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Development and initial validation of a Danish story stem screening tool for identifying traumatized children

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Background

There is a lack of validated, Danish assessment tools for preschool and younger school children exposed to trauma. Consequently, young traumatized children are at risk of not being identified.

Accessing young children exposed to trauma is challenging because the child may not be able to talk about the trauma or verbalize his/her trauma symptoms. Story stem assessment tools combine storytelling and play in order to access the internal world of young children in an age appropriate manner.

The recently developed Odense Child Trauma Screening (OCTS) is a story stem screening tool for children aged 4-8 years. Based on a structured doll-play setting the OCTS screens for behavioural and representational signs of traumatization in the child’s play narrative without talking directly about the trauma with the child.

The present study

With the current study we aim to provide initial support for the validity of the OCTS.

Methods

Fifty trauma exposed children aged 4-8 years are assessed using the OCTS. Caregivers of the children are interviewed using the Diagnostic Infant and Preschool Assessment (DIPA) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

OCTS

Includes 5 story stems with family figures and a house.

The story stems include relatable everyday problems with a controlled degree of distress e.g., a child figure waking up in the middle of the night because of a nightmare.

Administration time: 30 minutes.

Scoring time: 60 minutes.

Applicable in cases with a suspicion of a child being traumatized even though uncertainty of the nature and extent of trauma exists.

Expected results

Severity and frequency of trauma is expected to correlate with score on the OCTS.

Acceptable to good concurrent criterion validity when the OCST is compared to the DIPA and to the SDQ.

Conclusions

If the concurrent criterion validity shows good agreement between the OCTS and the DIPA and between the OCTS and the SDQ, this will provide initial support for the OCTS as a valid screening measure for traumatization among children aged 4-8 years.

As a valid story stem tool the OCTS can screen for signs of traumatization in an age appropriate manner, using a safe play setting with the young child as informant. Using a validated OCTS will aid in an early identification of possible traumatization and thus help secure a more efficient assessment process and treatment for young children exposed to traumas.

Further information:
