

Fall 2018

Psychological Effects of Genocide Participation: The Perspective of Perpetrators

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SIT Study Abroad

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Psychological Effects of Genocide Participation:
The Perspective of Perpetrators

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December 2018

World Learning - SIT Study Abroad

Rwanda: Post Genocide Restoration and Peace-Building Program

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List of Abbreviations

MRND - The National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development

TIG - “Travail d’Intérêt Général (Works of General Service)

PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

ARCT - Ruhuka - Rwandan Association of Trauma Counselors

BDI - Beck Depression Inventory

RCS - Rwanda Correctional Service

MDE - Major Depressive Episode

PFR - Prison Fellowship Rwanda

Abstract

The 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi exposed an entire population to unimaginable acts of violence and created severe and lasting psychological effects for all who were involved. This study focuses on this impact in those who participated in the genocide, acknowledging that committing crime carries a psychological burden and in many cases traumatizes the perpetrator. Through interviews conducted with ten genocide perpetrators and four professionals who have worked closely with them, the study describes the impacts of genocide participation, analyzes various coping strategies, and explores the psychological counseling processes for perpetrators in Rwanda today. Results suggest that genocide participation has a persistent and lasting effect on the mental health of perpetrators today, with many participants displaying signs of trauma in line with PTSD. Mechanisms such as sharing their pain with others, joining community support groups, and seeking forgiveness from their victims seem to elevate these negative effects. Currently there are many programs designed to provide counseling services to perpetrators, yet they remain reserved about utilizing those recourses, and there remains a stigma surrounding perpetrators seeking counseling in Rwanda today.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my Academic Director, Celine Mukamurenzi, for her endless support and dedication throughout all stages of this program and paper. Celine was always available and willing to provide guidance, connect me with sources, and help me formulate my thoughts throughout this entire process and I truly could not have completed it without her help.

I would also like to thank the rest of the SIT Staff: Mercy and Sunday, for making sure all our needs were met throughout the duration of this program. They worked tirelessly to ensure we were all supported, comfortable and cared for, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

Further thanks go to my Advisor, Eugene Rutembesa, for his guidance in this process. Our first meeting helped me find a starting place for this project and turned my ideas into a tangible plan, and the sources and information he provided me with helped to further guide my research.

I owe the most gratitude to my wonderful translator, Fred Rutagenwa, without whom I would not have been able to conduct my interviews. He was incredibly professional, accommodating, and always made the interviews feel relaxed and conversational, I am extremely thankful to have had his help in this process.

Additionally I would like to thank my incredible host family, Mugisha, Diane, Kendra, Ken, and Kellia, for welcoming me into their home and making me feel like a part of their family. Their support made my time in Rwanda that much more special. I would also like to thank the other students in my program, particularly my house mates, Cristina and Amelia, who became my second host family here.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to my participants. Both the perpetrators who were willing and brave enough to share their personal stories with me, and to the professionals who work to tirelessly to support the mental healing processes of those in Rwanda today.

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Chapter I: General Introduction and Background of the Study

Throughout *Psychological Effects of Genocide Participation: The Perspective of Perpetrators*, I acknowledge that committing a crime has a psychological impact and in many cases traumatizes the perpetrator. In a genocide, the impact of participation is greater than that of ordinary crime as it carries tremendous consequences for the perpetrator's place within their family, community, and national history. Furthermore, it holds weight for their decedents' place in society as well. From the perspective of the perpetrators, I examine the effects of genocide participation on their daily lives in their families and communities, the symptoms of trauma they face, and specific coping mechanisms they have developed for living with the guilt of their past. Additionally, I investigate the psychological counseling programs available to perpetrators, and the public opinions surrounding their use of those resources. Lastly, I explore how perpetrators view their role within Rwanda today, and messages they hope to relay to the future generation.

1.1. Background of the Study

Beginning on April 6th 1994, over one million Rwandan Tutsis and were killed by their friends, neighbors, and in some cases family members in what would become the second internationally recognized genocide of the 20th century. During this period, hate radio stations such as RTLM were used to dehumanize Tutsis, comparing them to cockroaches in need of extermination. Led by the MRND party comprised of Hutu Extremists, ordinary citizens were encouraged to participate in the attempt to exterminate the Tutsi population and anyone seen as their supporters, meaning those who did not participate in the killing were in danger of falling into the second category.

Many of those who participated in the killings did so willingly for a multitude of reasons. Some were convinced through propaganda that their actions were justified, while others knew they were in the wrong, yet participated for personal gain in the form of the property they stood inherit from their victims. Others killed reluctantly, believing they had no other choice and acting out of self preservation. Regardless of the how they justified their actions, every perpetrator is guilty of taking part in a genocide and must live with that knowledge for the rest of their life.

The past studies including the Milgram Experiment (1963) and the Stanford Prison Experiment (1971), sought to investigate the role authority played in the average person's potential to do harm to others. Unintentionally, these studies also revealed the resulting trauma of realizing one's own potential for evil. In the Milgram experiment, participants were lead to believe they administered lethal electric shocks to innocent people as instructed by an authority figure, while in the Stanford prison experiment, participants were given positions of power when assigned the role of "prison guard" and the opportunity to abuse those positions. In the aftermath of both studies, which have since become famous for their questionable ethics, participants were left appalled by their actions and horrified at their willingness to inflict harm on others. While these two instances were conducted in lab settings over short periods of time, they shed enormous light on the capacity for evil within ordinary people in given circumstances, as well as the long term psychological effects of realizing that capacity within one's self.

The Rwandan Genocide against Tutsis exemplifies the findings of these experiments on the scale of an entire country. Those who participated in the genocide did so in part because they were instructed to by figures of authority, while participation in turn elevated citizens to positions of power over their victims. Participants in the two lab experiments, while experiencing lasting trauma from reconciling their capacity for evil, were able to find comfort in the fact that no one was actually harmed. In the case of Rwanda, perpetrators are reminded that indescribable amount of harm was done as they face the descendants of their victims, their own families, and the aftermath of their crimes in their communities on a daily basis. Thus, the genocide perpetrators of Rwanda must carry a great mental burden as the result of their participation.

1.2. Research Problem

In the aftermath of the Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwandans faced the seemingly impossible task of rebuilding their country and attempting to return to normal life. Following mass atrocities, rebuilding efforts typically follow a pattern of support for survivors and punishment for perpetrators. In the case of Rwanda, many efforts have been made to promote unity and reconciliation through restorative justice processes such as Gacaca and and TIG, which encourage forgiveness and reconciliation rather than punishment alone. Following this trend, in

order for true reconciliation to occur, the psychological needs of the entire population must be addressed. Addressing grief and trauma and survivors is essential to ensuring they are able to heal and participate fully in society. Therefore, addressing the harmful effects of guilt and shame found in perpetrators is also necessary to ensuring their full and willing participation in efforts to rebuild the country and engage in the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

1.3. Research Purpose and Objectives

The study aims to discover the psychological burdens that perpetrators live with today as a result of their participation in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, and to identify the impact of those effects on their daily lives, within their families and communities. Furthermore it aims to uncover coping mechanisms perpetrators use to live with those burdens, and return to life within their communities.

1.4. Research Questions:

1. What psychological effects are perpetrators living with as a result of their participation?
2. What impact do these effects have on their daily lives?
3. What coping mechanisms have they developed for living with these effects?
4. Have they sought help in dealing with the effects and what recourses are available to them in this respect?
5. What are the public and personal views around perpetrators seeking counseling?
6. What do they see as their role within Rwanda today?

Chapter II: Research Methodology

2.1. Scope of the Study

This study took place in Kigali, Rwanda over a four week period beginning on November 3rd, 2018, and ending on December 2nd, 2018. Falling under the scientific domain of psychology, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the the lasting effects of committing a crime, and living in a post genocide society as someone who participated in that genocide. It incorporates two populations of interest: perpetrators in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and professionals who have worked closely with them by providing counseling services, collecting their testimonies, or collaborating with them on various reconciliation projects. Samples from both target populations were selected on a volunteer basis and the availability of the participants. From the broader population of genocide perpetrators, the selected sample comprised ten individuals who were tried during the Gacaca Courts, confessed to their involvement, and served out their sentences in the TIG program. All ten participants today live freely within their communities, and are a part of the Testimony and Forgiveness Village. I was able to find my participants from this sample through SIT's connections with their association.

The sample of professionals encompassed four individuals working as professional psychologists, government officials, and NGO employees, who were able to offer insights on the psychological state of perpetrators, and programs available for their counseling and reintegration in Rwanda today. Two of these participants I found through their connections to SIT, one of whom put me in contact with the third participant of this category. The fourth professional I found through my local connections with individuals I met during NGO site visits.

2.2. Data Collection Techniques

The study utilized qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with genocide perpetrators and the professionals who work alongside them. For the perpetrator participants, the nature of the study was highly personal and required them to reflect on topics that carry great weight in their current lives, thus I conducted individual interviews that allowed them to speak freely on personal experiences and gave them ample time to reflect on difficult moments. The ten

interviews I conducted with genocide perpetrators took place over two sessions. During the first session, I spoke with five individuals at the Testimony and Reconciliation Village in Nyamata, an location where perpetrators live alongside survivors with the goal of caring for them and rebuilding the community. For the second session I met with the remaining five participants at the SIT head office in Kacyiru, Kigali. Both of these areas were fairly private and provided a safe and comfortable space for the participants to share their thoughts openly, without fear of judgement. As most of the perpetrators in my sample spoke little or no English, I worked closely with a translator to carry out the interviews in their native language of Kinyarwanda. I began each interview with a set list of questions, which evolved into a more natural conversation tailored to the participants' individual experiences.

For my interviews with professionals, I was able to conduct them in English and thus employed a less structured, more conversational style. I began by asking them first to share their experiences working with perpetrators and any insights they may have on my topic, before transitioning to questions tailored to their specific field and the nature of their work. The first professional, Jane Abatoni, works as a counselor with ARCT - Ruhuka. Our discussion focused on an overview of ARCT's programs for counseling perpetrators, signs of trauma and psychological distress she sees in the perpetrators she works with, and her insights on attitudes surrounding perpetrators seeking counseling services. The second professional works as the director of Public Relations at the Prison Fellowship Rwanda. He was able to give me a broad overview of PFR's many initiatives for supporting prisoners, changes he sees in the prisoners who go through the programs, and community benefits. I also spoke with Edouard Bamporiki, author of *My Son it is a Long Story: Reflections of Genocide Perpetrators*, on the mental state of the perpetrators whose testimonies he collected for his book. Additionally, Bamporiki shared his opinions on prisoners' willingness to seek professional help and views surrounding counseling for them. Lastly, I interviewed Chrispin Mizero, a film director who recently produced a short movie on the reconciliation of perpetrators just outside of Kigali. Similarly to Bamporiki, he was able to touch on signs of distress and coping mechanisms in those he worked with. I met with all of the professionals I interviewed at their respective offices.

2.3. Ethical Values Observed During the Study

Since the study took place in a post-genocide society and primarily focused on issues of trauma relating to that genocide, there were many ethical concerns to take into account. The first of which being the nature of my interview questions. Designed to assess whether the participants were experiencing lasting effects and signs of trauma from their involvement in the genocide, they had the potential to bring up traumatic memories and potentially re-traumatize the participant. To avoid this, I informed participants before hand they did not need to answer any questions they felt were too difficult, and that they were free to stop the interview if at any point it felt too upsetting. Additionally, I used my judgment and the judgment of my translator to assess whether people were having a difficult time during the interviews, and at one point stopped one early when it seemed the questions were upsetting the participant. Furthermore, given the highly personal nature of the questions, I agreed not to use the names of the perpetrators who participated in the study, and refer to them in the results by their participant numbers.

2.4. Limitations of the Study

2.4.1. Scheduling and Time

Given that the study took place over a short span of time, with a language barrier, and in a post genocide society, several limitations were present, the first of which being the issue of scheduling. With four weeks to carry out data collection and write up my findings, the actual time frame I had for interviews was fairly limited. Aside from a few transportation difficulties, coordinating interviews with the perpetrators ran fairly smoothly. Scheduling interviews with professionals proved more challenging, especially since I was coordinating around their weekly work schedules and our meetings were subject to last minute cancellations if something more pressing came up. While I managed to meet with four individuals, there was one representative I wished to speak with, and that my study would have benefited from, who was never available to meet with me. Additionally, time posed a limitation for the scope of the study. Obtaining a permit to go conduct interviews within the prisons was beyond my four week time constraint, thus the study does not encompass the full population of perpetrators within the country.

2.4.2. Language Barrier

The second, and perhaps greatest, challenge I faced while conducting this study was the existence of a significant language barrier between myself and my interviewees. I was fortunate enough to have a skilled translator who understood the objectives of my project and was committed to the success of my interviews. However, throughout the interviews I could tell there were some questions that didn't translate the way I intended them to, despite my rephrasing them. Additionally, certain questions that seemed very clear to me in English appeared to confuse my participants when translated into Kinyarwanda, and for those questions I would get a variety of answers unrelated to what I had originally asked. However, after some additional rephrasing and specification, those questions seemed to translate more or less as I intended them.

2.4.3. Post-Genocide Context: Ethics and Reliability

Given the post-genocide context for this study, there were additional issues related to the sensitive and personal nature of my questions. Many of the interview questions involved perpetrators reflecting on challenging and emotional periods of their lives. During her interview, one woman appeared to become increasingly distraught as she recounted the challenges in her daily life brought on by memories of her past. Observing this, I asked my translator to let her know we could stop the interview if she found the questions too upsetting. She responded that remembering her past was always incredibly painful and she would appreciate not having to think about it anymore. While I believed stopping early was the ethical decision, it proved challenging for my data collection as I only got through half of the questions for that participant. Another challenge related to the post-genocide context was the reliability of information I received from my sources. Given the context, people often have a difficult time trusting those they do not know on a personal level. Therefore, there is a strong chance that people were not entirely forthcoming with the testimonies they shared with me, and in some cases may have simply been relaying what they thought I wanted to hear.

2.4.4. Sampling Biases

A further challenge that may have impacted my results was the sample of perpetrators selected. The perpetrators I had access to were those already released and living freely within their communities. Due to this, my study is only representative of that population and does not include perpetrators still imprisoned for their crimes or currently serving in TIG. Therefore the study can only be an accurate representation of the psychological effects of participating in the genocide for those released in the community today, rather than the entire population of genocide perpetrators. Furthermore, the study is subject to voluntary response bias as all ten perpetrators were selected on a volunteer basis, meaning those who were not willing to participate may have options that differ from those who were, and are thus under-represented in this study. Additionally, all volunteers were found through the Testimony and Reconciliation Village organization, and likely have similar perspectives to each other that differ from those who are not members of the organization.

Chapter III: Literature Review and Definition of Key Terms

A review of past literature encompassed subject areas relating to trauma in those who have committed crimes, coping mechanisms for overcoming the psychological effects caused by harm-doing, direct experiences of former perpetrators in Rwanda, and the roles shame and guilt play in restorative justice processes. The review revealed many themes relevant to the study at hand, as well as gaps in prior knowledge that the current study seeks to answer.

3.1. The Psychological Effects of Crime

Numerous studies relating to the after effects of harm-doing revealed that prisoners face a variety of psychological challenges as a result of committing violent crime. Vanhooren, Leijssen, and Dezutter (2017) found that all ten prisoners interviewed for their study struggled with recurring feelings of loss, shame, guilt, and despair, and challenges in attempting to re-define their identities in light of their crimes. Additionally, they expressed feeling dehumanized by the prison system, as well as former acquaintances who viewed them as monsters, rather than people. The theme of feeling dehumanized was echoed among those imprisoned immediately following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Furthermore, prisoners in Rwanda faced similar issues grappling with their new found criminal identities (Tertsakian 2011) and experienced “I-It Relationships” characterized by one party treating the other as though they are less than human (Vanhooren, Leijssen and Dezutter 2017).

Additional studies uncovered further negative psychological effects in those who commit crime. Chung, Di, and Wan (2016) found that 37% of the 339 male prisoners tested in their study suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the violent crimes they committed. Furthermore, 14% were found to suffer from partial PTSD (participants were assessed using the complete PTSD diagnostic scale). Negative effects of PTSD exhibited in the participants included decreased psychological functioning, difficulty sleeping, inability to get in touch with feelings (an indication that some prisoners had developed Alexithymia), and flashbacks to past trauma. Two additional studies which sought to explore the relationship between past harm-doing and current psychological health had similar findings, exhibiting that those who do harm often suffer from intrusive thoughts in the form of memories and flashbacks,

hyper-awareness of their actions, and nightmares (Hagai & Crosby 2015; Louis, Amiot, & Thomas 2015).

In addition to the above findings, the work done by Hagai and Crosby (2015) revealed those who participate in instances of collective violence often suffer from moral injury, which occurs as “individuals move from a context in which killing/harming are encouraged to a post-conflict context in which killing is seen as immoral/unjust.” This phenomenon is incredibly relevant in the case of Rwanda, where many participated in the genocide because it was encouraged and even mandated by the government, to later be viewed as criminals post-genocide for actions that were legal during the fact.

3.2. Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders in Rwandan Prison System

Limited research exists on current rates psychological trauma in Rwandan perpetrators, however, previous studies done by ARCT-Ruhuka (2011), and Foundation DiDé (2018), both in conjunction with the Rwandan Correctional Service, indicated the prevalence of mental health disorders within the Rwandan Prison System. Assessed through the PTSD Checklist, the study from ARCT-Ruhuka (2011) found that 56.25% of genocide perpetrators within the Kigali Central Prison suffer from PTSD, while BDI results revealed that 93.75% have experienced severe depression, and 6.25% moderate depression. In Foundation DiDé's (2018) investigation of Prisons across all districts of Rwanda, 50.732% of prisoners were found to have at least one psychiatric disorder, with 14.5% suffering from PTSD, and 30.25% experiencing MDE. These findings highlight the substantial mental health problem within Rwanda prisons, and while not addressing the population of perpetrators currently released within their communities, they indicate that trauma likely exists in that population as well.

3.3. Coping Mechanisms

Past research reviewed shed light on various coping mechanisms used by harm doers to deal with the trauma of their crimes and come to terms with their criminal identities. Some of the coping mechanisms explored were unhealthy and indicated the absence of psychological healing following criminal action (Louis, Amiot & Thomas, 2015; Vanhooren, Leijssen, & Dezutter

2017: Chung, Di, & Wan, 2016: King & Sakamoto, 2015: Hagai & Crosby, 2015), while others were found to promote positive outcomes and resulted in perpetrators redefining their meanings in life and within their communities (Vanhooren, Leijssen, & Dezutter, 2014: King & Sakamoto, 2015).

Numerous unhealthy coping mechanisms explored in past research followed the common theme of allowing perpetrators to avoid recognizing and taking responsibility for their crimes, thus preventing them from moving past them. Vanhooren, Leijssen & Dezutter (2017), found that former prisoners often turned to substance abuse as way of coping with their criminal identities, while the findings of Chung, Di, and Wan (2016) indicate that prisoners are at risk of developing Alexithymia as a way of regulating their emotional distress. Both of these strategies are related to an individual's acknowledgment of their crimes, but inability to deal with the emotional burden of what they have done.

In contrast, the work of Louis, Amiot, and Thomas (2015) revealed that in testimonies given to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, perpetrators used specific narratives and fell back on military language to distance themselves from their crimes and thereby avoid taking responsibility for their involvement. This type of language is reflected in the testimonies of Rwandan prisoners in the book: *My Son, It is a Long Story: Reflections of Genocide Perpetrators*, by Bamporiki Edouard. While a large number of the testimonies express acknowledgment of wrong doing, some rely heavily on military terms such as "ordered," "commanders," "surrendered," and so on, indicating that some prisoners have yet to accept full responsibility for their actions (Bamporiki 2017).

Aside from the use of military language, additional past research indicates that former perpetrators in Rwanda have developed coping mechanisms of silence and social isolation, through an attitude known as *nyamwigendaho*, or minding one's own business (Hagai & Crosby, 2015 : King & Sakamoto, 2015). In the community based culture of Rwanda, these coping mechanisms can be incredibly detrimental, eliminating any support the individual may gain in the healing process, as well as sending a message to the community that they do not wish to take responsibility and begin the reconciliation process for what they have done.

Despite the multitude of negative coping strategies found, past research also unveiled positive coping mechanisms as well. The work of Vanhooren, Leijssen, and Dezutter (2017) highlights the ways in which prisoners were able to use their incarceration periods to positively change their self perceptions and world outlooks. Prisoners within the study were able to find support in family members who observed positive changes in their behavior and encouraged them to push forward, religious institutions, and counseling services. Positive changes they saw within themselves included higher levels of self worth, the ability to ask for help, perseverance, relational changes, and a shift towards making life affirming choices.

While the work of Vanhooren, Leijssen, and Dezutter (2017) explored positive coping strategies for individual prisoners within the United States, King and Sakamoto's (2015) study dealt directly with survivors and perpetrators in post-genocide Rwanda. After observing participants from the group: Healing of Life Wounds (HLW), a community based program which brings together Hutu and Tutsi for mutual healing, the authors stated that both victims and perpetrators agreed the best approach for moving forward and bringing peace and healing to all those involved was to bring both sides together in the same space and confront the problems which divided them.

3.4. The Role of Shame and Guilt in Restorative Justice

Further research by Rodogno (2008) connects the negative psychological effects of crime to the topic of restorative justice as a whole. Through examining the roles of shame and guilt in restorative justice conferences, Rodogno concludes that both emotions can be helpful and detrimental to the conference goals. Shame is characterized as the way offenders see themselves and encompasses feelings of embarrassment and humiliation. Offenders experiencing shame will often feel the desire to hide, escape or even strike back. For restorative justice conferences that aim to have offenders take responsibility for their actions and pay their victims symbolic reparations in the form of apologies, these reactions are not welcome. However, shame is also linked to feelings of remorse, and the state of being ashamed, in which an offender realizes that people he cares about feel shame on his behalf, both of which can encourage offenders to take responsibility for their actions, and are thus productive to restorative justice (Rodogno, 2008).

Guilt, on the other hand, is characterized as how the offender sees their actions effecting others and is associated with the action tendencies to confess, apologize, and repair, all of which coincide with the goals of restorative justice. However, offenders experiencing guilt often tend to focus on the deed itself rather than others involved, which can provide challenges in reconciliation processes as well (Rodogno 2008). This research has applications in Rwanda today, where restorative justice processes have become a key part of the reconciliation efforts.

3.5. Key Terms Defined

For the purpose of this study the critical terms will be defined as follows:

Perpetrator - An individual convicted for any level of crime committed during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi

Trauma - The development of emotional issues, including but not limited to anger, sadness, guilt, PTSD, sleep difficulties, and challenges maintaining interpersonal relationships, following a distressing life event

PTSD - A serious psychological condition brought on by witnessing or taking part in a traumatic event, characterized through persistent and reoccurring memories of the events accompanied by intense emotional and physical reactions. Symptoms may include: flashbacks, nightmares, psychical reactions to memories, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating, heightened reactivity, and episodes of depression and anxiety (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018).

Psychological Effects - Any emotions, feelings, or conditions which alter an individual's base level of mental functioning as the result of that individual's actions

Shame - An emotion encompassing feelings of embarrassment and humiliation, typically experienced after one commits a negative act. Elicits thoughts of feeling small, worthless, or powerless in the effected individual, and encourages the action tendencies of hiding, escaping or striking back. Individuals suffering from shame are preoccupied by how others perceive them (Rodogno 2008).

Guilt - An emotion of responsibility or remorse for an offense, characterized by feelings of tension and regret, and accompanied by action tendencies of confessing, apologizing, and

repairing damage. Individuals suffering from guilt are typically concerned with how their actions affect others (Rodogno 2008).

Flashback - An involuntary, recurrent memory of a past experience or elements of that experience

Sleep Disturbances - Any difficulties in falling or maintaining sleep throughout the night, including nightmares

Nightmare - A frightening or unpleasant dream

Intrusive Thoughts - Thoughts which have an impact on an individual's everyday life and ability to concentrate on routine activities

Physical Reactions to Memories - Any bodily reaction or combination of reactions (i.e. increased heart rate, sweating, trembling or shaking, stomach pain, etc...) that accompanies an individual's memories of the past

Coping Mechanisms - Strategies individuals use to maintain emotional stability while suffering from trauma or other conditions that damage their mental well being

Reconciliation - The processes of restoring positive feelings between two or more groups who have experienced conflict with one another

Reintegration - The process of rejoining society after a period of incarceration

Restorative Justice - A justice process which seeks to repair the harm of the crimes and end cycles of violence by encouraging perpetrators to take responsibility for their actions and make amends to their victims

Chapter IV: Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of the Data

4.1. Perpetrator Background: Life and Self Image Before Genocide

In order to fully assess how involvement in the genocide has a continued impact on the lives of perpetrators, I began by establishing a baseline for how my interviewees characterized themselves and recounted their lives before participation. The following figure includes the basic demographics of the ten perpetrators, as well as brief descriptions of how they lived and viewed themselves prior to the genocide.

Figure 1: Participant Demographics and Life Before Participation

Participant	Gender	Age	Life Before Genocide	Self Description
Participant 1	Male	52	Married with 5 children, worked as farmer, middle income	A friendly, accommodating guy, lived in harmony
Participant 2	Female	70	Had a much better life, came from wealthy family	A cool mom, quiet, peaceful, lived well with neighbors
Participant 3	Female	71	Had a good life, much better than current one. Married with 9 kids, but some health issues.	Peaceful mother, lovely, honest, supportive
Participant 4	Male	61	A farmer and shopkeeper, lived with his wife and five kids, lived well	Easy going, loved peace, lived in harmony with others
Participant 5	Male	45	Young, single, worked as a farmer	A normal guy, very respectful
Participant 6	Male	56	Married with 5 kids, worked as a farmer	Lived well with others, hardworking, involved in the community
Participant 7	Female	62	Had no problems, married to lovely husband and had 6 kids, worked as a farmer alongside husband	Very welcoming, friendly, and loving
Participant 8	Male	62	Married with 2 kids, worked as a farmer	A peacemaker, humble, kind, lived a commendable life
Participant 9	Male	60	Married with 5 kids, worked as a farmer	Nicknamed “the lamp of God,” not angry or a fighting guy, friendly and lived well with others
Participant 10	Male	49	Lived a very good, standard life. Still lived with parents, worked at a brewing company	Had good character but was young, got in fights and arguments occasionally

As seen above, all ten interviewees described their lives in positive terms, using phrases such as “I lived much better,” and “I had no problems.” Many of them shared anecdotes of how they lived in harmony within their communities, got along well with their neighbors, and were generally peaceful people. Aside from one male participant who acknowledged he occasionally engaged in fights and “youth behavior,” all other participants avoided mentioning any sort of violence and used exclusively positive terms to characterize themselves during that period of their lives.

The data illustrates how the interviewees idealized their lives before the genocide. While I was not expecting people to describe themselves in negative ways, the adjectives they chose were entirely at odds with their later actions and self images during the genocide. It appeared they viewed the two periods of their lives as separate, and many of them placed the cause of this distinction on the government and others around them, rather than on a change within themselves. From these answers I identified the beginnings of a shift in self identity among my interviewees, from the peaceful, idealized individuals of their past, to their current perceptions of themselves as morally damaged from their involvement.

4.2. Genocide Involvement: Explanations, Emotions, and Shift in Self Perception

When I asked people to describe their involvement in the genocide, I received responses that varied in length and detail. People tended to give long-winded back stories, explaining the entire situation and putting their actions in perspective with the greater social context. Aside from one male interviewee who simply stated, “I played a large role in the genocide, I participated to the fullest extent,” no one directly said what they had done without first explaining the role of the government, the social pressure from those around them, and the threat to their own lives if they did not participate. I noted these lengthy responses as a coping mechanism for dealing with the shift in their identities from average citizens to genocide perpetrators. They wanted to make it clear to me that they did not commit their crimes in a vacuum, and that many factors contributed to their genocidal actions. Those I interviewed were sentenced through the Gacaca Courts for a range of crimes, including: keeping secret the death of Tutsi killed under their protection, giving

up the hiding places of their Tutsi neighbors, joining a mob of killers and acting as a bystander, killing as part of a group, and killing individually.

Along with descriptions of their actions, I asked my participants to describe how they felt about their role in the genocide, both at the time and today. To this all perpetrators expressed feeling extreme sadness over their actions, with many claiming they felt intense guilt and sorrow as they carried them out, feelings which have only intensified in hindsight. Additionally, I asked whether their perception of themselves changed as a result of that role. The responses I received to this varied depending on the degree of the crime they committed, with those who committed the most extreme crimes experiencing the greatest shifts in self perception.

Two female interviewees described their involvement as sheltering Tutsi children who were later killed when the Interehamwe discovered their presence. Both women maintained that there was nothing more they could have done for the children, and thus claimed innocence in their deaths. The first woman stated that her perception of herself has not changed: she is still the same person who loves God and other people, regardless of what she was implicated for. Although she feels badly for the child who was killed in her protection, those negative feelings do not extend to how she views herself. The second woman, however, expressed that while she felt innocent, she still has a great deal of guilt, both from failing to stop the killers and waiting to inform others about the deaths until after the genocide ended. For this woman, while she previously saw herself in a positive light, her perceptions now are clouded by her “moral failure to come forward” with the information she had.

The second woman’s change in self perception aligns with a theme common throughout the interviews: perpetrators today view self-characteristics in terms of their past actions. A man who was involved with a mob of killers expressed that he will always feel that identity associated with him, while another used the adjective “brutal” to describe himself, whereas to characterize himself pre-genocide he used the terms “friendly” and “not angry.” For many interviewees, their self perceptions shifted based on how readily they went along with destructive acts due to the influence of those around them. Another man who participated in a killing mob described himself as “weak,” for not allowing himself to be killed instead of joining the killing. He went on

to say that his questionable morals during that time have impacted how views himself today, and he wonders if he will ever be able to make up for his past.

Other perpetrators, however, described the opposite shift in self perceptions. When asked if he views himself differently in light of his involvement, one man relayed that before the genocide, he viewed himself as a good person who was able to live well with his Tutsi in-laws. While he would not describe himself in the same way today, he now sees himself as stronger than he did during that time, as his actions have taught him the importance of maintaining his morals despite what the people around him are doing. This sentiment was further echoed in two other interviews, where the perpetrators expressed how important it is to avoid joining something simply because others are doing it. All three seemed confident that their experiences have given them strength to be able to make the moral decision in the future, despite their failures to do so in the past.

4.3. Impacts of Involvement: Psychological Effects, Trauma, and Role in Community

Following the interviews, it is clear that genocide participation has a substantial and continued impact on the lives of perpetrators, both psychologically and socially, within their families and wider communities. Jane Abatoni, professional psychologist and counselor at ARCT-Ruhuka, described the signs of trauma she and her colleges see in perpetrators today:

“They have guilt, and fear. When they are released they don’t leave their houses so they can avoid those they have hurt. There is shame, but also flashbacks, nightmares, grief and mourning in the case of those who played a role in killing their family members. There is suspicion, lack of trust, migraines and other psychosomatic symptoms. They have the same symptoms as victims, but even heavier because no one can understand how they can feel that pain and trauma when they have killed.”

The perpetrators in this study were no exception to the above symptoms. Through a series of questions questions adapted from the Civilian PTSD Checklist, I uncovered many trends in trauma symptoms similar to those outlined by Abatoni. An abbreviated version of my findings are displayed in the following figure.

Figure 2: Psychological Effects of Crime by Participant

Participant	Intrusive Thoughts/ Trouble Concentrating	Flashbacks	Psychical Reactions with Memories	Nightmares/ Difficulty Sleeping	Guilt/ Interacting with Community
Participant 1	Couldn't concentrate on anything other than memories of his actions - felt inhuman	Experiences frequent flashbacks - 2 to 3 times per week	Whole body feels shaky/ trembles when he remembers the past	Frequent Nightmares	Overcome by feelings of guilt, didn't want to face community when first released
Participant 2	Memories haunt her, make her very sad	Experiences frequent flashbacks, at least 2 times per week, sometimes more	Diagnosed with stomach ulcers relating to the stress she experiences from memories	Frequent Nightmares	Felt extreme guilt, had difficulty believing people could forgive her
Participant 3	Did not wish to answer	Did not wish to answer	Did not wish to answer	Did not wish to answer	Did not wish to answer
Participant 4	Has many thoughts of his cowardice and fears what he was capable of, has trouble concentrating on work	Has many flashbacks	Feels a weakness inside of him when he remembers his actions - disturbs whole body	No difficulty sleeping	Feels guilty, living with the people he betrayed gives him many wounds
Participant 5	Feels emotionally down	There are always flashbacks daily	Feels rapid heart beat/ chest pain with memories	No nightmares or trouble sleeping	Sense of guilt is constantly inside of him
Participant 6	Reminded of past when he sees family living in poverty, he feels pain	Frequent flashbacks, multiple times a week	When things remind him of conflict, whole body begins to tremble and he is overcome by fear	Frequent nightmares - dreams of people dying	Experiences great guilt, feels the need to repay his community
Participant 7	Thinks about her past frequently, feels intense pain with memories	Experiences many flashbacks	No psychical reactions	Has frequent nightmares	Feels guilty for waiting to come forward about knowledge
Participant 8	Thoughts impact his daily activities	Flashbacks will always be there, they come randomly	Some physical reactions with memories, his heart has never been calm	Has many nightmares, both on his actions and work in TIG	Feels guilty for his involvement and his association with those who killed

Participant 9	He remembers his past constantly, thoughts impact his daily life	Some flashbacks	No physical reactions	No trouble sleeping	Feels guilt but feels united in community though support groups
Participant 10	Feels sorrow and helplessness, questions why he was born during this time, feels mentally disturbed	Flashbacks are constant in his life	Some physical reactions	Some nightmares	Feels he has a debt to repay to the community, wants to leave something positive behind to overshadow bad actions

4.3.1. Intrusive Thoughts and Trouble Concentrating

As seen in the above figure, there are many common themes of trauma symptoms in those I interviewed. When asked how frequently they think about their past, every participant except for one recounted how thoughts of the past occupy a great deal of their time, particularly as they interact with those in their communities today. Many mentioned that not a day goes by where thoughts of the past do not effect their lives, expressing they often feel weak, sorrowful, and helpless when they recall memories of their actions. Thoughts such as these can be characterized as intrusive, as they interrupt the perpetrators' lives and routines. One man described his memories of the past as opening a drawer and finding it full of bad things: "you have no idea when it will happen and once you see what is inside, you cannot feel normal." Another male questioned why he was alive today instead of centuries before, where he might have caused less harm. He stated that thoughts along this line plague him frequently, and have greatly influenced his current career path. Furthermore, many of my participants claimed they experience difficulty concentrating on their work as a result of intrusive thoughts, an occurrence which is recognized as a symptom of PTSD (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). One participant relayed there was a time shortly after the genocide when he felt he was no longer a human, attributing this to his inability to concentrate on anything besides the memories of his crimes.

Intrusive thoughts prevent perpetrators from carrying out normal lives, effecting their place within their families and wider communities, and causing harm to the society as a whole. It

is important to address these disturbances so that perpetrators may be able to focus on their work and on supporting their families, and become fully contributing members of society once more.

4.3.2. Flashbacks, Physical Reactions, and Nightmares

In addition to intrusive thoughts and concentration struggles, further symptoms of trauma include flashbacks, physical reactions with memories, and difficulty sleeping or nightmares. All but one of the perpetrators claimed to have persistent flashbacks, with the most extreme occurring on a daily basis, while the less severe cases experienced them a few times every month. Participants characterized their flashbacks as having sudden and intense memories of the genocide, as though they were reliving it. For some, flashbacks occur randomly and don't appear to be triggered by any particular event, others however, attributed seeing conflict or signs that a fight is about to start to the cause of the episodes.

During their flashbacks, many participants experienced physical reactions as well. When I inquired about this during one interview, the participant raised his fists to his shoulders and began shaking his entire body back and forth, miming the trembling sensation that occurs when he has sudden memories of his past. While they did not physically demonstrate their reactions, two other participants indicated that they react in a similar ways during flashbacks, experiencing a shaking feeling that encompasses their entire bodies. One of the participants attributed this sensation to fear of future conflict, particularly if the flashback is brought on by the sign of people fighting, while the other believed the shaking occurred because of weakness inside him. Other than shaking episodes, participants described chest pain and rapid heartbeats in line with a rush of adrenaline. Additionally, while not directly associated with her flashbacks, one participant experiences stomach ulcers as a result of chronic stress from her memories.

Aside from flashbacks during the day, many participants claimed to be affected by their memories during the night in the form of nightmares and sleep disturbances. According to one participant, his dreams are filled with images of people dying, making it challenging to sleep through the night. Another man expressed that in addition to dreams of the genocide, memories from his time working in the TIG camp haunt his sleep.

Mental disturbances of flashbacks, physical reactions, and nightmares are all in line symptoms of PTSD (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). All of the perpetrators in this study who wished to answer these questions suffered from at least one of these symptoms, with many experiencing all three. While I did not have the resources to conduct a full PTSD assessment, the above results indicate the interviewees suffer from at least partial PTSD, and are at the very least, traumatized from the crimes they took part in.

4.3.3. Guilt and Community Interaction

While the frequency and prevalence of flashbacks and other traumatic symptoms varied between the perpetrators, one emotion they all noted to effect their everyday lives was guilt. This was often the first negative effect they mentioned, before I even began questioning them on their trauma symptoms. In all of the interviews, the mention of guilt never existed by itself, but always in relation to the collective. Participants described other symptoms of trauma as they applied to their individual mental state, but guilt was always accompanied by an anecdote on how their crimes made it challenging to face those around them and live within their communities. This is to be expected, considering that guilt is an emotion with often leads people to consider the effect their past actions have on those around them (Rodogno, 2008).

One woman's guilt prevented her from believing she could ever be forgiven, despite being told repeatedly by the family of her victim that they harbored no ill will against her. It wasn't until they gifted her a goat and planted an avocado tree in her yard that she truly believed they had granted her forgiveness. This woman's difficulty accepting people could feel positively toward her was echoed throughout my other interviews, with multiple participants mentioning that despite what people say about reconciliation, they fear they will always be seen as different and separate from the rest of society. One man expressed how seeing the people he betrayed on a daily basis reopens wounds of the past. Although they told him they place the blame of what happened on the government, and have only welcoming and loving feelings towards him now, seeing them always reminds him of his own weakness and causes him sorrow. Situations such as these can lead people to become socially isolated, which in Rwanda, a society heavily based on community, can be incredibly damaging to their mental health (King & Sakamoto, 2015).

Many participants expressed that their own feeling of guilt clouded their interactions with others, claiming they were constantly on guard to how they may be perceived in light of their criminal identities. One man said, “there are things I can’t participate in because I’m a criminal, I wouldn’t be welcome.” When I asked how this made him feel, he described feeling helpless that there is nothing he can do to erase his past, which he claims has “ruined my life.” However, this feeling has not stopped him from trying, today he devotes himself to working with his community to create positive change and help those he previously hurt, with the goal of leaving a legacy of good for himself rather than solely being remembered as a perpetrator. Throughout my interviews it became clear that although guilt was the emotion that caused them the most pain, it was the most inspiring for them as well, in many cases leading perpetrators to develop coping mechanisms centered around giving back to their communities.

4.4. Coping Mechanisms and Sharing Pain

In many instances throughout my interviews, perpetrators would describe moments in their past when feelings of guilt and other negative effects were much worse than they are today. For these instances, they attributed coping mechanisms, often centered around community involvement, to lessening the symptoms of trauma. A summary of individual coping strategies and experiences with sharing their past are shown in the table below.

Figure 3: Coping Strategies and Sharing Techniques

Participant	Coping Strategies	Sharing Techniques
Participant 1	Works to construct houses for survivors and support them in any way, asks for forgiveness, becomes close to those around him	Shares past with family members, tells them everything about his involvement, speaks openly in the community about his past
Participant 2	Having a support system of people around her, being open about what she has done, visiting survivors and seeing if she can help them	Takes part in a support group between perpetrators and survivors, shares her testimony with those around her
Participant 3	Did not wish to answer	Did not wish to answer

Participant 4	Lives in accordance with forgiveness, lives peacefully, tries to forget his past, and start fresh today	Part of the group: "Peace-Builders," a space where he can share his needs and past, speaks with members of the church and those in his family
Participant 5	Sits down and concentrates on wiping out the past and focusing only on the future, part of an association where he teaches young people how to live peacefully	Talking with family and friends helps him feel integrated
Participant 6	Tells others what he has done and reminds them not to do bad things - makes him feel open and integrated	Shares with the people around him
Participant 7	Worships God, is a part of her church group, spreads feelings of love	Speaks with her family
Participant 8	Avoids loneliness - being alone is when his issues come, keeps himself busy and joins support groups	Told his children all the things he did and encouraged them to view others as equal, talks about his problems with those in support group
Participant 9	Always fights to think positively, chooses carefully who to speak to - avoids those who will see him negatively	Shares with family members - makes him feel happy and calm in his heart
Participant 10	Fights to create new legacy of positive actions, founded the Testimony and Forgiveness Village, tries to repay the debt to his country	Shares his experiences at peace building conferences in schools and with those in his community

As seen in the figure above, the coping strategies participants choose to share primarily centered around other people. Aside from one man who claimed to feel better when he sat alone and focused intently on forgetting the past, perpetrators seemed to find solace in spending time with others, sharing their past in educational ways, and encouraging the future generation to learn from their mistakes. This is to be expected, given the culture in Rwanda heavily revolves around the collective, and those who experience feelings of guilt often isolate themselves socially, which can in turn lead to further trauma (King & Sakamoto, 2015). Thus, coping mechanisms that allow perpetrators to feel reintegrated with their communities are likely the most effective for elevating those negative and isolating feelings.

For those I interviewed, sharing their feelings, whether with support groups, family members, or by asking their victims for forgiveness seemed to elevate guilt as well. One man

stated, “directly afterwards, I was overcome with feelings of guilt, until I was able to meet with my victims and ask them for forgiveness. When forgiveness was given my sorrow diminished and I changed dramatically.” Many others expressed similar sentiments, attributing forgiveness to the elevation of their guilt and feeling reintegrated in their communities. Furthermore, interviewees conveyed how sharing the past with their children, however painful it may be, helped them overcome their personal feeling of guilt by ensuring that their future generation was able to learn from their mistakes, and hopefully be more peaceful and unified as a result.

Something I noted as missing in the results was the mention of any negative coping strategies. While the review of past literature revealed a multitude of negative strategies, from disengagement to substance abuse, the interviewees in my study mentioned only positive things. This could be because they are part of an association that focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation, thus leading them to develop positive coping tactics, but it is more likely that my position as an outsider prevented them from sharing things that put themselves in a negative light.

4.5. Perpetrator Counseling

When asked whether they have sought professional counseling, the interviewees responded definitively that they have not, and seemed taken aback at the suggestion. Mental health counseling is often subject to stigma throughout Rwanda. While recognition of its importance has increased in conjunction with percentage traumatized civilians following the genocide, it remains a secondary priority in terms of national rebuilding. Counseling for perpetrators is often met with further stigma, as there are mixed opinions on whether they deserve to seek help for the trauma of participation. The professionals I spoke with while conducting this study were able to shed light on the attitudes surrounding perpetrator counseling, and the programs available if they choose to seek help.

4.5.1. Attitudes Towards Seeking Help - Perpetrator Perspective

Jane Abatoni, a representative from ARCT - Ruhuka, provided insights as to why so few perpetrators intentionally seek professional counseling related to their past crimes, stating: “they

know they have wounds but feel shy about speaking up... They see coming for counseling when they have killed as shameful, they are constantly on their guard as to how people view them.” For instance, if their counselor was a survivor, they would feel incredible shame telling them the trauma they face from having participated in the genocide. Abatoni attributes these feelings to why ARCT rarely sees perpetrators coming for counseling on their own accord. Those they do help are often referred to them by hospitals, when trauma is discovered as part of an assessment for a psychological condition. If perpetrators seek the services of ARCT directly it is typically for marital or family problems. According to Abatoni, the root causes of these issues usually stem from the trauma of the perpetrators’ past, thus the sessions often result in addressing the psychological effects of genocide participation as well. Furthermore, the organization provides counseling centered on reconciling survivors and perpetrators with one another, from which they receive the majority of perpetrators they help.

Despite the reserved attitudes of perpetrators towards initially seeking help, once they do, have incredibly positive experiences with it. Speaking on the topic of ARCT’s reconciliation program, Abatoni described this shift in attitude: “Once they are in the broader reconciliation setting, they begin to understand that someone wants to listen to their trouble and understands they have trauma, then they start asking for individual sessions.” She went on to say that those they counsel are often the ones who will go on to share their stories during the country’s commemoration period in April, “they become strong and can share openly and tell people what they have done, which helps with reconciliation and gives people closure.”

Edouard Bamporiki, author of *My Son it is a Long Story: Reflections of Genocide Perpetrators*, revealed a similar trend in the perpetrators whose testimonies he collected for his book. Initially, Bamporiki described, they feel as though they can’t ask for help with their emotional burdens because they are not deserving. As people who have killed and therefore betrayed God, they feel inhuman and that takes away their hope. In Bamporiki’s experience, it isn’t until they are exposed to situations where they find people who want to help them that they begin to think of themselves as people who are worthy.

4.5.2. Attitudes Towards Seeking Help - Public Opinion

In addition to shedding light on the attitudes of perpetrators themselves, Bamporiki and Abatoni were able to speak to the mixture of public opinions on counseling for trauma related to genocide participation. According to Bamporiki, many people believe it is not good to help those who have killed. There is a connotation that they are the “bad guys” in society and thus deserve to suffer. The way he sees it however, allowing their trauma to go unaddressed only creates further problems for the country. To him, being a bad person is one thing but having a family is another, “they need help so they don’t cause their family future harm with their emotional burdens.”

Abatoni echoed this trend in public opinion, recounting that when she first began working for ARCT in 2006 there was a trauma crisis for both survivors and perpetrators, and people on both sides were seen openly weeping during the commemoration period. Initially, people didn’t understand how perpetrators could be crying and have trauma when they were the ones who killed. However, overtime she has seen people come to recognize that perpetrators face a great deal of trauma, which is heightened by lack of support and understanding from their community members. Through these recognitions, she has seen the public opinion shift towards accepting that perpetrators deserve counseling for the trauma they face as well.

4.5.3. Programs Available

In Rwanda today, many programs exist which seek to aid perpetrators overcome the negative effects of their past and return to normal life in their communities. Briefly touched on in the above section, the first of these programs is ARCT’s reconciliation project, which seeks to build a bridge between of victims and perpetrators. The organization begins by working individually with a group of people from each category, listening to their concerns and addressing their emotional needs. According to Abatoni, within the perpetrator group they typically find feelings of sadness, anger, and even suicidal thoughts. The counselors facilitating the group help them to work through these emotions, and the members begin confessing and repenting, at which point the conversation changes to how they can move forward and ask for forgiveness. After many

sessions, the two groups are brought together and the perpetrators have the freedom to ask for forgiveness.

Aside from ARCT, the organization Prison Fellowship Rwanda (one of the 127 branches of Prison Fellowship International) currently has many programs designed to facilitate reconciliation and the reintegration of prisoners convicted for genocide crimes. For this study I interviewed the Public Relations coordinator of PFR, who outlined their five main initiatives for prisoner support, which are briefly summarized below:

1. *Unity and Reconciliation Villages* - Founded with the purpose of addressing the dual realities that many houses were destroyed during the genocide, and in its aftermath people need to learn to live together once more, these eight villages create a space where former prisoners and survivors live and work together to experience practical reconciliation. In the villages people engage in farming and other acts of manual labor, and generate revenue through cooperatives, which is then distributed among inhabitants.
2. *Ubumwe (Unity)* - This program facilitates face to face meetings between prisoners who wish to seek forgiveness and the families of their victims who are willing to forgive them. Currently implemented in five of the country's thirteen prisons, perpetrators begin by writing confession letters (which undergo intensive screening processes to ensure they are truthful and well intentioned), that are delivered to the families by program facilitators. If the families respond well to the confessions, they are invited to come to the prisons and meet in person, at which point perpetrators are able to give their testimonies and ask for forgiveness face to face. The final step of this program is then bringing the prisoners back into the communities for an event where they can seek forgiveness from the broader community before they are released.
3. *The Prisoner's Journey* - In this faith based program, groups of ten to twelve prisoners and two chaplains meet weekly to study bible verses and put their journey through the court system in perspective with the life of Jesus Christ.
4. *Children of Perpetrators Program* - Divided among four main components (spiritual resilience, education, health, and safety) this program provides support for the children of individuals convicted for genocide crimes, instilling in them positive values and teaching

them to disengage in from the harmful behavior of the previous generation. Additionally, it pays for their school fees, covers health insurance, and educates their caretakers on how to shield them from harm.

5. *Social Therapy* - A program which facilitates group therapy sessions between inmates and community counselors. Prisoners are able to share the wounds of their past with one another and receive counseling on trauma symptoms that come to light in the sessions.

While only one of the five initiatives detailed above directly works to provide psychological counseling, they all address needs which often contribute to further emotional burdens for the prisoners, and thus indirectly support their healing process.

Programs such as *Reconciliation Villages* and *Ubumwe* help to bridge the gap between prison and the return to community life. Many of the intrusive thoughts perpetrators live with stem from fears of community acceptance, while feelings of guilt are often related to facing those they have done harm to. These programs actively comfort these fears by creating a place specifically designed for them to be accepted, and allowing them the chance to apologize and ask forgiveness pre-release, therefore easing feelings of guilt and fears on whether they will be able to find a place within the community when they are no longer imprisoned.

Many of the perpetrators I spoke with described feelings of pain from not being able to provide for their children during their time in prison and at TIG. One man said that many of his flashbacks were triggered by seeing his children currently uneducated and his family living in poverty, knowing it was the result of his past crimes and subsequent imprisonment. The *Children of Perpetrators Program* helps to eliminate these triggers by making sure the prisoners children are well cared for despite their parents' current situations. While they still may experience flashbacks on their own accord, they no longer have to experience as a result of seeing their children uneducated.

The Prisoner's Journey aids in their healing process by giving them something more to believe in, and helps to eliminate the idea that God has abandoned them for their crimes. According to Bamporiki, in a deeply religious country such as Rwanda, the feeling that one has betrayed God can be the most painful thought to live with. By putting their own journeys through the court system in perspective with the journey of Jesus Christ, prisoners are able to understand

that God can forgive them for what they have done, which in turn allows them to forgive themselves.

Nearly all of the professionals I spoke to mentioned one major issue preventing prisoners from seeking psychological counseling today: they do not believe they deserve it. The only PFR program designed specifically for the psychological help of the prisoners, *Social Therapy* addresses this issue by creating a space where qualified counselors take the time to listen to the psychological wounds of the prisoners, allowing them to believe people are truly interested in helping them. Furthermore, as the therapy takes place in a group setting, prisoners are able to realize that others share their wounds as well, making them feel less alone in their challenges.

Helping perpetrators move past the psychological effects of their past is incredibly important, both for themselves and the broader society. When asked what changes he sees in the prisoners who go through these five programs, the PFR representative responded the initiatives have brought about very positive changes, including relieving the burden of guilt, easing symptoms of trauma, and allowing them to find inner peace. He went on to detail the community importance of moving past trauma, stating that when “when someone is incarcerated and they don’t open up, they feel a great deal of shame”. Unless they are prepared properly, when they enter society with this shame often results in self determined social isolation, which in turn leads community members to see the individual as problematic. However, if they are taught how to ask for forgiveness, be reintegrated, and properly cope with their psychological wounds, they have a much better time adjusting to community life and contributing positively to the society as a whole.

4.6. Perpetrator Reflections: Purpose in Rwanda Today and Messages for Future Generations

In every interview, I asked two final questions: the first being what the participant believed was their role in the country today, and the second what message they hoped to share about their past with future generations. Through these questions I was able to end on an uplifting note, allowing the individual to reflect on what they could offer to the country and share for the future, rather than exclusively focusing on the challenges they faced. My interviewees responded well to these questions, usually sharing lengthy anecdotes on work they do within their communities or

lessons they share with their children. These answers made me hopeful: although the perpetrators have done terrible things in their past, and struggle on a daily basis with the guilt of their actions, they are committed to creating a better society for the future, and not letting their children make similar mistakes.

The majority of perpetrators I interviewed described their role along the lines of contributing to the peace of society, helping others to learn from their past mistakes, and repaying their debts to their communities and those they hurt. To do this many are currently engaged in reconciliation projects, such as building houses for genocide survivors, and speaking at conferences in schools on the importance of peace and nonviolence in conflict resolution. Additionally, many claimed to see their role as having discussions like the one they were currently having with me, that allow others to use their experiences for educational purposes. But most of all, they saw their role as encouraging others never to fall down the path they found themselves on during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

For the future generation, they wish to encourage them to never ignore the history of the past, and learn everything they can from it. They wish for them to avoid making the mistakes of their parent's generation, to live in unity, and to see all people as equal, rather than divided along ethnic lines. Additionally they wish to instill in them the values of living in harmony, upholding morality, and being the good citizens Rwanda needs them to be.

4.7. Conclusion

Perpetrators in Rwanda today face a great deal of psychological challenges as a result of their participation in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. These effects come in the form of intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, physical reactions to their memories, and sleep disturbances, and have many impacts on their abilities to function on a daily basis and interact in their communities. For many, genocide participation has altered their perceptions of themselves, shifting from that of ordinary people, capable of coexisting with others, to those who will always be tainted by the moral failures of their past. Furthermore, perpetrators struggle with feelings of guilt and have a difficult time facing those they have hurt within their communities.

In order to manage their trauma symptoms, perpetrators often turn to coping mechanisms centered on community involvement, including sharing their pain with others, seeking forgiveness, and engaging in programs designed to give back to society and aid in the education of future generations. They have found that these methods relieve their symptoms of guilt and allow them to feel reintegrated with society, which eases the pain caused by social isolation. Despite the positive results found in these various coping mechanism, very few perpetrators openly seek psychological counseling on their own. Professionals within the counseling field attribute this to the common belief, both in the public sphere and from the perpetrators themselves, that they are not worthy of seeking help for the pain of having done harm.

However, these perceptions are beginning to change and currently there exist many programs within Rwanda which seek to aid perpetrators with the burdens of their past. Organizations such as ARCT - Ruhuka and Prison Fellowship Rwanda are committed to providing support for current prisoners and those released in their communities, both psychologically and socially. Through these programs, the professionals involved with them have seen perpetrators change dramatically, from people crippled by shame to the point where they cannot ask for forgiveness, to those who feel they can reintegrate with society and work to make a better future for the next generation.

The problems perpetrators face today as a result of their past participation hold weight not only in their own lives but for their families and communities as well. These problems are often intensified by a lack of understanding from the broader community that committing crime carries a psychological burden and has the potential to traumatize the criminal. By recognizing that that perpetrators face trauma and working to take away the stigma around providing counseling for them, organizations that support perpetrators today aid in the rebuilding of Rwandan society as a whole.

4.8. Future Recommendations

Given the short period of time and limited resources I had for this study, there are several areas I would expand upon given the opportunity for further research. Due to convenience purposes, I was only able to interview perpetrators already released within their communities, in the future it

would be interesting to speak with those still in prison today and compare symptoms of trauma and differences in opinions between the two groups. Additionally, I was not able to administer a full PTSD assessment to my participants, and only asked them select questions from the civilian PTSD Checklist. Considering many of my participants showed partial symptoms, it would be beneficial to evaluate them with the full assessment to determine the extent to which they suffer from PTSD. Additionally, further assessments such as the depression scale index could be administered as well to gain a broader perspective on additional psychological effects perpetrators face today. Furthermore, in future studies it would be beneficial to investigate the role that emotions such as shame and guilt play in the restorative justice processes. Past literature I reviewed touched on this but given my time constraint I was not able to expand on it further. However these insights could prove beneficial in further understanding the role of perpetrators in the reconciliation process in Rwanda, as well as other post-conflict societies in general. Lastly, I would recommend that more time be devoted to understanding the counseling programs in place for perpetrators and working to remove the stigma surrounding mental health in Rwanda as a whole.

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Appendix

Questions used for Interviews with Perpetrators:

I. Background

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What part of Rwanda are you from?
4. What was your life like prior to the genocide?
5. How did you view yourself during that time? (what adjectives would you use to describe yourself?)
6. What was your involvement in the genocide?
7. How did you feel about your actions during that time period?

II. Sense of self/ Criminal Identity

1. How do you feel when you think about your involvement in the genocide now?
2. Has your perception of yourself changed as a result of your involvement?
3. How do you explain your involvement to those around you?

III. Daily life/ Community Involvement

1. How frequently do you think about your past?
2. Do you feel that these thoughts have an impact on your daily life? (within the community, your family, at work?)
3. Have you faced any challenges in your daily life related to your involvement?

IV. Trauma Assessment (Civilian PTSD Checklist)

1. Do you ever experience flashbacks of the genocide? If so, how often?
2. Do you ever have difficulty sleeping or night mares? If so, how often?
3. How do you feel when something reminds you of your past involvement?
4. Do you ever experience any physical reactions when you think about the past? (i.e. heart pounding, trouble breathing, sweating)?
5. Do you ever avoid thinking about or avoid talking about the past?
6. Have you ever found gaps in your memories from the genocide?
7. Do you ever feel distant or cut off from other people?
8. Have you felt emotionally numb or unable to have loving feelings for those close to you?
9. Do you have difficulty concentrating?
10. Do you ever feel especially watchful or on guard?

V. Seeking Help

1. Have you ever shared your thoughts with anyone?
2. Do you feel that the effects your crimes have on you are a concern to those around you?

3. Do you feel those effects are a national concern? If not, do you believe they should be?
4. How do you cope with the memory of your crimes?
5. Have you ever sought professional help in dealing with that memory?
6. If so how has it helped? /in what ways could it do more?

V. Reconciliation

1. What do you see as your role within Rwanda today?
2. How do you explain your involvement to your children and people around you?

Questions used for Interviews with Psychological Service Providers:

1. Do you believe that participating in the genocide can traumatize a person?
2. What lasting psychological effects of the genocide have you seen in perpetrators?
3. Have you seen any signs of trauma in the perpetrators you have worked with?
4. What coping techniques have you seen them use to overcome these challenges (both positive and negative)?
5. Have the coping mechanisms you have seen been successful?
6. What methods do you use to counsel genocide perpetrators?
7. Based on your experiences, what attitudes do genocide perpetrators have towards seeking psychological help?
8. What do you believe is the national view on perpetrators seeking psychological help?
9. Do you believe that healing the psychological trauma of perpetrators could benefit the Rwanda? If so, in what ways?

Questions used for Interviews with Professionals (Non-Service Providers):

1. Do you believe that participating in the genocide can traumatize a person?
2. What lasting effects of the genocide have you seen in the perpetrators you have worked with?
3. What coping techniques have you seen them use to overcome these challenges?
4. Would you say those techniques have been successful?
5. In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges facing perpetrators today?