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Background

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 validate a cross-cultural 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 assessment).

Results

The internal consistency of the PSYCa 6-36 was acceptable (Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.61 to 0.74) and its temporal reliability was very good (intra-class correlation coefficient [ICC] ≥ 0.80). The inter-rater reliability was acceptable to good (ICC ranged from 0.60 to 0.83) as well as the external validity (area under

the curve ranged from 0.63 to 0.80). 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 6-36 is a promising screening tool for young children. Once adapted to the local context, the PSYCa 6-36 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 refine the scale.

The PSYCa 6-36 is a useful tool to screen for psychological difficulties among children aged 6 to 36 months.