

SUPPORTING REFUGEE FAMILIES THROUGH THE STRESS OF RESETTLEMENT

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TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- Present a strengths based approach to assist refugee families with the resettlement process
- Understand the difficulties refugee families experience before and after the transition
- Discuss 5 recommendations to enhance the well being of new Americans so they are able to navigate the community

INTRODUCTIONS

- Please introduce yourself

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT 101



www.resettlement.eu

Resettlement
saves lives

2020 campaign

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RANGE OF PRE-RESETTLEMENT STRESSORS

- Language barriers, unemployment, disrupted family dynamics, lack of resources
- Often affected by violence and conflict in their home countries
- Seek refuge do to fear of persecution due to their religion, race, nationality, or beliefs and practices
- Often have experienced trauma and arrive with unidentified mental health concerns

RANGE OF POST-RESETTLEMENT STRESSORS

- Stigma, cultural and linguistic barriers, lack of services, poor access to existing services
- Romanticized view of their lives post-resettlement
- Social, economic, cultural, familial, and psychological stressors
- Adapting to the new culture; social, economic, and academic demands in the U.S.; maintaining family cohesion; enduring family separation; risk of psychopathology
- Survivor's guilt and other family obligations
- Refugee families report feeling persecuted for their religious beliefs

WHAT IS THE GAP...

- PROGRAMS DESIGNED FOR REFUGEE PARENTS ARE LIMITED AND TEND TO FOCUS ON PARENTING SKILLS AND ASSIMILATION TO THE NORMS OF THE HOST CULTURE
- THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE OR NO EMPHASIS ON HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND AND NAVIGATE THE PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY BOTH THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN NOR HAS THERE BEEN ATTENTION GIVEN TO ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WHEN NECESSARY (BETANCOURT ET AL., 2015).
- PARENTS LACK A RELIABLE SUPPORT SYSTEM AS THEY STRUGGLE TO KEEP UP WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S ACCULTURATION, IN ADDITION TO THEIR OWN
- LANGUAGE
- MISINFORMATION, MISUNDERSTANDING & FEAR-BASED REASONING

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENGAGE THE FAMILY AS THE CENTRAL UNIT

Benefit

- Reduces the gap between children and parent acculturation
- Recognizes the family as the primary social unit
- Allows refugee parents to impart their valued traditions to their children

Why

- Refugee families experience stress when there is discord within the family structure
- The rate family members acculturate varies widely, leading to tension between parents and children
- The family unit is a critical component in the adjustment, recovery, and health of refugees

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENGAGE THE FAMILY AS THE CENTRAL UNIT (CONT.)

How

- Support parental acculturation - English classes and community supports.
- Incorporate family beliefs, knowledge, communication, and community connections into interventions.
- Involve parents with the development and the implementation of interventions
- Avoid employing children as interpreters for their families.

RECOMMENDATION 2: UTILIZE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ADDRESS BARRIERS.

The Benefit

- Community leaders are well-versed in common refugee challenges
 - Knowledgeable about both home and host country cultures
 - Help interpret / explain subtle cultural differences
 - Identify barriers for families in accessing supports
 - Can help develop “work arounds” or interventions to address barriers

RECOMMENDATION 2: UTILIZE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ADDRESS BARRIERS. (CONT.)

Why

- The Western philosophy of mental health is stigmatizing for refugee families.
- Bridge the gap between western and non-western philosophies of mental health
- Brings credibility to mental health practitioners
- Refugees are more likely to take advantage of existing resources

RECOMMENDATION 2: UTILIZE COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ADDRESS BARRIERS. (CONT.)

How

- Incorporate community leaders in outreach and program development.

Examples of leaders to enlist:

- Established members of the refugee community
- Religious leaders
- Those in a position to facilitate connections with refugee families (e.g., director of a refugee community center)
- Public Buildings – Schools & community centers
 - Reduces stigma around mental health services
 - Reduces travel burden

RECOMMENDATION 3: ENSURE THE FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS ARE MET.

Benefit

- Prevents exhaustion of natural coping resources
- Meets refugees at their level of need (where they are)
- Fulfilling basic needs allows them to acculturate, adjust, and recover

Why

- Imminent stressors has a more direct effect on the refugees than does past traumas (Bentancourt et al., 2015)
- More motivated to get basic needs met than to seek out mental health support.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ENSURE THE FAMILY'S BASIC NEEDS ARE MET. (CONT.)

How

- Intertwine case work with mental health interventions.

Basic need considerations

- Health care
- Financial assistance
- English language classes
- Translation services
- Transportation services

RECOMMENDATION 4: USE PSYCHOEDUCATION TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS.

Benefit

- Provides tools refugees need to adapt to their new home
- Can be implemented in community-based settings
- Appropriate for individual and family systems
- Vital to not question or challenge the families' existing structures and beliefs

Why

- New Americans are unaware of societal social norms in their new home
- Lack of understanding may lead to ridicule, isolation, and negative interactions with social institutions

RECOMMENDATION 4: USE PSYCHOEDUCATION TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS (CONT).

How

- Common parental psychoeducation needs
 - Health support including hygiene and nutrition
 - Laws – Such as discipline and supervision
 - Accessing the education systems
 - Understanding safety issues
 - Cultural differences related to parenting adolescents in the U.S.

RECOMMENDATION 5: CELEBRATE THE FAMILIES' STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY (CONT.)

Benefit

- Focuses on the many strengths of refugee families
- Improves families collective self-efficacy leading to improved motivation, family cohesion, and life satisfaction

Why

- Avoids focusing on problems and short comings
- Identifies and validates the tremendous challenges refugee families have overcome

RECOMMENDATION 5: CELEBRATE THE FAMILIES' STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY (CONT.)

How

- Acknowledge & Celebrate
 - Dedication to improving the lives of their family
 - Family stability
 - Social skills
 - Adaptability
 - Religious supports
 - Openness to new learning
 - New connections within the community

RECOMMENDATION 5: CELEBRATE THE FAMILIES' STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY (CONT.)

Building Resiliency

- Develop routines
 - Supports family cohesion
 - Establishes normalcy
- Strengthen family resiliency
 - Strengthen Parent-child relationships
 - Build connections to social institutions
 - School based interventions for children



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Q & A

