



SPECIAL EDITION KENYA

Healing the messenger

A journalist's trauma booklet



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These disturbing images, though receding to the background, have refused to go away.

*I just **hope** they will, **some day**.*



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Preface

Providing counseling for reporters who have witnessed some of the worst things that can happen to humanity – with no tools to handle the emotional shock – was identified as one of the most imminent and crucial needs for support to Kenyan media practitioners in the aftermath of the disputed December 2007 presidential election.

An unprecedented wave of politically motivated violence was triggered when the Electoral Commission of Kenya declared President Mwai Kibaki winner of the presidential election. More than 1,000 Kenyans were killed and over 500,000 displaced.

Responding to the mounting pressure on media, International Media Support (IMS) convened in February 2008 the Nairobi Round Table mapping the key challenges to the Kenyan media community and presenting a series of recommendations.

"Journalists and media practitioners are traumatized but are lacking counseling to deal with the post violence trauma and self denial," as concluded by the Nairobi Round Table. Evidence and symptoms gathered and reported among Kenyan media practitioners ranged from anxiety and depression to emotional numbness and substance abuse. Trauma counseling was consequently identified as one of the most crucial needs for support.

On this background, IMS decided to engage in a post-election violence trauma counseling project in close cooperation with the Kenya Association of Photographers, Illustrators and Designers (KAPIDE), Kenya Correspondents' Association (KCA) and Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ).

Under the theme: **Healing the messenger – Post-election trauma counseling for Kenyan Journalists**, trauma counseling was provided for a total of 150 journalists and photographers in five different locations.

The sessions were conducted by leading Kenyan psychiatrist and expert in disaster management, Dr. Sobbie Mulindi, and a rapid response team from the Kenyatta National Hospital.

This booklet offers insights into the experiences the journalists went through as told by themselves during the counseling sessions. All accounts reproduced in this handbook conceal the identity of the journalists to respect wishes for anonymity and the continued feeling of trauma and sensitivity characterizing the post-election situation in Kenya.

The booklet also provides guidance to recognizing and dealing with trauma as elaborated and presented by Dr. Sobbie Mulindi and his team.

IMS would like to express its profound gratitude to its Kenyan partners for their strong commitment and dedication to this important task and to Dr. Sobbie Mulindi and his team of counselors from Kenyatta National Hospital.

IMS is pleased to present this booklet jointly with its partners hoping that it will be a useful tool for media workers in Kenya.



Jesper Højberg
Executive Director
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Introduction

Journalists in Kenya faced tremendous challenges – physical as well as physiological – in the wake of the disputed presidential election in December 2007 and the unprecedented violence that followed in the first months of 2008.

Many journalists went through horrific events that greatly affected them. They photographed, filmed or reported on events where people were wounded, killed or became helpless. Like all human beings, journalists could not have been unaffected by the terror, death or the scenes of the wounded.

Research has established that even those who have been trained on skills of covering conflicts and wars are never left unscathed by the horrors they witness. Because of the demands of their profession, the journalists had to focus on the horrors and talk to the dying, the injured and the perpetrators.

Photographers and TV camera operators concentrated on the horrors, looking for the best angles to get the best shots even in the most gruesome of circumstances. Most journalists who reported from and about their own communities were particularly affected.

Even senior editors based in the capital, Nairobi, away from the conflict and killing zones, felt affected by the images they saw on the TV screens and the stories they handled from the field. They struggled to make rational decisions during those trying moments to keep the nation together.

The findings and recommendations of a Media Round Table in Nairobi held on February 12, 2008 pointed to the fact that the Kenyan media came under a lot of pressure during the General Elections and particularly in the post election crisis period.

The Round Table established that although media practitioners had gone through much trauma, no counseling had taken place and no such intervention had been planned.

Arising from the discussions and recognizing the very urgent need to deal with the issue of trauma, the Kenya Association of Photographers,

Illustrators and Designers (KAPIDE), The Kenya Correspondents' Association (KCA), and the Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ) approached International Media Support (IMS) for assistance to undertake trauma counseling for the journalists.

It is estimated that over 70 per cent of the daily content, both in electronic and print media, is generated by correspondents (freelancers) who have no contractual protection and who are not part of the fraternity of a newsroom.

The trauma counseling initiative largely targeted this group, from both print and electronic – predominantly field based. These are not only the most disadvantaged journalists in the media regime in Kenya but also happen to have been at the "battle front" and gone through some of the most trying moments in their work.

150 journalists, especially from the areas most affected by the post election violence, went through counseling. The sessions, lasting two days, were held in Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu and Mombasa.

The organizers deeply appreciate the enthusiasm of all the journalists who came forward to take part in the sessions and voluntarily shared touching stories and experiences, some of which are reproduced in this booklet.

It represents a modest but nonetheless important effort in helping the media, collectively, and individual journalists, to recognize the reality of trauma as a consequence of covering conflict situations and the need for quick responses to aid the process of healing.

George K'Ouma

Kenya Association of Photographers, Illustrators and Designers (KAPIDE)

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Kenya Correspondents' Association (KCA)

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Kenya Union of Journalists (KUJ)

General observations

Kenyan journalists' experiences during the post-election crisis

The trauma counseling sessions took place in five different localities across the country – the inaugural session was held in Nairobi in March 2008 and the last and concluding session was held in Mombasa in May 2008.

The depth of horror in the eye witness accounts from journalists in Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu and Mombasa was gruesome. But as expressed by one of the journalists in the Eldoret counseling session: "I believe through sharing and speaking out, we will move on".

As concluded at the Nairobi Round Table in February 2008, journalists and media practitioners are traumatized but are lacking counseling to deal with the post violence trauma and the self denial. They also need to address serious issues of interpersonal relationships within different media institutions and houses occasioned by partisanship.

During the trauma counseling sessions, there were journalists who could narrate their experiences but declined to write them down. Others were very sensitive when their colleagues attempted to make notes as the counseling sessions went on.

Some journalists declined to attend counseling sessions in towns close to their homes and requested to be in a different group in other towns far away. It later emerged that some of the journalists did not want to meet their colleagues from certain towns while others feared traveling through certain routes or taking certain public transport vehicles based on their experiences during the post election crisis.

It was difficult getting to the bottom of these fears because some were unable to express or freely talk about them. Suspicion and hostility among journalists was part of the outcome of the post election crisis, reflecting the deep divisions that emerged within the media over the election period. The mistrust and hostility took ethnic angles and is likely to persist for a long time among some of the journalists.



Initially, it was thought that journalists from Central, Eastern and North Eastern Provinces did not experience trauma as there was less conflict and violence in those regions during and in the post election period. But during the mapping for counseling, it was realized they also required counseling. So a number of them were invited for the sessions.

They too had their own experiences arising from the retaliatory evictions of certain communities from those areas following the violence in the Rift Valley, Nyanza, Western, and the Coast Provinces.

They also witnessed the brutality meted out to the evictees from these areas by armed gangs including the Mungikis in Central Province and got threatening telephone calls asking them not to write any stories on the evictions.

The journalists also got traumatized as they interviewed victims of violence who fled from the conflict zones to these areas. Some of the journalists had to host their own brothers, sisters or close relatives who were evicted. Some actually lost very close relatives.

In sections of Mount Kenya Region, some journalists witnessed the forced circumcision of members of certain communities during the evictions.

In the Rift Valley, Western and Nyanza, some of the journalists reported being evicted and having to move their families to safety.

In one case, a journalist came back from duty in the evening and found his wife badly beaten and injured. Other journalists had their houses burnt down or property looted or destroyed. In one instance, a journalist and his family had to raise money and pay his would be killers to escape death.

A number of journalists took refuge at police stations for weeks while others slept in offices for their own safety. Some had to relocate with their families to safe neighborhoods, in the same towns or in other towns.

Adding to their vulnerability, journalists and photographers had virtually no support from their media organizations.

One of the main recommendations resulting from the trauma counseling sessions was therefore urging editors to care about the mental wellbeing of their staff.

"When journalists are sick, the country is sick," as pointed out during the trauma counseling sessions.

Journalists' testimonies

The eyewitness accounts hereunder were recorded during the trauma counseling sessions and reflect the experiences journalists and photographers witnessed during the post-election violence.

“ I hope the disturbing images will go away, some day.

(Rift Valley Province) – I have never overcome the terrible feeling I had after I viewed the bodies of ten people who were killed by youths in a small village in the Rift Valley during the post election violence.

It was even more saddening for me to see vultures feeding on the bodies that littered the maize plantation immediately after the announcement of the disputed presidential election results.

I and other colleagues were there to witness the mutilated and decomposing bodies being loaded into police trucks and taken to the local district hospital ten days later.

The sight of the suffering internally displaced people at the camp where more than 20,000 had taken refuge was heart breaking. I went to the camp twice to interview them and I felt so bad that for the next one week, I decided I would not go back.

It was terribly shocking to see so many people, women and children and elderly people without food and shelter. There were many people I knew who looked up to me for some form of help which I could not manage to offer.

I interviewed a number of women who said they had been raped both by fellow villagers who attacked and drove them out of their homes and by security personnel. The displaced families took refuge at a police station where a displaced persons camp was set up.

Three days after it was set up, armed youths attacked the camp, shot dead two women and a child before driving away over 200 heads of cattle. At the time it pained me to see so much police inaction even as the people pleaded for support.

My interviews with some of the officers revealed there were serious divisions within the security personnel that hampered any responses that could help the suffering people.

During the same period, I and other colleagues visited a village in a neighboring district where we viewed the remains of some seven people killed and their bodies burnt beyond recognition by arsonists believed to be a local militia group fighting for land ownership.

In an adjacent village, we were to be confronted with the mutilated bodies of thirteen people, among them six children. Some of the thirteen were burnt alive in their houses while others were shot dead and some hacked with pangas (machetes).

Months since I witnessed some of these disturbing scenes, the images have refused to go away and until I attended the counseling sessions for journalists in Eldoret, I would not bring myself to talk about them with colleagues or my family members.

These disturbing images, though receding to the background, have refused to go away.

I just hope they will, some day.

“ I counted fifteen bodies

(Western Province) – In my life as a photojournalist, I will never forget December 31, 2007. On that day, I woke up early in the morning and prepared myself for the day as I always do.

I packed my camera after ascertaining that everything was working fine and headed towards the town center. Tension was high everywhere in the country and even in Busia, a small town along the Kenya-Uganda border, we expected chaos to erupt.

The previous day, the Electoral Commission of Kenya had declared Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU) as the winner of the presidential elections amid protests from the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

A few minutes after leaving my house, about 500 meters away, I saw excited youths carrying goods looted from shops. Being a photojournalist, I of course took a few shots. Then I hurried into town where I expected more dramatic scenes would be taking place.

About 100 meters from the scene of looting, I came across a group of police officers on patrol. As a law abiding citizen, I thought it was my duty to inform the police of the looting incident, which I did.

They rushed to the scene of crime as I went on. Less than twenty minutes later, I got phone calls from some of my contacts that the police had shot dead several people and injured others in a bid to stop the looters.

I rushed back to find out what had happened. I was horrified at what I saw. I counted fifteen bodies of children about the age between 15 and 18 years lying in pools of blood. I was lost for words and blamed myself for having informed the police. I knew I was partly to blame for their deaths because I had informed the police.

I knew many of those now lying dead, some of whom were my personal friends and acquaintances in the town. I thought maybe I should not have informed the police about the looting incident.

One of the victims was not even involved in the looting and but was shot as he sat on the porch of his uncle's house.

I kept asking why the police officers had decided to open fire on the unarmed youths instead of arresting them to face charges in a court of law. But those were crazy times and many more shootings were to follow.

The pictures I took of that incident were not even used by my editor who thought that they were not good enough.

“ I quietly folded my notebook

(Nyanza Province) – “Oh please God; don't let it be, please, I don't want to find him here”. These were the words of a young girl who had taken her search for her elder brother to the provincial hospital mortuary. My first instinct was to move closer and, as a journalist, interview her.

Before I could get to her, she let out a loud painful scream. She had just seen her brother's body among a pile of them that had been brought in the previous night.

I quietly folded my notebook and forgot about the interview as I was overwhelmed by her pain at the discovery of the body of her brother at the morgue. It was as if I was actually the one who had suddenly discovered the body of my own brother at the morgue!

Her brother was one of the victims of police shootings in the town following riots that broke out to protest the outcome of Kenya's December 2007 General Elections in which President Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner for a second term in office.

Riots had broken out in many parts of the country and within the town from which I worked for a radio station.

There had been a lot of shooting in the town and many people had died. I had filed some stories earlier on about the shootings and deaths and generally briefed my editor about the situation on the ground.

I had returned to the mortuary to get an update of the number of bodies brought in from the streets which had turned into killing fields when I bumped into this young girl whose own pain now affected my mood for the rest of that day. I did not do anything else and I was gripped by fear for my own safety and that of my family.

The times were hard and moving within the town involved serious risks for me and my media colleagues. The police were very hostile to us and had clobbered some of us as we covered the riots.

It was a time when one really needed encouragement and a feeling that somebody else was bothered about your safety. I wondered why no one had called from the news desk to ask about my well-being and general safety.

My conclusion was that my bosses were more bothered about stories from me than about my personal safety and well-being. Each time they called, the question was “What is new? Any update on the death toll?”

“ I have never felt so terrified in my life

(Nairobi) – I was assigned to cover an upcountry constituency for the December 27, 2007 General Elections. After the vote tallying at the local constituency headquarters, I relayed my results for both presidential and parliamentary seats.

Presidential results were coming in from different parts of the country and there was a lot of excitement and celebration

around for the parliamentary and civic seats winners and their supporters.

But tension was already building amid reports that the presidential elections were being rigged. I decided to go back to Nairobi because my assignment upcountry was over. So I set off on December 29 for Nairobi in a public bus.

We were approaching a small market center along the main highway when the presidential results were announced and President Mwai Kibaki of PNU was said to have won.

A large group of youths armed with stones poured onto the road and blocked our bus, ordering the driver to stop. They ordered the driver to reverse and take the passengers back to where we had come from or they would kill us all.

Some of the youths pulled out the driver from his seat and roughed him up, tearing his shirt to pieces. We all alighted and pleaded with them not to harm him. They allowed him back onto his seat and ordered him to reverse quickly.

He was terrified but managed to take us to the nearest police station where we sought protection. All the roads in and out of the trading center were barricaded minutes after the disputed results were announced.

We learnt that riots had broken out all over the country and that like where we were many people had been caught up in such situations and that others had been killed. We were terrified but were consoled that we had managed to reach the police station.

We camped at the police station for six days up to January 3, 2008. Every day, more people were arriving. Some managed to come with their vehicles, tractors, and others on foot.

We were starving. No food, water and other basic things. The police station was getting crowded. Even with money you could not buy anything because no shops were open.

No one came to our aid for those six days, not even the Red Cross. Every night, there were rumours that we would be attacked so we had to be awake and alert all the time.

Then on January 3, 2008, a convoy of army vehicles came and escorted us out of the station to Nairobi. We had to spend another night in another town en-route to Nairobi which brought back chills.

I have never felt so terrified in my life. With reports of death all around us, I thought I and the others would not come out of the police station alive.

For those six days, I did not take myself as a journalist and I did not have the urge to file any story. The only thing I wanted was to see myself out of danger. I informed my bosses about the situation in which I found myself. They expressed sympathy.

I had also informed my wife and some relatives about the dangers I faced and they got very worried. My wife called me very frequently in the first few days. Some relatives and friends also did.

I detected fear and desperation in my wife's voice each time she talked to me. She told me about the situation in our neighborhood in Nairobi which was not any safer. A number of people had been reported killed and others injured.

Then we lost contact because my battery went low and there was nowhere to charge it. It was quite a relief when I got to Nairobi and found my family safe. My wife was very worried and thought I had been killed.

I could not go to the office for the next few days. I just wanted to be home and relax. I could not talk very well about the details of my ordeal to my wife. But we informed our relatives that finally I was safe.

The first time I found myself able to talk in detail about my experiences for the six days was during the trauma counseling sessions. There I felt relieved because I realized from what my other colleagues narrated that I was not alone and that some of them had gone through worse experiences than mine.

“ Scenes that have refused to go away

(The Coast) – I covered the elections and the post election crisis for my media organization in four constituencies in the Coast Province, namely, Changamwe, Mvita, Kisauni and Likoni

In one incident, I was in a group walking when we were confronted by a group of over 200 youths chanting songs in praise of a particular political party on the voting day. Voting had been done in most centers and some voters already had results from some of the voting centers.

A member of the group, who appeared to be the leader, had a machete. He ordered us to kneel down, which we did. But one member of our group, a tall man who appeared slow, was not so lucky. He was slashed with the machete and seriously injured.

He bled profusely as assailants insulted us, calling us all manner of names. Some called us “thugs” while others called us “foreigners” who had been “paid” to support an unwanted party and candidate.

The women who were walking with us were whipped as their young babies wailed on their backs. We were too scared to talk or explain anything.

One member of the gang turned towards me menacingly. I quickly introduced myself as a journalist and pleaded with them to spare us. My press card and accreditation badge from the Electoral Commission of Kenya helped us.

We were ordered to leave the place immediately. As the injured man rushed to hospital, I called the police who responded and dispersed the group.

In another incident, I witnessed youths invade a guest house and rape female guests who had earlier on booked themselves there. The youth also looted the bar and set it on fire. They went on to set many other houses in the neighborhood on fire.

In another incident, two groups of rival youths fought and I saw some of them chop off the heads of two of their rivals. One was lynched and his body burnt by the roadside. I felt my stomach turn at the sight of so much violence.

During a political rally and street demo in Mombasa town, I saw a police officer shoot dead a youth who wanted to block the road. Another lost his hand in the shooting.

These and other scenes I witnessed have refused to go away.

“ Forgetting my role as a journalist

(Mombasa) – It was on December 29, 2007 at midnight when I was awakened by a big blast that was followed by calls from mosques urging residents of Bamburi area to wake up and be vigilant as a gang was going around the area torching any erected structure it came across.

Bamburi area, located in the expensive and cosmopolitan Kisauni constituency was one of the areas that was adversely affected by post election skirmishes. Other areas that were a no go zone included several parts of Mvita, Likoni and Changamwe constituencies.

As I hurriedly woke up I also heard other blasts in different areas which were accompanied by what people said were gun shots.

One of the biggest blasts, I came to learn later, came from my brother's shop which was under attack. He was targeted just because his wife was from a community whose political leaders were perceived to have rigged the election.

It was painful watching my brother's wife screaming in pain, as the gang descended on her with blows and kicks, notwithstanding the fact that my brother had allowed them to take everything that they could carry from the shop.

This was a shop we had jointly stocked using a loan we had not completed paying and now it was no more. What was more painful was that some of the people who were now looting and destroying our shop were people we knew well as we had grown up together at the estate and some of them were our customers.

I watched the whole scene for almost 30 minutes without saying a word and returned to my house. I was devastated. I did not know what to do – my body was trembling and I felt feverish.

I must confess that I was not myself as I was filled by anger, hatred and I felt like taking some weapon to kill some of them. I went straight to my house, pulled out a machete from under a cupboard and came out panting, ready to slash any man from the ethnic group whose members looted our shop.

When I stepped outside, I quickly thought about what I wanted to do and its implications. And then I thought about the people I was likely to attack. Would it not be basketball game playmates or the neighbors who were frequent visitors to my brother's shop?

I felt numb and just stood there with the machete in my hands. At around 4 a.m., I took a cold shower and sat thinking what had become of Kenya.

I had literally forgotten my role as a journalist and did not have the urge to report on what was happening around me. The following morning, I had to go for duty around the town to cover the events as they unfolded.

I lacked the drive and motivation to go on with my work. There was no public transport so I had to trek to town and other places where I was supposed to get updates.

As I trekked to town, I came across over 300 youths who barricaded the road. They were demanding national identity cards from all passersby near Barisheba Centre.

A number of people had already been forced to kneel down. I learnt they were targeting people from a particular ethnic group. Though I was not from the targeted community, my physical appearance made them believe I was from that community. So I was forced to kneel down with the others.

We were there kneeling for about 30 minutes before a man who was referred as Tyson started counterchecking our identity cards. Before we could understand what was happening, they hacked one man to death as we watched.

At that point I knew quick action was required. I had to act fast. I pleaded with them saying I was a journalist. It is at this time that Tyson demanded my job ID.

"Wandishi wa habari by the way wanafanya kazi poa sana. Maze tuko pamoja. Simama na nitakupa jamaa akupe escort hadi stage ya lights" (By the way, journalists are doing a splendid job. We are together with you people. Stand up. I shall ask one of us to escort you to the traffic lights stage", Tyson said as he released me.

I later learnt that four people were hacked to death before the police could arrive at the scene. Since that incident, I always shudder as I pass by the place. It reminds me about how close I came to being killed.

“ I exposed my countrymen and I really feel sorry for that

(Nairobi) – I was sent to the Kibera slum on December 30 to cover the events there. Fighting had already broken out. Bullets were being shot, tear gas cannisters were being thrown all over as groups of youths retaliated by throwing stones. We had to spend the night there to get more shots.

We came out next day on foot – there was no way, we could get out with a vehicle. We handed in the footage and were sent on to the Mathare slum in the Northern part of Nairobi.

At this point, residents had created a no go zone. We were taken in there by some security people. This is where I saw horrifying things happening; women and children being dragged out of the houses and raped; hands being chopped off.

I filmed these scenes. At first, I felt good, because I knew that I was taking some exclusive shots which would boost my business as a freelancer.

But then I realized that maybe I went too far.

I was taking shots of bodies hoping that they would be shown on national and international television. But I exposed my countrymen and I really feel sorry for that.

There is a time, when money comes in second and I feel very guilty for having taken this footage.

“ It was hell

(Eldoret) – When the results of the election were declared, clashes broke out immediately in Eldoret. It was hell. Shops were looted, houses were burnt down, and people were hacked down and killed. There was blood everywhere.

I was constantly in the frontline of the events and was one of the first journalists to arrive to the church in Kiambaa where 40 people, mainly women and children, had been locked up and burned to death.

Today, I still struggle with the trauma that has haunted me since I covered the gruesome events. I feel sad and painful – and deeply embarrassed watching my own countrymen turn against each other like they did in the weeks after the election.

I have not been offered any help from my newspaper. Employers do not care about freelancers. You are exposed to danger and they do not even care how you survive in the field.



Post election violence in Kenya – the psychological impact

By consulting psychiatrist, Dr. Sobbie A. Z. Mulindi

Following the announcement of the results of the disputed 27th December, 2007 elections in Kenya, there was spontaneous violence outbreak all over the country.

There was a deep sense of betrayal and highly volatile emotional reactions characterized by anger, hatred, ethnic animosity and cleansing and revenge, wanton destruction of property, arson, looting, torture and gang rape, murder, blocking of railways and roads, demonstrations, police brutality and use of live ammunition and teargas on protesters and innocent victims not directly involved in any of the above.

There was total pandemonium all over and nobody seemed to be in control at all. There was despair, apprehension, anxiety, fear and confusion. Traveling became impossible as people were asked to identify which tribe they belonged to and then killed. Business came to a standstill as shops and other premises closed for fear of being vandalized, prices of common commodities sky rocketed or became scarce. Dead bodies were not collected on the highways and in the fields, health facilities were overwhelmed with casualties and mortuaries were filled to capacity.

All these events were covered and captured by journalists who were not trained, prepared or protected in the manner they conducted themselves. The impact on those involved had enormous psychological effects. As terrible events that most Kenyans had not experienced for lifetime, the post-election violence inflicted heavy psychological burdens.

There was pain and sorrow of people being killed, separated or having gotten lost and never to be found. Pain and sorrow of losing homes and belongings and therefore loss and grief reactions occurred.

Journalists themselves were also victims. Some lost relatives or friends, some lost their property and some became part of the internally displaced people. Others again were wounded but lacked support or treatment.

Covering a violent conflict can create serious health problems for journalists and photographers who often find themselves in the frontline of the events to get the images and the stories. They often experience or witness traumatizing incidents and many of them will struggle to cope with the impact.

Typical reactions reported by journalists having covered these traumatizing incidents include depression, loss of motivation, insomnia, loss of appetite, crying spells, guilt, irritability, inability to concentrate, poor memory and stupor.

Usually such states are temporary and recovery is natural, but if stress is prolonged it can have disastrous effects.

Depending on the extent and duration of the symptoms, they may be diagnosed as mental disorders such as affective disorder, panic attacks or post-traumatic stress disorder. Such symptoms have been known to be associated with suicide, accidents, increased use of alcohol or tobacco, family or neighborhood discord (domestic violence), delinquent behavior or criminal activities.

Having no prior experience or knowledge of handling such disorders, journalists need to be trained and made aware of the symptoms they are likely to suffer from in covering traumatic events.

They should be trained in administering first aid to their colleagues in line of action or alleviating states of confusion, excitement and disorientation or be trained to recognize, understand and identify their colleagues who might suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders.

This following guidelines intend to help Kenyan journalists and photographers in managing the psychological reactions to traumatizing events such as the post-election violence.

Understanding trauma

Definitions

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A trauma reaction arising from mental trauma recollecting an experience which brings on terror of an intensity comparable to life-threatening situations.

A vivid scene of an event and associated feelings of terror are intrusively recalled e.g. as flashback, accompanied by increased arousal.

Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

Occurrence of transient excessive stress reactions immediately following a major disaster. Acute stress disorder symptoms appear between two days and four weeks after the disaster.

Debriefing (Psychological Debriefing)

An acute-stage intervention carried out between several days and several weeks after disaster experience, which has been claimed to be a way of preventing the worsening of stress reactions and the onset of PTSD.

Encouraging a person to talk about a traumatic event experience like the departed loved one has been used by African religious traditional systems in supporting the bereaved to overcome the loss to adjust and cope effectively.

In Western World, it is often used with firefighters, police officers and soldiers. During the acute stage it is necessary to surround the victim with helpful consideration.

Types of Traumatic Stressors

- Natural disasters (earthquakes, volcano eruptions, flooding, cyclones, tsunamis etc)
- Large fires (outbreak)
- Military combat
- Ethnic clashes, ethnic cleansing, xenophobic violence
- Detention camps
- Death camps, torture genocide, homicide,
- Bombing, suicide bombers
- Collapse of physical structures
- Hijacking, mugging, kidnapping
- Looting, arson, wanton destruction of property
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Airplane crashes
- Rape, child abuse, child neglect
- Domestic violence
- Threat to one's life or physical integrity
- Incest, exhibitionism
- Serious threat to one's children or spouse or friends, relatives
- Sexual harassment
- Imprisonment, detention, confinement
- Death, separation, divorce
- Taking care for chronically ill patients (cancer, HIV/AIDS, stroke, accident victims)
- Working in sensitive areas (morgues, intensive care units, high dependent units, burns unit, casualty department etc)
- Witnessing close relatives harmed, killed
- Gruesome pictures, images, stories
- Sudden destruction of one's home, premises, school, church or community
- Seeing another person injured or killed

How are traumatic events experienced?

Psychological Impact

- Shock
- Horror
- Denial
- Disbelief
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Confusion, disorientation
- Frustration, helplessness, hopelessness
- Disgust
- Anger
- Guilt
- Self-blaming
- Scapegoating
- Violence
- Depression



Post-Traumatic Psychological Reactions

- Recurrent and intrusive recollections of the event
- Recurrent distressing dreams
- Strong psychological distress
- Dissociative states
- Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with stressor
- Deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the event
- Psychogenic amnesia of the traumatic event
- Diminished responsiveness to the external world
- Decreased feelings of love, tenderness, intimacy and sexuality
- Inability to express angry feelings
- Feeling detached or estranged from others
- Difficult falling or staying asleep
- Difficult in concentrating or completing tasks
- Unpredictable explosion of aggressive behavior
- Increased substance abuse
- Phobic avoidance of situations or activities symbolizing original trauma
- Change in orientation toward the future
- Impulsive behaviors
- Depression and anxiety
- Psychotic decomposition



Crisis checklist

- Investigate unusual behavior
- Look for a triggering event
- Determine how involved the individual is with his problem
- Assess his balancing factors
- Has he perceived the stressful event that has occurred to him realistically?
- Or has he misinterpreted the event because of fear or ignorance
- Does he have adequate emotional support? Is this support available to him now?
- How does he usually cope with stress?
- Are these coping mechanisms available to him now?



Checklist for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms

The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced

- Recurrent and intrusive thoughts
- Recurrent distressing dreams (nightmares)
- Sudden acting or feelings as if event were recurring
- A sense of reliving the experience, illusions, delusions, hallucinations, flashbacks
- Distress at exposure to symbolic stimuli

Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma

- Efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with trauma
- Efforts to avoid activities or situations that arouse recollections of the trauma
- Marked diminished interest in significant activities
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others
- Restricted range of affect, unable to love
- Sense of a foreshortened future

Persistent symptoms of increased arousal

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response
- Physiological reactivity upon exposure to events that symbolize or resemble aspects of the traumatic event



Checklist for vulnerability

Hopelessness

Individual believes that all is lost; effort is futile; there is no chance for recovery.

Turmoil

Individual is tense, agitated, restless, indicating inner distress.

Frustration

Individual is angry about inability to resolve problems and get relief.

Despondent / depressed

Individual is dejected, withdrawn, tearful, often inaccessible to interaction.

Helplessness / powerlessness

Individual feels unable to initiate positive action; complains of being too weak to struggle; surrenders and avoids decisions.

Anxiety / fears

Individual has specific fears or dreads; feelings of panic or impending doom.

Exhaustion / apathy

Individual feels depleted and worn out; expresses indifference to outcome.

Worthlessness / self-rebuke

Individual feels no good, defective; blames self for weakness, shortcomings, and failures.

Painful isolation / abandonment

Individual feels lonely, ignored, alienated from others who he believes don't care.

Denial / avoidance

Individual speaks or acts as if unwilling to recognize threatening aspects of illness; minimizes complaints or findings.

Annoyance

Individual is embittered, feeling victimized or mistreated by someone or something outside, beyond control.

Repudiation of significant others

Individual rejects, turns away from, or antagonizes sources of potential help and support, usually a family member or friend.

Perspective of the future

Individual foresees a very limited future; day to day existence.





Treatment

No two persons see a stressful event in the exact same way, nor does one person always see it as he did before. Regardless, concurrent disorders do have a serious impact on a person's life.

In severe cases, the person should be referred to specialized centres for psychotherapy and counseling. Medication – anti-psychotic drugs and anti-depressants – may also be useful in severe cases.

In less severe cases, religious and traditional psychosocial support, prayer and bonding activities have been found to be extremely helpful.

Past Traumatic Events in Kenya

- Mau Mau concentration camps 1950 – 1961
- Mau Mau uprising and killings (Lari Massacre)
- Flooding of River Nyando 1961
- Frequent flooding of River Nyando and Nzoia (Budalangi)
- North Frontier District Uprising and massacre 1964
- Massacre in Kisumu during the opening of the Russian Hospital by Mzee Jomo Kenyatta
- Political assassinations of: T. J. Mboya 1969, J. M. Kariuki 1975, Argwing Kodhek, Kitili Mwendwa and Gama Pinto
- Boundary clashes in Nyanza, Western, Nandi, Kisii
- Coup D'Etat 1982
- Mwa Kenya events, detentions that followed, Nyayo torture chambers of political dissidents
- Political detentions of Oginga Odinga, Seroney, Martin Shikuku, Charles Rubia, Raila Odinga, Keneth Matiba, George Anyona and others
- Ethnic clashes Molo, Likoni, Kitale 1992/1997 (post election violence)
- St. Kizito Girls death (Meru 1991)
- Ngai Ndeithyia train disaster 1993
- Bombolulu Girls 1995
- El Nino Flooding of Nyando, Budalangi 1997
- Bomb Blast 1998
- Kenya Airways Airbus Crush – Abidjan Cote D'Ivoire 2000
- Alcohol Poisoning (Kumi Kumi) 2000
- Train Fire Disaster, Athi River 2002
- Bomb Blast Kikambala 2002
- Death of Kijana Wamalwa – 3 weeks mourning
- Increased Violent Robberies 2004 – 2006
- Mungiki killings and terror mayhem 2006 – 2007
- Landslide in Kakamega 2007
- Ethnic clashes Kuresoi and Mt. Elgon 2007
- Post election violence, property destruction, lootings, killings and internally displaced persons (IDPs) December 30th 2007
- Continued violence in Naivasha, Eldoret, Nakuru, Kisumu, Nairobi – TV images and reminders of atrocities 2008.



The first time I found myself able to talk in detail about my experiences for the six days was during the **trauma counseling sessions**. There I felt relieved because I realized from what my other colleagues narrated that **I was not alone** and that some of them had gone through worse experiences than mine.

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