

Psychosocial Support for the Children Affected by Communal Violence in Gujarat, India

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the various psychosocial problems that children and adolescents experienced due to communal violence in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002. Five strategies were adapted to provide support and care to the children and adolescents in the relief camps as well as in the community during the rehabilitation phase. Community volunteers were used in the program to facilitate psychosocial healing by using different mediums of expression. Each medium encouraged the expression of thoughts and feelings caused by the trauma and the building of hope for the future. Various community-oriented peace-building measures, which are explained and outlined, were adapted to build trusting inter-community relationships. The peace-building measures focused on rebuilding a nurturing environment by re-establishing community networks and social support systems. Life skills education was one of the approaches adopted for fostering psychosocial development among the children in order to restore peaceful cohabitation for a future based on mutual respect and acceptance. Ultimately, in disaster rehabilitation, rebuilding one's "sense of place" through holistic psychosocial support has been highlighted as a model for practice. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: conflict, violence, psychosocial, life skills, children, community participation, trauma

INTRODUCTION

Children have been described as the most vulnerable population when conflict or human generated disasters impose sufferings on life and living by impairing their daily routine, nurturing environment, and opportunities for learning and development (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies [INEE], 2006; Inter-agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2007). As history has proven,

some conflict situations continue over the course of generations, whereas others exist for brief periods of time. Regardless, it is important to recognize that conflict situations create conditions of threat that persist at length in the under currents between the effected communities, areas, and ethnic or religious groups. The world has witnessed conflicts all around, and serious situations still abound in different parts of the globe. This is of serious concern to humanitarian workers, professionals, and others as conflict continues to cross national boundaries.

Forced to carry the message of hatred and violence, while facing resistance to pursue their own future, younger generations are getting entangled in these situations. For communities in conflict, violence often produces more violence and hate increases hate, causing the vicious wheels to keep rotating. Therefore, the rehabilitation of a conflict affected community aims at reconstructing social networks and rebuilding trusting relationships towards harmony and peace beyond the physical requirements for survival. In this process children are crucial and must learn the value of acceptance, pluralism, and tolerance and the skills that make them capable of handling different situations. Psychosocial support for children in conflict is mainly directed towards this end. This article focuses on the different strategies that were adapted to work with children in the communities and schools following riots in the Indian state of Gujarat in February of 2002. In this incident some 2000 people lost their lives and over a *lakh* (one hundred thousand) continue to live in relief camps (Medico Friend Circle, 2002). This event sheltered more than 50,000 affected children in camps (Citizens' Initiative and Action Aid, 2002).

Human-made disaster, like large-scale riots, is characterized by cruelty that leads to an obvious social division based on the identifiable trait(s) that is being promoted as the issue for causing the conflict (Bhadra, 2006). Hence, the base of such a conflict is usually deeply rooted in culture, practice, belief and power structures as well. In a democratic society, the differences based on religion or ethnicity are mostly covered-up and a balanced state is maintained; however, these efforts do not erase the differences that could be exploited by those (any pressure group with vested interests) who would seek to gain control by causing disturbances (Bhadra, 2006). Human-made disasters are different in their nature and characteristics, in that the reason for sufferings are within the surroundings and hidden within the proximal environment. They are time and place specific. In Gujarat, interdependence between ethnic or religious groups is strongly threatened when conflict based on those identities erupts. As a form of natural cohabitation, interdependence developed and; through government policies, structure, and democratic ideologies; people belonging to different religious and ethnic groups maintain their own identity and territory while being in a functional relationship with others. When tension builds up communities start boiling with mistrust, and different groups attempt to establish their own identity and ensure or increase their control, as well as reduce their functional dependency with other parties in conflict (Bhadra, 2006).

The children and adolescents who face conflict situations bear the mental scarring for long periods of time. Psychological bruising raises various questions and impacts their social attitudes and behaviors – consciously or unconsciously (Gooder, 1996). The impact of the conflict and violence on the children in Gujarat had a wide and detrimental effect on their development, life opportunities, and ability to develop a free and independent sense of self. The post-conflict situation and prevailing atmosphere of hate impacted their capacity to think and act independently. The children also experienced psychological and biological reactions to stress (Yule, 2002). Therefore, the wide impact of the communal violence in Gujarat on the children is described later in order to help interpret the logical development of strategies employed while working with the children and adolescents in their schools and communities. Communal violence, implicating intentioned to cause harm, like riots or ethnic conflict, causes higher psychological and social problems than a disaster due to human error (Sekar *et al.*, 2005). When human intention to cause harm is involved situations are often more violent, and complexities arise to neutralize the perceived and actual social threats. Conflicts often create a perceived and persistent threat to a community from “the other.” In natural disasters, like earthquakes, there is one epicenter, but in human-made disasters every individual can work as an epicenter (Bhadra, 2006). The threat is deep rooted in the mind and the causes are wide spread in the social environment.

The impacts of the Gujarat riots on the children and adolescents are described here in five different dimensions: (1) the perceived threat, (2) over sensitivity about religion, (3) issues in the socio-political environment; (4) diverted attention, and (5) high incidents of trauma among the children and adolescents. The findings presented here come from my interventions with Oxfam India, in collaboration with Action Aid India from the beginning of the riots (March 1, 2002) until October 2002. Subsequently, under the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Science, Bangalore (NIMHANS), with funding from CARE India, we created the “Gujarat Harmony Project.” Riot survivors from all the refugee camps were visited on a daily basis.

Perceived Threat and Fear

Like any other disaster, after the riots people were displaced and sheltered in camps in different parts of the affected cities. Rioters mainly targeted the minority Muslim community and 90 percent of displaced peoples were from these minority communities (Acharya & Pandit, 2004; Medico Friend Circle, 2002; Shetty *et al.*, 2004; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2009). Camps were immediately organized in the community prayer tomb, in schools, theater halls, and in open grounds used for burial. Hence, children were forced to live in public spaces never thought of as hearth bearing environments. Most of the children and adolescent boys and girls were with their guardian and immediate family members (Medico Friend Circle, 2002; Varadarajan, 2002).

Nonetheless, they were deprived of basic amenities due to the extreme chaos and an inability of the formal system to deal with everyone's needs. Over crowded, living in camps, lack of privacy, total alteration of routine, and facing the daily challenges to meet regular needs were the major difficulties that child survivors faced together. Continued incidents of riots created a perceived and real threat and fear of violence in the mind of the children and adolescents. They were highly sensitive to and aware of events that were happening around the city. The perceived threat raised a lot of questions and doubts about their identity, religion and suspicions about each other. This behavior greatly hampered their study habits and discipline in the family, school, and community.

Over Sensitivity about Religion

Over sensitivity about religion caused major damage in understanding and relationships among the children. As people in the community became highly sensitive, the children and adolescents felt very confused about the meaning of religion and whether some religions are bad or good. At times, conversing about religion amongst themselves led the children to fight and quarrel over the events of the riots and religious animosity.

In schools, teachers reported that children suddenly started segregating themselves according to their religious identity after the riots. In the classroom, students belonging to the minority Muslim community were marginalized from most of the interactions. They started forming their own peer groups during recess and interacting amongst themselves inside and outside of class. At times students in the class also started commenting about each other's religion, food habits, differences in rituals, etc. In Gujarat, food habits are typically identified by religious background; the Hindu Gujarati community is vegetarian, whereas Muslims are non-vegetarian. The higher presence of a Jain community, with strict vegetarian habits, was also added to the major cultural differences among the majority Hindu and minority Muslim religious communities.

The city of Ahmedabad in Gujarat is typically divided by localities identified as Hindu or Muslim. Following the incident of riots, as the hostility and perceived threat increased, many border areas were defined. Some areas were considered highly sensitive, whereas other areas were marked as "ghetto" or as a "no go zone" by other communities. This situation posed a large threat and identity crisis among the children belonging to different communities. The children from the majority community felt they were vulnerable, as they learned and expressed thoughts and hate against other communities from their elders. The children and adolescents from the minority community felt they were always being hauled away and made refugees in their own homeland. They felt they had no status as citizens and saw no future for the Muslims in India. Such a complex social situation – each community seeing the other as the source of the problem – made the younger generations very much concerned about their identity and their display of religious symbols, practices, and beliefs.

The impacts of religious over sensitivity were not only limited to individual identity; rather, it was impacting each and every social relationship between the communities. In many occasions people stopped interacting with other religious groups or stopped going to certain areas. Economic relationships between the communities suffered as well. For example, an auto-rickshaw driver was not interested in leaving his community; a shopkeeper was more concerned about the religion of his clients than selling them goods, and an employer was suddenly conscious about the religious background of his employees. Equally, educational institutions were caught within this wildfire as students identified the teachers with their religious affiliations or vice-versa. Hence, the wide difference in social attitudes that were created due to the riots had a strong negative impact on the children and adolescents ability to have free thoughts and opinions. They were caught in a situation that was marked by pre-conceived notions of hatred, differences, and maintaining clear identity differences.

Issues in the Socio-political Environment

There were some issues that children kept hearing at home or in their community. These issues were reflected in their peer conversations and in their questions for their teachers. After the schools reopened, it took a long time (3–6 months) for the surviving children to return to the classroom. Many of the children were living in the camps for a long period of time as their houses were burned and ransacked. These communities had to run-off and live for months together in places far from their residential areas. Children could not return to school from the camps. Most of these children had also lost all their belongings and study materials and could not return to school until some organization arranged for the procurement of adequate study materials. Sometimes parents refused to send their children to school, specifically the girls, as they were worried about the re-occurrence of violent incidents at any time and the difficulty of getting the children back home safely. Many of the children not directly affected by the riots, but belonging to the minority community, could not go back to school due to perceived threats of violence. Several schools used for emergency shelter were closed for three to four months.

Incidents of riots and violence continued for at least six months, and every day one area or another was affected by continuous reports of violence (Christophe, 2007; Roy, 2008). News of these events caused severe trauma among the children and adolescents on a daily basis. After listening to these incidents the children used to ask a lot of question of their elders and of community volunteers (trained volunteers) who were in the camp to provide relief services and psychosocial support. One such incident occurred after a few male members from a camp went to see their destroyed houses and were attacked on their way back to camp. They were severely injured and two of them died. This incident caused a lot of fear, anxiety, and anger among the people living in the camps. The children started asking repeatedly who killed the men, why were they attacked, would they ever be able to go back to their homes and school,

why are people killing [specific religious group], and where should they go? One such case story is described here:

Samim¹ (eight year old boy) lost his father in the incident mentioned earlier and could not accept the loss for a long time. Samin recalled that his father was a savior for their family and how his father took him on his shoulders and ran for hours during the riots and saved him. Samim kept on asking, “my dad never killed anyone, he only saved people and arranged food for many others in the camp. He is loved by many people, he loves me a lot. He saved all of us in the riots. Why was he attacked and killed?”

This incident shocked the whole community after almost three months of riots, during which they lost about five members of their *challi* (row of houses marked by poor living conditions) and all their belongings (PTI, 2002). After three months, the hope to go home that people gradually developed was ruined again and again with the horror of repeated attacks. The people of this area, including Samim’s family, were relocated to newly constructed housing (after eight months of riots) far from their original homes. While some children were enrolled in new schools, most of the children of this area dropped out. All the adolescent girls were removed indefinitely as the parents could not take the chance of sending their girls to school in the new area (Engineer, 2003).

Attention Diverted from Studies and Learning

The riots and the subsequent curfew almost completely stopped regular life for two to three months all over Ahmedabad and many other parts of the state affected by riots. After the schools started and the affected children gradually began their school life, teachers reported a wide difference in their behavior and social interactions with other students. All the children were highly sensitive to noise and sound and were generally very disturbed in the classroom. Lack of concentration, creating noise, and talking about different incidents of riots was most common among the students. The teachers reported that a drastic reduction in performance was most commonly observed. The students who were enrolled in new schools and those who stayed in the camps for prolonged periods had many adjustment problems. At times they felt inferior; marked by other students as victim of riots with statements like: “He lost everything in the riots;” “He became poor after the riots;” “Now she has only one school outfit.” Teachers reported that some of the students also became aggressive or timid. Some of the teachers felt that students were overly conscious of religious background as they started identifying religious issues in class work or the religious affiliation of writers, scientists, and historical characters from their textbooks.

The children’s attention after the riots had been diverted from studies and education to talk about the community incidents and their future as members of a specific religious group. Many times discussion targeted Pakistan and sometimes student comments were heavily laden with animosity: “[specific religious group] should be killed;” “[specific religious group] have no future in

this country;" and "[specific religious group] are cheaters, do not believe and make friend with [specific religious group]."

High Incident of Trauma among the Children

Immediately after the riots, as well as in the long-term rehabilitation period, very high incidents of traumatic reactions were prominent among the children and adolescents; as is the case with any severe disaster (Prince-Embury, 2008). Parents reported their younger children being highly disturbed and developing clinging habits, crying frequently, being scared of any unknown persons, and very much scared of darkness, sound, and the barking of dogs at night, as well as displaying regressive behaviors. Among the elder children there was much confusion, and aggressiveness was very prominent among the boys. There were restrictions imposed on girls, and high levels of feelings of insecurity among them. It was reported that many of the children and adolescents, boys and girls alike, witnessed sexual violence. Some of them were sexually assaulted and left with burn injuries and other physical injuries. The following case stories reveal the psychological trauma of these affected children and adolescents:

Nassem (a 13 year old girl) described, "I cannot say what I saw, I cannot sleep [...] I feel they will come again and kill [...] I do not know why people are so aggressive. They also have mother, sisters!" After some time, while she was drawing a burning house in a session with the community volunteers, Nassem started explaining, "this house was next to our house. They were three sisters. Haseena was my close friend. While I was hiding on the top of another house, I saw all three of them were pulled out from the room and [...], finally they just throw them in the burning house. Every day I get this dream. I am scared to close my eyes. I never could talk about it. Only today I told you. I am not able to bare the pain. Hassen cried for help. Everyone wanted to kill her after harassing her and her sisters."

Rasheed (14 years old boy) explained, "I cannot forgive. Justice has to be done. I lost everything. My family has no hope. My father does not look at us, mom is ill from that day. She is not able to eat, sleep. What wrong did we do to them? My parents are too much worried about my sister and me. I am worried about all of us. I will not die before justice is done."

Considering these wide scale disturbances in the environment, and the psychological trauma among the children and adolescents, different initiatives were undertaken to work with the children and adolescents through the existing supporting organizations in the camps and subsequently in the communities and schools. The different strategies that were adapted to facilitate psychosocial support and healing are as follows:

- Strategy 1: Supporting the children and adolescents in the camps through the trained community volunteers on a regular basis through various activities.
- Strategy 2: Facilitating activities with the surviving children and adolescents that encourage psychological healing in the camps and subsequently in the community.

- Strategy 3: Subsequent work with the caregivers to facilitate rehabilitation and also to ensure the capacity to provide a more nurturing environment to the children and adolescents.
- Strategy 4: Adapting different community oriented peace-building measures that ensure sustainable peace and harmony among the community members.
- Strategy 5: Working in the schools to facilitate life skills education that promote acceptance, tolerance and pluralism.

These strategies were designed through different activities that were planned with the local partner organizations and donor agencies, and with technical support from NIMHANS to ensure psychosocial support for the riot survivors in an integrated manner with other rehabilitation services such as, providing basic supplies (kitchen set, food items in the initial days), provision of housing, vocational training, microfinance for initiating business, self-help group formations, livelihood support and also legal/paralegal assistances for filing complaints or to get compensation. In this process, capacity building of non-governmental organization (NGO) staff, workers, and community volunteers was crucial to helping them understand the psychosocial problems of the survivors in order to be able to establish basic trusting relationships and initiate other interventions accordingly. Therefore, the aforementioned groups working with the survivors were trained in psychosocial support. Many of these community volunteers were themselves survivors of the riots who volunteered to work in their camp and in the nearby communities. Gradually, some people from the other nearby Hindu communities were also involved in facilitating the process of communal harmony and peace building through community mobilization and participation.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE CAMPS

The internally displaced communities within Ahmedabab and from nearby villages were sheltered in camps which were in no way prepared to hold such large populations (in some camps at one point in time there were more than 10,000 people) (Ribeiro, 2003). Hence, the camps were over crowded and lacked all basic amenities like, sanitation, water, food, and places to sleep. Immediately NGOs and some of the community leaders arranged basic facilities for the survival of the displaced people. At this time the psychosocial problem of the children was clear as many of them were exhibiting a wide range of traumatic reactions, including mum, aggressiveness, and being highly demanding.

After the training on psychosocial support, volunteers started working with children in the camps and started organized various group activities (Acharya & Pandit, 2004). The purpose and mode of these activities were to first, allow the children and adolescent to ventilate their feelings, worries and develop new ideas and confidence in a controlled environment; and second, they served to create a trusting relationship and encourage meaningful engagement

in the group that would facilitate learning new skills and adjusting to the changed situation. Finally, volunteers utilized various mediums to work with the children so they could be more expressive, as well as interested in getting involved.

The volunteers used various mediums like: drawing, storytelling, clay modeling, group songs, play, and games. Through non-formal school most of the young children were involved in these activities. Initially, the children were more sensitive to what others were doing while they were in groups with a teacher (community volunteer) and wanted their mother to be around. Gradually, the children gained confidence and wanted to spend more time in the non-formal schools. The adolescent boys and girls were involved in study groups that were developed by partner NGOs to encourage the reading of books through a mobile library. These boys and girls were also given other avenues to get involved including, reading books of specific standard (according to their standard in the formal schools), drawing, stitching classes, organizing activities in relief camps (specifically, surveying to collect information), to maintain cleanliness, and to supervise and work with younger children alongside the trained volunteers. In three to six months, based on the time span of the camps, these organized activities quickly brought some changes among the children and adolescents as reported by the children, their parents, and also by community volunteers:

Afroz (11 years old) was studying in Class V. After losing all her belongings she was sheltered with her parents and two siblings in a crowded relief camp on factory grounds. All around the place was dirty with factory waste and other materials. In this camp about 1500 people were living. When the community volunteer meet Afroz for the first time she refused to talk, and her parents complained that she became very stubborn and aloof. At times she was very demanding and had angry outbursts. Her daily routine and sleep were disturbed and she refused to eat most of the time. Other boys and girls were also experiencing and exhibiting some of the same stress reactions. When the community volunteer, who actually belonged to the same camp, organized the children and started group song and play Afroz observed for two days before finally joining. While drawing and explaining the experience of riots many of the children started narrating their own experiences, which was not allowed by the parents earlier. Afroz explained, "when the disturbance started in the city my parents took the three of us and we went to a nearby society (housing cooperative area) to stay safe in the house of our leader. But the mob entered and started pulling women out. They carried swords and burning sticks in hand. With fear, my brothers and me went on the top and climbed on the water tank and looked how people were butchered. They were making the women naked" She started weeping, and continued after a few minutes with her own thoughts "why did people killed us? We never killed anyone. They are Hindu, every one said. But you know I had [a] lot of friends who worship gods/goddess, they are all Hindu". The teacher reported that Afroz took more interest subsequently and said that she will continue her studies once she is back at her school. She took active interest when they were asked to think, write and draw on topics like, "how human being[s] should love each other" and "how everyone can be helpful to others". This informal schooling helped Afroz to maintain her routine. Her parents reported that she became responsible about helping her mother and her behavior changed. Many other parents also reported similar change over months of continued engagement in the relief camp.

Facilitating Activities for Healing

During rehabilitation in the camp, as well as in the communities, various activities that were designed for the children were largely to ensure ventilation through talking, expressing issues related to trauma, visualizing the differences from before and after the riots, accepting the changes, and finally building hope for the future. This process was performed through a series of activities by using different mediums of expression and ensured that the children and adolescents in the schools and communities received adequate care and a nurturing environment. Activities for expression (drawing, story-telling, creative writing, school drama/skit, play or games, etc.) were globally labeled creative-expressive activities (Bordoloi & Khoja, 2006; Hansen, 2008).

The community volunteers used all these mediums of expression over a long period of time in different contexts and often with groups. Drawing was used widely as a medium of expression of the disaster related trauma as well as to encourage positive changes. Initially a lot of “free-drawing” – children were instructed to “draw as you like” – was encouraged and it was seen that invariably the children and adolescents between five to 15 years of age were expressing their experiences of the riots (Sekar & Bhadra, 2003). A content analysis of these drawings showed that all the children living in the relief camp drew the riots in the form of burning houses, religious places, and trains, and of people with swords. Further review showed 45 percent of the pictures had a human figure either crying for help, dead, or laying down. Another feature was that about 28 percent of the pictures showed people divided in two groups or fighting with each other (Sekar & Bhadra, 2003). These pictures very clearly showed people’s hostility towards each other. When the school going children were asked to make a caption for their picture, they expressed fear and elaborated on their personal experience of the disasters. Some of the captions were, “kill them, kill them [...] we do not know why they want to kill us,” “the horrible nights, never could I forget,” “god will punish them,” “sufferings are part of life for [religious group] people,” “what happened in Godhra, none of us are connected to that.”² The drawing activity was subsequently taken to “issue based drawing” – the children were given a specific topic to draw – to direct the children to focus on the changes that were positive around them and to talk about their futures and hopes (Ribeiro, 2003; Sekar & Bhadra, 2003). Children were asked to draw about what they lost or missed most. They often focused on their homes, the person who was attached to them, their school life, toys, play materials, and the prayer hall, among others. As the children were able to express their loss, they were also asked to draw the positive changes and good things that they were observing around them in the relief camp or in the community. At times they drew their new home, the family’s new pulling-cart, or any other good day or event that they had enjoyed. It was observed that the children could paint the day of a picnic, the class in the non-formal school, pictures of their friends, their new pet cat, and, at times, some basic home

articles and utensils. It was seen that as the children started drawing the positive changes they also started thinking about their future and individual betterment. Gradually, the children and adolescents were instructed to think about their future and how they could become successful. This drawing exercise helped to heal their wounds and encouraged the children and adolescents to look for positive changes. Figure 1 shows a sample of the drawing exercises that were conducted with the children and adolescent in combination with other methods of expression to facilitate psychosocial recovery.

Clay modeling was found to be another very strong medium for facilitating expression by the children and adolescents. Clay modeling was taken through the similar steps to encourage building hope for the future. The following case story reflects how a girl was able to express her vision through clay modeling:

Moon (13 year old girl) was studying in Class VII when she was attacked and ran for life. She was sheltered in Haz-house relief camp with many other families from different areas. Moon's father was a carpenter and was able to provide a house with the basic comforts of life. Her parents described her as a bright student in school. After she came to the camp, she was almost mum and very timid. She would respond very minimally and used to stand aloof in a corner and wished to be alone all the time. The community volunteers tried to involve her in the group, but she refused. When, the volunteer started giving colored clay to the children and asked them to make any model of anything "they liked most," Moon, went to the volunteer wanting to get a pack of colored clay. Subsequently, she started making different models of household goods and furniture with the clay. She made a table,



Figure 1: Samples from an issue based drawing exercise designed for emotional expression (Gujarat Harmony Project 2002).

chair, refrigerator, television, sofa and various other things. She took utmost care to make these models by using different colors and giving appropriate miniature shape. When the volunteer had to leave to close the session for the day she asked everyone to return the clay for re-use on the next day. When Moon refused to return the clay the community volunteers sat with her and asked what the models meant to her, and why she was not interested in returning the clay to them. For the first time Moon started talking with her and explained that “we had all these in our house, we were quite happy. Everything is burnt. Our house is destroyed. Now we became poor, we became like beggar . . . we have to stand in queue to get food, to use toilet, even no place to sleep, no bed. I cannot lead this kind life [. . .]!” For the first time she was able to share her pain and gradually she joined in other activities in the group, showed remarkable improvement. She went back to her regular school almost after seven months and started attending the tutorial class run by an organization in her area to cope with the backlog from her courses.

Story-telling and creative writing methods were used depending on the age and level of understanding of the children. The teacher told stories that reflected how a child should behave in school and how he or she tries to achieve his or her goals. Equally, the children were asked to tell different stories. A set of thematic picture cards was used to provoke the children to talk about different situations (Dave *et al.*, 2002). These cards, with different depictions of daily life, allowed the children to think about different situations and express their feelings, worries, and thoughts for the future. The adolescent boys and girls were quite expressive when writing on different themes. These themes included “the most important event of my life;” “the best thing that ever happened to me;” “I am most happy/sad when . . .;” “how I would describe myself;” “my best friend;” “the person I trust the most is and why?” and “describe a dream.”

For children and adolescents physical activities are an important way to overcome the problems and stress reactions they experience following a traumatic event (Dave *et al.*, 2002; Maita, Ramaswamy, & Sirur, 2002; Husain, 2005). In various play or games, the children or adolescents interacted with each other and gained control over the traumatic memories. By joining in the physical activities they were encouraged to express their feelings and understand how others are behaving. In games the children also learned to follow certain norms and behave in a certain manner that is desirable. After the riots the social norms and family control were highly disturbed. Some group games were designed to encourage the sharing of responsibilities and adjustment with others within a controlled environment. These physical activities facilitated the externalization of problems and traumatic experiences and allowed children to get involved in new activities. One of the community volunteers shared this story:

Before the class (a non-formal school in the community in a relief camp) started all the children used to fight with each other as a matter of game. They would identify themselves as “Hindu” and “Muslim” and then start fighting, uttering different abusive remarks about each other. They were pretending to throw bombs, killing each other, pulling from houses, burning and shout for help [. . .] shout as, kill them [. . .] kill them. It was very disturbing to see and the children playing like this, as if they had forgot all other things. The group

games taught in psychosocial training, were very good for involving them in physical activities and gave them a lot of opportunity to talk, learn, and enjoy within the limited space.

All these activities were conducted on a regular day-to-day basis through various community centers that were established as part of the peace building process in the communities. This gradual process of healing, starting with ventilation, also helped to develop the confidence of the community volunteers while working with the children. The community volunteers were also regularly supported by a group of professionals and their respective NGOs through group discussions, follow-ups, and refresher courses.

Working with the Caregivers

Caregivers are a crucial point of contact in redeveloping and re-establishing caring and nurturing environments at home, in the neighborhood, and in the community (Dybdahl, 2001; Qouta, Punamäki, & Sarraj, 2008). The severe and brutal activities of the riots impaired the nurturing environment to a great extent. Entrenched in their own worry and concern to rebuild their lives after the riots, parents were equally traumatized and no longer able to provide support for their children. The apprehension of the re-occurrence of violence caused wide scale disturbances among the caregivers. These worries were communicated to the children very often. Even the anger expressed by caregivers towards other communities, the government, and the social system caused a deep scar in the mind of the children and adolescents, which was reflected in their behavior, conversations, and interactions with others.

Enhancing the capacity of the caregivers was crucial to developing a sustainable caring atmosphere. An important component of this intervention was its integration with the rehabilitation services that facilitated the initiation of daily activities, rebuilding of houses, organizing self-help groups and psychosocial support. In various sessions with the parents, especially with mothers, the psychosocial problems of the children and their stress reactions were discussed in detail, and the parents were able to express their own worries about their children. This process helped the caregiver to develop an adequate understanding of the change in behavior of their children and also learn positive ways of handling their children's behavior; like allowing the children to express their views, encouraging them to help in household work and giving responsibilities, requesting rather than scolding, having meals together, visiting their school from time to time, and encouraging their child's small achievements. Community volunteers performed weekly visits to the families and visited parents separately on other occasions. Orphaned children (living with relatives), children with single parents, and children who experienced the death of close family members or siblings were most vulnerable, and as a result were in regular touch with the community volunteers. It was ensured that these families had

priority in establishing their livelihood venture or in receiving the basic supplies for maintaining their family life. Various scholarships were arranged for the orphaned, children of single parents, as well as disabled children to facilitate their education and vocational training. Hence, working with the caregivers was a three-fold approach in the rehabilitation program that ultimately helped in developing a healthy environment for the children and adolescents in the community. First, knowledge was provided about the stress reactions among the children and skills to handle them were taught. Second, psychosocial support was given to the caregivers themselves, facilitating their own healing process. Thirdly, an integrated approach helped further support other rehabilitation and material needs of the caregivers. The caregivers reported various changes within themselves after repeated interactions with the community volunteers. Some of them can be mentioned here:

I was very upset; disturbed after the riots. It was looking like we had nothing left in our lives. All the savings, the house, everything was destroyed, burnt in a day. I was not able to control myself. When I started coming for the group meeting I realized my own problems and also understood that I get angry frequently with my children and shout at them a lot. Gradually, I changed and now I could handle the realities of life and also feel hopeful about the future of my children. Debuben (a community volunteer) gave me and my family a new hope, even after all odds.

Another caregiver had this to say about the program:

I was very disturbed to see my daughters as they were just mum and not responding to anything. I used to scold them, even beat them to force them to take bath, to eat or to help me to collect rations from the [relief] camp office, but they were in their own world. At night Asifa (eight year old, eldest daughter) used to hold me tightly. She was not sleeping, nor would she allow me to sleep. Both of them were murmuring in their sleep, sometimes getting up at night. After, they started going to the activity centre (run by the community volunteer through a local NGO) I saw a lot of change. Now they are more normal. I myself was scared and confused with the condition of my daughters.

COMMUNITY ORIENTED PEACE-BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE HARMONY

Providing psychosocial support and ensuring a stimulating, nurturing environment were closely connected with the community where the children were living. The psychosocial support program was designed to facilitate sustainable peace among the communities through various community-based activities that encouraged people-to-people contact, open forum discussions, cooperation, and the development of trusting relationships through various common initiatives. These participatory methods were found to be a crucial part of post disaster interventions (IASC, 2007; Pyles, 2007).

Activity centers for conflict resolution: These centers were designed for the children, men, women, and youths to get meaningfully engaged in various initiatives. In all these activity centers the participation of both the Hindu and Muslim communities was ensured, and these centers were made a place of meeting, sharing, information dissemination, and learning. The community volunteers and people from other areas were encouraged to visit each other's communities and neighborhoods. Various social and cultural functions were conducted at the centers to generate awareness and ensure free and open discussions. Some of the centers were designed as non-formal schools for the children, hobby centers, and tuition classes for the school going children, and library and sports clubs for the youth.

Community events for conflict resolution: Community events were organized on frequent intervals to ensure a mass gathering and to create a clear and loud message of harmony among all. Community events allowed community leaders, intellectuals, professionals, and laypersons of various age groups from both the Hindu and Muslim communities and various localities to meet each other, listen, and gain an understanding of each other's situations. These meetings helped individuals and groups remove both the psychological and physical barriers between them and make commitments towards sustainable peace and collective growth and development. Towards this end, various multi-religious prayers and meetings were organized. Religious festivals were celebrated collectively, with each group including the other. For example, the Hindu communities arranged an *iftar* celebration (celebratory dinner indicating the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*) in order to host the Muslim communities. Equally, Muslim communities invited Hindus to celebrate *Diwali* (the festival of light celebrated by Hindus) in their communities. Various days of national importance (Independence Day, Republic Day, etc.) and international importance (Human Rights Day, Women's Day, etc.) were celebrated collectively to ensure a common understanding and a vision of peace building and harmony. Events, such as picnics and outings for men, women, children, and adolescents from both religious communities, were organized to bring the communities together. These community events were very successful at generating feelings of acceptance and at building trusting relationships among the common people.

Group building for conflict resolution: Various group initiatives were designed to enhance the opportunities for community members to meet together. These included the development of the Peace Committee, which included community leaders and other eminent persons in the locality, as a forum for meeting and working together towards the development of their areas. Self-help groups were initiated among the men and women in different areas. These groups created proposals for community projects, which were reviewed and critiqued by other self-help groups, creating a system of interdependence and idea sharing. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) were another initiative that mobilize large

numbers of people to gather and develop their own organizations in their respective areas. CBOs were registered as official organizations, ensuring proper legal status when demanding their due rights to the appropriate government authorities for different developmental and civic matters. In each of the activity, hobby, and tuition centers, and in the youth clubs and libraries parents and elder members from both communities were encouraged to make visits, organize various community events, and demonstrate their solidarity. The community volunteers took the lead in having multiple sessions with the common people to describe the political interests, how religious sentiments are used in politics, how the common people are made to suffer, and how the sufferings of the poor are the same – insufficient food, lack of jobs, and no proper place to stay – irrespective of religion. These sessions made the people come together more, and raise their voices as a united front above the threats of pressure groups for the development of their society. Gradually, this atmosphere impacted the thought process of children and adolescents. They developed the opportunity to think differently and learned the value of social acceptance above the mistrust created after the communal violence.

Working in the Schools

Reconciliation and conflict resolution is a long driven process. Working to alleviate the immediate problems is just one step. Young people must also be prepared to restore peace (Bhadra, 2006). Therefore, it was decided to promote psychosocial competencies among the children and adolescents, which can ensure harmonious living and sustainable peace (Bharath & Kumar, 2004). Life skills education is one such approach. Recognized world-wide in various preventative and promotive activities, life skills enhance the coping capacities of young adolescents (Bharath & Kumar, 2004; World Health Organization [WHO], 1997, 2005). Life skills education was also essential in promoting higher self-worth and positive attitudes towards other community members, helping to promote better psychosocial adjustment (Kovacev & Shute, 2004). Therefore, the life skills education program was initiated as a model in a few schools and focused on health promotion coupled with conflict resolution.

Ten schools were selected from the middle economic class (both government aided and Trust managed) from different areas of violence-affected cities. During the selection process, ensuring a good mixture of religious backgrounds was kept in mind. Therefore, four Muslim trust managed institutions, two Christian organization managed schools, and four Hindu majority schools were selected. In a three tier approach, the teachers were sensitized during a two day workshop on 10 basic life skills: decision-making, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, effective communication, inter-personal relationship, empathy, self-awareness, coping with emotions, coping with stress (WHO, 1997). Additionally, a group of teachers were selected as master trainers and trained through a weeklong residential program. These master trainers were given the main

responsibility of coordinating the life skills sessions with other teachers. Various sessions were developed and practiced to promote the value of humanity, acceptance and pluralism. One such session plan is detailed in Figure 2.

<p>Name of the Activity: <i>Trust and faith- connecting us all.</i></p> <p>Objectives of the Activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To help the students understand that developing trustworthy relationships is every one's responsibility.</i> <p>Expected outcome:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The students realize that trust and faith develop the connectivity in a relationship, which we have to keep alive.</i> 2. <i>The students also learn to take responsibilities for developing harmonious relationships.</i> <p>Situation-1:</p> <p><i>Rafi and Ranjan are very close friends. Both of them are studying in class IX in a school. Rafi is good in science subjects and Ranjan in language and social science. So, they both help each other in preparing notes in different subjects. They have a feeling that they will be in touch for their whole life. Rafi wants to choose a medical course and Ranjan is intended to go for administrative services. Both of them are very hard working and support each other all the time. During their board exam (final exam of 10th Standard) both of them have to go to a school far off from their school. In the mean time, there is tension in some areas and it becomes problematic to travel every day up to the examination center. They decided to stay together with Rafi's uncle, who lives near to the examination center. Both of their parents were happy with their friendship and Rafi's uncle was happy to host them. However, neighbors of Rafi's uncle, as well as the neighbors of Ranjan, started saying it was risky to bring people from other communities around or to go to another's area. But they continued to stay in Rafi's uncle's house and completed the examination very well. Both of their parents and uncle developed family friendship with each other.</i></p> <p><i>In this situation Rafi and Ranjan were very upset to see the reactions of the neighbors. They decided to make more friends, started celebrating friendship day, and established a friendship club in their school. Their teacher helped them to develop the idea and also to work on this matter.</i></p> <p>Facilitative question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the situation like Rafi and Ranjan common? • What are the factors between Rafi and Ranjan that kept them together? • What are the factors which were imposing doubt and restrictions on Rafi and Ranjan? • How is the parents' reactions to the situation important? • Why were the neighbors not happy? What was lacking in their understanding? • How does a friendship club promote harmony among the people and young generations? <p>Summarize:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The most important thing in any relationship is "fellow feeling" for each other's and building a trusting bond. 2. Building a trusting relationship is essential among all of us to maintain a strong bond of relationship. 3. Friendship was the most important matter, which kept them together as they helped each other in every aspect of their studies. 4. The parents' attitude also was very important in making their friendship strong and accepted by others. A friendship based on trust and good faith is always beneficial. 5. In society many people are not in a close relation with others and have various wrong notions about others, which have to be corrected by talking and showing good practices. 6. We have to remove the dividers from our mind to build up a society and also help others to remove the dividers from their minds. <p>Reflection for the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I have a relationship with my friend whom I trust and who belongs to another community? • If yes, what are all the good things we share between us? • If no, how can I develop this kind of relationship?
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Figure 2: Life skills session: trust and faith – connecting us all.

Largely after working with both communities it was seen that many of the children from the minority community were attending religious educational institutions (*Madrassa*), which had not been covered in any such psychosocial or other developmental program. Interactions with the ‘*Muftisab*’ (equal to doctoral degree in the field of Islamic teaching) in the *Madrassa* showed there was a need for psychological understanding among the *Madrassa* teachers. Hence, psychosocial competence building through life skills education was planned. Following the program, feedback from the “*Mufti*” and “*Moulavi*” (religious teacher) were very encouraging.

- This [life skills] is one of the most promising programs for the children in the *Madrassa*. It will help a lot of the children to overcome the day-to-day problems. It will also help them in the growth and development.
- This program is very much in touch with the main thoughts of Islam and also it is very close to the main teaching of the prophet. It is for building the human being, which is the most essential need of present society.
- Life skills teaching should be taken on long term and also this should be taken to other areas and other *Madrassa*.
- This is good for reducing the monotony of the education and increasing the capacity of the students. Many of the activities have directly focused on the problems of the children and this will help to improve the habits of the students.

Working in religious institutions was one of the major milestones in the many achievements of the peace-building process.

CONCLUSION

The process of psychosocial support for children and adolescents should be considered in a holistic perspective to facilitate a caring and nurturing environment. According to the concept of “psychology of place,” identity, familiarity and attachment are most crucial for human beings to develop a “sense of place” that was majorly threatened by the riots, subsequent displacement, and problems of daily life (Fullilove, 1996). Rebuilding the “sense of place” through psychosocial support can happen by a systematic rehabilitation effort that encourages re-establishing networks between neighbors, creating trust and harmony by rebuilding the social support system, and facilitating normalization of reactions. The strategies adapted for working with the children and adolescents affected by communal violence in Gujarat did not only focus on the immediate situation, but also ensured a sustainable peace. By encouraging an entire community to act as a “change agent” and creating structures and institutions for teaching knowledge and skills at the grassroots level, mass participation was achieved at various levels. The process of peace building presented intense challenges as unrest is a product of many vested interests and affects the socio-political-economic gain of certain sections of society. Sustainable peace is also closely linked with social justice. Though this article does not focus on it, it is important for professionals to

think about ensuring social justice for psychosocial support. It was seen that any initiative to ensure justice by involving legal mechanisms, which are largely controlled by state power, caused a wide psychosocial disturbance. Therefore, psychosocial support was managed with community members on the ground level. Consequently, authorities and state mechanisms were still an untouched avenue of bringing about change. Gilligan (2006) agrees that the “depoliticized approach for dealing with political violence is inherently self-limiting and may even serve to undermine peace-building efforts” (p. 339). Therefore, a project for enhancing communal harmony should be planned in consideration with state mechanisms as well as with community members. But in a typical situation, working with the community and enhancing people’s confidence in each other may also lead to definite change in the political and social system in the long term. Therefore, the effort made in Gujarat presents a unique model of a holistic approach for facilitating psychosocial recovery among disaster affected children, adolescents, and adults with participation from all community members.

AUTHOR NOTES

Dr. Subhasis Bhadra, M.Phil., Ph.D. received his doctorate from the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS. He began his career working with those affected by the Gujarat earthquake (2001) and subsequently worked in areas affected by riots (Gujarat, 2002), tsunamis (Southern India and South East Asia, 2004), earthquakes (Kashmir, 2005), terrorist attacks (Mumbai serial Train Blast, 2006) creating and implementing psychosocial programs with organizations, like Care India, American Red Cross, Oxfam India, Action Aid, International Medical Corps. Dr. Bhadra has developed materials and manuals for disaster intervention and most recently has aided with relief interventions after the Japanese tsunami. He is an Assistant Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Gautama Buddha University and is working to establish a Social Work Department.

NOTES

1. All names have been changed to preserve the individuals’ privacy.
2. The riot broke out after some miscreant set a train compartment on fire; killing 68 people from the majority (Hindu) community. The incident happened in Godhra in the state of Gujarat on March 27, 2001. Subsequently, minority communities were attacked all over the state.
3. Tuition schools are after school tutoring programs that supplement the public school curriculum. These programs, in addition to tutoring, generally provide psychological and social support programs. Tuition schools often have fees but are subsidized by organizations to help the poor. In the case of Gujarat, the NGOs developed the tuition centers and encouraged

children from both Hindu and Muslim communities to attend. Students who could not attend school owing to the disturbances had a particular need for these services. The schools provided provisions of text and reference books and offered all services at no cost for the first year. In the second year, as part of the sustainability plan, the NGOs began collecting nominal fees to ensure maintenance costs.

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