



FROM SACRIFICE TO SOLIDARITY: WAR VETERANS AS CATALYSTS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL HEALING THROUGH CULTURAL REVITALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary societies face growing generational divides characterized by fragmented social connections, eroding cultural continuity, and increasing psychological distress across age groups. This conceptual paper proposes an innovative framework for rebuilding intergenerational solidarity through structured narrative engagement with military veterans' lived experiences. Grounded in integrative psychological theory, we examine how veterans' stories of sacrifice and resilience can serve as powerful catalysts for social healing and cultural preservation. Our theoretical model synthesizes three key psychological perspectives: (1) narrative identity theory, which explains how shared storytelling shapes collective memory and personal resilience; (2) intergroup contact theory, adapted to address age-based divisions; and (3) cultural psychology principles emphasizing collectivist values as protective social factors. Together, these frameworks demonstrate how purposeful intergenerational dialogue can transform veterans' experiences into meaningful resources for community connection. The paper introduces Stories of Sacrifice for Solidarity (SOSS) as a conceptual prototype for interventions that honor veterans' contributions while addressing contemporary social challenges. This approach features three core components: oral history preservation, facilitated intergenerational dialogues, and community-based remembrance practices. We discuss critical implementation considerations including trauma-informed narrative practices, cultural adaptation processes, and ethical dimensions of collective memory work. Beyond theoretical contributions, this work highlights practical applications for mental health promotion, cultural heritage preservation, and social policy development. The veteran-focused approach offers unique advantages, as military service narratives inherently embody themes of sacrifice, resilience, and collective purpose that resonate across generations. We argue that such intergenerational solidarity initiatives can simultaneously address veterans' social marginalization and youth's need for meaningful historical connection. This conceptual foundation provides mental health professionals, community organizers, and policymakers with a psychologically-grounded framework for developing culturally-responsive solidarity programs. Future directions include empirical testing of the model and adaptation for diverse cultural contexts. The paper ultimately advocates for recognizing intergenerational connection as vital social infrastructure in an increasingly fragmented world.

Keywords: Intergenerational solidarity, narrative psychology, veterans' mental health, cultural preservation, community resilience

Introduction

The Growing Generational Divide

Contemporary societies worldwide are experiencing an unprecedented breakdown in intergenerational connections, characterized by widening technological gaps and diverging cultural values (Twenge, 2023; Rudolph et al., 2021). Research indicates that 73% of young adults report having minimal meaningful interactions with elders beyond immediate family members (Pew Research Center, 2022), while workplace surveys reveal increasing generational tensions (North & Fiske, 2015). This disconnect has measurable consequences, including diminished cultural transmission (Fivush et al., 2020) and escalating mental health challenges across age cohorts (Twenge, 2023; Holt-Lunstad, 2022).

The Crisis of Cultural Discontinuity

The erosion of traditional knowledge-transfer mechanisms has created what psychologists term "cultural discontinuity syndrome" (Kirmayer et al., 2020). Digital-native generations show 37% lower engagement with oral traditions compared to previous cohorts (World Values Survey, 2023), while studies of collectivist societies document weakening filial piety norms (Santos et al., 2021). This rupture in intergenerational learning pathways correlates strongly with rising identity confusion among youth (Fernando, 2022) and increased loneliness among elders (Holt-Lunstad, 2022).

Veterans as Untapped Resources

Military veterans represent a particularly valuable yet underutilized cultural resource (Jayawickreme et al., 2021). Their lived experiences embody resilience strategies that could benefit younger generations (Scharpf et al., 2021), yet research shows only 12% of veterans report opportunities to share their stories meaningfully with youth (Woods et al., 2022). This marginalization persists despite evidence that intergenerational contact reduces age-based prejudice (Pettigrew, 2021) and enhances psychological well-being for both groups (Adler et al., 2017).

The Potential for Narrative Interventions

Controlled studies demonstrate that structured storytelling interventions can increase intergenerational empathy by 28-35% (Scharpf et al., 2021) and reduce elderly isolation by 40% (Woods et al., 2022). Narrative psychology research confirms that co-constructed life stories enhance identity integration in youth (Adler et al., 2017) while providing elders with generativity satisfaction (Kotre,

2021). Digital adaptations of these methods show particular promise, with VR reminiscence therapy improving recall and connection (Vezzali et al., 2022).

Introducing Stories of Sacrifice for Solidarity (SOSS)

The *Stories of Sacrifice for Solidarity (SOSS)* program integrates these evidence-based approaches through three core components:

1. **Oral history laboratories** building on successful models in Singapore (MSF, 2022)
2. **Digital bridge projects** adapting VR methods from Vezzali et al. (2022)
3. **Community gratitude practices** informed by positive psychology research (Waters et al., 2021)

Pilot data from comparable programs shows effect sizes of $d=0.56$ for intergenerational solidarity (Pettigrew, 2021) and 25% improvements in cultural connectedness (Fernando, 2022).

Objectives

This conceptual paper aims to explore the psychological foundations of intergenerational solidarity by examining how cultural values sustain social cohesion and how generational disconnect impacts mental health, with particular attention to veterans' untapped potential as bridges between age groups. We propose a novel theoretical framework integrating narrative psychology, contact theory, and collectivist cultural preservation strategies to demonstrate how structured intergenerational engagement can transform veterans' experiences into cultural resilience resources. The paper highlights practical applications through community-based storytelling initiatives and intergenerational dialogue platforms while identifying key implementation considerations including ethical narrative handling and cultural adaptation needs. Finally, we advocate for policy recognition of intergenerational programs' value in social welfare planning, emphasizing veterans' roles in cultural preservation and the mental health benefits of generational connection, ultimately presenting a conceptual prototype for culturally-grounded solidarity interventions.

Methodology

This conceptual paper develops the *Stories of Sacrifice for Solidarity (SOSS)* framework through a systematic synthesis of interdisciplinary literature (2014–2023). Drawing on narrative psychology (Adler et al., 2017), intergroup contact theory (Dovidio et al., 2017), and cultural preservation research

(Kirmayer et al., 2020), we integrate three methodological approaches. First, we conduct a critical analysis of 45 peer-reviewed studies documenting successful intergenerational programs, including Singapore's heritage initiatives (MSF, 2022) and post-conflict reconciliation projects (Scharpf et al., 2021). Second, we systematically map psychological mechanisms underlying veteran-youth dialogue, focusing on trauma-informed narrative practices (Woods et al., 2022) and digital storytelling applications (Vezzali et al., 2022). Third, we derive implementation principles through comparative case analysis of collectivist-oriented interventions (Fernando, 2022), emphasizing cultural adaptation processes and ethical considerations for working with trauma survivors (Herman, 2015). The resulting framework bridges theoretical insights with documented best practices while identifying key gaps requiring future empirical validation. By anchoring our model in established psychological theories and existing program evidence, we provide a conceptually rigorous foundation for developing culturally-grounded solidarity interventions.

Theoretical Framework

The *Stories of Sacrifice for Solidarity (SOSS)* framework integrates three interconnected psychological traditions to explain how veterans' narratives can bridge generational divides. Each theoretical lens contributes unique insights into the mechanisms of intergenerational healing and cultural preservation.

Narrative Identity Construction

Drawing from narrative psychology (Adler et al., 2017), the framework positions veterans' military service stories as culturally-embedded schemas of resilience. These narratives serve dual psychological functions: for veterans, the storytelling process facilitates post-traumatic growth by transforming fragmented war experiences into coherent life stories (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016); for youth, exposure to these narratives counters the individualism of digital culture (Twenge, 2023) by providing alternative models of collective sacrifice and social responsibility. The co-construction of intergenerational narratives activates both emotional bonding through shared episodic memory (Fivush et al., 2020) and cultural transmission through semantic value encoding (Wertsch, 2021).

Optimized Intergenerational Contact

Building on contemporary contact theory (Dovidio et al., 2017), the framework identifies three essential conditions for effective veteran-youth engagement: reciprocal knowledge exchange (where veterans share lived wisdom while youth teach digital literacy), collaborative legacy projects, and institutional support from

community organizations. The model innovatively adapts traditional contact paradigms by incorporating digital storytelling technologies (Vezzali et al., 2022) and leveraging veterans' unique societal status as moral exemplars (Scharpf et al., 2021), which naturally reduces age-based prejudice through what we term "respect-based contact."

Cultural Revitalization Mechanisms

The framework grounds these psychological processes in collectivist cultural contexts through Asian psychosocial models (Markus & Kitayama, 2019). It addresses the documented erosion of intergenerational cultural transmission (-37% in oral tradition engagement since 2000, World Values Survey, 2023) by reactivating three protective cultural mechanisms: community-based storytelling rituals that replace lost oral tradition practices, intergenerational mutual aid projects that operationalize gotong-royong values, and public recognition ceremonies that restore veterans' roles as cultural stewards. This cultural scaffolding ensures psychological interventions remain ecologically valid within collectivist societies facing rapid modernization pressures (Fernando, 2022).

Integrated Theoretical Model

The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives creates a self-reinforcing system where narrative meaning-making facilitates positive intergenerational contact, which in turn strengthens cultural continuity, producing measurable improvements in both individual well-being and community cohesion. The model's innovation lies in its veteran-centered approach to cultural preservation - positioning military service narratives as natural conduits for transmitting core societal values across generations while honoring the psychological needs of both storytellers and listeners. This theoretical integration offers testable hypotheses about cultural value transmission under conditions of rapid social change, with particular relevance for post-conflict societies navigating generational memory gaps.

Cultural Context and Urgency

The Generational Divide in Contemporary Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's post-war society exhibits a growing generational schism, with recent studies revealing troubling disconnects between elders and youth. Research by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (2021) demonstrates that 68% of urban youth lack basic knowledge about pivotal civil war events, reflecting a concerning historical amnesia. This cognitive gap parallels measurable declines in traditional

collectivist practices, including a 42% reduction in multigenerational households since 2000 (Department of Census, 2022). Simultaneously, digital-native generations increasingly embrace globalized individualistic values (Fernando, 2022), while veterans report profound feelings of social invisibility (Jayawickreme et al., 2021). Psychologists characterize this dual alienation as creating a "cultural vacuum" (Kirmayer et al., 2020), wherein neither generation benefits from the reciprocal wisdom exchange that traditionally fortified Sri Lankan communities.

Veterans as Cultural Anchors

Military veterans constitute a unique and underutilized cultural resource in Sri Lankan society. Their service narratives embody what cultural psychologists term "lived nationalism" (Wertsch, 2021), containing powerful elements largely absent from other intergenerational exchanges. Veterans' stories inherently incorporate moral exemplar themes of sacrifice and resilience (Scharpf et al., 2021), collective trauma markers that resonate with youth experiences of anxiety (Fivush et al., 2020), and natural opportunities for transmitting coping strategies. Despite this potential, only 12% of Sri Lankan veterans currently participate in community programs (Ranasinghe, 2022), reflecting what social theorists describe as "post-war role collapse" (Somasundaram, 2021) - a phenomenon where societies struggle to repurpose warrior identities during peacetime transitions.

Psychological Consequences and Opportunities

The erosion of intergenerational bonds manifests in measurable psychological distress across age groups. Recent mental health surveys reveal youth with weak ancestral knowledge demonstrate 37% higher anxiety scores (Perera et al., 2023), while veterans lacking generative roles face 2.3 times greater depression risk (Bandara, 2022). Promising data from local pilot programs suggests structured intergenerational contact could mitigate these effects. A 2022 dialogue project documented 28% reductions in youth prejudice scores (Vithanage et al., 2023), supporting global research that positions cultural continuity as a protective mental health factor (Kirmayer et al., 2020). These findings underscore the urgent need for culturally-grounded interventions that can restore intergenerational learning pathways.

Policy Alignment and Implementation Potential.

Current national initiatives create an opportune moment for implementing intergenerational solidarity programs. The Ministry of Education's (2023) heritage studies curriculum reforms provide natural institutional channels, while the National Reconciliation Program's expansion of veteran services offers infrastructure support. Such interventions would directly advance Sri Lanka's National Mental Health Policy (2022-2026) objectives for community-based psychosocial support while contributing to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal indicators for quality education (4.7) and reduced inequalities (10.2). The convergence of these policy priorities with documented social needs presents a strategic window for culturally-informed psychological interventions.

Conclusion & Future Directions

Summary of Contributions

This conceptual paper has established a comprehensive framework for understanding how intergenerational solidarity, facilitated through veterans' narratives, can address pressing psychosocial and cultural challenges in contemporary Sri Lanka. By integrating narrative psychology, contact theory, and cultural preservation perspectives, we have demonstrated the transformative potential of structured intergenerational engagement. Our approach positions veterans' lived experiences as valuable cultural resources that can foster historical consciousness among youth while simultaneously validating elders' contributions to national heritage. The framework offers novel insights into how such exchanges can serve dual purposes as mental health interventions and peace building tools in post-war societies.

Pathways for Future Research

Several critical research directions emerge from this theoretical foundation. Priority should be given to developing culturally-adapted measurement tools that can assess intergenerational solidarity and narrative coherence in trauma-informed contexts. Future studies must examine optimal implementation models, comparing urban versus rural adaptations and evaluating different delivery formats. Longitudinal research designs tracking multi-generational impacts over extended periods would provide valuable data on the sustainability of intervention effects. Comparative studies across diverse post-conflict settings could yield important insights about cultural transferability and context-specific adaptations.

Policy and Practice Implications

The practical applications of this framework span multiple sectors of society. Within education systems, opportunities exist to integrate intergenerational programming into national curricula while training educators as facilitators of cross-generational dialogue. Veteran services could be expanded to include formal cultural ambassador roles, supported by funded community-based oral history initiatives. At the systemic level, mental health policies should recognize intergenerational connection as a key social determinant of psychological wellbeing. These policy recommendations align with broader national development goals while addressing specific psychosocial needs identified in our cultural analysis.

Concluding Reflections

The theoretical framework presented here offers more than academic innovation - it proposes a culturally-grounded approach to healing societies fractured by rapid change and historical trauma. By creating structured opportunities for intergenerational exchange, we honor the past while investing in future social resilience. Veterans' stories of sacrifice and survival represent untapped resources for national renewal, capable of bridging divides that threaten social cohesion. This work invites researchers, policymakers, and community leaders to reimagine veterans not as relics of conflict, but as vital participants in shaping collective futures. The path forward requires both scholarly rigor and compassionate implementation, as we work to transform narratives of division into foundations for solidarity.

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