

Conflict, Trauma and Peace: critical psychology approaches for peacebuilding?

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“Critical psychology” (liberation, critical community and critical health psychology) approaches emphasise a deeply grassroots, contextual and group-based means of healing. This research argues that the approaches are an effective means in which to bridge the gap in research and practice between Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and long-term peacebuilding, providing a means to empower populations instead of pathologizing them, pursue collective, nonviolent political advocacy and restore relational peace.

In conflict affected areas, MHPSS is typically focused on “psychological first-aid”: treating the symptoms of trauma or mental illness with a short-term, clinical intervention. In times of peace, MHPSS in developing countries usually consists of low-intensity, low-cost and short-term treatments integrated into primary health care systems. Yet both are implemented top-down and removed from the context in which they occur,

ignoring localised conceptions of both “peace” and “mental illness”, as well as the “societal condition of violence.”

But how do we treat the impact of trauma in the long-term, while still prioritising locally-led and legitimised processes? How do we take the context of elongated periods of violence and destabilisation into account? What is the role of trauma in the peacebuilding process? Or in other words, how do we integrate MHPSS and peacebuilding into a new model for long-term healing?

Building upon the work of researchers across the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, conflict and peace studies and psychology, this ongoing research addresses these questions in the hope of creating a new model for MHPSS.