Author's response to reviews

Title: Traumatic episodes experienced during the genocide period in Rwanda influence life circumstances in young men and women 17 years later.

Authors:

Lawrence Rugema (lrugema@nursph.org)
Ingrid Mogren (ingrid.mogren@obgyn.umu.se)
Joseph Ntaganira (Jntagani@nursph.org)
Krantz Gunilla (gunilla.krantz@socmed.gu.se)

Version: 3
Date: 14 December 2013

Author's response to reviews: see over
To reviewer Petra Brysiewicz.

Thank you for your comments to our paper on Traumatic episodes and its risk factors in post-genocide Rwanda. We have carefully considered all your comments and made changes accordingly. A detailed response is given below on how each comment has been taken care of. In the manuscript, we added text and changed wording indicated in dark red colour

Reviewer's report

**Title:** Traumatic episodes experienced during the genocide period in Rwanda influence life circumstances in young men and women 17 years later

**Version:** 2  **Date:** 13 November 2013

**Reviewer:** Petra Brysiewicz

**Reviewer's report:**

**Major Compulsory Revisions:**

**Reviewer's comment:** It does not mention if the respondents gave consent – please clarify this.

**Authors' response:** please see page 10, 2nd paragraph in the Ethical considerations part where the following sentence is placed: The structured interviews following the questionnaire were initiated after a written informed consent was granted by the respondents.

**Minor Essential Revisions:**

The title of the article does not accurately reflect the article contents as it is not just about traumatic episodes but also associated effects. The abstract is appropriate and reflects what is found in the article.

**Authors' response:** We believe that the title of the article actually does reflect the associated effects as these are the same as the identified risk factors (estimated by use of odds ratios). In the title of the paper, we however use the word life circumstances instead of socio-demographic and psychosocial risk factors to make
the title more understandable. We therefore suggest that the title is kept as it is. Please correct us if we have misunderstood this point.

**Reviewer’s comment:** The question posed by the authors is fairly well defined, however there are a number of terms that should be defined early on in the article. These terms are “traumatic episodes” and “young adults” – as these terms can mean different things to different readers and the authors need to make this clear from the beginning.

**Authors’ response:** On page 10, we have added a short paragraph, titled definitions and here Traumatic episodes and young adults are defined. Traumatic episodes relates to *trauma and torture related to mass violence and their sequelae* (Ref Shoeb M, Weinstein H, Mollica R. The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire: Adapting a cross-cultural instrument for measuring torture, trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder. International Journal of Social Psychiatry.2007; 53(5): 447–463. DOI: 10.1177/0020764007078362). Mollica and co-authors developed the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, a cross-cultural instrument to obtain information about the actual trauma events, including torture, and to assess DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* – American Psychiatric Association, 1994) symptoms and presumably culture-specific symptoms associated with PTSD. This instrument was used in this study.

Young adults – there are different definitions in different settings, 16-25 was suggested for some countries while in Rwanda young adults commonly define those aged 20-35 years. This is now in the ms at page 10.

**Reviewer’s comment:** It is also important for the authors to explain exactly what they mean by “during lifetime”, “the genocide period” and “in the past three years” as I find these to be confusing – please make it very clear in the beginning exactly what these three episodes in the respondents lives refers to.

**Authors’ response:** Traumatic episodes at the three time periods is now clearly explained in the Statistical methods section and also in the head of Table 3 as: The traumatic episodes related to the genocide period (1994) included all cases reported
in the period 1994±1 year to take care of recall bias of the exact age of exposure. This procedure was found important as age at episode was inquired about and not the exact timing (year) of each episode. As 17 years have elapsed since the genocide period in 1994 and some of the participants were really young then (from 3 years of age), it is plausible that some missed out on their exact age as evidenced in other studies (28). Traumatic episodes during life time relate to experience of any of the items inquired about during any point in life and past three years include all traumatic episodes experienced in the years 2009-2011.

Reviewer’s comment: More detail is needed regarding the questionnaire developed – it is mentioned that the developed questionnaire was based on previously validated instruments however only one instrument is mentioned – please make this clear. Please provide more details regarding the questionnaire development as well as who translated the tool into Kinyarwanda, and how this was checked.

Authors’ response: The questionnaire was based on previously validated instruments. However, as only The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire was used in this paper, the other instruments were not mentioned in this ms. But for mental conditions (to be used in next paper) the MINI instrument was used, Mini International Neuropsychiatric Instrument (a short version of the CIDI instrument) and for violence, the WHO instrument titled Women’s Health and Life experiences was used.

For socio-demographic and psychosocial items, we used items from the Rwanda Demographic and Health Surveillance from 2010. This is now added to the ms on page 8 under the headline Independent variables.

The questionnaire was translated into Kinyarwanda by a professional translator. This version was then checked by the clinical psychologists (data collectors) for full understanding and agreement between them. The questionnaire was hereafter piloted and then minor revisions were made. This is now clarified in the ms on page 7, 2nd para.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Authors’ response: A language editor whose mother-tongue is English has done language corrections to improve the English language in this paper.

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare I have no competing interests