

The emotional toll on child survivors of the Shoah:

Examining the work of Dr. Paul Friedman

This paper aims to outline the work of Dr. Paul Friedman, a psychologist who worked extensively with the survivor population in the early post-war period in order to assess their emotional needs and make recommendations for improved care.

In July 1946 Dr. Paul Friedman was sent by the JDC to Europe to conduct his study on the emotional state of child survivors who were being housed in various institutions. In six months he travelled to Germany, France, Switzerland and Poland during which he evaluated the emotional state of young children in institutions and made recommendations regarding their care. His reports made a great impact on Jewish organizations in the United States, Europe, and mandatory Palestine. As a result he continued to be involved in assessing the condition and needs of this population, always emphasizing that the correct therapeutic approach is vital for the reestablishment of emotional equilibrium and reconnection. One of the most important aspects of his assessment was that it was crucial to train and supervise professionals who would be able to work effectively and address the needs of this wounded yet resilient group of people. His observations were published as internal reports

as well as presented at professional conferences and published in scientific journals.¹

For researchers of this period, during which resources were directed to the rehabilitation of a severely traumatized group, this observations reflects the way that concepts such as “aid” and “rehabilitation” were constructed at a time that the provision of physical needs was seen as paramount. Friedman’s observations regarding the caregivers’ inability to consider the children’s wartime experiences when thinking about how to react and relate to their postwar behavior is striking. While it may suggest larger cultural and educational paradigms that were operating during that time, it also may reflect a recurring theme that was articulated by many child survivors in their postwar testimonies: they describe how they were encouraged to put the past behind them and focus their energies on rebuilding their lives. It may also reveal the adult world’s inability to listen to the traumatic experiences of these young victims, as their experiences reminded them of their own powerlessness in protecting and safeguarding their children during those devastating times. Yet it also may reflect the children’s basic inability to find the words and the emotions to communicate their difficult pasts; for some this was a process that could take years and even decades; for others it would remain an untold story.

His publications include: “The Road Back for the DPs”; “Some Aspects of 1 Concentration Camp Psychology,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 105, no. 8 (1949), pp. 601-605; “Can Freedom be Taught?: The Role of the Social Worker in the Adjustment of the New Immigrant,” *The Journal of Social Casework*, vol. 29:7 (August 1948), pp. 247-255; “The Effects of Imprisonment,” *Acta Medica Orientalia*, vol. 7 (1949), pp. 163-167

