Refugee and Immigrant Communities in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area

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Definition of Refugee and Immigrant

An immigrant is someone who chooses to settle in another country.

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her home country because of their race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; because they are a member of a persecuted social category; or because they are fleeing a war or conflict.

Demographics of the Immigrant and Refugee Population

According to the UN Refugee agency, there are currently 19.5 million refugees worldwide. Approximately 10% of the United States population is composed of refugees and their families. Between 1983 and 2004, over 22,000 refugees were settled in the St. Louis Area.

Current Health Challenges

Immigrants and refugees face a multitude of mental and physical health challenges, including:

Mental Health
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Flashbacks
- Hyperarousal/Hypoarousal
- Trauma triggers
- Adjustment issues
- Stigma for seeking mental health services

Physical Health
- Lack of access to medical care
- Inadequate or limited insurance
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Inability to perform activities of daily living

St. Louis: Current Efforts to Improve Immigrant and Refugee Health

Several organizations in the St. Louis area are working to improve immigrant and refugee health, including:

- Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma (CSTWT)
- Bi-Lingual International Assistance Agency (BIAS)
• Places for People (P4P)
• Language Access Metro Project (LAMP)*
• International Institute (II)
• Family Care Health Clinic

These organizations work together to provide outreach to these communities, collaborate with social service and government agencies, provide psycho-education in refugee communities, teach refugees about resources and how to advocate for themselves, and educate organizations, companies, schools, and health care systems about the unique needs of immigrants and refugees in the region.

*LAMP provides only interpretational services

St. Louis Refugee and Immigrant Community Needs

Pressing current questions that would benefit from attention by researchers are:

• How can information about refugees and immigrants and their healthcare needs be communicated effectively to residents and policy makers in and around the St Louis?
• How can access to health care and social services be improved for refugees and immigrants?
• How can we take into account the needs of multi-generational families?
• How can mental health services be designed to take into account the beliefs and needs of refugee and immigrants individuals and groups?
• What policies and programs can be developed to improve or hasten the adjustment to immigrants and refugees?

For more information or to schedule a consultation with the Center for Community-Engaged Research or the Community Advisory Board, please contact Hilary Broughton at hbrought@dom.wustl.edu or 314-362-7034.

References