

Story telling as a documentation method, healing process and means of mobilizing survivors

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Despite the fact that rape and other forms of gender Based Violence have been identified as international crimes since World War II they are one of the least prosecuted crimes as observed during Uganda's first war crimes trial the Kwoyelo case where there was no mention of sexual offenses yet he definitely committed them. There is still silence around the crime and justice for sexual acts is not received or delayed yet impunity that prevails for widespread acts of sexual violence and other forms of Gender Based Violence have to be addressed. Victims continue to live in denial and consumed with the ongoing impact such as trauma, HIV/AIDS, children born in captivity and gynecological problems. Lack of justice for crimes on sexual violence is partly because of the silence around the matter. Survivors are usually reluctant to talk about their experiences due in particular to stigmatization, cultural and social pressure. Rape in particular is one of the difficult topics to discuss in most cultures and communities.

There is need for attention to be drawn to investigate crimes of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) so that victims can attain justice otherwise there will be little or no accountability for crimes of such nature. It is important to provide survivors space to talk about SGBV in order to break silence so as to bring information and issues related to women and conflict for substantive resource, policy and political agenda. It also serves to get evidence and testimonies that can be used for prosecution purposes. Trauma is one of the brunt of SGBV that continues sully lives of survivors. When documenting sexual violence it is prudent not only to focus on getting information but also on the wellbeing of the victims. Methods used for documentation should not harm the victims but empower them at the end and if possible lead to healing. Documenting of SGBV should also lead to acknowledging of suffering of survivors and coming to terms with whatever happened.

Story telling as a documentation method provides a platform where victims can speak informally about what they went through. It is a culturally familiar space that victims can use to share experience of what happened to them during conflict. In Acholi for example families sit around the fire place and share stories. It is also the time when the younger generation is taught by the elders. Family issues were also discussed at the fireplace.

A familiar environment and method of sharing information such as story telling helps in enabling survivors to open up. It is important to give uninterrupted time and space for survivors to speak of tragic events. Through storytelling one is able to obtain testimonies which can be carefully documented.

Aside getting of information storytelling also strengthens survivors. During the story telling they can give each other peer support. Sharing their stories can also survivors to understand and support each other. Challenges such as social stigma that survivors of SGBV usually face can be addressed through sharing experiences. Healing can take place when traumatic events of the

past are discussed, acknowledged, and mourned among survivors. It can help in letting go of the past and moving on.

Sharing stories among survivors also helps to have a reflective process needed to help people to understand their collective wounds, the negative and positive changes that have occurred. This can foster the shaping of personal stories and help participants see larger trends that relate to their own experiences they went through that can be difficult to discern. Survivors can begin to identify collective wounds that they have to address. Sharing stories of the past helps in creating a sense of unity, solidarity and understanding between women. When survivors collectively acknowledge violations it becomes easy to organize them as agents of change around an issue. This eventually leads to victim mobilization where victims come together to advocate for a certain cause.

Several methods can also be used alongside storytelling to enable survivors to freely express themselves.

Body Maps

Body maps entail drawing the outline of one's body and marking the inside of the picture of the body to represent the physical or emotional wounds one faced as a result of the war. For example, if there was an event or circumstance that disturbed one's mind by creating flashbacks or triggering unpleasant memories, a mark is made on the paper near the image of the head to represent pain. After marking the picture the survivor reflects on the mark they put and shares what they experienced. Body maps help women to focus on what happened to them as women. It is common for women to usually talk about violations that occurred to others and not focus on what happened to them. The body map helps the women to focus on what specifically happened to them.



Life Maps

Another method to facilitate sharing is life maps. On a piece of paper, survivors are asked to identify events that changed their lives for better or worse. They draw symbols on paper to represent that event and then draw a line to map out what happened chronologically. They later

on share what they drew. The purpose of this exercise is to help answer questions about the past, recognize the impact on their present-day life, and examine what is possible in the future.

Place Maps

Another method is women draw places that they have ever stayed in and then share experiences of what happened to them in these places. This triggers some memories of events that took place in these places.



Memory Quilts

Memory quilts entail a survivor drawing a picture that symbolized her experience. Oftentimes, they draw a picture of different symbols, including a soldier, a tree, a thatched grass hut, a small child, or any other object and afterwards explain represented in the object. Memory quilts are helpful because they help women to use imagery to represent their experiences, which can be used to facilitate sharing.



Theatre

Drama and theatrical activities can also be utilized to act out whatever one went through. Theatre is not only about performances, stories or song but also a way of expression. . It is positive tool to help women reenact their experience. The games involved in theatre create an atmosphere of joy and trust. Whether one is educated or not theatre gives them space to reflect themselves in a way that is accessible.

Colored Quilts

Survivors can also use fabric to share their stories. Each color of the fabric illustrates a certain event in their life. The various color of fabric is knitted to together to illustrate the journey in some one's life. For instance a woman can use a white cloth to show how life was before abduction, black to represent abduction, blue to illustrate that life was fair, yellow to display times of happiness, and other bright or dark colors illustrate their experiences during captivity. When the pieces of cloth are tied together then the person can share about their experiences, explaining why they chose a certain color and how it represents their life.

Music

Songs can be composed and recorded about important issues in the life of survivors such as children born in captivity, ending social stigma, experience as an abductee and so on. The songs help to understand what survivors experienced before, during and after conflict.

Timelines

Time lines are chronology of events that someone experienced. These chronological timelines help survivors recall their experiences and make sharing easier.

For example a woman might share that she was born in 1980, abducted in 1995, forced to marry a commander in 1996, gave birth to a child in 1998, returned from captivity in 2004, and also explain her present-day circumstances.