

# Silence, Stigma, Survival: Family Disapproval and Intergenerational Trauma Transmission in the Khmer Rouge

Jenna Lee  
jennalee701@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia fell to a communist regime that snowballed into the Khmer Rouge (KR) genocide, in which approximately 1.87 million citizens were systematically murdered. The lingering aftereffects of the autogenocide remain, persisting in interpersonal communication and intergenerational trauma transmission (ITT). However, existing literature focuses largely on ITT and offspring-perceived family disapproval (FD) presence in KR as distinct spheres. The present study examines the relationship between vulnerability and resilience mechanisms of FD and ITT among descendants of KR survivors. Through a two-step exploratory sequential mixed-method research design, a qualitative hybrid content analysis first confirmed the presence of all mechanisms; afterwards, a Spearman's rank correlation coefficient analyzed the association between the quantified variables. Yet, while results indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between ITT Resilience and FD Resilience variables ( $\rho = 0.707$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), contrastingly, FD vulnerability and ITT vulnerability did not yield a significant relationship ( $\rho = -0.022$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Consequently, these results underscore that positive parent-offspring interactions not only mitigate traumatic responses but can also facilitate reconciliation processes in post-genocidal contexts. Conversely, it is also possible that a broader range of influences may exacerbate ITT vulnerability mechanisms rather than FD alone, whereby family resilience mechanisms might act as protective factors that cushion ITT vulnerability. Because families might concurrently demonstrate vulnerability and resilience, institutions might consider these concepts as distinct constructs. Future research might consider replicating this study with paired parent-offspring interviews.

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1975 and 1979, Cambodia endured one of the most horrific events of the 20th century: the Khmer Rouge (KR) genocide. The Communist Party of Kampuchea, the group that backed the Marxist KR regime, was formed in 1960 and gained popularity following the Vietnam War's mass destruction (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2024). From 1965-1973, the US Air Force deployed a

Aug 2026  
Vol 10, No 1.

minimum of 2,756,941 tons worth of bombs onto 113,716 independent Cambodian sites, a covert mission termed Operation Menu (1969-1970) (Owen & Kiernan, 2006). In 1971, 60% of Cambodians cited Operation Menu as the primary impetus to their displacement, and unexploded ordinance contamination, famine, and agricultural stagnation destabilized the nation's economy (Kiernan, 2002).

When KR officials promised to return Cambodia to its "golden age", many citizens believed them (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2018). Under the regime's radical agrarian ideologies, authorities forcibly relocated over three million urban "New People" to agricultural regions to form a classless utopia (González, 2022). Unaware of the sheer duration of their exodus, Cambodians weathered dehydration and starvation; those who faltered or fell behind were simply beheaded or shot (Clayton, 1998). Adolescents were separated from their families to live communally as a means of committing allegiance to the state, further destroying anchored familial roles (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2018). While the exact death toll is disputed, within four years, the KR systematically overworked, tortured, and murdered approximately 1.87 million citizens (Kiernan, 2003).

Given that, as an autogenocide, the Cambodian government systematically exterminated its own ethnic Khmer population, Pham et. al. (2019) acknowledge that "people could simultaneously be victims, perpetrators, and bystanders". Even decades after the initial conflict, Sonis et. al. (2009) and Seponski et. al. (2019) corroborate that the percentage for current probable PTSD in Cambodia is 11.2% and 7.6%, respectively, while Dubois et. al. (2004) found 53% of Cambodians in their study displayed high anxiety symptoms. With every new generation of Cambodians, the lasting legacy of the KR lingers, and influences are potentially transmitted to subsequent generations through a concept called intergenerational trauma transmission (ITT) (Pham et. al., 2019).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines literature regarding the presence of ITT and social acknowledgment of traumas (social acknowledgment) with reference to broad Holocaust literature and demographic-specific KR literature. These distinctions stem from "Holocaust literature on ITT...set[ting] a precedent for examining the indirect effects of parents' trauma...on the psychological adjustment of their offspring" (Field et. al., 2013; Rzeszutek et. al., 2020). Moreover, because non-Holocaust groups measurably lack ITT and social acknowledgment literature, Holocaust literature remains foundational for conceptualizing traumatology in post-genocide demographics (Rzeszutek et. al., 2020; Field et. al., 2013). Overall, existing literature focuses exclusively on ITT or social acknowledgment presence, failing to consider the relationships between these variables.

### ***Intergenerational Trauma Transmission***

Rakoff et. al. (1966) first coined ITT as “trauma manifesting in psychopathological symptoms among descendants of...survivors—descendants who did not experience this kind of massive traumatization directly, but were secondarily traumatized by parental traumatic history” (Rzeszutek et. al., 2020). ITT can be categorized into two mechanisms: vulnerability mechanisms, factors increasing susceptibility after initial traumatic exposure; and resilience mechanisms, factors increasing healthy responses to trauma (María-Ríos & Morrow, 2020; Suslovic & Lett, 2024).

### ***Holocaust***

van IJzendoorn et. al. (2003) did not find evidence of secondary traumatization among Holocaust survivor families who experienced no unrelated psychological stressors. These results were attributed to various protective factors: victims’ strong familial relationships, where the Holocaust was instigated by a totalitarian government regime, not one’s household; secure attachment styles, which many offspring later adopted in their own parenting; and diverse access to social support (van IJzendoorn et. al., 2003). However, conditions during and after the Holocaust are unique to its cultural demographic, meaning findings regarding Holocaust ITT presence cannot simply be reapplied to other cohorts.

### ***Khmer Rouge***

Indeed, the above protective factors are lacking in the KR, where Cambodians endured prolonged trauma from the Operation Menu bombings, separation from families to live communally, and no legal closure for decades (Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2018; Kiernan, 2002). Therefore, the protective factors in the Holocaust may not reflect in the KR demographic, plausibly impacting the presence of ITT among Cambodians.

Researchers corroborate that ITT presence remains prevalent in Cambodia; however, the relationship between ITT and social acknowledgment is underexamined. Notably, Field et. al. (2011, 2013) measured how KR victims’ maladaptive, trauma-impacted parenting methods psychologically augmented offspring vulnerability. Yet, while Field et. al.’s (2011, 2013) seminal research actively intersects dysfunctional parenting with ITT vulnerability, it lacks investigation into acknowledgment patterns as mechanisms for perpetuating secondary traumatization. Indeed, Field et. al. (2013) suggest a future direction for this research incorporating open communication and, more broadly, resilience mechanisms.

Generational proximity to the trauma survivor can also impact ITT presence. Kim et. al. (2025) examined ITT across three generations of Cambodian skipped-generation households, finding that the presence of secondary traumatization was not significant in the third generation (Kim et. al., 2025). As such, focusing exclusively on immediate offspring (second-generation individuals) might offer a more precise lens to probe ITT.

### ***Social Acknowledgment***

Communication patterns, social reactions, and socio-interpersonal behaviors can influence traumatic recovery by dictating how survivors emotionally and cognitively process their trauma (Lis-Turlejska, 2018). However, few have explored how this relationship impacts offspring through various ITT mechanisms. Maercker and Müller (2004) describe social acknowledgment as "a victim's experience of positive reactions from society that show appreciation of the victim's unique state and acknowledge the victim's current difficult situation." The term has three dimensions: general disapproval (GD), family disapproval (FD), and recognition as a survivor. Considering that a connection between the two variables could reveal the role of social acknowledgment as a modifiable factor in ITT, the paucity of information relating these forms of acknowledgment to ITT limits researchers' ability to understand these relationships. Moreover, if familial communication can mold survivor trauma processing, it might equally shape how trauma is received in households, making FD—one's perceived recognition from their family—a particularly compelling lens to examine ITT.

### ***Holocaust***

Lis-Turlejska et al. (2018), in measuring perceived war-related acknowledgment from Polish WWII survivors, reported that the severity of traumatic events correlated positively with greater GD and FD, meaning that severe trauma survivors were more likely to feel less acknowledged by their society and family. Because offspring might not engage with parental traumatic experiences, offspring's ignorance of parental trauma could exacerbate ITT vulnerability. Rzeszutek et. al. (2020) support this claim, specifying that offspring with higher levels of ignorance about their parent's Holocaust-related narratives demonstrated poorer subjective well-being. Such results indicate evidence that greater understanding of parental trauma could act as a buffer for ITT; however, the previously identified protective factors make this Holocaust-specific research difficult to immediately generalize to other cohorts. Thus, a source investigating the relationship between various social acknowledgment and ITT dimensions among offspring may be useful to conceptualize post-genocide trauma.

### ***Khmer Rouge***

Social acknowledgment post-KR remains widely understudied. Melander et. al. (2016) investigated fluctuating communication patterns of traumatic experiences between KR survivors and immediate offspring. Disbelief, questioning of passivity, and doubtfulness were "perceived as painful by parents", underscoring how FD vulnerability mechanisms might exacerbate survivors' psychological burdens (Melander et. al. 2016). Yet, how offspring internalize these patterns through secondary traumatization remains underexplored. Still, considering that the absence of familial social acknowledgment is established as an impetus of pain, FD represents a compelling lens to view ITT in a post-KR context.

### ***Situated Gap***

Though ITT and FD presence among KR survivors and offspring have been researched independently, these factors have not been explicitly tested for relationships. Among the reviewed literature, only Rzeszutek et al. (2020) implicitly incorporate both factors; even so, the study lacks an overarching set of variables and focuses on a Polish post-Holocaust demographic. Understanding these intersections could offer a more actionable lens for trauma intervention compared to examining isolated variables. Hence, to answer the research question ‘*How does offspring-perceived family disapproval associate with the vulnerability and resilience mechanisms of intergenerational trauma transmission among descendants of Khmer Rouge survivors?*’, a mixed-method study, including a hybrid content analysis and Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ), enables explorations of how, through patterns of FD, immediate offspring articulate intergenerational trauma. Therefore, the remainder of this study is structured as follows. First, the methodology includes the mixed-method design, participant selection, coding procedure, and statistical analysis. The results present the findings of the qualitative content analysis and Spearman’s  $\rho$ . Lastly, the discussion situates the findings in the context of preexisting literature, acknowledges the limitations of the study, and considers implications for future studies.

## **METHODS**

This study involves a two-step, mixed-methods research design. Due to the focus on examining the intergenerational nature of trauma, this study solely considers FD instead of the broader concept of social acknowledgment. Based on prior literature, this research question assumes three central ideas: first, that traumatic events correlate with persistent trauma; second, that most Cambodian parents and their immediate children have a relationship; and third, that this relationship could act as a channel through which trauma is transmitted through an interpersonal relationship (Onyut et. al., 2005; Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015).

Given that both variables share overlapping dimensions and existing research corroborates their independent presence, it was hypothesized that ITT and social acknowledgment vulnerability and resilience mechanisms would be present independently in the dataset (Field et. al., 2011; Field et. al., 2013; Melander et. al., 2016). Further, it was hypothesized that there would be an association between these variables (Field et. al., 2013; Melander et. al., 2016).

### ***Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design***

Exploratory sequential mixed methods research designs integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. Analyzing a particular sample or demographic, this approach aims “to see if data from a few individuals (in qualitative phase) can be generalized to a large sample of a population (in quantitative phase)” (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017, p. 226). This design was chosen because it allowed for the investigation of

relationships between abstract variables that couldn't easily be quantified, providing a more holistic perception of a complex interdisciplinary field like traumatology (Sharma et. al., 2023).

Specifically, in the present study's qualitative phase, a hybrid content analysis framed by preexisting theoretical frameworks identified ITT and family disapproval presence among KR survivors' offspring independently. These results were quantified based on the frequency of each code's presence, calculated for average values, then grouped into broader categories for statistical testing. Statistical analysis in the quantitative phase was conducted on the numerical results through Spearman's rho to measure the association between variables.

### ***Data Collection***

#### ***Participants & Cohort***

The sample consisted of 10 interviews, all found on the Brigham Young University (BYU) Cambodian Oral History Project, a public database featuring 5000+ interviews with KR survivors and their offspring. The Cambodian Oral History Project is an audiovisual project established to record family histories in Cambodia. Since then, the archives have "provide[d] opportunities for scholarly work on local histories, area studies, and narratological aspects of family histories" (The Cambodian Oral History Project, n.d.).

Considering this study's exploratory nature, greater emphasis was placed on conducting depthful analyses of KR survivors' offspring rather than producing statistically generalizable findings to the entire Cambodian population. As such, a smaller sample was incorporated to thoroughly investigate existing ITT and social acknowledgment mechanisms and identify recurring themes across interviews. Hence, the findings of this study are purely exploratory and represent this particular sample and not the broader KR-impacted population in Cambodia.

#### ***Selection Criteria***

Additionally, the selection criteria for interviews included that the interviewee be an ethnically Cambodian immediate offspring of KR survivors. Search words and filters, including the "Khmer Rouge Aftermath" topic, were incorporated for selection to find eligible interviews. Additional criteria included minimal redactions and the provision of an English transcript. Interviews without English translations were not considered because, as Khmer is considered a low-resource language, it is difficult for other online tools to preserve linguistic nuances.

Ultimately, ten interviews met these standards. While thousands of additional interviews exist in the database, many did not satisfy the above requirements (e.g., focused on survivors, lacked English transcripts, contained substantial redactions) and were not considered. This study's sample thus reflects the subset of interviews that met selection criteria rather than an extensive, all-encompassing representation of archival testimonials.

## ***Data Analysis***

### ***Hybrid Content Analysis***

A content analysis is “a systematic coding and categorizing approach used for exploring large amounts of textual information unobtrusively to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, [and] their relationships...” (Vaismoradi et. al., 2013, p. 3). A content analysis was employed to analyze data both qualitatively (to consider cultural context and existing frameworks) and quantitatively (during statistical analysis) (Vaismoradi et. al., 2013).

Content analyses involve two primary forms of coding: inductive, where the researcher establishes codes from the data, and deductive, where predetermined codes are applied to the text for “validat[ing] or extend[ing] conceptually a theoretical framework” to a new context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 5; Vaismoradi et. al., 2013). This study blended both dimensions, conducting a hybrid content analysis, which “use[s] some combination of emerging and predetermined codes” (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017, p. 199). This approach is recommended for research that presents a theoretical basis but poses unique circumstances that require inclusion of additional codes (Vaismoradi et. al., 2013). Overall, a hybrid content analysis offered a scholarly basis to code underrepresented populations while allowing KR-unique codes to emerge. This choice was further supported by Békés & Starrs (2024), developers of the HITT-Q framework adapted in this study, who acknowledge that “adding additional items in the future may be beneficial”. Further correspondence with Dr. Claire J Starrs introduced further scoring instructions that framed inductive codes (C. Starrs, personal communication, February 5, 2026).

### ***Measures & Frameworks***

When measuring ITT presence, deductive codes were extracted from the Historical Intergenerational Trauma Transmission Questionnaire (HITT-Q) and Historical Intergenerational Trauma Transmission Model (HITT Model). These two frameworks were chosen as they were comprehensive, cross-cultural ITT assessments (Békés & Starrs, 2024).

The HITT model features “five higher-order dimensions”: family vulnerability, family resilience, offspring vulnerability, offspring resilience, and historical moral injury (Starrs and Békés, 2025, p. 4). The family vulnerability and resilience dimensions were excluded because the Oral History Project interviewees were unrelated, making it difficult to evaluate specific ITT patterns. The remaining three dimensions acted as the parent codes for examining ITT presence. Resilience was considered because “although early traumatic experiences cannot be undone,” “specific interventions” can foster protective factors against ITT (Békés & Starrs, 2024, p. 11).

The HITT-Q is a validated “self-report scale utilizing 65-items organized into 12 factors including both vulnerability and resilience dimensions” (Békés & Starrs, 2024). Items that corresponded with offspring vulnerability, offspring resilience, or historical moral injury were adapted as sub-sub codes. Codes were given a binary scoring system, where each instance of presence indicated 1 point, meaning a single code could accumulate multiple “points” based on its frequency of presence. Given that resilience and vulnerability were theoretical opposites, the two constructs were tallied separately (Békés & Starrs, 2024). On the other hand, “theoretically, the valence of the vulnerability and the HMI score are the same” (Békés & Starrs, 2024; C. Starrs, personal communication, January 20, 2026). Hence, offspring vulnerability and HMI were tallied together.

Social acknowledgment presence was measured through the Social Acknowledgment Questionnaire, a validated 16-item self-report scale indicating a trauma survivor’s perceived acknowledgment of endured events. Differentiating between vulnerability and resilience mechanisms, only items 6 and 8-11— the FD items of the questionnaire— were included as codes.

Since the HITT-Q and SAQ were intended as self-report measures, items could not immediately be applied to interview transcripts. Instead, each item was operationalized into researcher-oriented codes. For instance, in the SAQ, “My family showed a lot of understanding for my response to the incident.” was reworded to “Offspring perceives their family showed a lot of understanding for survivor’s response to the incident” (Maercker & Müller, 2004). To preserve the existing theoretical constructs of the measures, codes were only applied if the item could be traced to explicit textual evidence in the interview.

### ***Coding & Procedure***

Coding was conducted by a single researcher, who established a predetermined codebook to “maximize coherence among codes” (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017, p.g. 199). Parent codes and subcodes, definitions, and inclusion criteria can all be found in Appendix A and B.

After interviews were translated and transcribed, the content analysis was conducted loosely following Elo & Kyngäs’s (2008) identified procedure. The transcripts were first reviewed to ensure familiarity. Following this, to increase consistency, transcripts were coded using line-by-line analysis with predetermined codes derived from the HITT-Q and SAQ in Atlas TI, a qualitative content analysis software. Once interviews had been coded deductively, emergent codes were added. Ambiguous portions of text were reexamined with the mentorship of Dr. Starrs to ensure consistency in the usage of frameworks.

Seeing that categorical data were produced, the data were quantified based on the frequency of each code’s presence per interview. Greater frequencies denote greater manifestation in the offspring’s articulated experience, meaning that frequency reflects prevalence rather than psychological intensity. By “group[ing] the codes into scales”, adopting categorical data into numerical values “is a useful procedure for moving from qualitative data analysis to scale development” seen in quantitative analysis (Cresswell

& Cresswell, 2017, p. 226). Because the number of subcodes per code varied, average values of each code per interview were calculated. These averages were calculated to account for differences in the number of subcodes within each category, ensuring comparability across variables (C. Starrs, personal communication, February 5, 2026). Each interview had a total mean ITT Vulnerability, ITT Resilience, FD Vulnerability, and FD Resilience score.

### ***Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient***

After final averages were determined for the four categories, a Spearman's rho was calculated on Jamovi, a complimentary data analysis software. This statistical analysis form "is a nonparametric technique for evaluating the degree of...correlation between two independent variables" (Gauthier, 2001, p. 1). Spearman's rho was chosen because the quantitative data generated was non-parametric; additionally, given that it is relatively unaffected by existing outliers, Spearman's rho would produce the most accurate results from the non-normally distributed data collected from the content analysis (Gauthier, 2001). Unlike other analysis tools, Spearman's rho could be applied to small sample sizes, making this choice especially optimal for this study (Gauthier, 2001). To note, given the exploratory nature of the present study, correlation coefficients were also interpreted according to magnitude (effect size,  $\rho$ ) alongside statistical significance.

### ***Limitations to the Method***

It must be noted that there are several limitations to this study's method. One limitation concerns the solely KR offspring cohort. Given that ITT involves both the trauma survivor and offspring, failing to include trauma survivors is a notable limitation; however, securing both cohorts was near-impossible as the interviewees available in the Oral History Project are unrelated, making it difficult to investigate individual parent-child ITT patterns.

Further, the small sample size of ten interviewees ( $n = 10$ ) limits the broad generalizability and statistical accuracy of results. Consequently, individuals with atypical experiences relating to the KR may not be included in the sample if they had not met the above selection criteria. Therefore, as noted above, these results must be interpreted as purely exploratory.

Considering data analysis, because coding was conducted by a single researcher, inherent researcher subjectivity could have clouded results. Thus, intercoder reliability statistics could not be calculated. While researcher subjectivity may be inevitable, in aiming to increase consistency, robust coding schemes through the codebook (see: Appendix A, Appendix B) and regular consultation with Dr. Starrs were employed. Moreover, because the HITT-Q and SAQ were originally designed as self-report questionnaires, adapting them into coding schemes could compromise the validity of the findings.

Additionally, solely considering the frequency of codes risks failing to characterize the context of the traumatic event, thus compromising the "richness of the qualitative findings" (Cresswell & Cresswell,

2017, p. 227; Vaismoradi et. al., 2013). Especially since higher frequencies could simply “reflect greater willingness of ability to talk at length about the topic”, numerical counts don’t always correlate with the intensity of the experience (Vaismoradi et. al., 2013).

## RESULTS

### *Frequency of ITT Codes*

| Category                | Code                      | Number of Subcodes | Total Frequency Across 10 Interviews |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ITT                     | Escape                    | 4                  | 12                                   |
| Offspring Vulnerability | Heightened Responsibility | 4*                 | 39                                   |
|                         | Trauma-Related Distress   | 8                  | 125                                  |
|                         | Historical Moral Injury   | 7                  | 38                                   |
| ITT                     | Positive Coping           | 2                  | 21                                   |
| Offspring Resilience    | Belonging                 | 7*                 | 86                                   |
|                         | Moral Values              | 3                  |                                      |

Note. \* includes 1 inductive subcode

**Table 1.1 Total ITT identified code frequencies across sample**

Among the 33 deductive ITT subcodes, 28 subcodes were mentioned across the ten interviews. Additionally, two inductive subcodes were created. All codes were filtered into ITT Offspring Vulnerability (ITT Vulnerability) and ITT Offspring Resilience (ITT Resilience) categories. Overall, ITT Vulnerability codes appeared more frequently than ITT Resilience codes across the dataset. Among vulnerability-related codes, “trauma-related distress” was most frequently observed, whereas “escape” appeared least commonly. In contrast, among resilience-related codes, “belonging” was most often acknowledged, while “moral values” were seldom seen. The frequency distribution of all ITT codes is summarized in Table 1.1.

### *Frequency of Family Disapproval Codes*

| Type of Code            | Code                | Number of times mentioned | Total Tally |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| Family Disapproval (FD) | Offspring-Perceived | 0                         | 9           |
| Vulnerability           | Exaggeration        |                           |             |

|                                    |                                                            |    |    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| Family Disapproval (FD) Resilience | Offspring-Perceived Underestimating                        | 4  | 24 |
|                                    | Offspring-Perceived Discomfort Talking About Experiences   | 5  |    |
|                                    | Offspring-Perceived Protectiveness                         | 3  |    |
|                                    | Offspring-Perceived Open Discussion of Traumatic Event(s)* | 13 |    |
|                                    | Offspring-Perceived Understanding                          | 8  |    |

Note. \* denotes inductive code

**Table 1.2 Total FD identified code frequencies across sample**

Among the 5 deductive FD codes, all were mentioned across the ten interviews. Moreover, one added inductive code emerged. All codes were filtered into FD Vulnerability and FD Resilience categories, reflecting negative and positive dimensions of perceived family social acknowledgment, respectively.

Overall, FD Resilience codes were observed more often than FD Vulnerability codes. Among vulnerability codes, “offspring-perceived discomfort talking about experiences” emerged most, whereas among resilience codes, “offspring-perceived open discussion of traumatic event(s)” was most observed. The frequency distribution of these codes is summarized in Table 1.2.

### **Mean Value Calculations**

| Interview # | Mean Values            |                         |                        |                        |
|-------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|             | ITT                    | FD                      |                        |                        |
|             | VULNERABILITY<br>Score | ITT RESILIENCE<br>SCORE | VULNERABILITY<br>SCORE | FD RESILIENCE<br>SCORE |
| 1           | 1.04                   | 1.29                    | 0.00                   | 0.00                   |
| 2           | 4.46                   | 2.86                    | 1.00                   | 0.67                   |
| 3           | 0.50                   | 2.00                    | 0.00                   | 0.00                   |
| 4           | 3.68                   | 4.43                    | 0.00                   | 1.00                   |
| 5           | 4.27                   | 0.57                    | 0.00                   | 0.00                   |
| 6           | 1.63                   | 3.00                    | 1.67                   | 0.00                   |
| 7           | 3.09                   | 4.12                    | 0.00                   | 3.00                   |
| 8           | 9.43                   | 3.36                    | 0.00                   | 1.00                   |
| 9           | 4.38                   | 2.07                    | 0.00                   | 0.00                   |
| 10          | 1.34                   | 2.10                    | 0.33                   | 2.33                   |

*Note. Values reflect the mean value of codes per interview following adjustment for differences in number of subcodes in each identified category. Higher mean scores indicate greater prevalence of the mechanism.*

**Table 2. Mean ITT and FD vulnerability and resilience codes separated by interview**

For statistical analysis, the above frequencies were converted into averages for comparability. Each interview was assigned a final mean score for each category: ITT Vulnerability, ITT Resilience, FD Vulnerability, and FD Resilience. These values indicate the relative presence of each bracket within the data generated from each interview. The final mean value calculations for each interview are summarized in Table 2.

***Spearman's Rank Order Correlation***

|                               |                | ITT<br>VULNERABILITY<br>Score | ITT RESILIENCE<br>SCORE | FD<br>VULNERABILITY<br>SCORE | FD RESILIENCE<br>SCORE |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| ITT<br>VULNERABILITY<br>Score | Spearman's rho | —                             |                         |                              |                        |
|                               | df             | —                             |                         |                              |                        |
|                               | p-value        | —                             |                         |                              |                        |
| ITT<br>RESILIENCE<br>Score    | Spearman's rho | 0.309                         | —                       |                              |                        |
|                               | df             | 8                             | —                       |                              |                        |
|                               | p-value        | 0.387                         | —                       |                              |                        |
| FD<br>VULNERABILITY<br>Score  | Spearman's rho | -0.022                        | 0.142                   | —                            |                        |
|                               | df             | 8                             | 8                       | —                            |                        |
|                               | p-value        | 0.951                         | 0.696                   | —                            |                        |
| FD<br>RESILIENCE<br>Score     | Spearman's rho | 0.188                         | 0.707*                  | 0.024                        | —                      |
|                               | df             | 8                             | 8                       | 8                            | —                      |
|                               | p-value        | 0.603                         | 0.022                   | 0.948                        | —                      |

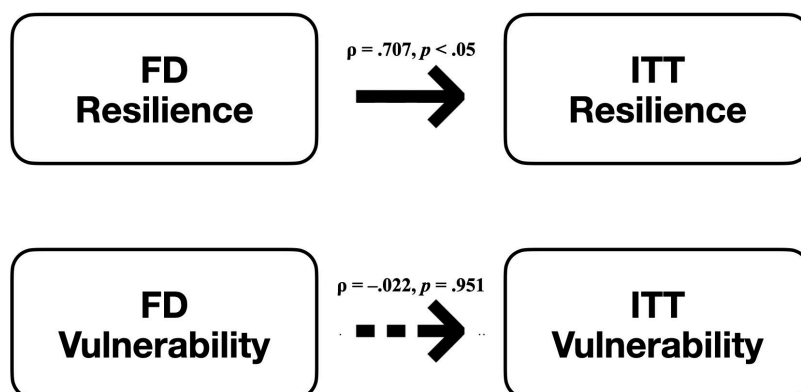
*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3. Spearman's rank-order correlation among ITT and FD vulnerability and resilience scores**

A Spearman's rho was computed to assess the association between the vulnerability and resilience mechanisms of ITT and FD. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between ITT Resilience and FD Resilience ( $\rho = 0.707$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), denoting that greater levels of offspring-perceived FD resilience were associated with higher levels of ITT Resilience. Apart from mere statistical significance,

the resilience mechanisms indicate a strong positive correlation. As such, while the sample size of this study remains small, the overall magnitude of the correlation suggests the practical significance of this relationship and warrants greater investigation.

On the other hand, no statistically significant correlation was found between FD vulnerability and ITT vulnerability ( $\rho = -0.022$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ); moreover, all other variable pairings did not yield statistically significant associations. All findings are presented in Table 3.



*Note. Solid arrows indicate statistically significant correlations ( $p < 0.05$ ), whereas dashed arrows indicate non-significant correlations ( $p > 0.05$ ). Correlations were assessed using a Spearman's rank-correlation coefficient, as indicated in Table 3.*

**Figure 1. Observed correlations between FD and ITT mechanisms.**

Overall, the relationships identified by Spearman's rho performed on the ITT and FD mechanisms can be visualized in Figure 1.

## DISCUSSION

This research deepens the understanding of FD and its association with ITT among KR survivors' offspring. The initial hypothesis was that the vulnerability and resilience mechanisms between ITT and FD would yield a statistically significant correlation, respectively. However, while this study corroborated evidence for the relationship between ITT and FD resilience mechanisms, findings did not support the hypothesis regarding vulnerability mechanisms, demonstrating that vulnerability might arise from a more diverse array of pressures.

Consistent with initial expectations, FD resilience and ITT resilience demonstrated a significant positive correlation considerably large in magnitude ( $\rho = 0.707$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The limited sample size of this study

suggests that only comparatively strong associations would be statistically significant. Hence, while replication of this study is necessary for generalization, these findings provide preliminary evidence for the relationship between these resilience processes. Possibly, this finding could be attributed to the role of interpersonal communication in cognitively and emotionally processing one's traumatic experiences, along with existing literature reinforcing the nature of resilience mechanisms as protective factors (Thompson et. al., 2018). Additionally, Field et. al. (2013) acknowledged the role of open familial communication in offspring psychological adjustment. The present study corroborates these findings, underscoring how offspring-perceived FD resilience, occurring through forms like protectiveness and open discussion, contributes to the bolstering of offspring ITT resilience forms like coping and moral values. Melander et. al.'s (2016) findings also complement these results, as researchers identified a desire among KR survivors to instill empowering values, including gratitude, curiosity, and hope, in their offspring as "reasons for communication" regarding the genocide. Though Melander et. al.'s (2016) study primarily focused on the pain caused by FD vulnerability mechanisms (e.g., exaggeration, overestimation, discomfort), the present study emphasizes that the inverse relationship may also stand: positive family acknowledgment might actively foster offspring ITT resilience, acting as a protective factor against secondary traumatization. Moreover, this link is supported by researchers' findings that FD resilience mechanisms like open communication reinforce interdependent problem-solving to improve connectedness, thereby bolstering identified ITT resilience mechanisms like belonging (Theiss, 2018).

Importantly, these results are also upheld by other genocidal cohort studies. The sentiment of wishing to instill supportive values is mirrored among Holocaust survivors, where researchers observed that resilience patterns could "be transmitted and developed by offspring" (Braga et. al., 2012). This result underlines the notion that positive parent-offspring interactions not only mitigate traumatic responses but can also facilitate reconciliation processes in post-genocidal contexts.

Unexpectedly, the lack of statistically significant correlation between the FD vulnerability and ITT vulnerability frameworks did not support the initial hypothesis. Surprisingly, these findings diverged from previous literature, a majority of which implicitly references a correlation between poor acknowledgment and secondary traumatization (Lis-Turlejska et. al., 2018). It must be noted that this lack of statistical significance could be linked to the small sample size of this study, which could adversely affect the sample's statistical power. Given this study's sample size, absence of statistical significance cannot be immediately interpreted as the absence of a relationship between these vulnerability mechanisms. Yet, it is also possible that a broader range of influences may exacerbate vulnerability mechanisms rather than FD alone. For example, Field et. al. (2011) and Kim et. al. (2025) cite maladaptive parenting styles as a mediating factor for secondary traumatization rather than solely FD mechanisms. Additionally, the KR's unique circumstances could have contributed to conditions that dilute the direct correlation between FD vulnerability and ITT vulnerability. While this study stresses immediate parent-offspring forms of FD, Shaikh et. al. (2023) identify the value placed on wider social networks beyond the nuclear family in Cambodia, branching to the extended family, peer solidarity, and patron-client relationships. Taking from the significance of the broader social environment in Cambodia, offspring ITT vulnerability might not be directly shaped by offspring perceptions of FD in the immediate household alone. Instead, they may be

molded by a wider social community. In sum, the relation between ITT vulnerability and FD vulnerability might be diluted through other channels beyond family disapproval vulnerability.

Beyond the individual relationships identified above, resilience mechanisms may have been more observable than vulnerability mechanisms. Walsh (2003) explores this connection, proposing that family resilience mechanisms might act as protective factors that cushion stress and weakened coping, both of which are ITT vulnerability symptoms. If this conjecture could be validated among a KR cohort, then the lack of statistical significance between the vulnerability mechanisms could be ascribed to resilience frameworks acting as mediators. Hence, it is plausible that resilience mechanisms could have obscured the direct correlation between the vulnerability mechanisms.

Further, Melander et. al. (2016) explain that communication patterns can shape how traumatic experiences are conceptualized among others. Thus, oral history interviews, which inherently foster reflective storytelling and meaning-making, may place a larger focus on articulating survival or inherited identity formation, which are resilience-related factors (Langley & Meziani, 2020). For the same reason, KR interviewees may be less inclined to share vulnerability narratives of anxiety, depression, or family dysfunction due to cultural stigmas surrounding mental health in Cambodia (Phoeun et. al., 2024). Since trauma symptoms might be less easily articulated, resilience mechanisms might be more visible compared to vulnerability ones.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Although this research sheds light on understudied aspects of ITT and FD, the conclusions of this study are limited. Firstly, while a correlational design describes the association between variables, a correlational relationship doesn't necessarily entail causation. Especially considering how this present study discusses other factors that could also impact ITT vulnerability mechanisms, other third variables could be involved, making the data unfit to draw causal conclusions.

In a similar vein, despite the small sample size of this study, pairwise correlations were conducted through Spearman's rho, increasing the probability of a statistically significant relationship by chance. As a result, all identified correlations should merely be considered as preliminary evidence instead of confirmation of a consistent relationship.

Notably, a correlational design also indicates difficulty in determining whether these results were uniquely defined by a post-genocide circumstance or if other familial background elements could influence findings. Because the distinct cultural demographic of the KR acted as the foundation for the interviews, these conclusions may not be globally representative, limiting the scope of generalizability of the findings to the broader trauma-impacted population.

Further, a third limitation involves the nature of interviews, where interviewees reflect or detail subjects and experiences at a particular point in time. By only capturing a snapshot of the offspring's reflections at

a single instant, the cross-sectional data might not be representative of developments over a longer period, and, since these interviews were reflective, data could be more susceptible to recall bias. Where recall bias could favor positive nostalgia mechanisms like survivorship, vulnerability mechanisms may be underreported, while resilience could be overrepresented. As such, findings might reflect offspring internalization and reflection rather than the actual presence or intensity of these mechanisms.

One final limitation is that, as FD was the sole social acknowledgment lens considered, these results are only applicable to FD instead of the broader social acknowledgment sphere. It could be argued that, if all three social acknowledgment variables had been considered, the findings may have indicated a relationship between the vulnerability mechanisms of social acknowledgment and ITT.

In light of the above limitations, these findings should only act as preliminary evidence for the association between social acknowledgment and ITT among KR survivors' offspring.

## CONCLUSION

This present exploratory study examined the association between the vulnerability and resilience mechanisms of FD and ITT among the KR genocide survivors' offspring. The significant correlation between resilience factors and the statistically undetectable correlation between vulnerability factors underscore the complex cross-generational relationships that stem from a collective traumatic event like the KR genocide, where the genocide's resonant legacy continues to define the lives and behavior of millions.

The interconnected nature of the FD and ITT spheres demonstrates that traumatic reconciliation is not a linear process: families might concurrently demonstrate vulnerability and resilience. These findings contribute to the limited existing literature by specifically examining the relationships between FD and ITT using quantitative statistical analysis, while maintaining qualitative saturation through a hybrid content analysis. This mixed-method approach expands beyond previous literature, which only examined these frameworks independently or through exclusively qualitative or quantitative methods.

This convergence between interpersonal family-based communication and multigenerational trauma manifestation suggests some implications. The limited visibility of vulnerability in interviews underscores the need to reduce mental health stigmas in Cambodia through collaborative means. Cambodian mental-health institutions should seek to holistically provide free, family-based resources like group counseling and financial assistance to promote comprehensive trauma relief for Cambodian genocide victims and their respective families. These dialogue-focused interventions might prioritize the open discussion emphasized by FD resilience mechanisms by encouraging Cambodian families to collectively process KR-related trauma. More broadly, culturally-sensitive mental health programs should consider resilience and vulnerability as distinct constructs that may operate through defined mechanisms, especially in contexts like Cambodia, where acknowledgment can be expressed through subtle or indirect

disclosure.

In terms of future research, to explore the generalizability of these results, it may be valuable to consider a cross-genocide population, including not only KR survivors, but also those of other 20th and 21st century genocides. If a similar association stands, the aforementioned implications could extend to engaging with genocide survivors of other cultural backgrounds and be relevant to understanding the global applicability of these findings. Additionally, future research may employ a longitudinal approach to mitigate recall biases and probe the emergence and development of vulnerability and resilience mechanisms over time. Furthermore, future research should incorporate all dimensions of social acknowledgment, as this study provided some evidence that vulnerability mechanisms may not function as they have in previous literature among KR survivors.

It would also be worthwhile to explore these same relationships with paired parent-offspring interviews to understand whether the distribution of perceived social acknowledgment differs depending on the individuals examined. This approach would allow for individual investigations into specific trauma and coping mechanisms for each parent-offspring pair, allowing studies to examine the different forms of parent-offspring communication present. Where Mor (1990) asserts that two forms of parent-child communication—obsessive recounting and “protective silence”—could play a substantial role in ITT, distinguishing communication patterns in each pair could offer a more nuanced view of secondary traumatization.

## REFERENCES

- Békés, V., & Starrs, C. J. (2024). Assessing transgenerational trauma transmission: Development and psychometric properties of the Historical Intergenerational Trauma Transmission Questionnaire (HITT-Q). *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 15(1), 2329510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2024.2329510>
- Braga, L. L., Mello, M. F., & Fiks, J. P. (2012). Transgenerational transmission of trauma and resilience: A qualitative study with Brazilian offspring of Holocaust survivors. *BMC Psychiatry*, 12(1), 134. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-134>
- Clayton, T. (1998). Building the new Cambodia: Educational destruction and construction under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-1979. *History of Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/369662>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Dehrone, T. A., Tropp, L. R., Burrows, B., Bilali, R., & Ginn, J. (2022). Coming together after genocide: How openness to communication about conflict experiences shapes willingness for social integration in post genocide Rwanda. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 28(3), 384. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000625>

- Dubois, V., Tonglet, R., Hoyois, P., Sunbaunat, K., Roussaux, J. P., & Hauff, E. (2004). Household survey of psychiatric morbidity in Cambodia. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 50(2), 174-185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764004043125>
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
- Field, N. P., Muong, S., & Sochanvimean, V. (2013). Parental styles in the intergenerational transmission of trauma stemming from the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 83(4), 483-494. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajop.12057>
- Field, N. P., Om, C., Kim, T., & Vorn, S. (2011). Parental styles in second generation effects of genocide stemming from the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. *Attachment & Human Development*, 13(6), 611-628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2011.609015>
- Gauthier, T. D. (2001). Detecting trends using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. *Environmental Forensics*, 2(4), 359-362. <https://doi.org/10.1006/enfo.2001.0061>
- González, M. (2022). Experiencing forced displacement: Cambodia. *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*.  
[www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/experiencing-forced-displacement-cambodia](http://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/experiencing-forced-displacement-cambodia)
- Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. (2018). *Khmer Rouge ideology*.  
<https://hmd.org.uk/learn-about-the-holocaust-and-genocides/cambodia/khmer-rouge-ideology/>
- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Kiernan, B. (2002). *The Pol Pot regime: Race, power, and genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*. Yale University Press.
- Kiernan, B. (2003). The demography of genocide in Southeast Asia: The death tolls in Cambodia, 1975-79, and East Timor, 1975-80. *Critical Asian Studies*, 35(4), 585-597.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1467271032000147041>
- Kim, T., Jordan, L. P., McLaren, H., Thlen, S., & Emery, C. R. (2025). The intergenerational effect of grandmothers' trauma on offspring's psychological distress in Cambodian skipped-generation households. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000859>
- Lis-Turlejska, M., Szumiał, S., & Drapała, I. (2018). Posttraumatic stress symptoms among Polish World War II survivors: The role of social acknowledgement. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 9(1), 1423831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2018.1423831>
- Maercker, A., & Müller, J. (2004). Social acknowledgment as a victim or survivor: A scale to measure a recovery factor of PTSD. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 17(4), 345-351.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOTS.0000038484.15488.3d>
- María-Ríos, C. E., & Morrow, J. D. (2020). Mechanisms of shared vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorders. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 14, 6.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2020.00006>
- Masten, A. S. (2021). Multisystem resilience: Pathways to an integrated framework. *Research in Human Development*, 18(3), 153-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2021.1958604>
- Melander, M., Dahlblom, K., Jegannathan, B., & Kullgren, G. (2016). Exploring communication of traumatic experiences from Khmer Rouge genocide survivors to their offspring: In-depth

- interviews with both generations. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 62(4), 327-333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764016631364>
- Mor, N. (1990). Holocaust messages from the past. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 12(5), 371-379. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00891707>
- Onyut, L. P., Neuner, F., Schauer, E., Ertl, V., Odenwald, M., Schauer, M., & Elbert, T. (2005). Narrative Exposure Therapy as a treatment for child war survivors with posttraumatic stress disorder: Two case reports and a pilot study in an African refugee settlement. *BMC Psychiatry*, 5(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244x-5-7>
- Owen, T., & Kiernan, B. (2006). Bombs over Cambodia. *The Walrus*. [https://gsp.yale.edu/sites/default/files/walrus\\_cambodiabombing\\_oct06.pdf](https://gsp.yale.edu/sites/default/files/walrus_cambodiabombing_oct06.pdf)
- Pham, P. N., Balthazard, M., Gibbons, N., & Vinck, P. (2019). Perspectives on memory, forgiveness and reconciliation in Cambodia's post-Khmer Rouge society. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 101(910), 125-149. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383119000213>
- Popov, L. M., & Ilesanmi, R. A. (2015). Parent-child relationship: Peculiarities and outcome. *Review of European Studies*, 7, 253. <http://doi.org/10.5539/res.v7n5p253>
- Rakoff, V., Sigal, J. J., & Epstein, N. B. (1966). Children and families of concentration camp survivors. *Canada's Mental Health*, 14(4), 24-26.
- Rzesutek, M., Lis-Turlejska, M., Pięta, M., Karlsen, M., Backus, H., Florek, W., ... & Szumiał, S. (2020). Knowledge about traumatic World War II experiences among ancestors and subjective well-being of young adults: A person-centred perspective. *PloS One*, 15(8), e0237859. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237859>
- Seponski, D. M., Lahar, C. J., Khann, S., Kao, S., & Schunert, T. (2019). Four decades following the Khmer Rouge: Sociodemographic factors impacting depression, anxiety and PTSD in Cambodia. *Journal of Mental Health*, 28(2), 175-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2018.1466039>
- Shaikh, S., Kolata, A. L., Johnson, J., & Binford, M. W. (2023). Home and away: Drivers and perceptions of migration among urban migrants and their rural families in the lower Mekong River basin of Cambodia. *Migration and Development*, 12(1), 13-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21632324231194763>
- Sharma, L. R., Bidari, S., Bidari, D., Neupane, S., & Sapkota, R. (2023). Exploring the mixed methods research design: Types, purposes, strengths, challenges, and criticisms. *Global Academic Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 5(1), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.36348/gajll.2023.v05i01.002>
- Sonis, J., Gibson, J. L., De Jong, J. T., Field, N. P., Hean, S., & Komproe, I. (2009). Probable posttraumatic stress disorder and disability in Cambodia: Associations with perceived justice, desire for revenge, and attitudes toward the Khmer Rouge trials. *Jama*, 302(5), 527-536. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.1085>
- Starrs, C. J., & Békés, V. (2025). Historical intergenerational trauma transmission model: A comprehensive framework of family and offspring processes of transgenerational trauma. *Traumatology*, 31(2), 243. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000505>
- Steinert, C., Bumke, P. J., Hollekamp, R. L., Larisch, A., Leichsenring, F., Mattheß, H., ... & Kruse, J. (2016). Treating post-traumatic stress disorder by resource activation in Cambodia. *World Psychiatry*, 15(2), 183. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20303>

- Suslovic, B., & Lett, E. (2024). Resilience is an adverse event: A critical discussion of resilience theory in health services research and public health. *Community Health Equity Research & Policy*, 44(3), 339-343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2752535X231159721>
- The Cambodian Oral History Project. (n.d.). *Home*. Retrieved November 17, 2026, from <https://cambodianoralhistoryproject.byu.edu/>
- Theiss, J. A. (2018). Family communication and resilience. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 46(1), 10-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2018.1426706>
- Thompson, N. J., Fiorillo, D., Rothbaum, B. O., Ressler, K. J., & Michopoulos, V. (2018). Coping strategies as mediators in relation to resilience and posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 225, 153-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.08.049>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (2024). *Origins of the Khmer Rouge*. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/cambodia/origins-of-the-khmer-rouge>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & Health Sciences*, 15(3), 398-405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048>
- Van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & Sagi-Schwartz, A. (2003). Are children of Holocaust survivors less well-adapted? A meta-analytic investigation of secondary traumatization. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 16(5), 459-469. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1025706427300>
- Walsh, F. (2003). Family resilience: A framework for clinical practice. *Family Process*, 42(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2003.00001.x>
- Zhou, N., Wei, Y., Killikelly, C., Xu, X., Stelzer, E. M., Maercker, A., ... & Smith, K. V. (2023). The relationship between social acknowledgment and prolonged grief symptoms: A multiple mediation effect of beliefs about the goodness and controllability of grief-related emotions. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 14(2), 2220633. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2023.2220633>

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A. Intergenerational Trauma Transmission (ITT) Mechanisms Codebook*

Below is a table breakdown of each ITT code, subcode, and sub-sub-code. All deductive parent codes, definitions, and inclusion criteria were **directly** (word-for-word) taken from Békés & Starrs's (2024) Historical Intergenerational Trauma Transmission Questionnaire (HITT-Q) and Starrs & Békés's (2025) Historical Intergenerational Trauma Transmission Model (HITT Model) unless indicated otherwise. Sub-sub-codes were operationalized to reflect offspring perception.

| Category                | Definition of Category                                                                                                                                                   | Deductive Code            | Inclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                   | Sub-code                                                                        |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Offspring Vulnerability | A child's vulnerability and increased risk of experiencing negative outcomes due to their physical environment, relationships with parents, or personal characteristics. | Escape                    | Adoption of soothing or numbing behaviors, problematic alcohol and substance use, risky sexual behaviors, emotional distancing (fear and aggression) | Finds it uncomfortable to be in a position of authority                         |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Sometimes uses alcohol, substances, sex, or food to soothe themselves           |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | First reaction to a new task is, "I can't..."                                   |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Pushes away their emotions to avoid intense anger/rage                          |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Feels that they have to make up for the suffering of their family and/or people |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          | Heightened Responsibility | Protecting parent's feelings, solving ongoing family problems, feelings of survivor guilt, perceived parental burden                                 | Is important for them to feel in control                                        |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Doesn't talk about their personal problems so as to not burden others           |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Offspring is burdened by familial problems*                                     |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Feels angry/enraged                                                             |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                           |                                                                                                                                                      | Feels sad/depressed                                                             |
| Trauma-Related Distress | Current thoughts related to the trauma faced by parents, community, their people; frequent                                                                               | Feels helpless            |                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                 |
|                         |                                                                                                                                                                          | Feels ashamed             |                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                 |

|                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                              | thoughts of historical losses                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Feels isolated/alone<br>Feels fearful/distrusting<br>Feels numb/detached from others<br>Feels hopeless                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                                                                              | Adaptive strategies (e.g., problem solving, self-assertion), self-efficacy, helping to mitigate posttraumatic                                                                                                                       | Growing up, offspring turned to people outside their family or support (e.g., friends, teachers)<br>Growing up, offspring had other adults besides their parents (extended family, other adult friends) to turn to for support when needed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                              | Positive Coping helplessness                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Offspring has a strong sense of belonging to their community/people/family<br>Offspring is proud and/or finds it meaningful to be part of their family/my people<br>Offspring was able to create their own story/narrative about their family's/their people's experiences<br>Offspring has actively collected information through art, readings, or field visits about their family/their people's history<br>Offspring has strong positive values that guide them in life<br>Being aware of their family/their people's history positively changed offspring's values and priorities in life<br>Offspring has a loving family* |
| "The dynamic capacity of a complex adaptive system to respond successfully to challenges that threaten the function, survival, or development of the system" | In-group connection, positive cultural identity, cultural connection, participation in culturally-specific activities, countering ongoing oppressive and discriminatory narratives, strong cultural values, positive group identity |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                              | Belonging                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Offspring  
Aug 2026  
Resilience  
Vol 10, No 1.  
(Masten et. al., 2021)

|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         | Moral Values                       | Turning to universal, humanist values, fighting against the victimization of all peoples, pride, reframing trauma narratives to emphasize strength, resilience, and bravery, construct their own sense of self, increased appreciation for life | Offspring was taught to honor and remember the history of their family/their people                                                                         |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Offspring was taught to fight against political/social injustice                                                                                            |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Offspring was taught to stand up to authority                                                                                                               |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         | Betrayed Personal Morals Component | A sense of injustice that contradicts deeply held beliefs about a moral and just world; moral injury; anger & outrage regarding moral injury                                                                                                    | A person or persons with power hurt offspring's family/offspring's people in ways that break their own personal rules about what is morally right and wrong |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | A group of people in power did something bad to offspring's family/their people                                                                             |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Other people did something offspring thinks was wrong to their family/their people                                                                          |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         | Diminished Trust Component         | Feelings of betrayal leading to the loss of trust in perpetrator or those who observed event with indifference                                                                                                                                  | Other nations/people(s) don't care about the suffering inflicted on offspring's family/offspring people and this is morally wrong                           |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Other people who offspring's family/offspring's people trusted did something to them that they think was morally wrong                                      |
|                                                |                                                                                                                                         |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The government/authorities don't care about offspring's family's/offspring's people's suffering and they think this is morally wrong                        |
| Historical Moral Injury Aug 2026 Vol 10, No 1. | The impact of a person experiencing or witnessing an event that is in direct contradiction with their personal fundamental moral values |                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                             |

---

Offspring's people/family were  
betrayed by someone they  
once trusted

---

*Note. \* indicates an inductive code*

**Appendix B. Family Disapproval (FD) Mechanisms Codebook**

Below is a table breakdown of each FD code. All deductive codes were taken from Maercker and Müller's (2004) Social Acknowledgment Questionnaire. Codes were operationalized to reflect offspring-perception in accordance with the present study.

| Vulnerability/Resilience Categorization | Code                                                                       | Definition of Code                                                                                                                                          | Inclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Family Disapproval Vulnerability        | Offspring-Perceived Family's Perceived Exaggeration of Incident            | Offspring believes their family perceives their parent's emotional or behavioral response to the incident as overreacting or exaggerating                   | Family members have suggested or insinuated that reaction to trauma is overreacting, exaggerating, unwarranted, dramatic, minimizing emotional distress, disbelief of trauma severity, reactions attributed to weakness and not an emotional response |
|                                         | Offspring-Perceived Family underestimating experiences of victim           | Offspring perceives their parent's trauma as undermined, dismissed, or not fully understood by family                                                       | Minimizing severity of traumatic experience, dismissing factual occurrences in event, suggesting that traumatic experience is unimportance, uncorrected misunderstanding of incident                                                                  |
|                                         | Offspring-Perceived family feeling uncomfortable talking about experiences | Offspring perceives their family as avoidant or unwilling to discuss the event(s) their parent(s) have endured or the aftermath surrounding said experience | Discomfort when speaking of traumatic events, shifting conversation away, refusal to speak of event, shutting down conversation, avoidance of traumatic topic                                                                                         |
|                                         | Offspring perceived family feeling that they have to protect victim        | Offspring perceives their family as protective of parent due to fragility or vulnerability                                                                  | Treatment of trauma survivor as fragile, vulnerable, or incapable of carrying out tasks that are unrelated to their trauma, emotional shielding, coddling, overprotective behavior, role reversing parenting                                          |

---

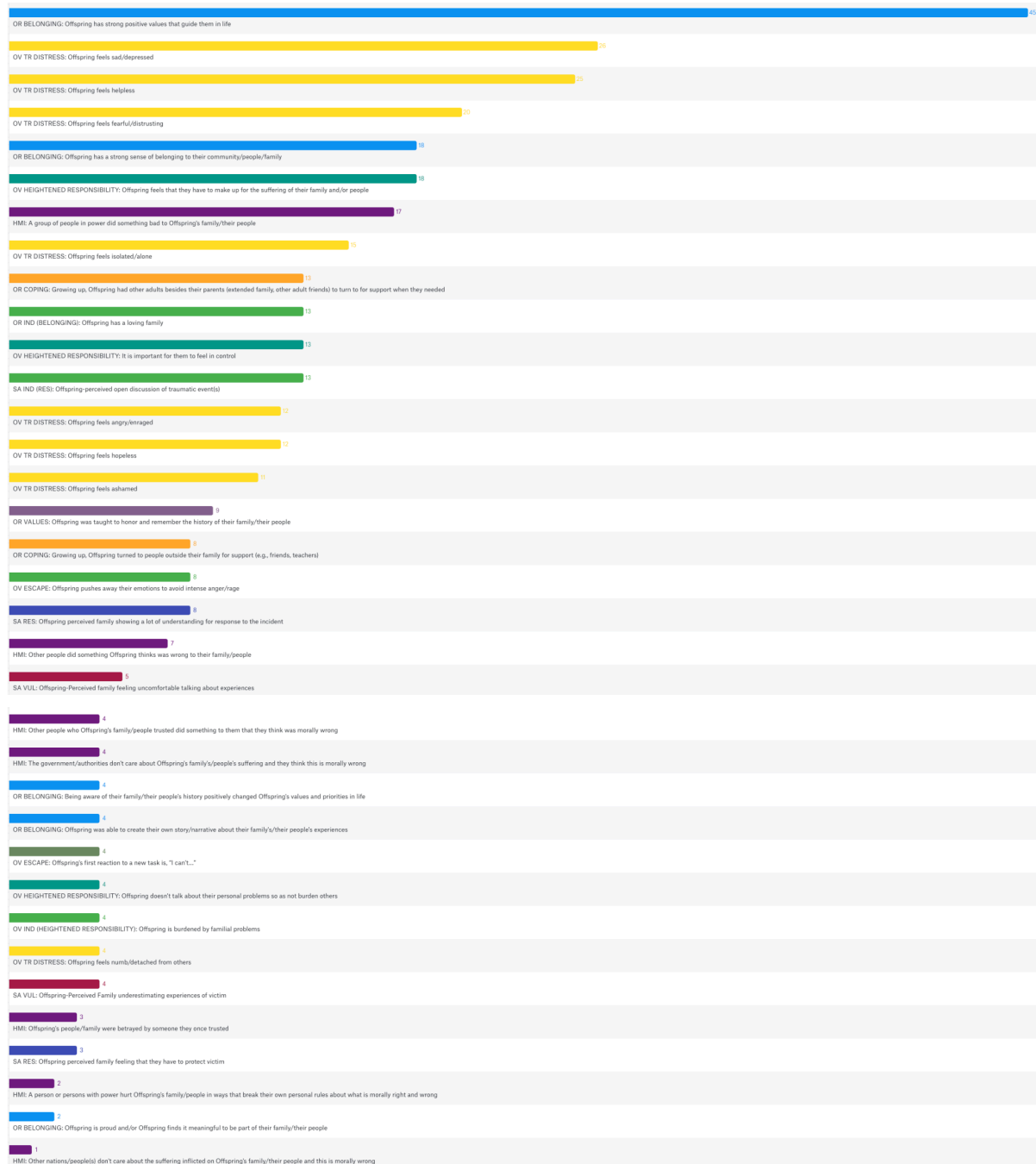
|                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Offspring perceived family showing a lot of understanding for response to the incident | Offspring perceives their family as emotionally validating, empathetic, and compassionate about the traumatic event(s) their parent(s) have endured | Empathy, emotional validation, compassion and recognition of trauma impact, active support of trauma victim and potential relief efforts                     |
| Offspring-perceived open discussion of traumatic event(s)*                             | Offspring perceives their family as having open discussion of the traumatic events their parent(s) have endured                                     | Direct statements about open conversation, regular or normalized discussion, mutual discussion, multiple family member participation, perceived transparency |

---

*Note. \* indicates an inductive code*

## ***Appendix C. Initial Codes Frequency Bar***

Below is a depiction of the “code manager” tool on Atlas.TI, where the hybrid content analysis was conducted. The length of the bar parallels the frequency of presence of each code across all 10 interviews.





**Appendix D. Interview-Specific Frequency Breakdown**

Below is a table breakdown of the frequency of each code in the hybrid content analysis by interview.

| Interview Number          |                                                                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Escape                    | Finds it uncomfortable to be in a position of authority                         | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
|                           | Sometimes uses alcohol, substances, sex, or food to soothe themselves           | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0  |
|                           | First reaction to a new task is, "I can't..."                                   | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0  |
|                           | Pushes away their emotions to avoid intense anger/rage                          | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0  |
| Heightened Responsibility | Feels that they have to make up for the suffering of their family and/or people | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 6 | 1  |
|                           | Is important for them to feel in control                                        | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0  |
|                           | Doesn't talk about their personal problems so as to not burden others           | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0  |
|                           | Offspring is burdened by familial problems *                                    | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0  |
| Trauma-Related Distress   | Feels angry/enraged                                                             | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0  |
|                           | Feels sad/depressed                                                             | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3  |
|                           | Feels helpless                                                                  | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0  |
|                           | Feels ashamed                                                                   | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 0  |

|                 |                                                                                                                                          |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|                 | Feels isolated/alone                                                                                                                     | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
|                 | Feels fearful/distrusting                                                                                                                | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 0 |
|                 | Feels numb/detached from others                                                                                                          | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
|                 | Feels hopeless                                                                                                                           | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Positive Coping | Growing up, offspring turned to people outside their family for support (e.g., friends, teachers)                                        | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
|                 | Growing up, offspring had other adults besides their parents (extended family, other adult friends) to turn to for support when I needed | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Belonging       | Offspring has a strong sense of belonging to their community/people/family                                                               | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
|                 | Offspring is proud and/or finds it meaningful to be part of their family/my people                                                       | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                 | Offspring was able to create their own story/narrative about their family's/their people's experiences                                   | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

|                                          |                                                                                                                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                          | Offspring has actively collected information through art, readings, or field visits about their family/their people's history                               | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                                          | Offspring has strong positive values that guide them in life                                                                                                | 3 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 8 |
|                                          | Being aware of their family/their people's history positively changed offspring's values and priorities in life                                             | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
|                                          | Offspring has a loving family *                                                                                                                             | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Moral Values                             | Offspring was taught to honor and remember the history of their family/their people                                                                         | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
|                                          | Offspring was taught to fight against political/social injustice                                                                                            | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                                          | Offspring was taught to stand up to authority                                                                                                               | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Betrayed Personal Morals Component (HMI) | A person or persons with power hurt offspring's family/offspring's people in ways that break their own personal rules about what is morally right and wrong | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

|                                  |                                                                                                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|                                  | A group of people in power did something bad to offspring's family/my people                                                         | 1 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
|                                  | Other people did something offspring thinks was wrong to their family/their people                                                   | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
|                                  | Other nations/people(s) don't care about the suffering inflicted on offspring's family/offspring people and this is morally wrong    | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                                  | Other people who offspring's family/offspring's people trusted did something to them that they think was morally wrong               | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Diminished Trust Component (HMI) | The government/authorities don't care about offspring's family's/offspring's people's suffering and they think this is morally wrong | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                                  | Offspring's people/family were betrayed by someone they once trusted                                                                 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Social                           | Offspring-Perceived Family's Perceived Exaggeration of Incident                                                                      | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Acknowledge

ment  
Aug 2020  
Vol 10, No 1.

|                                          |                                                                                        |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vulnerability Factors                    | Offspring-Perceived Family underestimating experiences of victim                       | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
|                                          | Offspring-Perceived family feeling uncomfortable talking about experiences             | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Social Acknowledgment Resilience Factors | Offspring perceived family feeling that they have to protect victim                    | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
|                                          | Offspring-perceived open discussion of traumatic event(s) *                            | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
|                                          | Offspring perceived family showing a lot of understanding for response to the incident | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 |

Note. \* indicates an inductive code

**Appendix E. Interview Breakdown**

Below is a table breakdown of each selected interview.

| Interview # | BYU Identifier                         | Interview Length | Selection Criteria    |                            |
|-------------|----------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
|             |                                        |                  | English Transcription | Meets Participant Criteria |
| 1           | ស្រង់ ផល្លា / SRENG Phalla<br>ID: 1626 | 26:58            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 2           | យ៉ុង កែវ / YONG Keo<br>ID: 14867       | 26:17            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 3           | សេង ពិសី / SENG Pisey<br>ID: 1289      | 18:13            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 4           | រ៉េត វណ្ណៈ / RETH Vannak<br>ID: 1404   | 27:08            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 5           | លាប ធៀត / LEAB Theaut<br>ID: 14798     | 25:33            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 6           | អុន ឡឿន / UN Ouan<br>ID: 1513          | 21:06            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 7           | គីម សុភាព / KIM Sopheap<br>ID: 2198    | 29:04            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 8           | ឈឿន សុផល / CHHURN Sophal<br>ID: 15038  | 40:53            | Yes                   | Yes                        |
| 9           | ហង់ ចាន់ធី / HONG Chanthy              | 26:31            | Yes                   | Yes                        |

|    |                                        |       |     |     |
|----|----------------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|
|    | ID: 984                                |       |     |     |
| 10 | អាង ប៊ុនធី / ANG<br>Bunthy<br>ID: 1465 | 25:22 | Yes | Yes |