

Learning the Connection Between Thoughts-Feelings-Behaviors

Trauma-informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy For Rwanda



Training Manual Draft

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I. Introduction

I.1 Need for mental health intervention in Rwanda

In 1994, more than 1 million Rwandans were killed during 100 days of genocide. In addition to the trauma endured by Rwandans who lived through this terror, HIV/AIDS was utilized as a strategy to rape women and infect them with the virus. This constitutes what many in Rwanda now call the “slow genocide.”

More than fifteen years post-genocide, many Rwandans are still suffering from the traumatic memories of the genocide, living with HIV/AIDS, dealing with issues of poverty and limited resources. Long-term mental health consequences are one of the ongoing issues that often get lost in the rebuilding of a society after a devastating conflict.

I.2 Prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Depression

The Rwandan Women’s Interassociation Study and Assessment (RWISA), a prospective observational cohort study designed to assess the effectiveness and toxicity of antiretroviral therapy in HIV-infected Rwandan women, including survivors of genocidal rape, also conducted a trauma assessment. The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) was translated and adapted for use in Rwanda using the World Health Organization’s translation guidelines and the instrument’s authors’ guidelines for adaptation. The HTQ was translated from English to French to Kinyarwanda and then back-translated by different translators. The document was then reviewed, item by item, with a group of local mental health specialists for adaptation to the Rwandan experience. RWISA interviewers were then trained to conduct the interview.

HIV-infected and uninfected Rwandan women enrolled in RWISA between May 16 and November 15, 2005. Participants were recruited by Rwandan women’s associations and from HIV clinics in Kigali. The trauma interview and a depression screening were conducted as part of the larger HIV study and included six month return visits where symptoms were reviewed with the participants.

Of the 779 women participants, 589 (75.6%) had clinically significant symptoms of depression, and 210 (27.0%) met the criteria for Major Depression Disorder. PTSD symptoms were also common in both HIV-infected (57%) and uninfected women (64%) as indicated in the HTQ.

The prevalence of Depression and PTSD in this study sample is an indicator of the need to address mental health problems in an effective and efficient manner. A review of current psychological literature suggests that cognitive behavioral therapy is an evidence-based practice that has demonstrated good treatment success in diverse populations.

I.4 Process to adapt the model for use in Rwanda

In order to assure that CBT would be appropriate for use in Rwanda, several steps were completed. The first step was to conduct separate focus groups with program participants and the mental health team from the Family Program of Women's Equity in Access to Care and Treatment (WE-ACTx), a non-governmental organization dedicated to serving HIV/AIDS women and their families. The Family Program provides psychosocial services to HIV+ children and their families enrolled in the WE-ACTx clinics.

In the focus groups, the participants and staff identified the following persistent problems:

1. Poverty related issues (such as not having adequate funds to cover costs of rent, food, school fees for children)
2. Psychological stressors of living with HIV/AIDS and from the genocide, including the experience of rape for many of the women. The most frequently reported symptoms were headaches, general malaise, heart palpitations, nervousness, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, thinking too much about painful experiences, shame, sadness, and sleep problems.

The second step was to review a Trauma- focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach with the Family Program staff for their input.

The modules reviewed during these sessions included:

1. Psycho-education: topics include, but would not be limited to long-term consequences of trauma and rape, living with HIV/AIDS, and symptoms related to these conditions.
2. Stress Management Techniques: Particular attention was given to cultural relevance of techniques that include movement.
3. Affect Expression and Modulation: Again, cultural modifications were critical in reviewing this module as the counselors explained that Rwandans express their emotions more through behavior than expression of thoughts and feelings. The somatization of emotions and strategies that are body-focused became an important focus of this adaptation.
4. Cognitive Coping: This module involves helping participants understand what is called the “cognitive triangle” and how thoughts/feelings/behaviors interact and influence each other.
5. Selection of Trauma Narrative: Due to the extensive number of traumatic experiences a participant may have experienced, it was decided to limit the narrative to one event and if needed, to consider drawing a picture of the selected trauma to provide a focus.
6. Cognitive Processing: The strategies learned in modules 1-4 are practiced with the sharing of the trauma narrative.

The third step involved three separate sessions conducted over six months with the WE-ACTx Family Program mental health team, all Rwandese providers, to review each module in details and to adapt for use in Rwanda. These adaptations were then translated into Kinyarwanda, and back-translated into English to assure the best accuracy.

Once this process was completed, it was reviewed and edited by a U.S. based team of one clinical psychologist and two doctoral level psychology students. A draft manual was piloted as a training and again edited. These efforts were made to create a manual that is culturally and contextually appropriate for use in Rwanda.

I.5 Trauma-informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Genocide requires a long-term recovery plan. Every aspect of civil life is impacted by the devastation that remains. Reconstructing governmental infrastructures and services, peace keeping, and restoring civil life take priority. Emotional wellness is as aspect of civil life that is often overlooked. The consequences of traumatic experiences, such as genocide, rape, war, and torture – can result in long-term emotional distress, such as Depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as was discovered in the RWISA prevalence study cited earlier.

Recognizing the importance of working within a trauma- informed framework, this CBT model is based on work done in the United States called Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) which is a psychotherapeutic intervention designed to help children, youth, and their parents overcome the negative effects of traumatic life events such as child sexual or physical abuse; traumatic loss of a loved one; domestic, school, or community violence; or exposure to disasters, terrorist attacks, or war trauma. It was developed by integrating cognitive and behavioral interventions with traditional child abuse therapies that focus on enhancement of interpersonal trust and empowerment.

Since this manual took privilege to adapt the model for use with all ages and in Rwanda, we are calling the intervention Trauma-informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. We do, however, acknowledge the TF-CBT model as the template in which our Trauma-informed CBT was developed.

III. Training Module 2: Relaxation Techniques

III.1 Why is relaxation important?

A person suffering from PTSD, Depression, or Anxiety can feel some relief from their symptoms by learning to relax. Teaching relaxation exercises encourages feelings of calm. These exercises can help a person feel more relaxed in just a few minutes, and with ongoing practice, they help a person to feel more relaxed more of the time. Relaxation techniques help with symptoms of PTSD, Anxiety and Depression because these problems cause people to lose feelings of calm in their minds and bodies. Relaxation is a way of taking care of themselves.

Relaxation exercises also help a person to have better control of their feelings. After trauma a person can experience overpowering feelings about what happened. These feelings can cause a negative reaction in their body, perception, and behavior. Negative reactions can be frightening. Relaxation exercises help a trauma victim to regain control of her feelings and they do not control her. This does not mean all the bad feelings go away. It means the person has an easier time controlling her reaction to her feelings. Over time a trauma victim can begin to work with painful feelings with less fear of being overwhelmed and having a reaction that she cannot control.

There is an important mind-body connection. The mind and body are part of the same system, so when the mind feels pain so does the body. Because of this fact, trauma affects the body and mind. Some victims may not see the pain and discomfort in their bodies as being related to their trauma. It is the goal of this section to help them begin to understand that feelings in the body start in the mind. This is simply a normal reaction to stress. Changes in the body happen because trauma affects the whole system - feelings and thoughts can affect the way our bodies move and function. Over time small changes can become bigger and negatively affect the way our brains, body organs, and muscles function. This can lead to a number of physical problems. All of these problems can be helped by relaxation exercises.

Relaxation Module

Goal: To help victims understand the idea that the mind and body are one and by working with their bodies in relaxation exercises, they can calm their bodies and their minds and reduce symptoms of PTSD, Depression, Anxiety, and other trauma related symptoms.

Purpose: To promote using relaxation exercises that help the body and mind feel peaceful and promote wellness.

III.2 Reaction of the Body When There is Stress

There are many ways the body can react to stress. Traumatic stress can be expressed in physical symptoms in the body, or it can appear in emotions and behaviors. The experience of trauma creates stress that sometimes causes unhealthy physical and emotional symptoms.

Remember we talked about how people who face painful events or situations can react differently. Some people cry, others get easily angry, some become fearful, are unable to sleep, become depressed, suffer from chronic headaches, backaches, or other pains in their body. Stress is expressed in different ways by different people. We are learning about stress and the different ways it affects the body and mind.

When a stressful or traumatic event happens in the environment in which we live, we take in what we see, hear, and feel. The brain takes in this information and communicates to the rest of our body to respond to the event. The brain alerts our body to respond. If the event is dangerous or a threat, some people will try and run away, others may try and fight back, and others may even feel like they cannot move and stand still, like a tree. These are normal protective responses to a threat or danger. The whole body is alerted. Blood pressure will increase, the

heart will beat faster, and the body will tense up. When the traumatic event or events are over, the body does not always turn off the alert, and all the strong emotions remain with the person.

When the body's alert system does not turn off it can cause stress symptoms. We reviewed them in the last module, but we will review them again now.

Stress in the body can cause:

- Anxiety, being unable to relax the mind or body
- Tremors, when the hands cannot be still
- Shortness of breath, unable to breath in or out completely
- Sweating when the body is not hot
- High blood pressure
- The heart feels as if it is jumping
- Sleep problems, the person has a difficult time falling asleep, difficulty remaining asleep, or he sleeps excessively and never feels rested.
- Chronic headaches or heat in the head
- Chronic backaches or heat in the back
- Chronic stomachaches
- Stiffness in the body, losing the ability to move with freedom
- Lack of calmness or quietness in the heart or mind

The normal stress responses to a threat or trauma can become unhealthy when it continues after the stressful event is over and the body cannot return to a non-stress response. Over time, the stress response is no longer helpful and it becomes unhealthy causing the kind of problems we have described.

Relaxation is one activity that can help teach the body to turn the alert off and allow the body and mind to recover from the stress. We are now going to focus on relaxation techniques that may help you teach your body to feel calm and peaceful again.

III.3 Relaxation techniques

Stress is part of the human experience. For many generations wise people have studied the art of relaxation and the ways we can help our bodies feel calm. There are many types of relaxation techniques or exercises. We will be teaching you relaxation techniques that many other Rwandese have found helpful. In order to benefit from the relaxation exercises and we encourage their practice on a regular basis. Regular practice will help you understand how stress is experienced by your body. Practicing relaxation techniques is like planting a tree of positive behavior which will grow over time into a healthy way for living.

There is a connection between breathing and relaxation. Breathing is often interrupted by stress and trauma. People breathe too quickly or do not take deep breaths. Sometimes we need to remind our bodies to take deep, healing breaths. Once the lungs are breathing better, other parts of the body begin to function better as well and then the body can relax.

Sometimes traumatic memories seem to control the traumatized person and can come at any time to cause them stress and pain. It seems as if your feelings control you. To gain control over one's feelings is a discipline that takes time to learn. Our breath is connected to our feelings, this is seen when we become joyous and we breathe deeply, and when we are sad and anxious our breath is heavy. Doing breath exercises is a way of working with our feelings and helping them to move and heal.

Exercise 1: To Breathe Deeply

Remember how your body feels when there is a big problem or when you think about past traumatic events. Your body can feel heavy, your hearts can start to

ache, and you breathe quickly or become unable to breath. You can also have a headache or stomachache. You can change your negative feelings by breathing deeply. To breathe deeply is easy to learn, we are going to do it now. The thought is to breathe slowly, deeply, and in controlling well how you breathe, strongly insisting on getting in or out air from the body. It means that the stomach expands when you breathe the air in, and deflates when you breathe the air out. You are doing it very well when you put your hands on your stomach. And feel it rise and fall (demonstrate). When slowly inhaling or exhaling deep breaths, make sure you are breathing using the nose. Try to think about your deep breath filling the lungs and then let the air out. You might find yourself thinking about things away from your breath. Don't worry this is normal. Bring your thoughts back to your breath. Feel the action of deep breathing.

Are you ready to try? We will help each other. If you are ready, close your eyes or fix your gaze on one spot, breathe slowly and deeply. We are going to try this for two minutes. If you stop in the middle of the deep breathing exercise, it is not a problem, rest and then continue when you are ready to try again. I will tell you when the two minutes is finished. (Now breathe deeply for two minutes).

What was this like for you? How did you feel? Let's talk about what you experienced during deep breathing.

You can do this at home if you want. It's very good to do the breathing exercise before sleeping; you do it also when you feel worried, anxious or when you have a big problem.

Practice:

Have participants practice *To Breathe Deeply* in pairs with one teaching the other and then exchanging roles.

Discuss experiences in the large group.

Are you ready to try another exercise?

Exercise 2: The Rocking Movement (This can be helpful for trauma and depression.)

Stand with your feet apart about the same distance as the width of your shoulders and with your hands at your side. Rise up off your heels and at the same time, with your palms facing up, raise your hands to the level of your chest. Turn your palms down and as you move your hands downward, lower your heels and raise your toes off the floor, like you are rocking. Continue this motion, slowly rocking back and forth while breathing deeply. With each move make sure your shoulders arms and fingers are relaxed, release the tension. Do the exercise slowly and smoothly. Breathe deeply. Imagine that your feet are planted securely on the earth and that your toes are like roots connecting with the energy of the earth. As you are raising your hands, imagine that you are able to bring the energy of the heavens to cleanse and fill you.

Trainer: Make sure each participant is comfortable with this exercise before moving on.

Exercise 3: The Shower of Light (This can be helpful for trauma and depression.)

With your left foot forward and your palms facing each other, raise your hands up over your head, and then move them downward as if showering yourself with light. Feel the energy cleansing and filling your body, mind, and spirit. Repeat on the right side, with the right foot forward. Imagine the energy that surrounds you. As you raise your hands, breathe in the shower of light, and as you lower your hands, exhale and let go of any negativity in you. Feel the light of the heavens

cleansing and renewing you. As you do the movement on the right side, get in touch with the violence and negativity in the larger world around you. In the name of the human family, commit yourself to healing the wounds of violence around you. Breathe in the cleansing light to strengthen the human community.

Trainer: Make sure each participant is comfortable with this exercise before moving on.

Exercise 4: Let go and Open to Receive (This can be helpful to let go of past trauma.)

With the left foot forward, palms curved softly downward and hands at chest level, push your hands outward in a gentle arc, letting go of all tension, negativity, and violence within you. Turn palms upward and draw them back towards the chest, breathing in the goodness and abundance of life. Repeat with the right foot forward. Connect with whatever wounds, tension, or violence you may be holding in your heart. As you do the movement on the left side, breathe out the pain and violence. Breathe in peace, grace, and the abundance of life around you. As you do the movement on the right side, connect with the pain and violence in the world. In the name of the human family, let go of the violence, and breathe in the peace and healing needed in our world.

Trainer: Make sure each participant is comfortable with this exercise before moving on.

Exercise 5: Fly through the Air

With your left foot forward, your left hand is above your left shoulder, palm outward. Your right hand, palm upward, is level at your right waist. Swim or fly through the warm, energizing air. Enjoy the grace and lightness of your body. The motion should be free and light with arms and shoulders relaxed. Repeat the movement on the right side starting with your right hand above your right shoulder, and left palm at your left waist. Fly freely through the air letting go of all that weighs you down, feeling the liberation of your spirit. Open your heart to

all the possibilities and desires you have for your life and growth. As you fly on the right side, imagine all the possibilities for the human family in different parts of the world. Imagine you are able to fly around the planet encouraging and inspiring all those that you meet.

Trainer: Make sure each participant is comfortable with this exercise before moving on.

Exercise 6: The Holds

This exercise consists of simple energy holds that may be done on oneself or on another person for anxiety, emotional or physical pain, traumatic memories, and strong emotions, such as anger and fear, insomnia and for deep relaxation.

Through the energy of our hands we have the power to bring profound peace, harmony and healing to the body, mind, and spirit. As the practice is used on oneself or another, hold in your mind and heart a deep sense of peace, light and spaciousness. The holds can be done for several minutes each, accompanied by deep abdominal breathing to promote greater release. The touch is very light, and if someone has suffered abuse and fears touch, the holds may be done off the body in the energy field.

Halo Hold to Connect

Hold hands at each side of the head without touching to connect with the person.

Head Hold

One hand lightly holds the head high on the forehead; the other hand holds the base of the skull. The energy of the hands connects with parts of the brain related to memories and emotions.

Crown Hold

Thumbs of both hands together contact the crown center at the top of the head. Fingertips softly touch area across the forehead. Along with deep breathing this hold is used in different bodywork to promote emotional release.

Shoulder Hold

The hands rest lightly on the shoulders, the place in the body related to anxiety, excess baggage or the burdens of life.

Heart Hold

One hand rests lightly across the sternum high on the chest. The other hand touches the upper back behind the heart. The heart area often holds emotional pain, wounds of the past, grief and resentment. Breathe deeply and imagine the heart pain draining down into the earth.

To finish

Lightly brush off the body energy field with the hands. The tops of the feet may also be held to help ground the person.

Trainer: Make sure each participant is comfortable with this exercise before moving on.

Exercise:

Have participants break into their small groups and have each member teach the other members one of the movement exercises.

Exercise 7: Muscle Relaxation

Remember how your body feels when there is a big problem or when you remember traumatic events - your heart pounds, you breathe so quickly, and you might get a headache and/or stomachache. What happens to your muscles when this happens?

Trainer: Have group respond before continuing.

Reminder to all participants: Approach all relaxation exercises with care. Take precautions so that no one hurts themselves.

We want to learn to change the tightness of muscles into softness. Let us begin. We are going to relax our all body, from the toes to the top of the head. We are going to try to change the muscle heaviness or tightness to become calm and relaxed. This method may help you to sleep at night.

Let's start. Sit down in comfortable position. Look and focus on the toes of your right foot. Now tighten your toes, like making a fist. Count to three. Now slowly loosen the muscles in your toes. Breathe deeply, thinking that the breathe reaches and flows to the toes, becoming more relaxed. Now think about the toes of the left foot. Try to tighten like a fist. Count to three. Then release slowly, let the toes and foot relax until they become soft and relaxed. Breathe deeply, trying to feel how the relaxation is spreading through the whole foot. Now try the same thing for the left leg, tense the calf and thigh, count to three, release the tightness. Continue this exercise of tightening and relaxing the muscles in the right leg, the buttocks, the stomach, left fingers and hand, left arm and shoulders, right fingers and hand, right arm and shoulder, down back, the neck, your face, mouth, eyes, and top of the head.

Imagine throwing all your stress away. Close your eyes when you feel your body is relaxing. Imagine a pleasant coolness. If there is a part of your body which is still tense, tighten and then soften it until it is relaxed. Breathe deeply for one to two minutes.

How does your body feel now? How do your muscles feel?

Trainer: Facilitate discussion.

If you found this relaxing, you can understand how this is helpful to relieve stress. It can easily be done at home. You can try this before sleeping, it may help you relax and improve your sleep. How might this help a trauma victim?

Trainer: Facilitate discussion.

III.4 Relaxation response

We have talked about the stress response and how the body prepares itself to respond to stress, threat, or danger. There is also a relaxation response. Scientific research has shown that by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and the movement exercises, the body can learn to relax and feel healthy.

The relaxation techniques you have learned as part of this module or only a sample of a larger number of ways to relax. Practicing any of these will on a regular basis, preferably every day, will teach your body to relax again and improve your physical, emotional, and social wellness.

These techniques can also be used when you feel yourself become distressed or upset. They give you tools to help yourself. In time, with practice, you will begin to realize that you are controlling your feeling in ways that help you feel more confident to handle your life.

There will be more time to practice and improve your ability to use these techniques and to make them part of your healthy coping.