

Cross-cultural validation of a screening tool for psychological difficulties in children aged 6 to 36 months

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Introduction

In low-resource settings, the lack of mental health human resources and the absence of cross-culturally validated screening instruments jeopardize the implementation of mental health care, especially for very young children. We aimed to develop and cross-culturally validate a general tool, the PSYCa 6-36, to screen for psychological difficulties in children aged 6 to 36 months.

Methods

A primary validation of the PSYCa 6-36 was conducted in Kenya (n=319 children aged 6 to 36 months; 2014), followed by three secondary validations (n=215, Kenya, 2014; n=189, Cambodia, 2015; n=182, Uganda, 2016). After standardized translation procedures, lay interviewers administered the PSYCa 6-36 in local languages to the children's caregivers at home. We assessed the psychometric properties of the tool and its external validity against a gold standard (*i.e.* clinical global impression severity [CGIS] score rated by a psychologist after clinical interview).

Results

The internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha=0.61, Uganda; ≥ 0.70 , Kenya and Cambodia). The temporal reliability was very good (intra-class correlation coefficient [ICC] ≥ 0.80) and the inter-rater reliability acceptable to good (ICC=0.6, Uganda; ICC=0.70, Cambodia; ICC=0.83, Kenya). The external validity was acceptable to good (area under the curve [AUC] 0.63, Uganda; AUC=0.80, Kenya and Cambodia). The prevalence of CGIS scores ≥ 1 , indicating mental health difficulties according to the psychologist, was 5.1% in Kenya, 8.7% in Cambodia and 10.5% in Uganda.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that the PSYCa 3-36 is a promising screening tool for young children. Once adapted to the local context, the PSYCa 6-36 use was easy and quick to use for trained non-specialists. The PSYCa 6-36 also increased the awareness on children's psychological difficulties and the importance of early recognition to prevent long-term consequences. Further use and validation of the tool in settings with higher prevalence of psychological difficulties will help to further refine the scale.

The PSYCa 6-36 appears useful to screen for psychological difficulties among children aged 6 to 36 months, allowing concentrating resources to children most in need.