

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Meeting Mental Health Needs: Service Delivery in Israel**

**Authors:** Alexander M. Ponizovsky and Alexander Grinshpoon (Dept. of Mental Health Services, Ministry of Health, Jerusalem, Israel and others)

The book *Meeting Mental Health Needs* presents broadly for the first time and academically in an in-depth fashion, mental health services in the State of Israel from the combined perspective of health needs and the organization of services by the Israeli system.

The authors describe how public health services in the State of Israel were constructed and crystallized from the outset of the 20th Century - a system whose final form was crystallized with the establishment of the State of Israel in the year 1948. In 1994, the health system in Israel underwent a significant change with legislation of a National Compulsory Health Insurance Law. The mental health service system was not initially included in the application of the law, and was postponed for various reasons.

In the years 1995-2011, numerous attempts were made to bring about reform that would broaden coverage to encompass mental health services in Israel under the 1994 National Compulsory Health Insurance Law. In the course of these attempts, mental health needs were addressed both in the press and within the country's various health systems and within the halls of government. Ponizovsky's and Grinshpoon's book is the first to describe in detail the mental health system in Israel in an era when such reform was solidly on the public agenda.

In its discussion of mental health patients' needs, the work charts the course of the dialogue on mental health reform from diagnosis and pinpointing needs, legislative questions generated by proposed reform in mental health services, and community-based rehabilitative services and emergency services, to deliberations on the environmental setting and general health needs of mental health patients in Israel, primarily those living in institutions.

The volume brings to the fore for the first time, where emphasis has been placed in medical treatment in public mental health services in Israel, examining the array of services provided and the degree to which they meet the health needs of mental health patients and their quality of living. Thus, for example, Chapter 10 deals with the 'side issue' - relegated secondary, but important in terms of the quality of life of patients of "Oral Health Needs of Patients with Mental Illness." Dental care is a painful issue that normally is pushed into a low priority in the hierarchy of services provided by the system to its patients, despite its importance and its essential role in the quality of life of patients.

Of heightened interest is the special chapter "Mental Health Service Needs under Terrorism" (Chapter 8) - devoted to discussion of mental health services for the Israeli population-at-large under the onslaught of repeated terrorist attacks and the ongoing threat of terrorism - an issue unique to Israel. The authors underscore the magnitude of the challenge Israel faces, in the opening to this chapter:

From 1967 through September 2003, there were 486 attacks, with 510 persons killed and 2,636 injured (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). During the armed Intifada (Arabic for uprising; the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, beginning in 1987), terrorism escalated in both magnitude and lethality. Since September 2000, 1,238 people have been killed by

Palestinian violence and terrorism. From 2001 through 2007, 8,342 Israelis were wounded in terror attacks."

Thus, in Israel, mental health services must provide support to the civilian population-at-large, of all ages and in all frameworks, to deal with anxiety of various magnitudes, when living under the constant threat of terrorism. Organization of mental health services must be and are indeed geared to provide a suitable response for the population-at-large on this issue.

Beyond this being a unique and interesting academic issue, the Israeli experience can serve as an informative foundation for other countries that are liable to find themselves facing sustained terrorist threats to their civilian population. Thus, while this chapter puts Israel in a class of its own from all the other populations in the western world, policy-makers elsewhere would be wise to take note of Israel's experience in dealing with mass casualty events perpetrated by terrorists -- both from the mental health perspective, as well as expertise Israel possesses in triage and emergency medicine.

On the whole, the work highlights core issues in the organization of public mental health services in Israel *per se*, but it can also serve as a model or example for other countries. Undoubtedly *Meeting Mental Health Needs* can serve as an important resource for scholars interested in organization of mental health services into the 21st Century.

*Review provided by Shifra Shvarts, PHD, Professor*

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