

Disability and disaster: explorations and exchanges

KELMAN, I. & STOUGH, L. M. (2015)

Reviewed by **Bianka Hudcová**

Crises and crisis situations are a normal part of life. These situations, despite their common nature, may cause various reactions of the affected individual, ranging from for example freezing, loss of orientation, crying, or, on the other hand, attack, escape, stereotypical behaviour etc. In order to mitigate the impact of crisis situations on the affected individual, various crisis intervention or psychosocial approaches may be applied. In post-modern society, most approaches to controlling the behaviour and perception of persons affected by a crisis event are those aimed at intact individuals. The following publications are good examples: *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Psychological First Aid* (Everly & Lating, 2017), *Community-based psychological first aid: a practical guide to helping individuals and communities during difficult times* (Jacobs, 2016), *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers* (World Health Organization, 2011). These are detailed handbooks describing the procedures of providing psychosocial first aid in crisis situations. These are undoubtedly top-quality and highly beneficial publications that facilitate practical application of knowledge. Unfortunately, they lack a detailed analysis of the topic concerning persons with health disability (referred to as HD). Regarding the increasing number of crisis situations, it should be noted that these situations also commonly affect persons with HD. The approaches to these persons might differ from the intact population with regard to the specifics of various HD categories. The problematic aspects that persons with HD might encounter in crisis situations are described for example in *Preparing for Disaster for People with Disabilities and Other Special Needs* (FEMA, 2013), *IS-368: Including People With Disabilities in Disaster Operations* (FEMA, 2014) or *Crises, Conflict and Disability: Ensuring Equality* (Routledge Advances in Disability Studies) (Mitchell & Karr, 2015), etc. These publications provide information concerning readiness of persons with HD for resolving crisis situations, obstacles preventing

crisis management by persons with HD, the needs of these persons resulting from the specifics of various HD categories, etc.

An outstanding and unique publication concerning the issue of crisis situations in persons with HD is *Disability and disaster: explorations and exchanges* written by **Ilan Kelman** and **Laura M. Stough**. To achieve authenticity and practical applicability of the publication the authors cooperated directly with persons with HD and workers in helping professions across the globe. In a retrospective way, these persons shared their experiences with various crisis situations in the form of **twenty authentic stories**.

The publication consists of **three parts**. **The first part** consists of three chapters that in a comprehensive manner explain the reasons for writing the publication, social construct of HD, and crisis situations and disasters. The second chapter provides an overview of the fundamental principles necessary for understanding the issue. By making References to international publications and relevant research-based findings, the authors emphasise the specifics and importance of the issue. This chapter discusses the categories of HD, specifics and problematic aspects and risks, which persons with HD could be exposed to in crisis situations during evacuation. The chapter also includes an insight into the area of documenting and international legislation concerning the issue. The last chapter of the first part includes basic information about the management, control and planning in crisis situations (on a micro-, meso-, and macro level), readiness of persons with HD for crisis situations, and barriers that may prevent effective solutions of a crisis situation involving persons with HD. In this chapter, the authors emphasise the need for modification of all levels of crisis management in order to match individual needs and specifics of persons with HD covering all HD categories.

The second and most extensive part of the publication was written by the authors in cooperation with persons with HD and workers in helping professions. Based on mutual collaboration and using personal experiences of these persons, a total of twenty realistic stories were produced that describe various crisis situations in the lives of persons with HD. These stories correspond with the twenty chapters of the publication. They are short retrospective stories told by persons with HD or workers in helping professions concerning their experiences, specifics, challenges and concerns that they have experienced in the context of crisis situations. The readers are informed about a large amount of new and crucial information about the frequently neglected or even deliberately disregarded issue, about problematic aspects that persons with HD are faced with in crisis situations. The stories 'feature' persons with visual impairment, persons with limited mobility (quadri-, di-, hemiparesis/plegia, meromelia), persons with multiple disabilities, persons with hearing impairment (with cochlear implant), persons with Asperger syndrome, persons with chronic inflammatory demyelinating neuropathy, epileptic persons, or the actual

crisis interventionists. The stories do not describe just the experiences of persons with HD in crisis situations, but also of those who became disabled as a result of crisis situations. The second part of the publication describes crisis situations such as fires, floods, terrorist attacks, accidents, etc.

The third part of the publication summarizes the importance and urgency of the issue. In the form of a discussion this part presents various questions and topics that need to be addressed by research and science, but also their practical applications. Some statements are aptly supported by other resources (papers, studies, etc.)

In a convenient and readable way, the authors of *Disability and disaster: explorations and exchanges* emphasise a topical and often neglected issue. The attitudes to persons with HD in crisis situations are presented in a structured and authentic way and are suitably supported by other studies and publications. The publication, also by involving persons with HD and workers in helping professions, represents a human insight into a difficult issue with exacting solutions and procedures aimed at persons with HD in crisis situations, as well as their specifics, perceptions and concerns. The added value of the publication is represented by the authentic statements and stories of persons with different categories of HD, as a result of which the publication is considered exceptional, original and unprecedented domestically or globally. However, there are also minor deficiencies such as absence of persons with intellectual disability in the stories, which could undoubtedly bring other interesting findings, topics and stimuli for a deeper examination and understanding of the issue. Unfortunately, the publication only focuses on the stage of evacuation of persons with HD from the epicentre of a crisis situation and fails to address the mental state of the individuals shortly after such situations. Crisis situations may influence the mental state of affected individuals in various ways, which often results in unpredictable reactions of these persons (irrespective of the presence of HD). Any analyses of persons with HD in crisis situations require a comprehensive consideration of the specifics of their HD. Placing more emphasis on the deficiencies mentioned above could be of great benefit for further scientific and research work as well as practical applications.

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The publishing of this book review is dedicated to the following grant of the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc (Institute for Research and Development): 'Preparedness/readiness of residential social service workers to manage difficult/crisis situations' (2018).