

EDITORIAL

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The IAFP Committee organising the 2023 annual IAFP conference in Turin could not possibly have imagined how their title, “From pain to violence”, anticipated the eruption of such a violent conflict on 7 October 2023. The day before, two four-year-old boys, Omer Siman-Tov in Israel and Omar Bilal-al-Banna in Palestine, living twenty-three kilometres apart, played happily outside. On 7 October 2023, Omer was killed by Hamas at his home in Israel. On 11 October, Omar was killed by an Israeli airstrike on his home city of Gaza. Omer and Omar never met, but if they had, they would have wanted to play together because that’s what little children do. As if the killing and loss of their two small children was not horrendous enough, both sets of families and friends have had to subsequently contend with repulsive social media exchanges, mainly via X. These have denied Omar’s death (he was only a doll masqueraded around) or blamed the “other” (Omer was killed by his own Israeli people and not by Hamas) (*BBC News*, 26 October 2023).

Omer and Omar were real little children. The dreadful suffering afflicting so many children, parents, families, and friends in the Middle East presently, and elsewhere in many other parts of the world, continues, regardless of colour, creed, or “side”. The current political climate has become contaminated by algo-rhythmically boosted, revenue-driven “news” delivered by social media platforms. It feels as though the important boundary between a societal id and ego has vapourised, enabling the most base and barbaric aspects in humans to emerge. To make matters worse, this unleashing of hatred and violence is highly contagious. If an outbreak of peace is ever to be achieved in such intractable conflict zones, all “sides” must come together respectfully, listen to each other, and then hear each other. All “sides” need to hear the pain of the hated other that led to the violence. Understanding the aetiology is the first necessary step for reconciliation and reparation. For therapy to help a sufferer, they need to be in the same room as their therapist to speak and to hear. Similarly, for peace negotiations and eventual reconciliations, those involved need to be in the same room with a “therapist” or negotiating mediator.

But where is psychotherapy in all of this and what value do talking therapies even have in such catastrophic situations?

During the thirty-first IAFP Turin conference, there were many presentations on situations where people had faced unimaginable pain and violence, as victims and perpetrators. One aim was to explore how understanding and managing psychic pain can help prevent and potentially reduce violence. What enriched the explorations and discussions was that the conference included not only those who specialise in forensic mental health (nursing,

social work, probation, counselling, arts therapies, psychiatry, psychology, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis), but also those from related disciplines in criminal justice, including criminology, social policy and the law. We are delighted that so many conference presenters have been able to share their presentations in written form for this special conference issue of the journal.

Dr Felicity de Zulueta gave the opening plenary, a written version which the reader will find as this issue's first article. De Zulueta focused on her, and her team's, research in previous years, which led them to develop the traumatic attachment induction procedure (TAIP). This work was inspired and confirmed experimentally by Allan Schore's theoretical model to explain traumatic attachment. In her article, de Zulueta gives clinical vignettes of patients suffering and/or reaching impasses in their therapy and how transformative the TAIP procedure can be. The profound positive change in the patient's way of relating to their historical and damaged/damaging attachment figures over a very short period of time is astounding. Readers will be interested to read more clinical examples, as well as information of how to train in using the TAIP, in her forthcoming book, *Healing the Fractured Mind: A Revolutionary Method for Treating Addiction and Other Disorders* (Karnac, 2025).

Our second article by Dr Gerard Drennan elaborates on the "Fears and tyranny cycle" (referring to the importance of this description by Barcai and Rosenthal (1974)), which, if overlooked in the forensic mental health care system, can lead to catastrophic consequences. If only one aspect of this cycle is addressed, (e.g. only "fears"), then the other aspect ("tyranny") can be "let loose" with devastating consequences for patients, carers, and the general public. Tyrannical patients, who are usually deeply fearful, can provoke very negative countertransferential responses in carers/treaters, with consequent hostile, punitive attitudes, and treatment planning. Eruptions of tyranny can arise as forms of "gate fever", where the patient or prisoner desperately tries to hide his or her unconscious terror at being "moved on" (abandoned, rejected)—when facing either discharge or release. Instead of being able to manage the demand of getting better, he or she acts out violently (tyrannically) in order to sabotage what they consciously might want—the release or the discharge. These ways of responding to the demands experienced by getting better are often connected to deep attachment disturbances. Drennan illustrates these important treatment issues with a number of clarifying clinical vignettes and a reminder of the crucial aspect of the containing "Brick Mother" as Henri Rey (1912–2000) affectionately described the Maudsley psychiatric hospital.

Continuing the theme of childhood trauma, Dr Alfred Garwood's moving article describes the author's childhood during the Holocaust and post-Holocaust years and his subsequent refugee experience in the UK "which was both formative and deformative". Unimaginably, during his adolescence and adulthood, he was further traumatised, but his inspirational work and examination of his own difficult experiences, along with decades of seeing patients as a general practitioner, led him to novel theories of psychic

organisation including the concept of the psychic guardian function and the deformative effects of trauma, which his article describes. With sophistication, and humility, he acknowledges how working with trauma survivors generated unexpected healing in him, “this wounded healer”.

Dr Hessel Willemsen describes the controversial concept of parental alienation in high-conflict separation and divorce family courts cases. Using Wellدون’s concept of the perversion of motherhood (2004), he suggests the importance of not overlooking certain crucial dynamics in parents’ psychological functioning. Parental alienation arises when a child becomes identified with one parent’s hatred for the other, leading to unjustifiable rejection of one of the parents—yet understandable if the conflictual dynamics are examined. He further describes how this controversial concept can inflame the split between the parents, and how essential it is to take the hatred felt by the alienating parent into consideration. Professionals can then help reduce the risk of terrible suffering for children, as well as that of the alienated and alienating parents. Two powerful clinical vignettes are used to illustrate the complexities of such cases.

Moving from intra-personal dynamics out into the wider world, Will Linden’s article on the public health approach of the violence reduction unit in Scotland is essential reading for all of us involved in working with offender patients and prisoners, in order to maintain a systemic perspective on this “epidemic”. Linden examines the drivers of violent behaviour in Scotland and argues that violent incidents rarely emerge in isolation. More often, they are the result of a complex interplay of social, economic, political, and psychological factors. Using a public health, holistic approach has shown significant reductions of violence in Scotland. His colleague, Dr Martin Griffiths, currently National Clinical Lead in Violence Reduction, London and England, spoke to our managing editor, Annie Pesskin, for *A Day in the Life* feature in this issue.

Next, in “Rehabilitation and control in prison”, Drs Caterina Marchetti and Alessandra Morandini describe an innovative tool to address factors which can affect the relationship between prison officers and prisoners. In particular, they consider the familiar tension between treatment/rehabilitation vs control. They have adapted the mathematical concept of the quadrant to examine how an individual prison officer is likely to respond to different prison cultures and prisoners in the context of the daily challenges of their jobs and “map” their unconscious predispositions towards the two polarities of control and rehabilitation. This tool has exciting potential for the improving the impact and provision of reflective practice within the prison estates.

In the next article by Drs Mathieu Lacambre and Wayne Bodkin, another tool is described, this time for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) known as the “BOAT”, which stands for “Boite à outils de prévention” in French. This tool addresses methods of primary prevention with children as young as five years old. Indeed, it is only one part of a comprehensive article that explores in-depth the intricate dynamics inherent to childhood sexual violence trauma, employing a multifaceted approach that encompasses psychopathological, psychoanalytic, and systemic

perspectives. A critical distinction between childhood sexuality and the grave repercussions of sexual violence experienced during formative years is emphasised. The article sheds light on the profound and enduring consequences of such violence, and emphasises the need for proactive prevention strategies. Extensive research findings and insights from experts in the field are described, aiming “to raise awareness, foster empathy, and stimulate a collective commitment to combatting this deeply rooted problem in our communities”.

Enabling prison officers to do their job better and keep themselves safer is the aim of Natalie Parrett and Elinor Bull’s contribution entitled “Who’s holding the trauma?” This article describes the system they have developed called RE-ACT, a reflective practice workshop. Noting how traumatising some critical situations can be for prison officers, RE-ACT is a twelve-month group process designed to allow reflection on disturbing incidents in a supportive setting. The authors state that subsequent to implementation (with a small pilot), the number of injuries sustained by staff reduced by 43%.

Dr Franco Scarpa explains how the Italian penal system developed the residence for the execution of a security measure (REMS) system following a change in the law in 2014. REMS replaced the previous secure hospitals for the treatment of dangerous offenders found not guilty by reason of insanity. Scarpa explores how the REMS function and some of the issues that have emerged since their creation just under a decade ago.

Henry Adeane takes the reader into the psychotherapy consulting room within a prison with “Denny”, a charming and extremely dangerous psychopath seen in therapy for just one year due to the termination of funding. Adeane describes in detail some of the blind spots that can develop with such patients and offers readers and clinicians a lesson in humility—suggesting the importance of a reduction in prognostic over-optimism, as well as the importance of regularly dissecting our various countertransference responses with cases like this. As our late colleague, Dr Leslie Sohn, often said when he supervised, “Beware the collusions with delusions of sanity,” one of the most common reasons for clinical misjudgements regarding risk.

Nelle Van Damme, one of the winners of the annual Gill McGauley prize at the IAFP conferences, has written about the innovative project she and colleagues set up in a psychiatric wing of a Belgian prison. Radio Begijnstraat, as it is known, is half radio play and half documentary. Each episode (six per year) explores two months of prison life—external and internal—by any who inhabit the psychiatric ward. The broadcasts organise themselves as collaborative as well as enabling the prisoners to communicate with the world outside prison. Interestingly, the project is not subsidised by the ministry of justice or health department but instead, by the ministry of arts and culture.

The last, brief article, is by medical student Jack Blake who gives an account of his first experience of attending an IAFP conference and we are grateful to him for sharing his thoughts and, hopefully, inspiring others to “take the plunge” into the world of forensic psychotherapy.

We offer two book reviews in this issue. Annie Pesskin has reviewed *A Love that Kills* by Anna Motz, a book that beautifully exemplifies how fascinating, informative, and essential it is to use forensic psychotherapy to look behind the mask of “monsters” that kill. Without this, there can be no progress and only a near-guaranteed repetition of familial traumas and/or further acting out violently and suffering for victims and perpetrator–victims.

Joran Mendel and Dr Ronald Doctor have reviewed *The Life Inside* by Andy West, which they describe as a thoughtful, poignant, yet frequently humorous account of prison. The book was shaped by the author’s experiences teaching philosophy classes to inmates as well as having first degree relatives with experiences of being “inside”. The reviewers write of how “Memory, autobiography, and gentle philosophical inquiry are intricately woven into a deeply personal meditation on life inside the mind as well as inside prison”.

We would like the reader to note the introduction of a “Letters to the editors” column, and to strongly encourage you to make use of this in order to enable discussions regarding articles read, issues raised or absent, criticisms, and clarifications. Note that all articles are the opinions of the authors and not those of the *IJFP* or *IAFP*.

As always, on behalf of all our contributors, we would like to thank the patients and prisoners who continue to inspire us and help us towards better understanding of their plights. We also thank our teachers and colleagues and the support from each other in these alarming times. We especially hold on to the hope that the atrocious suffering of all the people caught up in apparently intractable conflicts will be eased through the art of listening and being heard. We believe this is the only way of “rehumanising the dehumanised”. We are grateful to those brave enough to be working behind the scenes to enable dialogues to happen.

References

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