Foreword

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Psychologists and psychiatrists have long ignored the fact that shocking and severely distressing events can have a lasting impact. It was only in 1980 that a properly defined diagnostic category, describing the sequelae of traumatic experiences, was proposed and found general acceptance. The introduction of this category of posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) in DSM-III marks the revival of interest in psychological trauma as a cause of psychopathology. Only 10 years later 'classical' PTSD, as opposed to other posttraumatic syndromes, is generally recognized as a diagnostic category.

The First European Conference on Traumatic Stress was held in Lincoln, UK, in 1988 and was followed in 1990 by the second conference under this title, held in Noordwijkerhout, The Netherlands. The aim of the organizers was to bring together European health care professionals working with victims of psychological violence. Even if judged only by the increase in the number of participants, from 115 in 1988 to 500 two years later, the conference was obviously considered to fulfill a need. And there are further pointers signifying an increase of interest in the subject, at least in Western societies. In the last decade local and national study groups and an increasing number of postacademic courses on psychotrauma have emerged. The interest in victimology, incest, child battering, war victims, refugees, rehabilitation after torture, occupational trauma, traffic and transport accidents, and other disasters has increased noticeably. And, last but not least, in 1985 the Society for Traumatic Stress Studies was founded in the USA, which in 1991 adopted the prefix 'International' and publishes the Journal of Traumatic Stress.

The Second European Conference on Traumatic Stress also met an early but distinct desire for communication with Eastern European countries, after their liberation from oppressive regimes. The organizing committee was able to support a considerable number of delegates from these countries enabling them to attend the conference and to develop mutually beneficial contacts. Out of a total of 180 contributions presented at the Second European Conference on Traumatic Stress only a limited number will be published. Some contributions will appear in *Anxiety Research: An International Journal* [4: 183-254], edited by HM van der Ploeg. A number of studies on the impact of psycho-traumatic events on members of the police force will be published as: *Police Symposium*, edited by BPR Gersons, IVE Carlier, GCK Vlek, in the series: *Politie en Trauma* (Police

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and Trauma), ed. GCK Vlek. Den Haag, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, Directie Politie, 1992.

In this issue of Psychotherapy and Psycho-somatics a selection of articles based on contributions to the Second European Conference on Traumatic Stress is presented, which demonstrate the diversity in the field of psycho-traumatology. Three contributions deal with respectively traumatization as a result of incest during childhood (Albach and Everaerd), intrafamilial violence (Black et al), and shipwreck (Yule). Members of the armed forces are the subject of an article on Swedish members of the United Nations peace keeping forces, whose work is of a very complicated nature and gives rise to many conflicts (Lundin and Otto). A number of contributions deal with survivors of the Second World War, suffering from lasting chronic posttraumatic symptoms. One article examines the relation between the specific features of post-traumatic stress disorders and certain other psychological symptoms (Hovens et al.); another one concerning a cohort of resistance veterans in their fifth decade after the war describes the difficult psychosomatic problem of cardiovascular risk in relation to posttraumatic stress disorder (Falger et al.); the third describes a psychopharmacological study in this cohort, which appears to be very resistant to therapy (De Boer et al.). Somatic reenactment in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (Lindy et al.) is another aspect that hitherto has not attracted much attention. And finally, an ethological study (Wiepkema and Schouten) on a symptom observed in maltreated domestic animals illustrates the relevance of comparative biology to the understanding of possible parallels with post-traumatic states in human childhood. Apparently, this symptom is related to the psycho-biology of opioids which most probably play an important role in the generation of post-traumatic symptoms.

The scientific and practical field of psycho-traumatology developed very rapidly during the last decade. The Conference made it clear that psychotraumatology overlaps with many scientific disciplines. Psychotrauma is now recognized to be a major cause of psychosocial dysfunctioning. Apart from the propensity to cause the distressing symptoms of 'classical' PTSD, psychological trauma may have a profound impact on the life style and relations of the victims and on their personal systems of beliefs.

Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the germane and obliging assistance of the editorial advisors in the process of reviewing the manuscripts. We also thank Dr. H.E. Pelsers for his aid to the writing of this foreword.

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