

Transforming suffering through Flower Power: Post Trauma Healing in the Republic of Armenia

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Armenia, a country just south of the Caucasus mountains, has experienced continuous trauma in different forms: war, natural disasters, border blockade, and COVID-19. The hardship from the pandemic and the Azerbaijan war against Artsakh, negatively impacted the physical and psychological well-being on the people of Armenia. Prior research sought to examine the effects of meaning-making, forgiveness, and post-traumatic growth following a period of trauma. Little is known about the severity of post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) in populations suffering from multiple types of traumas before any recovery. This paper will focus on the way multiple trauma impacts meaning-making, forgiveness, and post traumatic growth, and how utilizing lower remedies alleviate the negative feelings created by war, unrest, border blockade, and feelings of defeat as Armenia witness world silence. Results indicated that presence of meaning was significantly negatively associated with PTSS, forgiveness of self was significantly negatively correlated with trauma symptoms, and the search for meaning was positively associated with an increase in PTSS. The results further emphasize the difference between presence of meaning and search for meaning, even in populations with continuous trauma. Self-expressed reports indicated feeling relaxed less traumatized, and less in fear while using the Flower Essences.

Keywords: Armenia, meaning in life, forgiveness, PTSS, war, Flower Essence

Introduction

Armenia is in the South Caucasus, a region where Asia and Europe connect. Formerly a republic of the Soviet Union, Armenia gained independence in September of 1991. This mostly peaceful transition presented new challenges for the country, as territorial disputes with regional adversaries led to intermittent conflict for much of the early 1990s and in 2020-2023. The country has faced hardship both economically and geopolitically that has likely had profound effects on the physical and psychological wellbeing of those who live there. This includes high unemployment, intermittent clashes in border regions with Azerbaijan and Turkey, low economic development, migration, and subsequent family separation (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). The country was also one of the hardest hit by COVID-19, having one of the highest infection rates per million people throughout the entirety of the pandemic (Markosian et. al., 2021).

On September 27, 2020, while still struggling with this pandemic, a violent conflict broke out in Artsakh, also known as Nagorno Karabakh. This majority-Armenian region with 150,000 residents had been the site of conflict in the early 1990s. Originally part of Armenia proper, Stalin, as part of his divide and conquer philosophy, separated this enclave and gave it to Azerbaijan. Although recognized internationally as part of Azerbaijan, it had operated as an independent state since 1994. Azerbaijan, with Turkish and Israeli support, initiated military intervention to exert aggression over the territory (Kazaryan et. al., 2020). Amnesty International reported the use of cluster bombs, which have been shown to indiscriminately harm civilians and non-military infrastructure in past conflicts (2020).

The Republic of Azerbaijan in violation of Articles 1 and 33 of the UN Charter on inadmissibility of conflict resolutions by force, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act Principle 2 on

refraining from the threat or use of force, Principle 3 on inviolability of frontiers, Principle 4 on territorial integrity of states, Principle 5 on peaceful settlement of disputes in September-November of 2020, with the support of Turkey, occupied the Hadrout and Shoushi regions of the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh¹, then invading the sovereign Republic of Armenia and occupying 150 square kilometers of territory in front of Russian peacekeeping forces, continues its armed, terrorist attacks on Armenian positions, settlements, and citizens performing agricultural work, providing utility services, killing and injuring unarmed, working people.

Hospitals, schools, and churches were damaged and destroyed by airstrikes. Over 5,000 soldiers and 143 civilians died or went missing during the conflict. 70,000 people were displaced, tens of thousands of whom sought refuge in Armenia (France-Presse, 2020). Additionally, since December of 2022, Azerbaijan blockaded this entire region of Artsakh, preventing humanitarian and other aid to help the remaining 120,000 Armenians left in that region, depriving them of their basic human rights. Azeris went even further, once again with the help of Turkey, Israel, and Russia and confiscated Artsakh from Armenia, in order to keep peace in the region, or else they threatened to attach Armenia proper.

In times of crises, such as the Artsakh war and a global pandemic, it becomes crucial to focus on tactics that encourage a positive outcome amidst such tragedies. Previous research has indicated a negative relationship between post-traumatic stress symptoms and forgiveness and meaning-making. Forgiveness of self, others, and situations is found to be related to an improvement in both physical and mental health (Cerci & Colucci, 2017). Finding peace after traumatic events, especially war, can also minimize the chances of intergenerational effects of

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Artsakh

trauma (Kelmendi et al., 2020). Exploring the act of meaning-making in Armenians will be beneficial for future generations to understand the importance of resilience, as well as reducing the chances of intergenerational trauma.

Intergenerational Trauma

A psychological consequence of the Armenian genocide included the traumatic responses that impacted the offspring of the survivors. Researchers Kalayjian and Weisberg (2002) explored the physical, spiritual, and psychosocial generational impact following the generation who experienced the genocide firsthand. The trauma from the violence, whether it be physical, such as a gunshot wound, or psychological, such as losing loved ones, shaped the identity of the participants. Participants commonly expressed feelings of anger, sadness, distrust, and often found themselves reliving the trauma. A workshop put together helped bring forth suppressed feelings in participants; this workshop also provided education surrounding understanding the trauma from the genocide, the emotions surrounding it, and steps towards healing (Kalayjian & Weisberg, 2002).

The flower remedies used for this kind of trauma were:

1. *Mustard* for creating peace within, by working on the generational depression and a darkened soul force. It assists in opening the solar plexus, the central chakra, to get in touch with the inner strength, that is deep within our core.
2. *Star of Bethlehem* for grieving the massive losses, comforting all sorrows. It offers a soothing, warm, and cozy blanket to those grieving, or feeling loss, sadness, especially long-term generational losses.
3. *Honeysuckle* for letting go and helping to place past traumatic memories in perspective, especially for those who are feeling homesick (as 2/3 of Armenia, including Mount Ararat is occupied by Turkey).

Forgiveness

Living in a war zone, or actively fighting in a war commonly leaves individuals with increased levels of anxiety, depression, anger, frustrations, and other PTSD symptoms. One study examined the perspective of forgiveness in war survivors in Africa, and the significant relationship between the readiness to forgive the perpetrators of the war and the decreased levels of mental health issues (Nyarko & Punamaki, 2017). This study consisted of young adults who escaped the Liberian civil wars and forgiveness levels were measured, as well as their reasonings behind their willingness to forgive. The most common reasons as to why the participants chose to forgive the perpetrators included: religious beliefs, an apology from the perpetrator, the importance of justice, a personal choice, and the influence of revered leaders. Nyarko and Punamaki (2017) highlighted the importance of understanding the traumatic experiences to understand the victims and the process that lead them to forgiveness.

A common reluctance to forgiveness, especially forgiveness of oneself, can be due to the idea of victim-blaming. Previous research shedding light on understanding victimhood suggests that constant shame leads to finding forgiveness becoming a challenge. Rafter and Walkate (2012) conducted a case study to identify the severity of victim proneness in the Armenian culture, following the Armenian genocide. The act of understanding victimhood provides an opportunity for victims to understand the experiences, turning focus away from denial and minimizing the intensity of the traumatic event (Rafter & Walklate, 2012).

Flower remedies used for this were:

1. *'Forgiveness'* and *'Forget-Me-Nots.'* To engender and nurture a spirit that endures.
2. *'Willow.'* This flower remedy helps transform feeling bitter, resentful defeated, and tendency to blame others and self.

Meaning-Making

The idea of meaning-making has become an increasingly common technique to foster resilience and post-traumatic growth (PTG). The Kosovo war left the population with severe mental health consequences, leaving close to half of the population experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Kelmendi et al., 2020). Through interviews, Kelmendi et al. (2020) explored the participants' lifestyle, war experiences, and making meaning about the experiences. The exploration of the changes in perception post-war brought forth common themes mentioned by the participant groups. Among those themes was resilience and finding meaning in life, where religion, support from others and unity, and maintaining optimism were common coping mechanisms that participants found encouraging. Living in Armenia through wars, similarly to Kosovo, signifies living in an agitated state, full of doubt and uncertainty (Stronski, 2016).

The aftermath of living in such a volatile state typically includes traumatic responses and poor mental health. Previous research has suggested that the meaning-making in one's life is commonly associated with decreased traumatic stress symptoms. Specifically, the existence of meaning in life helped individuals feel more at peace; the pursuit of meaning was not always a source to relief traumatic symptoms (Toussaint et al., 2017). An earlier study examining trauma responses and post-traumatic growth as a result of the Mexico City earthquake in 1985 noted intergenerational trauma as a result of the earthquake (Doran et al., 2014). The participants displayed heightened emotions, and especially noted the lack of psychological help. The limited opportunities to speak about the trauma forced many to suppress those emotions, carrying such a heavy weight generation after generation. Doran et al. (2014) also noted that an increased level of support was related to a decrease in PTSD symptomology and increased levels in finding meaning amidst the chaos.

Flower remedies used were:

1. *Grounding Green*, to help feel and recognize living qualities of the earth.
2. *Post Trauma Stabilizer*, to address the trauma symptoms, shock, and rebuild & recover.
3. *Fear-Less*, to address any remaining fear, panic, and terror.

Post Traumatic Growth

Post-traumatic growth (PTG), the positive changes that occur following a traumatic event, follows a typical process that requires acceptance of the trauma and the willingness to move past it. Achieving PTG is a process in which rumination, deliberate or intrusive, is critical (Huang et al., 2022). Understanding and moving past trauma is a cognitive process; rumination allows the individual to fully understand the event and the aftermath, as well as rebuild their thinking and thrive. Triplett et al. (2011) carried out a study with the goal to illustrate a model of the process of PTG. Outlining the model with the initial traumatic event, the researchers continued to trace the process by noting internal challenges to the morals the individuals faced, the thought processes that went along with the challenges, the trauma symptoms currently experienced, and the hope to reach the point of understanding meaning in life. The illustration of the path further notes the way PTG includes the need for intrusive rumination, or unintentional thinking about the event, and deliberate rumination, the continuous effort to reflect and move past the event (Triplett et al., 2011).

Previous research has examined the severity of post-traumatic stress symptoms, as well as post-traumatic growth, especially in natural disasters and human-made disasters. However, little research has examined the intensity of post-traumatic stress symptoms in populations suffering from a second traumatic event, when the first event hasn't been recovered.

Flower Essences used were:

1. *Roots TerrAnoint*: This blend will be used hopefully in future missions. It works on

clarifying our life force, strengthening lower chakras, receiving by the earth, and channeling upwards.

2. *Stuart Desert Pea*: This essence is indicated for the deep wounds that have long been with us, and we like to transform. Transforming the blood shed during the Ottoman Turkish Genocide of the Armenian, in 1915, where over 2 million were slaughtered, and the rest were forced through their death march through the Arabian desert.

Participants

The participants included 161 individuals living in Armenia. Participants ranged in age from 17 to 61, with a median age of 28 and an average age of 31.30. Participants were 80% female, and 92.99% Christian. 56.25% of participants were single, 40.63% were married, and 0.63% were widowed. As this mission was conducted following a year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Artsakh, we also included questions about personal loss from these two crises. 26.42% of respondents indicated that at least one member of their family was injured due to the war, and 7.55% lost at least one family member or friend in the war. 8.13% of respondents lost at least one family member from COVID-19.

Conclusion

Since we were unable to have experimental groups to scientifically study the outcome of the flower remedies, what is shared below is the anecdotal expressions of the survivors' comments after the use of flower remedies.

1. "I cannot believe a few sprays in my mouth would bring me so much peace. I was skeptical, and I took it home, and tried it, and now it's been a week, so I could definitely tell you it has been wonderful."

2. “Do you have any of those small bottles of tinctures? I felt so much better yesterday, but I did not take a sample home, as I did not believe in it at first. But I noticed how much more joy I feel within, could you give me a bottle of post trauma stabilizer?”
3. “Even though it was fearless that I tried, I was going for an interview, even though I did not feel fear, but was extremely anxious, after spraying 2 sprays in my mouth, I went through my interview and got the job, it was like a miracle.”
4. “I used the fearless and the post-trauma stabilizer, and my nightmares of the war stopped haunting me.”
5. “I did not know that peace of mind, and good night sleep could be expedited with a few sprays, and a few drops of flower remedies.”
6. “My child was crying for a long time, and I gave him a few drops of the Mustard, and he, almost immediately, quieted down and fell sleep.”
7. “My grandmother used to use the herbs from our garden, now they are gone, thanks to our unfriendly and aggressive neighbors, namely Turkey & Azerbaijan. But I am glad that you turned us on to these flower remedies, especially the Star of Bethlehem, which helped me a lot to grieve for my only son being killed in the 44-day war.”

Meaningfulworld banners were donated with the following positive messages (translated

into Armenian:

When one helps another, BOTH become stronger!

Shared sorrow is half sorrow, while shared joy is double joy!

Peace begins in our souls!

Don't be a crab in the bucket, pulling one another down, be a true Humanitarian and pull one another up!