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Neuropsychological Assessment of Refugee Survivors of War and Torture

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand

Bahrie Veliu

2013
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Abstract

This thesis presents the results of psychological and neuropsychological assessment of a group of refugees with PTSD and a group of refugees with co-morbid TBI and PTSD. The study was designed to evaluate the outcome related to co-morbid TBI+PTSD, compared to the outcome of PTSD alone. In addition, this study also evaluated the methodological barriers in neuropsychological assessment of refugees. Eighteen refugees diagnosed with PTSD and depression participated in the study. Seven of them reported head injuries that had led to loss of consciousness, and were assigned to the TBI+PTSD group with the remaining eleven in the PTSD only group.

Results indicated that neuropsychological assessment of refugees is challenging due to linguistic and cross-cultural barriers. Despite the adjustment of assessment according to suggestions from the literature, most refugees had difficulty doing the assessment, and for a small number assessment with the measures used in this study proved impossible. Non-parametric tests and boxplots were used to evaluate the differences between the TBI+PTSD group and the PTSD Only group in terms of psychological symptoms, self-reported functioning, and neuropsychological outcome. While no significant result was detected, possibly due to small sample size and high variability within the sample, the box plots revealed a number of tendencies that were consistent with the study’s hypotheses.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is the end of a long journey that has been challenging, stimulating and forever memorable. Foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the people who participated in this research. Their willingness to participate despite their experiences was truly inspirational.

Words are short to describe my gratitude to my supervisor Janet Leathem for trusting me to do this project in the first place and for being an amazing supervisor throughout this research. She was encouraging, patient and created an environment that allowed me to grow and learn. I would also like to thank my second supervisor Nigel Long for his contribution to this research.

It is difficult to overstate my gratitude to the staff at the Refugees as Survivors Centre in Wellington. They have helped this project throughout all its stages and in so many different ways that without them this project would not have been possible.

I thank all my fellow labmates in the Cherubs lab for stimulating discussions and all the fun we had over these years. A special thanks to my friend, Fernanda Mottin, who has been a loyal companion throughout this time, and who has provided support and stimulating conversations that have helped many ideas emerge.

Last but not least, a special thanks to my family. Without your patience, perseverance, and sacrifice this would not have happened. My love and gratitude goes, especially, to you all!
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