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Assessing the factor structure of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, and cumulative effect of abuse and neglect on mental health among adolescents in conflict-affected Burundi



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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the factor structure of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998), highlight rates of abuse and neglect among Burundian adolescents, compare these rates with those found in high-income nations, and examine the cumulative effect of multiple types of abuse and neglect on depression and PTSD symptoms. Participants were 231 adolescents and youth ($M = 14.9$, $SD = 1.99$, 58.4% female) from five provinces of Burundi, a country in Central Africa affected by war and political violence. Translation and back-translation of the CTQ was carried out to obtain an adaptation of CTQ in Kirundi, the native language of Burundi. With the exception of one item on 'molestation' in the factor of sexual abuse, the five-factor structure of CTQ was obtained comprising latent factors, namely emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and emotional and physical neglect. The rate of abuse and neglect ranged from 14.7–93.5% with more than 37% reporting 4 or more types of abuse and neglect experiences. Emotional abuse and neglect, and physical neglect were 2–3 times higher among Burundian adolescents when compared with studies from high-income countries using the CTQ. A cumulative effect of multiple types of abuse and neglect was found, such that, those with 4 or more types of maltreatment were higher on symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress. Findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive, standardized, and validated measures and norms for gauging childhood maltreatment in Burundi and related need for preventative interventions on childhood maltreatment.

1. Introduction

Child abuse and neglect are major global public health issues, with exposure to maltreatment being associated with increase in internalizing and externalizing psychopathology among children and adolescents (Arata, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Bowers, & O'Brien, 2007; Charak & Koot, 2015; Petrenko, Friend, Garrido, Taussig, & Culhane, 2012). However, a large portion of the research on child

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maltreatment is based on samples from high-income nations, while the risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect are higher in low- and middle-income countries, including most African nations. To name a few, these risk factors include poverty (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998), low literacy rates (Meinck, Cluver, Boyes, & Ndhlovu, 2015), lack of legislation and child welfare services, poor access to health and education services (World Health Organization [WHO], 2011), and residing in conflict zones (Catani, Jacob, Schauer, Kohila, & Neuner, 2008; for a review see Meinck et al., 2015).

Burundi, a small landlocked country located in the Central African Great Lakes region, is one such nation confronted with many risk factors mentioned previously. Burundi's population is one of the poorest in the world with more than 64% living below the poverty line (based on data from 2014, World Bank 2016) and 80% experience multidimensional poverty, that is, deprivation in areas of health, education, and standard of living (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2016). The majority of the population lives on subsistence farming, and pressure on the land is high as Burundi is the third most densely populated country in Africa with a high annual population growth rate of 3.3% (based on data from 2014, World Bank, 2016). Burundi's poverty stems partly from the long history of violent conflicts (e.g., Verwimp & Burndervoet, 2009) since its independence in 1962. In 2005, Burundi emerged from a 12-year civil war, and in its aftermath, the country continued to struggle with poverty, corruption and impunity and a legacy of ethnic, regional, and political divisions (cf. Berckmoes, 2014, 2015). Violent political contestations were on the rise again after the 2010 elections (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2010), with political violence reaching a new peak in the electoral period in 2015, a month after data collection for this study took place. Since then, more than 300,000 refugees have fled the country (UNHCR, 2016). At least 400 people have been killed and thousands have been arrested and possibly subjected to human rights violations (UN, 2016).

1.1. Child abuse and neglect in Africa

Research on child abuse and neglect in Africa generally, and specifically in Burundi is extremely limited. Most studies available from Sub-Saharan Africa report on findings from South Africa. To the best of our knowledge, only two studies examined childhood maltreatment in the context of Burundi, one focusing on street children and the second limited to two urban neighbourhoods in Burundi's capital (Crombach, Bambonye, & Elbert, 2014; Crombach & Bambonyé, 2015). Overall, studies from Africa report elevated rates of child abuse, as high as 53% for physical abuse and 56% for sexual abuse (Meinck et al., 2015). Presence of risk factors, such as, war, high levels of poverty, high prevalence of infectious disease, including HIV, and different family structures and socio-cultural attitudes, suggest that child abuse and neglect in low- and middle income countries in Africa occur in higher rates compared to high-income countries (Laird, 2016; Meinck et al., 2015). However, comparative studies of child maltreatment across nations is challenging as prior research studies vary greatly in terms of definitions of child abuse and neglect, nature of the study sample, recruitment, scales/instruments used, procedures followed, and due to diverse cultural/or socio-cultural contexts (Meinck et al., 2015; Nichols et al., 2014; Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, & Alink, 2013). To overcome current limitations for cross-cultural comparison and to allow for more context-sensitive knowledge, empirical research based on validated and standardized measures of child abuse and neglect in Burundi and other African countries, is urgently needed.

1.2. Factor analytic studies of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire from around the world

A popular and standardized measure for assessing childhood maltreatment is the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998), which was also used in the present study. Based on factor analytic studies the original five-factors structure comprising emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect has been supported across diverse populations (e.g., adolescents, substance users, sex workers; Bernstein et al., 2003; Bogaerts, Daalder, Spreen, van der Knaap, & Henrichs, 2011; Forde, Baron, Scher, & Stein, 2012) and across nations (e.g., the U.S., Canada, Bernstein et al., 2003; Paivio & Cramer, 2004). However, some studies primarily conducted in non-U.S. nations and where English is not the native language, suggest changes in the original factor structure of the CTQ. For example, studies conducted by different research groups in South Korea (Kim, Park, Yang, & Oh, 2011), Sweden (Gerdner & Allgulander, 2009), India (Charak & Koot, 2014), and Brazil (Grassi-Oliveira et al., 2014) found that the reverse scored items of physical neglect did not load on to their specific factor. Another study conducted in the Netherlands found that the item on 'molestation' did not load on the factor of sexual abuse and instead loaded on the factor of physical abuse. This item was dropped from the final model while retaining the five-factor structure of the CTQ (Thombs, Bernstein, Lobbestael, & Arntz, 2009). This specific item was dropped because the literal translation of the term 'molestation' in Dutch lacked a sexual connotation. Of the five dimensions of equivalence to test the transcultural usefulness of instruments (i.e., concept, content, semantic, criterion and technical validity) the literal translation of molestation in Dutch lacked semantic equivalence (de Jong & van Ommeren, 2002; Flaherty et al., 1988). Another research group from the French-speaking Quebec region in Canada faced a similar issue with the semantic validity of the item on 'molestation' wherein the item loaded on the factor of physical abuse rather than on sexual abuse (Paquette, Laporte, Bigras, & Zoccolillo, 2004). Cognizant of these discrepancies in the factor structure, the present study aimed to investigate the factor structure of the CTQ in an under studied and non-English speaking sample of Burundian adolescents and youth.

1.3. Childhood abuse and neglect, and differences across gender

Prevalence rates of abuse and neglect differ across males and females and studies often indicate physical abuse to be higher in males than in females (e.g., Chen & Wei, 2011; Thompson, Kingree, & Desai, 2004), and rates of sexual abuse are reported to be higher in females (Häuser, Schmutzner, Brähler, & Glaesmer, 2011; Pereda, Guilera, Forns, & Gomez-Benito, 2009). Conversely, higher levels

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