

Psychological coping with the legacies of collective violence

A multisite qualitative exploration on the interactive role of coping within social, community and family relationships after political violence in Peru

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Summary

In the aftermath of a prolonged internal armed conflict (1980-2000), Perú continues to face complex challenges in addressing the legacy of human rights abuses. Nearly 4 decades after, scholars continue documenting the transgenerational sequelae that still pervades the life of the victims, their relatives, and their communities. However, victims have initiated coping strategies and mobilized communal trajectories in searching for justice. This dissertation starts from a relational perspective on post-conflict sequelae and coping, it raises questions into an exploration of community and family coping strategies and their mutual interactions in shaping trajectories of restoration. In cases connected to victims' community work and transitional justice, this study's multi-site qualitative research design combines case analysis, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.

Chapter 1 examines five community-based psychosocial interventions with communities affected by political violence in Ayacucho as a starting point to explore the potential of mental health services in addressing the sequelae of conflict and promoting restoration within social relationships. This case analysis converges the delineation of potential capabilities of local practitioners and public mental health services to engage communities in promoting well-being and restoration.

Chapter 2 reports on clinical case analyses addressing the mental health sequelae in survivors from Huancavelica. Findings reflect on intersecting sequelae at a threefold level of individual functioning, emic formulations and cultural idioms of distress, and communal impact, making the case for a holistic and socially oriented assessment of victims of collective violence.

Chapter 3 proposes case analyses on two Peruvian transitional justice processes to explore coping strategies within social and collective action. Results show that victims of human rights abuses engage in public denunciation and in mobilizing social platforms to advocate for justice and inscribe their histories in broader national and international socio-historical contexts.

Chapter 4 reports on a qualitative focus group design to explore relational processes of coping with histories of collective violence of women engaged in peer groups oriented at activating human rights initiatives in Lima. This exploration raises emphasis and possibilities on community and family relationships to impact peer-group restoration and to gain new life meanings.

Chapter 5 presents the results of a small-scale narrative multiple case study within families of the disappeared in Lima and develops a seminal understanding of how family members' engagement in community groups may interact with the intra-family coping with the sequelae of conflicts.

Chapter 6 develops ethical reflections on the dimensions of representation, positionality, and social change, as experienced during the doctoral study, and uses these as a starting point to propose an empowering research practice in working with survivors of collective violence, including potential thresholds or possibilities in digital research in conflict-affected communities.

An integrative discussion concludes this dissertation which includes a synthesis of the main findings, the study's limitations, practical implications and potential directions for future research on understanding psychological coping strategies, and a closing reflection on ethical concerns throughout the research journey.