

Mental Health Problems in Sri Lankan Adolescents Exposed to the Tsunami and Other Traumatic Events

Citation for published version (APA):

Ponnamperuma, T. T. (2019). *Mental Health Problems in Sri Lankan Adolescents Exposed to the Tsunami and Other Traumatic Events*. Maastricht University. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190418tp>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2019

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20190418tp](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20190418tp)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

measured social economic status. Caution is also warranted in generalizing our findings to other populations, because the study sample was drawn from a specific tsunami-affected area in Sri Lanka. Lastly, the study lacked pre-trauma baseline data that would have allowed firmer interpretation of the causal relationship between risk factors (negative cognitive appraisal, daily stressors) and PTSS. Moreover, interpretation of causality in observed associations between PTSS with co-occurring EBP and cortisol levels with PTSS was also restricted due to the lack of longitudinal data.

Summary

The first part of the dissertation elucidated the effect of two possible risk factors for post-trauma mental health problems: negative cognitive appraisal of trauma was associated with persistent PTSS in adolescents, and daily stressors were an important transmitter of the impact of trauma on PTSS, EBP and impaired daily functioning, especially in youth with low perceived social support. Both of these theoretically significant findings also have important clinical relevance. Adolescents with PTSS could profit most from cognitive interventions. Addressing daily stressors in post-trauma settings could be an effective intervention and would benefit adolescents with functional impairment and EBP more than PTSD interventions alone. Given that post-trauma interventions are generally faced with limited resources, it is hoped that the findings of this study will be useful for recovery planning when disaster strikes. For further clarification of both these risk factors, longitudinal studies are needed.

The analysis of the relationship of salivary cortisol to trauma exposure and PTSS revealed that trauma-exposed girls had higher cortisol levels than boys, despite lower cumulative trauma. Internalizing symptoms moderated the effects of trauma and PTSS on cortisol levels. The finding that negative trauma appraisals were associated with higher cortisol level in traumatized adolescents can be targeted for effective PTSD interventions. Studies with clinically diagnosed cases are recommended for further investigation of the link between cortisol levels and PTSS, controlling for all possible confounders that affect the relationship.

The last part of the dissertation investigated co-occurrence of emotional and behavioral problems with PTSS. Results indicated that EBP was significantly higher among PTSD-positive

participants and that PTSS exacerbated the impact of EBP on daily functioning. Further it was evident that IPV-exposed adolescents experienced significantly more trauma types and had more severe psychological symptoms than trauma-exposed adolescents without violent events. These findings indicate that it is crucial for researchers and practitioners to investigate and understand the presence of trauma-associated general psychological problems (EBP) in adolescents, as these are common and, together with PTSS, pose a heightened risk for impaired daily functioning.