Developing measures of parent-child relationships: a tool development project

Flavia Zalwango
Godfrey Siu
Daniel Wight

Medical Research Council/Uganda Virus Research Institute
Uganda Research Unit on AIDS

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Introduction

• Parenting has a major impact on young children’s lives and health-related behaviours *(WHO 2007; Murray & Cooper 1997)*
  – cognitive development
  – emotions
  – behaviour and future outcomes

• Children’s agency strengthens as they grow older

• Large number of self-report measures of parent-child have been well validated in high income countries (HICs)

• Nevertheless, important issues remain, e.g.
  – social desirability biases
  – the minimum age for surveying children
  – how to interpret inconsistencies between parent and child reports
More limited research in LMIC

• Specific processes within families that lead to particular outcomes for children not clearly described in LMIC

• Parenting interventions are increasing in SSA but few have been carefully evaluated
  
  • Greater social desirability biases
  • Unfamiliarity with social science research
  • Limited attention to evaluation
  • Especially difficult to collect good data on non-conscious interactions between parents and children
Parenting styles and schema for classifying parent-child relationships

- Several schema for distinguishing different dimensions of parenting

- Buamrind (1967) identified 4 different styles of parenting
  - authoritative (high warmth, high control)
    - display inductive rather than punitive disciplinary methods
  - authoritarian (low warmth, high control)
    - value unquestioning obedience, restrict autonomy
  - permissive (high warmth, low control)
    - permit children considerable self-regulation
  - neglectful parenting (low warmth, low control)
    - added later

- WHO (2007) identifies 5 dimensions:
  - connection
  - behaviour control
  - respect for individuality
  - provision and protection
  - modelling of appropriate behaviour
Evaluations of parent-child relationships in SSA

• Vandehoudt (2010) investigated connectedness and positive reinforcement amongst 10-12 year olds in Kenya.

• Barber et al. (2005) evaluated parental support, parental monitoring or behavioural control, psychological control among 13-17 year olds in SA.

• Biddlecom et al. (2009) measured parental monitoring or behaviour control with 12-19 year olds in Ghana, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Malawi.
The tool-development project in Uganda

• Existing survey measures developed/adapted to assess mainly health related interventions
  – few measures to evaluate generic parenting interventions

• Instruments developed largely from HICs compromises their validity in other cultures since concepts of parenting maybe unique

• Content of measures often relies either on literature or expert panels; less informed by end users

• Some instruments measure particular domain in greater detail or are too short to provide meaningful comparisons

• Few instruments are multidimensional, thus difficult to do holistic assessment of parenting interventions in LMICs
Aim of study

• To further develop valid parental and child self-report survey measures of key dimensions of parent-child relationships in SSA to:
  – investigate how different dimensions are related to child outcomes
  – to evaluate parenting interventions robustly

• Combine:
  – existing measures from HICs adapted for Uganda (Biddlecom, 2009)
  – additional measures for further (etic) dimensions of parenting previously identified (Vandehoudt 2010, Barber 2005)
  – additional measures for emic constructs of parenting (Wakiso Uganda)

• ‘Parent’ refers to any adult who acts as a child’s primary care giver
  – adopted the term ‘parent-figure’
Methods

5 step process

• Qualitative interviews - parents & implementers’ emic concepts
  – revise draft questionnaire

• Pilot testing questionnaires
  – revise draft questionnaire

• Cognitive interviews (we are here)
  – revise questionnaire

• Testing tools: 200 questionnaires (100 par, 100 chn)

• Test - retest for reliability: 100 questionnaires (50 Par, 50 par)
Study Setting: Wakiso District

• Located about 40kms from Kampala

• Urban and rural

• Variety of occupations
  – formal employment
  – fishing
  – subsistence farming
  – trading

• Mixed ethnicity, although majority Baganda
Step 1: Qualitative interviews on emic concepts

- To investigate:
  - emic concepts of parenting
  - parents’ terms for parent-child relationships
  - gauged willingness to participate in interviews

- 10 parents
- 10 children (aged 10-14 years)
- 3 implementers of parenting programmes
Findings from emic concepts interviews

• Considerable contrast in how parents treat children, e.g.
  – family structure
  – socio-economic status
  – previous behaviour of child, etc.

• Caring for children demonstrated by three main things:
  – material provision (food, school fees, clothing)
  – teaching children to be well behaved, especially obedience and respect
  – encouraging them at school

• Mothers more active than fathers in monitoring children’s behaviour

• Fathers seen to play minimal role: provide money

• Good relationship with child understood as child being obedient

• Children thought to learn a lot from parents’ behaviour (modelling)

• Support of other parents/community parenting, although shameful behaviour of child brings disrespect to family
Ways parents described their relationship with children

Parents who are close to their children:

“X is easier to deal with because when I tell him/her to do something he/she does it quickly”

“X does not take me for granted, when I tell him/her something he/she does not answer back”

“You say to yourself, what shall I do? I cannot eat something and not keep for the children. You worry all the time. The men usually eat from the restaurants/hotels.”

“Oh, have you just poured the water! It's not a very good thing to do, please do not do it again.”

Parents who are not close to their children:

“This child is stupid”

“I do not have time for the children. I have my own problems, for instance, I have failed to get money. I regret why I gave birth to these children.”

“I get home late and leave very early before daylight. I do not have time to waste on them [the children]. When these 'masters of the home' see me they think I have come to haunt them. Everyone runs away.”
Revised questionnaire represented.....

- Connection/attachment
- Behaviour control
- Provision and protection
- Respect for child’s autonomy
- Modelling appropriate behaviour

- Supporting child at school
- Respect for parents
- Community parenting
- Gender norms

- Removed some items from the tool because they contained redundant content
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>How often do you have non-formal conversation with your child X on general issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding an appropriate observational measure is still a challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural control</td>
<td>How often do you react to your children’s current behaviour based on their past behaviour/record?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision</td>
<td>How often do you provide for your child X’s necessities, e.g. food, school fees?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for autonomy</td>
<td>How often do you let your child X to make her/his own decisions about how to do things?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>How often are there quarrels between your partner and you in the presence of your children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct</td>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>----------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect (heshima)</td>
<td>How often do you feel your child X’s behaviour brings embarrassment to the family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for education</td>
<td>How often do you encourage your child x at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender norms</td>
<td>How often do you talk to your child x about how to treat members of the opposite sex?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community parenting</td>
<td>How often do other people in the village monitor your child’s behaviour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External influences</td>
<td>How often do you feel that your child’s behaviour is influenced more by other people outside of family members</td>
</tr>
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Step 2: Pilot testing

• Pre-test the revised questionnaires with 10 parents and 10 children to check:
  - appropriateness
  - length
  - translation
  - comprehension

• We also set out to assess
  – mobilisation strategy
  – availability and participation
  – consent and assent
Step 3: Cognitive testing

- Back to the 20 interviewees after a few days
  - Interview them for why they answered the questions the way they did
    - to check/minimise the social desirability biases during the questionnaire interview
    - check for comprehension, translation issues
    - expected duration of questionnaire

- Involved different researcher going through the participants’ questionnaire with them
Challenges and lessons learnt from piloting

• Comprehension
  – difficulty distinguishing between questions with related concepts, e.g. comfort, encouragement and love

• Children preferred qualitative responses rather than choosing from fixed response options

• Some response options in Luganda translation not sufficiently distinct e.g., rarely vs sometimes

• Consent: all parents accepted child to participate, no child declined

• Gendered participation/availability: men harder to find home

• Mobilisation: support of local leaders to access families

• Children’s availability: school term in progress, weekend best

• Length of questionnaire: participants’ sense of what is reasonable

• Positive perception of the future value of the study
Thank You