

THE SAFETY SPIRAL: BUILDING PEACE SKILLS AFTER PROLONGED SOCIAL TRAUMA

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When societies experience prolonged social trauma, as in cases of war or natural disaster, the very psychosocial foundation upon which social progress is built—safety—is compromised. In this article, we develop a conceptual model for addressing prolonged social trauma based on a society's stage of psychosocial development. Grounded in the work of psychoanalyst Lloyd deMause, who argued that culture is transmitted largely through childrearing practices, we propose the creation of space for psychosocial capacity building in post-conflict reconstruction interventions. We offer theoretical support for trauma-informed community-focused peacebuilding initiatives that engage community members in learning peace skills such as mentalization and self-reflection, and in the safe practice of psychosocial skills such as impulse control, empathy, and moral and collaborative reasoning.

INTRODUCTION

When war ends, it is not over. The impact of violence, atrocities, human suffering, fear, and a general distrust of others make it difficult for a society

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