Fostering Resilience Among Immigrant and Refugee Youth

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Some Framing: What I Know and Don’t Know
What I Know

• I know about some of the research and clinical recommendations in this area

• I know that our identities, histories, and contexts deeply shape our lives

• I know that by merely growing up in this world we all have biases and prejudices built into our minds, and our systems, even if we wish they weren’t there

(Adapted from DiAngelo, 2018)
What I Don’t Know

• I don’t know about all cultures
• I don’t know about your specific experiences with this work and how they shape your current thinking and actions
• I don’t have all the answers of how to best serve and support youth of diverse backgrounds
• [Even though I don’t know a lot, I continue to keep trying and failing]

(Adapted from DiAngelo, 2018)
Dialectic Of My Positionality in this Moment

**Potential Pros:** As a person with many privileged and observable ‘dominant identities’ I can try to use my relative power and unearned privileges to influence equity-oriented actions and systems change.

- Step Forward and Step Back.

**Potential Cons:** I perpetuate the role of White Men in positions of authority. Perpetuate ‘white savior industrial complex.’

(Adapted from DiAngelo, 2018)
Refugee & Immigrant Core Stressors

COVID-19 Epidemic

- Social Support
- Emotion Regulation
- Trauma
- Environment

Core Stressors

- Family relationships
- Language Learning
- Cultural Learning
- Basic needs
- Financial
- Healthcare

- Isolation
- Discrimination
- Alienation
- Loneliness
- Resettlement
- Legal

(Ellis, Abdi, & Winer, 2019)
Multiple Epidemics

- Pandemics follow the fault lines of society – exposing and often magnifying power inequities that already shape the population

- COVID-19 X Structural Racism, Bias, & Inequity -> **SYNDEMIC** conditions that engender greater morbidity and mortality among marginalized populations (e.g., immigrant and refugee communities of color)

(Wade, 2020)
A 15-year-old Syrian boy, Mustafa, and his mother, are in the waiting room of a hospital-based mental health clinic. They are refugees who resettled in the United States have fled war and conflict in Syria. An English-speaking clinician calls them into an office with a hospital interpreter, and begins to explain the process of consent and confidentiality.

Before the interpreter finishes the explanation, the mother hands a piece of paper to the interpreter and speaks at length in Arabic. The interpreter turns back to the clinician with a worried look on his face and says, “She says her son isn’t crazy and doesn’t need to see you – she wants you to sign this paper so he can go back to school. The school says he can’t return until you do so.”

The paper in front of the clinician asks for verification that the clinician has fully assessed Mustafa for mental health problems and that he is safe and ready to return to school.
For some refugee and immigrant families, mental health services may be seen as useless at best, and damaging and toxic to their family and community at worst.
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

(Ellis, Miller, Baldwin, & Abdi, 2011)
Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees (TST-R)

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

Social environmental interventions

Self-Regulation Interventions
The Trauma System

A traumatized child who experiences *Survival-in-the-Moment* States in specific definable moments

A social environment and/or system of care that is not able to help the child regulate these *Survival-in-the-Moment* States
What is TST?

Clinical Model:
for the efficient and effective treatment of traumatized children

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

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What is TST?
What is TST-R?

- **Tier 1:** Community Engagement
  - **Skills-based Groups**

[Diagram showing a triangle with the layers labeled as above]
What is TST-R?

Tier 1: Community Engagement

Tier 2: Skills-based Groups

Tier 3: School-Based Counseling

Tier 4: In Home Services

Cultural Brokering
Example TST-R Informed Strategies:

TST-R “Tier-2” Skills-Based Groups
Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees: An Intervention Designed to Address Barriers to Care

BCH, SHS, & MGH-C Team!
Promoting Resilience in Refugee and Immigrant Adolescents from Central America

A Group Leader’s Manual

Refugee Trauma and Resilience Center
Boston Children’s Hospital

This manual was developed and adapted by Jeffrey P. Winer, Hong Sun Park, Seetha Davis, Dorys Lemus, and Haidee Cano, with additional cultural consultation from Gabriella Milla Godoy.

Version 1.1
Primary Function of Skills-Based Groups

- **Increase** foundational and transdiagnostic psychological skills (e.g., affective, cognitive, behavioral, interpersonal, identity)
- **Increase** subjective social belongingness
- **Increase** gateway opportunities and resource mapping for further services as needed (which may reduce resettlement stressors)

- **Decrease** acculturative stress (through cultural learning, validation, and collaboration)
- **Decrease** stigma of behavioral health services/providers (normalizing!)
The mother of 15-year-old Syrian boy, Mustafa, arrives at school to pick up her son, who stayed after to attend a skills group for teens of immigrant backgrounds. As the group emerges from the meeting room, laughing and chatting, a Syrian woman who co-leads the group waves the mother over. They exchange a greeting and pleasantries, catching up briefly about their families and community news. The group co-leader then asks the mother if she has a few minutes to chat privately. The group co-leader describes the boy’s positive progress in the group and shares that he is continuing to have trouble in the classroom and became upset earlier, knocking over a desk. The co-leader then shares that she has spoken with the teacher, who was worried, and wondered if they could meet together with the mother and the group’s other co-leader—a school social worker—to discuss how to help Mustafa succeed in the classroom. The co-leader added that she knew the mother was managing a lot at home and it could be a great opportunity to talk about how they could support those needs as well. The mother nodded in agreement, and a meeting was set for later that week.
What are other tools I can start using today to help build more refugee & immigrant responsive systems?
Refugee and Immigrant Core Stressors Toolkit

Direct link:
https://redcap.tch.harvard.edu/redcap_edc/surveys/?s=HRPDCPPA3H

TCRC home page:

Trauma and Community Resilience Center

The Boston Children's Hospital Trauma and Community Resilience Center (BCH TCRC) is dedicated to understanding and promoting the healthy adjustment of youth and families who have experienced trauma and adversity. In partnership with communities and service systems, we build prevention and intervention programs, conduct research, and develop resources to assist refugee families and service providers. At the BCH TCRC, we believe that social justice, equity, and human rights are at the core of a healthy society, and actively work to promote these values through our collaborative models of care for children and adolescents. We do not provide direct clinical services for youth.

The BCH TCRC currently focuses on three core areas of programming:

1. Refugee Trauma & Resilience
2. Multidisciplinary Models of Violence Prevention
3. Trauma-Informed & Culturally-Responsive Training
Recommendations for Building Comprehensive Assessment Batteries

https://www.nctsn.org/resources/measures-are-appropriate-refugee-children-and-families
Restructuring For Resilience Toolkit

- Language and framing matters
- [https://www.childrenshospital.org/-/media/Centers-and-Services/Programs/O_Z/Refugee-Trauma-and-Resilience-Center/2020-restructuring-for-resilience-vf-1.ashx](https://www.childrenshospital.org/-/media/Centers-and-Services/Programs/O_Z/Refugee-Trauma-and-Resilience-Center/2020-restructuring-for-resilience-vf-1.ashx)
Additional Resources!

UNHCR
https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/

U.S. Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit
https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/index.html

International Rescue Committee
https://www.rescue.org/

Switchboard
https://switchboardta.org

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
https://www.nctsn.org/

Multicultural Psychology Intervention Worksheets
https://www.multiculturalpsychology.com

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Thank you!

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