

Level of Exposure to Traumatic Experiences among Primary and Secondary Survivors of Post-Election Violence of 2007/2008 in Nakuru County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Recent advances in psychological research reveals that experiences of children and circumstances of children in armed conflict are diverse. Children have long been both direct and indirect victims of violence. Traumatic events can have effects on the victims, perpetrators and those who witness such events. In the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, children were exposed to and witnessed various traumatic events. The study sought to establish the level of exposure to traumatic experiences among the children survivors of 2007/2008 post-election violence. The study was guided by Cognitive Behavioral Theory. The study target population was 77,768 children. A sample size of 460 respondents was derived from 10 divisions in Nakuru county which were hard hit by post-election violence. The sample comprised of 400 children who included primary and secondary survivors of the violence and 20 deputy head teachers in the schools sampled and 40 parents who took part in focused group discussions. Expost facto comparative research design was utilized and multi-stage sampling approach was used to derive the sample. Data for the study was obtained using questionnaires, interview schedules and focused group discussions. A pilot study was conducted in Subukia division involving 80 children, four deputy head teachers and two focused group discussions. The hypotheses were tested at significance level of 0.05. The study found the mean of the primary survivor was higher than that of secondary survivors. This means majority of the children had witnessed more than ten traumatic experiences.

Key words: *Level of exposure, traumatic experiences, post-election violence, secondary survivors, and primary survivors*

Introduction

The experiences of children and circumstances of children in armed conflict are diverse. Children have long been both direct and indirect victims of violence. An estimated 300,000 children in more than 80 countries are involved in armed conflict as aggressors, victims of bombardment, crossfire and massacres. They are also involved in carrying guns, fighting, as spies, porters and cooks and being used as soldiers' wives (Zahr, 1996). A study carried out in northern Uganda to assess the level of exposure to war related violence in reported that (77.8%) had their lives threatened with death, (76.4%) experienced physical injury and 44.3% had been abducted (Vinck, Pham, Storer and Weinstein, 2007).

Children survivors of armed conflict experience personal terror. They witness the physical abuse or death of loved ones. They suffer destruction of their homes and communities, loss of their traditional livelihoods and material possessions. Several studies reveal some of the traumatic experiences of children. A study in Rwanda after the genocide revealed that the children had witnessed killings, their life had been threatened, had lost immediate family members and witnessed rape or sexual mutilation (Palmer, 1999).

In a study carried out in the Gaza strip by Thabet (2008), Palestinian children reported variety of traumatic events as a result of repeated incursions of the area. The number of traumatic events ranged from zero (0) to thirty one traumatic events with a mean of 13.7 events. The most common traumatic events were: hearing shelling of the area (81.5%), hearing the sonic sounds of jet fighters, hearing shootings and bombardment (78.2%) and seeing mutilated bodies on Television (76.7%) and hearing arrest or kidnapping (53.6) percent. Moreover, children also experienced deprivation of water and food, destruction of homes (73%), sometimes forced to leave home during the war (69%) witness assassination of people (54.3 %), hearing the killing of a friend (47.3%), hearing the killing of a close relative (47.3%) and hearing of disappearance of someone or a friend 42 percent. The study also showed that 50.5 percent of the participants lost someone they know during the war.

In another study by Tolin and Foy (2006) among preschool children in a war zone, in the Gaza strip, children were exposed to a wide range of traumatic events. Majority, which is 78.5 percent of them had between 0-15 traumatic events which was high exposure, 18.8% reported low exposure, while 4.3 percent reported moderate exposure. Some of the traumatic events reported included; witnessing wounded people on television was the most traumatic event, witnessing destruction of other people's houses with airplanes and helicopters and witnessing the beating of a family member or a friend. In Burma, children were direct victims of conflict in form of forced labor and pottering, torture, rape, trafficking, as internally displaced persons and extra judicial killings by the army and security forces. Displacement from home is believed to adversely affect children as they are most vulnerable to diseases and malnutrition due to lack of access to health care, they have no access to education, no security and are at the risk of serious human abuse if found by Burmese army troops. Girls and sometimes boys under the age of 18 are routinely raped by Burmese army soldiers. A report released in 2002 by the Shah Human rights Foundation, detailed rapes involving at least 625 girls and women by Burmese army troops (Dejong and Komproue, 2001). In Rwanda the situation was not different; a study by Palmer (1999) revealed that between April and May 1995, more than 15,700 girls and woman were raped. In the Balkans in 1992, it was estimated that more than 20,000 women and girls had been raped. Moreover, the rapes were extremely brutal with one-quarter of them resulting to death. They were carried out during relocation, at internally displaced camps, during forced labor and at military check points (Yule and Williams, 1990).

Every conflict forces children live through some terrible experiences, indeed millions of children have been present at events far beyond the worst nightmares of adults. In Sarajevo, UNICEF, conducted a survey among 1,505 children in 1993 and found that (97%) of children had experienced shelling nearby,(29%) felt "unbearable sorrow", (20%) had terrifying dreams while (55%) percent had been shot out by snipers and (66%) had been in a situation where they thought they would die (Zivcic, 1993). In addition, a survey in 1995 in Angola found that 66 percent of children had seen people being murdered, 91 percent had seen people being tortured, beaten or hurt. In addition, more than two thirds of the children lived through events in which they defied death (Pfefferbaum, 1997).

Child wartime deaths are not always from artillery. Many countries breakdown of health and water systems, leave the children more vulnerable to basic diseases. In a study conducted in southern Sudan to determine factors associated with PTSD during armed conflict, using a sample of 1242 adolescent respondents indicated that (47.9) of the respondents with PTSD reported to have been seriously ill without medical care. One third reported lack of food and water (Rober, Ocaka, browne, Oyok and Sondorp, 2008).

Children face further threat from war of emotional and mental damage. Some 10 million of the world's children suffer physiological trauma as a result of war experience. UNICEF found that almost 80 percent of Rwanda children witnessed massacre of one million people. Even when children do not witness violence or lose family members, they suffer the disruption of their normal lives as school close, friends disperse and their homes come under fire (Yule, 1999). While the international minimum age for children in armed conflict is fifteen years, often children are recruited or forced to serve as soldiers (Thabet and Vostanis, 1999)

Nonetheless, in 2007, Kenya's general election was accompanied by violent conflict dubbed 'land' and 'ethnic' clashes. These conflicts mostly affected parts of Coast, Western, Nyanza and Rift Valley regions and Nairobi slums. In Nakuru county in the Rift Valley region, tensions started building up before elections and the announcement of the results for presidential election was preceded by a lot of anxiety and eventually the breakup of the violence. During the post-election violence, many atrocities were committed and human rights violated (Centre for Rights Education and Awareness, 2008). The violence took the form of ethnically targeted killings, forced eviction, maiming, burning of houses and business premises. Traumatic and forced circumcision, penile amputations were some of the worst forms of violence inflicted on male victims from certain communities (Waki report, 2008).

According to ministry of education report (2008), education sector was not spared, schools were not spared, some schools were burnt, classrooms and offices destroyed; school property such as furniture and teaching materials were stolen. Many children came back to school after staying home for long time while others left due to unfriendly environment (Daraja Civic Initiative Forum Report, 2008). During the violence some schools were completely burnt down. In addition, 64,697 primary school pupils in Kenya were displaced; 32,847 boys and 30,652 girls from the secondary schools, a total of 9294 children have been displaced; 4682 boys and 2979 girls (Ministry of Education Report, 2008).

Nakuru county had experienced ethnic and political conflicts in 1992 and 1997 prior to general elections held in those years. However, in 2007 violence erupted after the announcement of results though tension had started to

build up before the elections. The post-election violence of 2007/2008 adversely affected Nakuru county, there was losses in human life, property and livelihoods. Injuries were also sustained. Further, thousands of people were displaced. According to Waki Report (2008), 1564 houses were burnt and 263 lives were lost during the initial and retaliatory attacks that took place in Nakuru county. Recent advances in psychological research indicate that traumatic events can have effects on the victims, perpetrators and those who witness them. In addition, studies have indicated that traumatic events affect children in a much more profound way than adults since they have not yet developed personality or psychological structures to deal with horrors and trauma. This raises a concern; how much did the children witness? It is in the view of this that the researcher set out to evaluate the level of exposure to traumatic experiences of children survivors of post- election violence of 2007/2008 in Nakuru County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traumatic Experiences of Children in Armed Conflict

The experiences of children and circumstances of children in armed conflict are diverse. Children have long been both direct and indirect victims of violence. An estimated 300,000 children in more than 80 countries are involved in armed conflict as aggressors, victims of bombardment, crossfire and massacres. They are also involved in carrying guns, fighting, as spies, porters and cooks and being used as soldiers' wives (Zahr, 1996). A study carried out in northern Uganda to assess the level of exposure to war related violence in reported that (77.8%) had their lives threatened with death, (76.4%) experienced physical injury and 44.3% had been abducted (Vinck, Pham, Storer and Weinstein, 2007).

The wounds inflicted by armed conflict on children include physical injury, gender based violence and psychosocial distress. Thousands of children are killed every year as a direct result of fighting from knife wounds, bullets, bombs and land mines. A study in Mozambique between 1981 and 1988, armed conflict was the cause underlying 454,000 deaths (Garborino and Kostelng, 1998). In addition children are the most vulnerable to collective assaults on the health and well-being.

Children survivors of armed conflict experience personal terror. They witness the physical abuse or death of loved ones. They suffer destruction of their homes and communities, loss of their traditional livelihoods and material possessions. Several studies reveal some of the traumatic experiences of children. A study in Rwanda after the genocide revealed that the children had witnessed killings, their life had been threatened, had lost immediate family members and witnessed rape or sexual mutilation (Palmer, 1999).

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In another study by Tolin and Foy (2006) among preschool children in a war zone, in the Gaza strip, children were exposed to a wide range of traumatic events. Majority, which is 78.5 percent of them had between 0-15 traumatic events which was high exposure, 18.8% reported low exposure, while 4.3 percent reported moderate exposure. Some of the traumatic events reported included; witnessing wounded people on television was the most traumatic event, witnessing destruction of other people's houses with airplanes and helicopters and witnessing the beating of a family member or a friend. There was no gender difference in the number of traumatic events.

Children are passive recipients of adverse effects of violence. In Burma, children were direct victims of conflict in form of forced labor and pottering, torture, rape, trafficking, as internally displaced persons and extra judicial killings by the army and security forces. Displacement from home is believed to adversely affect children as they are most vulnerable to diseases and malnutrition due to lack of access to health care, they have no access to education, no security and are at the risk of serious human abuse if found by Burmese army troops. Girls and sometimes boys under the age of 18 are routinely raped by Burmese army soldiers. A report released in 2002 by the Shah Human rights Foundation, detailed rapes involving at least 625 girls and women by Burmese army

troops (Dejong and Komproe, 2001). In Rwanda the situation was not different; a study by Palmer (1999) revealed that between April and May 1995, more than 15,700 girls and woman were raped. In the Balkans in 1992, it was estimated that more than 20,000 women and girls had been raped. Moreover, the rapes were extremely brutal with one-quarter of them resulting to death. They were carried out during relocation, at internally displaced camps, during forced labor and at military check points (Yule and Williams, 1990).

In many situations, the health of children may be endangered through malnutrition, insufficient food intake, and a lack of access to basic health care. A 2002 report by John Hopkins University and partners found that children in the Gaza and West Bank experienced severe levels of malnutrition. Moreover, children and their families were frequently being prevented from reaching clinics and hospitals during periods of occupation by Israeli troops. A study in the war zone attributed only two percent of death to violence while the rest were caused by interaction of malnutrition and infection (Thabet, 2008).

Every conflict forces children live through some terrible experiences, indeed millions of children have been present at events far beyond the worst nightmares of adults. In Sarajevo, UNICEF, conducted a survey among 1,505 children in 1993 and found that (97%) of children had experienced shelling nearby, (29%) felt “unbearable sorrow”, (20%) had terrifying dreams while (55%) percent had been shot out by snipers and (66%) had been in a situation where they thought they would die (Zivcik, 1993). In addition, a survey in 1995 in Angola found that 66 percent of children had seen people being murdered, 91 percent had seen people being tortured, beaten or hurt. In addition, more than two thirds of the children lived through events in which they defied death (Pfefferbaum, 1997).

Over the last 10 years, two million children have been killed in conflict, the Red Cross estimates that more than one million have been orphaned, over six million have been seriously injured and permanently disabled and over ten million have been left with serious psychological trauma (Green, Korol, Grace, Vary, Leonard, Glesser and Smitson-Cohen, 1991).

Child wartime deaths are not always from artillery. Many countries breakdown of health and water systems, leave the children more vulnerable to basic diseases. In a study conducted in southern Sudan to determine factors associated with PTSD during armed conflict, using a sample of 1242 adolescent respondents indicated that (47.9) of the respondents with PTSD reported to have been seriously ill without medical care. One third reported lack of food and water (Rober, Ocaka, browne, Oyok and Sondorp, 2008).

Children face further threat from war of emotional and mental damage. Some 10 million of the world’s children suffer physiological trauma as a result of war experience. UNICEF found that almost 80 percent of Rwanda children witnessed massacre of one million people. Even when children do not witness violence or lose family members, they suffer the disruption of their normal lives as school close, friends disperse and their homes come under fire (Yule, 1999). While the international minimum age for children in armed conflict is fifteen years, often children are recruited or forced to serve as soldiers (Thabet and Vostanis, 1999).

Among adolescents, research indicates that adolescents exposed to violence, particularly those exposed to community violence throughout their lives. Further, they tend to show high levels of aggression, acting out accompanied by anxiety, behavioural problems, school problems, truancy and revenge seeking (Seedat, Nyamai, Njenga, 2004). One study in a low income urban setting teens between ages of 9- 15 found that those who witness or were victims of violence showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder similar to those of soldiers coming back from war (Laor, Wolmer and Mayes, 1996). Symptoms included distractibility, intrusive and unwanted fears and thoughts and feelings of not belonging. The reviewed literature on this section indicates that children encounter numerous traumatic experiences during armed conflict, this underscores the present study concern: What were the traumatic experiences of the children survivors of post-election violence in Nakuru county? The current study aimed at filling this gap.

Objectives

- i) To determine the level of exposure to traumatic experiences of primary and secondary survivors in areas affected by post- election violence of 2007/2008 in Nakuru county.

Hypothesis

H_0 2: There is no significant difference in level of exposure between the primary and secondary survivors in areas affected by post- election violence in Nakuru county.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed ex-post factor and correlational research designs. The study was carried out in Nakuru County in the Rift Valley region of Kenya. The county has an area size of 74,905km² and administratively divided into four sub counties namely: Nakuru North, Nakuru central, Molo and Naivasha. The target population for study was 77,768 children. The study used a sample of 400 children survivors of the post- election violence, 20 deputy head teachers and 40 parents from 20 schools. To get the sample, multi stage sampling strategies were adopted. At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to get the 10 divisions that were hardest hit by the post-election violence of 2007/2008 which included; Naivasha, Keringet, Njoro, Molo, Olenguruone, Mausummit, Kuresoi, Mau Narok, Rongai and Mauche. In the second stage, day schools were purposively selected. In the third stage, simple random sampling was used to get the specific schools. In the fourth stage, purposive sampling was used to get the specific children who are residents of the sampled divisions during the Post-election violence. In the final stage, simple random sampling was used to get the final sample.

The deputy headteachers were selected from the 20 schools selected in the second stage. The parents were picked from two schools randomly selected in areas which were hardest hit by the violence. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the children survivors while the interview schedule was used for the deputy head teachers and focused group discussion guidelines for the parents. To establish the reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was carried out in Subukia division which possessed same characteristics as the divisions sampled. It involved 80 children, four deputy headteachers and two focused group discussions. Split-half method was used to analyse data from the pilot study and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.8. The results from the pilot study revealed the research instruments were reliable and possessed both content and face validity. Descriptive analysis was used to establish the mean and standard deviation of survivors' scores on the Impact of Event Scale while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses. Qualitative results were based on information obtained from 20 deputy head teachers in 20 schools and 40 parents who participated in focused group discussions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to evaluate the traumatic experiences of children during post- election violence of 2007/2008 in Nakuru county. On the overall, the study found the mean number of traumatic experiences of all the children sampled to be (13.2), with a standard deviation of (4.6). This is interpreted to mean that the overall traumatic experiences of all children who participated in the study was high. However, some differences were found between the primary and secondary survivors in number of traumatic experiences. While the mean of the primary survivors was (13.9), with a standard deviation of (5.0), the mean of secondary survivors was (12.5) with a standard deviation of (4.1).

The study found statistically significant difference between primary and secondary survivors in number of traumatic experiences. The primary survivors had higher number traumatic experiences than the Secondary survivors. Independent t-test was performed to establish whether the difference is significant. The study found that there was significant difference between the primary and secondary survivors. The primary survivors had $m=13.9$, $S=5.00$, $t(392)=9.58$, $P=.000$, $\alpha=0.05$ while the secondary survivors had $m=12.5$, $S=4.1$, $t(392)=9.58$, $p=.000$, $\alpha=0.05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected at significance level of 0.05 that there was no significant difference between the traumatic experiences of primary and secondary survivors during post-election violence.

An analysis of items of traumatic experience was carried out. According to the findings, the key traumatic experiences of the primary survivors during the post- election violence included; displacement from home (94%), sleeping in the cold 170 (89%), seeing people being injured 170 (86%), property being looted 168(91%), hearing people crying for help 189(97%), going without food 118 (64%), stopped going to school for some time 182(94%) and witnessing killing of people (75%). On the other hand, the secondary survivors had the following

key experiences; seeing people sleeping in the cold 172 (87%), seeing people going without food 161 (82%), hearing people crying for help (93%) and seeing other people's property being destroyed (83%) as indicated on table 46. It is therefore evident from the study that both the primary and secondary survivors had encountered various traumatic experiences.

Table 4.4: Traumatic Experiences of the Children during the Post-election Violence

Traumatic experience	Primary Survivors(N=197)		Secondary Survivors(N=197)	
	frequency	%	Frequency	%
Seeing killing of people	143	75.3	87	44.8
Physically injured	29	15.9	-	-
Their houses torched	117	61.6	-	-
Parent lost property or livelihood.	151	78.6	-	-
Saw people property being destroyed	182	94.8	163	83.2
Saw armed gang	129	79.9	138	70.8
Heard people crying for help	189	96.9	184	93.4
Saw dead bodies or body parts	122	67.4	118	60.8
Witnessed rape or sexually harassed	31	17.1	27	13.9
Parent killed	16	8.2	-	-
Brother or sister killed	1	0.5	-	-
Other relative killed	37	19.0	-	-
Relative injured	80	41.0	-	-
Brother or sister injured	4	2.1	-	-
Saw someone know to you being injured	106	54.4	154	78.2
Friend killed	57	29.2	-	-
Know someone who disappeared	57	29.2	165	84.6
Parent disappeared	77	45.3	-	-
Know a relative who disappeared	8	4.1	-	-
Friend who disappeared	22	11.3	26	13.2
Someone they know disappeared	32	16.4	26	13.2
Displaced from home	165	84.6	-	-
Stayed in IDP camp	172	94.0	-	-
Went without food for long hours	72	38.5	-	-
Slept in the cold	118	63.8	-	-
Stopped going to school for some time	171	89.1	-	-
Someone you know to them was killed	182	94	94	48.2
Saw property being looted	168	90.8	152	78.4
Detected smell of dead bodies	52	32.7	23	11.9
Saw people being beaten mercilessly	97	53.0	132	68.8
Saw people sleep in the cold	171	89.1	172	89.1
Heard yells of gangs as they attacked	189	96.9	138	70.8

Source: Field data

According to the findings, the key traumatic experiences of the primary survivors during the post- election violence included; displacement from home (94%), sleeping in the cold 170 (89%), seeing people being injured 170 (86%), property being looted 168(91%), hearing people crying for help 189(97%), going without food 118 (64%), stopped going to school for some time 182(94%) and witnessing people being killed(75%). On the other hand , the secondary survivors had the following key experiences ; seeing people sleeping in the cold 172 (87%), seeing people going without food 161 (82%), hearing people crying for help (93%) and seeing other people's property being destroyed (83%).It is therefore evident from the study that both the primary and secondary survivors had encountered various traumatic experiences.

In addition, a focused group discussions confirmed most of the traumatic experiences that had been mentioned by the children, the members of the groups confirmed that children had witnessed terrifying experiences where some of them witnessed their people being killed, raped, maimed and even injured. They also witnessed property, livelihoods and homes being burnt.

The focused group discussions reported that their children experienced very hard times in the internally displaced camps. Most of those camps were in police stations, administrative posts, churches and training centres

where sanitation was poor. In the IDP camps, life was very difficult, food was not enough, and children went for long hours without food and spent cold nights in the open without beddings. Moreover, in the camps they were also subjected to threats by criminal gangs since most of the inhabitants of the camps were children and women who felt insecure. Sexual exploitation was common in internally displaced camps. One member remarked: “Our children saw a lot of sexual exploitation during distribution of food in the internally displaced camps”. It was a form of forced prostitution where women were asked to have sex with men in order to get food to give their children. In addition, the focused group discussions revealed that other traumatic experiences that affected their children was seeing dead bodies or parts and smell of rotting bodies. A member of the one of the groups narrated how the brother had penile amputation and at the same time the body was left to rot for two days.

The focused group discussions also pointed out that when counter attacks were organized, young children even as young as twelve years of age were forced to join the gangs to increase the numbers. This finding is supported by other studies that have reported traumatic experiences of children during armed conflict. A study by Palmer (1999) reported that children survivors of the genocide in Rwanda had witnessed killing of people including family members, witnessed rape and sexual mutilation and destruction of property. It also agrees with a report by Ovuga and Oyok(2008) in a study in Southern Sudan which found that majority of former children soldiers had witnessed murder of a family member, had been taken ill without medical care and had gone for many days without food and water. Moreover, majority were victims of direct combat and torture. A study by Thabet (2008) to investigate the effects of political violence on mental health of children in the Gaza strip reported some of the traumatic experiences to include watching mutilated bodies, being forced to leave home during the war and deprivation of food and water. In the current study, children reported number of traumatic experiences as high as 31.

Further analysis was performed to determine the number of traumatic experiences of all children during the post-election violence. The mean number of traumatic experiences of the children was 13.2with zero as the lowest and 31 as the highest. Analysis for the primary and secondary survivors indicated that the primary survivors had a higher mean of 13.93 while that of the secondary survivors was 12.47.The difference was found to be significant.

The level of exposure of the children during the post-election violence was also analyzed. A scale adopted from Summerfield (1993) was used where the numbers of traumatic experiences of children was categorized into three as follows, 0-5 low exposure; 6-10-moderate exposure while above 11 traumatic experiences was high exposure. The study found that majority of the children sampled had high exposure to traumatic experiences. This is interpreted to mean that on average, both the primary and secondary survivors had experienced more than eleven traumatic experiences as indicated on table 4.5.This finding is consistent with those of a study by Thabet (2002) in Gaza Strip which found that majority of the children had high exposure to traumatic experiences which ranged between 0-15. Ovuga and Oyok (2008) in two studies carried out in Northern Uganda and Juba in Southern Sudan among former child soldiers found that majority registered more than 10 and eight traumatic experiences respectively.

Table 4.5: Level of Exposure to Traumatic Experiences during the Post-election Violence

Category	Primary survivors		Secondary survivors	
	F	%	F	%
Low exposure	5	2.5	5	2.5
Moderate exposure	4	2.0	8	4.1
High exposure	188	95.4	184	93.4
Total	197	100.0	197	100.0

Source: Field data

CONCLUSION

During the post-election violence, children were exposed to various traumatic experiences. The key traumatic events encountered by children included; displacement from home (87%), sleeping in the cold(86%), seeing people being injured(86%), going without food for many hours(82%) and seeing property being looted(85%).Further, reports of parents who participated in focused group discussions indicated that life in the internally displaced camps was hard for the children; food was not enough, children spent cold nights in the open and faced security threats from criminal gangs. In addition, children as young as twelve years of age were forced to join the gangs. On the overall the study found that had children had high exposure to traumatic experiences. This means majority of the children had witnessed more than ten traumatic experiences. Such high exposure to traumatic experiences may have implications on child's development; in their ability to build meaningful relationships and their overall mental well-being. It may also lead to long term stress reactions in the survivor. There was a significant difference in traumatic experiences between the primary and secondary survivors with the primary survivors being higher in number of traumatic experiences.

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