THE MENTAL HEALTH OF REFUGEES LIVING IN THE US

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Since 1980 the United States has admitted more than two million refugees - 75,000 per year
(Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2008)

REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY STATE OF RESIDENCE - 2011

REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN - 2010

**Asylees by Country of Origin - 2010**

- **China, PRC**: 32%
- **Ethiopia**: 4%
- **Haiti**: 5%
- **Venezuela**: 2%
- **Nepal**: 41%
- **Colombia**: 2%
- **Russia**: 2%
- **Egypt**: 3%
- **Iran**: 3%
- **Guatemala**: 3%
- **Other**: 3%

NUMBER OF REFUGEES AND ASYLEES GRANTED LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS, 1994 - 2008

The experience of physical and emotional trauma, and forced relocation from their home country, coupled with the following discrimination, social exclusion and lack of opportunities experienced in the country of resettlement, predispose many refugees to suffer mental health disorders prior to and after resettlement.
REFUGEE’S MENTAL HEALTH

Previous studies have documented that refugees and their families experience increased risk for:

- Major depression
- PTSD
- Substance abuse disorders
- Early pregnancy
- HIV/AIDS risk behaviors
- Learning problems and educational disparities
- Delinquency
- Radicalization

Blake et al., 2001; Fazel et al., 2005; Fenta et al., 2004; Hankins et al., 2002; Lustig et al., 2004, Porter & Haslam, 2005; United States House of Representatives, 2009; Kinzie, 2000; United Nations Population Fund, 1999
Refugee’s Mental Health

Providing mental health services for newly arrived refugees is a recognized U.S. public health priority

Barriers to Health Care Access

### Individual
- Mental illness
- Fatalism & mistrust
- Perceived discrimination & fear of deportation
- Other priorities

### Structural
- Affordability
- Limited services
- Language - Cultural competency of HCP

### Mixed
- Difficulty navigating the complex system
- Inadequate community support

Asgary & Segar, 2011
METHODS
NESARC

- The National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC)  
- Longitudinal nationwide household survey
  - First wave → 2001-2002
  - Second wave → 2004-2005

Conducted by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
NESARC SAMPLE

- Non-institutionalized U.S. population 18+ years in the US, including all 50 States and the District of Columbia

- Military personnel living off base and residents in non-institutionalized group quarters housing (e.g. boarding houses, shelters, and dormitories) also included

- Young adults ages 18–24 and minorities oversampled
NESARC WAVE 1

- Wave 1 sample size $n = 43,093$
  - inclusion of American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) ($n=1,304$) and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NH/PI) ($n=363$)

Household response rate for the Wave 1 = 89%
Person response rate = 93%
Overall response = 81%
NESARC Wave 2

- Wave 2 sample size $n = 34,653$
- LTFU: 8,440
  - 3,134 not eligible for a Wave 2 interview because they were institutionalized, mentally/physically impaired, on active duty in the armed forces interview period, deceased, or deported.
  - 5,306 were eligible for a Wave 2 interview but were not re-interviewed because they refused or because of the inability to reach or locate them

- Overall cumulative survey response rate = 70.2%
Data were collected through computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) in face-to-face household settings.

The information was collected using the NIAAA Alcohol Use Disorder and Associated Disabilities Interview Schedule–Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) Version (AUDADIS-IV).
OUTCOME VARIABLES – LIFETIME & PAST-YEAR

- Mood disorders: major depressive disorder and dysthymia
- Anxiety disorders: social phobia, generalized anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder
- Alcohol dependence
- Illicit Drug Dependence: Sedatives, tranquilizers, painkillers, stimulants, cannabis, cocaine/crack, hallucinogens, inhalants, heroine, others (steroids, Elavil, Thorazine, or Haldol)
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Refugee related variables:
  - Were you EVER a refugee - that is, did you flee from your home to a foreign country or place to escape danger or persecution?
  - How old were you the FIRST time this happened?
  - How long were you a refugee?

- Socio-demographic variables:
  - Sex, age, race, nativity, education and marital status
RESULTS
About 1.3% of individuals interviewed in the 2004-2005 NESARC reported ever having been refugees
### Characteristics of the Study Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Refugee Yes (%)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Refugee No (%)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex (males)*</td>
<td>59.6</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<sup>p</sup><0.01

<sup>a</sup> Weighted proportions
### Characteristics of the Study Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Refugee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes (%)\textsuperscript{a}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US –born (no)*</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school/GED</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college/more</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>52 (17.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*p<0.01

\textsuperscript{a} Weighted proportions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age when became a refugee</td>
<td>24.5 (16.2)</td>
<td>23.9 (17.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as refugee</td>
<td>8.3 (11.8)</td>
<td>6.1 (10.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years since refugee*</td>
<td>26.4 (14.7)</td>
<td>30.4 (18.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees in the last 10 years</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.01

a Weighted proportions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>LT%(^a)</th>
<th>PY%(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major depression</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysthymia</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Phobia</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Dependence</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit drugs dependence</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any mental health disorder</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Weighted proportions
Prevalence of Lifetime Psychiatric Disorders by Refugee Status – NESARC 2004-2005

MD=Major depression; D=Dysthymia; GAD= Generalized Anxiety Disorder; SP=Social Phobia; PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder; AD=Alcohol Dependence; IDD=Illicit drugs dependence

AOR=3.0 (2.1-4.4)
Prevalence of Past-Year Psychiatric Disorders by Refugee Status – NESARC 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Non Refugees</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>AOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDD</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MD = Major depression; D = Dysthymia; GAD = Generalized Anxiety Disorder; SP = Social Phobia; PTSD = Post-traumatic stress disorder; AD = Alcohol Dependence; IDD = Illicit drugs dependence

AOR = 2.2 (1.1-4.4) for Refugees vs Non Refugees
PREVALENCE OF LIFETIME PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS BY REFUGEE STATUS AMONG MALES – NESARC 2004-2005

MD=Major depression; D=Dysthymia; GAD=Generalized Anxiety Disorder; SP=Social Phobia; PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder; AD=Alcohol Dependence; IDD=Illicit drugs dependence

AOR=2.8 (1.5-5.3)
PREVALENCE OF PAST-YEAR PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS BY REFUGEE STATUS AMONG MALES – NESARC 2004-2005

MD=Major depression; D=Dysthymia; GAD= Generalized Anxiety Disorder ; SP=Social Phobia; PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder; AD=Alcohol Dependence ; IDD=Illicit drugs dependence
PREVALENCE OF LIFETIME PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS BY REFUGEE STATUS AMONG FEMALES – NESARC 2004-2005

MD=Major depression; D=Dysthymia; GAD= Generalized Anxiety Disorder ; SP=Social Phobia; PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder; AD=Alcohol Dependence ; IDD=Illicit drugs dependence
PREVALENCE OF PAST-YEAR PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS BY REFUGEE STATUS AMONG FEMALES – NESARC 2004-2005

MD=Major depression; D=Dysthymia; GAD= Generalized Anxiety Disorder; SP=Social Phobia; PTSD=post-traumatic stress disorder; AD=Alcohol Dependence; IDD=Illicit drugs dependence
CONCLUSIONS
- One in three refugees in the US has suffered in their lifetimes at least one of the seven mental health disorder assessed

- One in sixth refugees in the US has suffered in the past year at least one of the seven mental health disorder assessed
The most common disorders reported by refugees in the US were major depression disorders and PTSD.

Compared to the general US population refugees in the US were 2 to 3 times more likely to have experienced an anxiety disorder.
- Refugee males in the US were more likely to ever have experienced PTSD as compared to non-refugee men.

- Refugee women were more likely than their counterparts to experience generalized anxiety disorders and PTSD in the past year → preflight, flight, and resettlement factors.
• Refugee women reporting PTSD in the past year have lived in the US for at least four years \( \rightarrow \) persistent PTSD

• Therapeutic interventions need to be tried and evaluated with refugee clients who are at different stages of resettlement (Gonsalves, 1992)
LIMITATIONS

- NESARC restricted to English and Spanish speaking participants
- Limited description of refugee experience
- Self-report of sensitive information
- Cultural applicability of assessment methods (Bracken, 2002)
SERVICES TO SUPPORT REFUGEES FOLLOWING RESETTLEMENT

- Comprehensive & integrative: to attend the refugees psychological, educational, financial, and social needs

- Flexible: to work within the limited time framework and scarce resources allocated

- Culturally sensitive: to understand cross-cultural similarities and differences in the presentation, meaning, and appropriate methods of responding to symptoms of distress (Kleinman, 1988)
**Approach**

- Understand experiences and challenges within the resettlement environment
- Foster strength, capacity, and resilience

(Papadopoulos, 2007)
THANK YOU

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