

## **JOHN SPIEGEL FELLOWSHIP PRESENTATION: FOUNDATIONS OF SOMALI RESILIENCY: INSIGHTS FROM A NON-WESTERN PERSPECTIVE**

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**Background:** The prevalence of PTSD and depression is higher among refugee communities than the general population. Although “resiliency” is often invoked to suggest why some individuals fare better than others, recent developments in resiliency research have pointed to the necessity of understanding the construct within its cultural context by accounting for the most salient contributing factors within each population of interest. Despite resettling in the United States for nearly three decades, Somali refugees have been relatively neglected in contextual evaluations of resiliency.

**Objectives:** The primary objective of this study was to determine the factors that support resiliency among Somalis living in San Diego, as well as their most significant barriers to resilient outcomes. The secondary objective was to use this data to inform the development of a novel quantitative measure designed to assess resiliency within this particular population.

**Methods:** This was a qualitative investigation conducted through virtual focus group discussions (n=4) with Somali refugees in San Diego in partnership with Somali Family Services. Qualitative data were analyzed in Dedoose software using thematic analysis to identify the most salient themes and relationships between them.

**Results:** Investigators identified the primary barriers to resilient outcomes as difficulties in accessing resources (affordable housing, employment opportunities, appropriate healthcare) and discrimination due to racism and Islamophobia. Somali community members’ resiliency was supported by a collective self-identity as survivors; their Islamic faith and the perspective it provides on making sense of suffering; and a strong sense of community that encourages reciprocal helping behaviors.

**Discussion and Implications:** These findings suggest that resilient outcomes among Somalis in San Diego are more likely to be promoted by community-based interventions than the traditional focus on individual coping mechanisms. There is benefit to investing in community organizations and programs that support resiliency-based interventions to overcome mental illnesses in this high risk population.

### Full List of Authors

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### Learning Objectives

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

1. Participants will be able to recognize and describe the importance of understanding resiliency within the cultural context of each population of interest.
2. Participants will be able to identify both the barriers and supports to resilient outcomes among Somali community members in San Diego.

#### References

Betancourt, T, Abdi, S, Ito, B, Lilienthal, G, Agalab, N, and Ellis, H. 2015. "We Left One War and Came to Another: Resource Loss, Acculturative Stress, and Caregiver-Child Relationships in Somali Refugee Families." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 21 (1): 114–25. <https://doi.org/10.1086/498510>.

Wooyoung Kim, A, Kaiser, B, Bosire, E, Shahbazian, K, and Mendenhall, E. 2019. "Idioms of Resilience among Cancer Patients in Urban South Africa: An Anthropological Heuristic for the Study of Culture and Resilience." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 56 (4): 720–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461519858798>