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.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report
Thank you for very good comments to our ms and we have taken action and made revisions as described below for each of the reviewer’s comment. All changes made in the ms related to your comments are indicated in blue colour in the ms.

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

Version: 2 Date: 30 October 2013
Reviewer: Hannah Kuper

Reviewer's report:
This paper describes the reporting of traumatic episodes among young people in Rwanda over three time periods: lifetime, during the genocide and in the last three years. The authors showed worryingly high levels of experience of traumatic episodes. These data are important, and they could be appreciated even more with some improvements in the description of the methods and display of data.

Reviewer's comment: Major Compulsory Revisions
Sampling: The authors need to improve the reporting of the sampling of the population.
- Methods: page 6: the description of the power calculation is unclear as it seems to be mixing the sample size estimation for a survey and for a case-control study.
Authors’ response: We agree it is unclear and it is now changed accordingly as can be seen on page 5, last para. It reads:
As mental health was the overall RwVMHBC project outcome, the sample size was calculated based on the prevalence of depression (20%) in men and women in Rwanda (23). To detect a 1.5 fold risk increase of depression, with 80% probability, the sample size was estimated to 815 people after taking non-responders into consideration. As the prevalence of depression in men is generally lower than in women (23), it was decided to increase the sample size to 900.

Reviewer's comment:
- Methods: page 6. Was the selection of villages by probability proportionate to size (whereby large villages were more likely to be selected) or at random? If at random,
then the sample selected will be biased towards small villages and therefore not representative of the population. This would need to be discussed as a limitation.

- Methods: page 6. A description is needed as to how the households were selected for inclusion as this is currently not clear.

Authors’ response: The total population in the South Province was 2,266,110 people within eight districts. We applied a 2-stage sampling and randomly selected in a first step a total of 35 villages from 3512 villages (10%). In the second step, a number of households in each village were randomly selected but depending on the total number of households in each village, i.e. proportionate to total number of households. As smaller villages were more commonly occurring, more of the smaller villages were also selected but fewer households from the smaller villages. In our understanding this process was well performed and not biased towards the inclusion of smaller villages on the expense of bigger ones. If we have misunderstood this, please correct us.

From each household, one person was interviewed, either a male or a female aged 20-35, every second household aimed for a male and every second for a female. Households were identified from the village centre and then in a certain direction through the entire village. Every sixth household was visited. The text has now been revised accordingly, found on page 6, bottom paragraph.

- Methods: page 6. The description of selection of individuals for inclusion is not at all clear and needs to be improved. Furthermore, it would be useful to specify eligibility criteria (e.g. permanent resident? Lived in Rwanda all lives?).

Authors’ response: The inclusion criteria were being either male or female, aged 20-35 years. Respondents were permanent residents within Rwanda at the time of the study but they were not asked whether they have lived in Rwanda all their lives. We found however in our data that 27.7% of women and 21.8% men had ever been refugees, but we cannot say when and for how long a period. Rwanda has a long
history of periods of civil unrest when people fled their homes. The resident status is now added on page 6, 2nd last para.

Language: The subject matter is very sensitive and upsetting and it is unsurprising that the authors use emotive language. However, this is not entirely appropriate for a scientific publication and I suggest that the authors make efforts to report just facts, rather than judgment. For instance the sentence “... even their children were not spared” (introduction, paragraph 2) could be rephrased as “and children were also victims”. Or the sentence “The annual national commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda is another factor that awakens the trauma caused and also hatred among some people” (discussion, page 15, paragraph 3) could be taken out. I suggest that the authors read through the paper again and tone down some of the phrasing.

Authors’ response: Revisions are made as suggested, page 15, 3rd Para final sentence.

- Minor Essential Revisions

Abstract:
- Specify in the methods when the study was conducted
- Include some figures (e.g. numbers, %, p-values) in the results.
- The conclusion that the traumatic episodes may be as an aftermath of the genocide is too speculative and should be taken out.

Authors’ response: The time period of the data collection is added in the Abstract as suggested, some odds ratios are added in the Results part of the Abstract and the sentence is now changed in line with the suggestion given by the reviewer. It reads now: Such traumatic episodes are however still taking place, and the reasons for this need further investigation.
- Paragraph 3 – it would be useful to give the sample size for the population

Authors’ response: Our sample size was 917 participants, 440 men and 477 women which is now added in the Results part of the Abstract.

Introduction:
- Paragraph 4 – Some would argue that the Gacaca hearings and the Genocide
memorial period may help people by talking through issues and rather than being upsetting and traumatic.

**Authors’ response:** In many cases this was the case but it is not possible to neglect the trauma being reawakened when perpetrators return to their villages after a longer period either in prison or in exile mainly Democratic Republic of Congo and also at commemoration weeks in April.

- Page 5 – the top four paragraphs are long and not entirely relevant to the paper’s subject and should be reduced.

**Authors’ response:** We have deleted two of the paragraphs but believe that the remaining paragraphs are important for the understanding of present day Rwanda.

**Methods:**
- Page 7: specify that the interviewers were all clinical psychologists as this is currently not clear.

**Authors’ response:** This is specified on page 7, 2nd para, first sentence.

Page 9: specify that the asset score was created by adding up the number of assets owned.

**Authors’ response:** This is now made clear on page 9, 2nd paragraph.

**Results:**
- Page 10: please specify the response rate.

**Authors’ response:** The response rate was 99.8% as only two people declined participation. This is now stated on page 8, first paragraph (Methods section).

**Tables and Figures**
- I do not believe that the figures make a useful contribution and these could be taken out.

**Authors’ response:** Two Figures are presented, the first one is a visual presentation of prevalence of traumatic episodes in the three different time periods used throughout the study and this data is also given in a Table. The second Figure adds new data to the paper, which we believe is important as it pictures cumulative number of traumatic episodes experienced by men and women.

We have deleted Figure 1 and kept Figure 2 (now Figure 1)
- Table 1: The total column is not needed. P values should be written as <0.001 rather than 0.000. I am not sure that it is relevant/necessary to include partner information in this table.

**Authors’ response:** These suggestions are followed and Table 1 is revised accordingly.

- Table 2: Again, I do not believe that the total column is needed. It would be sufficient to present asset summary score, rather than including individual items.

**Authors’ response:** Total column are removed. However, we believe that the information given in Table 2 as individual items and not only summary scores are important information to readers in Rwanda and other countries as it really pictures the difference in living conditions between men and women and shows how poor the participants are and also how even the general living standard is among the study participants. This is also the first paper in a series of papers discussing different aspects of traumatic episodes and in this first paper we really want to be detailed. We hope this explanation can be accepted and the sub-items kept in Table 2.

- Table 3: I do not believe that this table is needed as the pertinent information is included in table 4.

**Authors’ response:** Table 3 is about total numbers but also contain information on percent within respective act. This is important information as it makes clear which acts of violence/trauma that dominates in different time periods. An important finding is then that these patterns differ between periods as discussed in the paper. We hesitate about leaving out this piece of information and would highly appreciate if it could be kept as it is, i.e. keeping Table 3 in the ms.

- Table 4: Please include the p-values comparing men and women at the three different time periods.

- Table 5: The OR in this table should be age-adjusted rather than crude.

**Authors’ response:** crude ORs are given all through in Table 5 and no adjusted analyses are presented in Table but results given in the text. Age was adjusted for in the multivariate analyses. Also, Age gives for women a statistically significant odds, which convinced us to keep age as a factor to adjust for in the multivariate analysis.
Please express comparisons in terms of “more likely” rather than “higher risk” as the measure is odds ratio not risk ratio.

**Authors’ response:** This has been done.

The statement on the majority attended school does not relate to the OR given for that sentence.

**Authors’ response:** Correct, we actually switched the reference category but now decided this is confusing so instead the OR is only given in the Table 5, indicating that OR for never attended school was <1.

**Discussion:**

- Page 15, paragraph 1. This paragraph is not needed and obscures the main findings which relates to experience of trauma.

  **Authors’ response:** The sentence is now deleted.

- Page 17, paragraph 4, final sentence. This sentence (“this points at feelings of insecurity...”) is too speculative and should be taken out.

  **Authors’ response:** We find it rather striking that the same finding was evident for both men and women (childlessness) and therefore changed the wording to the following: *A cautious interpretation is that this may indicate feelings of insecurity about the future accompanied by psychological distress in both men and women.*

  We hope this can be accepted as the finding needs a comment, we believe.

- The conclusion needs to be a bit “snappier” and in keeping with the findings.

  **Authors’ response:** we agree and has changed most of the content in the Conclusions.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

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

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