Roles of Religion in Helping Genocide Survivors to Cope with the Trauma of Sexual Violence in Rwanda

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Warning !!!

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- Because of its context of war and genocide, the content of this presentation might cause distress for some persons.
- In case you experience distress, please ask for help from the designated person.

1. Context of the Research

- 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi
- Sexual violence used as weapon for genocide: 250.000 SV survivors
- Proliferation of religious practices in coping with traumatic experiences, including SV

SV used as weapon of genocide

2. Problem Statement

- How does religion effectively help survivors cope with the traumatic experience of sexual violence?

3. Aim and Objectives of the Research

- To critically analyze the impact of religious coping among genocide survivors
- To explore the roles of religion in the process of coping with trauma of sexual violence
- To propose some practical recommandations for the care of the survivors of sexual violence

Key Concepts of the Research

- Armed-conflict
- Sexual violence
- Religious coping

4. Methodology

- **Qualitative research** which helps to understand the survivors's traumatic experiences of sexual violence.
- Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** carried out first onsite and secondly online.
- **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis** (IPA): to explore the meaning survivors give to religion in the process of copign with aftermath of the sexual violence.

5. Participants

Nickname	Gender	Age	Marital status	Religion	Type of abuse
Eva	F	60	Widow	Catholic	Rape
Anna	F	41	Single mother with a child of rape	Catholic	Rape
Suzanna	F	49	Married	Catholic	Threat of rape
Maria	F	62	Widow with a child of rape	Catholic	Rape
Marta	F	63	Widow	Catholic	Rape
Myriam	F	38	Single mother with a child of rape	Protestant	Rape
Sara	F	40	Single mother with a child of rape	Musilm	Rape

6. Summary of Findings

- 6.1. Forms of sexual violence inflicted to the participants
- 6.2. Consequences of sexual violence
- 6.3. Religious coping resources uses by participants
- 6.4. Roles attributed to the religion by participants
- 6.5. Raccomandations to cope with sexual violence

6.1. Lived Experiences of SV

- Six respondents have been raped, individually, severaly and collectively.
- Two respondents have been raped using sharpened objects.
- One respondent was threatened to be raped and disemboweled in order to remove the tutsi child and kill it.
- Because of rape, three respondents got pregnant and are living with rape born children
- Because of rape, two correspondents have been HIV infected.

6.2. Consequences of SV

- **Physical** consequences: unwanted pregnacies, HIV infections, genecological complications
- **Pyschological** consequences: Trauma, PTSD, insomnia, distress, shame, guilt-feeling for what happened
- **Social** consequences: loss of trust, rejection from the family, stigmatisation, rejection of the children born of rape
- **Spiritual** consequences: anger against God and the Church, abandoment of faith and religious practices, loss of faith.

6.3. Resources to cope with trauma of SV

1. Psychological resources (1 participant)
2. Economic resources (3 participants)
3. Medical resources (4 participants)
4. Psychosocial resources (5 participants)
5. Religious resources (7 participants)

6.4. Religious coping resources used by the participants

- **8 resources of positive religious coping:** individual prayer, praying in groups, religious beliefs, reading of sacred writings, religious songs, altruism, religious symbolic objects and spiritual accompaniment
- **3 Resources of negative religious coping:** getting angry with God, denying God's existence and abandoning the religious practices (e.g. going to Church or praying).

6.5 Roles attributed to religion as coping resource for SV

- **8 positive roles:** feeling protected, promoting forgiveness, facilitating the process of healing, giving courage, giving peace to the heart, giving positive meaning to negative events, accepting the child of rape as God's gift, keeping hope and fighting for life;
- **1 ambiguous role:** considering sexual violence as God's plan;
- **1 negative role:** provoking God so that he might kill the woman victim of rape together with the child of rape.
- **Particular finding**: Some survivors passed from negative religious coping (getting angry with God) to positive religious coping (surrending to God).

6.6. Recommendations from the SV survivors

- **5 recommendations for the care of survivors of SV:** accompanying victims, listening to them, praying for them, welcoming them, and training qualified counselors for them.
- **3 recommendations for the care of children born of rape**: accepting them, adopting them and baptizing them.
- **2 recommendations for fighting against SV**: raising awareness about SV and active commitment for long lasting peace because SV happens mostly in the context of war and genocide.

7. Research-based Recommandations for Coping with Trauma of SV

- 7.1. Pastoral programm adapted to the particular needs of SV surivivors
- 7.2. New structures of psycho-spiritual accompaniment for SV survivors
- 7.3. Benefits of religious practices as relevant coping resources for Survivors
- 7.4. To discern the effectiveness of religious coping for SV survivors
- 7.5. Collaboration between religion and mental health professionals
- 7.6. Multidisciplinary training for religion and mental health professionals

Conclusions

- For majority of survivors, religion is a relevant resource of coping with the aftermath of sexual violence.
- However, in coping with sexual violence, religion can function as a double edge sword: there is a positive, ambigous and negative use.
- For this reason, we need to set clear criteria for discernement and assess the effectiveness of religion in helping SV survivors.

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Thank You