

Katrin Glatz Brubakk

Title: Psychology outside of the comfort zone

Abstract:

Our training as clinical psychologists make us well prepared for individual sessions in a western context. But what if the context changes? When needs become more complex and our patients have a different cultural background?

Having worked in refugee camps, after disasters and where living conditions are poor, has forced me to rethink how we can help as psychologists and what therapeutic work is and can be. Sometimes holding a hand can save a life, sometimes simple explanations to the symptoms a person is experiencing is more important than complex interventions. Or accepting that we talk about “bad spirits” and not diagnosis in order to maintain the dialogue with a patient.

Working in extreme conditions forces us to reflect upon what psychological support is in its core. The basics of what we offer in order for people to feel better – mutual respect, warmth, understanding, cultural sensitivity and time.

In times where more of our patients have a different cultural background and many have experienced severe hardship, the importance to adapt our healthcare system to fit also them is eminent. Psychologists should be part of that debate and adaptation. Having knowledge is a privilege we can use both to help individuals but also shape the society we live in.