

Amanda Allan

No Way Back? Psychological perspectives on the identity of volunteers returning from first time humanitarian aid missions

This paper will address some of the psychosocial adjustment issues experienced by medical aid volunteers returning from the field and reporting a sense of no longer belonging to the home context from which they departed for mission.

This presentation aims to describe aspects of the 'coming home' phenomenon from a social constructionist perspective rather than from a clinical framework, normalizing the experiences of volunteers who find it difficult to find their place again amidst a Westernized, materialistic and pleasure seeking society.

Based on qualitative research currently being conducted in the Psychology Department at the University of Melbourne, this presentation will give insight into a more contextual and existential interpretation of the experience of medical humanitarian aid volunteers over time in their post-mission period through analysis of their constructed and changing perspectives of their international field and home identities.

Implications for preparing and debriefing medical personnel in relation to their post-field experiences will be drawn.