

Healing The Human Person ———

Post-Traumatic Counselling: Healing of Wounds caused by Violence*

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Abstract

The healing of wounds caused by violence provides a space for recovery from emotional and psychological harm caused to victims and offenders. Trauma is an experience of both victims and offenders. Meeting such needs creates an environment conducive to the reconciliation process. The discussion of post-traumatic counselling as the process of healing the wounds is addressed from both the restorative and reconciliation perspectives. Involvement of victims, offenders and community members in a quest to identify needs and responsibilities promotes healing among the parties involved.

Keywords

post-traumatic counselling, victim-offender conferencing, family group conferencing, community conferencing, Howard Zehr

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Introduction

This paper explores post-traumatic counselling as a method for healing wounds caused by violence. Philpott observes that “a wound of political injustice can be defined as some respect in which a political injustice ruptures right relationships within or between communities and diminishes the human flourishing of those who are involved in that injustice” (Philpott, 2012:# 31). The healing of such wounds provides a space for recovery from emotional and psychological harm caused to victims and offenders. Trauma is an experience of both victims and offenders. Meeting such needs creates an environment conducive to the reconciliation process. The discussion of post-traumatic counselling as the process of healing wounds is addressed from both the restorative and reconciliation perspectives.

¹⁸ I will discuss Howard Zehr’s restorative justice conferencing models. These conferencing models provide an opportunity for a victim to ask and understand the reason for the offence and for an offender to take responsibility for the offence. They cultivate an environment of freedom of expression which creates a more open forum for discussion that promotes cohesion in society. I therefore discuss these models as: victim-offender mediation/conferencing, family group conferencing and community conferencing.

Putting things right as a key to healing

Putting things right is the core aim of restorative justice. Things are put right in two ways: addressing the harms that have been done and addressing the causes of those harms. Restorative justice is concerned with the restoration and reintegration of both victims and offenders within the community. It is about balancing the concerns of all the parties. Both the victim and the offender suffer emotional and psychological trauma and stigmatisation in the aftermath of ethno-political violence. Children suffer emotionally due to separation from their parents caused by violence. The separation leads to children feeling betrayed and abandoned in their hour of need causing emotional strain to the children.

Sang *et al.* argue that of grave importance is the need to provide counselling services to children who are among the hardest hit by violence, and that counselling services should be extended to those affected by ethno-political violence, both victims and offenders (Sang *et al.*, 2011: 78). Post-trauma counselling deals with the loneliness, insecurity, fear and trauma

victims of ethno-political violence experience and the psychological trauma and stigma that offenders suffer after doing harm. The psychological effects of victimisation can make offenders sensitive to any new threats of conflict.

In response to new threats of violence, victims may strike out with the aim of defending themselves even where self-defence is unnecessary. In the process, victims turn into offenders themselves. Such action may be caused by the trauma and fear experienced during violence.

It is important to recognise that offenders are psychologically wounded by their actions as well. They experience stigmatisation as a result of their offence. They also suffer traumatic experiences from the cycle of violence when victims retaliate against them. It has been noted in Kenya that the unhealed wounds of victims have contributed to acts of violence against offenders. Some victims of the 2007/08 post-election violence were sometimes offenders from previous ethnic conflicts. Just as victims feel victimised, offenders are psychologically wounded by their actions. Some offenders suffered emotionally from fear and trauma. ¹⁹

Healing from psychological wounds or trauma that has resulted from victimisation is necessary for reconciliation. The healing helps to prevent defensive violence and enhances the capacity of intensely victimised group members to face reconciliation (Staub *et al.*, 2003: 288). Offenders also experience psychological trauma that develops out of fear, guilt and stigmatisation after the violence. Staub and co-authors argue that offenders suffer victimisation or other traumatic experiences as part of the prior cycles of violence. Their unhealed wounds contribute to their actions. Offenders of violence can be deeply wounded by their actions (Staub *et al.*, 2003: 288). Trauma healing helps decrease the tension between offender and victim and minimises animosity and hatred between them. I argue that taking responsibility for past injustices committed during violence is the best way for putting things right and healing victims from trauma after violence. Reconciliation occurs when the victim’s damaged humanity is restored. This can be achieved after a victim has gained a sense of meaning and identity.

Victim-offender mediation/conferencing

Some justice scholars believe that restorative justice can be achieved through one-to-one meetings. From a restorative justice perspective, such individual meetings (one-to-one meetings) are referred to as victim-offender

conferences. Victim-offender conferences primarily involve the victim and the offender. They are face-to-face meetings between the offender and the victim in the presence of a trained mediator who guides the process in a balanced manner (Zehr, 2002:# 47). Meeting the offender and the victim provides a platform for holistic reconciliation. This conferencing model generally involves a small number of participants and the family members of the victims and offenders may participate but they are usually seen as having secondary supporting roles compared with the victim and the offender.

The victim-offender conference provides an opportunity not to punish, deter or coerce the offender but provide healing and reconciliation. This kind of setting can provide a sense of inner peace. The provision of the victim-offender conference can provide an opportunity for answering questions like: why are we fighting? What are we fighting for? And possibly provide an answer to the question: how can we get out of this situation and move forward?

20 During the ethno-political violence in Kenya, some victims felt that it was impossible to forgive somebody who had not sought forgiveness and shown remorse for their wrongdoing. This means any amnesty given without the involvement of the victims leaves some gaps in the reconciliation process. An example of the use of such victim-offender mediation was in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Truth Commission (SLTRC) facilitated the process of victim-offender mediation and victims welcomed it. Every week a reconciliation ceremony was held where offenders and victims came together. Many of those who acknowledged their crime were baptised through a special cleansing ceremony and ritually reintegrated into the community (Graybill and Lanegran, 2004: 10). This means that without victims' and offenders' acknowledgement of their experiences and offences respectively, any findings made by the Church, truth commissions or tribunals may remain just academic reports.

Hearing from both victim and offender leads to a holistic reconciliation that can restore faith in them living together again without fear. The round-table meeting between victim and offender helps in understanding the deeper context of ethno-political violence. I view this as the starting point of trauma healing and reconciliation. The meeting between victim and offender helps them to regain confidence and trust in each other because no institution like the Church or government can forgive on behalf of the individual. From this

point of view, I argue that it is impossible to forgive if the person has not sought forgiveness and shown remorse for their wrong doing. Any amnesty given without the involvement of victims leaves a gap in the healing and reconciliation process.

Family Group Conferencing

There are direct victims and indirect victims who also experience pain and trauma in the aftermath of violence. The indirect victims include family members and close friends of direct victims of violence. Similarly, there are indirect offenders that are affected by the harm caused by offenders. The process of mediation at this level endeavours to reconnect both the families of the victim and the offender, especially where the offender is known.

This involves a much wider circle of participants than the victim-offender mediation. In addition to the primary victim and offender, participants may include the people connected to the victim and the offender's family members and others connected to the offender. The victim is helped to come to terms with the past; the offender is also able to come out of stigma and isolation and recover meaningful social connections with the victims' family members and the rest of his family members.

This model focuses mainly on supporting offenders in taking 21 responsibility and changing their behaviour and helps both victim and offender rise above the stigma caused by the harm. Both the victim's and the offender's families are invited (Zehr, 2002: 48). Their families (victims and offenders) and/or other relevant people from the community are especially important in bringing an inclusive understanding of forgiveness.

Community Conferencing

At the community level, individual and individual groups need to be reconciled. This means community plays a vital role in restorative justice. By this I mean that offence is not done in isolation but in the context of other relationships within society. The victim and offender are not only seen as individuals but also have relatives, friends, communities and society at large. This means we are all victims and offenders and hence jointly responsible both for overcoming violence and working for peace and reconciliation.

Community conferencing is one of the restorative models which can

be applied at the level of community. It is structured as a meeting for offenders, victims and both their families and friends, in which they deal with the consequences of the wrongdoing and decide on how best to repair the harm. Community conferencing is neither a counselling nor a mediation process; it is a victim-sensitive, straightforward problem-solving method that demonstrates how stakeholders can resolve their own problems when provided with a constructive forum.

Community conferencing provides an opportunity to discuss how to address the aftermath of an offence. Its main goals are; giving the victim an opportunity to be directly involved in responding to the offence, increasing the offender's awareness of the impact of his or her behaviour and providing an opportunity to take responsibility for it, engaging the offender's support system and making amends and shaping the offender's future behaviour as well as allowing the offender and the victim to connect to key community support structures (Prison Fellowship Centre, 2008: 1). Community conferencing also provides victims and others with an opportunity to confront the offender, express their feelings, ask questions and have a say in the outcome. Offenders hear at first-hand how their behaviour has affected other people.

Trauma healing in this kind of setting provides a space of connectedness and re-integration into society and reduces re-offending which can occur and prevents revenge from the victim. Feelings of revenge often oscillate with feelings of helplessness, humiliation and victimisation. Trauma causes new developments in social patterns of living leading to loss of life, destruction of property, and harm to natural resources with even massive pollution of water and soil. Offenders may begin to repair the harm by apologising, making amends and agreeing to give financial restitution or personal or community service work which can be determined during such conference meetings.

22 Community conferencing can provide an opportunity for trauma healing to individuals as well as a larger population of direct and indirect victims of violence. This can be geared towards the re-integration of both victim and offender within the community. The provision of conferencing models promotes forgiveness and provides an environment for learning the truth and getting all the details of what happened during the ethno-political violence. Chapman argues that reconciliation discerns the truth about the dimensions and causes of violence as well as about past abuses. For society to recover

from the trauma of violence, Chapman argues that 'truth is medicine'. He adds that without truth a society remains infected with past evils which are likely to break out again in the future (Chapman, 1999: 247–248).

Conclusion

These models help to promote justice and healing at both the individual and community level as offenders, victims and the members of the community are all represented. Understanding why violence broke out and the motivation behind it, as well as the consequences of such violence from the offender's and the victim's perspective, provides avenues for healing, and helps prevent recurrences of violence. Moreover conferencing models provide a space for sharing and eating together as, in such conferences, food and refreshments may be served. In an African context, eating and drinking together promotes belonging and a sense of community. Such a perspective is crucial to the healing and reconciliation processes.

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23 療癒人心——創傷後壓力諮商：治療暴力造成的心理創傷

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摘要

治療因暴力而造成的心理傷痛，可為受害者與加害者提供情感和 psychological 創傷的復原機會，創傷是受害者與加害者同時承受的經驗，為雙方治療心理創傷也營造一個有助和解的環境。本文從修復與和解的觀點，探討以「創傷後壓力諮商」(post-traumatic counselling) 的方式治療心理創傷，讓受害者、加害者與社區成員代表都參與其中，釐清需求與責任所在，更能提升各方的創傷療癒成效。

關鍵字

創傷後壓力諮商、被害人與加害人協商、家庭協商會議、社區調解會議、哲爾