

The Lived Experience of “Struggling through a difficult time” for women survivors of the Rwandan genocide



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Purpose & Study Design

- Purpose: “What is it like to struggle through a difficult time”
- Phenomenological-hermeneutic approach
- 12 subjects
- Age 18- 38
- Volunteered with in-country representative
- IRB approval CBU & Rwandan authorities
- Translator: Kinyarwandan
- Informed consent
- Audio & video-taped
- Dialogues transcribed & analyzed
- Themes emerged



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Literature Review Example: Smith 1990

- ***Struggling through a difficult time*** for persons who are unemployed.
- ***Struggling through a difficult time*** is sculpting new lifeways in turbulent change through affirming self while feeling expanded by assets and restricted by obstacles in the midst of grieving the loss of what was cherished.



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Literature Review Example (cont.): Doctoral Dissertation Allchin-Petardi 1996

- *Persevering through a difficult time* is deliberately persisting with significant engagements while shifting life patterns.
- weathering the storm was used as a metaphor for persevering through a difficult time.



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Lit Review (cont.):

Bournes & Ferguson-Pare 2005

- *Persevering through a difficult time* during the SARS outbreak in Toronto
- *Persevering through a difficult time* is a **smothering connectedness** with **sequestering protection** as **unsettling contentment** emerges amid **unburdening hope**



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Persevering vs. Struggling

<i>Persevering</i>	<i>Struggling</i>
Enduring	Endeavoring
Persisting	Contention
Balking	Fighting
Winning through	Exerting
Carrying on	Contending
Continuing	Striving
	Having difficulty
	Floundering



Concept Inventing: Structure of the lived experience

- “Struggling through a difficult time is an arduous peril surfacing with aching for regard enmeshed in paralyzing agony while sharing disregard forges nurturing affiliations.”



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The Stories of Women Participants

- Emerging Living Paradoxes surfacing in the stories
- Essences
 - participant's language
 - researcher's language
- 12 women participant stories
- 4 examples presented here



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Story One: Theresa

- “Struggling through a difficult time...
- ...started when I lost my husband... we were happy... when the war broke out, my husband died, along with our youngest child... my family... was all destroyed... three men came, they grabbed me and other men took my daughter, she was 9 years old... one man was taking my left leg away & another was holding my right leg and the man was on top of me. So my daughter was being raped beside me, and she was crying, holding my hand for help...”

Story One: Theresa

- “...they started to abuse me with trees & other objects... after they had enough of me... I was pleading for my life... nobody was able to talk to each other... the pain and the hunger & all of the beating...”

Story One: Theresa

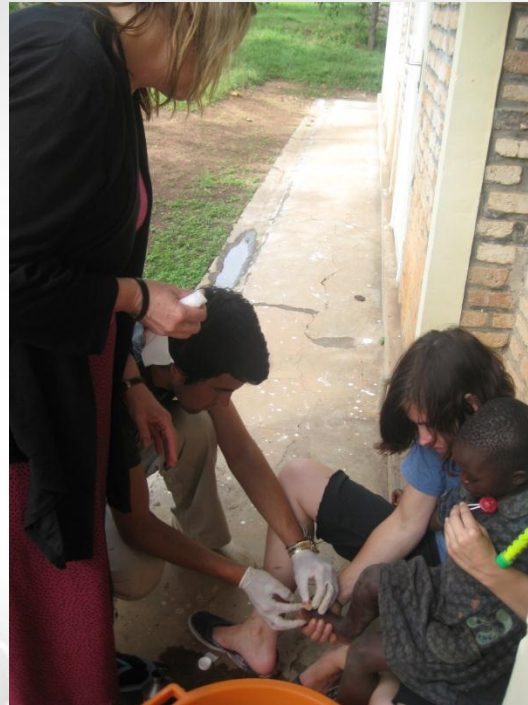
- “In my heart, I live with that pain & it’s hard to share & to talk about... I don’t like people to know what happened... I was looking like a mad person... mentally unstable... I felt upside down...”
- “I met with some other people who had the same problems... I saw that it was not only I who has the problem... I started to be calm... to clean myself... wash... dress...put on clothes. People thought I was crazy, a mad person, now I am quiet, because I am praying to God.”

Essences: Participant's Language

1. Struggling through a difficult time is the pain...& it's hard to share & to talk about. I don't like people to know what happened.
2. I was looking like a mad person... mentally unstable. I felt upside down. People thought I was crazy, a mad person.
3. I met with some other people who had the same problems... I saw that it was not only I who has the problem... I started to be calm.

Essences: Researcher's Language

1. Grueling torment darkened by invisibility.
2. Erratic derangement amid seeming condemnation.
3. Shared disregard forges nurturing alliances.



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Story 2: Rolinda

- “It’s really hard, it is really hard.... I was a very cherished child...the war came.... it was a chaotic period... my mother told me go, go, go.... they burned the house & my mother died, she was burned alive. They destroyed everything... we had so many troubles... I went & sat down in the forest... they killed my uncle... the girls were taken... for rape....
- “My neighbor who was a soldier came for me... & he made me pregnant... I have that child...”
- “...it was so many men, I cannot even say that truly he is the father... because I knew this one, I comfort myself saying maybe he is the father. I was taken by so many.”

Story 2: Rolinda

- “everybody rejected that baby, they didn’t want to do anything with the baby... the neighbors tried to help me out to make a small house... to live alone with my baby... I didn’t want to see people mistreat my baby.”
- “Then I was blessed, I could get a job, but I was traumatized... I was hiding from everybody. I was hiding... I was also not treated well by my own family. I felt like even those who mistreated me or those who killed my family was equal, I didn’t separate them, everybody was bad.”

Story 2: Rolinda

- “...I met with a friend, a man... I didn't want a man in my life... so we lived together for 3 years... then I became sick... I was having a child... he got another wife. But that gives me much peace, more than to live together. What is painful is that my baby is also infected.”
- “... I started... to help other people. It is not easy to get someone to tell you she has been raped. Where we are now, I am strong & I am making other people to be strong... God helps us to go through our pain.... we are strong, we are patient & I have devoted myself, my aim is to help others. That's it.”

Essences: Participant's Language

1. Struggling through a difficult time is really hard, it is really hard. I was a cherished child...it was a chaotic period...we had so many troubles.
2. I was traumatized...I was hiding from everybody. I was hiding... everybody was bad...I became sick.
3. I have devoted myself, my aim is to help others.



Essences: Researcher's Language

1. Unyielding turmoil with loss of treasured esteem.
2. Distressing invisibility arising with wariness.
3. Forging nurturing engagements.



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Story 3: Angelique

- “It’s a long way... I was raped by many men that I did not even know... they burned my fingers... I did not know why they did that... I did not know those people. My whole family was exterminated & killed, nobody in my family is still alive... everyone was abusing you in his own way. It was long way...”
- “Life was... a struggle... Life was just on a thread, it was not safe. There was no security... no peace... no sleep... no rest.”

Story 3: Angelique

- “... because I see there is somebody else who went through what I went through, now I can understand that it is not me alone.”
- “Now we are accepting ourselves & when we, when we are sick...someone comes along & takes you through & prays for you... talks to you... helps you, then you feel much better.”
- “Sometimes I felt like I don’t have to live, that I don’t have a life to live, & I don’t have a family to live for.”

Story 3: Angelique

- “I have many wounds of machetes all the way on my back & I was burned on my fingers, but we understand we should live & we agree this is our life.”
- “...I am overwhelmed by people who are willing to come & listen to us... & to be curious to know what we went through, & to have someone to share with & to tell your story, it makes me happy.”

Essences: Participant's Language

1. Struggling through a difficult time is a long way... everyone was abusing you in his own way. It was a long way. Life was just on a thread. It was not safe. There was no security. No peace. No sleep. No rest.
2. Sometimes I feel like I don't have to live, that I don't have a life to live & I don't have a family to live for.
3. Now we are accepting ourselves...someone comes along & takes you through & prays for you... talks to you... helps you, then you feel much better.

Essences: Researcher's Language

1. Lingering exploitation with treacherous contention.
2. Loss of cherished connections.
3. Self surfaces with nurturing engagements.



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Story 4: Raylena

- “This was so difficult... I have a kind of traumatic... I lose memories... I feel like my brain doesn't function properly... I have a fear, I feel like something is behind me & I am so afraid... lack of happiness & joy... a kind of no good feeling because of what I went through.”
- “When I see that they don't care or they don't listen, I feel like it is really painful. It is like I am between two things to go mad & crazy or to die.”

Story 4: Raylena

- “After what I went through in the war, now I am going through another difficult time... someone rescued me from the war... I was left naked... later, he married me... for 15 years we didn’t have a child... we had a baby boy... he was 4 months old... he had dysentery & he died... now I am going through a rough time again.”
- “...I feel like I should just keep quiet. I walk in so much pain... it’s like it was yesterday... it’s like I flip my life. So it has been so, so difficult.”

Story 4: Raylena

- “...nothing can make me happy... there is so much pain... so much grief... it’s like I am just walking into emptiness... I don’t want to eat anything & I don’t want to do anything, it’s just kind of depression.”
- “I have met some people... we speak about the word of God, I get some words that are so comforting... I feel like something is lifted off my shoulders & my heart... the word of God is what I am longing for.”
- “I like to be in a safe place...my brain has been stopped... sometimes... I am switching off & refusing to talk because my brain is shutting off.”

Essences: Participant's Language

1. Struggling through a difficult time is... I have a kind of traumatics... I have a fear, I feel like something is behind me & I am so afraid...lack of happiness & joy... a kind of no good feeling
2. It is like I am between two things to go mad & crazy or to die... I feel like my brain doesn't function properly... I lose memories...
3. I have met some people... I get some words that are so comforting... I feel like something is lifted off my shoulders & my heart

Essences: Researcher's Language

1. Lingering trepidation surfacing with discontentment
2. Paralyzing quandary
3. Unburdening alliances



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Summary: Struggling through a difficult time is

Story	Propositions
Theresa	grueling torment darkened by invisibility arising with erratic derangement amid seeming condemnation while sharing disregard forges nurturing alliances.
Rolinda	Struggling through a difficult time is unyielding turmoil with loss of treasured esteem, as distressing invisibility arises with wariness while forging nurturing engagements.
Angelique	loss of cherished connections amid lingering exploitation with treacherous contention while self surfaces with nurturing engagements.
Raylena	paralyzing quandary while lingering trepidation arises with discontentment amid unburdening alliances.

Results

- The findings of this study enhanced understanding of the lived experience of struggling through a difficult time:
- Arduous peril
- Aching for regard
- Paralyzing agony
- And nurturing affiliations



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Artistic Depiction: Struggling through a difficult time

This is what it means to be held.
How it feels when the sacred is torn from your life
And you survive.

This is what it is to be loved.
And to know that the promise was
When everything fell we'd be held.

With thanks to Kandice C. Johnston

[Link to you tube video](#)