



Rwanda Closes Orphanages Using TBRI®

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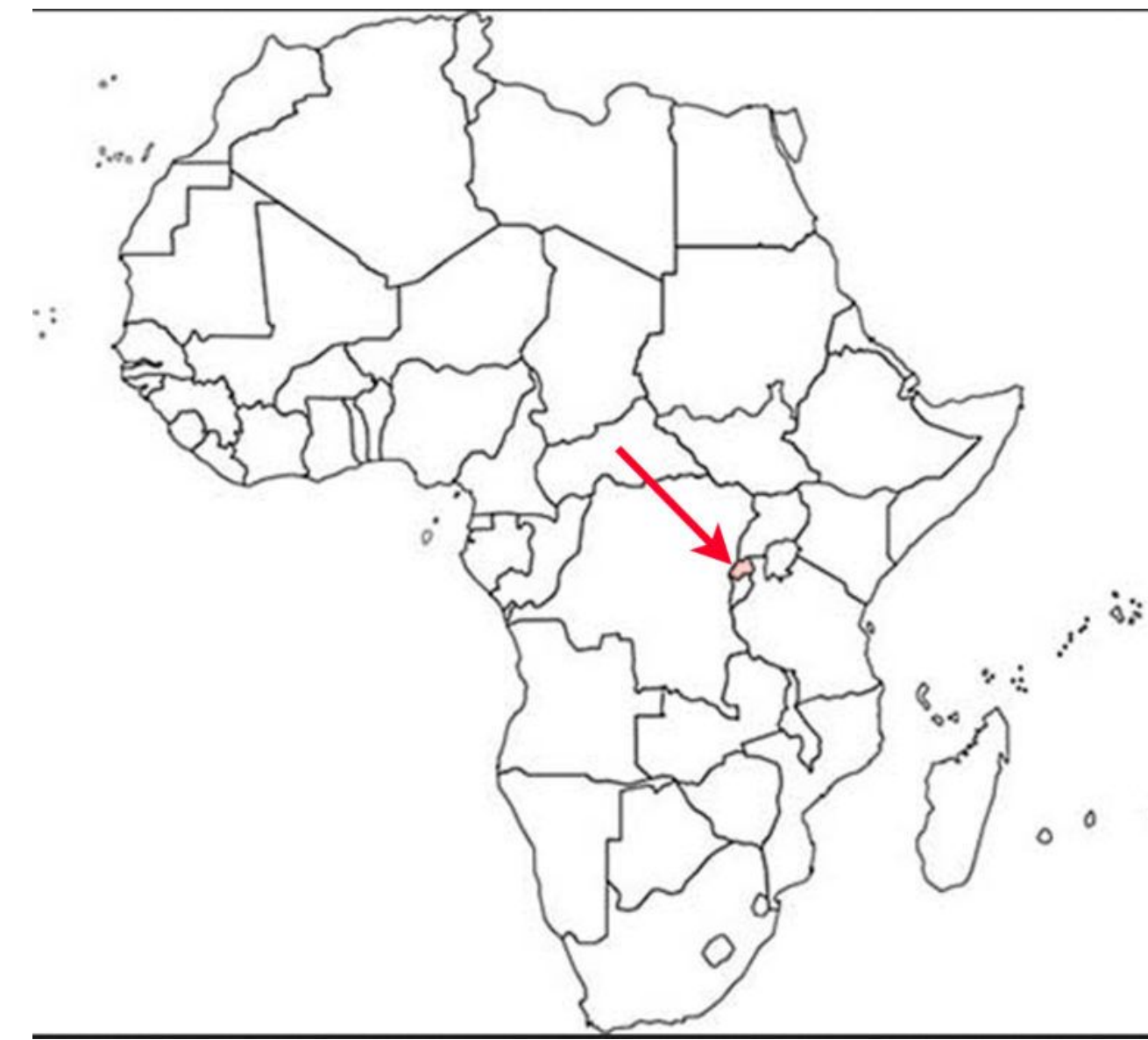
Introduction

Children who are institutionalized lack consistent and committed caregiving and are often faced with sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect (Dozier et al., 2012; Freidus, 2010). These traumatic experiences can negatively impact a child's development throughout the lifespan (van Der Vegt et al., 2009), leading to deficits in attachment and emotional and behavioral problems (Wilbarger et al., 2010; van den Dries et al., 2009). Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention aimed at addressing the needs of vulnerable children who have faced early-life adversity and has shown to be effective at reducing behavioral, emotional, and regulation problems (Purvis et al., 2013/2015). TBRI was used in Rwanda when orphanages were closed in 2012, and 3,323 children and young adults living in 33 registered residential care facilities were transitioned into families and adoption and life out of the orphanage (Better Care Network, 2015). The caregivers in Rwanda in the reunited and adoptive families were introduced to caregiving practices in TBRI, through the PEACE Plan that worked with the Rwandan National Commission for Children (NCC) and the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion to accomplish the goals of safe and effective TBRI caregiver training and family-based care. Using a train-the-trainer model, the PEACE Plan trained Rwandan volunteers as lay social workers in TBRI so that the lay social workers could then conduct caregiver training and provide support for the community.

Method

Rwanda began to close orphanages in 2012 and finished closing all orphanages by 2016. In order to close orphanages, Rwanda needed to find homes for every child in the orphanage. To be successful in this process, Rwanda trained potential caregivers in TBRI to equip them with the understanding of these children's needs and the parenting tools necessary to meet the needs.

The current study involves semi-structured interviews of the individuals (lay social workers) who provided the TBRI training to caregivers. Participants included 10 individuals who volunteered to be lay social workers. Lay social workers trained caregivers in TBRI, facilitated monthly support groups, and conducted home visits with their respective caseloads on a consistent basis, depending on the needs of the families on their caseload.



A research team traveled to Rwanda to complete data collection as part of a larger study. The research team consisted of individuals from both the United States and Rwanda. Data was collected at two different locations in Kibuye, a remote rural and impoverished area of Rwanda located in the Karongi district near Lake Kivu. Data was collected in Kibuye because most of the TBRI training occurred in this area.



A member of the research team who was fluent in both Kinyarwanda (the official language of Rwanda) and English conducted the semi-structured interviews in Kinyarwanda. Interview questions included the usefulness of TBRI in Rwanda, their work with families, stories of using TBRI, and cultural changes that occurred from closing orphanages. Interviews were audio-recorded, translated into English, transcribed, and analyzed using phenomenological qualitative analysis.

Results

The goal of this study was to begin to understand the use of TBRI internationally and the way TBRI was implemented in Rwanda in their work to close all orphanages. Lay social workers participated in semi-structured interviews about their TBRI use. Five themes emerged and each theme revealed several different codes.

Ownership of the Need

Adopted into Family: The participants describe that families decide to adopt because they are adopted into God's family, and they saw the need for these children to be adopted into their own family.

Lay Social Worker Choice to Support: The participants describe their choice to be a lay social worker in order to support families because they are called as Christians and as members of the Church to support one another.

"The reason that I wanted to enter this work firstly because I am a Christian and felt that God asks us to love each other and to care for each other, and he promises the Kingdom for those who serve Him."

Value of Family

Belonging: The participants describe children entering the family as becoming part of something else where they find value, identity, and role models.

Future Success: Families allow for children to learn skills that will help them survive and be successful as a member of the community. Orphan care did not give the children the skills they need to be successful in the future.

"It is a very good thing that a child can be raised in a family and they have someone that they can call their older siblings and young siblings, parents, and aunts and uncles, and it takes children out of hopeless and isolation and a child is able to socialize with others and be comfortable with themselves being with others."

Children's Need for Connection

Giving Voice: The participants understand the importance of connection in order to give voice, allowing children to express their needs in order to get their needs met and communicate about what is happening.

Time: The participants understand the value and need that children have for attention and time, and they understand the power of spending time with family.

"Once you have connected with the child and you are able to connect with them as your child, then they also start to open up to you and connect to you. And then you are able to empower them to be able to express their needs and stuff."

Power of Community

Responsibility: The people within the community share a common cause of helping children who have been adopted, and they understand the responsibility of the community to take care of the children together.

Support and Encouragement: The people within the community give support to each other by sharing experiences, going to support groups, being involved in the trainings, and encouraging each other.

Universality of TBRI: The principles of TBRI learned by the members of the community not only helped their relationships with their children, but it also helped the relationships among everyone in the community and brings the community together.

"That's why I wanted to be an approachable person and for me to also feel like I can approach others so we can work together and help each other and support each other and be community together."

Lay Social Worker as Mediator

Connection (rapport): The lay social workers build a relationship with each member of the family individually. They talk with each of them and connect with them personally.

Trauma Processing: The lay social workers help children process their past, talk about their emotions, and learn about their family of origin.

TBRI Expert: The lay social workers give advice to parents on how to utilize the TBRI principles and help problem-solve certain situations with the parents.

Improving family relationships and communication: Lay social workers help to improve the relationships and the communication within the family system and with the adopted child.

"I talk to the child and I help the parents understand what the child is going through, and I give the parents advice. And I talk to them about how they would help the child."

Discussion

The results of this study reveal five primary themes of TBRI in Rwanda: ownership of the need, value of family, children's need for connection, power of community, and lay social worker as mediator. The findings highlight the inherent value placed on relationships and community in Rwanda. This value is contrasted against the 1994 Rwanda genocide where one million Rwandans were killed; many Rwandans believe this traumatic event changed the cultural landscape of the country, helping Rwandans see the value of humanity. In implementing TBRI, Rwandans easily accepted the need to connect and the power of relationships in healing trauma.

This study also is the first to demonstrate the universality of TBRI. Not only did TBRI help the relationships within adoptive families, but it also helped strengthen the relationships in the greater community. Additionally, this study is the first international study of TBRI. Rwanda executed a country-wide model of TBRI implementation in their deinstitutionalization efforts that could be replicable in other countries and cultures.

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