

## CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

# The young victims of MNR terror

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by  
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TWO years ago "F", a nine-year-old girl, was kidnapped from her village with her father and brother by MNR bandits.

They were marched away to an MNR base and on the way she was forced to watch them hacking off her father's hands.

Thereafter, she witnessed many more brutalities, including murder and she was forced to take part in attacks on other villages. She was beaten and starved. After three months, she escaped with her father but does not know what has happened to her brother.

Today, now 11, she is preoccupied by the violence she witnessed, has nightmares, suffers from headaches, is easily startled and often fearful, particularly of men.

This harrowing account of the experience of one war-traumatised Mozambican child is contained in two reports presented to an international seminar of doctors and psychologists meeting in the northern Mozambican Indian Ocean provincial capital of Quelimane.

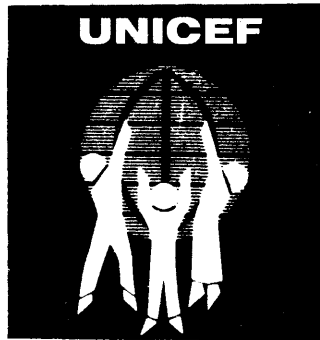
To protect their identities and to save them from further interviews by academics and journalists, the 76 children and teachers interviewed as to the effects of the war upon them are only identified by a letter. They were chosen at random.

The two preliminary reports covering the experiences of children and teachers have been produced by an eminent British child psychiatrist, Na-

omi Richman, and two Mozambicans completing masters' degrees in psychology, Anabela Ratilal and Aires Aly. All work for the Ministry of Education's Department of Special Education.

Of the 50 children interviewed, whose ages ranged from seven to 15 and whose average age was 11, at least 42 had experienced the loss of relatives or separation from their family.

Eleven had witnessed the murder of a parent, 12 the murder of a member of the family, 23 the murder of a non-family



member. Twenty-six had witnessed atrocities.

Thirty-five are now living with their extended families, six in foster homes, eight in a hostel or a home, one in a house with no adults.

The study on the 50 children categorises them as markedly, moderately or minimally affected by their experience. Only 20 percent are minimally affected by the horror they experienced.



TINY tots who have fled from MNR bandits tuck into a meal at the "February 3" reception centre in Gorongosa town.

Almost 25 percent are markedly disturbed. The remainder are described as moderately affected.

Another victim in the study is 13-year-old "A". She was kidnapped with her mother and aunt. She was stripped naked and thrown to the ground but was not willing to elaborate as to what followed.

"C" is 12 years old, living with a foster family. She was kidnapped with her family and does not know whether they are alive. She was beaten and starved, witnessed murder, torture and rape. Her worst experience, she told the interviewers, was seeing "a mound of human skeletons".

A seven-year-old girl, "D", heard the shots which killed two of her uncles. She is preoccupied by their deaths, became angry and wept when the interviewers tried to discuss them with her.

In varying ways all are traumatised, afraid of loud noises, of strangers, suffering nightmares, sleeplessness, or body pains. One sleeps in the bush at night for safety, others are prepared to run from their homes at the sound of anything unusual.

The plight of Mozambique's teachers is investigated in the second report. "Schools and

teacher training colleges are frequently looted and destroyed and teachers are particular targets of attack, usually killed if they are identified by bandits," the report states.

Twenty-six primary teachers were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 25 to 53. The average age was 30. Most now work in extremely difficult conditions with classes of 70 to 80 pupils, forced to supplement their incomes by growing food.

Only three had never been subjected to an MNR attack. The rest had been attacked at least once and several had fled attacks on five occasions.

The objective of the study is not a media or propaganda device. It is not even known to Mozambique's Press. Its intent is to seek ways of rehabilitating Mozambicans from the most unbelievable atrocities through community mental health care rooted in the primary schools.

But, it sounds a historical note:

"On the way to bases (MNR) captives are capriciously beaten, humiliated and killed in a policy reminiscent of the transport of prisoners to Nazi concentration camps, with the aim of breaking any will to resist." — SARDC.