

## Political fallout and psychological challenges

Two recent events in Kenya have had profound psychosocial impacts, not because they are uncommon human events, but because they happened most unexpectedly, according to David Ndeti, professor of psychiatry at the University of Nairobi and founder and director of the Africa Mental Health Foundation, writing in the latest newsletter of the Pan-African division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

First was the Nairobi American Embassy Bombing on the busy Friday morning of 7 August 1998, and second were the clashes resulting from the disputed general elections of 27 December 2007.

That 1998 event had both bad and good effects, writes Ndeti. 'We are still grappling with psychotrauma related to the 1998 event and I still see patients (and I am sure other professionals still do) with related psychological complications nearly ten years down the line.'

However, he continues: 'The good side of that event is that expertise in psychosocial interventions in psychotrauma has developed very fast since then. Many degree and other level programmes have been developed as a result of awareness generated by the 1998 event. Psychiatrists and psychologists came together and have worked together inter-dependently for a common goal. The result is that Kenya has adequate human resources to tackle the psychosocial impacts of mass trauma (including that from the events following the 2007 elections) at clinical level. We even have a surplus to export.'

These two events, together with a myriad of natural disasters and other but minor man-made disasters that Kenya has continued to experience over the time, make psychotrauma psychology and psychiatry very relevant today, Ndeti concludes, adding: 'If today we still see psychotrauma related to the war of independence (the Mau-Mau rebellion) of the early 1950s, culminating in independence in 1963, then Kenya must brace for subsequent and protracted psychotrauma issues over a full generation.'

Source: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)

## Understanding generalised anxiety disorder

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), characterised by excessive anxiety and worry that affects many aspects of daily life, affects people the world over from all aspects of life.

The development of GAD is believed to be due to a combination of biological, environmental and psychological factors, and its

diagnosis is often complex due to the nature of the symptoms, some of which mimic other mental and physical disorders, as well as the co-morbid presence of other mental disorders.

GAD and its related disorders have been subjected to widespread stigma and misunderstanding – one of the most persistent and damaging myths being that it is not a real illness. In order to improve awareness of GAD the World Federation for Mental Health (WFMH) has produced an international awareness packet, providing accurate, evidence-based information on its symptoms, cultural differences, treatment, and impact on the lives of individuals who experience it and their families. The aim is to increase public understanding and awareness about GAD, and to reduce the misunderstanding and stigma that often prevent people from seeking the assistance and support that is available to them.

Early identification, diagnosis, and appropriate treatment, along with the positive support of families, friends, employers, and the community combine to make recovery possible for people with a mental disorder.

Source: [www.wfmh.org](http://www.wfmh.org)

## Music therapy may offer hope for people with depression

A therapist may be able to use music to help some patients fight depression and improve, restore and maintain their health, a Systematic Review from the Cochrane Library has found.

Four out of five relevant studies identified in the literature reported greater reduction in symptoms of depression among people who had been given music therapy than those who had been randomly assigned to a therapy group that did not involve music. The fifth study, however, did not find this effect.

'While the evidence came from a few small studies, it suggests that this is an area that is well worth further investigation and, if the use of music therapy is supported by future trials, we need to find out which forms have greatest effect,' says lead author Anna Maratos, an arts therapist who works in the Central and Northwest London Foundation NHS Trust, London, UK.

'The current studies indicate that music therapy may be able to improve mood and has low drop-out rates,' says Maratos. However, she adds: 'It is important to note that at the moment there are only a small number of relatively low-quality studies in this area, and we will only be able to be confident about the effectiveness of music therapy once some high-quality trials have been conducted.'

Source: [www.cochrane.org](http://www.cochrane.org)