

WORKSHOP 7: STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING & COLLABORATING WITH REFUGEE COMMUNITIES TO DELIVER MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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Traumatic exposure combined with significant stressors in resettlement place refugee youth and families at risk for mental health problems. Despite this, many refugees are reluctant to seek mental health services. Indeed, an estimated 92% of refugees in need of mental health services never receive them (Ellis et al., 2008). Common barriers to service engagement include mistrust of service systems, mental health stigma, linguistic and cultural barriers, and primacy of resettlement stressors (Ellis et al., 2011). In order to effectively address these barriers to care, equal partnerships with members of the refugee community that inform and shape service delivery are essential (Ellis et al., 2013; Ellis & Abdi, 2017). However, cross-cultural partnerships and community outreach are often overlooked as key elements of behavioral healthcare.

This workshop will teach attendees strategies for engaging refugee communities in mental health services. It will include an introduction to Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees (TST-R)—an empirically-supported behavioral health intervention that emphasizes both community engagement and cross-cultural collaboration as central to treatment effectiveness. The presenters will also discuss the importance of utilizing clinical interventions that nurture culture-specific methods of coping and responding to adversity. Programs such as TST-R represent multilayered, community-wide responses to not only traumatic stress, but also resettlement challenges (e.g., financial stressors, discrimination, isolation, acculturative stress) by addressing sources of pain at the community level and increasing sense of belonging.

Learning Objectives

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

1. Participants will be able to identify the tiers of Trauma Systems Therapy for Refugees and their ways in which these tiers help to increase engagement.
2. Participants will be able to formulate a plan for engaging refugees in their local communities and solidifying partnerships.

References

Ellis, B. H., Miller, A. B., Baldwin, H., & Abdi, S. (2011). New directions in refugee youth mental health services: Overcoming barriers to engagement. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 4(1), 69-85.

Ellis, B. H., Miller, A. B., Abdi, S., Barrett, C., Blood, E. A., & Betancourt, T. S. (2013). Multi-tier mental health program for refugee youth. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 81(1), 129.