

Trauma and Healing

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What is a traumatic event?

According to the DSM IV: “experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or the threat to the physical integrity of self or others.”

A non-life-threatening event may become traumatic if it goes on too long, happens too frequently, or happens at an inappropriate age or to a person with limited coping skills.



Examples of Trauma

Human cruelty or extreme loss

Childhood physical, mental and/or sexual abuse, or neglect

Losses, deaths, separations, or abandonment by caregivers

Witnessing violence

Accidents, injuries, defects, invasive or painful medical procedures



Need for Trauma Healing in Burundi

Views of the Self

from: invulnerability, goodness, happy future

to: vulnerability, feeling out of control, bad, guilty, ashamed, weak, unworthy of a good life

Views of the World

from: The world is meaningful, fair, predictable, safe

to: The world is confusing, unsafe, without a loving God.

Views of Others

from: People are good, trustworthy

to: People are bad, exploitive. Nobody understands.



Challenges in Burundi

Very limited mental health system, lack of government support for mental health projects

A population where everyone has been touched by violence

Many thousands of refugees and displaced people

No word in Kirundi for trauma

Some observations

Most of the people with whom we work have histories of being traumatized; they are either victims or perpetrators.

Many of us also have histories of trauma

“That which is to give light must endure burning” –

Victor Frankl



Responding to Trauma in Burundi

Public education

Trauma workshops

Support groups

Community involvement



Listening Rooms

A listener with a room/safe space.

Networked into the community.

Supervised by a psychotherapist.



THARS Healing Process

Active listening,
empowerment

Psychosocial activities:
dances, cultural-get
together opportunities, etc.

Support groups and self-help
initiatives

Community involvement in
healing



T.H.A.R.S.

Trauma Healing And Reconciliation
Services *restores hope and health*

Zones of intervention: 11 provinces,
has 22 Listening Rooms in villages

Programs include:

- Awareness raising and sensitization
- Trauma Healing and conflict transformation
- Victims of torture psychosocial intervention
- Sexual violence rehabilitation

Partners are: Search for Common
Ground, Ligue Iteka, APRODH,
TPO, UNICEF, CARE – Burundi and
Swiss Cooperation, CICR.

