POST-MIGRATION LIVING DIFFICULTIES AND MENTAL HEALTH IN REFUGEES & ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SERBIA

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BACKGROUND

The risk factors for psychological difficulties among refugees and asylum seekers are usually divided into the ones experienced before migration (pre-migration), during migration and after resettlement in the host country (postmigration). Still, as refugees may spend even years in receiving camps or transit countries, the line between transit and permanent host country is blurred. Serbia is generally perceived as a transit country, but many refugees spend several years in this limbo. Over the past several years the presence of refugees and migrants in Serbia ranged from 3 000 to 15 000, with high fluctuation rates and more than 1 million of people passing through on their way to western Europe. Following the official closing of the so-called Balkan route many refugees and migrants started spending longer periods of time in Serbia (usually between six months and two years), majority of which being accommodated in collective refugee centers.

OBJECTIVE

This study explores the presence of postmigration living difficulties and their relationships with mental health status in refugees and asylum seekers who have been staying in Serbia for six to 36 months.

METHOD

Total of 306 participants volunteered to take part in the research. All respondents were refugees, asylum seekers or migrants accommodated in one of 18 collective reception centers in Serbia. They all filled out two questionnaires: Refugee Health Screener 15 (RHS-15) assessing the mental health status and Post-Migration Living Questionnaire (LDQ), - assessing everyday difficulties they are facing during the stay in Serbia. In addition to that all participants filled basic socio-demographic questionnaire.

Refugee Health Screener-15 (RHS-15) Arabic Version. The form includes a logo for Pathways to Wellness, a title in Arabic, and a section for demographic information (Name, Date of Birth, Gender, Date of Arrival, Health ID, Administered by, Date of Screen). It also contains a list of symptoms in Arabic and a section for the screener results.

Post migration living difficulty	r	RHS screen		X²
		positi ve %	negati ve %	
Communication difficulties (language barrier)	.11	59.6	47.1	2.92*
Discrimination	.08	23.4	5.9	9.02**
Separation from family	.27**	73.0	41.2	20.62**
Worries about family back at home	.11	76.6	64.7	3.37 ^{ns}
Unable to return home in case of emergency	.17*	70.2	43.8	13.93**
No permission to work	.18*	70.9	52.9	6.71**
Not being able to find work	.14	63.8	52.9	2.30 ^{ns}
Bad job conditions	.09	27.7	17.6	2.48 ^{ns}
Being in detention	.07	30.5	14.5	6.00*
Interviews by immigration	.06	16.3	4.7	5.26*
Delays in processing your application	.17*	36.9	18.8	6.84**
Conflict with immigration officials	.05	12.8	5.9	2.20 ^{ns}
Fears of being sent home	.24**	70.9	35.3	24.91**
Worries about not getting treatment for health problems	.14	49.6	31.3	6.21*
Poor access to emergency medical care	.14	47.5	31.3	4.90*
Poor access to long term Medical care	.20*	45.7	29.4	5.02*
Poor access to dentistry care	.18*	54.6	41.2	3.31 ^{ns}
Poor access to counseling services	.25**	50.4	29.4	8.18**
Little government help with welfare	.30**	61.7	35.3	11.29**
Little help with welfare from Charities (e.g. Red Cross)	.32**	44.0	17.6	12.27**
Poverty	.27**	80.9	58.8	10.82**
Loneliness and boredom	.32**	73.8	47.1	13.15**
Isolation	.34**	70.2	41.2	14.61**
Poor access to the foods you like	.29**	67.9	29.4	24.65**

Notes: r – correlation coefficient, X² – chi square value, * - p < .05, ** - p < .01

RESULTS

The results showed high screen-positive rate of 88.4% in regards to mental health difficulties. The most prevalent postmigration living difficulties are poverty, lack of work permit, isolation and boredom, separation from family and worries about family back home. Furthermore, the majority of living difficulties tend to be more pronounced in those who screened positive on the initial mental health assessment, e.g. little welfare help from either government or charities, fears of being sent home, poor access to counselling, etc.

PMLDQ 24: Post-Migration Living Difficulties Questionnaire. The form includes a title, a section for demographic information (Male, Female, Country, age, Serbia entry date), and a table with 24 rows of difficulties (e.g., Communication difficulties, Discrimination, Separation from family) and 5 columns of response options (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results imply the need for improved living conditions for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in recipient countries, regardless of the duration of their stay, in order to protect their mental health and psychological well-being.

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