



RELIGIOUS IDENTITY REINVESTMENT AS A COPING RESOURCE AMONG CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN THE WAKE OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE.

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Abstract

There is very little empirical evidence available regarding reinvestment in a religious identity to cope with traumatic life stressors. In order to address this gap in the literature, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen Christian missionaries who were affected by religious violence that broke out in Orissa, India in 2008. The study aimed to describe the subjective experience of violence and explore factors that fostered resilience among the missionaries. The findings revealed that religious identity reinvestment emerged as a source of resilience and form of coping among individuals exposed to violence and persecution as a result of their religious identification. These findings are discussed with respect to their theoretical and clinical implications and limitations.

Key Terms: Socially Devaluing Experience, Religious Identity Reinvestment, Religious Coping, and Resilience.

Introduction

Background to the study

Religion can be a powerful force behind the moral and social order of a society. Authors (Girard, 1972, 2005; Jones, 2008; Juergensmeyer, 2000; Kimbal, 2008; Marshall, 1997 & Selengut, 2003) have recognized the strong nexus between religion and violence perpetrated against individuals and communities worldwide. Some contend that religious violence is one of the most pressing issues affecting the world today and argue that religious conflicts are more intense than other types of conflicts (Pearce, 2005). When violence breaks out between two religious or cultural groups, according to Galtung (1990), it entails lowering of four classes of basic needs below what is potentially possible for an individual or a group namely: The survival needs, well-being needs, identity needs, meaning needs and freedom needs. These deprivations of basic needs can lead the deprived individual or the community to shame. Lee (2009) understands the experience of shame as the precipitating factor in creating group violence. Lee further adds, "Shame may serve its function to exclude certain people from communities and neglect them" (p.258).

When it comes to religious persecution, no religion appears to be exempt from religious persecution. Grim and Fink (2008) define religious persecution as "physical abuse or physical displacement due to one's religious practices, profession, or affiliation" (p. 643). Hindus are persecuted in Bangladesh, Pakistan and elsewhere. Muslims belonging to minority sects are targeted in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Persecution of Christians (the focus of the present study) is worldwide and likely underreported (Marshall, 1997). Catholic bishops, protestant pastors and other religious leaders have been persecuted in China, while Christian peace activists have been kidnapped and killed in Democratic Republic of Congo and Iraq (Grim & Fink, 2007). Although religious persecution has received increased attention in the past few decades, it remains an under researched area of inquiry (Marshall, 1997).

Global Profile of Religious Persecution

Religious persecution is a growing problem and there is an overall rise in religious intolerance and discrimination in some parts of the world including Sudan, Pakistan, China, Vietnam, Burma and India (Grim & Fink, 2007). Grim and Fink (2007) published a global profile of religious persecution revealing that out of 143 countries, 77 countries have documented cases of religious persecution that include physical abuse or displacement from homes. Although religious persecution is prevalent in almost every region of the globe, it is far higher in the Middle East and South Asian regions and noticeably lower in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

Characteristics such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status can aggravate or alleviate oppression (Hodge, 2007). For instance, a review of the literature on religious prosecution reveals that religious minorities without access to political or cultural powers are most often the targets of persecution (Hodge, 2007). In parts of the world rife with religious persecution, religious believers suffer from both government-sponsored and government-tolerated violations of their rights (Hodge, 2007; Khanna, 2008). Violations include surveillance by "moral police", sanctions against holding positions in government or education, denial of the right to assemble, confiscation of property, severe restrictions against the construction or repair of



places of worship, state-sponsored slander campaigns, and prohibitions against publishing, distributing or possessing religious literature (Hodge, 2007).

Violence against Christians in India

Christian minority groups have been targets of violence in some states of India in the past few years. The state of Orissa experienced unprecedented acts of violence against the Christian community after the alleged killing of a Hindu swami and four others in their ashram in the Kandhamal district of Orissa (now renamed as Odisha) by the Maoist wing of Naxalites (an Indian communist guerilla group) in August 2008. Though the Maoist group claimed responsibility for the killing of the Swami and the others in the ashram, the Hindu radical groups alleged that the acts of murder was a plot made by the Christians as the Swami had been spreading hatred against Christians in Kandhamal where he had set up his base for four decades (Akkara, 2009). Instead of demanding a legal course of investigation, the Hindu fundamentalists exploited this incident to spark off violence against the Christian Community. They took the slain body of the Swami in a massive procession across Kandhamal, through interior villages to incite hatred and vengeance among the majority Hindu community. They spread the alleged Christian conspiracy behind the murder of the Hindu Swami to arouse their passion. As a result, trail of violence broke out in Kandhamal and the neighboring districts of Orissa against the minority Christian community. According to Vedantam, (1999) "A plausible explanation for the outbreaks of violence against Christians and Christian missionaries is that their increasing political and social activism has come to be perceived as interference in local affairs" (p.415). Missionaries who work as social activists and educators come as a hindrance to the age old practice of grabbing the land and property of the lower caste *Hindudalits* (untouchables) or preventing them from collecting exorbitant interest rates by the upper caste money lenders. This explanation holds good as one of the reasons for the outbreak of violence in Kandhamal. "When missionaries turn to activism, they run the risk of antagonizing the power structures" (Vedantam, 1999 p. 415). When they bring education and other social empowerment programmes, to the tribals and *dalits* in backward areas of India, they help these people become more aware of their rights and privileges. These empowerment activities by the Christian missionaries apparently disturbs the social structure, and forces that are averse to social change perpetrate violence against the Christian community.

After the outbreak of violence, The National People's Tribunal (NPT) was organized in Kandhamal (2010) to assist the victims and survivors of the Kandhamal violence in seeking justice, peace and personal dignity. After recording the testimony of 43 victims- survivors and their representatives and hearing fact-finding reports prepared by volunteer organizations and experts, the jury observed that most of the survivors of violence are *dalit* and tribal Christians from low socio-economic strata of the society. These survivors underwent incredible hardships, including physical and psychological trauma, an extensive loss of property and accessibility to education and health services. They faced persecution and cultural, caste and class-based discrimination (NPT, 2010). The jury further observed that communal forces used religious conversions as a means for political mobilization and to incite violence and discrimination against the Christians in Kandhamal (NPT, 2010). At this point it is important to look at communal violence in the context of India.

In India, religious violence is most often referred to as communal violence. Communalism as a concept is specific to India (Kakar, 2000). It is used today to connote the political exploitation of a religious ideology which defines groups in society only on the basis of religion (Singh, 1993). This concept has a strong identification with a community of believers. Communalism, in addition to, its own religious affiliation, also has its social, political, and economic interests in common. These interests conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers--the *enemy*, (a Muslim or Christian) who lives in the same neighborhood. Now, coming to what the Swami Laxmananda did in Kandhamal, he "openly campaigned against the activities of Christian missionaries. He set up educational and health centres for poor tribal people but used these as a platform for spreading an anti-Christian message. He also conducted 'home coming ceremonies' to reconvert local Christians back to Hinduism" (HRLN, 2008, p.6).

Trauma and Religion

Most people who experience violent or life threatening situations, experience a sense of loss for a brief period, function normally, face the new challenges, and move on with life (Bonanno, 2008). However, when the symptoms persist long after the trauma has subsided and become chronic, they are no longer adaptive, and are understood as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some people derive meaning from their trauma through turning to their religious and spiritual beliefs (Norris, 2008). Religious beliefs can provide assurance that an event "makes sense" because it can be incorporated into a comprehensive system of religious meaning (Park, 2005). Indeed, empirical studies reveal an intimate connection between religion and meaning, particularly among older and more intrinsically religious populations (Ardelt, 2003; Krause, 2003). For instance, a study by Ardel (2003) showed an association between intrinsic religiosity and a sense of meaning in a sample of older adults. Furthermore, strong religious faith has been associated with reduced PTSD symptoms. Spiritual well-being was



found to ease PTSD symptoms in a sample of veterans who participated in a group mantra intervention (Bormann, Liu, Thorp & Lang, 2012), and an intrinsic religious orientation was found to be associated with less severe PTSD symptoms in a sample of battered women (Astin, Lawrence, & Foy, 1993). Clearly, religion has the potential to offer individuals a meaningful framework for interpreting and coping with their traumatic experiences.

Religious coping

Individuals use varied coping strategies in the wake of a serious life crisis. The types of coping strategies employed by an individual are contingent upon the stressors and the availability of coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos, Holahan & Beutler, 2003). These coping resources are available within oneself or within one's environment (Sabina & Tindale, 2008). At the personal level, coping resources include one's physical and emotional health, social skills and problem-solving abilities (Sabina & Tindale, 2008). Resources in the environment by way of community support can include receiving emotional, informational or material support from others (Moos, 1995; Lagman, Yoo, Levine, Donnell & Lim, 2014). Seeking social support is considered to be a universal coping strategy for disaster survivors (Ibanez, Buck, Khatchikian & Norris, 2004).

It is common for people to turn to religion for solace and succor in times of extreme life crisis. Religion can provide answers to some of the most daunting questions that individuals face when they are in deep distress. Those who use religious coping strategies such as seeking spiritual support, benevolent religious reappraisals and collaborative religious coping typically experience positive emotions, enhanced self-esteem, as well as spiritual and other stress-related growth (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). A study by Harrison and colleagues (2001) found that depressive symptoms were lowest when people used positive religious coping strategies, such as seeking spiritual support, expressing spiritual satisfaction, receiving community support, benevolent appraisal of stressful events and engaging in a collaborative relationship with God (Harrison et al., 2001).

One facet of religious coping is the use of sacred objects. Miller, Gall, and Corbeil (2011) explored the experience of prayer with a sacred object within the context of significant life stress. The findings from their study were found to be consistent with La Mothe's (1998) observation that prayers with sacred objects provide a sense of cohesion, identity, security and comfort in times of distress (Pargament, Magyar-Russel, & Murray-Swank, 2005). Among the varied types of religious coping, forgiveness also deserves a special mention. Researchers have taken a keen interest in factors that motivate religiously inclined people to forgive their offenders. Through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 10 religious individuals, Kidwell, Wade and Blaedel (2011) examined how religiously inclined individuals understand and use forgiveness to cope with distressing life experiences. Religiously inclined individuals endorsed a number of religious and secular motivations to forgive. The most common religious motivations to forgive were "to draw closer to God", "to be like Christ or to be like God" and the belief that person should "forgive others because God forgives us", demonstrating that a positive and trusting relationship with a deity can encourage forgiveness and coping among adherents.

Religion and Resilience

Resilience can be defined as a process of adapting positively when confronted with significant life stress or adversity (APA, 2004). Resilience has been described as sustained competence in response to demands that take a toll on one's coping resources and has been linked to personality characteristics such as self-esteem, assertiveness, hardiness, ego resilience, locus of control and the capacity to utilize resources (Wilson & Agaibi, 2005). Research has demonstrated that resilient participants return to homeostasis faster than non-resilient participants in anxiety-producing situations (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Ai and Park (2005) contend that the effects of trauma may be better understood by taking a broader perspective that includes resilience and recovery, as well as damage and symptomatology. Bonanno (2008) posits that individual displays of resiliency in the face of trauma or loss is a more common phenomenon than previously believed, and there are multiple, unexpected pathways to resilience. Dimensions of resilience include hardiness, self-enhancement, repressive coping, positive emotions and laughter (Bonanno, 2008). Resiliency in the wake of trauma is tied to an emerging area of trauma research: post-traumatic growth. Recent research has focused on how working through of trauma can lead to positive outcomes including a deeper appreciation of life, greater resilience and subjective well-being (Ai & Park, 2005; Augustine, 2014). A number of studies (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi & McMillan, 2000; Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998; Shaw, Joseph & Linley, 2005) report that religiosity and spirituality increase after the experience of trauma and are associated with post-traumatic growth. For example, in a study by Kennedy and colleagues (1998), 70 female victims of sexual assault were assessed on questionnaire measures of well-being, spirituality, intrinsic religiosity and severity of trauma. The participants reported an increase in spirituality in the 9 to 24 months following their attack, which was in turn positively associated with a measure of subjective well-being. Those who reported high intrinsic religiosity prior to the trauma experienced greater increases in spirituality following the trauma. It appears that a strong commitment to religion and spirituality prior to the traumatic event may not only be protective against the ill effects of trauma but also facilitate personal growth and happiness.



Study Rationale

The aim of the present study is to describe holistically the subjective experience of violence among Christian missionaries and to determine factors that foster resilience and positive coping after trauma. While varieties of religious coping have been well-documented in the literature, there is a lack of research on religious coping in the wake of religious violence. Furthermore, no studies have illuminated the subjective experience of violence among Christian missionaries in the context of India and how they cope with their experience of oppression in the wake of trauma. Understanding coping strategies used by missionaries in India has the potential to add new dimensions to the religious coping construct. This study is unique in focusing on the spiritually transformative experiences among missionaries after exposure to violence and religious motivation to forgive as an important factor that help adherents reinvest in their religious identity.

Methods

Objective

To explore subjective experience of violence among Christian missionaries and determine factors that foster resilience and positive coping after trauma.

Research Design: As the study intends to explore the participants’ subjective experience of violence, a phenomenological qualitative research approach is chosen for this study. The search for both meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2002) characterizes this study. This study seeks to gauge individual missionary’s perceptions and meaning of experience of exposure to violence through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Sampling and Sample Size: The primary author selected purposive sampling method for data collection. As there is no random selection of participants, this sampling method is consistent with the research design. In total, 15 participants between the ages of 20 and 65 years who had worked in Orissa from or before June 2008 were included in the study. The sample consisted of Catholic nuns ($n=6$; mean age=48.2), Catholic priests ($n=5$; mean age=42.8) and pastors from different Christian denominations ($n=4$; mean age=50.8) who were directly affected by the 2008 violence. All but one of the participants had secondary school education. Majority of participants ($n=11$; 66.7%) belonged to the *adivasi* (aboriginal) tribes.

Data Collection: After the pilot study, the primary author started data collection using a semi-structured, interview guide. This was to obtain a detailed and in-depth understanding of the participants’ lived experiences. The primary author focused on obtaining subjective interpretation from the lived experience of the participants.

Data analysis

Using IPA the primary author analyzed the data for emerging themes related to the subjective experience of the participants and explores factors that fostered resilience among them.

Several processes were performed in order to minimize bias, assumptions and unconscious attempts to shift the focus on interpretation from the participants’ subjective worlds. First, by adhering to the “double hermeneutic” stance proposed by IPA, the primary author was able to stay neutral regarding his preconceptions and biases. The double hermeneutics of IPA also involves the recognition of the fact that researcher’s own conceptions and ideas are necessary to understand another person’s subjective world through an interpretive process while at the same time trying to make sense of, the participants trying to make sense of their experiential world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Second, a research assistant independently audited the data from transcripts to verify the validity of the primary author’s interpretations of the text. Third, the primary author confirmed with the participants the results of the analysis.

Results

The ability to reinvest into one’s identity as a missionary emerged as an important coping strategy for many participants. Reinvestment in one’s identity emerged as an outcome of three main psychological experiences: validation of one’s identity and enhanced self-esteem, experience of emotional and spiritual support, and connection at a transpersonal level

Table.1

Overarching theme	Super-ordinate theme	Organizing themes	Basic themes
1. Transpersonal identity	1.1. Transformative experience	1.1.1. Religious identity reinvestment	1.1.1.1. Validation of identity and enhanced self-esteem 1.1.1.2. Experience of emotional and spiritual support 1.1.1.3. Connection at transpersonal level.



Validation of Identity and Enhanced Self-Esteem

The missionaries coped with the trauma of violence and enhanced their self-esteem through validation of their identity. Here, by 'Validation of Identity' what the primary author means is the 'upholding and valuing' of one's identity as a missionary. Victor received recognition and acceptance from his community, which in turn affirmed his missionary and religious identity and gave him hope for the future. He shared, *"One thing I can tell you that it is God's providence that I walked like a lamb, humble way without any problems, accepted everywhere, everybody wanted to take care of me, took care; wanted to support, they even told they will give life for me"*. Likewise, Rose strengthened her resolve to continue her mission in the same mission sector because she perceived that she was valued and accepted by her community. External recognition of her personal power and moral integrity boosted her self-esteem and self-determination. Community members in her mission station said to her. *"We do not want you to work, you be here if you are here we will be safe and no harm would come to us"*. For Vincent, the violence did not discourage or disappoint him. He reported experiencing an extraordinary sense of personal power during times of violence. While many got discouraged to continue with their mission because of violence at their mission stations, Vincent chose to continue at the same mission station. His experience of violence seems to have deepened his religious convictions. He described not being afraid during the violence: *"Not at all afraid. There was something. I felt that I should give something to those children (the hostel children whom he rescued to safety). I was not afraid at all; I was simply there ;(may be) I was not afraid yet"*.

Factors such as positive self-belief, perceived self-efficacy, and self-determination helped Benedict cope with the stressors in his life. He stated *"Enough strength God has given me to bear it and deal with it so that people have life"*. Although Michael went through some painful experiences of violence, the material and emotional support received from within the community made him feel accepted and valued. These experiences enhanced his self-esteem and self-worth, and he was determined to reinvest in his mission. He shared: *"Of course, I have gone through those experiences and I have experienced this communal violence, and I am also a victim. But then, when I remember now, the situation is different, the support of people around and now totally it has changed. I feel normal"*. Sandra's perceived self-efficacy, self-determination and her positive self-esteem helped her deal with the days of violence. As a leader, she led her team with courage and commitment. Her strong experience of connectedness with the community perhaps helped her transcend her ego needs and reach out to the very members of her community who were in distress. She stated: *"When she heard about the violence and priests and nuns were contacting her for help, I said to myself, if violence is going to break out in one place, then it is going to happen all over. At the same time, instead of protecting me, what can I do for them was strongly on my mind. As for me if I am in it, let it be. As long as I am there I will do something for them"*. The experience of being accepted, valued and recognized by the Christian community and others in their mission sectors, validated their identity as a missionary. The experience of inner power, positive self-belief, positive self-esteem, and perceived self-efficacy enhanced the self-esteem and self-determination of the missionaries.

Experience of emotional and spiritual support

Participants also were able to cope better and strengthen their resilience when they received emotional and spiritual support from spiritual leaders and authority figures. This was true in the case of Margaret. According to her, *"the leader of the community (Sr. Superior) was a strong support"*. For Samson, emotional and spiritual support he received from a spiritual leader helped him elevate himself from his distress and build resilience to carry on his mission. He shared *"The greatest support I received was when a Roman Catholic bishop came here and gave us a talk. He said we must win our enemies, not with hatred, but with whatever love you have in your heart; you trade alone with love. You have to love them, means you have to forgive your enemies. If you forgive, you will be able to love them, which were the greatest emotional support I received in that broken situation"*.

Victor received moral, emotional and financial support while he was away from his mission station. He narrated as follows: *"During those difficult times people around me took care of me, bringing clothes, food and even little money what they could afford, that was very strengthening. There was man who would come every day after his work, bring food and fruits"*. For Michael, the emotional support he received from people from the nearby parishes and the help rendered by the bishop was morally and emotionally uplifting. He narrated as follows: *"Many came to visit me; from other parishes and even from other states. Even bishop helped us to rebuild the church and people contributed towards purchase of articles for the church"*.

Susan recounts her experience of spiritual and emotional support as follows: *"Sisters supported us through their prayers. Back in the village, one retired military man dissuaded the radical Hindu youth from doing any harm to the nuns. He told them that the nuns were doing so much for the society and giving everything for them and the youth obeyed him. People were also praying for us"*. Margaret shares her experience of strong emotional support as follows: *"After three days, one Hindu boy, our electrician came looking for us sisters in the forest. He told us that he would take us down to the village and give us some food to eat."*



The spiritual, emotional and material supports the missionaries received spiritually and emotionally empowered them and strengthened their positive self-belief and their call as missionaries

Ability to connect at a transpersonal level

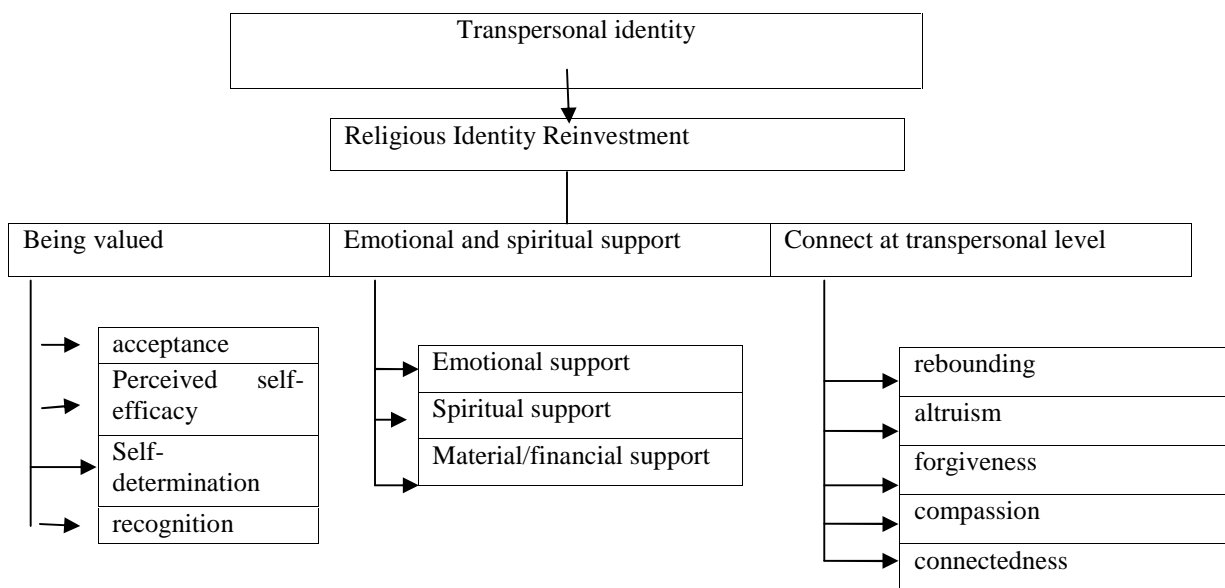
As a result of their experience of violence, many participants described greater connection at a transpersonal level. Susan made an effort to build rapport and trust with people in different communities in order to connect with them at a transpersonal level. Her efforts to develop greater social solidarity were recognized as an important need for the church in Orissa. She shared *“That’s why I make up my mind to meet those people who caused us harm; I automatically reach out to these people to bring them back to us”*. Mary also made earnest attempts to rebound after the violence. She reached out to the community through altruism and forgiveness. Along with her companions, she visited the families of those who ransacked their convent as a gesture of reconciliation. Through her altruism, she reinvested in her missionary identity. She recalled, *“We visited their houses, and we found they have carried our convent things and kept with them. Yet we talked to them and if they needed our help when they are sick with fever, stomach problem, we help them”*. As a reconciliatory gesture, Baptist and his wife visited the families of those who were instrumental in damaging their house. This couple clearly embodies higher values of compassion, forgiveness and freedom. This experience of freedom helped them reconnect with their broader community. Their deepened faith is evidenced in their experience of freedom. Baptist stated: *“Those who were put to test, their life is strengthened. Those people whose house JCB broke, who were instrumental in breaking our house, we both went to see them”*.

Sensing the urgency of human needs, Paul chose to be mindful in his mission. His service stemmed from the connectedness he shared with the community and his empathy toward the less privileged and disadvantaged individuals in society. He reflected, *“If you go to interior places they have not heard about Christ, they are in more wretched situation than Kandhamal. So we went there, and I’ve four people working in those areas. They are fasting and praying, and God is doing lots of miracles. They are getting healed no matter whether they are Christians or Hindus”*.

The experience of violence transformed David for the better. He gratefully acknowledged that his zeal and vigor to serve the Lord increased after the experience of violence. He perceived himself as being spiritually empowered to continue his mission with greater dynamism and mindfulness. He disclosed the following: *“I am ‘converted’ by going through all these things. I had not changed my life; energy and the zeal with which I’ve to serve the lord have increased within me”*.

The Christian missionaries shared a strong connectedness with the people at a transpersonal level which is evidenced through their gestures of forgiveness, reconciliation and altruistic deeds. With strong feelings of compassion and love in their hearts they, once again were able to reachout to the poor and the needy without any discrimination based on caste or religion.

Concept Map





Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate that Christian missionaries coped with their experience of violent persecution by reinvesting in their religious and missionary identity. The missionaries' intentional efforts to reinvest in their missionary identity appeared to be a mindful effort to cope both with their personal distress and strengthen the demoralized Christian community who were exposed to the violence. Reinvestment in their identity was encouraged through three primary experiences: validation of their identity, emotional and spiritual support, and connection at a transpersonal level. These experiences allowed the missionaries not only to cope with the violence, but also to build greater resilience and growth emotionally and spiritually. Sharma and Sharma (2010) has argued that further research is needed to explore how groups coped with their socially devalued identity by reinvesting in their existing identity in order to protect their individual and collective well-being. The present study has contributed significantly to this knowledge gap. Feeling valued and socially supported helped the missionaries regain their self-esteem. Many of the missionaries described experiences of post-traumatic growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) observed three main areas of post-traumatic growth that have been identified within the literature; these domains are consistent with those identified in the present study. First, individual's report enhanced relationships. Several participants reflected that they deepened their relationship with God and community members who they relied on for support. Second, individuals develop more positive views of themselves. Participants reflected that they perceived themselves as more resilient and energetic after recovering from their trauma. Third, individuals report changes in their life philosophies. Participants in the study reflected that as a result of experiencing violence, they deepened their religious investment and wished to serve God and people with increased zeal. Furthermore, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) contend "supportive others can aid in posttraumatic growth by providing a way to craft narratives about the changes that have occurred and by offering perspectives that can be integrated into schema change" (p. 8). Support from community members helped the missionaries develop narratives of the violence that held religious meaning, which in turn protected them against negative posttraumatic reactions. The participants also described a strong sense of connectedness with their community that helped them develop empathy toward the perpetrators of violence and which resulted in altruistic deeds. By choosing to forgive the perpetrators of the violence, the missionaries reframed their experience of violence as a divine opportunity to live out their religious ideals. Possessing a strong identity not only sustains one's self-esteem (Ramiah, Hewstone&Schimid, 2011), but also may lead people to consider their actions at an abstract rather than concrete level. When one construes actions at a higher level of abstraction, they may be performed because of principles or values rather than simply with the goal of achieving specific outcomes (Leary, Toner & Gan, 2011). Consistent with this idea, the missionaries positively reframed their experience of violence and drew meaning and purpose from the stressful event. They connected their actions during the violence to their higher principles and values, which imbued the trauma with a sense of transcendent meaning. For example, Margaret perceived her exposure to the experience of violence as an opportunity to serve God. She commented: "*I had one chance to serve Him through this suffering*".

It was observed in the present study that participants' self-esteem, self-determination and self-efficacy contributed to greater reinvestment into their missionary identity. Worthington Jr. (1989) views religious generativity as a virtue in middle adulthood whereby the "religiously matured person cares for and shapes their community with an eye to the future" (p.562). According to Worthington Jr. (1989) "mature religious generatively can free the person for life or increase altruism and care for people in the immediate community and beyond" (p.562). The majority of the participants in the study are in middle adulthood and their resolve to reinvest in their identity may be characteristic of their mature religious state.

Many of the participants demonstrated great commitment to their missions despite the danger of violence. Individuals who include their community in their sense of self and empathize with community members are more likely to take altruistic or pro-social actions (Snyder & Lopez, 2007; Leary et al., 2011). Individuals who integrate specific *others* into their sense of self and perceive benefits to others as personally beneficial are more likely to set aside resources for others in a communal fashion (Aaron, Aron&Smollan, 1992). The missionaries described a strong commitment to supporting each other throughout the violence, and this sense of solidarity served as a protective force against the trauma of violence. Moreover, commitment to their community and altruistic actions resulted in the missionaries experiencing greater connectivity, freedom and faith in their God. Overall, this study demonstrates the healing effects of social support while recovering from trauma and violence.

Previous studies exploring the positive associations between religion and mental health have called for the integration of religion and spirituality into the counseling process (Pargament, Koenig & Perez, 2000). The results of the current study indicate that counsellors could encourage clients to develop a strong positive social support network where they can process their feelings about the trauma in a safe and accepting environment (Tedeschi& Calhoun, 2004). Disclosure within a caring environment can facilitate the ongoing cognitive processing essential to trauma recovery and posttraumatic growth (Sheikh, 2008). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) posit that cognitive processing or rumination of the traumatic event can gradually reduce emotional distress and facilitate more deliberate exploration of new beliefs. Furthermore, in order to help clients



actively engage in the process of meaning-making, the counselors may wish to explore with clients whether there has been any change in their sense of self, roles and relationships or perception of priorities since the trauma (Sheikh, 2008; Zenkert, Brabender & Slater, 2014). A comparison of pre-trauma and post-trauma self in relation to a range of variables, including coping strategies and self-efficacy, may foster greater awareness and acceptance in the client (Sheikh, 2008).

Conclusion

This study has its share of limitations. First, the generalizability of the findings is limited given that the study used a small sample with the majority of the participants representing the 'adivasi' (aboriginal) hill tribes. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine the extent to which personality variables characteristic of this cultural group impacted the findings. Second, the study did not address the extent to which some of the factors antecedent to the violence (e.g. demographics, personality, and ethnicity) impacted the choice of religious coping strategies and the resiliency of the missionaries. Finally, two and a half years had elapsed between the occurrence of violence and the interviews, which may have affected the participants' memory of how they coped with the violence. Future research may wish to address whether reinvestment in one's identity is also a common coping strategy among non-religious individuals. Furthermore, future researchers may consider exploring how religious coping strategies among Indian missionaries compare and contrast with coping strategies used by other religious groups around the world.

To conclude, this study reveals that religious groups that are victims of violence may cope with their socially devaluing experience by reinvesting into their religious identity. Consistent with the results of previous studies (Pargament et al., 2000; Richard & Bergin, 2002; Emery & Pargament, 2004; Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Schroeder & Frana, 2009), this study highlights the usefulness of religious coping strategies during times of distress, particularly with religiously inclined individuals. In particular, religious identity reinvestment as a coping strategy results in greater resilience and post-traumatic growth. Strategies including forgiveness, social support and benevolent religious reappraisals can be used as a means of reinvestment in one's religious identity. The notion of religious identity reinvestment as a means of coping adds a new dimension to the religious coping construct, which has received little attention in the literature. Of further interest is the novel finding that religious motivations to forgive can help adherents reinvest in their religious identity and recover from trauma. These findings significantly contribute to our understanding of how religious individuals and communities recover from the experience of violence.

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