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NEW WORDS

- 1) **Anxiety:** a feeling characterized by a lot of worry and unease because of an event whose outcome are unknown.
- 2) **Clergy:** religious leaders (or a body that of) who lead faith-based groups and allowed to perform religious duties.
- 3) **Depression:** a feeling characterized by high levels of dejection and despondency.
- 4) **Disorder:** a state of confusion or irregularity (in regular settings).
- 5) **Fight-or-Flight:** Refers to the quick response people have when they perceive something harmful, an attack or threat to life.
- 6) **Hyperarousal:** A state where someone may feel extremely sensitive, anxious and may also experience extended hours of activity without sleep.
- 7) **PTSD:** The abbreviation for ‘Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.’
- 8) **Social Wellbeing:** refers to one’s ability and style of interacting with people and objects around their environment.
- 9) **SOGI:** Abbreviations for ‘Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity.’
- 10) **Therapy:** a type of treatment meant to reverse a disorder. Usually, Therapy includes psychological and practical steps to recovery.
- 11) **Trigger:** is anything that causes an event or incident to happen.
- 12) **Trauma:** a very disturbing or distressing experience.
- 13) **Gay man:** a man who is emotionally and sexually attracted to fellow men only.
- 14) **Lesbian:** a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to fellow women only.
- 15) **Bisexual:** being emotionally and sexually attracted to people of both male and female people.
- 16) **Transgender:** a general term that refers to those who are changing or have changed their gender or sex (adopted from ‘Transgender 101’ by Transgender Education and Advocacy- TEA).

INTRODUCTION – WHY PTSD?

Generally speaking, PTSD mostly affects children and young adults (who are largely youth). In the larger parts of the world (other than most parts of Africa) PTSD amongst youth is quickly recognized, responded to and, the capacities of families and other concerned groups are built to protect youth with PTSD and those at risk of PTSD. This relative comparison may directly mean that there is a need to emphasize social wellness of youth at home and; expand sensitization and service delivery on issues relating to mental health. According to United Nations statistics on global youth population (2013), the youth comprise the largest of the world population. This in turn would mean that the youth are likely to be largest in most sectors. In Kenya for instance, youth are more than any other age group; in colleges and universities, new Police/Army recruits are largely youth and the unemployed Kenyans are mainly youth. Among these youth population in Kenya are youth who identify and belong to minority groups, particularly the sexual and gender minority group.

As you will see in the following chapters, PTSD is mainly caused by fearful and threatening events. This is specifically true for LGBT youth in Nairobi who live against a largely homophobic and transphobic background. These irrational fears and hate may lead the haters to carry out random or organized attacks, kidnappings, threats to life, corrective rape among others. The most vulnerable targets are usually the young and youthful LGBT people, who are already the most likely age group to have PTSD and suffer from the effects that of. Unfortunately, very few LGBT youth in Nairobi (and most likely Kenyawide) are aware of PTSD, or even the fact that they could be suffering from PTSD. This in turn mean that they are not likely to seek professional help because they may not know what is happening to them or, how to take care of themselves. The short term and long term effects of untreated PTSD are so serious, that it could affect the social wellbeing of LBGT youth with PTSD and worsen some of their physiological conditions –in addition to homophobia and transphobia.

Below are a few notes on PTSD, its effects on LGBT youth, how to control PTSD and some of the places LGBT Youth can get help in Nairobi.

FACTS ABOUT PTSD

- Only a mental health expert and professional medics can properly tell whether someone has PTSD.
- PTSD is treatable.
- Identifying and assessing PTSD in some people can be a challenge, especially because some people do not want to talk about their experiences, or have forgotten details about what happened, and how it made them feel.
- Symptoms can develop immediately after the traumatic event although they may last a little longer in some people.
- Up to about 30% of adults who experience a traumatic event are likely to develop PTSD. The figure is higher among young adults and children.

WHAT IS PTSD?

It is an anxiety disorder that some people develop after living through or witnessing a terrifying ordeal. Mostly, they involve physical harm or threat.

*It is important to know that PTSD is a natural response to a situation, and can be treated!

WHAT CAUSES PTSD?

With reference to recent trends, reports and incidences happening to LGBT youth, here are some of the most-likely causes of PTSD;

Cause	Additional Notes
Sexual abuse	E.g. forced anal examination because you are gay (Petition 51 of 2015) and gay youth being forced to have sex with a woman whilst being supervised in order to 'correct' their orientation. Some sexual abuses are carried out by relatives, friends or loved ones.
Emotional abuse	Usually it happens in bad/abusive relationships. Sometimes this emotional abuse is done by relatives, guardians, parents or teachers who dislike your SOGI,
Rape	For example some lesbian women are raped in order to 'correct' their sexual orientation. Gay men may also be drugged and raped by a gang, or raped in parties or raped by gay relatives who believe the victim cannot report.
Being held hostage	Some kidnappers may decide to keep LGBT people and demand ransom. Sometimes the victims may be beaten, starved, raped or outed in order to pressure friends and family to negotiate.
Hijacking	A group of LGBT people might be targeted for hijacking on their way to/from an event. Mostly this happens when hijackers know the targets are drunk or very vulnerable at that time.
Kidnapping	LGBT people are most likely to be taken away against their will because of their vulnerability. You might be blindfolded and driven to unknown and uncomfortable destinations.
Torture and/ battering	After being arrested or kidnapped, torture may include; being physically beaten, psychologically threatened, being suffocated, damage of body parts like fingers, and extended durations of pain.

Other causes of PTSD include;

- Military combat. E.g. some Kenyan soldiers in Somali, some US soldiers in Iraq/Afghanistan among others.
- Natural disasters. E.g. Floods, Hurricanes, Collapsed mines, lightning strikes, fire, sudden death among others.
- Terrorist incident. E.g. Garissa attack in Kenya, 1998 attack in Nairobi.
- Robbery.
- Serious road accidents.
- Riots e.g. Victims of political violence in Kenya 2007/8 and victims of Police battering May 2016 demonstrations.

SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

Naturally when in a situation where one is terrified, the body tries to make a 'fight-or-flight' response. Generally speaking for LGBT youth, flight is usually the most common response because of deep belief of vulnerability and knowledge of fear/hate from the larger society. Whilst some symptoms may take a few weeks, PTSD symptoms usually occur after about a month after the traumatic experience. The symptoms are classified into three;

- 1) Re-experiencing symptoms,
- 2) Avoidance symptoms and,
- 3) Hyperarousal symptoms.

These three categories are described in detail in the table below;

Category	Symptoms	Additional notes
Re-experiencing	Flashbacks	Having moments when you suddenly remember the bad things that happened to you.
	Bad dreams	Having nightmares similar or related to the bad ordeal you went through.
	Frightening thoughts	Having scary & imaginary ideas or expectations about the bad incident. E.g. a gay man raped by a gang of 5 men may have frightening thoughts when he gets into a matatu with only 5 male passengers.
Avoidance	Staying away from places, objects, people or events; that may remind you of the bad experience	E.g. a trans person stripped by motorbike youth is likely to avoid that route, and literally all motorbikes. A lesbian girl raped by a relative in their rural home (corrective rituals) may never go back there.
	Feeling emotionally numb	One has challenges expressing their feelings (intimacy, tenderness or sexuality), some feel detached and easily gives up on future (career, marriage, family etc.)
	Loss of interest in activities and objects that you used to enjoy	E.g. After being gang-raped in a party, one may avoid all parties. A trans youth stripped for wearing 'female clothing' may avoid the dresses for some time.
	Having trouble remembering what happened	This happens when the incident was so sudden and so extreme, that your memory of the events surrounding the bad ordeal is jammed.
	Feeling of strong guilt or worry	Because of the larger homophobic or transphobic pressure, one may start to hate his/her self or feel like he/she is the bad one in the whole neighborhood.
Hyperarousal	Being easily startled	Falling leaves, sudden sounds or a touch on the shoulder from behind can make some victims to scream or get up and run.
	Having difficulty sleeping	Your body gets on a 'high alert' mode and makes you awake for hours with fears that the bad ordeal might happen again. Falling asleep may also bring bad dreams and so one may avoid sleep subconsciously.
	Having angry outbursts	This usually happens when one subconsciously gets on defense mode thinking that everyone hates them or wants to ask them about the bad ordeal which they want to keep secret. It also happens when one is extremely sensitive and has less control of feelings of anger.

Other symptoms experienced by LGBT youth in Colleges/Universities and at work include;

- Poor time management
- Attention/concentration problems
- Sluggishness
- Slow executive functions e.g. challenges solving problems that were easier before the bad ordeal happened.
- Angry outbursts at classmates/colleagues.

EFFECTS OF PTSD

May lead to self-exclusion or isolation

Because of subconscious loss of self-control, some LGBT youth with PTSD usually experience anger outbursts. These may be directed towards friends and colleagues and as a result those friends and colleagues may avoid them. Some people with PTSD also avoid some people or places that may remind them of the bad ordeal. Some also avoid crowded places and certain people and so, they end up being excluded.

May lead to relationship of family problems

Self-hate, anger outbursts and the need to avoid some people may make partners be difficult to deal with. For instance, a victim of rape with PTSD may experience loss of tenderness/intimacy which is needed for relationships. The other partner may have challenges coping with that reality especially if he/she does not understand PTSD, and does not know when things will get back to normal. A partner or family member who is always angry is also not easy to deal with.

Some people with PTSD may also choose to avoid certain things (E.g. going to events that they used to go with their loved ones) or simply feel like being alone. This can affect the relationship or family (if partners were married). LGBT youth with PTSD as a result of SOGI-based abuse from family and relatives may hate some of their family members and relatives for a very long time.

May affect performance at school

Apart from having a bad temper which may lead to suspension and/or isolation at school, LGBT youth with PTSD may begin to get lower grades and get into conflict with school authorities like lecturers. This mostly occurs because of challenges with attention in class, poor time-keeping and late presentation of assignments as a result of subconscious sluggishness. Performance at school may also be affected as a result of giving up activities or ambitions that were formerly important. E.g. a lesbian youth who has gone through corrective rape (and maybe got a STD or pregnancy) may contemplate giving up school. LGBT youth bullied, or physically attacked by schoolmates may consider forgetting that school.

May lead to joblessness and loss of interest in career

Most employers find difficulty keeping employees who are sluggish, poor time managers and who avoid certain objects or people at work. LGBT youth with PTSD and who show these symptoms are likely to be suspended from work or fired. Challenges with emotional management and high levels of guilt and self-hate may also contribute to trouble with supervisors at one's new job.

Some causative factors of PTSD such as rape, torture, emotional abuse among others may have long term effects that result into loss of interest in important activities such a pursuit of a career. For instance, during emotional abuse, young LGBT victims are usually stigmatized, sometimes undergo biased punishment and told that they are worthless, bewitched and/or different from other human beings. When this is asserted and repeated with hateful/fearful reference to young LGBT people's SOGI, they grow up believing so. This has a greater impact when coming from a homophobic/transphobic family member or relative. Growing up, the LGBT youth learn that the larger society also hates/fears them and so they think of themselves as smaller people, and as third class citizens in some contexts.

May lead to drugs and substance abuse

Some LGBT youth turn to drugs such as alcohol to make them feel less pain and try to forget the ordeal. Some use khat to keep themselves awake in an attempt to avoid nightmares related to the traumatic event they went through. Some also use marijuana to stimulate themselves and; excite their feelings which may be numb after the traumatic event, control pain especially if the ordeal involved injuries, get work assignments and school work done faster, and to be happy/more sociable. This repeated use of these drugs without prescription can get to dependency levels, and those who use drugs this way may still use the drugs even after getting over PTSD.

TREATMENT & CONTROL

There are two methods of treating PTSD; (1) Therapy and (2) Medication. These treatments are only prescribed by professionals. Therapy includes Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE) and Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). Medication includes the use of (prescribed) Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs). Other ways of supporting oneself from PTSD include welcoming support from friends and family. Friends and family can help overcome most avoidance symptoms (anti-social behavior) and help one get back to normal routine at home, at work and at school. People with PTSD, and who are believers may also involve clergy for spiritual support.

MOVING ON AFTER PTSD

(a) Stop Worrying

After traumatic events, you are likely to feel extremely worried, fearful and some amount of self-hate. The situation is temporary and can be overcome like any other. Do not let an ordeal change your perception of yourself from great to pathetic or miserable. Work hard on overcoming it and get back to your feet, your dreams are still as valid as they were before the ordeal.

(b) Identify your Triggers

Triggers are what jumpstart certain things to happen. In this case, they may remind you of events that you do not want to remember at all at that time, or probably forever. With PTSD, this may slow your healing process and make the symptoms re-occur. Being familiar with your triggers can help control the chances of remembering the original traumatic event. Some of the triggers include:

Trigger	Original Traumatic Event likely to be Remembered
Seeing a bedroom, lying down on bare grass, closing eyes in a public space	Rape
Asthmatic breathing	Rapist's hand held over mouth when being raped Head covered by clothing bag during kidnapping
Being in an elevator with strange men	Sexual assault (mostly women)
Being in an elevator with strange people	Organized robbery
Extreme criticism from Bosses/lecturer at school	Being criticized (your clothing, body language, or choice of friends) by your parent/guardian/relative
Being offered a lift during a rainy evening in the city	Kidnapping, Hostage situation,
Being invited to a party	Sexual abuse
Watching/Reading a report about how a known or strange LGBT person was physically assaulted, or looked for by angry mob	Physical assault, threats to life, self-hate
Police walking during patrol, Police vehicle parked somewhere in town at night	Arbitrary arrest, Interrogation based on your appearance/friends/what you were carrying (cosmetics, make up kits, etc.), torture.
Watching a Government official (secretariat, etc.) preparing to make an official communication.	Government order to look for and arrest LGBT people Sexual and Gender-Based Persecution in countries experiencing state-backed violence against LGBT people.

(c) Awaken Intimacy and Sexuality

If you have friends and loved ones, it is good to try and keep them closer and do the things you used to do. E.g. going for walks in the evening, cooking together, and cycling among others. Also, if someone attacked you, abused you or threatened you because of your sexuality, it is advisable to remind yourself that since your sexuality cannot change, the person attacking, abusing or threatening you is the wrong one.

(d) *Develop optimism*

Think of yourself positively and motivate yourself. It works. Here are a few examples of how to motivate oneself;

Bad belief	Motivated belief
I am worthless and no good since the traumatic event	The trauma tried to bring me down but I am still strong. My worth does not equal the trauma.
People will know it happened and my weakness will be exposed	All humans have weaknesses. Some flaws are endearing
I am the bad one. Nobody came to help me and many people also dislike me and some of my friends	I have friends so am not that bad. Am also not the only one who was fearful at that time.
Talking about it will make it worse	A problem shared is a problem that may be solved if not solved immediately.
If I go to the party/home visit/activity I'll have a bad time	Last time didn't go so well but I can try something different this time. It might turn out better.

WHERE TO GET HELP

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Karen Hospital

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Emergency: +254 702 222 222
Lang'ata: 0726 222 001-3
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Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

Nairobi, Kenya.
Tel: +254202720114
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Center for Victims of Torture (CVT)

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REFERENCES

Glenn R. Schiraldi, Ph.D – *“The Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Sourcebook.”*
National Center for PTSD website – *“What is PTSD? FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions).”*
Children's Crisis Treatment Center – *“Info Sheet: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).”*