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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder within Refugee Populations and its Effects on Acculturation into the United States

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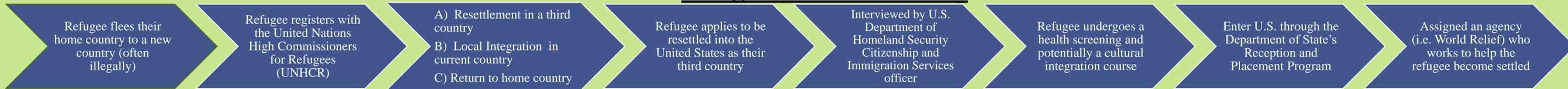
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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder within Refugee Populations and its Effects on Acculturation into the United States

Brittany R. Burk, Augustana College | Honors Capstone Project

Refugee Admission Process



What is a refugee?

- The U.S. defines a refugee as “someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.” (U.S. Department of State, n.d., para. 2)
- In 2013, 69,926 refugees entered the U.S.
- In 2011, approximately 170 refugees were resettled into the Quad Cities

Social Perceptions of Refugees with PTSD

An online survey of 101 U.S. citizens was conducted using a modified version of the Emory Bogardus’s Social Distance Scale to determine the public’s perception of refugees with PTSD to refugees in general and Vietnam veterans with PTSD. Participants ranked each statement from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree).

Refugees with PTSD were perceived differently than the other two groups

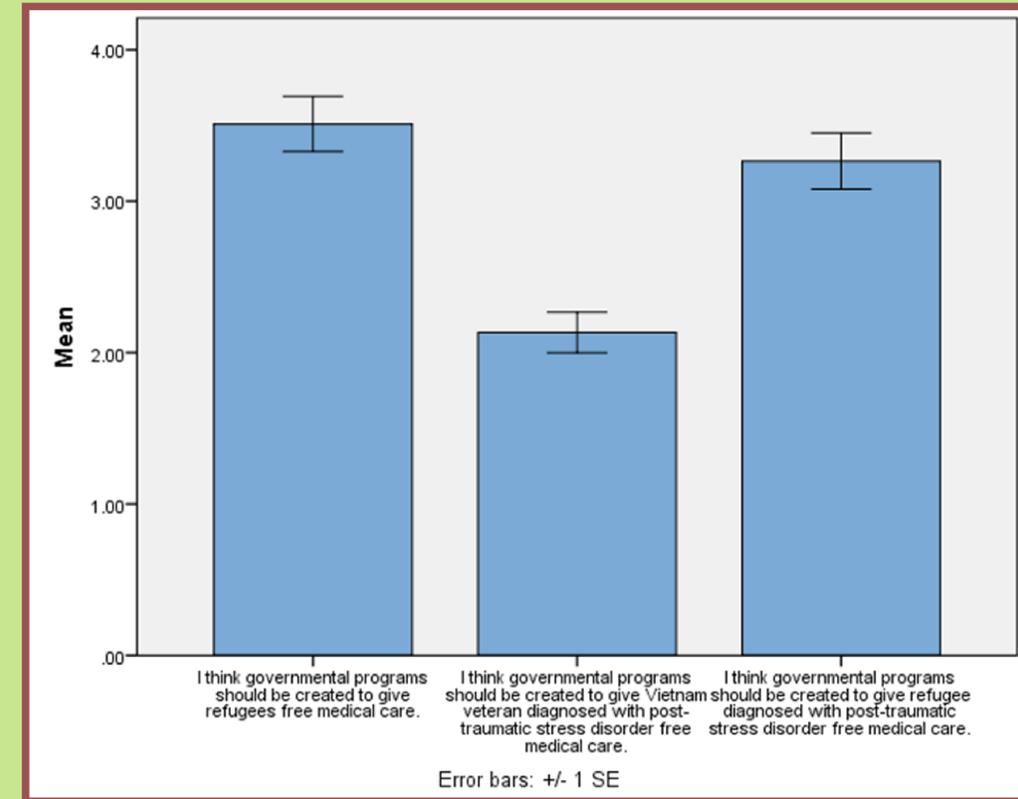
- Less likely to want to live next door
- Less likely to want to send children to school with refugees who have parents with PTSD

In other cases, refugee status was the most important factor

- More likely to want to give Vietnam vets dental care and food stamps compared to the other two groups

Other cases where PTSD was the most important factor

- Less likely to want to have someone with PTSD babysit their child
- Participants were less likely to want to give refugees benefits for governmental programs than U.S. veterans but more willing to provide medical care to refugees with PTSD than those without it (See Graph 1)



Graph 1. Participants ranked each statement from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- An intense, long-lasting anxiety disorder resulting from a disturbing event (e.g. war, assault, natural disaster)
- Results from exposure to a traumatic event, repeatedly experiencing traumatic events, learning a traumatic event occurred to a family member
- In the U.S., PTSD symptoms include: flashbacks, avoidance behavior, negative mood, and heightened arousal
- Can lead to difficulty maintaining relationships with friends or family members or difficulty in successfully keeping a job

Prevalence in U.S.

- 4% prevalence rate in U.S. population
- Estimated 70% of refugees whose home country includes Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos are diagnosed with PTSD
- According to the directors of World Relief and the Family Literacy Program, PTSD is suspected in the majority of refugees in the Quad Cities

Challenges faced by refugees in general during acculturation

- Linguistic barriers
- Finding jobs/housing
- Difficulty understanding Western medicine and physician's instructions
- Adapting to a new culture without family and friends
- Mistakenly fearing deportation
- Fears of using transportation

Additional challenges faced by refugees with PTSD during acculturation

- Difficulty seeking medical help
 - Multicultural differences for diagnosis
 - Misunderstanding about treatment
- Director of Quad Cities World Relief reports that many refugees turn to substance abuse in light of their symptoms of PTSD

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Better normed, culturally diverse assessments of PTSD for early diagnosis and intervention

Clearer guidelines and expectations set by the federal government

What can be done to help refugees with PTSD acculturate?

Cultural brokers to help assist in the acculturation process

Train medical providers on cultural differences regarding mental health and medical care