

Derailed by a sugar daddy: An investigation of the failed treatment of an adolescent township rape survivor with PTSD

Anita Padmanabhanunni and David J.A. Edwards

Abstract

This study investigates the transportability of an evidence-based psychological intervention to local contexts by documenting the treatment process with an isi-Xhosa speaking Black South African adolescent. She was sexually assaulted on two separate occasions, the second incident involved a gang rape by several perpetrators and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. She was treated using Ehlers and Clark's (2000) cognitive therapy (ECCT). Systematic case study methodology was used. Treatment was partially successful as Lulama prematurely terminated after 11 sessions. Nevertheless, her case study highlights some of the challenges in working with adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds characterised by dysfunctional home environments, parental psychopathology, community violence and the presence of perpetrators. The study identifies some of the obstacles that can be encountered when implementing trauma- focused interventions in local South African contexts and serves to sensitise practitioners to some of the conditions necessary for treatment to be effective.

Introduction

Despite the emergence of effective manualized treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it is erroneous to conceptualize PTSD as a discrete medical problem requiring a specific treatment that is somehow independent of the life context of the traumatized individual. This is illustrated by the case of Lulama (16), an isi-Xhosa speaking Black South African adolescent who had been sexually assaulted on two separate occasions during the course of a single day. One assault involved a gang rape by several perpetrators. Lulama was referred to the first author, a counselling psychologist, who treated her as part of a research project investigating the transportability of Ehlers and Clark's cognitive therapy (ECCT) for PTSD to South African conditions. ECCT is an evidence-based treatment that has been demonstrated to be very effective and its application in various South African settings was examined in a series of case study projects over several years (Edwards, 2009; 2010; 2013).

Observations from systematic case studies from this project and other published case studies generated in South Africa and other countries, led to the development of an integrative model (Edwards, 2013). This situated the specific procedures involved in

- Swartz, K. 2007. *Contextual obstacles to the delivery of effective psychological treatment of PTSD in a South African community setting*. (Unpublished research report for master's in clinical psychology). Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.
- Taylor, L., Kaminer, D. & Hardy, A. 2011. Risk factors for premature termination of treatment at a child and family mental health clinic. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 23(2): 155-164.
- Vranceanu, A.M., Hobfoll, S.E. & Johnson, R.J. 2007. Child multi-type maltreatment and associated depression and PTSD symptoms: The role of social support and stress. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31(1): 71-84. Available at: doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2006.04.010.
- Walker, J.L., Carey, P.D., Mohr, N., Stein, D.J. & Seedat, S. 2004. Gender differences in the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and in the development of pediatric PTSD. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 7(2): 111-121. Available at: doi:10.1007/s00737-003-0039-z.
- Watt, B. & Dadds, M.R. 2007. Facilitating treatment attendance in child and adolescent mental health services: A community study. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 12(1): 105-116.
- Zembe, Y.Z., Townsend, L., Thorson, A. & Ekström, A.M. 2013. "Money talks, bullshit walks" interrogating notions of consumption and survival sex among young women engaging in transactional sex in post-apartheid South Africa: A qualitative enquiry. *Globalization and Health*, 9(1):28.