BOOK REVIEW

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“Psychological Debriefing: Theory, Practice and Evidence” Edited by Beverley Raphael and John P. Wilson. New York, Cambridge University Press 2000, 376 pp, ISBN 0-521-64700-2 Recommended retail price: \$130.00

The use of Psychological Debriefing has come under fire in recent psychological debate. This debate concerns the wide spread general use of psychological debriefing techniques in varying clinical settings and concerns about its efficacy. Recently the process of debriefing has become so widely utilised that large companies have implemented compulsory debriefing procedures for staff following traumatic events. These industries include emergency services, military groups and some large scale corporations.

The seemingly indiscriminate use of debriefing has generated research concerning its efficacy for the prevention and management of psychological trauma, and questions the structure and purpose of debriefing. Some research generated regarding its efficacy has split the field into believers and non-believers. The editors of this book have involved over 41 authors from a variety of clinical and research backgrounds to review research and practice and to offer their conclusions about the future of psychological debriefing.

The first of four sections moves the reader through the key theoretical concepts that form the basis of debriefing processes. An historical literature review leads into an exploration of the models and theory behind the practice. This introductory section also discusses the purpose and role of debriefing for the prevention and management of psychological trauma. Relevant methodological issues are discussed including the skills and training of the facilitator and the timing of the debriefings.

The second section offers a review of the research from 11 different contexts including military, trauma, disasters, adolescents and emergency service personnel. Each chapter includes a review of procedures, history and research of debriefing specific to the field. There are similar amounts of evidence both for the support and criticism of debriefing as a process and as a theory. A recurring theme is the lack of valid and scientifically rigorous research. Much of the evidence and opinions offered are based on the clinicians' experience in the absence of empirical data. However, with highly qualified and experienced researcher/clinicians such as Robyn Robinson, Claude Chemtob and the creators of debriefing Jeff Mitchell and George Everley, this type of evidence is invaluable.

The third section deals with the adaptation of the psychological debriefing model. Modifications to the framework to remove the preventative aspects and move more into the management of psychological trauma are discussed. The research into the use of debriefing to deal with regular work stress rather than critical incident stress is explored. The impact of cultural variation is also addressed in the context of the Australian indigenous population. The future is contemplated in the closing chapters and the survival of debriefing as a prevention and management of psychological trauma is discussed. An attempt is made to draw conclusions from both sides of the debriefing debate, but due to the lack of valid empirical evidence the authors are forced to sit on the fence, and prompt readers to engage in further research.

The division of the evidence into situational contexts clarifies research outcomes and validity of its use in psychological trauma. Overall a balanced view of the debate is gained and highlights the lack of firm evidence for and against debriefing, despite its continued wide spread use in psychology and counselling within psychological trauma. Although long, the book would definitely be of value to emergency service workers, and psychological and counselling practitioners.