special opportunity was given to war veterans to exchange their personal experience with the scientists and practitioners

Conclusions

1. The First International Conference on the Psycho-Social Consequences of War brought together 350 participants from 39 countries of the five continents. The multi-disciplinary orientation of the participants and their geographic span enabled an exchange of views to be held between scientists and clinicians, decision-makers and war veterans and victims of war. This constituted its unique and innovative character.

2. The Conference made it possible to confirm that there is basis of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) common to war veterans and victims of all armed conflicts and similar situations, regardless of their nature and geographic location. The Conference noted that, despite existing knowledge and the results of research in this field, many of those suffering from PTSD still do not benefit from the treatment based on that knowledge, or receive the financial compensation to which they should be entitled.

3. The Conference pointed out that there are other traumas as well, especially in the psycho-social sphere, which may vary in particular according to the nature of the conflict, the socio-political structure of the country and the attitude of their communities to war veterans and victims of war on their return home. These psycho-social consequences require further research as to their etiology and treatment.

4. The Conference considered the serious traumas suffered by women during armed conflicts or in similar situations and in particular the consequences of sexual violence, and the response to them. It noted that the efforts made in this connection should be strengthened considerably and that research should be pursued.

5. The Conference also studied the problem of children and adolescents who were the witnesses or victims of violence during armed conflicts and considered transgenerational problems. It believed that special attention should be paid to adolescents with a view to determining the intensity and gravity of any possible traumas so as to be able to treat them or prevent them from occurring, while stressing the serious consequences that the absence of such measures could have on society when such adolescents became adults.

6. The Conference also considered the special situation of those who had taken part in the UN Peace-Keeping operations and the traumas they may have suffered.

7. The Conference discussed the positive effects on the evolution of PTSD and the psycho-social consequences of war, of bringing the alleged perpetrators of war crimes, genocide or crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Tribunals of The Hague and Arusha and the considerable negative effects of the impunity of the perpetrators of such crimes.

8. The Conference highlighted the action to be taken by war veterans and victims of war, in particular within the WVF, to overcome antagonism between former enemies and the psycho-social consequences of war and to contribute to peace.

9. The presentations made at the Conference and the discussions that followed therefore led to the following general conclusion:

9.1. The psycho-social consequences of war call for research and treatment which are of importance not only for the victim but also for the future of his or her community.

9.2. Such research requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

9.3. To pursue its action for this purpose, an Advisory Board to the WVF has been set up to determine the follow-up to be given to the Conference and to prepare the second International Conference on these subjects.