

IDIOMS OF DISTRESS IN MUSLIM AND CONGOLESE REFUGEE'S PERCEPTIONS OF TRAUMA AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS

Aya Cheaito, MA
University of Vermont
Vermont USA

Background

Refugees fleeing war and persecution experience trauma that affects their mental and physical health (Fondacaro & Mazzulla, 2018). Although we know that refugees suffer from trauma, the current classification of PTSD in the DSM-5 is problematic and western centric. In their discussion of the cross-cultural applicability of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Hinton and Lewis-Fernandez (2011) discussed PTSD as a Western culture-bound disorder and revealed concerns about the validity of individual items and criteria thresholds.

Aims

We aim through this study to examine the idioms of distress in the refugee population in Vermont. To this date, very little literature has examined non-western conceptualizations of mental health in Congolese, Iraqi or Bosnian populations living in rural areas. We plan to run a thematic analysis of interviews (using Cultural Formulation Interview) qualitative data to synthesize idioms of distress in Iraqi/ Bosnian Muslim and Congolese refugees.

We also plan to collect quantitative data from previously validated questionnaires such as the PCL-5 for post traumatic stress (Belvins et al., 2013), the ASR (Adult Self Report) for general psychiatric regulation profiles as well as the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire.

Methods

We plan to study the discrepancies between the qualitative and quantitative data to capture what is missing from the current traumatic and dissociative nosology. In addition, we plan to compare idioms of distress and quantitative data between Congolese, Iraqi and Bosnian populations.

Discussion

The DSM-5's western centric and colonial approach to understanding mental illness may lead to false assumptions about refugee mental health, inadequate mental health care and increase in barriers to healthcare (Wong et al., 2006). Allowing the field to better characterize refugee experiences will allow new Americans to feel further integrated into the community. This project may also assist in the development of culturally sensitive and responsive prevention and treatment of post-traumatic stress.

Full List of Authors

Aya Cheaito, K. Fondacaro

Learning Objectives

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

1. Identify PTSD DSM5 nosology and think critically about the current DSM 5 criteria
2. Explore possible idioms of distress in Congolese, Iraqi, and Bosnian cultures.