

# **PAST TRAUMA, RESETTLEMENT STRESS, AND MENTAL HEALTH OF OLDER BHUTANESE WITH A REFUGEE LIFE EXPERIENCE**

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**Background:** Older displaced persons often receive limited attention from national and international aid providers although they may be more likely to experience physical and psychological distress than younger refugees.

**Objectives:** The overall objective of this study is to identify the relationship between experiencing traumatic events prior to resettlement, current resettlement stressors, and mental health of older Bhutanese with a refugee life experience.

**Methods:** Study participants were 190 older Bhutanese with a refugee life experience living in a metropolitan area in New England (US) and Ontario (Canada). Participants aged 50 and over answered questions related to sociodemographic characteristics, exposure to past traumas in Bhutan and Nepal, and current socioeconomic stressors. We used structural equation modeling to determine the direct and indirect association between traumatic events in Bhutan and Nepal and current symptoms of anxiety and depression, as measured by the GAD-7 and PHQ-9.

**Results:** Resettlement stressors of health problems and housing insecurity were associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression. Being jailed/tortured in Bhutan and physical assault in Nepal were directly associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression. The relationship between serious injury and/or illness in Nepal and outcomes was mediated by current health problems.

**Discussion:** Based on our findings, attention is needed on the comorbidity of physical and mental health within this population specifically, and older refugees more broadly.

## **Full List of Authors**

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## **Learning Objectives**

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

1. Describe the relationship between past traumas, resettlement stressors, and psychological well-being among older refugees resettled in North America.
2. Identify strategies to address co-morbidity of mental and physical health issues affecting older refugees.

## References

Chenoweth, J., & Burdick, L. (2001). The path to integration: meeting the special needs of refugee elders in resettlement. *Refugee: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 20(1), 20-29.

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