Pressemelding (press release)

Post traumatic survival
Gwynyth Overland

Why do some who survive traumatic events recover and thrive, while others do not? This study sets out to discover what successful survivors of the Khmer Rouge found instrumental for their survival and mental health. The aim is to make a contribution to the understanding of their resilience, understood as the ability to recover from misfortune or change, and to the psychosocial rehabilitation of survivors of war crimes and other traumatic events.

Findings suggest that the resilience of the Cambodians interviewed builds on self-reliance, a strong work ethic and social integration, all founded in a worldview. For these survivors, religion and culture have provided a secure ‘knowledge’, both of how to act and of how to understand the traumatic events of the Khmer Rouge regime. Guidelines for accessing patients’ cultural backgrounds are available, but health workers often fail to access the cultural resources used by survivors in building personal and group resilience. Proposals from the project are incorporated in a cultural resilience interview scheme for the use of health and social workers wishing to do resilience work with war survivors.

Personalia

Overland was born and raised in New England and attended Vassar College. She completed her Masters degree in sociology at the University of Oslo in 1998, with a dissertation entitled "Culture and survival: the continuity of cultural practices among Cambodian refugees in Norway". She is currently senior advisor at the Regional trauma centre in Southern Norway (RVTS Sor) and Sorlandet hospital trust(SSHF). Her field of expertise is forced migration.

Overland’s doctoral studies were carried out in the program Religion, ethics and society at UiA. The project manager was department head Birgit Lie, SSHF, and the principle supervisor was professor Ole Riis, UiA. Her doctoral studies were funded by the Southern Norway regional health authority (Helse sørøst RHF).

Gwynyth Overland’s doctoral thesis, Post traumatic survival: a study of Cambodian resilience will be defended at the Universitety of Agder on 24 August 2012.