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Counselling Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma by C. Sanderson, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84310-962-4 – (Pbk).

This informative and comprehensive work sets out to illuminate the nature of abuse that occurs within trusting, dependent or attached relationships. Using the term “interpersonal abuse” the author outlines the nature of the traumatic, usually complex, responses that are particular to this type of abuse, whether as a result of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, and argues for this complexity to be recognised by practitioners and acknowledged in diagnostic criteria.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section explores interpersonal trauma in general and discusses key areas of understanding that are important for clinicians working in this field. The second section covers, in more detail, the various types of interpersonal abuse, including child sexual abuse, rape, prostitution, human trafficking and slavery, domestic abuse, elder abuse, institutional abuse and professional abuse. The final section explores the impact on clinicians of working in this field and provides practical suggestions for managing the challenges of potential burnout or secondary traumatisation.

The author makes effective use of summary boxes and diagrams to highlight the key points of each chapter. Particularly valuable is the inclusion of moving and powerful case vignettes to bring emotional valence to the themes discussed and

to place them in a real life context. There are also useful suggestions for further reading.

As many aspects of the trauma response and the associated goals for therapy are general to many abuse presentations, this structure occasionally results in some repetition and overlap across chapters. Perhaps the generic trauma reactions could have been explored at the start, and only those concerns particular to each type of trauma focused on in their respective chapters.

On the whole, the book is written in an appropriately scientific style, making use of clinical evidence and research from the therapeutic field to support the author's assertions and providing sensible suggestions for work in this area. The expertise and wealth of clinical experience of the author is very much in evidence. On occasions, however, there is a lapse into unscientific terminology, fuzzy concepts and metaphor, which seems out of place in what is otherwise well grounded, evidence-based writing. For example, reference to such phrases as "ossification of the self", "life energy force" and "psychological death" serve to blur the distinction between opinion and evidence.

Apart from a fleeting reference to ritual sexual exploitation, there is no exploration of abuse by those in religious institutions or cults, the chapter on institutional abuse almost exclusively concerning abuse in children's homes. In view of the recent and highly publicised sexual abuse scandals within the Catholic Church,

which have highlighted the prevalence of such abuse and have led to an increase in referrals to therapy from those abused by priests, this seems an important omission.

I would also have liked to have seen a clearer acknowledgement of individual differences with regard to trauma response. There appears to be an implicit assumption that all survivors are deeply traumatised by their experience. The variety of levels of impact on individuals could have been more explicitly acknowledged.

In spite of this, the book remains, on the whole, clearly written, comprehensive and accessible, providing almost everything a therapist needs to know about working with those who have experienced interpersonal abuse. The focus on the complexity of interpersonal abuse and the devotion of a separate chapter to each form of abuse, distinguishes it from most other books in this field. I would recommend it as a must-read for a broad range of professionals and others working with survivors of abuse.

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