

## **“WE ARE ALL UNDER THE SAME ROOF”: COPING AND MEANING MAKING AMONG OLDER BHUTANESE WITH A REFUGEE LIFE EXPERIENCE**

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**Background:** Refugees have elevated risk of psychological distress and mental disorders compared to the general population. Unfortunately, the majority of research has been conducted with youth and younger adults, and little is known about the mental health of older refugees. Community-based participatory research projects are a promising approach for individuals with a refugee life experience to collaborate with outside researchers to explore the needs and strengths of older refugee populations.

**Aims/Objectives:** We describe community-based participatory research collaboration between the Bhutanese Society of Western Massachusetts, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and McGill University. This partnership led to an ongoing mixed methods study on older resettled Bhutanese residing in the United States and Canada. This presentation focuses on using qualitative research methods to understand how older Bhutanese with a refugee life experience cope with migratory traumas and grief.

**Methods:** We conducted semi-structured interviews with 41 ethnic-Nepali Bhutanese aged 50 and over with a refugee life experience resettled in the United States and analyzed data using thematic content analysis.

**Results:** Results indicate that forced expulsion from Bhutan was viewed as a violation of core ethnic-Nepali beliefs and sense of purpose related to collective identity. Throughout their 30-year refugee life trajectory, participants utilized coping strategies, including interpersonal support, reappraisal of experiences of trauma and loss, and helping oneself by helping others, that were informed by, and strengthened, this collective identity. These strategies served to both reaffirm worldviews and make new, positive meaning out of a refugee life experience. Individuals who were unable to leverage these strategies struggled to find meaning.

Discussion/Implications: We discuss study findings in terms of implications for psychosocial services for older refugees and contribution to theory on meaning making among diverse, vulnerable populations who experience multiple traumas and loss.

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## Learning Objectives

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

1. Identify strategies to develop collaborative partnerships between researchers and community-based refugee organizations
2. Identify mental health needs of older refugees and promising clinical services and strategies to address these needs.

## References

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2. Lood, Q., Hägglom-Kronlöf, G., & Dahlin-Ivanoff, S. (2015). Health promotion programme design and efficacy in relation to ageing persons with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis. *BMC health services research*, 15:560. DOI 10.1186/s12913-015-1222-4