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# International trauma: Gender and trauma in India

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## Introduction

- Marked by extremes of opulence and squalor, privilege and oppression, India is one-third the size of the United States. Yet India houses over one billion people (over three times the US) and has great religious diversity (www.cia.gov).
- Along with its varied religions and practices the country also has a caste system that divides society into classes based on a family's economic wealth. In this system many of the poor belong to the class of "Pariah" and are called "Harijans": "the outcasts, untouchables, children of God."
- Many of these outcasts have suffered neglect, abandonment, and rejection, along with physical, sexual and emotional abuse. (<http://www.slumstoschool.com/fact-about-indias-child-population>).
- The present study focused on individuals who underwent these particular traumatic events to determine how they were experienced. Participants were compared to other international trauma participants, including survivors of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Sudan civil war and famine survivors, and West Bank Palestinians who were exposed to ethnic, cultural, and religious warfare.

## Methods

### Participants

**Indian** participants were 29 volunteers from an orphanage in India, with a mean age of 39.15 years (sd= 13.37); 19 (73%) reported they were female and 7 (27%) were male.

**Haitian** participants were 69 volunteers [44 were male (64%) and 25 male (36%)], tested about five months after the January 2010 earthquake.

**Sudan** participants included 31 volunteers, 9 were female (29%) and 22 were male (71%); they had been exposed to ongoing civil war and famine.

**West Bank** participants included 23 volunteers, 12 (52% were female and 11 (48%) were male; they were exposed to civil conflict and ethnic, cultural and religious persecution.

### Instruments

#### Demographic Questionnaire

Included items about age, gender, and education.

#### Cumulative Trauma Scale (CTS)

Gathered data on the various types of traumatic events the person had experienced (Kira et al, 2001). Alpha was 0.78.

#### Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R)

Assessed the type of distress participants had experienced due to traumatic events during their lifetimes (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). Alpha was 0.89.

#### Dissociative Experience Scale (DES)

Screened for dissociative experiences due to trauma; only the eight Taxon items were included (Ruiz et al, 2008). Alpha was 0.81.

#### Procedure

Data were collected in 2010.



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## Results

### CTS Results

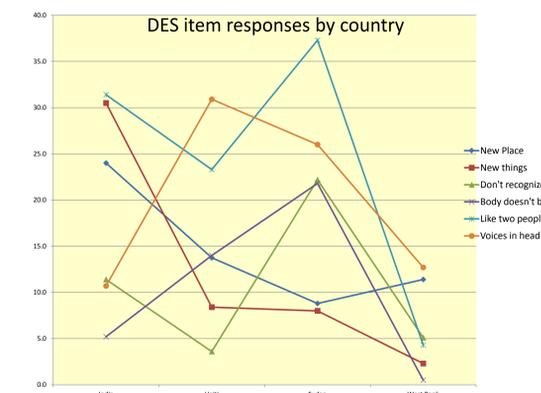
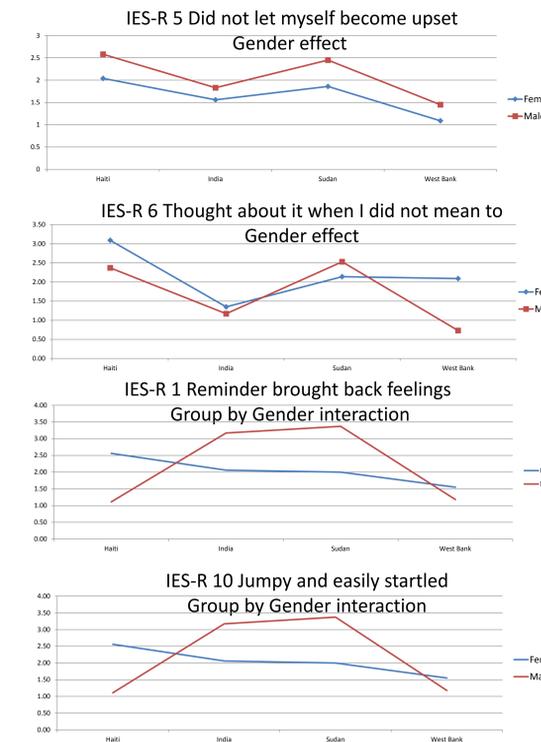
- A significant main effect was found for groups on the CTS total score ( $F_{(3, 99)} = 22.92; p < .001$ ).
- Participants from India scored similarly to participants from Haiti and West Bank; the total CTS scores from the participants of Sudan were higher than India, Haiti and West Bank.
- GLM analysis found significant main effects for groups on 17 of the 20 CTS items.
- Gender effects were found for four items: CTS-9, CTS-10, CTS-11, and CTS-13.
- An interaction of groups and gender was found for CTS-7 and CTS-16.
- Indian participants reported witnessing another being sexually assaulted and tortured more than other participants.
- Sudan and West Bank participants reported exposure to civil war.
- Haiti participants reported exposure to natural disaster.

### IES-R Results

- A main effect was found for groups ( $F_{(3, 95)} = 7.48; p < .001$ ) for the total score.
- Participants from India scored similarly to participants from Haiti and the West Bank on the IES-R total but lower than participants from Sudan.
- GLM analysis found significant main effects for the groups on 10 of the 22 IES-R items, .
- Gender effects were found for IES-R-5 and IES-R-6.
- Gender by group interactions were found for IES-R-1 and IES-R-10.
- Participants from India were less likely to think of the trauma when they did not mean to, to dream of it, or to have their sleep disrupted than those from Haiti or Sudan; they were less likely to "feel like they were back there" than those from Sudan.

### DES Results—Taxon Items

- No differences were found among groups for the total score on the DES Taxon items due to missing responses ( $F_{(2, 9)} = 0.971; NS$ ).
- Among the groups, GLM analysis found significant main effects for six of the eight DES Taxon items (all but DES-7 and DES-12), but no gender effects and no gender by group interactions were found.
- Indian participants were more likely to report "finding new things among their belongings" they did not remember buying than the other groups. They also were more likely to feel or act like a different person in some circumstances than those from the West Bank in post hoc tests.



## Discussion

### Measuring Trauma

- Internal consistencies were adequate to strong despite challenges of language and culture.

### Traumas Reported

- Main effects for the CTS items indicate that participants reported significantly different sources of trauma.
- Indian participants reported witnessing more sexual assaults and torture than the other groups; conversely, they did not report exposure to natural disaster or civil warfare.

### Trauma Impact

- Main effects for the IES-R suggest different levels of trauma among the groups examined. Indian participants scored similarly to participants from Haiti and the West Bank, but reported lower subjective distress than those from Sudan.
- Indian participants were less likely to think of traumatic episodes involuntarily, to dream of trauma, or to have their sleep disrupted.
- Males were less likely to become upset or to think about their trauma when they did not mean to do so.

### Dissociation

- No groups differences were found for the total score on the DES Taxon items due to missing data.
- DES item results found that participants from India reported they were more likely to find things in their possession that they did not remember purchasing and to feel and act so differently across situations that they almost felt like two different people.

### Concluding comments

- Differences among groups in the impact of trauma could be due to the specific trauma to which they were exposed, whether trauma was caused by natural or human events, economic and socio-cultural factors, or the duration and severity of the stressful events.
- Although language and culture pose challenges, these findings indicate that it is possible to measure trauma in international samples and discern meaningful patterns of response.

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