

# Trauma in urban Sierra Leone: A qualitative approach exploring sociocultural, historical and political contexts

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Cross-cultural research has acknowledged culturally dependent ways of understanding, interpreting and processing psychological trauma. Discourses about individual responses to traumatic events in low-income countries like crisis-ridden Sierra Leone ought to consider a person's psychosocial background within a sociocultural, historical and political context.

As a sub-study of a research project in Sierra Leone we chose a qualitative approach to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of trauma in the West African country. Semi-structured interviews with 20 Sierra Leonean students and 4 Sierra Leonean experts from trauma-related scientific fields were conducted in the capital Freetown.

Our emic findings revealed unique culture-specific insights, such as a cultural recognition of trauma belonging to life, collective efforts to "forgive and forget", implemented by the government after the civil war, as well as religious and interpersonal counselling having an impact on an individual's response to trauma in Sierra Leone. While we found specific tendencies of social, cultural, political and historical patterns on a macro-level, the participants' statements sometimes showed a different manifestation on the micro-level. Therefore, these patterns should rather be assessed from case to case for a thorough understanding of an individual's response to trauma in a certain culture.

This research highlights the benefit of emic, culture-sensitive approaches and encourages more comprehensive trauma discourses. Our findings confirm that the impact is not only related to a limited event but is shaped by a person's psychosocial environment, which is influenced by society, culture, politics and history.

## Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am still a student or have not yet received my Ph.D.

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