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THE HEALING CENTERED PEACEBUILDING APPROACH

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Abstract

In many parts of the world, entire generations and nations live in chronic violence and have existed in survival mode for decades. The exposure to violence has long-lasting effects which are not well accounted for in conflict analysis, stabilization efforts, peacebuilding and governance initiatives. Extreme exposure to violence, abuse, neglect and marginalization negatively affects levels of resilience and the ability of affected nations to transition from war to peace. Symptoms associated with trauma in individuals influence all levels of society and aspects of governance and security, when large segments of a population are affected. There are three mainstream responses: the mental health approach, the psychosocial approach, and the “ignore it” approach. The study used grounded theory methodology within an action research framework to develop a new approach. The new approach gives a name to an approach not uncommon among peacebuilders dealing with the impacts of violence and trauma.

A healing-centered peacebuilding approach refers to ways in which leaders, programs and organizations mitigate the impact of chronic violence, bringing trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies. A healing-centered peacebuilding approach requires fundamental changes in how systems are designed, organizations function, and practitioners engage with people, their communities, and their institutions. Key elements of the practice-based approach from the research included Inclusion, Customization and contextualization, Breaking cycles of violence, Systems thinking, and Trauma-informed tools. A healing-centered peacebuilding approach considers emotional distress to be a critical variable in violent conflict and instability. Trauma is not only a consequence of violence, but also a cause of instability.