

## **Stressors Experienced by Refugees in Transition between Home Country and Resettlement Country**

Sara Makki Alamdari

### **Learning Objective(s):**

1. To improve the understanding of the main stressors experienced by refugees in their transition to a resettlement country
2. To provide implications for contextually-appropriate research and practice in the field of refugees

### **Overview:**

This research is an exploratory study on the nature of stressors experienced by refugees before their resettlement in a third country such as the U.S. Eleven Syrian refugees living in Jordan were interviewed. The stressors listed by them are rooted in the systemic challenges existing in the host country such as economic, political, and societal issues.

**Background:** Refugees go through different phases before getting resettled in a developed country. Many studies focused on stressors experienced in home country or post-resettlement stressors. More studies are needed to examine their stressors during their transition. Around 80% of refugees live in urban settings of their neighboring countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016), which are mainly developing countries before resettlement in a third country. When refugees live in neighboring countries, they suffer from different kinds of stressors including the lack of recognition, the lack of access to the basic needs and rights (Asylum Access, 2014; Center for Victims of Torture, 2015; Dako-Gyeke, & Adu, 2017; Thomas, Roberts, Luitel, Upadhaya, & Tol, 2011). Learning about the nature of these stressors faced by refugees in such settings in developing countries is invaluable, as the majority of refugees worldwide live in such settings. Further, studying refugees in the developed countries such as the U.S., it is important to learn about their past stressors experienced during their transition.

**Methods:** This is an exploratory study to discover the nature of stressors encountered by refugees when living in neighboring and developing countries. For this purpose, Syrian refugees in Jordan were recruited using convenience sampling and through Facebook pages. One open-ended question was asked, which was “what are your five main challenges as a refugee?” In this way, they could only mention their most important issues (Panter-Brick et al., 2017). The question was translated into Arabic, and then, the responses were translated back into English. For analysis, similar answers were categorized under the same category. Then, content analysis approach was applied to count the frequency of each category (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

**Results:** Eleven Syrian refugees responded to the question, and identified 51 main stressors. Thirteen categories were developed. The stressors with the most frequency were the lack of job opportunities ( $n = 7$ ), lack of affordable housing ( $n = 6$ ), inadequate medical and health

services (n = 5), and barriers to access education for both adults and children (n = 5). Other stressors included the lack of support from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or other organizations (n = 4), difficulties in getting economic well-being (n = 4), the lack of legal protection (e.g., the lack of right to have a property or access to driving license or refugee status) (n = 4), and general challenges (e.g., camp conditions, unstable life, the lack of transportation, and the likelihood of deportation) (n = 4). Food insecurity (n = 3), challenges in regard to asylum seeking process or resettlement in a third country (n = 2), discrimination (n = 2), and the lack of decent job and exploitation (n = 2) were other critical stressors identified by respondents.

**Conclusions:** The stressors discussed by the participants are mainly relevant to their basic needs and rights, and rooted in macro-level issues of host countries such as economy, politics, and culture. These findings have fundamental implications for contextually appropriate studying of refugees especially in the fields of mental health, trauma, and resilience. Studying refugees in the Western context, these kinds of stressors should be taken into account to have a comprehensive picture of past trauma and stressors, and consequently to have better practice.

#### References:

- Asylum Access. (2014). Global refugee work rights report. Retrieved from <http://asylumaccess.org/global-refugee-work-rights-report/>
- Bishop, C. & Makki Alamdari, S. (2018). The impact of paternal involvement and United States stay length on Latino youth's depressive symptoms. *Perspectives on Social Work Journal*, 14(2), 2-16. doi: <https://doi.org/10.7912/ja6w-em36>
- Center for Victims of Torture. (2015). Reclaiming hope, dignity and respect: Syrian and Iraqi torture survivors in Jordan. Retrieved from [http://www.cvt.org/sites/default/files/attachments/u11/downloads/ReclaimingHope\\_01042016.pdf](http://www.cvt.org/sites/default/files/attachments/u11/downloads/ReclaimingHope_01042016.pdf)
- Dako-Gyeke, M., & Adu, E. (2017). Challenges and coping strategies of refugees: Exploring residual Liberian refugees' experiences in Ghana. *Qualitative Social Work*, 16(1), 96-112.
- Panter-Brick, C., Hadfield, K., Dajani, R., Eggerman, M., Ager, A., & Ungar, M. (2017). Resilience in context: A brief and culturally grounded measure for Syrian refugee and Jordanian host-community adolescents. *Child Development*.
- Thomas, F. C., Roberts, B., Luitel, N. P., Upadhaya, N., & Tol, W. A. (2011). Resilience of refugees displaced in the developing world: A qualitative analysis of strengths and struggles of urban refugees in Nepal. *Conflict and Health*, 5(1), 1.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2016). Global trends: Forced displacement in 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7.pdf>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 15(3), 398-405.