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

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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

Construct

Connectedness

Behavioural control

Provision

Respect for autonomy

Modelling appropriate behaviour

Question

How often do you have non-formal conversation with your child X on general issues?

Finding an appropriate observational measure is still a challenge

How often do you react to your children's current behaviour based on their past behaviour/record?

How often do you provide for your child X's necessities, e.g. food, school fees?

How often do you let your child X to make her/his own decisions about how to do things?

How often are there quarrels between your partner and you in the presence of your children?

Construct	Question
Respect (heshima)	How often do you feel your child X's behaviour brings embarrassment to the family?
Support for education	How often do you encourage your child x at school?
Gender norms	How often do you talk to your child x about how to treat members of the opposite sex?
Community parenting	How often do other people in the village monitor your child's behaviour?
External influences	How often do you feel that your child's behaviour is influenced more by other people outside of family members

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