



Rwanda – Global Mental Health Conference

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| Theme: | The <i>Generation After</i> : Living with the consequences of the 1994 genocide |
| Host university: | University of Rwanda (Center for Mental Health) |
| Dates: | June 22-29, 2019 |
| Price: | \$1,290 per person |
| Credit: | 28 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) credits (Rwanda Medical & Dental Council) |

Background

The genocide committed against Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 was one of the largest humanmade disasters of the 20th century and deeply damaged the fabric of Rwandan society. Over the past two and a half decades, researchers have documented the psychosocial impact of the genocide on the Rwandan population and provided epidemiological evidence on the lasting effects of this catastrophic event (Bolton et al., 2002; Boris et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2009; Dyregrov et al., 2000; Schaal et al., 2011, etc.).

A household-based study conducted on the general population (age >16 years) by Dr. Munyandamutsa and colleagues in 2012 concluded that 79.41% of the study population experienced one or more traumatic events, including threats of death, bodily injury to a person or member of his family, being a witness of killing of a family member, being a witness of killing of another member of the community, and rape. Not surprisingly, the same study found the prevalence of PTSD in Rwanda among its adult population to be at 26%. Beyond the individual suffering, the genocide caused incalculable devastation to the Rwandan community's fabric, upset reference systems, compromised familial and community organizations, and impaired individual psyches.

As time goes by, it is becoming increasingly clear that the consequences of the genocide are strongly impacting on the generation born after 1994. They are now by far the largest demographic, as 51% of the current Rwandan population is under 20 years old. All youth born after 1994 did not directly witness the genocide. Still, they grew up in affected families and a societal environment strikingly marked by the genocide. There is emerging evidence that mental health suffering is transmitted through the generations.

Rieder and Elbert (2013) studied trauma, mental health and psychosocial conditions in genocide survivors, former prisoners accused of participation in genocide and their descendants. Descendants of genocide survivors presented more symptoms compared to descendants of former prisoners with regards to all assessed mental health disorders, including PTSD.

A study conducted by Perroud et al. (2014) provided evidence for the intergenerational transmission of PTSD. Mothers pregnant during and exposed to the genocide and the children born from this pregnancy showed increased PTSD and depression severity compared to non-exposed mothers and their offspring. Moreover, these psychopathological findings were associated with biological alterations of the HPA axis; including changed patterns in cortisol, glucocorticoid receptor and mineralocorticoid receptor levels, and epigenetic modifications on the promotor region of NR3C1.



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

How do youth individually or collectively think of and narrate about this destructive past? What is the content of their memories about the genocide and how is this memory preparing them to be active citizens who don't perpetuate the hatred? Does passage from one generation to another permit developmental work of overcoming past traumas or does it rather lead to stagnation and younger generations being crushed by the weight of the past? What are the actual problems that the post-genocide generation identifies themselves with? Most importantly, what are the essential components of the reconstruction process leading to resilience of the youth?

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

The conference and summer school

The Center for Mental Health of the University of Rwanda's College of Medicine & Health Sciences, in collaboration with the Global Engagement Institute (GEI), will host the 5th Annual Global Mental Health Conference & Summer School in June 2019. The Conference will address questions of the *Generation After* in relation to the genocide committed against the Tutsis in Rwanda and reflect on the various forms of work to be done with youth so that they are less affected by the past.

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

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



Internships

In combination with the Conference, we also offer 4-week or 8-week mental health internship placements in Rwanda. Approved participants are matched with host organizations according to their qualifications and interests. Placements are available, among others, in the country's main neuropsychiatric hospital (clinical psychology, mental health nursing and psychiatry), the National Association of Trauma Counselors, the University Teaching Hospital in Kigali, several district hospitals, several genocide survivors organizations, various street children projects, and organizations involved in the conflict resolution and reconciliation process.

Certificate

A certificate, endorsed by the Order of Medicine, thus representing valid training credits, will be awarded to all participants who attend the full five conference days (June 24-28).