

## **Mental Health Crisis: Interpersonal Violence During COVID-19 Experience**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the contemporary problem of Interpersonal Violence in Kenyan marriages and families, especially during the COVID-19 experience, and more so in the quarantine period. The paper takes the perspective that the multiple forms of violence in Kenya are a mental health crisis. This mental health problem of interpersonal violence in the Kenyan society is mirrored in marriages and family, and that during the quarantine period violence and mental health issues became a crisis. This qualitative research is a reviews literation from authors and scholars, who wrote during COVID -19. This mental health crisis focused on problems of abuse in physical, sexual, mental, behavioral and emotional systems of living. This paper uses Bowen Family Systems theory and is applied to violence in marriage and family during COVID -19, thus this theory is applied as a cross-cultural and multicultural context. Interpersonal violence as proposed in this paper is a trans generational system by transmission; from traditional African society, and through modern, colonial and postmodern periods and systems; and into the era of COVID- 19. Using Bowen's Systems Theory, the study showed that under the stresses of COVID -19 (Mental Health Crisis), these systems of interpersonal violence as trans generational transmission of societal pathologies were more exaggerated. This study concluded that the oppressed and abused become perpetrators of interpersonal violence (though trans generational, cultural and ethnic systems of transmission) and also under stressors such as COVID- 19. The study also concludes that the best practices of counseling to marital and family systems must break the cycles of violence, abuse and oppression (from national to marital and familial systems).*

**Keywords: Mental Health; Crisis; Interpersonal Violence, Marriage and Family; Transmission; Perpetrators; and Bowen Family Systems**

## **Problem Statement**

The problems of interpersonal violence in marriage, family and society in Kenyan are rampant and growing at a muritic speed. This study sought to connect the mental health problems, especially, interpersonal violence to COVID -19 Quarantine.

## **Population and Location of the Study**

Under review were researchers and scholars worldwide and in Kenya. Also analyzed and synthesized were historic systems of interpersonal violence in Kenya. The paper discusses recent studies on mental health crisis and the definitions, meaning and effects of relational violence and as relates to COVID -19 experience. The paper uses Bowen Family Systems theory, with its nine concepts to understand the systems of violence; transmissions, causes and effects and their connections interpersonal violence and relationship to COVID-19 experiences in the family relationships.

## **Objectives of this Research on Interpersonal Violence**

1. The overall objective was to investigate and do a literature review on interpersonal violence during the COVID-19 period, especially during the closedown and quarantine.
2. The other objective was to establish connection between interpersonal violence and COVID -19 and mental health crisis
3. The other objective was to establish connection between the history of interpersonal violence in Kenyan history and contemporary systems of interpersonal violence and mental health crisis in the era of COVID-19.
4. The other objective is to interpret interpersonal violence from Bowen's Systems Theory; and for the purposes of understanding, prevention and intervention in counseling.

## **Method of Study**

This paper uses the qualitative method in literature review while the design is simple purposeful with random techniques of getting paper writers and scholars in Kenya and worldwide; all towards the purpose of getting data related to the problems of mental health crisis and COVID-19 experiences.

### Significance of the Study

This study will give data to counselors, pastors, teachers, lecturers and policy makers information to serve humanity in our contemporary times.

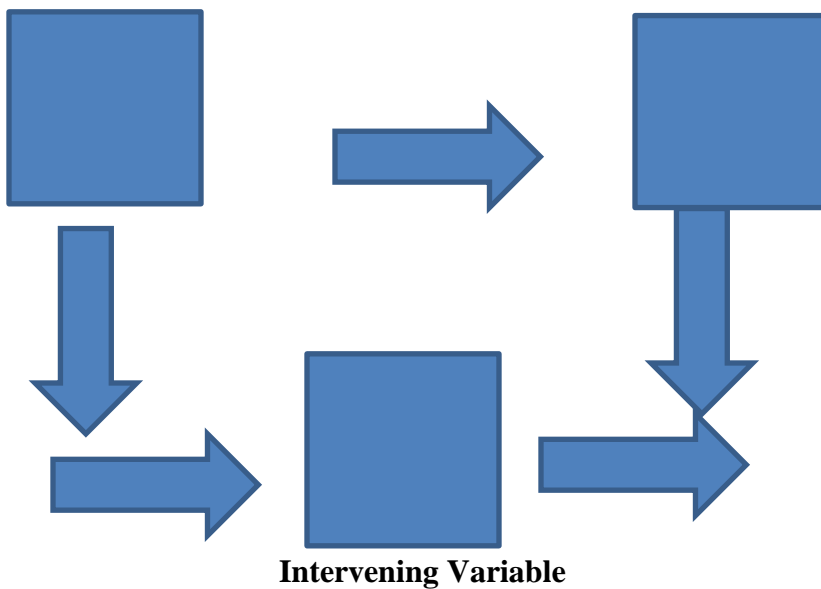
### Conceptual Framework: Figure 1

**Primary Variable**

**Secondary Variable**

**Mental Health**

**Mental Health Crisis COVID-19**



**Intervening Variable**

**Bowen's Systems Theory and Counseling**

### Interpersonal Violence: Definition and Causes

Mazza, et al<sup>1</sup> are helpful in defining Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as physical and/or sexual violence, emotional abuse and stalking; and also connected and called domestic violence. These authors discuss the causes of interpersonal violence and intimate that interpersonal violence is caused by: feelings of frustration, agitation and aggression; trans generational transmission of

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<sup>1</sup> Mazza, et al, 2020, *Danger in Danger: Interpersonal Violence During COVID 19 Quarantine* in Online Publication, Institute of Psychiatry and Psychology, Rome, Italy.

trauma and violence; and abused children also become abusers in adulthood. Labrum, et al<sup>2</sup> argue that personal violence is also connected and perpetuated by persons who have psychiatric disorders. Lessard et al<sup>3</sup> also argue that parents who are drug abusers have parenting problems; also they have parenting problems; and are unable to meet the needs of their children; and also become perpetrators of violence. Gruhn and Compass, 2020<sup>4</sup> argue that due to COVID-19, there were dynamics of poor emotional regulation; poor defense systems were used, including avoidance and emotional suppression.

### **Dynamics of Victimization in Interpersonal Violence**

Drapkin and Viano<sup>5</sup>, argue that victims of interpersonal are subjected to oppression, deprivation, suffering and manipulation. Miller<sup>6</sup> argues that victimization and victims have to be understood within “sociological processes of change”, especially in relation to change of values. Miller<sup>7</sup> further argues and for our purposes, about the victims of institutional and cultural patterns (victims of cultural and ethnic violence) and in relationship to historicity. Miller’s victimology can be interpreted for victims of cultural and ethnic violence. Victims of ethnic and cultural violence are characterized by experiences of powerlessness, stripping off power to be and to make choices, stereotyping, narrow definition of roles, inappropriate defining of roles and functions, constriction of interactions, constrictions of operating in their environments and changes in status are seized. On the other hand, the oppressed through violence also become oppressors, therefore victims of violence become perpetrators of cycles of violence.

Miller<sup>8</sup> argues that victims’ interpersonal violence also struggle with a range of emotions, including anger, grief, guilt, shame and anxiety. Kenyans from the three eras and ethos (traditional, modern and postmodern) have been victims of violence and also perpetrators of

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<sup>2</sup> Labrum, et al, 2020, *Victimization and Perpetration of Violence Involving Persons with Mood and Other Psychiatric Disorders and Their Relatives*, Published Online, Psychiatr, Serv. Appi.ps.2020 (Google Scholar)

<sup>3</sup> Lessard, et al, 2020, *How Adolescents, Mother and Fathers Qualitatively Describe Their Experiences as Co-Current Problems: Intimate Partner Violence, Mental Health, and Substance abuse*, J. Interpers. Violence. 2020. (Google Scholar).

<sup>4</sup> Gruhn and Compass, 2020, *Effects of Maltreatment on Coping and Emotional Regulation in childhood and adolescence*. Child Abuse.Negl.2020 (Google Scholar).

<sup>5</sup> Drapkin, I and Viano E., Eds. in *Victimology: A New Focus, 5 Volumes*, 1974

<sup>6</sup> Miller, D. E., “Victimization,” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, 1990:1301-1303*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Miller, *Victimology*, 1974: 1301-1303

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Miller, *Victimology*, 1974: 1301-1303.

violence and their most expressed feeling is anger; turned inward, they are victims of depression; and turned outward, they are victims of violence directed to other persons. Njogu and Wafula<sup>9</sup> show that political violence in the 2013 elections had two concerns: a democratic process which is both inclusive and representative; and resolution of deep seated ethnic claims and grievances. But political violence in Kenya works hand in hand with ethnic and cultural wars, “a strong ethnic dimension, with polarization and divisions along ethnic, economic, regional and other cleavages being a common feature.”<sup>10</sup> Meaning that; violence in Kenya is used to achieve particular goals (long-term and short-term); violence is perpetuated by collective frustration and aggressive tendencies; violence is fueled by internal conflicts; violence is fueled by long-term feelings of “stuckness” and lack of change; and contradictions in community operations where common good and individual good are mixed with disparities between the rich and poor, impunity and corruption.

### **Background Information to Interpersonal Violence in Kenya History**

We divide the Kenyan victims of violence into four types: victims who have inflicted violence on themselves (abusers of alcohol, drugs and other substances and suicide); victims of institutional violence (ethnic violence, cultural violence, family violence, kinship violence, gender-based violence); victims of group and intergroup violence (political violence, economic violence, philosophical violence, and gang violence); and victims of personal assault (rape violence, physical violence, murder by husband and vice versa, female and male genital mutilation, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, wife and husband battering and child abuse). Violence and victims of violence in Kenya is becoming complex day by day (politically-based, religious-based, social-based, gender-based, family-based, class-based, economic-based, terrorist-based and sexual-based).

### **Traditional (Premodern) Era and Violence: Before Colonization of Kenya (Before Berlin Conference, 1885)**

First, Kenyan life was informed by the traditional ethos, customs, proverbs and values, both ethnic and cultural. These traditional systems of guidance to functioning were orally transmitted rules of living. Traditions were seen as the authoritative source of knowledge about functioning,

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<sup>9</sup> Njogu and Wafula, *Kenya's 2013 General Election*, 2015: 17

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and that dictated what was violence and not violence, what was healthy and optimal and what were pathological, unhealthy and harming human life of individuals and their communities of embeddedness. This traditional system of life is viewed by Kenyans as comprehensive, unified and connected; and as “good old days,” “old African order” and period of peace.<sup>11</sup> This traditional system was also viewed as humane, spiritual, meaningful, fulfilling, purposeful, cohesive, orderly and relational. Njuguna<sup>12</sup> also mentions that there were “skirmishes, alliances and raids.” Culture and ethnicity were the source of an integrated identity for persons and their communities of embeddedness. We argue that, ethnicity and culture as traditional systems of life were also based on patriarchal systems, the birth bed of violence. The “WE-Ethos” of this era in Kenya can be criticized to silencing the “I-Ethos” that came with modernity, especially for women and children. Violence at all levels in this era was intertwined with the structures and systems of family, ethnic community and cultural functioning. The structural systems of “silencing” and systems of violence against the “I” of women and children built an inner anger, shame and guilt as well intolerance, emotional fusion, hate, self-disregard, shame and guilt in response to the abuses, mainly by men in the family and in the name of family kinship, ethnicity and culture. It seems to us that, the perpetrators of violence were not only sadistic and masochistic individuals but also that the community devalued its own women and children in the name of keeping the status quo of ethnicity and culture.

### **Modern Era and Violence: After 1900-1950, Colonization, Modernization and Christianization**

The second level of Kenya life is that of modernity. This era and ethos was both a “blessing” and a “curse.” On one side, modernization, Christianization and democratization was a blessing as Kenya was exposed to the other worlds. Modernity around the world began with the triumph of “critical rationality, social struggle over authority (political and religious, horizontal dualism).”<sup>13</sup> The modern ways of life that came to Kenya involved Westernized expansionism of the empires and their systems of operation, including colonization and its systems oppression, exploitation and abuses; and new economic systems that produced classism and neighborhoods, rural and urban communities. As much as modernity affirmed new systems order, unity, coherence,

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<sup>11</sup>Njuguna, *Kenya: Down Memory Lane*, 2015: 14-43.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Njuguna, *Kenya: Down Memory Lane*, 2015: 16.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, in *Postmodern Theology*, 1989:3-8.

progression, situationist solutions and a new form of spirituality, this ethos became the second level of violence. Modernity also came to Kenya with the glorification of individualism, “I”, materialism and quest for power, all became the birth bed of communal and individual forms of violence. This modern era in Kenya saw abuse, exploitation, divide and rule, negative stereotyping, tribalism and a class system where the power of the “powerful” continues to be the thorn in the flesh of Kenyans. The insider-outsider mentalities of this era in Kenya demonstrated the strength to emit violence on legal basis. These legalized systems of violence (*de jure* systems of violence) were added to the preexisting traditional systems of violence, especially against women and children. Violence through governance and dislocation of persons by the British governor in Kenya was also legalization of violence.<sup>14</sup> The other issue related to individual and communal violence is “Bible on one hand and the gun on the other”, or *Gutiri muthungu na Mubea*- Mentality, meaning there is no difference between the priest and the colonialist.”<sup>15</sup> The first anti-violence issue led by some missionaries was “women circumcision”, namely, Female Genital Mutilation.<sup>16</sup> The second set of anti-violence issues led by some missionaries was forced labor, Mau Mau Oaths, polygamy and dowry, witchcraft and consulting with traditional healers.<sup>17</sup> The third anti-violence issue was an all war (*de facto* system of violence) by the Mau Mau and other groups of men and women who decided to fight against White oppression and occupation of Kenya as a colony. What can be observed from the modern era is that, there was violence by individual to individual and legal systems of imperial violence which was perpetuated by the British government system to the local Kenyan community. This violence was physical, social, religious, functional, economic, linguistic, mental and philosophical. We can also observe violence meted on women and violence metered on men, or on both men and women increased in intensity.<sup>18</sup> We can also observe that, modernization, democratization and Christianization did not break down the systems of ethnic and cultural violence as perpetrated in the traditional era. We can also observe that fighting for individual and community rights had escalated into other forms of violence such as ideological, economic, political and religious

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<sup>14</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*: 2005:1-31 and Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire*, 2006: 1-53.

<sup>15</sup> Njuguna, Kenya, 2015: 71-89.

<sup>16</sup> Njuguna, Kenya, 2015: 54-57.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Elkins, Caroline, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005: 31-368.

violence.<sup>19</sup> As the new colonial Kenya evolved and developed; colonial systems of violence were being born and hidden in legal systems of the state (disruption of life, disunity among Kenyans and isolation; causing further friction, exploitation and indignity).<sup>20</sup> A new consciousness “I-ism” was also being born and nurtured as individual voices were grown; individual rights and communal rights also came with the new consciousness.<sup>21</sup> This new consciousness also involved questions of land ownership and governance at the national level, both of which were now understood as critical issues.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the second world war (1948), this new consciousness started to burn like fire and a new communal neurosis erupted among Kenyans as they fought colonial dictatorship, indifference, reign of terror, use of detentions and extermination and administrations that repressed, abused and used social racism to propagate. As the abused become abusers, Kenyans now started to fight the colonizers. Ikenye and Malomba<sup>23</sup> argue that the control by the colonizers had gotten to systems of dehumanization and Kenyans had to reclaim respect, dignity and values; and an all-round emancipation (political, economic, social and spiritual). These freedoms were ushered into Kenyan life at Independence on 12 December 1964. We argue that, political independence did not break down the systems and cycles of violence as perpetrated in traditional and modern era, instead more forms of violence are being experienced by Kenya.

### **Postmodernity (1990 to Present Day) and Violence: Paradoxical Experience of Freedom and Bondage**

Third, postmodern ways of life in Kenya have rejected both “traditionalism and modernism” as orders for living, yet traditional ways of life govern the hearts of many Kenyans, especially in time of personal and communal crisis and pain. Kenyan life is now postcolonial with new systems of government per Kenya 2010 Constitution: Executive, Legislative, Justice and Public

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<sup>19</sup>Mveng, Englebert, “Christianity and the Religious Culture of Africa,” in Best, Kenneth Y. Edt. *African Challenge*. Nairobi, Kenya: All Africa Conference of Churches, 1975:1-24.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, David, *Stories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the end of the Empire*. London: Phoenix, 2005:41-53,289-327; and Kenyatta, *Suffering Without Bitterness*, Forward, 1968: v-xvii.

<sup>21</sup>Preface, Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 2005: xi-xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Kenyatta, 1968: 332-339.

<sup>23</sup> Ikenye, *Decolonization of the Kenyan soul*, 2002: 14-21 and Malomba, “Decolonization: A Theoretical Perspective” in Ogot and Ochieng, Edits., *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya*, 1995:7-24



Service. There is an underlying system of life, namely, neo-colonial life, where one feels that the colonialists have a lot of power over the Kenya government. Postmodernity as postcolonial reality in Kenya came with “subjective knowing” which is relational, conversational, and functional. Postmodernity became the third birth place of the present systems of violence in all parts of life: social, functional, economic, familial, relational, political, religious, ideological and philosophical. With these new forms of knowing and commitments, postmodernity in Kenya came with blurred systems that produced crisis of personal, communal and legal functioning and boundaries, crisis of identity, lack of differentiation (breakdown of id, ego and superego boundaries) and the systems of the painful unconscious systems continued to flow from underneath) and violence was now being acted out (violence against others) and acted in (violence against self) at all levels in individual, familial, communal and national life.

Three Kenya systems (traditional, modern and postmodern) in history, ethos and eras show that violence is a complex and multidimensional reality in personal, communal and national life. The magnitude of life changes in Kenya shows that systems of violence and more specifically, communal, individual, marital and familial forms of violence are born and yet with a history, continuation and propagation. As postmodernity took root in Kenyan life, it was characterized by new possibilities for women and men; new responsibilities emerged; and shifts in the operational paradigm brought challenges that are far reaching in individual, familial, communal and national functioning.<sup>24</sup> The internalized systems of violence (traditional, modern and legal) and primitive systems of acting-out in violence, and violence of doubt and skepticism became more hidden (what was said and done remained different from the hidden systems of violence, and political correctness of the political class and the powerfully privileged, remained violent and systems of violence at home and in the work place and at the national level remained. Meaning that postcolonial and postmodern reconstructionalism of national, cultural and ethnic levels is at the manifest level. As we popularly say, the devil is in the details. Kenya’s people today are more violent than before.<sup>25</sup> This research has discovered that violence and reactionism continues to

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<sup>24</sup>Ochieng, William R, “Structural and Political Changes” and Maxon, Robert M. “Social and Cultural Changes,” in Ogot, B.A. and Ochieng, W.R., Edits., *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya: 1940-93*, Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1996: 83-147.

<sup>25</sup> Ikenye, Ndung’u, *Decolonization of the Kenyan Soul: Theory and Practice of Minding the Collective and Individual Soul*, Nairobi, Kenya: Envoy Graphics and Print Systems, 2002: 14-

increase in 2018 and 2019, and that ethnic and cultural hyphens, self-other, insider-outsider, we-they systems increase animosity and continue to heighten multiple forms of violence. Meaning that, Kenyans wear the mask “we are all equal and inclusive,” but in reality violence is evident; divide and rule is evident; rich and poor and class systems divide, and rulers and ruled exist; all of which propagate systems of violence at individual, familial, marital, communal and national level.

### **Interpersonal, Relational Violence and COVID-19 in Kenya**

Decker et al<sup>26</sup> research on Gender-Based Violence during COVID -19 among adolescent girls and young women in Nairobi and reported an increase of (GBV), especially those of ages 15-24. These systems of violence were characterized by conflicts, problems of traditional gender roles, emotional stressors, economic stressors, tensions, injury and deaths, physical and sexual violence, homicides, limited mobility, social isolation, and increased time with potential abusers, lack of privacy and loss of safety. These same problems were researched by the World Health Organization,<sup>27</sup> available; <https://aaps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665> and Google Scholar. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Kenya Ministry of Health, Kenya National AIDS Control Council and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and Department of Children’s Services also did studies that showed an increase in violence against women and children.<sup>28</sup> The responses to the COVID -19 related to Intimate Partner Violence was discussed by WHO.<sup>29</sup> Frontiers also did a study in Kenya and Uganda on the impact of COVID -19 on Gender- Based Violence<sup>30</sup> and reported increased vulnerability of women, children and girls and also characterized by social isolation, economic insecurity, and breakdown of public services. This study also showed that

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21.; Chemorion, D.C., Esther Mombo and C.B. Peter, *Contested Space: Ethnicity and Religion in Kenya*, Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa Ltd., 2013: 99-200; and Njogu, Kimani and Wekesa, Peter Wafula, Edits., *Kenya’s 2013 General Election: Stakes, Practices and Outcomes*, Nairobi, Kenya: Twaweza Publications Ltd., : 16-31, 48-63, 112-123.

<sup>26</sup> Decker et al, 2020, BMJ Global Health

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization, 2007<sup>27</sup>, available; <https://aaps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665> and Google Scholar

<sup>28</sup> National Survey, 2019, Google Scholar.

<sup>29</sup> WHO, 2013, Google Scholar.

<sup>30</sup> Frontiersin.org, on Global Women’s Health, 22 January 2022, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa, by Roy et al

sexual violence, exploitation, restrictions of movement and increased interpersonal and economic stressors were related and on the increase.

### **Bowen's Systems Approach to the Culture of Interpersonal Violence in Kenya Today: COVID-19 Interpretations of Causes and Effects**

Kenya as a national government, under the constitution with four arms<sup>31</sup>: President being the head of the executive branch and public service; Speakers heading Senate and Parliament as the Legislature; Chief Justice heading the judiciary; and devolved governments headed by Governors. The argument presented by scholars and politicians is that these four arms of governing Kenya, since independence have not been an “impartial arbiter”<sup>32</sup> Kenya for the last fifty-four (54) years as an independent nation from British colonization has grown and promoted multiple systems of growth and development and efficiency and yet she has continued the colonial legacy of multiple forms of violence. Kenyans in public and private discourse continue sending messages of contradiction on culture and ethnicity that perpetuate the glorification of violence. One of our basic assumptions in this paper is that colonization and decolonization as well as ethnicity and culture affect all departments of life (personal and communal), including systems of interpersonal violence. Our holistic approach to African life was proposed by Mbiti and supported by Nichols and Schwartz<sup>33</sup> and this approach involves all departments of life. Bowen Family Systems<sup>34</sup> is discussed and interpreted and in our contexts of study in this paper is applied to multiple systems of violence. We have concluded that violence in Kenya involves individual and communal systems of feelings, thoughts, attitudes, attachments in relationships and functioning as a whole. We have also concluded that life in the postcolonial times as a whole is systemic and multidimensional and therefore functioning is connected to systemic capabilities and regulations in changing times. Life in Kenya also has to do with systems of nature, nurture, development, transmissions and interactions to inform functioning systems. Meaning that, multiple forms of violence as shown in this research affects and is affected by psychosocial and

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<sup>31</sup> Kenya Constitution, 2010: 17-19.

<sup>32</sup> Okoth and Ogot, Edits. *Conflicts in Contemporary Africa*, 2000:2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1979:2-5 and Nichols and Schwartz, *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*, 2002:366-305 and Nichols and Schwartz, *Marital Therapy: An Integrative Approach*, 1988:43-48).

<sup>34</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 1985: 103-240, 285-450 and Jacobson and Gurman, Edits., *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 1995: 11-23.

biological perspectives, (heredity, nurture and development) and humanistic perspectives (love of one another, natural erotic instincts and natural loss of love that leads to anger and violence, thonic instincts); all affecting strategies and structures of being and functioning as well as experiences, cognition, behavior and solving of problems and spiritual functioning. This also means that multiple facets violence has to do with transmissions, from traditional culture and ethnicity (traditional Kenyan culture had systems of violence); to modernity (colonial experience was an experience of ethnic and cultural violence at personal and collective level). Kenyan experience of postcolonial life has continued to propagate colonial and traditional systems of violence. These experiences of violence are connected to individual, communal and national anxiety. Manifestations of this anxiety (physical and psychological) include “wariness, suspicion, physical tensions, fatigue and irritability.”<sup>35</sup>

Bowen Family Systems theory<sup>36</sup> and its nine concepts (differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional system, family projection process, emotional cutoff, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, societal regression and systems of anxiety) demonstrate that systems approach to interpersonal violence in Kenya is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes and effects.<sup>37</sup> Meaning that violence affects the functioning of individuals and communities, in terms of their lack of capacities for separating emotional and intellectual systems ideal functional systems and relationships. Anxiety not only affects differentiation in functioning but also creates triangles to manage the anxiety<sup>38</sup>. This means that an anxious person (husband, children and wife), nation, anxious individuals and anxious communities create unhealthy alliances, reactivity and problems of communication (perception, sensitivity, interpretation, behavior and personalization of issues; all of which cause and perpetuate violence. Kenyan history of violence begets violence as a projection process. Meaning that there is a

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<sup>35</sup> Nichols and Schwartz, *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*, 2002:366-305; Nichols and Schwartz, *Marital Therapy: An Integrative Approach*, 1988:43-48). Bowen Family Systems, in Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 1985: 103-240, 285-450 and Jacobson and Gurman, Edits., *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 1995: 11-23; and violence impedes ... ability to use intellectual system to guide the self through the world,” (Nichols and Schwartz, *Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods*, 2002:366-305 and Nichols and Schwartz, *Marital Therapy: An Integrative Approach*, 1988:43-48).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Bowen, *Family Therapy*: 103-240.

<sup>37</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 1985: 103-240, 285-450 and Jacobson and Gurman, Edits., *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 1995: 11-23.

<sup>38</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy*, 1985: 283-450.

history of violence in Kenyan life; societal regression (of Id, Ego and Superego systems) is an emotional and social illness attached to violence; and transmission of violence, and processes of violence from one generation to another speaks to violence from traditional, modern and into our postmodern and postcolonial times (projection and introjection of violence in marriage and family). Papero argues that anxiety in the system increases as relationships worsen and further distance, silence, avoidance, conflicts and dysfunctions increase; thus leading to more violence<sup>39</sup>. Meaning that, without “coaching to create a climate where all are involved and are close in relationships,”<sup>40</sup> dysfunctions, including violence will increase in the system. Worsened function is characterized by more distance, conflicts, loss of functioning capacities, loss of togetherness and love, reactionism and increase of irrationality (as a part of societal regression). Meaning that violence will increase and more violence systems will be born. The fourth part of this paper develops a systems integrative theory, method and model of individual and communal care, counseling and transformation of the whole (spiritual, mental, relational, attitudinal and functional adjustment) and also for the purposes of decolonization, restoring and transforming the Kenya soul (personal and communal rebirth of the soul) and healing of violence. Individual and communal care, counseling and transformation if not used, the systems of deprivation in the following systems of interpersonal violence propagated in Kenyan life means that collective violence and its systems of embeddedness are bound to escalate violence. There is enough evidence of escalation of violence which is a product of not only personal and communal discontent, frustration and complex stressors but also lived notions of poverty, injustice and unachievable goals and expectations. Our observation on African psychological anthropology shows that the systems of violence discussed below demonstrate problems of balance in the id, ego and superego. Meaning that aggression and violence will continue to grow, if systems of prevention and intervention are not put in place.

### **Family Violence and COVID-19 in Kenya**

Violence begins with the unwritten norms of family, extended family and kinship systems under the traditional, modern and postmodern ethos. We argue that following this definition of violence, “anything that results in injury to the other member of the family is violence...

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel V. Papero in Jacobson and Gurman, Edits. *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 1995: 11-23.

<sup>40</sup> Jacobson and Gurman, Edits., *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, 1995: 11-2),

physical, emotional, mental and behavioral.”<sup>41</sup> Meaning that, use of force or any form of abuse, coercion, destruction, domination, disturbance, threat and any form of violation qualifies to be violence; all these end in hurting another in the family; and takes away freedom. Mbiti<sup>42</sup> argues that family and kinship are central to the African life (being and doing), philosophy and worldview: “I am therefore we are and since we are, therefore I am.” Meaning that, balance of “I-We” is life and colonial imbalances (forced or taught) to this philosophy is violence to family and in family, and the extended family, clan and kinship system. The narratives of common origin, shared identity and a sense of belonging, oneness and togetherness which were broken down by the colonialists and missionaries did violence to the family as a whole. The shifts and prescriptions were valuations of violence and ethical violence to the Kenyan family.

Our argument is that family violence (During COVID-19), between family members (husband-wife, husband-wife children, and extended family and kinship against women and children) is all homemade. These multiple forms of violence in the family are perpetrated by intimate members(s) who are well known to the victim(s). Factors that contribute to family violence include psychosocial problems; problems of costs, reward and punishment; frustration and aggression, interacting environmental issues and learning from the culture of violence in the family or ethnic community. Our interpretation of media reports in Kenya show that; isolation and control; power differentials, especially used by the one with more resources, as powerful and one without or less resources experiences powerlessness. Violence and powerlessness produce people with substance and drug abuse; and pathological self-perception issues, including low self-image, low-self-esteem and lack of self-actualization; all bringing shame and guilt that are acted out in violence. Other issues include relational problems such as pathological disconnects and conflicts, problems in balanced functioning, reactivity, unrealistic reactivity and anxiety.

### **Bowen Systems Theory of Counseling: Prevention and Intervention in Counseling Families and Communities (During and After COVID-19 Experience)**

Bowen empathized that the counselor stance should be that of a coach, creating a climate and environment for enhancing best performance and eliciting best contribution of members and

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<sup>41</sup> Wallace, Harvey, *Family Violence: Legal, Medical and Social Perspectives*, Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005: 1-29.

<sup>42</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions*, 1969: 100-109

allowing the natural restorative processes to emerge. To successfully reach the four functions of a “Counselor Coach” we propose a five steps process system: (1) Theory of Inquiry into the presenting problem (2) Theory of the Problem, that naming the pain of the presenting problem theoretically (3) Theory of Change to the presenting problem as a counseling theory, method and practice; (4) Theory of Continuity and Action on the presenting; (5) the Management of the counseling process and relationship. These five steps are boundaries, procedures and techniques of counseling in all schools of counseling, including Bowen Systems Theory of Counseling. The four functions of the “Counselor Coach” are: (a) defining and clarifying the emotional processes between couples, members of the family, extended family and community of embeddedness; (b) keeping self detriangulated from the emotional processes of the persons involved in pathological systems; (c) teaching the functions of emotional systems, role of anxiety and meaning of interactions; and (d) demonstrating self-differentiation.

**Bowen Systems Theory of Counseling proposes the following steps in prevention and intervention in working through violence During and After COVID-19 Experience**

<b>Bowen Systems Theory of Psychopathologies in Individuals, Couples and Communities that Lead to Interpersonal Violence</b>	<b>Bowen Systems Theory of Counseling Leading to Change of Interpersonal Violence</b>
<p><b>1. Lack of Differentiation: Symbiosis, fusion, problems of separation in emotional and intellectual systems and lack of balance in togetherness and individual choice and decisions and devaluation of self definition, relatedness, caring for others, nurturing, autonomy and being driven by emotions, undifferentiated family ego-mass.</b></p>	<p><b>1. Differentiation: Coach individual family and societal members to speak and think for themselves and give their own opinions and own their own feelings; thus be a solid selves who are well differentiated.</b></p>
<p><b>2. Dysfunctional Triangles: Using a third party to maintain the pathology of the system and reduce the tension in the relationship but anxiety will increase and more interlocking triangles will be formed. Results of</b></p>	<p><b>2. Detriangulation: Coach individuals and societal members to detriangulated and reduce tension and anxiety. Teach members to know emotional processes and triangles in</b></p>

<p><b>Triangles: Further destabilization and conflict; Removal of a third party and harmonize;</b></p>	<p><b>marriage, family and society.</b></p>
<p><b>3. Dysfunctional Emotional Systems from the Nuclear Family: Emotional Fusion, Tension, Unstable in Functioning; Chronic Anxiety; Acute Anxiety; Physical and Emotional dysfunction in a spouse or child; Overt, chronic and unresolved conflict and family anxiety being absorbed by a symptomatic father, child or wife; psychological impairment in a child who is enabled by one parent or both parents</b></p>	<p><b>3. Coach, Teach and Train marital, family and community members to Reduce Tension, Maintain Stability, reduce acute or chronic anxiety and grow differentiation by balancing emotional and intellectual systems; and develop life goals and mature relationships.</b></p>
<p><b>4. Dysfunctional Family Projection Processes : Fusion among the family members and projected to one member, father, mother or child (projected and introjected); one person is most sensitive, identified patient of the system and is more prone to disturbances; parent’s immaturity in differentiation is projected to one of the children who introjects and physical and/or mental symptoms are seen in practice as transmissions of undifferentiation; use of sibling positions of parents in their family of origin; most attached child to the parent; undifferentiated parent uses projection in the nuclear family projection (overprotection and anxiety level, or infantilization of the child and child in response becomes demanding and impaired)</b></p> <p><b>5.</b></p>	<p><b>4. Coach, teach and train to care for each other within the boundaries of parental and Sibling-Sibling Dyads and develop interdependent relationships.</b></p>



<p><b>5. Emotional Cutoffs from the Family of Origin:</b> Children insulate themselves from anxiety of lack of differentiation, problems of fusion in thinking and feeling by: (a) geographical separation; (b) psychological barriers of refusing to talk to parents and self-deception of freedom from parents by breaking off emotionally. All these systems of flight are desperate efforts to resolve issues of fusion and projection (lack of differentiation). Anxiety and emotional dependency and conflicts are hidden and used in a pathological way of self-preservation and are acted out in violence (against others or against self).</p>	<p><b>5. Coaching, teaching and training will focus on healthier ways of dealing with anxiety, growing differentiation of emotional and intellectual systems; and self-deceptions in forms of acting-in or acting-out; and unfinished businesses.</b></p>
<p><b>6. Multigenerational Transmission of Pathologies:</b> Selection of wife or husband with the same level of differentiation and also lower level of differentiation assures transmission of pathologies in differentiation and emotional processes and projections (From grandparents to parents and to children). Each weak link increases problems of anxiety, fusion and dependency. Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996) argues that this vulnerability brings more dysfunctions: schizophrenia, alcoholism and psychophysical illnesses. These systems of pathology will increase to violence against self and against others.</p>	<p><b>6. Coaching, teaching and training of individuals, marriages, family and society will be geared toward developing relationships that are mature; with good enough and balanced differentiation; thus develop relationships that are more symptom-free, lesser anxiety and higher levels of differentiation.</b></p>
<p><b>7. Dysfunctional Sibling Systems (Toman, 1961):</b> Sibling position is connected to the levels of differentiation, thinking and family emotional processes. Marriage of husband and wife also duplicates levels of differentiation, anxiety, psychosocial and psychodynamics, and psychopathologies. Interactional patterns, roles-taking in marital and familial systems and societal-</p>	<p><b>7. Sibling Position and Coaching:</b> Choices of relationships, with a prospective wife or husband; choices of persons to relate to in groups must consider sibling position. These relational systems are related to sibling positions; and to avert violence, sibling position analysis is a helpful tool.</p>

<p><b>role taking are all related to the levels of differentiation and birth-order and family of origin and present nuclear family emotional systems. Meaning that, violence in marriage and family is related sibling positions and personality profiles and their characteristics.</b></p>	
<p><b>8.Societal Regression Processes: Functioning in society is related to differentiation. Thinking and emotions of society are related to differentiation. Chronic and acute anxiety in society is connected the society’s undifferentiation and emotional processes. Individual’s levels of differentiation are projected to society growth, togetherness and development. The lower the level of differentiation, the lower the society’s level of discomfort and anxiety. The level of violence in society today (political violence, religious violence, violence in marriage and family speaks to the society’s level of differentiation and problems of emotional intelligence, problems of rational decision making</b></p>	<p><b>8. Coaching against the regression of society. Coaching, teaching and training are geared toward a rational society.</b></p>
<p><b>9.Systems of Anxiety (Acute and Chronic): interactions, relying on reason, self-definition, differentiation, togetherness and driveness and decision-making, all produce anxiety; Chronic Anxiety; Acute Anxiety</b></p>	<p><b>9. Coaching Against Psychosocial Anxiety. Kenyan systems of marriage, family kinships and communities need a coach. This coach for these relational systems will focus on differentiation dynamics for functioning, use of differentiation in emotional and intellectual decisions, in addressing needs of the nation and communities.</b></p>

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The primary and overall objective of this paper was to relate the systems of contemporary violence in Kenya to violence in marital, familial and societal systems, and more specifically during and after COVID-19 experience. The study showed that the mantra: Stay safe, stay home as used by Kenya government and other world health organizations was producing opposite results: Interpersonal Violence and Gender-Based Violence, and against adolescent girls. The Interpersonal violence was reported to be characterized by isolation, loneliness, anger, aggression, depression, emotional stresses, post-traumatic disorders, alcohol abuse, legal factors, economic factors (unemployment) and political factors as well as barriers to getting help during the pandemic. The study used Bowen Family Systems theory to discuss the problems of mental health during the COVID -19 experiences, as mental health crisis. Bowen's systems theory and its nine concepts were used to discuss mental health crisis as pathologies and interventions and prevention of violence, during and after COVID -19. The study recommends coaching approaches to be used to work through the current systems of violence. The study also recommends that interpersonal violence against self and violence against others is a mental health issue and that it must be addressed in the lives of individuals, marriages, family communities and nation.

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