

**Disclosure of Genocide Experiences in Rwandan Families: Private and Public Sources
of Information and Child Outcomes**

Caroline Williamson Sinalo,

Department of French, University College Cork, Ireland

Pierre Claver Irakoze,

The Aegis Trust, Rwanda

Angela Veale,

School of Applied Psychology, University College Cork, Ireland

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Author Note

Caroline Williamson Sinalo <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1105-3314>

Pierre Claver Irakoze

Angela Veale <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5758-421X>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Caroline Williamson Sinalo, Department of French, University College Cork, Ireland.

Email: caroline.williamsonsinalo@ucc.ie

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Abstract

It has now been 26 years since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi took place in Rwanda and many of those who lived through it are today raising the next generation of Rwandans. This study explored the cultural practices of Rwandan parents surrounding exposure of their children to accounts of genocide history in both the private and public realm, the age at which children were exposed to information from different sources, and the extent to which exposure moderated parent-reported child outcomes. A survey of 317 parents was conducted across each of Rwanda's four provinces and Kigali City. Results found that parents disclosed the genocide openly with their children and that children were exposed to information about the genocide from the community. Parents tended to share stories at home before exposing their children to public sources of information. Significant correlations were found between a number of private (parent disclosure) and public (commemoration, school) sources of information about the genocide and a range of parent-reported child problem outcomes (mental health problems, communication problems, social problems, education problems and general parental challenges related to the genocide). Qualitative content analysis suggested that this correlation may be the result of incongruence between the stories of the genocide and its history in private and public spaces. While it is clear that parents want to teach their children about the genocide, they are having to do so in an environment where information about the genocide is abundant yet politically and socially sensitive.

Keywords: Rwanda, genocide, disclosure, parents, children, incongruence

Public Significance Statement

This study found that children's exposure to information about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda from both private and public sources was associated with poorer parent-reported child outcomes. This finding may be explained by conflicting stories about the genocide that circulate in public and private spaces, increasing the risk of children receiving incongruent messages

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Disclosure of Genocide Experiences in Rwandan Families: Private and Public Sources of Information and Child Outcomes

The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi was among the worst atrocities of the 20th century and had a profound impact on Rwandan families. Over the thirteen-week period of genocide, the death toll reached around 1 million people, leaving the population traumatized. Every Rwandan experienced the genocide differently, but all must deal with its legacy. It has now been over 26 years since the genocide took place and many of those who lived through it are today raising the next generation of Rwandans. Through a survey of 317 parents, this study sought to investigate the cultural practices of Rwandan parents surrounding exposure of their children to accounts of genocide history in both the private and public realm.

Talking about troubling or traumatic experiences has, throughout history and across cultures, been considered to play a role in overcoming one's emotional difficulty (Pennebaker, 1993). But what is the effect of disclosing a traumatic story to one's children? Some research suggests that sharing such stories with children is beneficial. Kellermann (2001), for example, notes that exposure to open discussions of parents' camp experiences in non-threatening ways mitigated the effects of intergenerational trauma in the children of Holocaust survivors. In a study of multigenerational trauma in Northern Ireland, Downes et al., (2012) explain that "unawareness of trauma, and a lack of a coherent narrative about the trauma, may be related to poorer psychological well-being" because, in the absence of information, children "create fantasies to complete their own narrative of the story" (p. 598). Danieli et al., (2016) found a significant negative effect of the mother's emotional detachment and silence ("numb style") on children's adaptation in the families of Holocaust survivors. Such silencing could result in what the authors referred to as broken generational linkages, that is, when Holocaust survivors' offspring rarely thought of a parent's murdered parents as their grandparents or remembered grandparents genocide experiences "only in bits

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and pieces” (Danieli et al., 2016, p. 643), which created a risk factor for negative effects in offspring.

In contrast, Kidron (2009) found evidence for “the nonpathological presence of the Holocaust past within silent, embodied practices, person-object interaction, and person-person interaction” (p. 5). Through an examination of ethnographic accounts of Holocaust descendants, Kidron (2009) argues against the prevailing idea that “the absence of voice” signals psychopathology; she suggests that “silence may be seen as a powerful and effective conduit of memory” (p. 15).

Measham and Rousseau (2010) conducted a study which compared parental disclosure style and children’s representations of their experiences in creative play in families affected by war and family separation in Africa. They argue that the “disclosure or nondisclosure of traumatic events may not in and of itself be protective or pathology inducing. Instead, the timing and manner of disclosure is important” (Measham & Rousseau, 2010, p. 94). Specifically, they highlight the importance of understanding the precise details of what should be disclosed and that this should be “linked to the developmental status of the child, the family’s reunion status (and thus the capacity for feeling safe together) and the meaning of disclosure and of the traumatic events to the families and their children” (Measham & Rousseau, 2010, p. 94).

A number of studies of refugee families seem to concur that modulated disclosure – that is communication that is sensitive to the child’s cognitive and emotional needs – is associated with better psychological adjustment in children (e.g. Dalgaard & Montgomery 2015; Dalgaard et al., 2015). In a study of disclosure and child-attachment in refugee families, Dalgaard et al., (2015) found that open style of communication was not more strongly associated with a positive outcome than a silencing strategy. However, an unfiltered style of communication was associated with insecure attachment. This refers to “parents who

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report not speaking of the traumatic events with their children, but who, in the research settings at least, seem unaware of the presence of their child/children, and openly discuss their traumatic experiences from the past, even though their children are within hearing range or even sitting right next to them” (Dalgaard et al. 2015, p. 79). According to Dalgaard et al. (2015), this can create “a lack of congruence between the children’s Story Lived [what they experience] and Story Told [what they are told], which leaves the children with only their imagination to make sense of the things they experience within the family” (p. 72; see also Montgomery, 2004); such incongruence resulted in poorer child outcomes.

Disclosure in the Rwandan Context

The therapeutic effects of disclosure have been observed among children in Rwanda. Hogwood et al., (2017) investigated the effects of disclosure about birth history in Rwandan children born from sexual violence. Before the disclosure event, the researchers report that these children “often lacked the agency or coping strategies to deal with their situation” (Hogwood et al., 2017. p. 14). The children were usually aware of being “treated differently from other children in the family or had heard rumours in the community which were distressing” but did not have the knowledge and understanding to explain why (Hogwood et al., 2017. p. 14). After disclosure, the children became more “aware of their stigmatized identity and there was an immediate negative response to this awareness” (Hogwood et al., 2017, p. 14). They nonetheless found that all the young people in their research “valued knowing the truth about their birth history” as it enabled them to “resolve their questions and curiosity surrounding identity” (Hogwood et al., 2017, p. 14).

Hogwood et al.,’s (2017) study was limited to children born of rape and only included a sample of 10 children. To date, there have been no studies of disclosure practices among Rwandan parents more generally. Hogwood et al.,’s (2017) study contradicts the cliché of Rwandan people that they are “silent” and “secretive”; Burnet (2012) notes, for example, that

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Rwandan women, in particular, are “viewed positively when they are reserved, submissive, modest [and] silent” (p. 44).

Scholars have also noted silence among Rwandans with regard to the genocide and its history. Buckley-Zistel (2006) observed in her interviews with convicted *génocidaires*, Tutsi returnees, and Tutsi survivors in Nyamata and Gikongoro, that although individuals were willing to discuss the genocide itself, many were silent on historical matters, particularly the causes of the genocide and previous episodes of violence and tension between Hutu and Tutsi. According to Buckley-Zistel (2006), the omission of this history is a form of “chosen amnesia” which is “essential for [the] local coexistence” of these various groups (p.131). Similarly, Burnet (2012) found that genocide survivors have “placed boundaries around and cordoned off ‘the genocide’ from their everyday lives” (p. 78). Otake (2019) found that silence, enforced by a political and social environment which discourages discussions of grief surrounding the genocide, exacerbated suffering through preventing people from constructing their own narratives which could otherwise help them to process mourning. In her view, “unprocessed mourning remained a serious problem, resulting in mental health problems such as hallucinations of the spirits of the dead” (Otake, 2019, p. 171). Such silencing of personal narratives in the public sphere may have negative implications for children by creating a disconnection between their “story lived” and “story told”, as articulated by Dalgard et al., (2015) above.

Broader Political Context: Commemoration and Education

Despite these observations of silence regarding talk about the genocide among individuals, official, public discussions of the genocide abound. Indeed Longman (2017) argues that the government uses the 1994 genocide as “a focal point for constructing a new national identity” (p. 37). Through various institutions—including public education and annual commemoration ceremonies—the “regime has identified the genocide as the key event against

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which all Rwandan history before and since must be considered” (Longman, 2017, p. 52). In Longman’s (2017) analysis, the current government, led by the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) endorses a particular narrative of history which minimizes its own crimes while overemphasizing the genocide and the RPF’s role in ending the violence in order to claim “moral authority”, thereby justifying its power. Part of this narrative has involved the introduction of policies intended to eradicate genocide ideology and foster national unity. According to the government, there are no Hutu or Tutsi ethnic groups; there are only “Rwandans”. Ethnicity has been removed from national identity cards (Hintjens, 2008) and new crimes such as “divisionism” and “ethnic ideology” have been added to the penal code. The use of the terms “Hutu” and “Tutsi” has become taboo as “Rwandans interpret these laws as mostly requiring public silence regarding ethnicity” (Eltringham, 2011, p. 274). These policies have been perceived by some (e.g. Reyntjens, 2016) to mask a Tutsi ethnocracy and silence political opposition.

Longman (2017) believes that the government uses public commemorations to pave “the way for a particular political agenda in the present” (p. 8). Drawing on Vidal’s (2004) observations of commemoration ceremonies, Lemarchand (2009) agrees that these ceremonies deny the status of victim to Hutu who lost their lives and act simply as a reminder to the Tutsi population that their people were killed by Hutu. Overall, Lemarchand (2009) argues, the ceremonies serve to maintain Hutu in a position of culpability while providing “ideological legitimacy to the consolidation of Tutsi power” (p. 72).

Scholars of Rwanda’s education system express similar concerns. Following the genocide the Rwandan authorities imposed a moratorium on History education which some scholars argued created a vacuum that enabled “the inculcation of a politicised history, harnessed by those in power, to promote values amenable to their own ethnocentric

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perspective” (Thomas & van de Kooij, 2018, p. 3). A full History syllabus was eventually implemented in 2008 in the secondary school curriculum.

In a content analysis of various versions of this syllabus, Thomas and van de Kooij (2018) argue that it appears “to suppress the spirit of enquiry as well as alternative perspectives favouring instead a history that elevates one ethnic group above others” (p. 11). Similar observations have been made by King (2014) who states that:

the government simultaneously espouses that reconciliation is underway and that ethnicity no longer matters, while it also bases its rule on the notion that Tutsi status as victims of the genocide grant it the moral high ground and right to make decisions. The hypocrisy of maintaining both positions is evident in the feelings of deprivation engendered by such practices as a singular narrative of Hutu perpetrators and Tutsi victims and the distribution of educational scholarships (p. 143).

The government has come under increasing criticism among international scholars for its authoritarian regime and for the lack of free speech in Rwanda, particularly the freedom to criticize the government or challenge its view of history (Longman, 2017; Prunier, 2009; Reyntjens, 2004; 2016) including criticisms made in the classroom (Freedman et al., 2011).

This body of Western research on Rwanda, which largely excludes Rwandan voices, is somewhat contradicted by some Rwanda-based scholars, who tend to portray the government’s initiatives more positively. For example, in a study based on interviews with school pupils, Mafeza (2013) writes that the Rwandan education system “has and continues to contribute to national reconciliation by creating a culture of peace” (p.5). According to Basabose and Habyarimana (2018), who conducted another interview study, official sources suggest that genocide ideology remains prevalent in 25.8% of the population. The main problem they observed in the school system is that it is trying to promote social cohesion, positive values and critical thinking, while some students are taught messages at home or in

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the wider community that contradict this curriculum, through their emphasis on genocide denial, divisionism, hatred and violence, which consequently creates conflict with and mistrust of teachers. It seems that both the Rwandan and the Western researchers acknowledge the existence of contradictory narratives about the genocide and yet, reflecting this incongruence, provide opposing explanations. Given the existence of such conflicting understandings of the genocide, it would seem that there is a likelihood that children hear incongruent messages about the genocide across private and public spaces which may have a detrimental effect on them.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As this literature review reveals, disclosure of traumatic stories to children can have varying effects which appear to be contingent on the developmental status of the children, the degree to which the trauma has been resolved, and the level of congruency between what children are told by trusted caregivers and what they experience.

The above discussion of the Rwandan context suggests that Rwandan parents might find it challenging to disclose their personal stories, given Rwanda's political context and the culture of silence surrounding expressions of grief. On the other hand, their children may nonetheless be exposed to some form of genocide education either at commemoration or in school. As such, this research aimed to explore the cultural practices of Rwandan parents of exposure of their children to accounts of genocide history in both the private and public realm. The study explored the following research questions: 1. What is the degree of exposure of Rwandan children to different sources of information about the genocide, that is, through parental disclosure at home, through exposure to genocide commemoration and through being taught in school? 2. Is there a difference in the age at which parents expose children to information through these difference sources? 3. Does degree of exposure to different sources of information moderate parent-reported child problem outcomes?

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Given the likelihood of incongruent information coming from private vs. public sources, we set forth the following hypotheses. The first hypothesis states there is a difference in the age at which children learn about the genocide through private spheres (parental disclosure) and public spheres (attendance at commemorations; media coverage of commemorations; school education). The second hypothesis states there is a positive relationship between children learning about the genocide in the private sphere (parental disclosure) and parent-reported child problem outcomes (overall problems, behaviour, mental health, communication, social, education, other). The third hypothesis states there is a positive relationship between children learning about the genocide in the public sphere (attendance at commemorations, media coverage of commemorations, school education) and parent-reported child problem outcomes (overall problems, behaviour, mental health, communication, social, education, other).

Method

Participants

In total, 317 Rwandan parents participated in the study of whom 50.5% were male and 49.5% were female. Participant inclusion criteria were that individuals were a parent and/or guardian responsible for raising children after the genocide in 1994. The respondents collectively reported to raise 1073 children between them, of which 241 were adopted. Among the respondents, 18.0% had one child, 20.5% had two children, 21.8% had three, 13.9% had four and 12.0% had five children. The remainder had six or more children with one person reporting caring for twenty children. The mean age of all children of respondents was 20.6 years (SD 9.84) The age distribution of children ranged from 1-50 years. This included 249(23.2%) children aged 12 years or younger (children), 187(17.4%) aged 13-17 years (teenagers), 266(24.8%) aged 18-24 years (youth) and 371(34.6%) aged 25+ years (adults).

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of participants

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	Sample	National statistics
Percentage of people in each age category (in years)	30-34: 7.3%	0-14: 41.38%
	35-39: 11.4%	15-24: 19.34%
	40-44: 15.1%	25-54: 32.77%
	45-49: 17.7%	55-64: 4.09%
	50-60: 28.4%	65+: 2.43% (CIA, 2018)
	60+: 20.2	
Mean fertility rate per mother	3.39	3.9 (The World Bank, 2018)
Median age at first birth	25-29	25-29 (2014/15 est. CIA, 2018) ⁱ
Sex ratio (F:M)	49.53:50.47	50:50 (CIA, 2018)
Urban:Rural ratio	35.4: 64.3	30.7: 69.3 (CIA, 2018)
Primary education	87.1% (of which 50.2% completed primary only)	32.9% primary completion rate 97.7% primary enrollment rate (UNICEF, 2018)
Occupation	Unemployed: 10.7%	Unemployed: 5.2%
	Agriculture: 49.8%	Agriculture: 63.1%
	Education: 9.8%	Education: 2.3%
	Health: 0.3%	Health: 1.1%
	Professional/scientific/technical: 0.9%	Professional/scientific/technical: 0.5%
	Construction: 1.9%	Construction: 6.1%
	Transportation: 1.6%	Transportation: 2.4%
	Finance: 2.8%	Finance: 0.4%
	Public service: 1.2%	Public service: 0.6%
	Other services: 2.8%	Other services: 1.2% (NISR, 2017)
	Other 15.4%	

The age distribution of parents ranged from 30-60+ years with almost half the respondents over the age of 50 (see Table 1). While this is at odds with the age distribution of

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the general population, it is in line with the target demographic, i.e. Rwandans with parental responsibilities for children old enough to discuss the genocide (including adult-aged children). Approximately a third of participants, 35.5% were from urban areas and two thirds, 64.5% were from rural areas. This is reflected in the occupation of participants with 49.8% of participants involved in agriculture, 9.8% in education, 5.2% in other professional jobs (health, professional, finance, public service), and 10.7% unemployed. Primary school completion rates were slightly higher among participants (50.2%) than in the general population (32.9%). Sex ratio of participants, median age at first birth and mean fertility rate per mother were in line with that of the general population. Overall, 83.6% of the participants were present in Rwanda during the genocide.

Four Rwandan male research assistants who had previously participated in the Aegis Trust Peace Education Program were trained on implementing the survey and then traveled to each of Rwanda's four provinces as well as the capital, Kigali, to recruit participants through parents' associations in schools, community groups/clubs and church groups and communities where the Aegis Trust works. The Aegis Trust works in survivors' villages, that is villages created to provide shelter to vulnerable survivors, and reconciliation villages, that is villages created by the government where perpetrators and victims are neighbours in the aim of fostering reconciliation and social cohesion among the villagers. We targeted parents through these channels in the aim of recruiting a diverse sample in terms of age, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and experiential background with respect to the genocide, (including people who participated in the genocide, people who survived it, those who tried to help or rescue others, those who acted as bystanders, as well as those who were in exile during the genocide and later returned). While no sample can be comprehensive, we wanted to obtain one that was inclusive of, as far as possible, the population of modern Rwanda. Given the legal framework surrounding ethnicity, the study did not ask people about their

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ethnic group or personal experiences during the genocide, although some respondents did provide this information in their qualitative responses.

In Kigali City, the team covered all three districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo and Kicukiro). A pilot survey of 17 participants which largely involved parents from a Kigali primary school was extended to a further 300 participants. Among the other respondents from Kigali, some were recruited from church and prayer groups and others were inhabitants of survivors' villages and a reconciliation village (located in Bibare Cell, Kimironko Sector, Gasabo District and Kamashashi Cell, Kanombe Sector, Kicukiro District). In Eastern Province, data were gathered in Rwamagana and Kayonza Districts (through church and prayer groups) and in Northern Province, the team covered Gicumbi and Rulindo districts. Respondents from Gicumbi also included inhabitants of a reconciliation village located in Buyoga. In Southern Province we covered Muhanga, Nyanza and Huye Districts, mostly from church/prayer groups although respondents from Huye also included inhabitants from a reconciliation village. Finally, in Western Province the team went to Nyamasheke district where participating parents were recruited in schools as well as from a group of parents taking literacy courses. Out of a total of 30 districts, 11 districts were surveyed, and this included 112 participants from Kigali, 48 from Northern Province, 56 from Easter Province, 53 from Southern Province and 47 from Western Province. No incentive was provided for study participation.

Materials

The survey instrument consisted of 50 questions written both in Kinyarwanda and English and participants were free to choose the language of response. Translation of the survey was conducted by two independent translators, back-translated and then cross-checked. The survey included an informed consent form that detailed the nature of the study, right to anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study. The survey was structured to include

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socio-demographic questions on parent gender, number and age of children and the relationship of children in their care to participant (17 questions); questions about child exposure to the genocide (“Do you think it is important to discuss the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda at home” rated in a 5-point likert scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”; “Do you discuss your personal history of experiences linked to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi at home?” rated on a 5-point likert scale from “frequently discuss” to “never discuss”; age started sharing personal history with each child; age appropriate to discuss the genocide in general with children; a series of questions about genocide commemoration participation for self and children and age of participation; if children are taught about genocide history in school and the age they started learning this history; a series of questions about the challenges participants may experience as a parent, rated on a five point likert scale from always to never; “behavioral problems in children”, “mental health problems in children”, “communication problems in children”, “social problems (e.g. bullying, fighting, exclusion)”, “education problems”, “other problems” and open-ended specification. An open question invited participants to “Please use this space to describe in more detail the challenges you face as a parent/guardian after genocide”. This open question was analyzed using content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, deciding the level of analysis (individual response, usually a single phrase or sentence), coding for the existence of a key concept in the sentence, returning one code per response. Initially 9 categories were identified (Financial/poverty; lack of time; Child social/emotional factors; Child educational factors; Child genocide disclosure challenges; Parent emotional factors; Parent-type of household; Other, No challenge) and these were reduced to the final 6 categories (Financial & poverty related challenges; Child social and emotional challenges; Child disclosure and

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communication challenges; Parent (single parent, widow, child-headed household); Other (e.g. disability, no services), No challenges). Inter-rater reliability was 97.4%,

Procedure

Participants were approached in May and June 2018 through school administrators, group leaders and church leaders who informed parents in advance of our arrival and provided us with a private space in which to brief parents about the nature of the survey as well as to collect completed questionnaires. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, anonymous, and that they may withdraw at any time from the research and for whatever reason, and they may omit questionnaire items to which they do not wish to respond. Following this briefing, participating parents were presented with the questionnaire using Qualtrics survey software. All 317 respondents agreed to participate by electronically signing the consent form and none of them later contacted us to withdraw their information.

Results

The Private Sphere: Parental Disclosure Practices to their Children

To determine the degree of exposure of children to discussions of genocide history generally with parents, we asked: “Do you think it is important to discuss the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in your home?” As can be seen in Table 2, 96.8% of participants strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Of the remainder, 1.3% had no opinion (neither agreed nor disagreed) and 1.6% strongly disagreed.

This was followed by a question about parental disclosure practices about personal experiences: “Do you discuss your personal history of experiences linked to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi with your children?” It was noted in the question that “Experiences linked to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi” included “episodes of violence committed at other times before or after the genocide, life in exile, life in refugee camps and

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any other hardships linked to this period of history”. Again, Table 2 shows that 32.5% of parents reported that they frequently discussed their personal experiences at home, 39.4% sometimes did so, 17% did so once in a while, and 5.4% did so but rarely. Only 5.7% of parents never discussed their genocide experiences at home (in all cases, parents were asked to respond to questions in reference to their first-born child).

Table 2
Disclosure practices at home

	Important to discuss at home? (n=299)	Discuss personal experience at home (n=317)
1	65.3	32.5
2	31.5	39.4
3	1.3	17
4	0.3	5.4
5	1.6	5.7

Note: Responses to questions scored on a five-point Likert Scale. 1 = strongly endorses statement to 5 = does not endorse statement.

Parents were also asked about the age at which they believed it was appropriate to discuss the genocide at home. The mean age they believed it was appropriate to do so was 10.74 years (SD 3.18). They were then asked about the age at which they started sharing personal stories with their children. In response to this question, the mean age at which parents discussed their personal experiences of genocide was 11.74 years (SD 4.38) (see Table 3).

Table 3
Age of disclosure at home

Age disclosure	Age range (years)	Distribution (% by years)	Mean age (years)	SD	Median age (years)	Doesn't discuss (%)	Can't remember (%)	(N)
Appropriate age to discuss at home (child 1)	3-19	3-6: 4.4 7-9: 27.8 10-12: 45.7 13-15: 15.1 16-19: 6.9	10.74	3.18	10	N/A	N/A	317

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Age	4-19	4-6: 3.7	11.74	4.38	10	1.7	26.1	216
disclosure		7-9: 32.9						
of personal		10-12: 26.9						
story (child		13-15: 13.9						
1)		16-19: 22.2						

To examine potential variations in disclosure practices within the overall sample, we analyzed the effects of the following variables on disclosure levels of personal stories: gender, education level, current age of parent, age of becoming a parent, mean age of children, and challenge type (based on qualitative coding discussed above). We found no significant effect for the variables of gender, education level, parents' age; age of becoming a parent, nor for the qualitative categories based on parental challenges. A one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant effect of child age on disclosure ($F(4, 312)=7.6721, p<0.001$) and Tukey post-hoc tests showed that these differences were significant between parents of infants and children ($p<0.05$) and between parents of infants and youth, infants and adults, and children and adults (all at $p<0.01$). While not all differences were significant, Table 4 shows a steady increase in disclosure levels as children get older.

Table 4
Mean levels of disclosure about personal stories related to the genocide for parents of different aged children

Average child age (years)	Level of disclosure about personal stories related to the genocide	SD	(N)
Infant (0-)	3.63	1.69	8
Child (6-12)	2.38	1.05	79
Teen (13-17)	2.12	1.04	67
Youth (18-24)	2.08	1.05	91

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Adult (25+)

1.74

1.07

72

Note: Responses to questions scored on a five-point Likert Scale. 1 = strongly endorses statement to 5 = does not endorse statement.

The Public Sphere: Children's Exposure to Genocide Commemoration

To determine the degree of exposure of children to public sources of information, parents were asked about their practices around exposing their children to official genocide commemorations.

Table 5

Parenting practices with respect to children's exposure to genocide commemoration

	Does parent participate in annual commemoration (n=316)	Discuss commemoration with children (n=316)	Child attend commemoration (n=317)	Child watch/listen to commemoration on television/radio (n=317)	Commemoration on TV/radio useful for child to learn history (n=317)
1	67.4	44	31.9	38.2	64.7
2	19.3	25.3	32.8	33.8	31.5
3	8.2	22.2	23.7	18.0	3.2
4	4.1	5.1	6	7.3	0.3
5	0.9	3.5	5.7	2.8	0.3

Note: Responses to questions scored on a five-point Likert Scale. 1 = strongly endorses statement to 5 = does not endorse statement.

Over two thirds (67.4%) of parents reported that they always participated in annual commemoration while 94.9% have participated at some time (see Table 4). Reflecting parent's own high levels of engagement with commemoration, 91.2% of participants responded they always, regularly or sometimes discuss commemoration with their children. Reported child attendance (including reports of parents of adult-aged children) at commemoration was somewhat lower, with participants reporting that in 31.9% of cases, their child always attended commemoration, 32.8% regularly attended, 22.2% sometimes attended and only 5.1% and 3.5% of participants rarely or never let their children attend commemoration. In addition, 90% of parents stated that their child at least sometimes watched or listened to commemoration events on television or on the radio. What is more,

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parents were positively disposed to exposing their children to commemoration events through such media. When asked if they believed that watching or listening to TV and radio during the genocide commemoration period can help their children learn about the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, 96.2% believed this was the case, and two thirds (64.7%) strongly agreed with the statement. In total, less than 1% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Participants were asked about the age at which they exposed their children to discussions of genocide commemoration at home, allowed their children to attend commemoration, and allowed their children to watch or listen to genocide commemoration on TV or radio (Table 6).

Table 6
Age of children's exposure to different types of genocide commemoration

Type of disclosure	Age range (years)	Distribution (% by years)	Mean age (years)	SD	Median	Doesn't discuss/attend/watch/learn (%)	Can't remember (%)	(N)
Age start discussing commemoration (child 1)	4-19	4-6: 1.9 7-9: 17.0 10-12: 37.8 13-15: 16.5 16-19: 26.9	12.84	4.07	12	1.6	29.1	212
Age start attending commemoration (child 1)	5-19	5: 0.5 7-9: 2.6 10-12: 33.3 13-15: 28.6 16-19: 34.9	14.47	7.47	14	1.7	34.1	192
Age start watching/listening (child 1)	4-19	4-6: 5.6 7-9: 19.6 10-12: 35.2 13-15: 15.0 16-19: 24.6	12.4	4.22	11	1.3	40.6	179

The mean age at which participants discussed commemoration with their first child was 12.8 years (SD 4.07) and at a mean age of 12.4 years (SD 4.22), parents allowed their children to watch or listen to commemoration events on the media. Parents on average waited

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until their children were slightly older, 14.5 years (SD 7.47), before they allowed them to attend genocide commemoration events.

The Public Sphere: Children’s Exposure to Genocide Education in School

The survey also sought to identify the extent to which, according to parents, children were exposed to the history of the genocide at school (see Table 7).

Table 7
Responses to questions on schooling

	Taught in school (n=317)	If agree with school approach (n=102)
1	32.2	56.9
2	48.6	29.4
3	10.7	13.7
4	5.7	0
5	02.8	0

Note: Responses to questions scored on a five-point Likert Scale. 1 = strongly endorses statement to 5 = does not endorse statement.

Parents were asked the following questions: had their child been taught about the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in school? and if so, what was the age of their child when they started learning about the genocide in school?; did they agree with the school’s approach to teaching the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi? and what did they believe was the appropriate age children should learn about the genocide in school? In total, 32.2% of parents said their children had definitely been taught about the genocide in school while a further 48.6% said probably yes. In addition, 13.7% did not know if their child had been taught about the genocide in school. Only 8.5% responded their child had probably or definitely not been taught about the genocide in school. In their answers to the question about whether they agree with the school’s approach to teaching genocide history, the response rate was low (n=102/317) and among those who did answer the question, 56.9% of parents strongly agreed with the approach of school in teaching about the genocide, 29.4% somewhat agreed, and 13.7% neither agreed nor disagreed. While those who answered

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generally agreed, the low response rate could indicate that as many as 215 respondents (68%) were not comfortable to answer this question, such as if they disagreed with the school's approach.

When asked about the appropriate age children should start learning about the genocide in school, the mean response was 11.0 years while the mean age they reported their children starting to learn about genocide in school was 12.5 years (see Table 8).

Table 8
Age of learning about genocide in school

Age learn/appropriate to learn	Age range (years)	Distribution (% by years)	Mean age (years)	St. deviation	Median age (years)	Doesn't discuss/attend/watch/learn (%)	Can't remember (%)	(N)
Age to start learning in school (child 1)	4-19	4-6: 6.7 7-9: 16 10-12: 38.7 13-15: 12 16-19: 28	12.55	4.26	12	8.8	19.6	75
Appropriate age to start learning in school	1-19	1-6: 2.8 7-9: 22.4 10-12: 52.1 13-15: 15.8 16-19: 5.7	10.96	3.02	12	N/A	N/A	317

To answer our second research question and test our first hypothesis, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out on all parents' responses to questions about age and this determined a significant effect for type of exposure on age, ($F(6, 1501)=27.41, p<0.001$). The Post Hoc Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test revealed that the age participants thought appropriate to start discussing the genocide at home was

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significantly lower than the age they started discussing commemoration, significantly lower than the age their children started attending commemoration and significantly lower than the age their children started listening to/watching commemoration (all at $p > 0.001$). The age of disclosing one's personal story was also significantly lower than the age they started to discuss commemoration with their children ($p > 0.05$) and significantly lower than the age their children started attending commemoration ($p > 0.001$). Similarly, the age they started discussing the genocide commemoration with their children was significantly lower than the age their children started attending commemoration ($p > 0.001$). The age parents reported their children learning about the genocide in school was significantly higher than the age for discussing the genocide at home ($p > 0.05$), however, parents would like their children to start learning in school at 11 years, which was not significantly different from the age they believe children should start discussing the genocide at home.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a difference in the age at which children learn about the genocide through private spheres (parental disclosure) and public spheres (exposure to commemoration and learning in school). This hypothesis is supported by the data as it seems that parents share information at home significantly earlier than they allow their children to be exposed to outside or official information at commemoration events and earlier than children learn about the genocide in school.

The Relationships between Exposure to Private and Public Sources of Information and Parent-Reported Child Outcomes

To answer the third research question which sought to examine the relationship between exposure to different sources of information and parent-reported child outcomes, participants were asked how often they experienced behavioural, mental health, communication, social (e.g. bullying, fighting, exclusion), education and other problems in their children. The most frequently cited challenge experienced always, regularly or

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sometimes was behavioural (37.9%), followed by educational (32.5%), communication (24.4%), mental health (16.1%) social (7.6%) and other (25.4%) challenges. Participants were also asked a more general question about challenges to parenting that they believed were directly related to their personal history of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and related experiences. In response to this question, 62.2% reported that they always, regularly or sometimes experienced such challenges.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, a Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to explore the relationship between private and public channels of exposure to genocide history and parent-reported child problem outcomes. The analysis was carried out on responses to the following: questions about private sources of information: (“Do you discuss your personal history of experiences linked to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi with your children? rated on a 5-point likert scale from “frequently discuss” to “never discuss”); questions about public sources of information (“Do your children or does your child participate in annual commemoration events about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi?” rated on 5-point scale from “always” to “never”; “Do your children or does your child watch or listen to genocide commemoration events on the television or radio?” rated on 5-point from “always” to “never”; “Has/have your child/children been taught about the history of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in school?” rated on 5-point scale from “definitely yes” to “definitely not”); and questions about parent-reported child outcomes (“Do you experience challenges to parenting that you believe are directly related to your personal history of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and related experiences?” rated on 5-point scale from “always” to “never”; How often do you experience the following parental challenges? Child problems linked to: behavior, mental health, communication, social life, education, other, all rated on a 5-point scale from “always” to “never”).

Table 9

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Correlation of channels (private and public) for exposing children to the genocide and parent-reported child outcomes

	Parental disclosure	Attended commem.	Watch/listen to commem.	Taught in school	Challenge due to genocide	Behavior	Mental Health	Communication	Social	Education	Other
Parental disclosure	1										
Attended commem.	.473**	1									
Watch/listen to commem.	.426**	.537**	1								
Taught in school	.456**	.391**	.381**	1							
Challenge/gen	.302*	.406**	.237**	.278**	1						
Behavior	.10	.241**	.032	.110	.33**	1					
Mental health	.15**	.304**	.253**	.218**	.50**	.35**	1				
Communication	.12*	.255**	.150**	.130*	.49**	.52**	.57*	1			
Social	.19**	.150**	.089	-.006	.46**	.23**	.48*	.44**	1		
Education	.17**	.225**	-.003	.169**	.32**	.43**	.19*	.29**	.48**	1	
Other	.20**	.276**	.144*	.173**	.44**	.37**	.36*	.31**	.61**	.68**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As Table 9 shows, a correlation was found between many of the channels (private and public) for exposing children to the genocide and the parent-reported child outcomes. These correlations were significant for behavior problems and attending commemoration; mental health problems and parent disclosure, attending commemoration, watching/listening to commemoration, and being taught in school; communication problems and parent disclosure, attending commemoration, watching/listening to commemoration and being taught in school; social problems and parent disclosure and attending commemoration; education problems and parent disclosure, attending commemoration and being taught in school; and other problems and parent disclosure, attending commemoration, watching/listening to commemoration and

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being taught in school. A significant correlation was also found between all disclosure variables (private and public) and the general question about parental challenges linked to the genocide.

Hypotheses 2 predicted that there is a positive correlation between children learning about the genocide in the private sphere (parental disclosure) and parent-reported child problem outcomes; and Hypothesis 3 predicted that there is a positive correlation between children learning about the genocide in the public sphere (attendance at commemorations, media coverage of commemorations, school education) and parent-reported child problem outcomes. The data suggested that the more children are exposed to information about the genocide (whether private through personal stories or public through attending commemoration, watching/listening to commemoration or learning in school), the greater likelihood of parents reporting a range of problem outcomes in their children, supporting both Hypotheses 2 and 3.

To seek a potential explanation to these correlations, a content analysis was carried out on an open-ended question which asked parents to describe in more detail the challenges they faced as a parent/guardian after genocide. Out of the 236 parents who reported a challenge, 59% experienced financial and poverty related challenges, 13% reported child social and emotional challenges, 10% child disclosure and communication challenges, 8% single parent, widow or child-headed household and 9% other. The following two sections report the analysis of child disclosure and communication challenges, and child social and emotional challenges, both of which shed some light on the correlations noted above. As can be seen, many of the responses were related to identity problems which were frequently the result of conflicting understandings of the genocide and its history between private and public spaces.

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Parenting challenges: Disclosure and communication: As summed up by one parent, “To explain the history of Rwanda to our children is not easy, that’s the challenge I faced”. This difficulty surrounding disclosure and education of children was reiterated by another parent who noted:

The challenge we have is to answer the questions our children ask us about our history; it is still complicated to them. We don’t have any support as survivors so we need support especially advice, [this] is more important.

Some parents felt under pressure to disclose and educate their children about the genocide before they receive information from community sources. As one parent explained, “the problem is that the community my children are growing in makes them grow up fast and they start asking questions, questions which I am not ready to answer”. In another case, the source of such exogenous information came from school: “the challenge was to explain every question he would ask about the Genocide against Tutsi because he had many questions from school.” A third parent mentioned additional information coming from commemoration as well as survivor organizations:

It is difficult (almost impossible) for me to control what my children know and the information they get. With commemoration events, survivor associations, and other groups... I get the impression that my children are growing up too fast. Sometimes, because of what they have heard, they ask me questions that I am not even ready to answer, but I answer them, fearing that they can learn it from someone else.

As a result of abundant external information, many parents felt pushed into a conversation before they were ready. With so much public discussion, in school, commemoration and through associations, parents felt challenged to control the genocide information their children were exposed to while also managing the political sensitivity of this history. For example, information available to children outside the home could be perceived as politically

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incorrect. One person shared, for example, the challenge of finding “sufficient answers to issues that children imitate from society, mostly questions about who is a Hutu or Tutsi in our present generation”. Such questions, which are interpreted as being “imitated” or deriving from society, may raise fear of defying the national agenda of a unified identity and of violating new norms and laws prohibiting such discussions. In a similar vein, another respondent described difficulties linked to “the interference of culture between Rwandans and refugees from the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo] [and the need to] hide the true history of Rwanda from children which brings some negative effects to them.” Presumably, this person is referring to (predominantly Hutu) refugees who fled to the DRC after the genocide and who may have a narrative of events which contradicts the official version. Perhaps the parent is concerned with the need to protect the children from repeating such stories in such a politically sensitive context.

Parenting challenge: Children’s social and emotional life: A frequently cited parental challenge related to how to support children emotionally in the context of genocide history. As one respondent explained:

My children are still very much affected by the history of genocide, even the young ones who were not yet born in 1994. Mostly in the commemoration period, there is usually a high tension in our house because of trauma cases.

Genocide history was also identified as a topic that was difficult to talk to children about as can be seen in this response:

Parenting children needs many things which are not easy. I, personally... it was not easy when my children were young to teach them humanity and explain the history of Rwanda, like who is Tutsi who is Hutu [and] what is the difference between them.

Identity challenges for children were highlighted as a core concern of parents. As one parent explained, “The biggest challenge I face is the community in which they are growing. They

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are facing an identity crisis. They want to identify themselves in relation to the history of the genocide, and this scares me.” A few respondents (survivors) expressed concerns about their children learning to identify as survivors, as can be seen in the following:

I am always worried that some of the solutions implemented to help genocide survivors can now be a problem to this new generation. For example, there is a students' association called AERG which is an association of students who survived the genocide. Its initiation used to be very useful and important, but it is very irrelevant to our children today. It makes me feel sad when I hear my children identifying themselves as genocide survivors ... sometimes I just think that it is because they don't know what they are talking about.

This concern about children socially identifying as genocide survivors was reiterated by another parent, who noted:

My community has turned the fact that I am a genocide survivor into something that benefits me, and the worst thing is that this is also affecting my children. Wherever they go, my children present themselves as genocide survivors in the hope of getting a favor or being treated differently. The problem with this is that I am worried about their future; how will they be one and unite as Rwandans when they are still setting themselves apart as genocide survivors - and they weren't even born in 1994.

In other cases, identity challenges were the result of social tensions caused by community members identifying children through the lens of the genocide, as expressed in the following two examples:

I am one of those who committed the genocide. I served my sentence in prison and I was released and sent back to my community. Even though I asked for forgiveness and have been forgiven, I always have a feeling that people are scared of me and my

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family. Sometimes my children ask me why they can go visit their friends, but the friends never come to visit them.

After the genocide I was innocently accused of committing the genocide. I was sent to prison for some time then released, but even considering the fact that I was declared innocent, I never regained the trust of my neighbors. I can't borrow anything from anyone, no child can come play with my child at my place.

In some cases, identifying with the genocide has caused children to turn against their parents or against society, as can be seen in the following:

I am among those who committed the genocide. I served my sentence and have been released. But the challenge is that in the community I live in some people can still identify me as a killer. Worse still, even my own children do not trust me and, when we argue about something, one of them can tell me that I cannot tell him what to do because I am a killer.

Since the previous commemoration period [my son] went back and he is living in a place where we used to stay before 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. My son watches killers' movies, he even has a plan to join the army and take revenge against the killers of my husband. My son was supposed to join university but because of his situation he has now dropped out of the school.

Embedded in some of these concerns is the social and emotional challenge for children in positioning themselves with respect to the genocide, which, in some cases, is expressed as a fear of children violating the government's vision of a united Rwanda.

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Overall, these qualitative responses suggest that explaining/disclosing history to children constitutes a challenge for parents as does supporting children in the context of such history.

Discussion

This study set out to determine the degree of exposure of Rwandan children to different sources of information about the genocide through private and public channels, to determine the differences in age at which children are exposed to the genocide through these different channels, and the impact of such exposure on parent-reported child outcomes.

The results suggest that, in the private sphere, parents are discussing the genocide with their children, contradicting the notion of Rwandans as “silent” people who have “cordoned off” the genocide (Burnet, 2012, p. 78). The results also show that parents allow their children to be exposed to information through the public sphere, including allowing them to attend commemoration, to watch or listen to commemoration events through the media, and to discuss commemoration events. Children are also learning about the genocide in school. The data suggest, however, that parents share information at home significantly earlier than they allow their children to be exposed to outside or official information at commemoration events and significantly earlier than the children learn in school. This supported our first hypothesis, that there is a difference in the age at which children learn about the genocide through private spheres (parental disclosure) and public spheres (commemoration, school).

The finding that parents disclose their personal experiences of genocide at home earlier than they allow their children to be exposed to official information may be a pacing or information management strategy to ensure children learn about the genocide within the trusted relational context of home where the parent can control the narrative, a strategy noted in other post-conflict contexts (Shanahan & Veale, 2016).

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We also hypothesized that exposure to both private and public sources of information would result in an increase in parent-reported child problem outcomes (Hypotheses 2 and 3), given the complex political environment and therefore likelihood of incongruence between these sources of information; previous research suggested incongruence between stories lived and stories told resulted in poorer outcomes for children (Dalgard et al., 2015). A significant correlation was found between the channels (private and public) for exposing children to the genocide and parent-reported child problem outcomes including child mental health, communication, social, education, and other problems in children.

To further explore this relationship between disclosure and parent-reported child outcomes, a content analysis was conducted on qualitative responses describing challenges in children. The results of this analysis suggested that this correlation may be the result of incongruent understandings of the genocide and its history between private and public spaces. Contradictions between the messages being taught at home, in school and in the broader community, highlighted by Basabose and Habyarimana (2018), are likely creating a source of incongruence between children's experiences and what they are told at home. Overall, these results lend support to Dalgard et al.'s (2015) finding that incongruent information about a traumatic experience can have a detrimental impact on child outcomes (see also Montgomery, 2004). The results of this survey also corroborate Measham and Rousseau's (2010) argument that disclosure can be either beneficial or pathologizing, depending on the circumstances. While it is clear that parents want to teach their children about the genocide, it seems that the timing and manner of doing so are not necessarily within their control because children are discovering information about the genocide from the community. In a climate where official discourse denies ethnicity and yet government legitimacy centres around the history of genocide (King 2014), and where contradictory versions of history and identity

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abound, it is perhaps unsurprising that discussions of the genocide at home and in public spaces are associated with parent-reported problems in children.

The qualitative data indicate that such contradictions and the challenges of disclosure may be experienced differently depending on the identity and experiences of parents. For example, those who identified as survivors or perpetrators described quite distinct parenting challenges around trauma and identity that related to their experiences of the genocide. One of the main limitations to this study is that, for socio-legal reasons (such as the removal of ethnic groups from national ID cards, the law against divisionism, and the country's post-genocide reconstruction policies which encourage Rwandaness first as the fundamental shared identity for every Rwandan, e.g. Ndi Umunyarwanda, Agaciro, Gacaca, and the Competence-Based Curriculum), we did not ask participants to divulge their ethnic group or describe their personal experiences of the genocide. As such, we were unable to systematically analyze potential differences between parents of different ethnicities (i.e. Tutsi, Hutu or Twa) or experiential groups (e.g. survivors, perpetrators, returnees, bystanders, rescuers etc.) and the challenges they encounter when discussing the genocide with their children. Future research could seek to supplement our findings through more in-depth, qualitative approaches aimed at engaging individuals over a longer time period in order to build up trust and gain more detailed responses about the nature of what is disclosed, the effects on children and how this differs across the Rwandan population.

What this survey does highlight is that disclosure is not, on its own, the fix-all solution to the complex problems parents face. We are not suggesting that educating children about the genocide and its history is bad for children. Indeed, the vast majority of parents underscored the importance of education for preventing future violence. What we recommend, however, is an awareness of the abundant, and often conflicting, accounts of the genocide and its history

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and the need for further dialogue within communities, particularly across generations, to attempt to mitigate the potential negative effects of such contradictions on children.

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<https://www.aegitrust.org/what-we-do/activities/peace-education/>.

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