

Session 3 BACKGROUND READINGS

The Challenges of Resettlement

Section a

LOSS AND GRIEF

“Soon after arrival I was so stressed and I cried every single day. Everything was so stupid. I missed my home, house, my friends. I wanted to go back immediately”

(17 year-old girl from the Former Yugoslavia)

One of the biggest traumas refugee families face when they arrive in their resettlement country is the grief they feel for all that they have left behind. Often members of their family have been killed, and in resettlement refugees are again separated from their extended families. They have lost their homes, communities, schools, friends – everything they knew and loved. Unlike migrants, refugees don't choose to come to live in a country like Australia. They would prefer not to have to live in a resettlement country. What they really want is to go home to their own country and live in peace there. They come to countries like Australia because they fear for their safety elsewhere.

Refugees also fear for the safety of the family members they have left behind. Unlike migrants, they can't go home to visit them whenever they feel like it, and they have a lot of difficulties in sponsoring members of their families to come to Australia. Each year there are 200 000 applications for the 6000 visas available. Many resettlement countries don't recognise the importance of extended family in their family sponsorship policies. In Australia, refugees who are granted 3 year Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) are not able to sponsor family members to join them here. The inability of refugees to successfully bring extended family members to the safety of Australia can cause extreme grief, anxiety and guilt.

Section a

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

. their culture dictates the way they behave and dress, their gender roles and roles within the family, their religion and the way they raise their children. When they arrive in Australia, they are suddenly expected to fit in with a very different way of doing things.

faster than their parents. They often find that they behave one way and speak English when at school or with their friends, while at home they are expected to behave very differently and they speak their first language with their parents. Parents often cling even more strongly to traditional roles and customs when faced with the anxieties and unfamiliarity of the resettlement environment. There are clashes between parental and school systems of discipline and issues of teenage independence.

Section c

ADJUSTING TO SCHOOL

“The depression that I had is because how I feel about the gap in my education. I started my schooling in English in Southern Sudan but due to war, I fled to Northern Sudan where I found the education there in Arabic language. I found it difficult to cope with that and it affected my educational progress. Then, I left for Cairo. I thought the situation would change but I found the same problem. Most of the government schools is in the Arabic language.”

(18 year-old Sudanese refugee)

Refugee children have often experienced a disruption to their education as a result of war in their home countries or because they were unable to attend school during the refugee journey or in refugee camps. In addition, many of them don't speak any English when they first arrive. Dealing with a new language, a new school system, and having to catch up to other children of their age group can be a very stressful experience for refugee students.

Refugee students may also have trouble fitting in and making friends at school when they are new. Partly this is because of their lack of English, but also because of the cultural differences between them and Australian-born students. Refugee students often have to take on more responsibilities at home than their classmates, and they often don't have much leisure time. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and exclusion from their peer groups.

Section d

Refugees have been variously linked with terrorism, crime and violence and viewed as threats to Australians' jobs. The colour of their skin, their dress, language and religions are often treated suspiciously and refugees increasingly find themselves marginalised by the Australian community. Attempts by refugees to recreate the extended family and community support structures that are so important for them are seen as evidence that they don't want to integrate. While these views are by no means universal, refugees quite commonly encounter prejudice and discrimination, increasing their marginalisation. This racism can have a devastating effect on children's self-esteem and on a family's ability to cope with the challenges of resettlement.

The newly arrived African communities and those who are from identifiable Muslim communities are those most often targeted for racist behaviours. This ranges from racism at airports to

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minors were sometimes isolated from anyone who spoke their language (HREOC, 2002; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003).

These children and young people can exhibit extreme mental health disorders: major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, mutism, refusal to eat or drink, suicidal thoughts. Adolescents often display extremely dysfunctional anti-social behaviour, while younger children experience severe developmental delays. They may require psychological and psychiatric support, as well as other