

Official Transcript: Jorge Sierralta (Part 6 of 10)



Role: Staff Psychologist

Country of Origin: Peru

Interview Date: 17 October 2008

Location: Arusha, Tanzania

Interviewer: Lisa P. Nathan
Donald J Horowitz

Videographer: Nell Carden Grey

Interpreter: None

Interview Summary

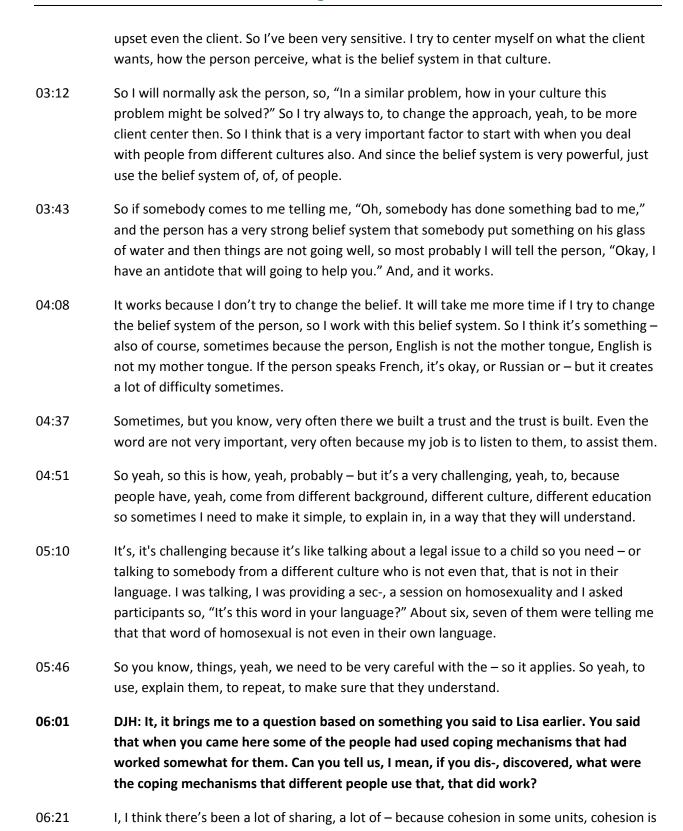
Jorge Sierralta talks about his role as a psychologist and social counselor for the United Nations and reflects on the challenges of working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. He discusses his work as a counselor at the ICTR, including the mental health education and support services that have been introduced. Sierralta describes various coping mechanisms employed by Tribunal staff as well as the stigma associated with seeking counseling.

The transcript of Part 6 begins on the following page.

Part 6

00:00 Donald J Horowitz: One of the things that occurred to me, actually in the break you mentioned about talking to some judges, I think you said, in, when you were in Afghanistan. Why don't you relate that what you told me? 00:15 I, I was, yeah, judges also they have also – some of them they have this macho probably mentality yeah. That – but I remember a case, yeah, when the, in one of the houses, because they, the judges were there to improve the law system. And one of the staff died inside the house because of this monoxide carbon, you know you need to heat the house and you have a heat inside the room. 00:49 So one of – and then I was asked to provide assistance and one of the judges was telling me that, you know, "We're used to this kind of, but when you see somebody who is close to you, when something happened, somebody who is close or next to you, then it's a totally different." 01:11 "And also we thought," he told me, "we thought that this can happen to, but, you know, you always have the belief that this will happen somewhere else but not here." 01:23 So we have several, yeah. Even the time I was there during this three years, I heard yeah, of several people; three, four people who, yeah, they died because of this intoxication, this . . 01:38 DJH: Oh, carbon monoxide poi-, poisoning. 01:40 Yeah, carbon, yeah, carbon monoxide, yeah. 01:42 DJH: Mm-hmm. Because the heating system . . . 01:44 Because of the heating sys-, you need to heat your – and then you, you forget or you, yeah. 01:48 DJH: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. You have – your practice has taken you to a great many different places with v-, a great many different cultures. And you were trained in particular place and my question is what, what effect if any the different cultures or different attitudes towards I guess mental health or illness and so forth? 02:15 DJH: How have you managed to, first of all, understand the different cultures you're in and adapt? If you, if - and tell us a little bit about the difficulty, if, if there was any, of adapting your mental health approach to different cultures? 02:31 Is a, is a very interesting question. I think sometimes because I, I've been trained to provide counseling sessions, therapy and I remember the first time when I started in with people from different cultures trying to apply some of this western style. It didn't work well and it

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been very, very useful.

very high so I think that coping mechanism, that feeling connected to each other, that has

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06:36 Some people had been sharing their problems also, yeah, very – and the fact that many people are here with their families and they are not disconnected with their families, also that, that social network is very important, has been a very, yeah. 06:53 So that's why I didn't see, I don't - I expected to see more problems; people with traumatic stress but it's, it's not. People, yeah, they, they cope well with, yeah, with, yeah, I mean in, in, under these circumstances, yeah. Probably in a different environment, yeah, the, the case might be higher but you know we need to understand that many of our staff come in the cultural background, the social support is very strong. 07:25 If you see the origin, the country that people come from, many of them they come from countries that the social network is very strong so, yeah. 07:40 DJH: So that helps . . . 07:40 Many things, many things yeah, many things that we discuss in, in counseling that we try to - we make people to talk to, it happens in their own culture so they activate their own system and it's, it's healing so, yeah. 07:56 So like if somebody dies, yeah, like just yesterday somebody we heard, I was in the corridor and I saw somebody on the phone and I saw crying the person. The person was crying. So I

were probably 20 people next to the person providing support.

didn't provide any assisting. I just wait until the person finish. When the person finished, the person told me that their father die. Immediately, I don't know how many but there