

Poster Presentation

Forgiveness and Reconciliation Following Human Rights Abuses. Is It Possible? The Impact of Post-Transitional Justice in Chile on Exiled Survivors of Political Violence.

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Abstract

Background

- The Chilean Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been described by some as one of the world's most successful. What do exiled survivors in the UK and Sweden make of the efforts made in Chile to address the atrocities committed during the dictatorship? What is the impact of Post-transitional Justice in Chile on these exiled survivors? Have the achievements in Chile in relation to Post-Transitional Justice facilitated a process of forgiveness and reconciliation for these survivors?

Methodology

- This is a qualitative study based on semi-structured in depth interviews with 12 (6 women and 6 men) Chilean exiles and survivors of political violence (e.g. torture, detention, forced exile) during the dictatorship in Chile.
- 6 of the participants had fled to the UK, 5 to Sweden, and 1 to Australia.
- The interviews took place in the UK, in London and Sheffield, and in Sweden, in the Skåne region.
- The questions were deliberately designed to be open-ended to facilitate dialogue during interview. Prompts were provided, where necessary to enable the participant in their responses.
- All transcripts of the individual interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed using Thematic Analysis.

Ethical considerations:

- Confidentiality Policy was reiterated and observed at all stages of the research. Where confidentiality had been inadvertently breached by participants (for example, by naming people) the relevant transcripts were anonymised prior to analysis.
- Consent to participate was voluntary and all participants were informed of the nature of the study and its aims.
- Participants were not asked any questions about their own personal experiences.
- All participants had access to psychological support in case they would need it, both during the interviews and afterwards.

Results

- Survivors had little information about the Transitional Justice processes as they were occurring.
- Some atrocities were seen as unforgivable.
- Acknowledgement from the perpetrators was seen as a prerequisite for reconciliation.
- They identified the denial of the atrocities and justification of atrocities by other Chileans as an obstacle for reconciliation.
- Invalidating their reality was seen as another obstacle.
- The mistrust towards the Political Right in Chile even today was seen as a problem.
- They thought that if they forgave the perpetrators, the perpetrators would forget what they had done and violence would reoccur.
- Transitional justice in Chile was seen as giving an illusion that things were changing, when in reality, those in power wanted to maintain the status quo.
- They spoke about the importance of specialist rehabilitation treatment in exile for torture survivors.

Conclusion:

- The process of forgiveness and reconciliation is a complex one involving a number of personal, relational and socio-political factors linked to the past, present and future. In this study we could clearly see that these survivors could not contemplate forgiveness and reconciliation without justice.