

The Generation After/La Generation Après: Living with the Consequences of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi - Summer School/Knowledge Exchange

Center for Mental Health, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Rwanda

Monday, 24 June 2019 at 08:00 - Friday, 28 June 2019 at 17:00 (CAT) - Kigali, Rwanda

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Background

The genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 was one of the largest human-made disasters of the 20th century and deeply damaged the fabric of Rwandan society. Over the past two and a half decades, researchers have documented the psychosocial impact of the genocide on the Rwandan population and provided epidemiological evidence on the lasting effects of this catastrophic event. A household-based study conducted on the general population found the prevalence of PTSD in Rwanda among its adult population to be at 26%. Beyond the individual suffering, the genocide caused incalculable devastation to the Rwandan community's fabric, upset reference systems, compromised familial and community organizations, and impaired individual psyches.

As time goes by, it is becoming increasingly clear that the consequences of the genocide are strongly impacting on the generation born after 1994. They are now by far the largest demographic, as 51% of the current Rwandan population is under 20 years old. These youth have a different understanding of the Genocide as they did not witness the genocide directly. Still, they grow up in affected families and a societal environment strikingly marked by the genocide. There is emerging evidence that mental health suffering is transmitted through the generations. Rieder and Elbert studied trauma, mental health and psychosocial conditions in genocide survivors, former prisoners accused of participation in genocide and their descendants. Descendants of genocide survivors presented more symptoms compared to descendants of former prisoners with regard to all assessed mental health disorders, including PTSD. A study conducted by Perroud and colleagues also provided evidence for the intergenerational transmission of PTSD. Mothers pregnant during and exposed to the genocide and the children born from this pregnancy showed increased PTSD and depression severity compared to non-exposed mothers and their offspring. Moreover, these psychopathological findings were associated with biological alterations of the HPA axis; including changed patterns in cortisol, glucocorticoid receptor and mineralocorticoid receptor levels, and epigenetic modifications on the promotor region of NR3C1.

The mental health challenges experienced by young Rwandans do not only relate to growing up in a traumatised post-genocide society, however. Today, Rwanda has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa and is experiencing rapid socio-economic and

technological transformation. In this context of rapid globalisation, for many young Rwandans the world feels ever closer, while they personally fear being left behind in a competitive and at times capricious market. For others still, the promise, frequently made to this generation, of a “bright future”, is tempered by the realities of common problems – lack of capital, absent parents, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, various forms of abuse, or vulnerability to market shocks of climate change.

Twenty-five years after the genocide, the time is right to ask questions on the impact of the genocide, its traces, its heritage and its transmission to young Rwandans, both on the individual and societal level, as well as how young Rwandans are coping with the pressures and uncertainties of globalisation. We know that after a collective catastrophe as was the genocide, children have endless questions for their families and communities about the past. They seek to define their personal past, present and future.

The Generation After is undeniably heavily affected by questions about their collective past and individual futures. We need to understand better in which way they are affected; and in what ways this impact is different from the impact it has on their parents. We also need to create a space for the Generation After to develop a public voice of their own, or even multiple public voices, that reflect their anxieties, aspirations, needs and wishes. Rwanda as a country goes through a mourning process that will continue for the next decades and even centuries. As mourning goes through different stages, the voice of the Generation After needs to be heard to allow Rwanda to continue healing. After all, the future belongs to the Generation After.

Summer School/Knowledge Exchange

The Center for Mental Health of the University of Rwanda, College of Medicine and Health Sciences (CMH, UR-CMHS), in collaboration with the Global Engagement Institute (GEI) will host the Fifth Annual Global Mental Health Knowledge Exchange/Summer School from Monday, 24 June, 2019 until Friday, 28 June, 2019. The Summer School will address questions of the Generation After in relation to the genocide committed against Tutsis in Rwanda and reflect on the various forms of work to be done with youth so that they are less affected by the past.

The Summer School will be open for all interested. We will invite senior speakers from Rwanda and abroad, but mostly we will be inviting young Rwandans and create different forums that will allow for constructive and synergistic discussion, including expert panels, group discussions, break out working groups, and more. We will touch upon a variety of themes, all related to reconciliation and mental health wellbeing. Some of the subthemes that will be tackled include:

- Narratives of genocide for youth and from youth
- Mourning: individual, family and collective memory
- Psychopathological consequences of children from genocide survivors and genocide perpetrators.
- Intergenerational transmission of trauma.
- Resilience of the Generation After
- Genocide commemoration and the Generation After
- Reconciliation and the Generation After

For a more detailed understanding of the content that will be provided through the Knowledge Exchange/Summer School, we intend to soon publish ‘Agenda GMH Summer School 2019’.

Internships

In combination with the Knowledge Exchange/Summer School, we offer internships for our international visitors varying from 1 month or 2 months in length with our different partner institutions. There are internships available with national and international ngo’s, public health institutions and more.

For an overview of the internships that are available, please see the attached ‘List of Internships 2019’.