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(She/Her/Hers)

Improving Mental Health Services for Refugee and Immigrant Children and Families: Using Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugee (TST-R) to Improve Engagement and Outcomes

College of Education and Human Development

School of Social Work

University of Minnesota
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Agenda

- Who is a Refugee?
- The Refugee Experience
- Refugee Barriers to Mental Health Services
- Refugee Core Stressors
- Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees (TST-R)
  - Cultural Humility
  - Using Cultural Brokers
  - Addressing barriers to engagement
  - Building a better system and increasing community capacity
I want You to Meet Abdi

Abdi 13 years old boy recently arrived refugee

Was placed in 7th grade though he never had any schooling prior to arrival in the US

Teachers report that he is disruptive and constantly sent out of class

Has multiple cases pending

Child Protection case opened

Abdi’s parents are overwhelmed by calls from multiple system (schools, LE, CP)

They are often angry at Abdi who they blame for the family’s struggles

They have been advised to send him back to Africa and they are considering it

They refuse mental health services because they feel the issue is behavioral
A person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.

-- Article 1 of the 1951 U.N. Refugee Convention
Immigrants vs. Refugees

• Difference in legal status: refugee vs. immigrant, documented vs. undocumented
• Similarities in experiences
• Differences in access to services
• Other special groups: unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers, temporary protected status
Refugee Trauma Exposure

- **Pre-migration:**
  Death of loved ones, torture, imprisonment

- **During Migration:**
  Travel long distances by foot, death of loved ones, lack of basic necessities

- **Resettlement:**
  Community violence, discrimination, lack of resources, loss of social support
Refugee Youth Core Stressors

![Diagram showing core stressors for refugee youth]

- Social Support
- Environment
- Family Relationships
- Language Learning
- Acculturation
- Cultural Learning
- Trauma
- Emotion Regulation
- Discrimination
- Isolation
- Loneliness
- Alienation
- Resettlement
- Basic needs
- Legal
- Financial
- Healthcare
Of those with PTSD, how many sought services of any type?

8% Sought services
92% No services

(Ellis, Lincoln, Charney, Ford-Paz, & Benson, 2008)
Refugee Barriers to Service Engagement

1. Distrust of Systems of Care
2. Stigma
3. Language and cultural barrier
4. Primacy of resettlement stressors (food, housing, education)
Consequences of Unaddressed Traumatic Stress

- Socially: an increased risk for interpersonal difficulties, drug abuse, isolation
- Psychologically: an increased risk for mental illness
- Academically: an increased risk for learning problems, low academic motivation, and school failure
Clinical Model:
for the efficient and effective treatment of traumatized refugee children

Organizational Model:
for the integration of services for agencies that provide treatment to traumatized refugee children

Culture

TST-R
Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees

Social environment

- Individual
- Family
- School
- Peer Group
- Neighborhood
- Culture

Individual Self-Regulation 1
How does TST-R Clinical Intervention Work?

**Social intervention**

Enhance the capacity of the child’s social environment to:

• protect child from current threats and/or traumatic reminders
• support child’s regulation

**Child-focused intervention**

Enhances a child’s capacity to:

• stay regulated when confronted by a stressor/reminder

**Cultural-Clinical Partnerships**: TST-R uses teams composed of cultural brokers and clinicians to support child and caregivers
Structure of TST-R Services

- **Tier 4:** Safety-Focused
- **Tier 3:** Regulation-Focused & Beyond Trauma
- **Tier 2:** Skills-based Groups
- **Tier 1:** Community Outreach
Incorporate Cultural Brokers

Cultural brokering is the act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change

(Jezewski, 1990)
Why Use Cultural Brokers?

Using a cultural broker can improve access and quality of care, and ultimately significantly improve outcomes, by:

- Creating trust
- Building better communication
- Improving assessment and treatment
- Enriching the knowledge of both systems
- De-stigmatizing treatment
- Building capacity in the community
- Fostering a more holistic treatment approach

Adapted from: Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. (2004). Bridging the Cultural Divide in Health Care Settings: The Essential Role of Cultural Broker Programs, from http://nccc.georgetown.edu/resources/brokering.html
Identifying Cultural Brokers

- Who are the community helpers?
- Who are the gatekeepers?
- Who knows the mental health system?
- Who do community members go to for information and assistance?
- What are program priorities and what are barriers to hiring?
- Who is trusted?
Interpreters vs. Cultural Brokers: What’s the Difference?

- Interpreters pass information from one person to another without making changes
- Cultural brokers add to information, facilitating deeper understanding
- Cultural brokers add context, provide background knowledge to enhance provider’s understanding of situation
- Cultural brokers are partners to clinicians
TST-R Objectives

- Engage refugee children and families in services
- Decrease stigma of mental health
- Increase identification of refugee children/adolescents with mental health needs
- Provide sustainable culturally- and linguistically-appropriate school-based mental health services
- Reduce core stressors in the child/adolescent’s social environment
Cultural Humility

1) A commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique
2) Recognize, acknowledge and change power imbalances in relationships
3) Develop mutually beneficial partnerships with communities; work towards institutional accountability
4) Commitment to social justice and institutional transformation
Let’s Reconsider Abdi’s Situation Using TST-R Lens

Trauma Experience:

• Exposed to trauma and violence in refugee camps and has not been assessed for traumatic stress
• Was placed in the 7th grade where he feels lost because he is not able to keep up with the school work.

Trauma Triggers in the Environment: Teachers who are not aware of his history, punish and shame him for not doing his work and often unintentionally engage in behaviors that trigger him, family conflict/

Acculturation Stress

• Exploited by elder youth
• Struggles with language /learning
• Family conflict due to Abdi becomes acculturated to environment vs parental expectations
• Abdi’s parents use parenting skills that previously worked in their country but that are not effective in the US.

Isolation: Bullying, discrimination..

• Resettlement Stress: Parents are overwhelmed by resettlement stressors, legal issues faced by Abdi and potential impact on legal status, family lacks secure housing
Let’s Reconsider Abdi’s Situation
Using TST-R Lens

• Using the Core Stressor Tool, we can identify core stressor and prioritize those that are most impacting Abdi’s symptoms

TST-R Services:

• Safety-Focused (Tier four) including home-based services with a cultural broker who can help the parents navigate systems and educate service providers about the family’s culture

• TST-R skills-based groups (Tier Two) to help him engage in pro-social activities, build his self-regulation/coping skills/create trust

• Training and consultation to care systems: TST-R team can provide training/consultation to school/providers to help them develop skills to create a trauma informed and culturally relevant environment

• Support with Resettlement Stress: Referral to community resources

• In the future both Abdi family would benefit from therapy
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Importance of Community Engagement in TST-R

1. Community engagement activities are usually harmonious with values of the communities we serve.

2. Community engagement activities can increase understanding of cultural/community factors that may shape perceptions of mental illness.

3. Community engagement activities can increase understanding of cultural/community factors that may impact help seeking behaviors for psychological distress.

4. Community engagement activities can reduce stigma and increase trust.
Barriers to Mental Health Care

- Distrust of Authority/Power
- Linguistic & Cultural Barriers
- Stigma of Mental Health Services
- Primacy of Resettlement Stressors

Strategies to Address Barriers

- Community Engagement
- Partnership of Providers & Cultural Experts
- Embedding Services in Service System
- Integration of Concrete Services


New NCTSN Product


- For further training and consultation
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