



Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention

Mental Health Outreach Project to Nigeria:

Healing, Peace Building & Mindful Leadership

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The Federal Republic of Nigeria, commonly referred to as Nigeria, is a federal republic in West Africa, bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west. Its coast in the south is located on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. The federation comprises 36 States and 1 Federal Capital Territory, where the capital Abuja is located. Nigeria is officially a democratic secular country, founded on October 01, 1960, with a population of 174.51 million (per 2013 reports) and GDP of 4397.47 billion U.S.D. (per 2018 reports). Although English is the official language in the country, Nigeria's large population is responsible for its linguistic diversity which is like a microcosm of Africa as a whole.

Despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government and international groups, Nigeria is still in great need of emotional healing.

Strengths of Nigerians

Nigeria has a strong community orientation, strong faith (no matter which denomination), and places a great importance on education. Nigerians are resilient and hard working.

Challenges in Nigeria

Multiple challenges keep Nigeria imbalanced. Religiously motivated conflicts and violence is rampant. High rates of poverty results in many 'slums' areas, and extremely poor neighborhoods. There is also a high rate of violence against women, although not acknowledged by the locals, this is a serious problem transmitted generationally, and reinforced culturally. Nigeria also suffers from high rates of suicide (WHO, 2016).

According to WHO Nigeria has 15th highest suicide rate in the world, and top 5th in the African nations.

Violence Against Women & Political Unrest

Analyzing the genesis of modern-day brutality against people, especially women, in Nigeria, scholars have pointed to the beginning of exploration and exploitation of oil in the area. According to these community the exploitation of oil resources has resulted in economic and environmental conflicts, with the women bearing the brunt of the situation. Studies have shown that oil provides over 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, yet the people, especially the women, are among the poorest in Nigeria.

While a lot of attention has been devoted to stabilizing oil production, little has been done to address the mental health needs of the residents of this region, especially women.

Nigerian Culture, Literacy, Health, Religion & Politics

Nigerian's culture is influenced by several different ethnic groups, who all determine the country's food, clothing, and overall culture. With around 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria has extensive and diverse list of traditions and customs. Education is extremely important and valued: adult literacy rate is 59.6% in 2015 up from 51.1% in 2008. Nigeria has one of the most complicated healthcare systems in Africa. Health standards, as measured by life expectancy, in Nigeria have increased since 1950, although progress has not been steady. Maternal mortality rate appears to have increased between 1990 and 2010. According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) data, life expectancy in Nigeria is 54.7 years for men and 55.7 years of women with a total life expectancy of 55.2 years. This gives Nigeria a world life expectancy ranking of 178. Religion is an important phenomenon in contemporary Nigeria as it affects every segment of the Nigerian society. There are three primary religions in Nigeria: Christianity (53%), Islam (45%), and African Traditional Religion (2%).

Politically, Nigeria has 68 political parties with the most popular being the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All-Progressive Congress (APC), and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

ATOP Meaningfulworld Goals

The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld (www.meaningfulworld.com) is an international charitable organization devoted to fostering a meaningful, peaceful, and just world. In June of 2019 Meaningfulworld conducted a Mental Health Outreach Project (MHOP) to the Niger Delta region. ATOP team members are trained in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model, which will be implemented. Peace building and conflict transformation trainings are scheduled to take place at several universities, orphanages, older age homes, police, Ministries of Health, Education and Social Welfare, and other community centers.

Our goals are three pronged: 1. Healing and Education; 2. Research and Publications; 3. Policy Revisions and Developing Sustainable Programs. The following goals were met: 1. Healing groups; 2. Educational workshops on Emotional Intelligence and Post Trauma Healing; 3. Planting Trees and Nurturing Healthy Ecology; 4. Working with children, adolescents, adults, with men and women; 5. Establishing Peace &

Forgiveness Gardens; 6. Transforming Horizontal Violence and Generationally Transmitted Trauma; and 7. Sharing the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model.

Our Collaborators

Our collaborators are the University of Lagos, Department of Peace and Ethnic Studies, Centre for Human Development & Social Transformation (CHDST), Urban Planning and Development (UNILAG), and Institute for African & Diasporan Studies. Overall, we worked with 10 organizations, 2 media agencies, 2 churches, as well as the Police Commissioner and the police officers. Special gratitude to our Nigerian collaborators King Dakota, Juliet Ottoh, Fr. Paul Akin Otiko, Dr. Afolabi, Rev. Mrs. George, Uchenna Ekezie, Faustino Babatunde Adeshina, Dr. Churchill, Lamu Dimeji, Mr. Okpaku, Nkechi Anyagwa, Alex Oni, and many more who helped us to make our Humanitarian Relief Mission a success.

ATOP Meaningfulworld has spearheaded humanitarian missions in the past 30 years in over 47 countries and 25 States in USA, in response to both human-made and natural disasters. This humanitarian mission was spearheaded by Dr. Kalayjian, Founder and President of ATOP Meaningfulworld.

Clinical & Educational Programs

I focused on education transforming the following 4 kinds of trauma:

1. Individual trauma: Traumas that individuals have experienced personally
2. Generational trauma: Traumas that individuals carry from past generations
3. Horizontal Violence: Identifying with the perpetrator, we cause/receive trauma from our loved ones
4. Vicarious or Secondary trauma: Being exposed to secondhand trauma, mostly with care givers, psychologists, police, and other health care providers.

Firsthand experiences

We conducted an all-day workshop on post trauma healing, forgiveness and meaning-making! We were invited by the University of Lagos's Teaching Hospital! Close to one hundred registered and many had to be refused due to the venue size! Participants were active, enthusiastic, and extremely interested in the Integrative approach of the lecture, Dr. Ani's passionate and animated presentation and the new research shared on Logotherapy, Aromatherapy, Breath work and mindfulness meditation. Generational traumas are from tribal wars, religious divisionism, and ongoing political crises! We concluded with meditation, special training with clinical supervisors on the use of Flower Essences and Mindfulness Meditation! Overall, it was an amazing experience! Our team returned exhausted but invigorated, excited, and hopeful!

Although there was a deep resistance by the general citizens of Lagos to outreach to the police, we insisted, as it is in leadership that the real change is nurtured. After several procedural steps, such as writing a letter of intent, getting the letter stamped, delivering copies of the letters physically to the Police Commissioner, and then being invited to meet with the Commissioner in person. We were able to secure a workshop on the last day of our mission. It was the most enlightening workshop, as most of the police expressed feeling frustration, embarrassment, and many symptoms of secondary trauma. They were eager to learn way to manage their emotions, to address their family

challenges, as well as workplace complications. They shared how an officer had killed his family and then himself not too long ago. They insisted that we stay for another workshop the following week, as they expressed “We never had a workshop like yours. In the past, we always have someone give a boring lecture. You have given us experiential exercises, the theory behind how they would work, and many tools for us to take home. You also gave us flower essences for us to take home and use them to relax, as well as natural flower remedies (which is consistent with our indigenous African medicinal plants and herbs).”

Teaching through Media Engagements

We were invited at the UNILAG Television, channel 184, with creative production of Mrs. Jhonson and was interviewed by charismatic duo Lamu and Gbenga! The creative team had done extensive research and were so familiar with ATOP, EQ, ecological health, and even Heart-Hug-Dolls! We showcased our recent research and publications, I described the 7-Steps for healing ourselves on mind-body-eco-spirit levels, discussed the importance of flower and plant healing, and our Peace & Forgiveness Gardens!

storm hit hard, visibility is below 4 miles, winds gusting hard, although temperature is at 85, but due to 90% humidity it feels like 100!

Radio was the second form of outreach to the masses. Radio is tuned in even more than television. I listed the 7-steps for healing, and shared the negative impact of colonization, violence against women, and shared a variety of tools for managing one’s emotions.

Outreach to Children in Orphanages

Outreach to orphanages, is another area we focus on. We worked in 4 orphanages, and Hearts of Gold, Children’s Hospice, both with children as well as their teachers, administrators, and staff. Her Excellency Rev. Mrs. George at the Little Saints Orphanage was a great organizer and a resourceful administrator and spiritual leader. Close to 60 faculty, administrators, teachers, and staff joined us. Most frequently expressed emotions were fear of future, worry, fear of scarcity, frustration with political violence, tribal & religious conflicts, and congested traffic.

I focused on the 4 kinds of trauma, Emotional Management, the 7-Steps for Healing, Ecological Health, donated flower essences (donated by FesFlowers.com), earrings and essential oils! Rev George said “We have never experienced this kind of interactive, energetic, and wonderful program ever before. It’s our very first experience and we need more of it!” She and the participators prayed wishing for continued strength to Meaningfulworld to reach the masses, protect us from all evil and attacks, keep us healthy to continue our healing journey, wanted us to come back soon, as the need is enormous and the healing although has just begun in Nigeria with our mission, but they need our support to continue reinforcements! We made plans to return as she has over 10 branches of orphanages around Nigeria and that “Meaningfulworld is the cure for Nigeria!”