

# THE ROLE OF LOCAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN EDUCATING OF EMDR PRACTITIONERS IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

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## SUMMARY

**Introduction:** Providing good mental health services to the vulnerable and needy should be of utmost importance to all mental health professionals. To be able to do so, professionals require to be, not only educated but actually properly trained and supervised in specially, among various skills, psychotherapy orientation. Unlike developed countries, psychotherapy services and professional career in psychotherapy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) is relatively new primarily due to the recent historical developments and events in B&H. Besides, there is scarcity of professional institutions in B&H which could, not only establish structure for, promote but also educate mental health professionals, according to the European psychotherapy standards as well as accredit and certify psychotherapists, locally or internationally.

**Aim:** The purpose of the present study is to show the role of International University of Sarajevo (IUS) as a local private educational institution in educating and training EMDR therapist in B&H.

**Method:** The collaboration between EMDR HAP UK & Ireland, Association of EMDR Therapists in Bosnia and Herzegovina (AEMDRTBH), Department of Psychiatry University Clinical Center (UCC) Tuzla and Psychiatry Clinic, Clinical Center of University (CCU) Sarajevo described with focus on the collaboration with International University in Sarajevo.

**Results:** Local institutions in B&H can in a variety of ways make a significant contribution to the education and training of therapists in BiH in the following ways: providing rooms for realizing of education and training and/or conferences (pro bono), promoting EMDR as a successful therapeutic method for treating of stress and trauma within relevant subjects and programs, providing scholarships for excellent students for EMDR education, and in collaboration with local and European EMDR therapists to offer EMDR specializations for professionals. Since 2010, one group of therapists has been educated and trained by EMDR HAP UK at Department of Psychiatry UCC Tuzla, two groups at the Psychiatric Clinic CCU in Sarajevo and one group at IUS. Thanks to EMDR HAP UK&Ireland, EMDR therapists in B&H are among the youngest yet very efficient and successful therapists who greatly contribute to improving mental health of fellow citizens.

**Conclusion:** Collaboration between Association of EMDR Therapists in Bosnia-Herzegovina, HAP UK & Ireland AP B&H and local educational institutions such as IUS can significantly contribute to training efficient preparation of EMDR professionals in B&H and help improve overall mental health and wellbeing of B&H citizens.

**Key words:** psychotherapy - B&H - EMDR HAP UK - IUS

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina caused great devastation and destruction in all domains of life, from personal physical and psychological losses to the material ones and even destruction and closing of numerous traditional mental health and psychiatric institutions. BiH citizens experienced and still experience massive psychological suffering as a result. Mental health services (primarily offered within psychiatric care) in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war were fairly developed, and was based on psychiatric hospitals and small neuropsychiatric wards within general hospitals, accompanied by psychiatric services in health centers (Cerić et al. 2001). Due to the great need for physical and mental health care in B&H reconstruction and reorganization of the mental health services in B&H started during the war but continued with powerful efforts of many afterwards. Although no large scale studies B&H which could offer official data on prevalence of psychological disorders among B&H population, some indicators are alarming (Avdibegović et al. 2008).

The War and post war events in B&H point to presence war stress-related disorders and suicide, physical disabilities of war veterans and wounded civilians closely relates to functional disability caused by psychological disorders indicate presence of impaired psychosocial well being of many B&H citizens (Hasanović et al. 2006, Hasanović & Herenda 2008, Hasanović 2011, Hasanović et al. 2011). One can boldly say that B&H needs comprehensive and accessible service for community mental health care with educated and well equipped professionals who are willing to contribute to the improvement of mental health conditions of fellow citizens (Zildžić et al. 2001, Sinanović et al. 2009).

Soon after the war collaboration between a number of local institutions and experts (B&H Ministry of health, Psychiatry clinic, mental health care centers) and international ones, such as The World Bank and WHO, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Swedish East European Committee (SEEC) SweBiH, HealthNet International (Netherlands), had joined the forces and came to assist in reconstructing services and training professionals (Lagerkvist et al. 2013).

For example, Swedish experts organized and supported training of community psychiatry and social work as part of the mental health reform project of Swedish support to B&H, who in period from 2002-2012 trained and staffed professional mental health team consisting of psychiatrist, four nurses, a psychologist and a social worker), who serviced 25-30 persons a day, (65,000 people of all ages), pointing to 75% had psychiatric problems (Lagerkvist et. al. 2013). At the same time, news headlines (print and electronic media) often point the fact that more and people in B&H use (on their own) tranquillizers and sedatives (antidepressants), indicating the need for psychological and psychiatric help.

These are some of the indicators which point to the fact that there is still need for professionals who are well equipped to assist and help clients cope with, not only recent war related trauma but coping with daily stresses and problems and thus caring for their best interest offering them most efficient treatment methods and improving their psychological wellbeing.

According to Union of Psychotherapy Associations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (UPAB&H) Bosnia and Herzegovina currently has large number of representatives of psychotherapy directions (IGW Gestalt Germany, Group analysis, EMDR, Gestalt, Integrative Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy, Systemic Family Practice and Therapy, Reality Therapy, Transactional, Psychodrama, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), which support mental health system and development of psychotherapeutic activities locally (Hasanovic et al. 2017).

Studies on impact of war throughout the world indicate presence of serious psychological disturbance in post war societies and great psychiatric needs. Bosnia and Herzegovina, not only as post war society but society which is still in transition, is no exception. Professional trainings of personnel in community psychiatry and mental health is very much needed in order to answer to all needs.

Providing good mental health services to the vulnerable and needy should be of utmost importance to all mental health professionals. To be able to do so, professionals require be, not only educated but actually properly trained and supervised in one, among various, psychotherapy orientation. Unlike developed countries, psychotherapy services and professional career in psychotherapy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is relatively new primarily due to the recent historical developments and events in B&H. Besides, there is scarcity of professional institutions in B&H which could, not only establish structure for, promote but also educate mental health professionals, according to the European psychotherapy standards as well as accredit and certify psychotherapists, locally or internationally.

At the same time, professional trainings in different therapy orientation is not only time consuming but also very expensive. Thus, continuous contribution of international professional organizations who offer therapy trainings to local professional at lower cost for developing countries such as B&H or pro bono, is very much welcomed and appreciated.

Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR) Europe Humanitarian Aid Program (HAP) of United Kingdom and Ireland, being a network organisation responsible for the promotion and development of EMDR, as an evidence based, empirically supported psychotherapy, which aims to assist communities affected by the consequences of psychological trauma, to which category Bosnia and Herzegovina falls. In the past decade, EMDR HAP team selflessly helped and trained 4 cohorts of B&H therapist pro bono. Thus, thanks to EMDR HAP UK EMDR efforts and contribution, therapists in B&H are among the youngest yet very efficient and successful therapists who greatly contribute to improving mental health of fellow citizens. At the same time, due to the need for such education and training among mental health professionals in B&H on one hand and lack of free public free space for such purposes locally and its high cost on the other, there is room for local institutions such as Universities to get involved as well.

Having in mind scarcity of mental health professionals as well as the cost of professional trainings in psychotherapy, the purpose of the present study is to show the role of International University of Sarajevo (IUS) as a local private educational institution, in educating and training B&H EMDR therapist.

## REALIZATION OF COLLABORATION

In spring 2015, IUS (International University of Sarajevo) psychology professor Selvira Draganovic (EMDR trainee herself who finished such education earlier) was contacted by the president of Association of EMDR therapists B&H (AEMDRTB&H) Dr. Mevludin Hasanović, EMDR consultant and practitioner, about a possible collaboration between IUS and APB&H. From then on, Selvira Draganovic undertook necessary steps which involved setting a meeting with IUS officials, IUS secretary general first, then rector himself, to explain the addressed issue. AEMDRTB&H, presented by Dr. Hasanovic, offered mutual collaboration, asking IUS to provide, pro bono, space and complementary facilities (parking space, restaurant, toilets, cafeteria) for the fourth group/cohort EMDR therapists, who would be, again pro bono, educated by EMDR HAP UK and Ireland professional and AEMDRTB&H offering their skills in return (public lecture/s or seminar /workshop with special topics for IUS undergraduate and Master students). Upon hearing this, IUS rector Dr. Yucel Ogurlu, not only approved the request but also was happy to establish such collaboration, pointing to the ways local educational institutions can contribute to B&H citizens' wellbeing improvement and giving the green light. As a result, EMDR education and training for the fourth EMDR cohort in B&H was held at IUS, in three periods from June to December 2015, resulting in approximately 30 therapists educated and trained to deal with stress and trauma related disorders. EMDR trainers (educators) and trainees expressed extreme satisfaction with IUS contribution, its facilities provided and the

will to contribute to the wellbeing of B&H citizens. Many B&H therapist would not be able to afford such an education otherwise because it is very expensive.

## DISCUSSION

Having in mind the need for mental health professionals, psychotherapists mainly, scarcity and lack of well educated and prepared ones among the existing, the high price for psychotherapy education and training in B&H, we can say that many local institutions can significantly contribute to this cause. Thus, we can say that, local educational institutions, such as Universities, can contribute to training professional therapists in B&H following ways: by providing, pro bono, space and its facilities to UP B&H for EMDR training and/or conference, promoting EMDR as successful, time saving and effective stress and trauma treatment method in relevant courses, providing scholarships for excellent students for EMDR therapy training, offering specialised training courses in collaboration with EMDR Europe association for future therapists. Pairing this in a form of mutual collaboration, IUS can also benefit and get EMDR therapist to offer seminars, public lectures or specialised courses and thus contribute to the quality of IUS psychology, undergraduate and graduate programs.

## CONCLUSION

The case study on collaboration between AP B&H and local educational institutions such as IUS, demonstrates how other local educational institutions can contribute to mental health of B&H citizens. By offering, pro bono, space and facilities for therapy training, local institutions contribute to increased mental health specialists in B&H who handle and treat the needy, improving professional networking and promoting mental health.

All these actions and steps result in significant contribution in, otherwise very expensive psychotherapy education of, very much needed mental health professionals in B&H. IUS, as a local educational institution, is an example of such, mutual collaboration. This article demonstrates that and invites other, local institutions, to contribute to overall mental health and well being of Bosnian and Herzegovinians, and help APB&H and EMDR HAP UK and Ireland to educate professional therapists in B&H.

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