

**Book review** by: Dr Debbie Hawker

Mass Trauma and Violence: Helping families and children cope Ed. Nancy Boyd Webb. The Guilford Press (New York), 2004. 378 pages. ISBN 1-57230-976-8.

This book concentrates on how to help children and families cope with intentionally caused mass trauma (such as acts of terrorism or war). Many of the chapters contain principals which are also relevant for other types of traumatic stress.

The chapters cover issues related to assessment and treatment. They cover a wide framework, including the literature on attachment, risk, resilience, bereavement, trauma, stress and coping.

A range of therapeutic interventions are discussed, from cognitive-behavioural therapy, client-centred therapies, debriefing, psychoeducational approaches and support groups to creative techniques (using music, art and play therapy).

One strength of this book is that twenty-one mental health professionals have contributed chapters. This leads to a wealth of different therapeutic ideas, and many useful case examples to illustrate them. Although mainly written from a North American perspective, several chapters refer to cultural considerations. One chapter focuses on Northern Ireland, another concerns work done in Israel, and others include discussion of work with Asian Americans, and consideration of the impact of different religious beliefs. There is also an interesting chapter on 'community outreach and education to deal with cultural resistance to mental health services'.

Children of military families receive special consideration. Some of the points made in this chapter may also apply to other high-mobility families (including families of aid workers or missionaries), especially when the father is away from the family for long periods.

Realising the toll that trauma work can have on the helpers, there is also a section on how to avoid vicarious traumatization.

The material covered is generally up-to-date and realistic, warning against such modern-day problems as 'too many helpers' swamping people in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Given that over 160 instruments exist for the assessment of children's fears and anxieties, the authors helpfully select five that they would recommend for the screening of post-traumatic stress disorder in children. This sort of practical recommendation is extremely useful for the busy clinician who may not have time to research the area personally.

Although written for clinicians, this book is easy to read, and is also useful for lay people. The comprehensive index is very useful for locating specific topics. Researchers will appreciate the references provided for every chapter, although may feel frustrated that the book contains more clinical examples than research findings. In particular, the debate on the effectiveness of debriefing receives little attention. Despite this, I strongly recommend this book to clinicians working with children who have experienced mass trauma, and to other people who have an interest in these issues. I do not know of any better book on this topic.