

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN FEMALE ASYLUM SEEKERS IN QUEBEC: AN INTERSECTIONAL AND NARRATIVE APPROACH

Laura Gallo Tapias

McGill University

Montreal, Quebec

1. Background. Despite the growing visibility of gender-related issues in the field of refugee mental health, many studies view “men” and “women” simply as discrete and comparable categories. Some authors have stated that this approach does not account for the complex interplay of power and identity dynamics (Timmerman et al. 2015). This project explores the meanings that Latin American female asylum-seekers in Quebec attribute to their migratory trajectories. Drawing from feminist migration scholarship, it explores the construction of their identity, focusing on how migration intertwines with other aspects of their lives such as cultural background, gender roles, race, age and self-representation. It focuses not only on their vulnerabilities, but also on their psychological strengths, strategies and interpersonal resources.

2. Objectives.

2.1. To integrate the epistemologies and methods of feminist migration scholarship and refugee mental health.

2.2. To holistically examine the experience of the participants following a transnational intersectional paradigm.

3. Methods. 10 to 15 female Latin American asylum-seekers will be invited to participate in a) In-depth semi-structured narrative interviews and b) an arts-based focus group. The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed following a narrative approach and triangulated with the data collected from the creative expression group exercise.

4. Potential outcomes. The research project will cast light on aspects of participants’ agency and resilience that may contribute to the development of a strengths-based approach to refugee mental health that critically addresses issues of gender and identity.

5. Implications. This project seeks to underline respectful listening as a valid approach to the experience of forced displacement, transcending the psychiatric paradigm of mental illness and vulnerability. It might help recognize that other disciplines can in fact alert us to the gendered dimensions of the social (Kalra, Kaur, & Hutnyk, 2005), contributing to an alternative understanding of psychosocial wellbeing.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify some methodological and epistemological assumptions in feminist migration scholarship and their potential contributions to the field of refugee mental health.
2. Discuss the importance of a gender-sensitive approach in clinical work and qualitative research with vulnerable populations like asylum-seekers and refugees.

References

1. Kalra, V. S., Kaur, R., & Hutnyk, J. (2005). *Diaspora & hybridity*. London : SAGE Publications.
2. Timmerman, C., Martiniello, M., Rea, A., & Wets, J. (2015). *New dynamics in female migration and integration*: Routledge.