

# Lived Experiences

Drawing strength from my personal journey: a collection of lived experiences.

## **Lived Experience as a War Survivor**

War can increase the risk of psychological disorders. Due to the fear, stress, and violence experienced during war, survivors may sometimes adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms. I survived wars in 1996, 1998, and 2000; it was not a good experience. We lived without hope of seeing the next day. Life didn't make sense anymore. Losing friends, relatives, neighbors, and always thinking that you could be the next to die wasn't easy.

Having to flee your province or country to save your life can be traumatic in itself. We had to leave everything behind. We slept outside, hid in forests, and went days without food. All these experiences can negatively impact our mental health.

Surviving war is a miracle, but the consequences can affect survivors for a very long time. Therefore, it is always good to contact a mental health professional and get help.

## **Lived Experience as a Refugee**

I left my country when I was 19 years old. I had to go because boys were targeted. They were forced to join the national army or rebel groups, and others were just killed. This is a horrible experience that a human being can go through. It is about taking a journey without a well-defined destination. I left everything behind and went. In my mind, I knew that I would stop where they would accommodate me. I met people from different countries, but there was no communication because of the language barrier. Some people were willing to help, but how can you help someone without understanding what they're saying? I was forced to learn new languages to integrate with people from different nations; now I can easily speak 7 languages.

I experienced rejection from time to time, but I never gave up trying again. Many refugees face the same situation. Being rejected has a direct negative impact on our mental health. Therefore, refugees and displaced people need psycho-social support.

The positive side of being a refugee is that it gives you the opportunity to visit other countries, meet new people, and learn more about others and yourself. I managed to visit 10 countries in Africa and 7 countries in Europe.

## **Lived Experience as Married**

Marriage is a beautiful thing that happens in our lives. It puts two people together, united with love. When I was married, I enjoyed every moment with my ex-wife and our child. I didn't know that the enjoyment was for a short time. I believe none of us knew that our marriage wouldn't last for long.

My experience is that I ignored some important points. I saw red flags before marriage, but I think I painted them green. I am sure many people can relate. Every relationship has ups and downs; I believe the best thing to do is to seek help whenever things aren't going well. If I had received help when I encountered troubles with my ex, I think my marriage would have survived.

## **Lived Experience as Divorced**

Divorce has a huge impact on everyone involved, including the man, his wife, and their children. It affects everyone on different levels, but all are affected psychologically. Psychological pain, financial crisis, and remarriage issues affected me the most. The most painful was the separation anxiety I experienced when my daughter was taken away from me. She went back to Europe with her mom when she was 1 year old; now she is 10, and I haven't seen her since then. I believe many people can relate to this. Without help, it can sometimes be difficult to move on with life.

## **Lived Experience as a Father**

Becoming a father is not an easy task, but it gives a very good feeling. It made me assess every aspect of my life, from what is good, what is bad, what is healthy, and what is unhealthy. It helped me focus on things that are productive so I could continue providing for my child. The challenge I found is the education of children after divorce or even before divorce when both parents are not cooperating. Another challenge is understanding teenagers and helping them embrace the right direction. Therefore, our teenagers need proper guidance and support. Their future depends on the education they are given.

## **Lived Experience as a Businessman**

Having a business is something nice. Many people wish to start one, but they sometimes don't know where to start. It takes courage to initiate a business. I started my own transport business in 2012. I accepted the risk of investing all my money in a new business. Everything was moving well at the beginning. One year later, I lost my business because I didn't have experience and a better understanding of the terrain. The pressure to succeed and make the business grow was very stressful. I had many sleepless nights, which pushed me into unhealthy coping mechanisms. It took me a long time to accept that I had lost the business. I am sure many entrepreneurs can relate to this experience. It is therefore important to seek help if you cannot control the level of stress or anxiety caused by your business.



**M. PEDRO MADEGE**  
COUNSELLING