The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Psychologists’ Responsibility for Human Rights and Mental Health

Lauren Weisberg, Chad Lazzari, Sarajane Rodgers Gargi Roysircar

Antioch University New England
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The Role of Psychologists in Helping Ameliorate the Effects of the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Lauren Weisberg, M.S.
4th yr. PsyD student
Syria

- Syria is a traditional society with a long cultural history. Importance is placed on family, religion, education, self-discipline, and respect.
- Primary language: Arabic (several different dialects)
- Major cities: Aleppo, Damascus
Pre-Conflict Aleppo
Devastated buildings in Aleppo, 2014
The Syrian Refugee Crisis is predicted to be one of the worst humanitarian crises of this century.

A young Syrian girl, raising her arms because she believed the camera lens was a gun.
Aleppo Pediatric Hospital
Airstrike
Genocide and the Syrian Refugee Crisis

- How does genocide relate to the Syrian Refugee Crisis?
- Propaganda and silencing of foreign media
Refugee Admission Ceiling in the United States
Controlling the narrative—Media portrayal
Psychologists’ Responsibility

- Addressing racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia whenever possible through research and practice
- Supporting the acculturation process of refugees
- Addressing the massive amount of trauma suffered by refugees
- Supporting aide workers
- Possibility of tele-therapy and tele-support
Islamophobia and Discrimination

Sneaking into a COUNTRY doesn't make you an 'IMMIGRANT' any more than breaking into a HOUSE makes you 'PART OF THE FAMILY'.

SO WHAT IF MUSLIMS ARE "OFFENDED"!!

OVER 3000 AMERICANS WERE MURDERED ON 9/11 IN THE NAME OF ISLAM AND WE'RE SUPPOSED TO CATER TO THEM!? I DON'T THINK SO!!
Acknowledging Acculturation and Adjustment

- There is a large cultural adjustment from a predominately Muslim, Middle-Eastern country to the United States
- Once refugees relocate, they face a different set of challenges including
  - Alterations in diet
  - Climate change
  - Different customs and social practices
  - Unfamiliar clothing
  - New employment
  - Different family composition
  - Islamophobia

(Personal Communications, Gargi Roysircar, April 2017)
Trauma and Culturally Informed Therapy

- The effects of trauma are pervasive and long-lasting
- Culturally-sensitive treatments
  - Cambodian refugee example
  - Bosnian war refugees
Community Intervention
A Brief History of the Syrian Conflict and Refugee Crisis

Chad Lazzari
2nd yr. PsyD student
SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS
Massive Displacement
Syrians are now the largest refugee population in the world.

May 2011
2012
2013
2014
2015

May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December
January
February

1,250
50,000
225,000
636,000
800,000
1,4 million
1,9 million
2,3 million
2,5 million
3,8 million

NUMBER OF REFUGEES

MercyCorps
There are over 4.8 million Syrian refugees and 7.6 million refugees displaced within Syria. There are 13.5 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria.
An Arab Spring
Revolution Begins

“IT’S A REVOLUTION WHAT’S GOING ON IN SYRIA, PLEASE UNDERSTAND US.
THE SYRIAN REVOLUTION-KAFRANBEL-11-1-2013

We Will Fight Until the End. Inshallah.”
Islamic State/ISIS/ISIL
Bombing of Syria
Crimes of War

Starving boy in Madera, Syria Jan 10, 2016
The Exodus

Syrian IDP's and refugees in the neighbouring countries (as of 19.08.15)

- **12.2 million** in need of assistance inside Syria
- **4,015,070** Syrian refugees
- **1,172,753** Syrian refugees in LEBANON
- **1,805,255** Syrian Refugees in TURKEY
- **1,451** Dispersed in Iraq
- **343,904** Beirut
- **310,000** Dispersed in Jordan
- **280,587** North L.
- **250,406** Syrian refugees in IRAQ
- **410,269** Bekaa
- **77,477** Az Zarqa
- **168,358** Amman
- **630,224** Syrian Refugees in JORDAN
- **155,080** Al Mafraq
- **156,430** Syrian Refugees in EGYPT & North Africa
- **310,000** Al Aqaba
- **10,824** Madaba
- **201,113** At Balqa
- **9,048** Al Karak
- **3,103** At Tallah
- **6,976** Ma'an
- **280,587** North L.
Alan Kurdi
A Dangerous Journey
Hana holding her cousin Marah as they make the bumpy ride to work in a plum orchard.
Five Syrian Refugee Children Pose for a Photo at Domiz Camp in Iraq
How Are Humanitarian Efforts Bringing Assistance to Displaced Individuals’ Multifaceted Needs?
Sarajane Rodgers, M.S.
2nd yr. PsyD student
What do refugees need?

- Improved shelters
- Clothing
- Access to food and clean water
- Reduced political and cultural tensions in high-conflict areas already low on resources
- Continued children’s education
- Helping refugees, particularly children, develop ways to cope with prolonged exposure to trauma
Organizations Involved in The Crisis

- Airlink
- American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
- CARE USA
- Catholic Relief Services
- Church World Service
- Concern Worldwide
- Global Communities
- Handicap International
- International Orthodox Christian Charities
- Islamic Relief USA
- Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
- Life for Relief and Development
- Lutheran World Relief
- Mercy – USA
- Mercy Corps
- Save the Children
- Oxfam America
- Relief International
- ShelterBox USA
- Unicef
- UNHCR
- US Committee for Refugees & Immigrants
- World Food Programme USA (WFP)
- World Renew
- World Vision
- Zakat Foundation of America
Handicap International
Organizational Psychological Support for Syrian Refugees
# The Psychological Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Several Relevant Disorders</th>
<th>Sample of 6,000 Syrians</th>
<th>World-wide Prevalence</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depressive Disorders</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
<td>15-20%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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[https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/europe-response](https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/europe-response)
Reducing Severe Mental Disorders

- International Medical Corps and the International Aid Network opened a mobile medical unit (MMU) in Serbia.
- Doctors Without Borders set up a mental health clinic providing psychosocial assistance to those in Iraq’s Domeez refugee camp. Support groups for children are being utilized in northern Iraq.
Helpful Therapeutic Modalities

- Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) - “anchor in time and context”
- Intercultural Psychotherapy technique – building resilience through providing cultural support
Karim

- Reads and responds to text messages in Arabic
- Analyze how the individual is doing emotionally
- Takes all prior patient and AI responses into account when responding
Local explanatory models of mental illness

Economic stressors

Social stressors

 Violence

 Jinn

 Evil Spirits

 Evil Eye
Limitations of Current Assistance

- New arrivals into the United States only receive support for the first 90 days after their arrival.
- It is difficult to provide meaningful assistance to a transient population.
- Interest decreases over time.
- As new humanitarian crises arise, focus is detracted from the Syrian Refugee crisis.
How can psychologists in the United States help?

Gargi Roysircar
Professor of Clinical Psychology
As psychologists are addressing the many challenges of our global era, we are encouraged to examine the profession’s assumptions and practices as these are applied within an international context whether domestically or internationally-based; and how this globalization, in turn, has an impact on the psychologist’s self-definition, purpose, role, and function.
In the 21st century, as internationalization intensifies its influence around the world, psychologists in the United States (U.S.) aspire to move beyond a focus on European American-centric theories when they serve in international settings, and simultaneously endeavor to increase their understanding of mental health from the perspectives of other cultures. Psychologists are encouraged to avoid colonization and practice globalization, where the field of international psychology represents a postmodern form of consciousness and theorizing about universal human nature and conditions, such as, pain, trauma, resilience, empowerment, human dignity, and coalition-building across nationalities to stop oppression, disempowerment, and crimes against humanity.
In the past 25 years there have been dramatic changes around the globe and in the United States (U.S.): 9/11 trauma of the United States and the ensuing War on Terror, terror attacks in Paris, Brussels, Tel Aviv, Orlando, Dhaka, and Nice, bombing or bomb threats of international air flights, mass killings in U.S. educational institutions and places of entertainment, genocide in the Ukraine, continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the two-state solution, economic crises in Europe and North America, the Occupy Movement and Black Lives Matter activism in the U.S. against economic and racial injustice, the Arab Spring of Egypt and its call for democracy, ethnic and religious cleansing in Africa, the Balkans, Iraq, and Syria, ISIS forces overrunning the Middle East, Nigerian school girls kidnapped by Boko Haram men for sexual enslavement, exodus of millions of refugees not welcomed by receiving nations, the fall of the Soviet Union, the exponential growth of United States capitalism, liberation struggles in South American nations, and the fall of dictators in Africa and of Apartheid in South Africa.
These international events visible at the surface level through media coverage have beneath great complexity and confusion of many cultures grappling with the challenges of an ever rapidly changing world. Clearly, these fast-paced and momentous events and transitions to a new social order challenge psychologists’ understanding of individual and mass trauma caused within systemic contexts, and psychologists’ application of this understanding to inform research and professional practice (Roysircar, Podkova, & Pignatiello, 2013). The enterprise of the internationalization of psychology requires multilateral and horizontal sociopolitical and sociocultural dialogs among mental health professionals working collaboratively in cross-national projects as they address the question of what it means to be human, to be local and indigenous, as well as to be communal and an individual.
Within international contexts, U.S. psychological theories and practice can be expected to be challenged philosophically, scientifically, and politically because clients, families, students, and their local communities and organizations across the globe are likely to represent and present stresses and illnesses in multitudinous ways. So proponents of psychological theories are encouraged to investigate conceptual holes in certain U.S. theories, fill these gaps with cultural constructs relevant to a particular population, and then adapt their theories to culture-specific representations (Roysircar, 2013); and practitioners are encouraged to implement culturally consistent ways of healing.
Psychologists are encouraged to examine U.S. psychology’s purposes, roles, and functions as these intersect with cultural and nationality differences. Psychologists are encouraged to be reflective about the consequence of uncritically exporting therapy models and the importance of respecting and incorporating local or indigenous healing practices (Gerstein, Heppner, Stockton, Leung, & Aegisdottir, 2009). Miike (2012) summarized the significance of humility and respect when working in another culture:
Learning about cultures is one thing. Learning from cultures is another. We can be very arrogant and ethnocentric, but we can still learn about other cultures. Learning from cultures, on the other hand, requires us to be humble and modest to understand and appreciate other cultures. (Miike 2012, p. 67)


References: 1st Presenter

- http://www.holocaustawarenessmuseum.org/content/Art-From-Within-Terezin
References: 2nd Presenter


References: 3rd Presenter


References: 4th Presenter


http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452240589.n10

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Right: https://lebanonglc.wordpress.com/2012/10/26/killing-in-the-name-of/


Bottom: http://img3.yourmiddleeast.com/media/news/images/2015/660x39092c4f3c2220914369926cfffie8e1849f90a940.jpg

Slide 8: http://donate.unhcr.org/neilandgeorgina


Slide 10: https://d2zyf8ayvg1369.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/styles/imagestack/adaptive-image/public/MercyCorps_SyriaCrisisRefugeesGraph_0215.jpg
Image References: 3rd Presenter

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Slide 6: http://www.shelterbox.org/donate.php

RefR RRRRER
“The knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level”

(Herman, 1997, p. 2)