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Nicaraguan Training Program Offers Front-line Look at Clinical Issues

By Jeffrey Ring and Carmelo Vázquez

The Nicaraguan landscape is riddled with earthquake faults and volcanos, yielding a volatile geological reality of potentially destructive turbulence and instability. It was this risk that influenced the decision to build the great canal in Panama and not in Nicaragua. This geological turbulence has been matched and surpassed, however, by the social turbulence of war, violence, and the chaotic recent political history that this small country continues to endure.

The past 14 years since the Sandinista revolutionary overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 have been marked by continued violent, bloody war. The brutal armed conflict waged by the Contras against the Sandinistas was

overtly and covertly supported by the United States during the Reagan and Bush administrations. This warfare resulted in thousands of Nicaraguans killed, wounded, kidnapped, or disappeared. Many made the perilous decision to seek a better life by emigrating to the United States. The economic costs of the war have been estimated at 2.5 billion dollars in physical destruction and lost production. The widespread psychological consequences range from fear and depression to post-traumatic stress and substance abuse disorders. Politically, economically, and socially, Nicaragua continues to live precariously.

Since 1992 the Madrid-based Universidad Complutense has offered a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

School Psychologists Are Prime Providers Of Mental Health Care for World's Children

By Thomas Oakland

The psychological interests and needs of children and youths are most commonly met worldwide through school psychologists. This article summarizes the results of a recent study, which I conducted with Jacqueline L. Cunningham, PhD, of the University of Texas at Austin, to determine the status of school psychology in 54 countries.

The survey showed that there are an estimated 87,000 school psychologists worldwide. Typically, higher numbers are found in countries with high gross national products, and there are more school psychologists in urban than in rural areas. Numbers range from approximately 25,000 school psychologists in the United States, to 1,000 in Russia, to 250 in China, and down to as few as 20 in small poorer countries.

The scope of school psychological services tends to be quite extensive. Virtually all countries surveyed offer common direct services, such as vocational and academic guidance, personal and academic counseling, and educational curriculum-based interventions, and indirect services, including consultation with teachers and parents,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

comprehensive two-year masters program in psychology for faculty and community psychologists affiliated with the psychology department at the Universidad Centroamericana in Managua. The program is coordinated by psychology professors Manuel Muñoz in Madrid and Gustavo Pineda in Managua. Every three months, a team of psychologists, drawn principally from the Universidad Complutense and the Universidad Autónoma in Madrid, provides a three-week training program on a specific area in psychology, ranging from cognitive to social to quantitative. We had the opportunity to lecture on psychopathology and epidemiology during the last three weeks of July 1993.

It is a humbling experience to lecture on anxiety and stress in a place where so many have lived in unimaginable situations of fear and trauma. Our notions of teacher, expert, and student were thrown into question, and learning quickly became a two-way street. At times our sense of offering valuable clinical information would collide with an existential concern — that the more valuable and pressing issues at hand should be how to build roads and develop food production, rather than how to conduct a methodologically sound epidemiological study.

On the other hand, we were able to listen to, encourage, and support the students in the front-line clinical and research work with which they are engaged. The psychology clinic on campus has developed a rich and comprehensive practical clinical training program for undergraduates, with ample supervision and processing groups where interns can talk with one another about the personal stress and coping aspects of their work. The quality of education is all the more remarkable given the very limited resources available in Spanish, particularly in terms of clinical assessment materials. One Spanish copy of *DSM-III-R* does not go very far in a busy clinic of some 20 staff and interns.

Daily life in Nicaragua is far from easy. The streets are home to hungry children. Most hospitals are vastly undersupplied and are far from hygienic.

Patients must bring their own thread for stitches if they plan to be operated on. Television pictures of the armed confrontations at Estelí this summer revealed horrifying images of surgery conducted without anesthesia. Global nutritional data show that Nicaragua ranks almost last among the world's nations in terms of average daily calorie intake.

The quantity and intensity of our observations are difficult to enumerate, due to a great extent to the painfulness of these observations. The commemoration of the 14th anniversary of the Sandinista revolution celebrated in Managua's large central plaza on July 19 was characterized by a harsh awareness of the terrible economic situation and uncertain political future that Nicaragua faces. Weighing on people's minds was

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the news that the price of staple foods like rice and beans had increased. Just as the unbearable humidity and heat of that afternoon hung unyielding in the air, so too did hopelessness, frustration, and shattered dreams hang heavy in the minds of many. We could not help but feel that hopelessness as well.

Yet psychology has a very important role in social healing and in the treatment and prevention of psychopathology in regions where human-made disaster is so prevalent. Ignacio Martín-Baró, PhD, a Spanish social psychologist and Jesuit priest who lived and worked in neighboring El Salvador until his murder by the Salvadorean army in 1989, suggested that psychological problems with social etiology such as war, poverty, or oppression, will only be suc-

cessfully treated by bringing change to the underlying social structure. The writings of Martín-Baró, and our experience this summer, remind us of the valuable role of psychologists in establishing collaborative, supportive international relationships. The ethical imperative for psychologists to work to improve the conditions of individuals and society is clear. There is much work to be done.

Building roads and feeding children are important areas to begin the work. In addition, interchange programs such as the one between the Universidad Centroamericana and the Universidad Complutense serve as excellent models for how academic collaboration with critical social and psychological analysis, creativity, and intervention must remain key components in efforts toward social change, arm in arm with economic and human capital investments.

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