

The Impact of Resettlement on the Emotional Well-Being of Afghan Refugees



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Understanding Types of Protection

- **Special Immigrant Visa (SIV):** Program available to Afghan nationals who were employed by, or on behalf of the US government within Afghanistan.
- **Priority 2 (P2):** Group of “special concern” to the U.S. Government. A new P2 designation for Afghanistan expands beyond the SIV program.
- **Asylum:** A person from Afghanistan can apply for asylum from within the U.S. or at a U.S. port of entry.
- **Humanitarian Parole:** Temporary status allowing Afghan parolees to stay in the U.S. up to 365 days while applying for a longer term solution.

Resettlement is a life crisis

- Refugees move to a new country with a different language and culture, leaving behind family and friends. – usually do not have choice of location.
- The resettlement period = 90 day
- Their initial financial situation is extremely limited
- Opportunities for employment may be few due to a lack of education or language skills,
Ex: some may have education from their counties,

Resettlement is a life crisis

- Feelings of isolation can also emerge due to a lack of language skills, extended support network, and transportation. To complicate things even further, they may feel their values conflict with the culture in which they reside, or they may become targets of discrimination or oppression.
- Refugees cite resettlement factors as the most critical to their mental health. “According to studies of adult refugees, post-migration stressors such as unemployment and family separations have a more powerful effect on refugee mental health than pre-migration stressors during the first few years of resettlement” (Hyman, Vu, & Beiser., 2000, p. 281).
- Help foster this as best you can (specifically welcoming refugee clients, smiles, a sense of warmth in everyday interactions)

Resettlement challenges specific to King County

- Economic - Housing
 - Seattle area has one of the highest costs of living in the US.
- Isolation
 - Lack of transit options in suburbs.
 - Less refugee density.
 - Less “walkability.”
 - Fewer accessible community centers and other close options for gathering.
- Lag in cultural competency
 - Services – schools, hospitals, etc. – less experience with refugees and providing services to refugees.

What do we mean by “mental illness?”

- In the western world “mental illness” refers to a wide range of emotional distress.
- In many other cultures, mental illness means “crazy.”
- The difference in the meaning of “mental illness” is a major barrier to service access.

How to identify clients who need further mental health support

- Difficulty with schoolwork, focusing, tearful and not willingness to share.
- Gain some knowledge of client background
- The landscape of the individual
- Explain the meaning of mental illness
- Explore their cultural help seeking behavior (ie. Parents, mosque)
- Talking to the clients about symptoms such as sleep, sadness, worry
- Checking with interpreter to see what your words may mean to client.
- Avoiding discussions on negative discouragement activity.

Working with Refugee Children and Youth



Third Culture Youth

- Teens whose parents are first generation Immigrants/refugees and whose peers are American teens.
- They are a critical subset of the refugee community.
- They often do not readily identify with their parent's culture, or their adopted American culture.
- The struggle with their cultural identity adds an additional element of stress to both the teens and their parents' lives as they try to cope with the usual tensions of adolescence.

Common Issues

- Loss and Grief
- Depression and Anxiety
- Guilt and Shame
- Trauma and PTSD
- Adjustment– level of adjustments depend on the age of resettlement, level of literacy, resettling with family/relatives or unaccompanied minor, trauma and the experience before, during and after resettlement.



Collaborating with Parents

- Always include Parents/Foster Parents/Care Givers in providing support, if possible
- Be a cultural navigator/broker for the family and youth. Family members' unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge in US system(legal, educational, health, mental health) hinders help seeking.
- Mistrust of the government and their past experience with authority figures can hinder help seeking behaviors. Take your time to build trust and explain to decrease their anxiety.

Collaboration with Parents

- Find out how they understand their children's problems; what they have tried; what worked and what did not work.
- Build partnership and alliance.
- If possible always match culture, language and gender to youth and their family.
- Have trained interpreter available. Make sure that culture/language/gender and age of interpreter is appropriate (if possible).

Collaboration with Parents

- Pay attention to the family's understanding of mental illness. The Western mental health symptoms may not be looked upon as mental illness, but rather "gifts" and "special power".
- Pay attention to their spiritual belief system.
- Many parents and adult care givers are dealing with their own issues: trauma, PTSD, loss, grief, health, mental health problems, substance abuse, chemical dependency, problem gambling, domestic violence, sexual assault/abuse, employment, housing issues that affect their ability to support the child. Offer them resources and connect them to culturally appropriate services.

Collaborating with CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Encourage them to have their parents involved but assure confidentiality.
- Establish trust and credibility— work with tangible needs first. Assign staff who has similar refugee and cultural experience.
- Pay attention to issues at home—who lives at home, who is raising them, who makes decision.
- Pay attention to history of refugee experience— resettlement experience, trauma, loss, etc.
- Pay attention to cultural norm and tradition.



Collaborating with CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- Assess school and academic development
- Assess social/peer life
- Assess identity—cultural/ethnic/sexual
- Assess developmental stage
- Assess health issues that may be affecting mental health—make sure that youth has medical providers.
- Connect youth to resources in the community—after school, sports, cultural groups, and other fun activities.
- AND Empower them, give them Hope and Dreams!!!



Questions?

Stay Connected

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