SESSION 3:

LEAVING VIOLENCE BEHIND? – RESETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Time 1 Hour 30 minutes - ⌛

"It smelt like a sense of freedom with no cares" *(Afghan Focus Group, 2004)*

"Trying to live on only a benefit was so hard - we are very resourceful people having survived war, but resettlement here was very stressful."
(Bosnian Focus Group, 2004)

"Once we are here and relaxed, then all the diseases come out and our bodies get very ill."
(Iraqi Focus Group, 2004)

Introduction

Before coming to Australia, many refugees think of resettlement as the answer to their hopes and prayers. They often have unrealistic expectations of their new life and the resettlement process. Many of these hopes are realised, but refugees can also find the resettlement process very difficult, and in the early years, disappointment and the "loss of a dream" sometimes adds to the burden of grief which they bring with

them. Loss of a beloved homeland, racism and difficulties in adapting to a new culture can make life very difficult in the early years.

Session Objectives

It is intended that on completion of this session, students will be able to:

- Discuss the factors that impact on the resettlement process for refugee communities.
- Explore and discuss the views of refugee communities about their positive and negative experiences of resettlement.
- Apply this understanding to the service provision needs of refugees, in particular with regard to families experiencing domestic and family violence.

PRESENTER'S NOTES

Presenters must read and be familiar with the course material for this session before conducting the training. Section 1, SESSION CONTENT, is background material for the facilitator. This material can also be given as class handouts if required. Section 2, SESSION MATERIALS, includes a suggested running order, a power point presentation, audio visual materials and activities to use when presenting this training session. Small copies of the power point slides are included in the text to indicate where they will be most useful. Larger copies of the PowerPoint slides are printed at the end of the section and can be photocopied as Session Handouts.

SESSION CONTENT

Leaving Violence Behind? Resettlement in Australia

THE LAND OF HOPE – RESETTLEMENT IN A NEW COUNTRY

"The first year or two everything is filled with excitement then depression and reality comes"
(Somali Focus Group, 2004)

When refugees arrive in their new homeland, they frequently experience what is referred to as a "honeymoon period". Freedom from hunger and thirst, adequate housing, school for their children and most importantly, life in a peaceful country are all beyond their wildest dreams. They eagerly start to plan their new lives, to seek a place to call home, to find employment and settle their children into school. Many do succeed, and the dream comes true.

The impact of pre-arrival trauma

However, over time, reality slowly sets in, and many refugees realise that it is going to be a lot harder than they first imagined to achieve all that they hoped for. In addition to the complex set of challenges faced by all migrants, refugees arrive in countries of resettlement with the "emotional baggage" they carry from their pre-arrival experiences. This may include previously established patterns of domestic violence, but more generally refers to the often extensive psychological trauma they carry with them. Every refugee family has a powerful story of uprooted lives and multiple traumatic experiences. They have usually escaped torture and persecution, and have spent varying amounts of time in camps awaiting resettlement (Bailey-Smith, 2001; Kaplan & Webster, 2003).

"Consequently, refugees often suffer from trauma-related mental health sequelae, including anxiety, depression, somatic symptoms, behavioural disturbance and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Carciero, 1998; Friedman, 1992; Silove, 2003). A study of asylum seekers in Australia showed that rates of PTSD, depression and anxiety were uniformly high: 38% of the sample displayed symptoms of PTSD" (Silove, Sinnerbrink, Field, Manicavasagar & Steel, 1997, in Silove, 2003).

When the "very fabric of life" has been destroyed, as it is by the refugee experience, it is not surprising that the psychological toll is enormous (Kaplan & Webster, 2003, p.106). For families adjusting to the process of resettlement, the legacy of trauma from armed conflict, persecution and

flight, can have a major impact on their ability to deal with the challenges and stresses of adapting to a new culture. Men who have experienced violence, torture and trauma, and life in camps or as asylum seekers, sometimes resort to violence as a way of dealing with stress and problem-solving. This partially accounts for the increase of domestic abuse in families who have fled war and terror (McWilliams, 1998).

In addition, the effects of debilitating trauma on refugee men's ability to resettle into a developed country may itself contribute to women's vulnerability to domestic violence (Easteal, 1996). Some forms of trauma, particularly torture, are particularly damaging to future psychological adaptation (Silove, 2003). A counsellor at an Australian torture rehabilitation service notes that:

"personal traumatic experiences can lead to a loss of belief in the security of the self…. In some instances traumatic experiences are never forgotten but stay with individuals as a major focal point of their experience." (Carciero, 1998, p.50)

The occurrence of PTSD among resettled refugee populations is high (Carciero, 1998; Silove, 2003). People with PTSD suffer from long-term debilitating symptoms of intrusion, avoidance, arousal, dissociation and sleep disturbance which impair their ability to function normally in daily life (Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, 2003; Friedman, 1992; Regeher & Cadell, 1999). For refugees, PTSD can adversely affect the resettlement process, which in turn can be a push factor for domestic violence.

The resettlement process

The resettlement process, and more generally the post-migration environment, has an enormous impact on the ability of refugees to recover from their pre-arrival trauma and to rebuild their lives (Kaplan & Webster, 2003; Silove, 2003). The many barriers and obstacles encountered in adapting to a new culture can compound the existing psychological problems of refugees (Carciero, 1998). Newly settled refugees frequently experience anxiety about family and friends left behind, guilt and shame, feelings of helplessness in an unfamiliar environment, fear and insecurity, isolation from family and community networks, and cultural dislocation (Kaplan & Webster, 2003, pp.108-109; Freidman, 1992). Some may also have significant difficulties with language, unemployment, financial problems and racism (Bailey-Smith, 2001; Perilla, n.d.). Access to, and the quality of resettlement and settlement services provided, play a key role in the ability of refugees to resettle successfully.

However, all too often refugees find that adequate and effective settlement services are not available. The barriers and problems to settlement have been well documented over the years, both for migrants and for refugees (Iredale, Mitchell, Regalia & Pittaway, 1996; Refugee Resettlement Working Group, 1993). Settlement services have been

introduced, amended and redesigned to fit the needs of successive waves of migrants and refugees from different parts of the world. Yet many refugees find that they are socially, culturally and economically marginalised upon arrival, and have little or no access to services which facilitate their integration. Problems accessing English classes and torture and trauma services with which they are familiar and comfortable, are commonly cited as a major aspect of their difficulties in adjusting (Iredale et al, 1996; Bartolomei and Ekhardt, 2004). Without being able to speak the dominant language, it is difficult to find well paid employment, to succeed in the education system or even to navigate the social systems necessary to survive in Australia.

Racism is another major challenge faced by both migrants and refugees. Sadly, in the last decade in Australia, racism has once again emerged as a defining factor in the political landscape. This coincided with the arrival of a new wave of refugees from the African sub-continent, and emerging research indicates that they are experiencing sometimes extreme forms of racism as they seek to establish themselves in Australia (Bartolomei & Eckert, 2004). Lack of access to adequate settlement services, combined with the racist attitudes of the wider society, creates a poor socio-economic environment for resettled refugees.

Resources

Pittaway, E. The Ultimate Betrayal

SESSION MATERIALS

Leaving Violence Behind? Resettlement in Australia

"I saw the dark side of humanity. Then here in Australia I saw humanity again and hope for my child and my mother"
(Bosnian Focus Group, 2004)

"How we came here is different. We were forced.Tthe war came and it all changed"
(Bosnian Focus Group, 2004)

Show Section 2 of the From Horror to Hope Video clip and section 6 of the Roads to Refuge Video clip

Introduction – 30 Minutes

In this session, we explore the experience of resettlement in a new country. This is done mainly through the voices of the refugees who participated in the focus groups which provided the materials on which this training kit is based. In the groups, the women discussed how they felt about their homelands. There were many mixed feelings. There were happy memories from before the conflicts and persecution. There were terrible memories of not being secure in one's own home and country. The women discussed their conflicting feelings about their culture and their new lives; about threats and opportunities; about the positive aspects of resettlement, and about the negative and painful issues which they have to face here in Australia. The biggest issue of all of these was the sense of loss of their old life, their homeland and their culture.

"Losing culture, community family and friends - so much loss"
(Iranian focus group, 2004)

Starting a New Life

Following a brief "honeymoon "period, refugees often find the early years of resettlement extremely difficult.

Use PowerPoint 15

Use PowerPoint 16

Use PowerPoint Number 17

Discuss each of the issues which have been mentioned by the refugees, with the participants.

Activity: role play

Divide participants into two groups. Give one of the sets of comments in the PowerPoint graphics to each group Ask them to devise a role play in which one of the group plays a refugee who is describing some of the problems they are facing, and another group member is a worker responding to them. Get the groups to perform the two role plays and then discuss how workers can and should respond to refugees who disclose feelings such as these.

Challenges in Resettlement 1 hour

"It is very hard to adjust to the different life, very hard"
(Afghan Focus Group, 2004)

"We are losing the cultural practices - no language"
(Afghan Focus Group,2004)

"No one really understands!!"
(Croatian Focus Group, 2004)

Introduction

The refugee women discussed the major challenges which they faced in resettlement.

Use PowerPoint Number 18

Use PowerPoint Number 19

Use PowerPoint Number 20

Main Areas of Loss for Refugees

- Loss of family connections
- Loss of elders
- Loss of community
- Loss of friends
- Loss of homeland
- Loss of profession and status
- Loss of culture, changes in cultural identity
- Loss of confidence
- Loss of health and well-being
- Loss of control of family

Use PowerPoint Number 21

Health and Well Being

*"Once we are here and
Relaxed, then all the diseases come out
And our bodies get very ill"*

"Lots of depression - always sad"

"Torture and trauma - how do you get over such sadness"

"Depression , I felt sad for a long time"

*" My family suffered both mental and physical
Health problems"*

*"The war has affected our health;
always scared of things around me"*

*"The first year or two everything is filled with
excitement, then the depression and reality comes"*

Use PowerPoint Number 22

Activity: Small group work

Guided Fantasy:

Divide the participants into groups. Tell each group that they have been given an annual budget of $3 million to run a program for refugee women. They are to spend 15 minutes deciding the range of services they would offer.

Positive Aspects of Resettlement 30 minutes

"Here we have a bright future"
(Iraqi focus group)

"Rights, security, benefits, opportunities for education and work, health and social security, rights for women, care for older people"
(all focus groups 2004)

The refugee women in the focus groups also discussed the positive aspect of resettlement in Australia.

Use PowerPoint Number 23

Use PowerPoint Number 24

Use PowerPoint Number 25

Activity: Brainstorm

Ask the group to list the ways in which they can build on these positive aspects to assist refugee women who are experiencing domestic and family violence.