

## ABSTRACT

### Association between Adversity and Prosociality in Children

#### Exposed to Trauma in Four Sites in West Africa

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The negative effects of trauma exposure on youth behavior and mental health has included internal disturbances that cause distress to the individual, as well as, externalizing behaviors that cause distress to others. Researchers have also argued that trauma exposure can have a positive impact on psychosocial development, in that it can lead people to align with others, rather than turn against them. In an effort to identify factors that might nullify the association between trauma exposure and subsequent negative consequences, this paper examines the relationship between trauma exposure and prosocial behavior in Sierra Leone, Togo, Burkina Faso and Liberia.

Results indicate that total trauma exposure was negatively associated with prosocial behavior in Sierra Leone and Liberia, while the inverse relationship was found in Togo and Burkina Faso, where trauma exposure was shown to have a positive association with prosocial behavior. The effect of trauma exposure on prosocial behavior varied by gender in Togo; among girls, trauma exposure had a positive significant association with prosocial behavior, however it did not impact prosocial behavior among boys. Lastly, the negative impact of trauma exposure on prosocial behavior found in Sierra Leone is partially explained by the indirect effect of PTSD and depression. Results are discussed in the context of individual and environmental differences that promote risk or resilience. Limitations and future implications for research, and practice are discussed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	v
Dedication .....	vi
Chapter I    INTRODUCTION .....	1
Chapter II    LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
Psychosocial Effects of Adversity and Trauma Exposure .....	4
Negative Impacts .....	4
Pathways of Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth .....	9
Altruism and Prosocial Behavior .....	10
Prosocial Behavior as a Consequence of Adversity .....	12
Background Information .....	15
Research Aims .....	19
Chapter III    METHODS .....	21
Recruitment/Procedure .....	21
Participants .....	23
Study Measures .....	25
Sociodemographic Questionnaire .....	25
Traumatic Events Checklists .....	25
Prosocial Behavior .....	25
Psychiatric Disorders .....	26
Data Analysis .....	29

Chapter IV	RESULTS	31
Preliminary Analyses		31
Analyses Examining Aims		34
Aim One		35
Aim two		37
Aim three		43
Aim four		44
Chapter V	DISCUSSION	50
Summary of Research Findings		51
Implications for Research and Practice		59
Limitations		62
Conclusions		63
REFERENCES		64
APPENDICES		74
Appendix A: Map of West Africa		74
Appendix B: Sociodemographic Questionnaire		75
Appendix C: Traumatic Events Checklist and UCLA PTSD Index		81
Appendix D: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire		87
Appendix E: MINI Neuropsychiatric Interview for Children		89