

Construction of a questionnaire for readiness to reconcile in victims of human rights violations

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Background: Post-conflict reconciliation is supposed to have a positive impact on survivors of war and conflict. However, knowledge is limited as validated questionnaires to assess individual readiness to reconcile in the context of human rights violations are still missing.

Objectives: This study aimed to develop and pilot-test a questionnaire to assess individual readiness to reconcile in victims of human rights violations.

Methods: The questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested in a sample of 60 adult Kurdish refugees from Turkey. In addition to the questionnaire, trauma exposure, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, perceived emotional closeness to the Kurdish people as well as the participants' ability to differentiate between perpetrators and the people in general were assessed in structured interviews, and their associations with readiness to reconcile were analyzed.

Results: Factor and item analysis resulted in an 18-item questionnaire with three subscales (openness to interactions; absence of feelings of revenge; openness to conflict resolution). Cronbach's α for the subscales ranged from 0.74 to 0.90, explaining 61% of the total variance. The ability to differentiate between perpetrators and people in general and perceived emotional closeness were the best predictors for readiness to reconcile. The level of trauma exposure was not linked to readiness to reconcile. Although readiness to reconcile was negatively related to PTSD, depression and anxiety, none of these associations reached statistical significance.

Conclusions: The questionnaire appears to be a reliable measure with good psychometric properties. Further validations in different samples are needed.

Keywords: *forgiveness; trauma; conflict; questionnaire; survivors*

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Reconciliation has become a key concept for sustainable peace activities in post-conflict societies on a socio-political level. Despite the growing interest in and support for reconciliation after civil war and mass human rights violations, little is known about the mechanisms underlying individual reconciliation processes or about the possible prerequisites and consequences for the individual.

Studies examining forgiveness in social contexts report positive relationships between forgiveness and psychological well-being. For example, participants scoring higher on forgiveness were found to be less depressed (Brown, 2003) and to show lower levels of anxiety (Subkoviak et al., 1995). In concordance with these findings, forgiveness interventions have been found to be beneficial for mental health in groups such as post-abortion men,

female incest survivors and patients with substance abuse (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Lin, Mack, Enright, Krahn, & Baskin, 2004).

First studies of forgiveness and reconciliation in the context of civil war and human rights violations provide evidence for similar positive relationships with mental health as in social contexts. Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, and Zungu-Dirwayi (2001) interviewed victims of the South African apartheid regime, some of whom testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They found that participants scoring lower on forgiveness had generally poorer psychiatric health outcomes. Pham, Weinstein, and Longman (2004) found that Rwandan survivors of the 1994 genocide who met symptom criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were less open to reconciliation. In a study of former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers, Bayer, Klasen, and Adam (2007), found those meeting the criteria for PTSD to be less open to reconciliation and to have more feelings of revenge. Likewise the desire for revenge was positively associated with PTSD symptoms among Cambodian survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide (Field & Chhim, 2008; Sonis et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that there seems to be no association between attitudes towards reconciliation and the severity of trauma exposure. With the exception of Pham et al. (2004), most studies found no relationship between trauma exposure and reconciliation (Bayer et al., 2007; Biro & Milin, 2005; Field & Chhim, 2008).

Despite the apparent consistency of findings on the relationship between PTSD and reconciliation in survivors of human rights violations, the data should be interpreted with caution. The studies reported investigated different concepts, including forgiveness, the readiness (willingness or openness) to reconcile and desire for revenge. Most of these concepts lack a solid theoretical base and are inconsistently defined in the literature, making the findings difficult to interpret and generalize. In addition, most of the studies used unvalidated instruments that were developed *ad hoc* to measure the core concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The aim of the present study was to construct and test a questionnaire assessing readiness to reconcile in a sample of Kurdish refugees from Turkey. In order to analyze the relationships between readiness to reconcile and other constructs, we additionally assessed trauma exposure, PTSD, depression, anxiety, emotional closeness to the Kurdish collective and ability to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general.

Methods

Study design and procedure

Between March 2007 and April 2008 we conducted a cross-sectional study with 60 Kurdish refugees from

Turkey residing in Germany. Of the participants, 46.7% ($n=28$) were current patients and 20.0% were former ($n=12$) patients at the Berlin Center for Torture Victims. One third ($n=20$) had never received psychological or psychiatric treatment.

Participants were recruited from the Berlin Center for Torture Victims and by means of advertisements posted in various Kurdish cultural centres. No exclusion criteria were applied. The respondents were interviewed in structured face-to-face interviews in Kurmanji or Turkish with the aid of professional interpreters. As many participants were illiterate, this method was chosen to avoid the exclusion of these persons from the study. Except for the Reconciliation Inventory, all items were translated during the interview from German into the target language by the interpreters. Prior to the interviews, the participants were informed about the procedure and the content of the interview. Participants gave written informed consent prior to the interview and were assured that all interviews were confidential. The interviews lasted approximately 2 hours. The study was approved by the Konstanz University Review Board.

Scale construction

In the first phase of the study, items capable of assessing readiness to reconcile in Kurdish victims of human rights violations were generated. This phase comprised five steps: First, the psychological literature was screened for publications on reconciliation (Medline and PsycInfo articles until 2006, keywords: reconciliation, forgiveness, anger, revenge, vengeance, human rights violation/abuse, mental health). Second, based on the literature search and our clinical experience, we formulated the following working definition of readiness to reconcile: Reduction of feelings of anger and revenge toward the perpetrators; ability to take the perspective of the perpetrators; reduction of personal avoidance of the perpetrators, and openness to positive relationships with the perpetrators on a societal level. Third, existing questionnaires assessing reconciliation (Reconciliation-Questionnaire; Readiness to Reconcile/Orientation to the Other Measure) (Adam, 2006; Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005), and other relevant concepts, such as forgiveness (Heartland Forgiveness Scale; Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory, TRIM) (McCullough et al., 1998; Thompson et al., 2005), and vengeance (Vengeance Scale) (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992) were examined. Fourth, based on the screened psychological literature on forgiveness and reconciliation, interviews with clinical experts in the treatment of Kurdish survivors of torture, as well as on already existing questionnaires on forgiveness/reconciliation, a pool of items that fit our target population and working definition was generated. Unlike existing questionnaires, the items were formulated to refer not to a single perpetrator, but to a group or

nation of perpetrators (i.e., to the Turkish people). Three items were directly reformulated from pre-existing questionnaires (one from the TRIM and two from the Reconciliation-Questionnaire); all other items were newly generated. Fifth, after evaluation by four experts in PTSD and the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, the draft pool of 42 items was reduced to 33 items. The items were equally spread across our working definition, tapping feelings of revenge (sample item: “It is my obligation to take revenge on the Turkish people”), perspective taking (“The violence has caused losses to the Turkish people as well”), avoidance (“I avoid contact with Turkish people”) and positive relationships (“Kurdish and Turkish people should approach each other”). Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (“applies not at all”) to 5 (“applies totally”).

All items assessing readiness to reconcile were translated into Kurmanji and Turkish by professional interpreters and subsequently back-translated by interpreters who were unfamiliar with the original German versions to verify their correspondence.

Measures

All interviews were conducted by two of the authors who are trained clinical psychologists. In addition to readiness to reconcile and sociodemographic data, the following constructs relevant to this article were assessed.

Posttraumatic stress disorder

PTSD was measured with the Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS) (Foa, Cashman, Jaycox, & Perry, 1997). This 49-item self-report instrument, which is based on the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-IV) criteria for PTSD (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 1994), is used to establish a formal diagnosis of PTSD. It consists of a traumatic event checklist, a symptom scale and a scale assessing functional impairment. Participants are asked to indicate the frequency of each symptom over the 4 weeks prior to the interview from 0 (“not at all or only one time”) to 3 (“five or more times per week/almost always”). In the present study, internal consistency for the PDS symptom scale was $\alpha = 0.92$.

The PDS traumatic event scale was supplemented by events derived from the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) (Mollica et al., 1992) and the Vivo Checklist of war, detention and torture events (Vivo Foundation). A total of 36 possible traumatic events were assessed.

Depression and anxiety

We used the Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCL-25) (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974; Mollica et al., 1996), to detect increased symptom levels of depression and anxiety. The HSCL-25 is a frequently used 25-item screening instrument to measure symptoms

of depression and anxiety over the past 30 days. Symptoms are scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 4 (“extremely”). The HSCL-25 has been widely used and validated in studies among diverse cultural groups (Mollica, Wyshak, de Marneffe, Khuon, & Lavelle, 1987; Shrestha et al., 1998). Internal consistency in the present study was $\alpha = 0.86$ for the depression subscale and $\alpha = 0.79$ for the anxiety subscale. We applied a cut-off score of 1.75 for both the depression and anxiety subscale.

Emotional closeness to ethnic groups

We used an adapted version of the Pictorial Representation of Illness and Self Measure (PRSIM) (Büchi et al., 2002; Büchi & Sensky, 1999) to measure perceived emotional closeness to the Kurdish and Turkish people as part of the self-categorization component of collective identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Cameron, 2004). The PRSIM is a projective and quantitative tool that was originally developed to assess perceived distress and suffering caused by illness. It shows good reliability and validity (Büchi et al., 2002). The PRISM was previously used to assess perceived emotional closeness in former Ugandan child soldiers and showed a good feasibility for its use in rather illiterate participants (Glöckner, 2007). The participants in the study were instructed to imagine that a white A4 sheet of paper represented their life and that a red circle in the bottom right represented themselves at the time of the interview. They were then asked to put a brown paper disc (representing the Kurdish people) and a purple paper disc (representing the Turkish people) on the A4 paper. The instructions were:

Please place these discs on the sheet in a way that illustrates how much space these groups take in your life. If the group takes a lot of space in your life, then place the disc close to the circle that represents you. Placing the disc in a greater distance to yourself indicates that the group takes less space in your life.

The distances between the midpoint of self and the two groups were measured. Smaller distances indicated greater emotional closeness; greater distances indicated lower emotional closeness.

Ability to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general

After the interview, the interviewers estimated the degree to which participants were able to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general based on the participants' answers during the interview. This was rated on a three-point Likert scale with the response options 0 (“not at all”), 1 (“partly”) and 2 (“completely”).

Analysis

Concerning the scale construction, we first conducted an item analysis, closely inspecting the distribution of each item to detect any floor or ceiling effects, and testing the discriminatory power of each item. Second, we conducted principal component analysis (PCA). We conducted Velicer's minimum average partial (MAP) test (Velicer, 1976) to identify the number of factors. The requirements for the PCA were tested with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) (Kaiser, 1970) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Oblique rotation (direct oblimin) was chosen because we expected medium to high levels of intercorrelations of the subscales (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2002). After extracting the factors and corresponding items, we performed a second PCA to determine the goodness of fit of the factors and the items identified. Internal consistency reliability of the whole scale score and of each subscale score was then measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A multiple regression analysis was conducted as a check for discriminant validity.

Scores for PTSD, depression and anxiety were normally distributed, whereas those for exposure to trauma and readiness to reconcile were not. Hence, relationships between measures were tested using Pearson and Spearman correlations. Differences between subgroups were tested using the Mann-Whitney test and the Kruskal-Wallis test, respectively.

Due to the fact, that some participants refused or were unable to answer certain questions, the sample size varies between interview sections. For this reason the sample size is reported in each analysis.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The sample consisted of 60 Kurdish adult refugees from Turkey (39 male and 21 female). The age ranged from 20 to 62 years ($M = 39.7$, $SD = 10.3$). All participants were born in Turkey and resident in Germany. The average duration of stay in Germany was 9.3 years ($SD = 6.9$). Residence status was classified as secure in 66.1% ($n = 39$) and as insecure in 33.9% ($n = 20$) of cases. The average time spent in school was 8.4 years ($SD = 5.6$), which was defined as the educational level of the participants in this study. In terms of religious affiliation, 82.8% ($n = 48$) were Muslim, 10.3% ($n = 6$) Alevi, 1.7% ($n = 1$) Yezidi, 1.7% ($n = 1$) Christian, and 3.3% ($n = 2$) other.

Traumatic experiences and mental health

The mean number of reported traumatic experiences was 14.8 ($SD = 8.6$), ranging from 0 to 29. The most frequently reported events were violent house searches (85.2%, $n = 46$), being beaten by officials (77.8%, $n = 42$)

and being in the immediate vicinity of armed fighting or shelling/bombing (73.6%, $n = 39$).

Of the total sample, 60.4% ($n = 32$) of participants were diagnosed with PTSD. According to the PDS, the traumatic experience the participants considered to be the most stressful, was used as the index trauma to assess the PTSD. Torture was most frequently mentioned as the most stressful event by 25.0% ($n = 15$) of the participants, followed by imprisonment as mentioned by 20.0% ($n = 12$) of the participants. The mean PDS total score was 18.4 ($SD = 12.0$). The mean anxiety score was 2.2 ($SD = 0.65$); 78.4% of the sample ($n = 40$) scored above the cut-off for anxiety as measured by the HSCL-25. The mean depression score was 2.1 ($SD = 0.63$); 68.0% of the sample ($n = 34$) scored above the cut-off for depression as measured by the HSCL-25.

Scale construction of the "reconciliation inventory"

Because the amount of missing data was low (<5% for each variable), we used the Expectation-Maximization Method (EM-Method) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2002) to replace missing values. Total scores on 33-item version of the questionnaire were normally distributed ($D[60] = 0.1$, $p = 0.17$). The mean total score was 3.3 ($SD = 0.76$), ranging from 1.6 to 4.7, with higher values indicating greater readiness to reconcile. Tests for floor and ceiling effects and discriminatory power led to the exclusion of nine items.

Because the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was good ($KMO = 0.79$) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(276, N = 60) = 826.25$, $p < 0.001$, we submitted the 24 remaining items to a PCA (oblimin rotation, $\Delta = 0$). Based on the K1-criterion, the PCA identified seven factors explaining 73% of the variance. The scree plot was unclear, as there were breaks after the first, the third and the seventh factors. The MAP test suggested a three-factor solution, which emerged as optimal, explaining 53.3% of the variance (with the single factors contributing 37.9, 8.3 and 7%, respectively). Items that loaded below 0.5 on a given factor were excluded from further analysis, as our goal was to obtain a short questionnaire. A second oblimin-rotated PCA supported the three-factor structure of the 18-item version (Table 1).

The first factor explained 41.4% of the variance, the second 10.7% and the third 8.7%. As the factor structure did not change, the 18-item solution was chosen as the final version and labelled as "Reconciliation Inventory (RI)". As shown in Table 1, all items had high loadings on the factors to which they had been assigned. The total score of the 18-items RI was not normally distributed ($D[60] = 0.1$, $p = 0.03$). The mean changed only marginally relative to the original 33-item version ($M = 3.4$; $SD = 0.95$), showing a tendency to higher values. The range became slightly bigger (1.2–5). While the first and the second factor were clearly interpretable, the third

Table 1. Factor loadings of the reconciliation inventory ($n = 60$)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
<i>I avoid going to Turkish shops</i>	0.75		
I also listen to Turkish music	0.74		
<i>I do not want to talk to Turkish people</i>	0.73		
<i>I avoid contact with Turkish people</i>	0.69		
<i>I have broken off all relationships with Turkish people</i>	0.65		
I can imagine having Turkish friends	0.62		
I would allow my child to marry a Turk	0.56		
<i>It is my obligation to take revenge on the Turkish people</i>		0.91	
<i>Honour requires that the Kurds take revenge on the Turkish people</i>		0.91	
<i>I would like to take revenge on the Turkish people</i>		0.88	
<i>It is my right to take revenge on the Turkish people</i>		0.69	
<i>I often talk about Turkish people in a bad way</i>		0.67	
<i>I accept violence as a form of resistance against the Turkish people</i>		0.64	
Many Turks have helped the Kurdish people			0.81
The majority of Turks are good people			0.71
I can imagine getting along with the Turkish people some day			0.64
Kurdish and Turkish people should approach each other			0.60
The Kurdish people also did terrible things to the Turkish people			0.57

Notes: Negative coded items are italicized. Factor 1, Openness to interactions; Factor 2, Absence of feelings of revenge; Factor 3, Openness to conflict resolution.

factor comprised items that were originally developed to assess both the ability to take the perspective of the perpetrators and openness to positive relationships with the perpetrators. The first factor was labelled “openness to interactions”, the second “absence of feelings of revenge” and the third “openness to conflict resolution”. The internal consistency of the 18-item version was excellent to good with $\alpha = 0.91$ for the total score, $\alpha = 0.89$ for openness to interactions, $\alpha = 0.90$ for absence of feelings of revenge and $\alpha = 0.74$ for openness to conflict resolution.

We found significant positive correlations between the total RI score and scores on all three subscales (openness to interactions: $r_s = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$, absence of feelings of revenge $r_s = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$, openness to conflict resolution $r_s = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$). Likewise, the subscales showed highly positive intercorrelations (openness to interactions with absence of feelings of revenge: $r_s = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$; openness to interactions with openness to conflict resolution: $r_s = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$; absence of feelings of revenge with openness to conflict resolution: $r_s = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$).

As a check for discriminant validity, we conducted a multiple regression analysis to determine the extent to which readiness to reconcile can be predicted by other variables. Table 2 summarizes the results of a hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting readiness to reconcile as measured by the RI. In step 1, the variable “psychological stress” was entered in the regression

analysis. This variable was derived by calculating the mean of the standardized PTSD, depression and anxiety symptom scores, which correlated very highly with each other ($r_s = 0.49 - 0.70$). Given these high intercorrelations, we decided against entering the three variables separately in a regression analysis. Further variables were

Table 2. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis predicting readiness to reconcile

Predictors	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	0.06	
Psychological stress ^a		-0.25
Step 2	0.08	
Education ^b		0.28
Step 3	0.35***	
Emotional closeness ^c		-0.50***
Ability to differentiate ^d		0.57**
Total R^2	0.49***	
n	46	

^aMean of standardized scores for PTSD, depression and anxiety symptoms.

^bSchool/university attendance in years.

^cThe higher the score, the greater the emotional closeness to the Kurdish collective relative to Turkish one.

^dAbility to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general; the higher the score the greater the ability.

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

entered simultaneously in the next steps: education in step 2 and perceived emotional closeness (collective identity) and ability to differentiate between Turkish people in general and Turkish perpetrators, as assessed by the interviewers, in step 3. Emotional closeness and ability to differentiate each explained a significant amount of the total variance of readiness to reconcile, but psychological stress did not.

Relations of readiness to reconcile with other constructs

As there were no statistically significant differences among the groups of current patients, former patients and non-patients, $H(2)=2.7$, $p=0.26$, or the groups of female and male participants, $U=358.5$, $p=0.43$, $r=-0.1$, we did not divide the sample. Readiness to reconcile was not significantly associated with age, the length of stay in Germany or residence status.

As shown in Table 3, participants with higher levels of education were significantly more ready to reconcile. The number of traumatic events was not related to the participants' readiness to reconcile. Although negative relationships were observed between readiness to reconcile and PTSD, depression and anxiety, none of them reached statistical significance.

A significant correlation was found between readiness to reconcile and perceived emotional closeness. The more participants perceived themselves as belonging to the Kurdish collective relative to the Turkish one, the less ready they were to reconcile. This relationship was reflected in all three subscales of the RI (avoidance: $r_s = -0.53$, $p < 0.001$, revenge $r_s = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$, conflict resolution $r_s = -0.49$, $p < 0.001$). The ability to differentiate between the Turkish people in general and Turkish perpetrators, as rated by the interviewers, was related to participants' readiness to reconcile.

Participants growing up in urban areas were significantly more ready to reconcile than were participants growing up in rural areas, $U=301.5$, $p=0.03$, $r=-0.28$, as reflected in less avoidance of Turkish people in urban participants, $U=288.5$, $p=0.02$, $r=-0.30$. No other significant correlations were found between readiness to reconcile and demographic or other variables.

Discussion

Questionnaire construction

We found the Reconciliation Inventory (RI) to be a reliable questionnaire to assess readiness to reconcile in Kurdish refugees from Turkey. Principal component analysis revealed three subscales. The subscales "openness to interactions" and "absence of feelings of revenge" were clearly interpretable and showed high internal consistencies. The subscale labelled as "openness to conflict resolution" was less well interpretable and had a lower internal consistency. Further research in different samples is needed to clarify its stability.

Contrary to our expectations, readiness to reconcile was not predicted by mental health status or by level of education and thus differs from both variables. However, readiness to reconcile was predicted by the interviewees' ability to differentiate between perpetrators and Turkish people in general, as well as by their perceived emotional closeness to the Kurdish people. These findings imply that in our sample readiness to reconcile is to some extent explained by a cognitive component (the ability to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general) as well as by an emotional component (emotional closeness to the Kurdish people as part of the collective identity).

Table 3. Intercorrelations between readiness to reconcile, psychopathology, and demographic variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Readiness to reconcile	0.27†	0.02	-0.12	-0.16	-0.19	-0.59††	0.51††
2. Education ^a		0.57***	-0.02	0.01	-0.33*	-0.18	0.58***
3. Trauma exposure ($n=55$)			0.47**	0.20	-0.03	0.03	0.27*
4. PTSD ($n=53$)				0.67***	0.47**	-0.10	-0.16
5. Depression ($n=50$)					0.69***	0.08	-0.04
6. Anxiety ($n=51$)						0.05	-0.20
7. Emotional closeness ^b							-0.12
8. Ability to differentiate ^c							-

Notes: $N=60$ if not otherwise specified.

^aSchool/university attendance in years.

^bThe higher the score, the greater the emotional closeness to the Kurdish collective relative to Turkish one.

^cAbility to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general; the higher the score the greater the ability.

* $p < 0.05$, two-tailed; ** $p < 0.01$, two-tailed; *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed; † $p < 0.05$, one-tailed; †† $p < 0.001$, one-tailed.

Relations of readiness to reconcile with other constructs

Contrary to previous findings, our study with Kurdish refugees resident in Germany did not find readiness to reconcile to correlate with mental health (Bayer et al., 2007; Kaminer et al., 2001; Pham et al., 2004), but to be a construct independent of mental health. Although PTSD, depression and anxiety scores were negatively related to readiness to reconcile, none of these associations reached statistical significance. One possible explanation of this finding is that our study examined victims of human rights violations living in exile, whereas previous studies have been conducted in the post-conflict homeland of the participants. The factors influencing the association of readiness to reconcile and mental health may differ in these two groups. Besides pre-migration experiences in the home country, research has shown post-migration factors such as the stress of the asylum procedure, lack of work and separation from family members to influence the mental health of immigrants (Hauff & Vaglum, 1995; Laban, Gernaat, Komprou, van der Tweel, & De Jong, 2005; Silove, Sinnerbrink, Field, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 1997). Likewise, living in a secure country, far away from the conflict and the perpetrators, may affect attitudes toward reconciliation with perpetrators.

Consistent with most previous findings (Bayer et al., 2007; Biro & Milin, 2005), our data did not show trauma exposure to be linked to readiness to reconcile. This finding underlines that readiness to reconcile may be associated with coping with traumatic experiences, rather than with the traumatic experiences themselves.

In our study, the participants' level of education correlated significantly with readiness to reconcile. However, regression analysis did not reveal a significant effect. It seems likely that this relationship is mediated by the cognitive ability to differentiate between Turkish perpetrators and Turkish people in general.

In addition, Kurdish refugees growing up in urban areas, who would have had more contact with Turkish people, were more ready to reconcile, as reflected in less avoidance of Turkish people. Having more contact with the Turkish people may result more favourable attitudes toward them, as prejudices may decline (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This interpretation is consistent with the results of studies conducted in the former Yugoslavia and Northern Ireland, which showed that having a friend in the other group or simply having contact to members of the group were predictors of readiness to reconcile and forgiveness, respectively (Biro & Milin, 2005; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Tam et al., 2008).

Besides the interviewers' estimation of the participants' ability to differentiate, perceived emotional closeness to the Kurdish people emerged as a predictor of readiness to reconcile in our study. The more individuals perceived

themselves as belonging to the Kurdish collective relative to the Turkish one, the less ready they were to reconcile. Similarly, in a sample of Bosnian, Serbs and Croats, Petrović (2005) found a negative relation between the readiness to reconcile and nationalism as well as the importance of belonging to one's nation. Hence, feeling closer to one's own group seems to impede readiness to reconcile.

Limitations

Among the limitations of this study is the relative small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of our results. As with the small sample size, the criteria for carrying out a principal component analysis were only barely met, the results should be interpreted with caution and the factor structure of the reconciliation inventory should be replicated in a study involving more participants. Furthermore, the ad hoc translation of the items—except for the RI items—from German by the interpreters, may have led to linguistic inaccuracies. Moreover, the fact that the interviewers were not blinded to the participants' answers during the interviews when rating their ability to differentiate between perpetrators and Turkish people in general may have influenced their judgement. In further studies this problem should be addressed by using a more unbiased measure to assess the participants' ability to differentiate between perpetrators and the people in general. Another limitation relates to the political situation of our sample. Although the conflict between Kurds and Turks in Turkey was stabilized, it was not yet settled. In fact, it flared again up during the period of data collection. Although we found no mean differences between participants interviewed before and after this flare-up, it may have influenced our results, as we think that readiness to reconcile in the individual is depending on the current situation of the conflict, the political situation and/or behaviour of the former perpetrators, rather than being a stable personality trait. However, further studies are necessary to improve our knowledge on whether readiness to reconcile is rather a personality state or trait. As the readiness to reconcile depends on the underlying conflict itself, the transferability of our results to other post-conflict groups is limited. In addition, as one third of the participants were recruited by advertisements in Kurdish cultural centers, it cannot be ruled out that these participants were mainly politically sensitized Kurdish people. Finally, only a longitudinal design would make it possible to determine the causality of the associations between readiness to reconcile and mental health.

Conclusion

To date, there are no validated questionnaires to assess readiness to reconcile in victims of human rights violations. In this study, we developed a reliable instrument

with good psychometric properties to assess readiness to reconcile in Kurdish refugees. However, further validation of the questionnaire is needed in different post-conflict societies, preferably with larger samples. This could also enhance our understanding of post-conflict reconciliation and to identify factors associated with it.

Conflict of interest and funding

There is no conflict of interest in the present study for any of the authors.

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