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Impacts of War & Trauma: Understanding the Perception of Mental Health Among Resettled Somali Refugees

Zahara Shidad '21 – (Sponsor: Professor Nicole Overstreet)



INTRODUCTION

A literature review was conducted to answer the following research question: What effects does trauma have among resettled Somali refugees' perceptions of mental health?

To answer this question, the history of the Somali refugees must be addressed. In the early 1990's a civil war broke out in mainland Somalia; many citizens were ousted and forced to flee their homes. As the affluent Somalians' escaped to Western Europe, the future of the poorer people was bleak. Many of the experienced trauma through the resettlement process that was started by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The first phase of resettlement was in the outer countries of Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. This literature review addresses the unique perspective that Somali refugees have on mental illness due to ongoing trauma experienced through resettlement process in the United States and the United Kingdom. The rising prevalence of mental instability is due the listed traumatic experienced (from the war) in Figure 1, and structural, cultural and specific barriers for refugees, like visa status within resettled host countries.

Experienced trauma	Men (N = 91)	Women (N = 89)	p-value
Shortage of food	70%	56.2%	0.04
Shortage of water	27.8%	11.2%	0.03
Without shelter	46.7%	55.1%	NS
Poor health	83.3%	76.4%	NS
Torture	41.1%	3.4%	< 0.001
Imprisonment	34.4%	4.5%	< 0.001
Suffered serious injury	35.6%	4.55%	< 0.001
A murder	80%	75.2%	0.41
Being lost	8.9%	15.7%	NS
Being kidnapped	6.7%	2.3%	NS
Separated from family	75.6%	65.2%	NS
Being raped	0	2.3%	0.05
Being sexually violated (short of rape)	0	1.1%	0.03
Being brainwashed	6.98%	3.37%	0.01
Enforced isolation	64.04%	47.2%	0.04
Feeling close to death	72.2%	52.8%	0.05
Being in a combat situation	91.1%	85.4%	0.16

Fig 1: Image from Dhui et al. (2003)

METHODS

A total of 12 peer-reviewed articles were used for research purposes. The data was made up of interviews, focus groups, observations, and visual methods. These studies were found through PsycInfo, PubMed, PsycARTICLES and Google Scholar. Much of these studies were written from the early 2000's throughout 2017. The search for these articles was quite difficult due to the minimal research invested in it. Keywords used within this literature review include: pre/post migration, stigma, refugee, qualitative research, acculturation, perceived discrimination, coping, and resilience.

RESULTS

Research done has shown that high rates of Common Mental Disorders (CMD) such as: depression, anxiety, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are present within the Somali refugee population. Throughout intensive research, it has been found that the Eurocentric approach towards Somali refugees mental health should be reexamined. The Islamic beliefs of Somali refugees has been shown to have a considerate amount of influence in how Somali refugees shape their perspective on mental health.

FUTURE STUDIES

Further studies should be conducted that take an intersectional approach towards de-stigmatizing the Somali refugees' complex perspective of mental health. Installing educational and bilingual centers to encourage openness to seeking professional services. Education for both the clinician and the patient is important to achieve a culturally sensitive approach towards intervention. Incorporating colloquial terms in mental assessments will allow for a framework that can be used to approach younger and rising American Somali refugees mental wellbeing.