

Co-preserving Young People's Knowledges in Response to Childhood Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence

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Study Overview

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a critical social and public health issue globally.
- In Rwanda, IPV prevalence rate is 46% (in Africa: 36%; Global: 30%).
- Young people (YP) experience IPV in childhood (CEIPV) through seeing, hearing, or perceiving the aftermath of violence between parents or caregivers.
- Impact: YP suffer long-term psychosocial harms.
- Research Gap: While the effects of CEIPV are well documented, how YP respond, navigate adversity, and voice their concerns remains underexplored;
- Research question: This study explored how to understand Rwandan YP's responses to CEIPV through participatory digital archiving, and whether this methodology can be useful in sharing their stories for their own and their peers' benefit.

The State of CEIPV Research

- CEIPV prevalence in Africa ranges from 9.3 to 67.8%, higher than the 8 to 25% reported from high-income countries.
- CEIPV research has mostly focused on the negative impacts on YP's mental health but not on how they respond.
- When responses are identified, they are not richly described (named, storied, historicized, and linked to broader social systems) from YP's direct voices.
- Existing research does not describe YP's responses to sensory exposure to IPV in detail.
- Researchers report limitations in research methods that privilege verbal communication alone.
- There is a need for methodological choices that allow YPs to tell their stories in ways that are important and accessible to them, particularly in Rwanda, where CEIPV remains insufficiently explored from YP perspectives.

Preliminary Findings

✦ The power of creative and participative storytelling: YP developed innovative methods for generating, preserving, and sharing their stories in ways that are important to them. They produced and archived stories in textual, oral, visual, and digital formats.

✦ Remembering & Reframing Narratives
Sharing stories helped participants reflect on personal growth and resilience. *"I realized I had made choices that shaped my life... I remembered I had committed to ending violence in my family, and I did!"* – Nelly

✦ Validation & Collective Healing from Storytelling: *"Hearing others say my story showed courage made me see myself differently."* – Kalisa

✦ Safe & Supportive Spaces Matter: Ethical storytelling with peer witnessing promoted openness, resonance and expanded meaning-making: *Majority of participants shared it helped them find vocabularies and images to illuminate experiences and strengths they had overlooked.*

✦ Secure Digital Platforms Expand Accessibility & Impact: Digital preservation provided a secure and controlled environment for sharing stories and served as a form of self-collective advocacy and a means of reaching broader audiences---*"We can use short-form content (like reels and TikToks) to raise awareness, create safe spaces, and educate communities about IPV."* – Kim

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Digital injustice/s: Access to reliable digital tools and online images that capture authentic African experiences → Advocacy for digital justice

Ethical concerns: Balancing confidentiality with the need to share stories for advocacy. → Navigating Visibility & Safety.

Implications & Future Directions

1. There's untapped potential for youth digital archives to educate policymakers, practitioners, and caregivers on CEIPV (Policy and Advocacy).
2. There's a critical need to expand digital Social Work practices to digital Justice: strengthen youth digital literacy and youth-led digital preservation CEIPV community projects (Practice).
3. Integrate findings into youth friendly and youth-led intervention programs to respond to CEIPV (Practice & Research).
4. Collaboration with schools, mental health agencies, youth centers and advocacy groups for scaling up CEIPV research (Future research).

Conclusion: By prioritizing participants' ways of knowing and putting tools directly in their hands, this study illuminated the need to co-preserve youth CEIPV stories and knowledge in ways that are important to them for greater access.

Methodology

- There is traditional wisdom in Rwanda through the proverb that asserts: "nta mukuru uribara nk'umuto wariraye" [no adult can tell a story better than the young person who lived it]. This proverb provides a relevant epistemological stance to the study as it evokes the imperative of letting YP with lived experience tell their own stories in their own ways.
- Choosing a research approach and methodology that can give space to YP's different ways of knowing (extended epistemology: whereby a knower participates in the known in at least four interconnected ways: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical knowing (Heron and Reason, 1997)).
- Participatory Digital Archiving (PDA) is a new form of PAR that shares key principles with other participatory visual and digital methods (photovoice, digital storytelling, participatory video), including collaboration, empowerment, and democratic engagement. PDA allows participants to curate and share their narratives in ways that amplify their voices and bridge knowledge beyond academic spaces. In this study, PDA was applied to center participant agency and produce multimodal, narrative-driven data.
- Study participants: Thirteen Rwandan youth mental health advocates with CEIPV joined the research team to share and document their diverse experiences of knowing, storytelling and storylistening.
- Data collection phases: (i) storytelling circles, (ii) digital archiving (preservation) and (iii) follow-up interviews/focus groups to reflect on the process.
- Rooted in a ground-up practice-research process, represented by a house metaphor:

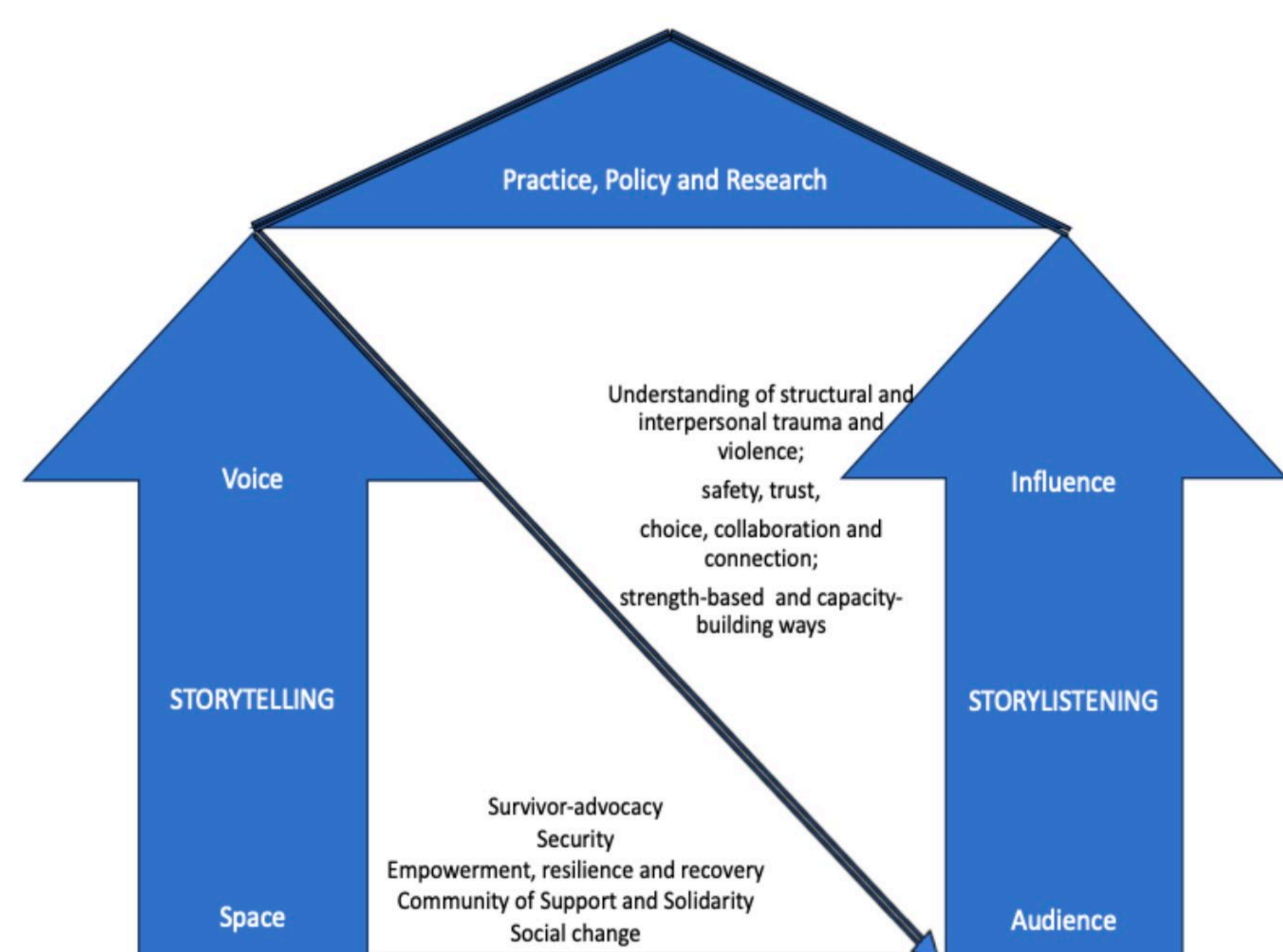


Figure 1. Narrative shelter model (Nyirinkwaya & Jenney, 2024)

- Built on the foundation of insights from the women's shelter movement: centering and amplifying YP's lived experiences, putting their safety first, and aiming at consciousness-raising,
- Pillars that include YP's rights to participation and narrative ideas,
- These are connected by the principles of Trauma and Violence-Informed Care (TVIC) to cement the structure which rises towards the ultimate to improve practice, policy, and research in CEIPV.

Scan Me - Digital Archive Exhibit!



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