Trauma and Distress of Immigrant and Refugee Families: The Journey of Strengths, Resilience and Healing

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Migration Process

Pre-migration condition

- Have time to prepare
- More options
- Have proper documents
- Have more resources
- Have time to say good bye to family and friends
- May have experienced trauma
- Based economics/country
- Of origin internal conflict

Refugees

- No time to prepare to leave
- No options/leaving for survival
- May not have documents due to survival at the time of leaving
- May have no time to say good bye to family and friends
- May have experienced traumatic conditions or events
- Based on humanitarian reasons
Migration/ Post Migration

- Migration time may take many months or years
- People may live in different countries (acquire different skills/languages)

Hopes /expectations upon arrival:

- a) hope for medical care/ cure for illness
- b) find peace (trauma re-emerges)
- c) fast integration to employment
- d) learn fast
Life in a Refugee Camp

• Precarious leaving conditions
  a. water b. food supply is scarce

• Constricted living space

• Common space vrs personal space

• No adequate medical care: lack of resources for supporting physical/mental health (1 hospital/8 refugee camps)
REFUGEE DISPLACED COMMUNITIES

- Families are in survival stage for short/long period of time
- Families may be grieving the lost of family members
- Families may be dispersed in different displaced communities and not know about other family member’s where about.
- Food, water, safety is the priority vrs. education, play, arts
- Refugees may be experiencing trauma/stress/mental health illness
- No access to work/ or to earn an income
What is Trauma?

“Is when we have encountered and out control, frightening experience that has disconnected us from all sense of resourcefulness, safety, coping, or love.”

Tara Brach, 2011
Trauma Informed Tool Kit, 2nd Edition, Klinic Manitoba
PTSD and Trauma Symptoms

- Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within three months of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event. These symptoms cause significant problems in social or work situations and in relationships.
- PTSD symptoms are generally grouped into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, or changes in emotional reactions.
- **Intrusive memories**
  - Symptoms of intrusive memories may include:
  - Recurrent, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event
  - Reliving the traumatic event as if it were happening again (flashbacks)
  - Upsetting dreams about the traumatic event
  - Severe emotional distress or physical reactions to something that reminds you of the event.
Avoidance
Symptoms of avoidance may include:
Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event
Avoiding places, activities or people that remind you of the traumatic event

Negative changes in thinking and mood
Symptoms of negative changes in thinking and mood may include:
Negative feelings about yourself or other people
Inability to experience positive emotions
Feeling emotionally numb
Lack of interest in activities you once enjoyed
Hopelessness about the future
Memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event
Difficulty maintaining close relationships

Changes in emotional reactions
Symptoms of changes in emotional reactions (also called arousal symptoms) may include:
Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
Always being on guard for danger
Overwhelming guilt or shame
Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
Trouble concentrating
Trouble sleeping
Being easily startled or frightened

Reference: The Mayo Clinic
Trauma Informed Context & Cultural Sensitivity
Intake, Assessment and Treatment.

Principles

Acknowledgement of trauma
Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness
Opportunity for choice, collaboration and connection
Strengths based and skill building

These principles are important in every stage of the process: intake, assessment, treatment

Trauma Informed Practice Guide, British Columbia
http://bccewh.bc.ca
Restoring Health and Wellbeing

- Acknowledge Trauma
- Safety Trustworthiness
- Opportunity Choice Collaboration Connection
- Strengths Based Skill Building
- Healing
“Resilience, is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress, such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace or financial stressors. It means, “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.”

American Psychological Association
Keys to Family Resilience

**Belief Systems**
- Making Meaning of Crisis & Challenge
- Positive Outlook: Hope
- Transcendence & Spirituality

**Organizational Resources**
- Flexibility / Stability
- Connectedness; Leadership
- Kin, Social, & Economic Resources

**Communication Processes**
- Clear, consistent messages
- Emotional Sharing; Humor / Joy/ respite
- Collaborative Problem-solving / Proaction

Froma Walsh, Chicago Centre for Family Health
BELIEF SYSTEM

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respite
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Nurturing Resilience through:

- Developing structure and routine
- Creating/connecting with community
- Remembering skills, talents
- Developing a vision for the future
- Honoring the past, honoring the future
- Learning new skills
- Connecting with internal and external sense of trust
- Getting familiar with own neighborhood
- Re-connecting with customs, traditions, spiritual meaning
- Developing a sense of belonging, and contribution to the common good
- Volunteering
References

American Psychological Association:  www.apa.org
School of Social Sciences;  Centre for Refugee Research Annual Report 2014.
University of New South Wales, Sydney Australia

The Mayo Clinic

Trauma Informed Tool Kit, 2nd Edition, Klinic Manitoba

Trauma Informed Practice Guide, British Columbia:  http://bccwh.bc.ca

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Walsh, Froma: Chicago Centre for Family Health

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Picserve.org
THANKS
In the 1990s, the Balkan wars created hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers. Many of them found refuge in industrialized countries. Today, the surge in armed conflicts around the world presents us with similar challenges. Our response has to be just as generous now as it was then – providing access to asylum, resettlement opportunities and other forms of protection for the people fleeing these terrible conflicts.

António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

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