Refugees in Pennsylvania: Through a Health Equity Lens

Office of Health
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- Pennsylvania Interagency Health Equity Team (PIHET)
- Culturally Linguistically Appropriateness Services (CLAS)
- Public Health 3.0
- Health Equity Report
Objectives

- Focus Refugee population in Pennsylvania.
- Overview of Refugees Trends Arrivals 2009-2017
- Overview of Refugees Arrivals by Countries
- Overview of Refugees by area of Residency
- Identified needs of Refugees in Pennsylvania.
- Strategies to support the Refugees population.
- Benefits/importance of focusing on the refugee population.
Focus on refugees

- After 1980, over 3 million refugees resettled in the US.
- With a ceiling of 45 thousand, the country have received 22 thousand in 2018.
- This ceiling have been reduced from 110,000 in 2017 to 30 thousand for 2019.
- Refugee services are covered by 7 resettlement agencies.
- Refugees are served by 7 Health care providers.

WWW.REFUGEESSINPA.ORG
Refugees Admissions steps.

- **Forms require**
  - DHS interview
  - Security check

- **Health Screening**
  - Mental Health Screening.
  - Physical Exam: TB, Vaccine, STD
Refugees Arrival Trends in Pennsylvania 2009-2017
Top 10 countries or Refugees Arrivals in Pennsylvania 2017

- Nepal: 19%
- Bhutan: 16%
- Afghanistan: 13%
- Syria: 12%
- Ukraine: 11%
- DRC: 10%
- Iraq: 7%
- Ethiopia: 4%
- Tanzania: 4%
- Somalia: 4%

Refugee Health Program Draft Report, 2017
Barriers Faced by Refugees in Pennsylvania.

- **Experiences of refugees**: 
  - lack of food and water, faulty Education, living on camps, expose to communicable diseases (malaria, cholera, Zika, TB...), faced a lot of mental issues (see people dying, killing to survive...), Prosecution, War, Rape...

- **Barriers**
  - Access to care
    - Primary care
    - Mental care
  - Other barriers: social Determinants of Health
    - Education
    - Transportation and Housing
    - Financial resources
    - Legal prospective
Access to care

Before and after their arrivals, refugees are mandated to undergo a health screening.


hypertension, diabetes, dental and vision

Mental health issues – depression, trauma

Refugee Health Program Surveillance Draft Report 2017
Primary care

- **Health Screening:**
  - Prior to come to Refugees camps, Approximately 35% refugee have never had a complete check up (Healthydebate.ca, 2016)
  - The health support provided lasts past 8 months (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society)
  - Lack of health care coverage.

- **Limited follow up due to:**
  - Inadequate transportation
  - Length of wait time to have an appointment
  - Unawareness
Mental Health Barriers

- 94.3%, meaning 1792 Refugees have received mental health screenings in 2017 (Refugee Health Program Draft Report, 2017)
- 37% of refugees have reported incidents of torture which lead to high rate of PTSD and adjustment disorder ((PTSD in Refugees ptsd.va.gov).
- Professionals services (not affordable for refugees).
- Prohibited to talk about personal concern to strangers due to cultural beliefs.
Health Barriers

- **Cultural barriers:**
  - Health proficiency (Patients and Physicians misleading).
  - Lack of interpreter services
  - Some body parts are considered sacred
  - Preference to turn to a Spiritual Counselor rather than a Therapist
  - The patients family is told the diagnostic (Host society).
  - Foods and lifestyle habits cannot be easily readjusted

[RefugeeINPA.org](http://www.refugeeINPA.org)
Social determinants of Health: Housing and Transportation

- Temporary accommodation from Resettlement agency.
- Refugees subject to scam or exploitation from their landlord.
- Affordable safe and adequate housing is expensive.
- Language barriers increase challenges with transportation.
  - Driver’s license- need a translator or must be literate.
- Lack of transportation limits mobility and access to food, healthcare, education, and other essential resources.
Other Barriers: Education

- Situation might vary depending or whom you are supported by resettlement agency or post resettlement agency.
- ESL class provided only for three months by the resettlement agency.
- Limited education on various subjects like law and public health issues
- Continue their education (transcript and credibility of their knowledge).

Survey analysis and health need, Department of Health Iowa
Other Barriers: Financial Resources

- Low income (insufficient for basic needs)
- Lack of secure jobs
- Lack of work experience/job training opportunities
- Uneducated on how to manage finance, for example
  - Bank accounts
  - Investments
  - Loans
Opportunity to improve refugees situation

- Expand health coverage.
- Address English proficiency and expand education area of study.
- Reinforce Training.
- Revise the Personal Responsibility and Work Act (PWORA)
Opportunity to improve refugees situation

- Break cultural barriers
  - Provide care respectfully and be responsive to individual patient
  - Make interpreter services widely available
    - Train refugees as interpreters
- Provide opportunity to learn how to develop their own business and jobs skills
- Provide guidance and instruction in different languages on common issues faced by refugees
Importance to improve refugees situation.

- **Economic benefits:**
  - Create employment. (high demand of employment)
  - Good and services increase.
  - Investment in the country. (taxes, importation…)

- **Personal benefits:**
  - Integration (reinforce the meaning of live in America – “Diversity and acceptance”)
  - Health status improvement. (Reduce suicide, chronic diseases)
  - Fair access to care and public services.
Case Study: Unaccompanied Refugee Minor
Conclusion

- The refugees are qualify for Public Benefits and Assistance from the government (loan, for travel, medical examination, cultural orientation…).

- However, this Assistance can expire or exhausted. (8 months most of the case)

- How we can improve a fair and better support to this community? It is just a matter of willingness and time.

Health Equity Measure
WORK CITED


https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/specific/ptsd_refugee.asp

https://healthydebate.ca/2016/12/topic/syrian-refugees-ptsd

https://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/mental-health/adult-mental-health/traumatic-experiences-of-refugees/
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THANK YOU!

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