Exploring the Role of Spirituality in Coping With War Trauma Among War Veterans in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Spirituality affects people's well-being and can be used to cope with traumatic experiences. The present study explored the role of spirituality in coping with war-related trauma among war veterans who fought in the Zimbabwean war of liberation between 1966 and 1979. Sixteen in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted using a semistructured interview guide. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. The study revealed the following seven themes that pointed to the role of spirituality in coping with war trauma: connectedness with ancestors, spirit mediums help to cope with fear, spirit of war, role of war songs and dances, spirituality and unity, spirit mediums helped with moral issues, and believing in God. The study recommends the need to be culturally sensitive to understand an individual's coping responses when faced with war-related trauma.

Keywords

spirituality, war, trauma, coping, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Very few qualitative studies have focused on the use of spiritual beliefs to cope with war trauma during the ongoing war and after-war experiences. Spirituality helps people get a sense of mastery and meaning from traumatic events. This meaning making through spiritual coping may curtail symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and hence better psychological well-being (Bormann, Liu, Thorp, & Lang, 2012; Slater, Bordenave, & Boyer, 2016).

Spirituality and Zimbabwe's War of Liberation in Zimbabwe

The war of liberation in Zimbabwe (1966-1979) was fought between the indigenous people of Zimbabwe against the Rhodesian forces who had colonized the country (Alexander & McGregor, 2004). The two main groups of fighters from Zimbabwe were ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army—dominated by fighters from the Ndebele speaking regions of Matabeleland) and ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army—mainly from Shona speaking regions of the country). During the war, the Zimbabwean freedom fighters incorporated Guerrilla war strategies (hence, they are called Guerrillas). At the outbreak of the war in 1966, Rhodesian forces were more prepared than the Guerrilla fighters who largely were not trained. Most indigenous freedom fighters died during the initial stages of battle (Chingono, 1999).

The objective of the struggle was to obtain African majority rule characterized by equitable distribution of wealth among the African majority through removal of the European settlers who had colonized the country (Dzimbanhete, 2013). It has been noted that the collaboration between the Guerillas and the general rural population in the war zones guaranteed survival of the freedom fighters (Dzimbanhete, 2013). One way in which the Guerrillas interacted with the rural populace was through religious ceremonies at which spirit mediums (spirits of the dead speaking through someone they choose) spoke through selected individuals among the civilians.

During the war, spirituality played a key role and helped veterans to deal with the traumatic experiences of war (Chung, 2006; Lan, 1985). The spirit mediums played crucial roles, for example, leading in morning rituals (Lan, 1985), ensuring that the rains fall and that agricultural produce was enough for the people, and healing injured veterans (Fontein, 2006); they helped to get the support of the people in the community, led the fighters to safety zones, predicted the movements of the enemy, and inspired confidence and determination in the fighters (Bourdillion, 1984).

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The veterans in turn strongly believed in the spirit mediums and always informed the ancestors about the war especially justifying the need for war. The ancestors in return would pledge to help the freedom fighters. The belief in the role of the ancestors to lead the fighters was important, as it helped to transform their previous peasant mind-set to seasoned fighters. However, there has been a dearth of psychological studies focusing on war veterans and spirits in Zimbabwe (Fontein, 2006).

Spirituality helps people to perceive the world, and "creates a screen for experiences and perceptions related to possible spiritual events" (Farley, 2007, p. 3). It also helps people to interpret and explain the world and to create beliefs, values, and ethics. Both religion and spirituality have been found to be very important for an individual's psychosocial well-being (Fonda, 2011; Ingersoll, 1994; Kahle & Robbins, 2004). Ancestral respect has been found to provide protection, health, and balancing of individual, family, and cultural dynamics (S. Edwards, Makunga, Thwala, & Mbele, 2006). Spiritual and religious beliefs have been found to help in coping and may contribute to resilience in times of trauma (Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, & Koenig, 2007).

Cross-Cultural Applicability of Trauma Models

There have been many debates on the cross-cultural applicability of trauma models, and spirituality has been found to be one of the main factors that mediate between catastrophic events and the trauma that is experienced. It has been noted that although PTSD describes some features of universal response to trauma, it falls short of explaining local forms of expressing distress (Hinton & Lewis-Fernández, 2011; Miller et al., 2009). The PTSD diagnosis also falls short in that it leads to medicalization of human suffering by ascribing biological causes to social issues (Kienzler, 2008). Healing entails treating psychological scars and not addressing livelihood issues and difficulties thereby trivializing social causes and consequences of human well-being (Million, 2013). Some authors have contended that the PTSD diagnosis is a Western approach and does not capture the dynamics of trauma as experienced by the African people as it focuses on a single traumatic event (Afana, Pedersen, Rønsbo, & Kirmayer, 2010). Kirmayer et al. (2011) noted that war consequences are long lasting and may be passed on to the next generation.

This study sought to explore how veterans who fought in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe used spirituality to cope with their traumatic experiences during and after the war. It is premised on the Afrocentric approach which advocates for the need to conceptualize the world in ways that are consistent with African people's history and to apply that knowledge in tandem with the situation (Asante, 2007). The Afrocentric perspective views cultural differences as important and feel that these differences should not be trivialized (Asante, 2007). Similarly, Kirmayer, Lemelson, and Barad (2007) explicated

that individual ways of coping with trauma mirrors the people's personalities, resilience as well as their cultural context. People's understanding of diseases and remedies are transmitted from generation to generation, thus there is need for a holistic approach to support trauma survivors that should emphasize the importance of one's culture (Bojuwoye, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Marshall, 2005; Pellerin, 2012).

Method

Research Design

The study was qualitative. According to the qualitative approach, a cultural frame should be used to understand people's experiences (Marsella & Christopher, 2004). Qualitative research methods were suitable for this study to help the researchers understand how war veterans in Zimbabwe have used spirituality to cope with traumatic events during and after the war. The phenomenological research design was adopted. It was aimed at exploring the lived experiences of a group of people with a phenomenon of interest (Hancock, 2002). In phenomenology, rich data can be obtained if the subjects are given the freedom to choose their own examples of lived experiences (Sodi, 1996).

Research setting. Gweru district was chosen as the research site to study how war veterans in Zimbabwe use spirituality in coping with war-related traumatic events. The district is located in the Midlands Province. Various tribes and especially the dominant ones, the Ndebele and the Shona, are found in Gweru district.

Sampling

Criterion sampling was used in this study to select veterans who had experienced more than seven traumatic events. The Life Events Checklist (LEC) was used as the screening tool (Gray, Litz, Hsu, & Lombardo, 2004). The LEC "assesses exposure to sixteen events known to potentially result in PTSD or distress and includes one item assessing any other extraordinarily stressful event" (Gray et al., 2004, p. 330). Consultations with key informants and trauma experts were done and this helped in modifying the LEC to suit local contexts. Although the LEC is not specifically meant to assess war-related events, it has several items that are unique to the war experience, for example, combat exposure or exposure to war; captivity ("kidnapped, abducted, held hostage, prisoner of war); life-threatening illness or injury; sudden, violent death; sudden, unexpected death of someone close to you; serious injury, harm, or death you caused to someone else"; "assault with a weapon (being shot, stabbed, threatened with a knife, gun, bomb); exposure to toxic substance (for example, dangerous chemicals) and fire or explosion" (Gray et al., 2004, pp. 330-341). It should be noted that although the LEC did not screen for distress or PTSD among the participants, a

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information.

Participant	Gender	Age	Current employment	Level of education	Age joined war	Period of involvement in war	Deployment marital status	Number of children	Age of eldest child	Age of youngest child	Score on checklist
1. Ind	M	56	NIL	PRI	18	3	S	5	29	11	7
2. Ind	M	67	NIL	SEC	25	7	M	6	40	25	9
3. Ind	F	55	NIL	PRI	15	3	S	6	35	15	14
4. Ind	M	57	NIL	PRI	17	3	S	4	30	16	16
5. Ind	F	54	S/E	TER	14	5	S	5	29	14	8
6. Ind	M	61	NIL	PRI	20	6	S	5	30	10	8
7. Ind	M	63	NIL	PRI	21	3	M	6	40	20	14
8. Ind	M	51	SOL	SEC	13	3	S	3	35	14	14
9. Ind	M	60	S/E	PRI	18	5	S	6	35	17	7
10. Ind	F	50	SOL	PRI	14	6	S	2	25	20	16
11. Ind	F	65	NIL	PRI	20	8	M	4	40	25	15
12. Ind	M	57	NIL	PRI	16	4	S	4	25	10	8
13. Ind	M	58	NIL	SEC	20	2	S	5	31	16	10
14. Ind	M	61	NIL	PRI	21	3	M	7	37	19	10
15. Ind	F	57	NIL	PRI	15	4	S	5	26	15	10
16. Ind	F	60	NIL	SEC	17	6	S	2	28	20	14
17. FGD 1	F	53	POL	SEC	15	3	S	5	30	14	12
18. FGD 1	F	55	NIL	PRI	15	3	S	4	28	13	9
19. FGD 1	M	75	NIL	TER	30	6	M	8	52	30	11
20. FGD 1	F	61	NIL	PRI	22	4	M	6	38	24	15
21. FGD 1	M	52	NIL	PRI	14	3	S	4	25	10	12
22. FGD 2	M	55	S/E	SEC	17	3	S	4	23	8	14
23. FGD 2	M	58	NIL	PRI	17	4	S	6	32	14	9
24. FGD 2	M	67	NIL	TER	28	2	M	5	38	15	12
25. FGD 2	M	56	NIL	SEC	16	4	S	4	27	15	16
26. FGD 2	F	57	NIL	SEC	18	4	S	5	34	18	14

Note. Ind = individual interview participant; M = male; PRI = primary; SEC = secondary; S/E = self-employed; F = female; TER = tertiary; SOL = soldier; FGD = focus group participant; POL = policeman.

person who has been exposed to five of the events on the LEC is at risk of developing PTSD (Gray et al., 2004). All the study participants had been exposed to more than seven traumatic events and this was above the cutoff of five.

A sample of 26 war veterans was drawn from the register of war veterans kept at Gweru District War Veterans office. Of the 26 participants, 10 were females and 16 males. The participants' ages ranged from 50 to 75 years. Three of the participants were self-employed, three worked for the government, and 20 were unemployed. Three participants had tertiary qualifications, eight had gone up to various stages of secondary education, 15 had some primary level of education. and six had completed their primary education. The ages at which the participants had joined the war ranged from 13 to 30 years. The period of deployment (years spent at war) ranged from 2 to 8 years. At the time of deployment, six of the participants were already married and 20 were single. The average number of children that each participant had was five, with the ages of their children ranging from 4 to 40 years (see Table 1).

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of 2 months at the Gweru District War Veterans office. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. Pretesting of the research instruments was done before the actual study was carried out. Participants in the pretest were not part of the final study. In phenomenological research, in-depth interviews are used to explore individual's unique personal experiences (Cousins, 2002). To ensure uniformity, the researchers developed an interview guide. In-depth interviews were done with 16 participants. Selection of war veterans to participate in the in-depth interviews ended when there was saturation of data, that is, when the researchers felt that there were diminishing returns and no new themes were being generated from the participants' narratives (Ziebland & McPherson, 2006). Interviews lasted about 1 hr to 1½ hr.

Two focus group discussions were conducted with five people per group. Individual interviews were meant mainly to explore sensitive issues which the researchers felt could not be discussed in a group setting. Focus group interviews helped to compliment the in-depth individual interviews, to explore the participants' shared understandings of the events that they had been through, to corroborate information, and to obtain rich data from the interaction of participants (Kennedy, Kools, & Krueger, 2001). This synergistic interaction generated data that were more holistic (Lederman, 1990). Focus groups also helped to check the reliability of

the information that was provided. The participants who were part of the focus group discussions were different from those who were interviewed. The study aims were explained to the participants in a language that they understood before commencement of the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic content analysis refers to "qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Analysis of data started after the first interview. A notebook was kept throughout the study to record the main ideas, codes, and themes. Ziebland and McPherson (2006) noted that the qualitative data analysis was a continuous and repetitive process.

The researchers used the eight steps of data analysis elucidated by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), and borrowed from the original content analysis procedures by Tesch (1990). These were "data preparation, defining unit of analysis, developing categories and coding systems, testing the coding system on a sample of text, coding all text, assessing coding consistency, drawing conclusions form coded data and reporting of findings" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, pp. 3-5).

Issues of Bias, Objectivity, Reliability, and Validity

Study boundaries were delineated through clarifying the variables, the population, and theoretical perspective. In addressing credibility, investigators attempted to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon (coping in trauma) under scrutiny is being presented by use of the LEC to screen participants who had been exposed to traumatic events. Triangulation in data collection with the use of focus groups and individual interviews also helped to ensure credibility of research findings. Use of different methods covered for limitations in using one instrument, helped exploit their unique benefits and to buttress the study's usefulness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To allow transferability, details of the context of the fieldwork and background data were provided. To allow for reanalysis, an inventory of interview questions and procedure, recorded interviews, and transcriptions as well as the comprehensive details of the coding process were produced. The researchers also involved peer researchers and experts in the field of trauma to assist with interpretation and to improve the analysis. Respondent feedback was also used to improve the validity of the study. This involved having three war veterans who were not study participants reading and commenting on the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the research, the researchers sought and obtained ethical clearance from the University of Limpopo's Research and Ethics Committee. Participants were informed about the research, this helped them to understand and to make informed decisions about their involvement in the research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005) and all participants signed individual consent forms. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of study participants.

Results

The study participants revealed several themes that showed their use of spirituality in their process of coping with trauma from the war period and in their day-to-day life. The study revealed the following seven themes that pointed to the role of spirituality in coping with war trauma: connectedness with ancestors, spirit mediums help to cope with fear, spirit of war, role of war songs and dances, spirituality and unity, spirit mediums helped with moral issues, and believing in God (Mutambara & Sodi, 2016).

Connectedness With Ancestors

War veterans reported that during the war, spirit mediums helped them to stay sane and to cope with the negative circumstances they were facing during the war of liberation. The spirits of the dead as they spoke through the living helped by instilling in them the spirit of courage. *Mbuya* Nehanda and *Sekuru* Kaguvi were two of the well-known spirit mediums and during the war were reported to have always urged the veterans to keep on fighting and not lose hope.

After the war, some of the participants narrated that they still maintained a connection to the ancestors. Those who were of this view said that this connection helped by giving them a sense of safety and a sense of achievement as they felt that they had succeeded in doing what the ancestral spirits had instructed them to do. They said connection with the spirits had helped them to cope with the rejection and alienation that they faced from civilians after the war. They felt that even when civilians seemed not to understand them, the spirit mediums were happy and grateful that they won the country's independence. The following extracts illustrate how the connectedness with the ancestors/spirit mediums helped war veterans to cope:

> Mbuya Nehanda the great Chimurenga spirit always told us that "mapfupa angu achamuka" translated into English to mean "my bones will rise." This meant that although she was dead she was going to come back again to revenge whatever atrocities were being done against her children. Therefore, we did not have fear at all because we were connected to our ancestors. They were helping us and they were our pillar of strength. (Male, Participant 6)

> We knew that whatever was said by the spirit mediums had to be respected. They had more authority compared to the commanders who were leading us during the war. They had promised that one day we were going to live in the land of milk and honey and we believed it. (Female, Participant 18)

One of the challenges that we faced after the war is that civilians do not really know how we suffered during the war. Even when you sit to discuss with them the difficulties that we faced during the war they just appear to be uninterested. That is very painful. But I believe that the spirit mediums rewarded us by helping us win the war. Despite what people might say, the spirit mediums that we worked with during the war are happy with our achievements. (Female, Participant 17)

The war veterans' narratives therefore pointed to the role and importance of spirituality in their lives. This belief is embedded in their cultural background and was found to be important in boosting mental wellness and resilience among the study participants. Thus, culturally, belief in supernatural beings helped the study participants to cope with their war experiences as well as the rejection and isolation that they faced after the war. The study participants used religion for positive interpretation of events.

Spirit Mediums Helped to Cope With Fear

The study participants noted that during the war, spirit mediums helped by warning them of any dangers that would befall them. Veterans reported that the spirits showed themselves in the form of birds, baboons, ants, and frogs. These animals and their behavior had symbolic meanings which helped veterans to know if they should proceed or not (if there was danger or if it was safe). War veterans said that this made them to be courageous and invoked in them a spirit of perseverance.

After the war period, some of the study participants noted that they were aware of new political parties, most of which did not appreciate the sufferings that the participants went through during the war. Participants feared that these political parties had hidden agendas. However, some reported that the assurance that they got from the ancestors during the war helped them to be hopeful. The extracts below illustrate how spirits helped to allay fear among the veterans.

When birds such as the Bateleur Eagle (chapungu) came over the camped war veterans and dived down to earth we knew that there was something bad that was about to happen and we would quickly leave the place. Spirits would also show themselves in the form of animals like baboons. Whenever we saw baboons running around making noise we would know that we were going to win the battle. On the other hand, if the baboons were quite with their hands folded we would know that we were going to be defeated. If we saw mist covering the place it would mean a fierce battle was about to happen and we would prepare for it. (Male, Participant 21)

If you crossed a river and frogs made some noise it meant that they would have blessed you and if there was a battle the comrades would win. However if the frogs were silent it meant disaster and bloodshed. So these animals helped to predicted what was ahead. It made us fearless. (Male, Participant 25)

After the war it seemed that things had changed. The animals that used to communicate with us during the war were no longer doing so. They had finished their mission since we had now won our independence. But the fact that we had encountered there sacred things during the war gives us confidence. Our spirit mediums will not allow those who do not appreciate the sacrifices that we made to rule this country. (Female, Participant 20)

The study participants believed that when spirit mediums appeared in the form of animals, they would help the war veterans by encouraging them to go on. In this way, the spirits gave the war veterans courage. Again cultural beliefs helped war veterans to cope with adversities during the war. The ability to communicate with and to heed the messages from the spirit mediums were reported to be very important. The above extract also points to the therapeutic nature of being connected with other living things, which allowed for active coping with a stressor.

Spirit of War

War veterans reported that the spirit mediums would evoke in them a spirit of being courageous and a desire to fight for their country. Most of the war veterans believed they fought in a state of spirit possession or a spirit of ecstasy. They said if it were not for this, they would have been unable to fight. Again, the veterans mentioned that the spirit of war still lingered among the veterans and some reported that even post the war they felt this urge to achieve in whatever they did. They had observed that their life even post war was driven by the experiences that they had during the war. This is revealed in the following narratives:

I was a form three student (15 years) at a boarding school in Chipinge. I left the boarding school with two of my friends. We really wanted to go and fight for the country and up to now we do not know what gave us such courage. When we reached the Mozambique border (war combatants were being trained in Mozambique), we could not find anyone to lead us into the country since we did not know the way and we were travelling by foot. We had to run back to school and we travelled for over one hundred kilometres that day. No one had noticed that we were absent and that was quite unusual as we were away for more than eight hours. We knew the spirits had brought confusion to the school authorities by failing to discover our absence. After two days we escaped again. I really think the spirit mediums gave us the power to soldier on and to feel a sense of obligation to join the war. We were very young kids by that time and I really wonder what had got into us. (Female, Participant 3)

Sometimes we fought and won very fierce battles. Sometimes I don't know how to explain how we managed to survive given the challenges that we faced during the war. Sometimes I believe that the spirits possessed us as we fought the war of liberation. No acceptable explanation can account for how we survived. (Male, Participant 1)

I am now a Christian but I don't trivialise the experiences that we had during the war. I have this urge and courage to go on even when I face difficult circumstances because I feel if I could make it during the war, I am still capable of accomplishing anything. (Female, Participant 5)

Believing in someone who is all-knowing and very powerful is a type of an emotion-focused coping strategy. In this sense, religion is used as a source of emotional support for individuals who are under stress. It helps to relieve anxieties and to know there is a supernatural power that is in control. This belief in supernatural beings helps to bring comfort as people are assured that someone will be taking care of the situation. This type of coping helps to remove guilt and uncertainty. Post war, some of the veterans noted that the war experiences had given them strength to face any challenge.

Role of War Songs and Dances

War veterans who took part in the current study reported that songs boosted morale in the camps and helped to relieve stress. Songs also helped those who were possessed by spirit mediums to get into a trance and start advising the veterans on the way forward. Songs were followed by dance and jubilation and the dancing would sometimes go on for the whole night (*pungwe*). The following excerpts illustrate the role of songs in the participant's life:

Songs would instil the sense of war into our souls. There was a particular song that I liked which went like "maruza imi vapambepfumi" translated into English to mean "you white people who take other people's riches you have been defeated." Whenever this song is sung I cry the whole night. (Male, Participant 25)

Whenever we sang war songs we would become fearless and face whatever was coming our way. (Male, Participant 2)

Post the war, the veterans noted that songs and dances were an important part of their gatherings. War veterans said during national holidays like the National Heroes' day (day set aside to commemorate the veterans) they usually gathered to honor the contributions that the war veterans made to the country's independence. Again, during funerals, they sang war songs. They reported that these war songs helped them to reconnect with each other and to remember what they had been through as illustrated below:

On this day all veterans from the district gather together at a designated place. We engage in song and dance and we meet other war veterans after a long time. The songs help to rejuvenate the war spirit. It is so calming to be with other war veterans. The spirit of togetherness is soothing and comforting. At times we hug each other and cry for being alive after such experiences during the war and after the war. (Female, participant 20)

As we bury fellow veterans we usually send them off by singing war songs. These songs are usually centred on thanking the departed for their bravery. We feel lively again during these burials and it's a time to show those who would have attended the funeral that we had been through a lot during the war. The songs and dances help us to face and cope with the death of a loved one. (Male, Participant 23)

Such gatherings are a time to share our problems and seek support from one another. Through song and dance we reconnect with those who passed away. Since independence we have lost many veterans, and songs and dances help us to celebrate the lives of those who have departed. (Male, Participant 4)

Singing helped to distract veterans from the emotional pain of losing a close acquaintance. Participants noted that songs and dances helped to release stress and negative emotions. Dances and songs lead to the connection of the body, mind, and spirit, which helps to release pent up emotion and contributes to the healing process. The therapeutic nature of these gatherings lay in the ability to foster social support and provide an outlet to bring out emotions and feelings in a safe environment.

Spirituality and Unity of Purpose

War veterans also said that the spirit medium and the traditional way of worship fostered a sense of unity among them. They reported that during the war, people had come from various backgrounds with their own ways of worship but they abandoned everything and started following the way of the ancestral worship. As the war veterans had left their families, having similar religious beliefs fostered a sense of unity that helped them to cope with war stressors like homesickness. The subsequent extracts illustrate this point:

There was a sense of unity among the war veterans. We would share whatever we had. We could exchange clothes and even when someone got fruits and honey in the bush, they would come back and share with the rest of the war veterans in the camp. People were selfless and spirit mediums encouraged people to share and to be equal. (Male, Participant 2)

The spirit mediums upheld a sense of unity among the war veterans by telling us to depend on each other. We believed that people who were selfish would anger the spirits and would die in battle. Things were tough but whatever little we got was evenly distributed. The spirit mediums warned us that even after independence whatever little we would get was to be shared amongst all. It is a pity that people are now greedy in independent Zimbabwe, which is against the teachings that we got from spirit mediums during the war. We believe that people who seek self-aggrandisement will die sorrowful death because they did not heed the warnings of the spirit mediums. (Male, Participant 14)

Having common goals and being in the company of people with whom one shares similar beliefs helps in coping

with adversity. Unity of purpose is an emotion-focused coping strategy that helps to cope with fear, anxiety, and frustration. Actively seeking support is also instrumental in coping and healing from trauma.

Spirit Mediums Helped With Moral Issues

The study participants stated that the moral principles they were given by the spirit mediums during war helped them to cope with war killings and witnessing death. All of them said during the war, spirit mediums had warned them that they were not to engage in cruel killing. They were told not to cut enemies into pieces (*kutema tema*) or to kill someone as they looked into his or her eyes. Observing these rules was an assurance that no one would be haunted by the spirit of the deceased. War veterans said that thinking about the people that they had killed during the war was one of their least worries because of the assurances that they were given by the spirit mediums. Again, participants noted that spirit mediums helped them by instructing that they were to remain sexually pure. They noted that making sexual advances was prohibited. The extracts below elucidate these points:

> The spirit mediums always warned us and gave us rules of conduct during the war. Therefore, as long as you did not kill people in an inhuman manner you were safe. The spirits did not allow brutal killings of people or killing people by your own hands like suffocating them. This was inhuman and it was against the war teaching. So we are not worried about the people we killed during the war. (Male, Participant 8)

> I believe that veterans who has a psychiatric condition could have gone against the rules that were given by the spirit mediums during the war. (Female, Participant 17)

> The spirit mediums gave us rules on morality. They warned us as males never to touch a female (have sex). The spirit mediums told us that those who defied this would be killed in the war front and this is what actually happened. Therefore, whoever was against the teachings of the spirit mediums would meet their fate. There was no debate about it. So teachings on moral issues meant that females were safe and there were no cases of rape. (Male, Participant 25)

Spirituality therefore helped the study participants to cope. It helped with enforcing moral standards that had to be followed and this minimized confusion. Spirituality is very important to overall well-being and can help buffer against adverse life events. Spirituality gave them the assurance and hope for a better future.

Believing in God

More than half of the study participants noted that after the war, they had converted to Christian religion and two of the participants were now pastors. Most of the participants noted that they now had a strong belief in God, which greatly helped them to cope with adverse life events. They reported that this belief in God helped them to cope with traumatic events after the war period, for example, economic hardships, unemployment, failure to provide for their families, lack of appreciation from the civilians, being labeled as troublemakers, and isolation. Under this theme, participants viewed suffering as God's will, surrendered their sorrows to God, and hoped that God was going to change their situation.

Suffering as will of God. Most of the war veterans who took part in this study said they believed that the suffering in terms of the poverty that they were going through was the will of God. Some said that maybe God wanted them to learn something from the mishaps that they were going through. This is illustrated in the extracts below:

> We are God's children and our God and our ancestors will one day come to our rescue. People label us as trouble makers. They say all bad things about us. I know that of God has a way of showing the whole nation that we are very important. One day through God they will come to realise that. (Male, Participant 21)

> Everything has its own time just like the bible says. God has time for everything. We are suffering as Zimbabweans because God wants us to learn something. So, we need to find out what God is communicating with us through the suffering. (Male, Participant 14)

Belief in God as the all-knowing and all powerful being helped to relieve pressure from the study participants. Belief in a deity helped to cope with adverse circumstances like poverty.

Surrendering control to God. The participants agreed that a higher being controlled their lives. They would give all their sorrows to God through prayer. Some said when things were tough and there seemed to be no way out, they believed God would always make a way as shown by the extracts below:

> We are powerless as human beings and we need to call upon the power of god to lead and to control our destinies. (Male, Participant 19)

> I am a born again Christian and have a leading role in church. I have surrendered my life to God and I believe that it is not me who is living but the Lord God now lives in me. Guiding me all the way. God is in control of our destinies and we are just helpless beings. (Male, Participant 13)

The study participants noted that surrendering everything to God helped to reduce the anxieties of things about what was going to happen in future. They noted that when one surrenders everything to God, they will no longer be worried about what will happen in their lives but will be comfortable with whatever happens to them. It also helped to do away with all negative emotions.

Hope that God will change situation. War veterans also said they felt that they still believed that whatever was happening to them today, God was going to bring a smile to their faces one day. They felt that their turmoil's were going to be over one day. This is illustrated in the narratives below:

> Who thought that we were going to fight against the whites who had colonised this country and defeat them. No one ever dreamt of an independent Zimbabwe since the whites had advanced war equipment and they were vigorously trained compared to us. They did not lack any basic necessities like us who used to starve during war. However, with the guidance of the war spirits which gave us strength we managed to defeat them. So the same way that we won the war against the whites, God is going to make sure that we overcome any challenge that may be facing us. (Male, Participant 12)

> I imagine how we survived the economic depression that the country faced during the 2005-2008 period. We had the worst inflation in the whole world. Supermarkets had no food and people had to queue for days to get mealie meal. However, it is now in the past. God helped us to sail through all that. So whatever problem there is now God will help us find a way out. (Female, Participants 17)

Hoping that God will change the situation through prayer is an emotional coping mechanism. It helped to foster hope among the veterans and helped them to prepare for any outcome.

Discussion

The study participants reported use of spiritual coping strategies for various traumatic events in their lives. A sense of connectedness to the ancestors helped them to cope with traumatic events like witnessing wanton killings during the war. Spirit mediums gave them courage to go on and to cope with fear even when the situation seemed hopeless. Lan (1985) noted that it was not only the fighters who believed in ancestors but also many indigenous people in Zimbabwe have given accounts of the help that they received from ancestors during the war. The guerrilla army infused these beliefs into rituals that guaranteed their safety and protection. Therefore, belief in spirit mediums helped foster resilience and psychological well-being among the study participants. Schiele (1996) has reported the importance of ancestors in the lives of Africans. He noted that from an Afrocentric paradigm, spirituality and nonmaterial aspects of a person's life are very important. In studies on trauma healing that were done in Cambodia, Boyden and Gibbs (1996) noted that Western-oriented therapies might not be effective because they do not recognize the contribution of ancestral spirits in the causation of ill health and healing. S. D. Edwards (2013) is in support of holistic psychology that takes into cognizance spiritual and traditional wisdom in the treatment of illness.

Spirituality also inculcated a sense of togetherness among study participants. Unity of purpose as an emotion-focused coping strategy helped study participants to cope with fear, anxiety, and frustration. Study findings have shown that spirit mediums were a major source of strength and motivation for the war veterans during the war. They instilled courage and a feeling of fearlessness in the lives of the war veterans during battles. The psychodynamic approach to therapy supports the conscious and unconscious experience of the patient, which largely is part of African traditional beliefs (Levine, 2014). Therefore, the therapist has to go beyond the surface to consider meaning of believing in ancestral spirits with a culture. These beliefs may be hidden in the unconscious memory but influencing the client's behavior.

Some war veterans reported that belief in spirit mediums had helped them cope with adverse events. Fonda (2011) has noted that spirituality affects people's well-being and helps in the recovery of mental health concerns. The spirit mediums as reported in the current study, helped war veterans to uphold morality and engage in acceptable behaviors during the war. None of the female combatants interviewed reported rape or sexual abuse during the war. Lan (1985) corroborated this by noting that spirit mediums restricted indigenous fighters from eating certain foods, ordered them to abstain from sex, and not to slay wild animals. Guerrillas believed that by observing these rules they would conquer their distracters.

Spirit mediums helped the war veterans to avoid cruel killings during the war. During this study, many participants noted that they were not tormented by the spirits of the people they slew during the war because they were advised by the spirits to avoid brutal killings and they heeded these messages. It has been assumed that excombatants are usually tormented by the spirits of the people they killed during the war (*ngozi*). Lan (1985) however elucidated that these beliefs and practices were not conceived by the freedom fighters or by the spirit mediums but existed among the Zimbabwean people for years. Marsella and Yamada (2007) noted that culture shapes people's experience of reality and their ability to control the world.

War veterans communicated with spirit mediums during their rituals; songs and dances helped to relieve stress and to allow for communication with the supernatural world. Songs helped distract study participants from concentrating on traumatic events, to reduce anxiety and helped in the relaxation process, brought unity, and sense of purpose and oneness. Malchiod (2005) observed that songs are a form of expressive therapy that allows individuals to unveil thoughts and feelings in a manner that is different and quickly helps to communicate issues.

Believing in a higher power like God who is supernatural and ruler of the universe helped the study participants to cope with traumatic circumstances in their lives. War veterans believed that the suffering that they had been through in their lives was the will of God and this helped them to accept their situations. It also aided in fostering hope in the future

and reducing anxiety. Whenever they felt overwhelmed with situations, some study participants reported that they surrendered everything to God and this helped reduce negativity. In all their predicaments, some participants still had the hope that God would change their situations from sorrow to happiness. Prayer helped to distract participants from thinking about their problems to focusing on the power of God.

Conclusion

Studies of trauma need to embrace the cultural diversities in the experiences and coping strategies used by individuals when faced with an adverse life event. It is important to understand the individual as well as the cultural uniqueness of a group of people when interrogating war-related traumatic experiences and related coping strategies. In addition, there is need to integrate spirituality into the therapeutic process especially among Zimbabwean veterans who are exposed to a myriad of post-war hardships.

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