

Refugee Resettlement and Mental Health

September 2022



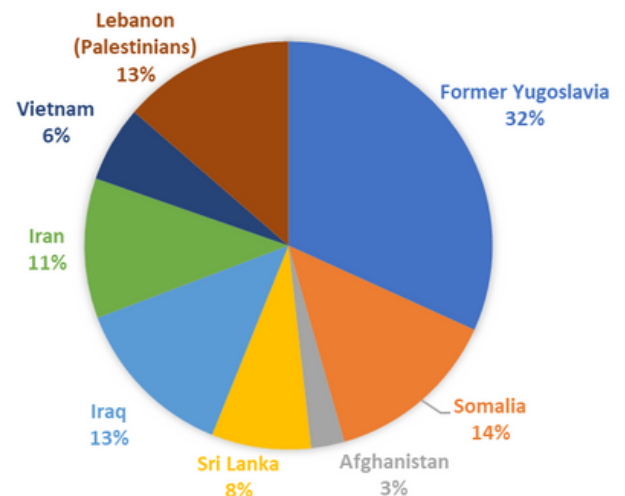
Background

Refugees are one of the world's most vulnerable groups. Risk factors linked to migration - including exposure to conflict, poverty, persecution, and family separation - put refugees at risk for various mental health conditions.

Little is known about how the neighborhoods in which refugees resettle may affect their post-migration risk of mental health problems. Factors such as social cohesion, school quality, and social and health services may be important.

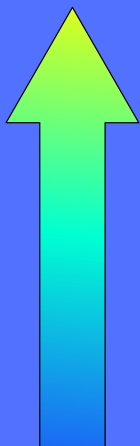
Researchers at the University of California San Francisco and Aarhus University studied how disadvantaged neighborhoods affect refugees' mental health. They examined a natural experiment in which refugees arriving in Denmark from 1986 to 1998 were randomly dispersed to neighborhoods of different levels of social disadvantage. Over 18,000 children and 42,000 adults were followed for up to 3 decades after arrival in Denmark.

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF REFUGEES, 1986-1998



Findings

Increased Risks Associated with Assignment to Highly Disadvantaged Neighborhoods



- Adults: 14% Increased Risk of Any Psychiatric Diagnosis
- Adults: 5% Increased Risk of Psychiatric Medication Usage
- Children: 11% Increased Risk of Psychiatric Diagnosis Before Age 30
- Children: 8% Increased Risk of Psychiatric Medication Usage Before Age 30

Neighborhood disadvantage was measured using neighborhood-level income, education, employment, and welfare assistance.

For both child and adult refugees, resettlement in highly disadvantaged neighborhoods was associated with an increased risk of being diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder or being prescribed psychiatric medication.

Over the past decade, the global refugee population has doubled. At the end of 2021, at least 89.3 million people worldwide have been forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 27.1 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18.¹

1. [UNHCR Global Trends 2021](#)



Evidence-based policy tools can improve well-being of arriving refugees.

New data-driven approaches to refugee resettlement have shown that strategic matching of refugees and locations can have positive outcomes.

[Stanford's Immigration Policy Lab](#) created an algorithm that considered the characteristics of both refugees and resettlement locations. They found that using the algorithm - free to any organization or government - could increase refugee employment.

Including considerations for mental health, as examined in the studies described here, could further improve the lives of displaced persons.



Recommendations



The level of neighborhood disadvantage may have long-term impacts on refugee mental health. It should be part of resettlement considerations.



Governments and non-profits should consider investments to improve disadvantaged areas where refugees reside and, more generally, for other people in disadvantaged neighborhoods.



Healthcare providers serving refugees, especially those in disadvantaged areas, should screen for mental health problems among adults and children.

References:

Foverskov et al. Neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage and psychiatric disorders among refugees: a population-based, quasi-experimental study in Denmark. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-022-02300-3>

Foverskov et al. Risk of psychiatric disorders for refugee children and adolescents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods: A quasi-experimental study. *JAMA Pediatrics* (2022). <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.3235>

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This work was supported by grant R01AG063385 from the National Institute on Aging.