

A Dual Debrief-Based Co-Autoethnography of a Humanitarian Delegation Member: Supporting Ukraine Refugee Mothers through Ambiguous Loss

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Abstract : Autoethnography - a combination of autobiography and ethnography - focuses on the intersection of personal experiences and the culture in which they take place and is considered a viable method for exploring human experiences. The Russo-Ukrainian war has resulted in millions of forcibly displaced asylum-seeking refugees facing ambiguous loss. Whereas much is known about refugees' support needs, little is known about the needs and experiences of the humanitarian delegation members (HDM) who assist them. Through a debrief-based co-autoethnographic account of a female HDM who supported Ukrainian refugee mothers and children on the Polish borders, we explored the lived experiences involved in such a mission. Specifically, we conducted a transnational dyadic autoethnography debrief-based co-autoethnography which included both verbal and photo-based debriefing (8 two-hour sessions) alongside a reflexive (10-day) field diary analysis. Content analysis revealed cognitive dilemmas, emotional struggles, and practical adaptations occurring within the HDM's three identity-related domains: personal, professional (psychologist), and ethnic. The methodology presented and demonstrated in this paper enhances our theoretical understanding of the challenges faced by HDMs and may contribute to better future design of HDM training. Practically, the findings of the current study suggest the need for a three-stage accompaniment for HDMs relating to their personal, professional, and ethnic identities and considering their cognitive, emotional, and adaptive aspects. First, before leaving, HDMs should be briefed on personal and professional aspects of their experiences and ways of coping with them, as well as ethnic and religious affiliation issues. Second, while volunteering every evening their dilemmas, emotional struggles, and ways of adapting should be addressed for the three layers of identities. And finally, shortly after their return, there should be a final meeting to discuss all aspects of their identities and layers of personality. In this way, HDMs can become more effective in the important mission they fulfill. We hope that future HDMs and the bodies that send them on humanitarian missions of paramount importance will adopt these recommendations and generate proactive insights for members of future delegations.

Keywords : autoethnography, refugees, humanitarian delegation, ambiguous loss, Russo-Ukraine War, parenting

Conference Title : ICP 2024 : International Conference on Psychology

Conference Location : Rhodes, Greece

Conference Dates : July 18-19, 2024