Refugees from war-torn Afghanistan are a vulnerable population carrying a high risk for developing mental problems. Their pre-migration traumas are further exacerbated by the extreme stress of post-resettlement daily hardships, poverty, alienation, loss of social capital, helplessness, hopelessness, & poor functioning. Current treatment for refugees with sub-threshold disorder scores includes neglect, over-medicalization, and misattribution of symptoms to biological causes.

Researchers from UC Barcelona, UC Davis, CSU East Bay, and Loma Linda University, propose that refugees exhibit the Ulysses Syndrome, a cluster of symptoms experienced by migrants facing chronic and extreme migratory stressors. According to these researchers, current medical practice erroneously overmedicalize social conditions as psychiatric disorders.

The Ulysses Syndrome

- Psychological or Mental Problem
- Neurological or Medical Problem
- Life Hardship Problem
- Spiritual Problem
- Environmental Problem

The Ulysses Syndrome affects 88.89% of the population:
- Had endured trauma because of war
- Felt down, depressed, or hopeless
- Felt nervous, anxious, or on edge
- Were not able to stop or control worrying
- Had nightmares or thought about their trauma
- Did not receive care for a mental problem

The post-work surveys show that there are several perceived barriers to accessing help, including not receiving help through the healthcare system, a lack of support for employment, and free talk therapy.

Although 92.59% of refugees indicated that they did not suffer from a mental health problem, 88.89% had endured some trauma because of war and 96.30% had some stress because of post-resettlement daily living hardships.

Conclusions

- The Ulysses Migratory Stress Syndrome requires post-resettlement social, mental, and medical interventions to restore health and proper functioning.
- Involvement of Afghan Community Health Workers and International Medical Graduates is needed to provide resources in a culturally competent manner.
- There is a need for post-resettlement training programs (orientation training, guidance with language acquisition, employment, health, educational navigation, etc.)

In conclusion, collaboration between researchers of the Ulysses Project, Refugee Resettlement Agencies, and Afghan community-based organizations is necessary to inform policy changes for refugee resettlement and integration.

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