

# **Providing Prevention and Early Intervention Services Through Community Resources**

**Asian Americans for Community  
Involvement**

**Center Survivors of Torture**

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# Immigration Status

- **Refugees** are identified by the U.N. outside the U.S. as victims of persecution in home countries
  - Admitted to the U.S. With that status, they can remain permanently
- **Asylum Seekers** have not secured their status and must prove their persecution should they return to their home countries

# Immigrant Experience

- Immigrants

- Some are Refugees or Asylum Seekers

- Some are Torture Survivors

# Refugee Experience

- While most immigration is voluntary, refugees are fleeing from something, e.g.
  - War
  - Persecution
  - Imprisonment
- Because departure is involuntary and often with little forewarning, losses for refugees are more profound, grieving more complicated than with immigration

# Refugee Experience

- Stressors Commonly Include
  - Continued threat, hiding, fear of discovery, arrest
    - Imprisonment
  - War trauma
  - Malnutrition
  - Death/disappearance of family, friends
  - Loss of home and possessions
  - Loss of employment, career, SES
  - Repeated relocation, displacement; migration
  - Refugee Camps
  - Experiencing/witnessing continuing violence

# Multiple Adjustments/Stressors Upon Arrival in U.S.

- Linguistic
- Cultural/Religious
- Occupational
- Identity

# Immigrant Experience

- All Immigrants Experience Loss
  - Loss of country and (usually) language, therefore also loss of cultural referents
  - Often also lose access to family, friends, possessions, familiar places

# Immigrant Experience

- Country and Culture are Part of Our Identity
  - Successful adjustment to immigration requires a re-formation of identity
  - Losses must be grieved

# Identificaton of Torture Survivors

- Over 70 countries practice torture on a systematic basis (Amnesty International)
  - About 50% identified as practicing torture
- Surveys show that when a refugee group flees a country that practices torture, at least 20% of the refugees are direct victims of torture (Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies)

# What is torture?

- "...an act committed by a person acting under the color of law specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering (other than pain or suffering incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within his custody or physical control." (18 U.S.C. § 2340A)

# Identification of Survivors

- Approximately 150,000 refugees in Santa Clara County
  - 5-35% are torture survivors (Piwowarczyk, L., et al, 2000)
- Approximately 30,000 survivors of torture
- Our research conducted in 2008-2009 suggests approximately 49% primary survivors
- Estimated over 500,000 nationally (Campbell, T.A., 2007)

# Scope of Problem

- U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (2009) estimate 350,000 in U.S.
- Further estimate 35-50% survivors of torture
  - Conservatively 122,500 survivors

# Sequelae of Trauma

- PTSD

- **Reexperiencing**

- Recollections
    - Dreams
    - Feelings

- **Avoidance** of Trauma Triggers

- Thoughts, Feelings, Conversations
    - Activities, Places, People
    - Detachment or Restriction of Feelings

# Sequelae of Trauma

- PTSD

- Persistent Autonomic **Arousal**

- Sleep difficulty
    - Irritable/Angry
    - Difficulty Concentrating
    - Hypervigilance
    - Exaggerated Startle

# Recognizing Torture/Trauma's After-Effects

- Somatoform Disorders
- Anxiety
  - Panic Attacks
- Depression
  - Suicide
- Substance Abuse
  - Other forms of acting out
- Domestic Violence
  - Both IPV and child abuse

# Recognizing Torture's After-Effects

- Disruption of Identity
- Shame/Self-Hatred
- Inability to Trust or Feel Safe
- Social Isolation
- Apathy
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness

# Refugees in Santa Clara County

- Nearly 500 refugees resettle in Santa Clara County annually
- In FY2010, refugees came from 17 different countries
  - Iran: 31%
  - Iraq: 25%
  - Vietnam: 10%
  - Burma/Myanmar: 8%
  - Eritrea: 7%
  - Zaire: 7%

Source: California Department of Social Services-Refugee Programs Bureau, FY 2010

# Mental Health Screenings – Lenzen Refugee Clinic

- 322 adult refugees screened
- 44% symptomatic for anxiety
- 51% met diagnostic criteria for depression
- 26% exhibited symptoms of PTSD

# Refugee Project Goals

- Increase Access to mental health services by Reducing Stigma
  - Obtain cultural information regarding effective information delivery to specific communities
    - Nine largest refugee communities in Santa Clara County
      - Afghani, Burmese, Chinese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Indian, Iranian, Iraqi, and Vietnamese

# Refugee Project Goals

- Design and implement community-specific programs for providing psychoeducation as an early intervention strategy, with Community Partner
  - Social and educational groups with psychoeducational component
    - Orientation to US culture
    - Parenting, Nutrition groups
    - Social meeting for women and men

# Refugee Project Goals

- Providing culturally competent, brief mental health intervention services
  - Culturally relevant, non-stigmatizing assessment
  - Brief cognitive therapy interventions in appropriate modalities
  - Medication management services, if appropriate

# Reduce Stigma

- Obtain understanding of cultural perception of mental health, protective factors, and information on effective delivery to specific communities
  - Focus groups
  - Consultation with Community Partners and community leaders
  - Rating of approaches by acculturated community members

# Reduce Stigma

- Dissemination of information and resources for new arrivals
- Social marketing campaign
- Testimonials from peer mental health consumers
  - DVD
  - Community/faith leaders
  - Community dialogues

# Psychoeducation as Early Intervention

- Implementation of culturally appropriate prevention strategies derived from community
  - Organized and promoted through Community Partners
  - Delivery through community/faith centers and at cultural events/celebrations

# Accessible Mental Health Services

- **Center for Survivors of Torture** an example of agency commonly providing services
- Cultural and linguistic competency
- Familiarity with relocation and other refugee issues
- **Multidisciplinary team**
  - Case Management
  - Psychotherapy and psychiatry
    - Trauma specialists

# Case Management

- Assistance in accessing refugee benefits
  - Monetary
  - Medical
  - Educational
- Practical, rapid assistance builds trust, confidence

# Psychiatry

- Medical treatment often most familiar and acceptable
- Often provides relatively rapid symptom-relief
  - Further builds trust, confidence
  - Increases ability to utilize psychotherapy
- Psychiatrist's credibility then allows recommendation for psychotherapy and a transfer of credibility to therapist

# Multidisciplinary Team Intervention

- As each component stabilizes and strengthens client, her/his ability to utilize and benefit from other components increases in a synergistic manner

# Measuring Outcomes

- Pre and post survey
  - Attitudes towards mental health
- Outreach survey
  - Knowledge of existing mental health resources

# Contact Information

- Center for Survivors of Torture  
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