RESILIENCE IN WARTIME: THE IMPACT OF THE KWAMOUTH MASSACRES ON FINALISTS' SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Adversity inevitably impacts every individual. While some manage to rebound, defy obstacles, and progress despite adversity, others face greater challenges, such as the students affected by the KWAMOUTH massacre in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Amidst a tribal conflict during the school period, these students were forced to migrate to the capital, where they had to regroup, rebuild, and still pass the State Exam.

Our aim was to examine the resilience demonstrated by these young individuals and the resources that facilitated their recovery from this traumatic experience. Through a mixed-method approach, our investigation involving 35 surviving students allowed us to identify the cultural and community resources acting as protective factors, enabling them to persevere and remain engaged in their studies despite the impact of the massacre

Keywords : Resilience (in times of war), Kwamouth massacre, academic engagement, agency, education.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

For many years, armed conflict and war have posed unavoidable threats not only to children's well-being, but also to their access to quality education. In many parts of the developing world, these conflicts seriously undermine children's fundamental rights, primarily their right to education (Tabatabai, 2005; Koukougnon, 2010).

Researchers have observed that the combination of young people's vulnerability and gaps in education systems increases the risk of conflict in many war-torn countries. These education systems struggle to provide young people with the skills they need to escape poverty and unemployment (Perez, 2022; Wilson & Scarpa, 2011; Butembo, 2001).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the detrimental effects of armed conflict on education are particularly alarming, especially in the Eastern region, comprising the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. Prolonged conflict and violence in this region have considerably degraded the quality of education, depriving hundreds of thousands of children of access to education (UNICEF, 2023).

This armed conflict in the east of the DRC is complex, but it is not the only one to be troubling the country. Tribal conflicts in Kwamouth, in the province of Haut-Katanga, add another layer to the already tense situation. What makes these two conflicts so special, as the BBC points out, is the betrayal felt when those we considered brothers turn against us. This betrayal increases the psychological trauma, as it creates a sense of confusion and disorientation, where it becomes difficult to know who to trust (Marshal, 1997; Mintclos, 2000).

These wartime situations have created a general climate of insecurity, exposing schools to attack and destruction. Armed groups present in the region often target schools and teachers, seeing education as a threat to their authority. As a result, many schools have been damaged, burnt down or occupied by armed groups, leaving children with no place to learn (Mintclos, 2000).

In these areas of armed conflict, many children lose interest in school due to trauma, constant fear and insecurity, making education unattractive, if not almost impossible to pursue. However, some studies have shown that despite these challenges, some children manage to overcome these obstacles and continue their education. For example, research carried out in Somalia revealed that children who had survived the civil war were able to resume their schooling as normal (Marshal, 1992; Mintclos, 2000).

It is crucial to understand how individuals, especially schoolchildren, manage to overcome trauma, especially after periods of war. This ability to cope with difficulties can facilitate their social and academic reintegration, encouraging them to continue their studies despite the challenges encountered.

However, despite a number of reports by UNICEF and other international bodies on the resilience of children in wartime, there is a regrettable lack of in-depth studies on the subject. In countries often plagued by armed conflict, it is crucial to understand how students maintain their commitment to their education and to explore institutional ways to support these traumatized children so that they can persevere in the education system (Nfundiko, 2017; Cirhuza et al., 2022).

With this in mind, we undertook a study of Kwamouth massacre survivors, with the aim of identifying factors influencing Kwamouth students' academic resilience. We are examining how traumatic experiences of armed conflict impact students' motivation to continue their schooling. In addition, we analyze how students' academic

resilience varies according to gender, age and personal experiences of conflict. The study's interest lies in providing adaptive resources for children and individuals facing educational challenges after experiencing trauma related to armed conflict.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Resilience

Resilience, a crucial concept in psychology, explores the human capacity to bounce back from trauma. It has come to the forefront of scientific circles recently. Various researchers from different fields have embraced the term, highlighting the coping strategies of individuals faced with traumatic situations, supported by resources such as optimism, humor, spiritual engagement, and artistic creation. Yet, as Fortin and Bigras (cited in Anaut, 2003) point out, resilience goes far beyond simple survival strategies; it is the fruit of a complex balance between risk and protective factors, as well as individual particularities and the circumstances surrounding the traumatic event (Cyrulnik, 2018; Delage & Cyrulnik, 2010).

Basically, resilience manifests itself as the resumption of development after a trauma, with the memory of this injury becoming an organizing element of the ego. Research has led to the exploration of various perspectives on resilience, viewing it as a balance, a dynamic process, a personality trait, an ability to adapt, or even an outcome. This ability to overcome challenges is influenced by a multitude of factors, ranging from genetic inheritance to early experiences, social ties and environmental context (Anaut, 2005).

For Richardson (2002), resilience unfolds as a continuous process of adaptation to stress, adversity, change and opportunity. This process consists in identifying, strengthening and enriching protective factors, whether personal or environmental. These factors act as a bulwark against stress, contributing to the individual's bio-psychospiritual well-being.

In times of war, the study of resilience focuses on how individuals mobilize these resources while navigating through the most difficult situations, from dysfunctional to resilient reintegration, where protective factors are reinforced, renewed or developed. This is why various authors have a particular vision of resilience.

For some, it is seen as a positive state or outcome resulting from the implementation of effective coping strategies (Vanistendael & Lecomte, 2000; Egelard, Jourdan-Ionescu & Werner, cited by Michallet, 2009).

For others, resilience is the ability of certain individuals to overcome obstacles and difficult conditions to pursue their normal life trajectory. They point out that resilient children share a temperament that elicits positive responses from those around them, an ability to analyze and resolve difficulties, and a belief in the value of life despite hardship (Cyrulnik, Lecomte, Manciaux, Tomkiewicz and Vanistendael, 2001, Egelard, Jourdan-Ionescu and Werner, cited by Michallet, 2009).

It should be noted, however, that whether resilience is an outcome or an adaptive capacity during armed conflict, many traumatic triggers can somewhat complicate an individual's ability to cope; from the loss of loved ones to exposure to the violence and horrors of war. In such situations, courage, aspiration for a better future and resilience become crucial factors in the survival and recovery of affected individuals and communities.

Collective resilience also refers to a community's ability to cope, adapt and rebuild in the face of adversity. This form of resilience manifests itself in solidarity, cooperation and the ability to maintain a degree of social cohesion despite extreme challenges. It encompasses the mobilization of collective resources, the reaffirmation of social ties and the reconstruction of community structures degraded by the devastating effects of war (Lanoue, Pontalis & Lagache, cited by Mbakidi, 2021; Waller, 2001).

From this perspective, collective resilience can be seen as a mobilizing force that enables communities to overcome trauma, maintain their integrity and build a common future. It is based on a shared understanding of traumatic experiences, thus promoting collective healing. Collective resilience offers a rich conceptual framework for understanding how societies facing war can meet challenges together, drawing on their social, cultural and institutional resources. It's a complex and dynamic dynamic that deserves in-depth exploration to better understand how communities can rebuild and thrive in the face of adversity (Lanoue, Pontalis & Lagache, cited by Mbakidi, 2021).

This form of resilience is a complex phenomenon, influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including cultural values, religious beliefs, family solidarity and perseverance. Culture acts as a catalyst, while crucial family support and environmental factors such as social support and cultural identity play an essential role in building resilience in times of war. These elements contribute to individuals' ability to overcome the trauma of armed conflict and re-establish a functional life trajectory. Although this study does not specifically address this form of resilience, it would be relevant to explore the cultural context surrounding the Kwamouth massacre in order to better understand the challenges faced by individuals and the factors that helped them cope.

2.2. About the Kwamouth massacre

The Kwamouth massacre, which took place in early June 2024, was the result of a violent confrontation between the Teke and Yaka communities. This hostility stems from an ancestral dispute over land ownership and customary royalties. The Tekes claim to be the original owners of villages along the Congo River, stretching for some 200 kilometers. The Yaka, for their part, settled in the region at a later date. Tensions came to a head when the Tekes sharply increased the royalty demands imposed on the Yakas. The dispute evolved from an initial demand for 50 measures of maize and one bag of cassava pods to demands for 150 measures of maize and five bags of cassava pods.

The situation escalated when a delegation of Yaka went to Chief Teke's house to discuss an increase in royalties, but were threatened by Chief Teke's entourage, resulting in the deaths of five Yaka. On learning of this tragedy, the Yaka mobilized to take revenge, initiating a spiral of violence. From the Yaka perspective, the land is theirs by right, and they should not be subject to customary rights. Indeed, the original name of the region, Kwamouth, is of Yaka origin and means "there is no one". The village is said to have been founded following an appeal by a Yaka who originally found the land uninhabited and invited his brothers to settle, declaring that there was no one here. According to some sources, the Tekes arrived from Angola and were traders who found the Yaka already present on this land.

Some local residents claimed that the Yaka's victory over the Tekes was attributed to an oath made on their land, according to a common expression, "likambo ya mabele" (matters concerning the land). Unfortunately, this conflict

became politicized over time, turning into an insurgent movement known as Mobondo, which is now in confrontation with military forces. According to some reports, politicians may be involved in this Yaka movement known as Mobondo.

It's important to stress that the above information was obtained by cross-referencing television reports with testimonies gathered from local residents. As authors, we have endeavored to contribute to the exploration of this theme, thus shedding new light on this complex situation.

2.3. SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

The concept of school engagement, according to several authors, is a broad notion encompassing students' motivation as well as their active involvement in all aspects of school life, including their classroom behavior, participation, investment in schoolwork, social ties to school and perseverance in their educational journey (Parents, 2014; Archambault & Vandenbossche-Makombo, 2014; DoréCoté, 2014).

The dropout prevention perspective, presented by Wehlage and colleagues (1989), defines school engagement in terms of educational commitment (students' mental and physical efforts in their schoolwork) and affiliation (sense of belonging and social ties with the school), aspects that evolve throughout the school experience and play a crucial role in predicting dropout or graduation.

Another perspective, based on the investment model, characterizes engagement by the intention to persist in a long-term perspective (behavioral component) and by a sense of attachment to the object of engagement (attitudinal component), thus recognizing three dimensions of engagement: behavioral, affective and cognitive (Ungar & Hadfield, 2019).

The behavioral dimension manifests itself in the observable actions of students in the school environment, encompassing disciplinary, academic and extracurricular aspects, while the affective dimension focuses on the feelings that school elicits in students, translating into their attitudes and interests over the course of their school experience.

Some authors highlight the motivational dimension of school engagement, linked to the energy invested by students in their academic tasks, as well as its links with various aspects of quality of life such as social interactions, psychosocial skills, personal development, sense of personal fulfillment and perception of competence (Brault-Labbé & Dubé, 2010; Grégoire and al., 2016).

For individuals affected by armed conflict, the consequences for their engagement with school are profound. Proteau (2005) points out that the psychological trauma engendered by violence and instability affects their ability to concentrate, learn and interact productively in the classroom, sometimes leading to post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety, thus impairing their academic performance and motivation to pursue their studies. In addition, the destruction of educational infrastructure and the forced displacement of populations often deprive them of access to quality education, compromising their future and that of their communities (Lanoue, 2006; Azoh, Koutou & Chelpi-den Hamer, 2009; Papazian-Zohrabian, Mamprin & Lemire, 2019).

These different perspectives and their implications underline the importance of understanding school engagement in its multiple dimensions and contexts, particularly in situations of armed conflict. Thus, a thorough methodological approach is required to study and address these issues in a meaningful way.

3. METHODOLOGY

To carry out our study of the Kwamouth massacre, we opted for a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to fully grasp the complexity of the phenomenon under study. We began by identifying five victims of the massacre in collaboration with the prefect of the educational province of Kinshasa-Plateau. These subjects were interviewed in an exploratory manner, using a semi-directive interview guide to gather their testimonies on their experience of the massacre, their emotions and the resources they were able to access to maintain their schooling. The interviews were analyzed using a phenomenological approach to extract essential themes and motifs. We used borrowed names to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

At the same time, a Likert questionnaire was administered to a larger sample, including more boys than girls, with a majority of students aged between 16 and 18 who had lived through the massacre for around 7 months. Quantitative data analysis was carried out using Jamovi software, and Cronbach's Alpha was used to ensure the reliability of the data collection instrument. Despite the logistical obstacles encountered, this methodological approach enabled us to gather relevant data on the academic resilience of students affected by this trauma, thus providing a more complete overview of their experience.

4. RESULTS

4.1. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Analysis of the life stories revealed the following themes: the massacre experience, risk factors, resources and resilient attitude.

As for the massacre experience, all survivors were directly affected by the Kwamouth massacre, with varied experiences including the loss of loved ones, material possessions, and the destruction of homes. This has resulted in profound emotional effects such as stress, anxiety, fear and grief.

"light of hope testifies to his experience», Yes, I was injured while we were searching." This traumatic experience has left lasting emotional scars.

"Spark of Resilience" also shares her own experience: "The loss of my father was devastating, and everything was destroyed'."

As for risk factors, the main ones mentioned by survivors include relocation to a new environment, lack of financial means, loss of material possessions, disruption of daily life and the need to adapt to difficult circumstances.

"This relocation and the destruction of material goods are major risk factors that have had a considerable impact on his life.

"Sunbeam, too, speaks of the difficulties of relocating to a new environment: "The sudden change of environment was difficult to manage."

As for resources, identified by survivors of the Kwamouth massacre include support and encouragement from family, friends and the community, as well as faith in a better future through education, prayer and faith in God.

"Spark of Resilience shares her experience, explaining, "I was determined to carry on for a good future, a good tomorrow."

"Valiant heart, despite the challenges he faced, also stresses the importance of family support and personal motivation: "You never know what the future holds, who knows if I won't be an important man? That's why I was motivated to keep going."

Despite the trauma and challenges, all the survivors of the Kwamouth massacre demonstrated a resilient attitude by persevering with their education. They see education as a means of overcoming past hardships and building a better future for themselves and their community. Their resilience lies in their motivation and commitment to continue their studies despite the difficulties they face.

"Rocher fort explains: "I plan to continue my studies all the way to university. I'm appealing to the government for support, given my parents' lack of resources.

"Valiant heart declares: "My motivation is due to the fact that I'm still young, so it's not too late to miss this opportunity, which was like the last chance...". His commitment to his studies is reinforced by the sense of urgency of his age and the importance of not missing this opportunity.

These results give us a shocking insight into the reality experienced by these individuals, confronted with profound personal losses and the destruction of their environment. Add to these traumatic events elements such as the loss of possessions and the disruption of daily life due to relocation, and it's easy to see how these subjects plunge into vulnerability. Yet, in the midst of these challenges, survivors have found essential protective factors. Faith in a better future through education, prayer and faith in God played a central role in the resilience of the individuals.

A general analysis of the testimonies of the five survivors of the Kwamouth massacre highlighted key elements linked to their individual resilience. Despite considerable trauma and challenges, each subject showed a determination to continue their studies and build a better future. This understanding of individual resilience offers valuable insight into the psychological mechanisms that enable these survivors to overcome traumatic events.

To reinforce and validate these findings, a larger study, based on a structured questionnaire, is warranted. This study provided quantitative data from a more diverse sample of survivors, helping to consolidate previously observed findings.

4.2. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

4.2.1. Description of variables

The variables in our study were based on the following theoretical scheme:

Independent variables

- self-esteem
- importance of work
- social support

Independent variables

Resilience attitude :

- motivation
- commitment

Moderating variables
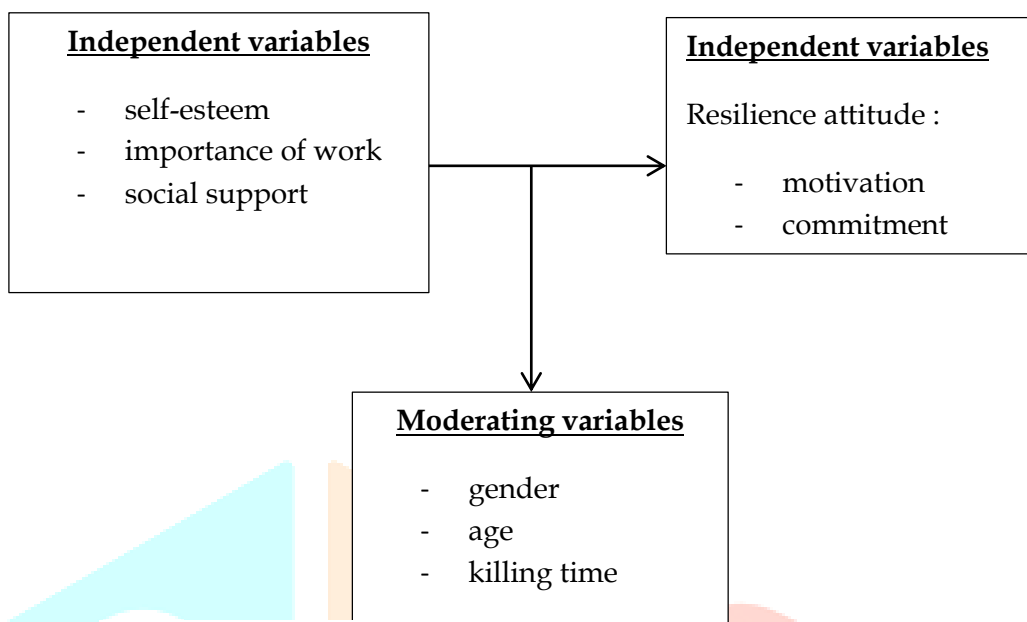
- gender
- age
- killing time

Figure 1 Variable modeling

Self-esteem: The mean is 2.07, with a standard deviation of 0.47. This means that, on average, participants have relatively moderate self-esteem (2.07), and the variation around this mean is quite low (standard deviation of 0.47).

As for the importance attached to work, the average is 2.27, with a standard deviation of 0.52. This indicates that, on average, participants attach some importance to work, but the variation between responses is also moderate.

On the subject of support from loved ones as a resource, the mean is 3.07 with a standard deviation of 0.60. This suggests that, on average, participants perceive a relatively high level of resources or support in their environment. The moderate standard deviation indicates that there is some variability among participants' responses, meaning that some may perceive more support than others.

In terms of school motivation, the mean is 3.02, with a standard deviation of 0.45. On average, participants have a fairly high level of motivation (3.02). The low value of the standard deviation suggests that most participants are similarly motivated.

In terms of school engagement, the mean is 2.63 with a standard deviation of 0.76. The mean indicates moderate school engagement, but the high standard deviation suggests greater variability in engagement levels among participants.

In addition, a small but significant positive correlation (.031**) between self-esteem, importance attached to work and support from loved ones could suggest that participants with higher self-esteem tend to attach greater importance to work and perceive stronger support from loved ones. This could indicate that self-esteem and the importance attached to work may play a role in how individuals perceive their social support.

A weak but significant positive correlation (.026**) between motivation and school engagement suggests that participants who are more motivated tend to be more engaged in their schooling as well. This could indicate that these two aspects are interdependent, and that motivation can contribute to school engagement.

4.2.2. Multiple regression between variables

Measuring the impact of the independent variable on the dependent, we found a statistically significant relationship between levels of self-esteem, importance attached to work and resources, and individual resilience, with p-values below 0.05. This suggests that these factors have a significant impact on resilience. In other words, there is a statistically significant relationship between these variables and individuals' resilience to education-related challenges. Higher levels of self-esteem, greater importance attached to schoolwork and increased social support are significantly associated with a resilient attitude towards school.

As for the effects of moderation on the variables, we noted the following:

1. Self-esteem

- Gender (p 0.09 > 0.05): Although self-esteem did not have a significant gender-differentiated impact, it is important to note that self-esteem continued to influence resilience equally regardless of gender. This underscores that building self-esteem remains a valid strategy for promoting resilience, regardless of gender.

- Age (0.10 > 0.05) did not significantly moderate the relationship between self-esteem and resilience. The effect of self-esteem on resilience appears to be similar regardless of age.

2. Importance of school work

- Gender (0.03 < 0.05) significantly moderated the relationship between importance of work and resilience. This suggests that the impact of work importance on resilience may vary according to gender. Psychologically, this implies that the importance attached to work may lead to different impacts on resilience depending on gender, underlining the need for a differentiated approach.

- Age (0.08 > 0.05) did not significantly moderate the relationship between work emphasis and resilience. The effect appears to be similar regardless of age.

- The duration of the massacre (0.06> 0.05) did not significantly moderate the relationship. Psychologically, this indicates that, in this context, the duration of the trauma does not significantly influence the way in which the importance attached to work impacts on resilience.

3. Resources

- Gender (p 0.01<0.05) significantly moderates the relationship between resources and resilience. This suggests that the impact of resources on resilience may vary according to gender. Psychologically, this means that social support may have different implications for resilience depending on gender, underlining the need for personalized intervention.

- Age (p 0.02 < 0.05) significantly moderated the relationship. This indicates that the effect of resources on resilience may depend on the age of the subjects. Psychologically, it underlines the importance of adapting support strategies according to age.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our work has sought to shed light on the resilience of young victims of the Kwamouth massacre by adopting a rigorous methodological approach, both qualitative and quantitative. We undertook a comprehensive analysis, comparing our findings with previous research and evaluating our hypotheses from different angles.

In our qualitative component, the data collected reveals the remarkable ability of the young participants to overcome extreme challenges. Their resilience, a testament to their inner strength, is expressed through their perseverance in their educational path despite the traumas they have endured. We have identified crucial protective factors, such as family support, faith and emotional management, which played a decisive role in keeping them in school.

In the moderating domain, our analyses highlighted the universal importance of self-esteem in building resilience. However, we also observed nuances according to gender, with a differential influence of the importance attached to schoolwork. In addition, the age of participants was a significant moderating factor in the relationship between available resources and demonstrated resilience.

Our results, consistent with previous studies, highlight the importance of individual and environmental factors in building school resilience. These findings suggest the existence of universal resilience mechanisms, while underlining the importance of context-specific educational interventions.

The study confirms that school resilience is the result of a complex interplay between different factors. Supporting these factors, whether individual or environmental, is essential to help students overcome trauma and achieve educational success. These findings have profound implications for educational policy and support for young people worldwide.

Despite these advances, our study has certain limitations. We acknowledge the possible influence of memory bias in participants' narratives, as well as sample size restrictions. A future study, with a larger sample and more diverse methodology, could strengthen the external validity of our findings and provide even richer insights into the academic resilience of young trauma victims.

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