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*The Trauma We Could Not Name:
Psychological Legacies of Political Violence
Across Generations*

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Introduction

- Political violence does not end when repression stops — its effects persist within families across generations.
- Descendants of political prisoners often carry trauma they struggle to name or articulate.
- Taiwan's White Terror (1949–1987): tens of thousands imprisoned or executed for political reasons; families silenced for decades.
- **Research gap: How do descendants understand and carry intergenerational political trauma in non-Western, post-authoritarian contexts?**

Research Object & Method

Research Object

Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS)
educational program:

- Documentary screening: Holocaust survivor family across three generations
- Post-screening forum with descendants of White Terror victims and a trauma researcher, led by a psychiatrist

Method

- Qualitative textual analysis
- Systematic coding of forum discourse
- Focus on how participants articulated trauma, silence, and recognition

Finding 1

Silence and Pressure to Remain Strong

- Families developed unspoken rules against expressing pain or vulnerability.
- Descendants felt pressure to be strong — to protect parents who had already suffered too much.
- Emotional expression was limited: grief, fear, and confusion were carried privately rather than shared.
- Silence functioned as both protection and imprisonment — shielding the family while trapping individual pain.

Finding 2

Psychological Manifestations in Daily Life

Insecurity

Persistent anxiety about safety and belonging within the family

Dissociation

Emotional detachment as a way of coping with unprocessed grief

Hypervigilance

Heightened alertness carried from parents' survival mode

Outsider Feelings

Sense of not fitting in — in families, communities, and broader society

Finding 3

Naming the Trauma

- Naming the trauma — putting language to previously unspeakable experiences — opened possibilities for recognition.
- Sharing in a structured, supportive space (the forum) allowed descendants to articulate what they had carried alone.
- The cross-cultural mirror — seeing a Holocaust family's experience — helped participants locate their own trauma within a broader framework.
- Recognition and language created pathways toward help-seeking that silence had blocked.

Conclusion

- Intergenerational political trauma persists through emotions, relationships, and everyday practices.
- Healing requires language, acknowledgment, and safe spaces for descendants to speak.
- Descendants must not be forced to forgive, forget, or remain close — healing happens on their own terms.
- **Structured public forums — combining media, clinical expertise, and peer sharing — can serve as meaningful intervention sites.**

Thank You

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Questions & Discussion