Working with Refugee Children and Families

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Objectives

• To gain an understanding of the experience of refugee children and families
• To identify trauma in the lens of immigrant and refugee experiences
• To build culturally sensitive skills and strategies in working with immigrant and refugee children and families
Passion

• Where is your passion?

• What drives you to do what you do everyday?

• How does this passion feed your research, practice, activism and engage policy?
Universality of Experience

• William Barclay

• “There are 2 great days in a person’s life…”

• My father

• Refugee Stories
Crack in the Window
The story of Mot

- 14 y.o.
- South Sudan
- Witnessed all family members being killed
- Escaped and walked through the killing fields of Sudan
- Finally ended up in refugee camps of Kakuma, Kenya.
Refugee Stories

• Sometimes, we crossed the same river two or three times to escape being noticed by the enemy. We kept running. We did not know who we were running away from. We could not trust anyone. It was very scary. Some of the children belonged to the enemy and they reported on us. We were too scared to sleep at night. We wondered what would happen to us. We hated them and I suppose they hated us (Mot).
• I saw quite a number of children killed. Most of them were killed with clubs. They would take five or six of the newly abducted children and make them kill those who had fallen or tried to escape. It was so painful. Twice I had to help. And to do it, it was so bad. It was very bad to have to do (HRW, 2004 account of 14 y.o.)
• I saw quite a number of children killed. Most of them were killed with clubs. They would take five or six of the newly abducted children and make them kill those who had fallen or tried to escape. It was so painful. Twice I had to help. And to do it, it was so bad. It was very bad to have to do (HRW, 2004 account of 14 y.o.)
When they killed anyone they called us to watch. I saw eleven people killed this way. One of them was a boy who had escaped. They found him in his home and called him outside. They made him lie down and they pierced him with a bayonet...Seeing this I felt like I was a dead person, not feeling anything... but then feeling the pain (HRW account of 17 y.o)
Life in the Camp

• Life in the camp was very bad. We received small rations of food, cornmeal, nothing much. Sometimes we would have to sell our food to get other necessities. We had to decide whether we eat in the morning and spend the day on empty stomachs or eat in the evening and have a good night’s sleep… But there were also peace keepers who protected us during the day but came to steal our food and rape us in our huts at night. It was bad, very bad (Chet)
• What do you notice and bout what you notice?
# Myths and Fun Facts

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Immigrant and Refugee Faces

- Media stories
- Children
- Women
- Men
- An international/global phenomenon
- Across ages and nationalities
- Across history and national boundaries
- Internally displaced persons (IDPs)
Media Faces

A picture is worth a 1000 words
Kosovo
Rwanda
Kony and LRA
Sudan-Darfur
Boko Haram
Hungary
Syria
Iraq
At Sea
Immigrants to Europe
Refugee Camp
Refugee camp
IDPs
IDPs
The Tragedy of SUDAN

Fifty thousand are dead, thousands more will die, and more than 1 million have lost their homes. Simon Robinson visits Darfur and witnesses what is happening while the world dithers.

Photographs for TIME by James Nachtwey—VII
Key considerations

- Which group of refugees?
- When did they arrive?
- Where did they come from?
- What conditions did they encounter?
- How have they been received?
- How do they understand themselves?
2016: Who are these people?

- Recent events in Syrian war
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo
  - Home to largest number of refugees in the US
- Myanmar
- Iraq
- Somalia
- Top 10 home countries of new arrivals = >90% of all refugees in the US
Profile of Children

- Children: most vulnerable and least protected
- Ages range 7-14 years
- Boys and girls
- War as weapon of oppression and suppression of the life of child
Why Children?

• Children caught between:
  – Disintegrating family forms
  – Authoritarian states
  – Grasping capitalism
  – Civil wars
  – Economic mismanagement
  – Forced recruitment into war
  – Seeking surrogate family for survival
Other reasons

• Evolution of weapon technology
• Interethnic conflicts
• Easy targets of exploitation
• Used for the most dangerous tasks
• Not easily detectable by enemy fronts
• Vulnerable and gullible
Impact on Children and Families

- Threat to well being and safety
- Increased vulnerability
- Confusion as child’s response
- Loss of awareness of bodily sensations
- A sense of loss and meaningless
- Fragmented memories
- Becoming anxiously attached to care-givers
- Increased compromise on immune system
Disruption

- Attachment disruption
- Layers of disruption
- Loss of community (Hardy, 2008)
- Dehumanization of loss
- Loss of role models
- Loss of connection
- Loss of sense of physical safety
Disruption

• Loss of friendships
• Loss of diminished function
• Loss of economic security
• Loss of cultural values and beliefs
• Foreshortened future
Attachment Disruption

- Compromises culture, gender and race
- A disconnect with one’s or a community’s psychic integrity
- Lack of knowledge about loved ones
- A search for a new way of living
- From “a broken heart to two hearts” (Falicov)
Layers of loss

• Loved ones
• Language and language ability
• The familiar
• Self-expression
• Cultural expression/beliefs
• History
• Religion and spiritual practices
• Relationship with country of origin
Loss associated with disruption

- Socio-economic status
- Educational level
- Language ability
- Relationships between sexes
- Length in host country
- Trauma experiences during flight
- Loss of traditional ways of living
- Socialization to violence
Cultural values and beliefs

- System of cooperation and mutual dependence
- Loyalty to, and solidarity with family/kin
- Interpersonal relationships
- Shame and guilt
- Extended family systems
- Go-betweens
Attachment Disruption

- Exposure to war, political/random violence
- Downward occupational mobility
- Stressful events associated with migration (crime, job instability, language, fear of deportation)
- Long periods of separation between family members
- Differential treatment by host country (utilization of resources)
Attachment Disruption

- Survivor guilt
- Collective guilt
- Confusion over the safety of host society
- Threatened sense of security
- Law enforcement seen as betrayal
- Balancing relativistic and universalistic needs
Recent anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments

- Immigrants and refugees experience of prejudice and hostility
- Great impact on the lives of immigrants and refugees
- Seen as a threat to social cohesion, order, culture, traditions and economic wellbeing
- Societal scapegoats: threaten status quo
Anti-immigrant sentiments

• Executive Deportation orders
• Immigration raids
• Separation of families (Logan/MGH story)
• Intimidation and interrogations
• Betrayal of trust
• Discriminatory immigration policies
• Anti-Muslim and anti-refugee rhetoric
• Stigmatization of term: “refugee”
Neuro-developmental effects

• Disturbance in cognition, memory and attention
• Changes in brain function
• Changes in metabolic and endocrine function
Exercise

• How do your work these stories to make people stronger?

• How do you engage people to tell and retell their story in ways that offer hope and sustenance?
Narrative Approaches

- Exploring immigrant/refugee story of trauma & its complexity
- Seeking unique outcomes
- Using language to explore healing
- Challenging dominant narratives
- Bridging gaps: disconnection, loss, disruption
- Examining current effects of trauma
- Listening for what has survived and how it has survived
Narrative Approaches

• Tracing histories of what is important to immigrant and refugee experience
• Learning from lost loved moments
• Acknowledging special skills of survival
• Linking healing with justice
• Sharing memories of strength
• Double listening: Listening for more than just one story
Addressing Loss

• Attending to all stories
  – loss, disruption and fragmentation;
  – courage and strength

• Seek a connection to one’s psychic integrity

• Meaning and meaning making

• Engaging in culturally appropriate relational stances

• Adopting a cultural bereavement lens
Cultural Bereavement Lens

• Helps to:
  – Refine understanding of psychiatric disorders
  – Understand loss experience as contextual suffering
  – Locate challenges even without clearly expressed clinical symptoms
  – Examine a range of outcomes measures for mental health (Research imperative)
  – Engage in Trauma Informed Care
  – Reappraise meaning and meaning making
Creation of Meaning

• Story and story-telling
• Re-membering
• Re-authoring (self-definition)
• Healing and witnessing circles
• Spirituality: Seeking meaning and purpose
• Bridging gaps of disconnection, loss and disruption
• Story, metaphor and meaning making
Creation of Meaning

- Managing discrepancy between situational and global meanings
- Re-discovering sense of agency and control
- Linkages to predictability and consistency
- Seeking safety, contentment and harmony
- Rebuilding trust and reappraisal of events
- Restoration of global meaning
Stories of sustenance

• Listening and learning from others
• Music and song; Poem
• Acts of prayer
• Adopting new traditions
• Connecting with nurturing family/others
• Building healthy boundaries
• Nurturing good memories/linking to ancestors
Culturally Sensitive Strategies

- Integrating language & culture into existing communities in the resettlement process
- Addressing racism and xenophobia
- Using story and story telling in addressing trauma
- Addressing linguistic barriers, interpretation & translation services w/cultural sensitivity
- Providing competent legal representation
- Advocacy and educational opportunities
Meaning Making: Stories of Coping

• Seeking metaphors of healing

• The crack in the window
The crack in the Window
Thank you!
References


References


