

Religious Healing in War-Affected Children in Sri Lanka

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Abstract: The impact of war on children was mainly given attention after the Second World War. The reason was researchers found that Second World War caused many children to be severely affected by war in many ways and especially it caused many children to be displaced and separated from their families. Therefore, attention has been focused on the mental health and psychological and emotional well-being of children after Second World War and healing techniques were planned accordingly. Psychiatric treatment (mental health approach) was one of those methods practiced to address psychological problems of the war-affected population. During that time most commonly used psychiatric treatments were cognitive behavioural therapy, pharmacotherapy and dynamic psychotherapy. It seems that these methodologies influenced the healing programmes operated in war areas worldwide. However, the use of psychiatric treatments or mental health approach alone in healing activities came under severe criticism later on. On one hand critiques state that healing mechanisms must be planned and designed according to the social structure in a society and that the cultural background of that society must be kept in mind. On the other hand, critiques highlighted that in the third world countries where war is more prevalent, there is a huge shortage of professionals in the psychiatric field and therefore, difficult to heal war-affected people only through formal psychiatric methodologies. Therefore, in using the social context method, a few important factors can be observed. Firstly, it allows a larger population to be served within the healing process. Secondly, it is believed that social contextual methodologies can be accessed easily and at a lower cost. When taking into account of the social contextual methodologies researchers are of the view that the most suitable coping methods among the social contextual factors are ‘religious practices’ and ‘traditional beliefs’. In Sri Lankan history proved that this argument up to some extent and especially canonical literature has described how religion can be used in order to heal people’s mental and physical suffering. Therefore, main intention of this paper is to analyse the ways in which how religion, especially Buddhism can be used in order to heal war-affected children in Sri Lanka. This is a qualitative research solely based on a literature review on the relevant subject.