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Impact of Civil War: Trauma in Southern Sudan

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Introduction

In a January, 2011 referendum, the South Sudan voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Kampuchean-based Northern Sudan. Just this week, the UN Security Council voted to extend the U.N. 2005 peacekeeping mission in Southern Sudan until July 9 of 2011, when the south is expected to officially declare independence from northern Sudan. These developments are the culmination of more than two decades of civil conflict that pitted the predominantly Muslim north against the People’s Liberation Army of the mainly Christian and spiritist south. In the process, more than two million have been killed and millions more displaced. For many Sudaneses, their entire lives have been shadowed by this ongoing conflict. This purpose of this study was to explore the psychological effects of the prolonged conflict to determine what psychosocial responses the survivors experienced. Participants were compared with trauma participants from India, southern Sudan, and the West Bank.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 35 volunteers from South Sudan. Mean age was 38.68 years (sd = 9.8); 29% were female and 71% were male. Eighteen of the participants reported a mean education of 9.83 years (sd = 3.45). Comparisons were also made with 217 participants from India, Haiti, and the West Bank.

Instruments

A Demographic Questionnaire included items about age, gender, and education.

Data were gathered in 2010 from 1,757 participants from India, southern Sudan, and the West Bank.

The Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) assesses the type of distress a person has experienced due to traumatic events during their lifetime (Weiss & Marmar, 1997)

The Cumulative Trauma Scale (CTS) gathers data on the various types of traumatic events the person has experienced over his or her lifetime on a 4-point continuum (Kira et al, 2001)

The Dissociative Experience Scale (DES) screens for dissociative experiences due to trauma on a never (0%) to always (100%) continuum. For this study, only the eight taxon continuum were included (DES-1, DES-5, DES-7, DES-8, DES-12, DES-13, DES-22, and DES-27) (Ruiz et al, 2008)

Procedure

Data were gathered in 2010 in a January, 2011 referendum, the South Sudan voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Kampuchean-based Northern Sudan. Just this week, the UN Security Council voted to extend the U.N. 2005 peacekeeping mission in Southern Sudan until July 9 of 2011, when the south is expected to officially declare independence from northern Sudan. These developments are the culmination of more than two decades of civil conflict that pitted the predominantly Muslim north against the People’s Liberation Army of the mainly Christian and spiritist south. In the process, more than two million have been killed and millions more displaced. For many Sudaneses, their entire lives have been shadowed by this ongoing conflict. This purpose of this study was to explore the psychological effects of the prolonged conflict to determine what psychosocial responses the survivors experienced. Participants were compared with trauma participants from India, southern Sudan, and the West Bank.

Skills and tactics used in this study included items about age, gender, and education.

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Results

CTS Results

Alpha = .72.

The CTS data revealed that most participants reported several kinds of traumatic experiences:

1. Lived in a country experiencing civil war (100%)

I felt watchful and on guard

Symptomatically, participants reported recurring flashbacks, intrusive pictures of these events, and distressing thoughts, feelings and behavior on the IES-R.

No significant gender differences were found between groups for any of the administered scales. Significant differences were found among participants from different countries in the trauma reported, their impact, and the forms of dissociation reported.

All participants reported multiple traumas: exposure to civil war, seeing loved ones or others close to them die, observing physical assault, seeing dead bodies, observing and experiencing torture, observing and being victimized by physical violence.

• Reports of life threatening illness and accidents, natural disaster, and international warfare were also very common.

• Symptomatically, participants reported recurring flashbacks, intrusive pictures of these events, and distressing thoughts, feelings and behavior on the IES-R.

• Results indicated different forms of dissociation across groups. In this sample, survivors were likely act so differently in one situation, compared to another, that they felt as if they were two different people; they reported hearing voices inside their head telling them to do things or commenting on things they were doing.

• Sudanese participants were more likely than other groups to experience difficulty recognizing family or friends; while lower than other dissociative symptoms, participants from Sudan also were more likely than other groups to report finding things among their belongings they did not remember buying.

• No significant gender differences were found between groups for any of the administered scales.

• Significant differences were found among participants from different countries in the trauma reported, their impact, and the forms of dissociation reported.

• Differences among groups may be due to exposure to different forms of trauma or cultural differences.

References

