

Psychological Effects of Violence on Youths - Review of Selected Cases in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: There have been five episodes of state-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe, killing more than 30 000 people and several other thousands being unaccounted. In all the episodes, youths have either witnessed or been affected. The study therefore sought to establish psychological effects of violence on the youths in Zimbabwe. It was an explorative study following a qualitative approach. Data were collected through three waves through structured questionnaires that were electronically administered. SPSS was supported by Latent Content Analysis to analyse data. The study was guided by the concepts of governance and delinquency. It established that exposure to violence leads to high levels of pressure among youths which has been linked with the development of a lot of psychological challenges. It also found that time heals. However, the recovery time is determined by issues like healing in post-traumatic era, degree of harm, the managing abilities of the youth which is again dependent on the age of the affected youth.

Key words: Youth Violence • Coping Strategies • Peer Motivation • Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

The youth in Zimbabwe have been adversely affected by the political processes experienced since 1980 when the country attained political independence. All the activities and processes were recorded during the Robert Mugabe era dubbed the 'First Republic'. In the Zimbabwean case, there have not been much of studies on the real effects of violence on young people probably because of the following; an ailing economy, massive migration, unemployment and lack of effective equipment and systems to test the effects. For a near-accurate outcome, this study takes a keyhole approach that allows us to appreciate the general effects of violence on the youth using Zimbabwean lenses.

Exposure to violence is known to be bad to young people in their future lives. Whatever they see and experience usually defines their long-term habits and psychological practices. This is the fear that might have crept into some youths in Zimbabwe through their experiences of some violent episodes. It is feared that with some of the episodes, it was actually the state fuelling the violence and conflicts thus rendering them unstoppable and unregulated. In all instances, the government would hide behind the 'sovereignty clause' to ward off external interference.

Young people have, of course, always been trapped in the violence. They normally have little choice but to go through, at least, similar troubles as their elders; as victims or even perpetrators. Latest developments in violence have considerably intensified the risks for young people. Over the same period, it is estimated that over four million young people in Zimbabwe have been displaced; moving away from their extended family systems where they benefit socialisation and other safety nets.

Election related violence, economic deprivation and security services driven violence have psychologically and emotionally impacted generations of young people for the better part of their lives [1]. It is believed that one out of three young people who live in violence are susceptible to develop some form of psychopathological symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and lower psychosocial working levels during their lives, which goes back to the unpredictable and violent environment they live [2]. Among those young people subjected to violence-related stressors for an extended period, it is commonly projected that the occurrence of post-traumatic stress symptomatology differs from 10 to 90%, shown by anxiety disorders like post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychiatric illnesses as well as disruptive behaviours, depression and somatic symptoms [3].

Between 1980 and 2019, Zimbabwe has recorded five prominent episodes of state-sponsored violence against its people. For the purpose of this study, the selected cases include the *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and the 2008 political violence. These cases are put into perspective so that the study aligns. Between 1982 and 1987, government unleashed violence on the people in the Matebeleland regions and the Midlands allegedly for subverting against the Shona-run government [4]. Using the three systems of security: the military through the Sixth Brigade specifically trained by North Korea, Police Support Unit, a quasi-military police arm and the Central Intelligence Organisation respectively, it is estimated that over 20 000 civilians were exterminated in cold blood [5].

Deliberately, Ndebele ethnic and some moderate Shona ethnic people were murdered. Besides killing, raping and maiming, property was also destroyed [6, 7]. All these torturous events took place in full view of the children. The massacre ended following the 1987 Unity Accord between some Ndebele and Shona leadership [8, 9].

In 2004, the government through the Ministry of Local Government embarked on an operation dubbed 'Restore Order' (*Murambatsvina*) in all urban areas. The operation was meant to cleanse all urban settlements of illegal infrastructure in order to curb criminality and ensure cleanliness [10, 11]. Without giving any reasonable notice, more than 400 000 structures were destroyed leaving tenants shelter-less and exposed to cold and diseases [12]. The implication was that children dropped from schools, exposure to ill-health, loss of valuables and exposure of children to trauma and shock and loss of dignity.

The operation was conducted by the responsible local authorities and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. It was stopped only after the international community had made some noise with the United Nations sending an emissary [13]. It was believed that the government was 'punishing' urban dwellers for supporting the opposition politics.

Zimbabwe had Harmonised elections (combination of Council, Parliamentary, Senatorial and Presidential) in 2008 March which were conducted [14] following the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections [15]. They were free, fair and credible. The results produced no out-right winner thus requiring a re-run pitting Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) against Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). However before the results of the first round were announced, there was a silence for 35 days without any update on the outcome [16].

Upon announcement of the poll results, commenced a reign of terror against known and perceived sympathisers of the MDC for 42 days. The operation of terror was sponsored by the security sector and bank-rolled by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe which procured more than 200 operational vehicles. The terror operation left thousands of people either dead, raped or maimed with others displaced. Political bases were established from where torture and mass killings were executed [17, 18]. This left thousands of children orphaned and in the abyss of poverty while some youths actively participated.

In all the violence episodes, young people either witnessed, were victims or were part of the perpetrators. This all means that the youth were affected in some way. Therefore, the scope of this study is to review the psychological effects of the violence on the youth. This study borrows the definition of violence 'behaviours that cause or threaten to cause physical injury on other persons' from [19].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was an explorative study following a qualitative approach for easy interpretation of descriptive data. The sample consisted of 120 participants (60 females and 60 males). It was also ensured that at least half of the participants were still in the youth age category (hereafter referred as youth participants) as defined by the Constitution of Zimbabwe [20] and the other 60 adults to be referred as adult participants. Youth participants were required to share their experiences while adult participants were also expected to share what they see and learn from the youths' experiences. The youth in the study range from 18 to 35 years while adults are over 36 years old.

The study employed a sample of 120 participants only since it followed an anti-positivist' perspective whose argument is in depth of data rather than width. It therefore settled for a small sample which could bring out the desired results efficiently [21].

Data were collected through three waves that were conducted concurrently in terms of time. The first wave sought to collect data on 40 participants focussing on the *Gukurahundi* issue of 1982-1987. The participants were drawn from Mzingwane district (Habane with 20) and Bulawayo (Entumbane with 20). The second wave gathered data from 40 participants in the *Murambatsvina* case of 2004 (Seke with 20 and Mufakose with 20) while the third wave focussed on the 2008 election violence. Equally, it had a cohort of 40 participants drawn from Bindura (Chipadze with 20) and Mazowe (Glendale with 20). The 120 participants were deliberately drawn from the

most affected provinces; Matebeleland South and Bulawayo; Harare and Mashonaland Central. Gender ratio was also evenly distributed: 50:50.

The three waves sought to answer the following questions;

- Their perceptions of the violence
- What the youth are going through post the violence era
- How the victims are coping with the effects

Data were collected through structured questionnaires that were electronically administered on the sampled participants over a four-month period. To ensure maximum response rate, the researchers made continuous follow-ups. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure that the right and well placed respondents were selected. These were selected from the lists of Zimbabwe violence victims that were compiled by some civil society organisations' coalition.

The study created three datasets for analyses as advised [22]. The first dataset was on the effects of the *Gukurahundi* crisis and the second was on the impact of the Operation Restore Order (*Murambatsvina*) while the last was on the 2008 election driven violence.

In the analysis of data, SPSS was supported by Latent Content Analysis; the themes especially behaviours, ideas and incidents were generated from the data itself, with no pre-existing assumptions. The findings were corroborated by triangulating data from the questionnaires and archival literature before presenting them both descriptively and statistically. The results were also organised into coherent sets of significance, sequence of events and rate of occurrence to establish important implications in the messages.

To ensure reliability, integrity and some generalizability of the results, the study used data triangulation which implied the application of diverse sources of information and procedural triangulation. An effective audit trail was instituted to guarantee comprehensive and accurate analyses, truth value and call backs. It also observed procedures for standard ethics safeguarding the participants' secrecy and confidentiality. The scope of the study was expounded to the sampled participants before they agreed to partake in the study. There was no need for any official authority to interview the participants since they were all adults. Equally, no personal identifiers were taken from them and were aware of the fact that they could pull out from the study at any time and that the data would be destroyed. Yet again, the study did not pay anyone for taking part.

Conceptual Framework: The study was guided by the concepts of governance and delinquency. Governance looks at the conditions under which youths are raised in their respective societies, which in some cases may not be appropriate for human habitation. It also focuses on the available coping strategies and safety nets availed by the responsible authorities in respective areas. The concept of delinquency also looks at the various illegal and immoral activities that the youths engage in. The concept looks at how the youths perceive violence in relation to their morality and other social expectations.

The two concepts are good for this study in that they help delineate boundaries between the good and bad, violence benefits and violence effects and what is ideally supposed to be at the exposure of the youths for their well-being. This is good governance.

Youths in Zimbabwe: Youth is a complex category in Zimbabwe. It is no longer a clear life-stage demarcated by traditional initiations and marital status. While youth is defined by age, maturity and assumption of certain responsibilities in Zimbabwe [23], the aspect of age and responsibility seem to have lost relevance since most people are no longer achieving what they are expected during the period socially defined. Similarly, some people are even failing to assume certain responsibilities at the expected time because of the new trends in an ailing economy and the effects of migration.

Youths are a mixed cluster and their life time experiences, education, gender, cultural upbringing and economic standing can be totally diverse, depending on where they live [24]. Appreciating the subtleties of youth in each local setting is thus crucial. Each generation of youths faces unlike problems [25]. Youths go through numerous changes: emotional, cognitive, physical and social [26]. Without suitable deliberate and committed developments in the youths in line with their rights, these change over shave dangers [27].

As the study explores the world of the youth in relation to violence and their feelings and conduct post-violence, it is prudent that we also understand how they are side-lined in critical matters. The youths in Zimbabwe just like in several other developing democracies are critical pillars in the sustenance and development of political democracy and the economy [28]. They are placed at the centre of most economic and political processes that require foot-soldiering, blood and sweat. However, they are 'sort of excluded' in other critical areas like decision-making and harvesting of the benefits that come with most economic and political processes. Such an attitude towards the youths is seen in

South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Kenya, Sudan, Algeria and several other democracies [29]. They are involved in endless running battles with either their governments or rival political systems. It is also observed that the same youths are at the centre of most of the conflicts and directly drive all the violence. In the process, they either vandalise invaluable infrastructure or guard jealously their democratic and social ideals.

In Zimbabwe, youths constitute over 67% of the population [30] and yet constitute less than 10% of the formally employed segment. They have however participated in most violence episodes in Zimbabwe; October 1998 Food riots, Farm invasions of 2000 [31], 2002 Presidential elections' violence, 2004 *Murambatsvina*, 2008 election violence [32], 2017 coup [33], August 2018 election results protests [34] and the January 2019 fuel price increase protests.

Types of Violence: Today's conflicts commonly involve diverse ethnic and religious groups, merging communitarian, political and criminal violence. Violence that seems unselective might also be consciously directed at particular groups of civilians and could include the use of sexual and gender-based violence [35]. Violence generally comes in various forms and lethality depending on the surrounding conditions and grievances within the parties. These various forms of violence could be physical or psychological; structural, direct or cultural or political, religious, social or economic among others [36, 37]. It has been characterized as prevalent and unbound. Youths according to some studies account for the bulk of non-combatant fatalities in most cases of violence [38].

Researchers have attempted to look beyond biological and psychological explanations to understand violence drivers and their respective forms [39, 40, 41]. Some have gone as far as looking at the mental, social, economic, religious, cultural and even physical aspects of humanity [42]. Efforts to understand violence as a social occurrence arise from a realisation that cases of violence tend to be irregularly spread within society contrary to some studies' findings that argue that violence is defined from a cultural and community perspective [43].

Youth are taken advantage of and militarised when required, but then side-lined and disregarded particularly when it comes to addressing the root causes of their social marginalisation, specifically the systemic miscarriages in economic and educational development [44]. There are however studies arguing that there are several situations where youth agonise from high levels of marginalisation but do not partake in violence [45].

Youths and Violence: In conflict- and violence-affected situations, youths are frequently seen as either perpetrators or sufferers of violence with male youth commonly thought to be the main agents and female youth the major victims [46]. Yet realities of youths in these circumstances are more intricate than these stereotypes submit. Some youths could be both direct victims and committers of violence while others can be neither [47]. It has been noted that most conventional attitudes to youth and conflict in recent years have been by and large guided by concepts around youth bulge [48]. These concepts have been disseminated through popular forms of literature positing that swelling male youth population combined with urbanization and joblessness is most likely driving towards increased insecurity and violence.

Studies have also established that the world's youth population has definitely been surging; there are presently 1.2 billion youth (15 to 24 years) in the world, the biggest figure of youth ever to have been recorded and translating to 18% of the world's population [49]. It is expected that there will be 72 million more youth by 2025 [50]. Several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia have very high youth populations comparative to their entire populations [51]. Yet, whereas studies have confirmed a link between a highly comparative youth population and a higher numerical threat of conflict, UNDP [52] results are not a direct prognosticator of violence. Rather, they show which countries are expected to be at greater risk of violent conflict. Additionally, whereas most fighters are male youths, women constitute 10-30% of armed forces and groups [53, 54]. There are however other scholars who argue that even if youths constitute the majority of perpetrators of violence in most circumstances, the bulk of youths do not get involved in violence [55, 56]. Unfortunately, in the case of Zimbabwe, there is inadequate collected and documented data about the day-to-day lives of youths who do not participate directly in violence, how they make a living, their routine activities and why ahead of, throughout and after violence episodes.

It is known that violence has an undesirable and long-term effect on youths. However, some studies argue that youths and children seem to be overrepresented among the primary and secondary sufferers of violence whether of criminality or armed violence in both violence-affected and non-violence contexts [57]. The forms and targets of violence agonised by youths are moreover exceedingly gendered. Male youths aged 15 to 29 are most at risk of getting killed and are four to five times

more likely to be murdered than female youths [58]. Female youths are most at risk of domestic and sexual violence and physical abuse by both their partners and armed youths [59].

Reactions of Youths: Exposure to violence has evidently been established to be a source of high levels of stress among youths which has been linked with the growth of a host of psychological complications [60]. However, it is difficult for youths to go through cataclysms of this type without displaying their consequence in problematic behaviour and in deviation from normalcy. Violence touches youths in several of the same ways that it touches adults [61]. There are, nevertheless, particular effects on youths. To begin with, youths' access to the attention, sympathy and care of adults is frequently limited or absent. Violence also has a huge effect on youth-hood, which might undesirably disturb the life course of the youths much more than adults [62]. This is seen in how the behaviours and habits of youths develop post-violence experiences.

There is destruction of the local agriculture, businesses, employment and infrastructure [63] thus exposing the youths, most of whom require sustenance, to unemployment and poverty. Often times, lack of such essential services imply that basic social services are also adversely affected. Similarly, youths usually go through interrupted development or no education [64]. This is further perpetuated if the youth are forced to move into refugee or displaced person camps (DPC) where they can wait for ages in exceedingly frustrating and tough conditions for normal life to recommence, if it ever does.

Several youths do not understand the basis of some of the violence and conflicts or why they occur [65]. Extreme losses and disturbances in their lives result in high levels of depression and anxiety in violence-affected youths. These effects could be protracted by exposures to additional hardships and violence in refugee conditions. Contextually, refugee may mean youths who flee their homes for either safety or employment in others' or urban areas. Their experiences could make it challenging for them to start strong relationships with either their peers or adults. Some manage by resorting to either drugs or alcohol [66].

Spiritual and moral effects can also take place [67]. The experience of indifference from the immediate world or the wickedness can drive youths to suffer loss of meaning in their creation of themselves in their world. They may have to shift their ethical structure and steal, lie

and engage into prostitution to live [68]. They may have their moral structure compulsorily ripped to pieces and substituted with training to either unleash violence or murder as part of a militia force.

Several youths are subjected to rape and sexual violence [69, 70]. Young women can have babies in the process, or are so hurt and damaged that they will not be able to bear children in the future. These youths usually lose their social life [71]. Girls who are raped could be ostracised by society and miss marriage chances. Boys who are forced to turn into youth militias are usually expelled from their communities because of the violence they perpetrated on their communities and own families. Youths often lose their communities and their cultures during conflicts, sometimes having it rebuilt in diaspora situations or refugee.

RESULTS

The study found out several responses that are presented to answer the following set objectives. All the 120 questionnaires were returned and completed. They were then processed using SPSS, which then created some valuable themes. However, the findings are presented as per the objectives with the themes coming in as sub-themes under objectives.

- Their perceptions of the violence
- What the youth are going through post the violence era
- How the victims are coping with the effects

Demographics of Participants: The demographic distribution of the participants was as follows;

Their Perceptions of the Violence: Youths contacted in the study described a series of traumatic experiences occasioning from violence (56) [93%], state collapse (28) [47%] and forced displacement (43) [72%].

The responses indicated that what they witnessed was unbelievable. With regards to violence, it was indicated that some victims had their arms amputated, ears cut off and publicly raped during the political violence. While most participating youths did not really witness the *Gukurahundi* crisis, they only described the challenges that they are facing regarding acquisition of identification documents like birth certificates and national identity cards in the absence of their biological parents. Some in the Matebeleland region indicated that they have been

Table 1: Demographic Distribution

Province	District	18-25yrs		25-35yrs		36-45yr		46-++yrs		Total
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Mtshatshata	Mzimba	3	2	3	2	1	4	5	0	20
Bulawayo	Entumbane	3	2	4	1	2	3	2	3	20
Harare	Seke	3	2	2	3	3	2	0	5	20
Harare	Mufakose	2	3	1	4	3	2	3	2	20
Mashonaland Central	Chipadze	1	4	3	2	2	3	2	3	20
Mashonaland Central	Glendale	4	1	2	3	4	1	3	2	20
	Adults	12	17	13	18	60				
	Youths	18	13	17	12	60				

told that the *Gukurahundi* was a deliberate exercise to exterminate the Ndebele people. Participating youths indicated that it was painful seeing their ‘homes’ coming down with all their possessions getting reduced to trash. One youth said this;

What was most worrying was the fact that the Police details that were pulling our houses down showed no remorse or sympathy as if their lives were in good shape. Most of them are our neighbours.

Adult participants also revealed that it was touching either witnessing or getting victimised during the violence episodes as there was nowhere to lodge complaints. It was the state driving the crusade.

Fifty eight (97%) indicated that the actions were just extreme, excessive and barbaric given the magnitude of the problems at hand. Of those, 37 (64%) who witnessed the *Gukurahundi* indicated that witnesses were not allowed to shed tears no matter how much one was touched. Often, they said, it caused anxiety, neurosis, attention deficits and insomnia, confusion and memory problems in the long run. One said this;

The killers actually enjoyed it. Enjoyed seeing us cry and having our *makhelwani* (neighbours) die just like that in cold blood. It was really a case of ethnic extermination.

Two adult participants (3%) simply responded by writing that ‘It is indescribable’.

Twenty-three adult participants (38%) reported that what contributed to their distress was loss of employment and failure to regain positions of commensurate status after they had absented from their jobs trying to attend to challenges of either accommodation of having relatives brutally tortured.

Twenty (33%) youths reported experience as violence perpetrators during the 2008 election violence.

Twenty-nine(48%) reported of drug addiction, separation from family, loss of assets, insecurity and the threat of revenge violence as some of the issues that they associate with violence. They also witnessed some victims suffering from these: hysteria, depression, insanity, paranoia and psychosis.

What the Youth Are Going Through Post the Violence

Era: Exposure to violence has undoubtedly been established to lead to high levels of stress among youths which has been linked with the growth of a host of psychological challenges. The study established that from the 60 youth participants, 52 (87%) had gone through some serious stress especially emanating from the 2004 *Murambatsvina* episode where they had witnessed their homes getting razed to the ground and left in the open. Similarly, the 2008 political violence had exposed the youth to some heinous scenes; seeing their relatives and neighbours getting either severely beaten or having their arms amputated in cold blood.

The study found that, in some youths, uncharacteristic withdrawal from the world has been recorded. It was established that 38 youths (64%) had decided to lead lonely lives with eight (21%) of them choosing never to marry.

Some turn out to be emotionless like a robot. According to 24 adult participants (40%), there were some affected youths who had literally lost their feelings due to the experienced violence in their childhood.

Thirty-six adult participants (60%) reported seeing some emotional outbreaks of hysterical type from the youths who had gone through traumatic violence especially the *Gukurahundi* crisis and the 2008 political violence.

The study established that in general, sooner or later the youths return to good relations with the outer world. 40 youth participants (67%) reported that they had however managed to let go of some of the traumatic and stressing experiences after deliberately engaging in some programmes that occupied them and allowed them to develop socially and economically.

Fifty-three adult participants (88%) reported that some of the youths had eventually managed to adapt to the new situation especially after finding work to keep them busy and empower them economically.

It was found that youths who had been affected by violence had become unsympathetic to the grief of others.

Twenty youth participants (33%) indicated that they were not worried about what their victims in violence episodes go through. All they are interested in is seeing them suffer in order to record victory.

The same sentiments were also echoed by 28 adult participants (47%) who reported that most of the former violence victims showed no mercy when they are perpetrating violence on their rivals. They indicated that when these youths unleash terror, they show some elements of anger, wrath and revenge.

How the Victims Are Coping with the Effects: Youthful nature has some ways at its disposal to deal with the unexpected, deprivations and disappointments in life. Of the 60 youths, it was found out that 42 (70%) had internally developed coping mechanisms. Of these, 21 (50%) had turned to delinquency in their local communities, 12 (29%) had resorted to marriages while 20 (48%) had turned to some religious and spiritual help.

Some youth reported that after going through horrific atrocities, they had managed to adapt with minimal symptomatology. 34 (57%) indicated that they had managed to get counselling support from close family members and other peers. They revealed that there was no deliberate support from the state despite the need. In the case of the 28 (47%) *Murambatsvina* challenge victims, they revealed that the support from the various civil society organisations kept them on their feet.

Some of the protective factors that were identified by 36 (60%) youth participants include the following: the youths' ability to diagnose and dodge risks, the youths' capacity to use adults for support activities and the youths' ability to manage anxiety.

The other 24 participating youths (40%) indicated that they now enjoy participating in the violence activities especially during election times and other national stay-away and protests where they also take an opportunity to enrich themselves through looting and other illicit activities. Of these, 11 (46%) from Chipadze and Glendale revealed that they had actively participated in the 2008 election violence.

There were also 13 (22%) participating youths from Chipadze, Glendale, Seke and Mufakose who indicated that they actively participated during the November 2017 coup solidarity protests, 01 August 2018 election results protests and the 14 January fuel price increase protests.

These 13 youths indicated that they strongly believed that quick solutions to some of the socio-political and economic challenges in Zimbabwe were in violent means.

There were 44 (73%) adult participants who reported that they knew of some youths who had turned to some economic projects to make a living. Some youths had also, through education, transformed their attitudes towards life and behaviours in public.

Twenty-two (37%) adult participants indicated that there were some youth victims of some of the violence episodes who seriously required clinical interventions to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They also noted that most of the affected youths often resort to drug abuse and become anti-social or restlessness.

Fourteen (23%) adult participants explained some of the behaviours that they had observed in the affected youths classifying them as; hallucinations, emotional distress, delusions, unusualness, social deviance and maladaptive behaviours among others.

DISCUSSION

After analysing all the data, various conclusions and interpretations are deduced and explained separately. It has been noted [72] that exposure to violence leads to high levels of pressure among youths which has been linked with the development of a lot of psychological challenges. It was therefore impossible for youths to experience such disturbances without presenting their consequence in difficult behaviour and in deviations from the normal. Youths who have either witnessed or directly gone through violence are definitely affected in different ways.

The study found that time heals and the affected youths had greatly recovered. However, the recovery time is determined by issues like healing in post-traumatic era, degree of harm, the managing abilities of the youth which is again dependent on the age of the affected youth. There is also need for a strong supporting background especially the family and other state sponsored social services. In certain instances, youths subjected to lots of violence and destruction at young ages can have a heart that could be scratched no more. They get unconcerned to the miseries of others as noted by Jimerson *et al.* [73].

Despite the substantiation in research that exposure to violence could result high levels of trauma and the development of PTSD symptoms, psychological studies have not adequately researched the impact of the experience on mental health among youths in Zimbabwe. The prevalent experience of potentially distressing events in Zimbabwe has had a noticeable effect on, health and well-being, including long-term psychological and physical damage to the adults and youths alike.

According to local studies, more than a million youths in Zimbabwe could be in need of clinical assistance, including psychotherapy.

Although youths' preliminary exposure to violence related shock could have been moderately constrained in time and space, there are a range of ancillary stressors in the aftermath of violence, which continue to have an effect on the youths and their families. Some of the stressors include loss and separation from valuable family members, social and economic trouble, hunger and illnesses. These were evident in the cases of families that lost either, their possessions, hard-earned financial savings or jobs. In means that there is no longer subsistence money, medical aid security in the event of illnesses and probably irreversible displacement due to the gravity of property destruction.

It was established that the psychological effects of violence on youths depend on an array of factors like the pre-war situation, atrocities to which the youths are exposed during the violence and post-violence circumstances. However, regardless of exposure to a range of horrendous violence not all exposed youths display long-term health challenges and some youths can acclimatise with insignificant symptomatology.

The study found that the youths engaged different defences and coping tactics against stressors to safeguard their psychological and emotional well-being similar to those posited by Thomas *et al.* [74]. Generally, some of the protective elements that were used by the youth are the following: the youths' capability to identify and circumvent risks, the youths' aptitude to use adults for support activities and the youths' ability to cope with anxiety. Other factors comprise the degree of community, social and family cohesiveness and supposed social, as well as common ethics and beliefs systems with youths and those around them. Biological and temperamental factors moderating trauma response have been cited. Although youths revealed few psychological reactions in response to their experience of being in violence, this was transformed with increased proximity to the area of violence and the amount and lethality of exposure. The study established that the psychological effects of violence on youths depend on a variety of factors such as the pre-violence scenario, atrocities to which the youth is subjected during violence and post-violence situations.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that any form and gravity of exposure to some form of violence is bad for human beings. It is even worse for youths to experience violence

since they will learn bad habits and start to believe that violence places one on a higher and better position than the others. This is the time in their lives when they learn the ropes and often times choose their career paths.

The study also concludes that essential services such as basic health care, education and counselling, are often interrupted or get difficult to get to during violent situations. Shock and absence of social support are particularly detrimental to youths and could have permanent effects on their mental and physical health. When social structures collapse in the face of violence and insecurity, youths often participate in high-risk drug use, street gangs or sexual behaviour.

The study concludes that there are a series of ancillary stressors as a result of violence, which continue to have an effect on the youths and their families. However, it is concluded that in most cases, the youths employ a variety of defences and coping strategies against stressors to protect their emotional and psychological well-being. The study also concludes that violence situations are never the same and therefore, interventions can never be the same; they have to be tailor-made for specific situations.

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