

Session 4
BACKGROUND READINGS

Some Impacts on Children and Young People

Section a

CHILDREN'S REACTION TO THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

Becoming a refugee is always a traumatic experience for children, no matter what their circumstances. When working with refugee students, it is important that we understand that they have all suffered serious trauma as a result of the experiences they have lived through. Th

Section c

IDENTIFYING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS SYMPTOMS

Section e

THE IMPACT OF FAMILY STRESS AND POOR PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH

The two factors that have been found to most contribute to poor mental health amongst refugee children are family stress and parents' emotional well-being (Hjern et al, 1998). These factors are highly dependent on the resettlement environment, which, as we have seen, places many pressures on parents and families.

From this we can understand why it is necessary to treat refugee trauma among children holistically rather than focusing only on the clinical aspect. The best way to promote happy and healthy refugee parents and families is to support them in their resettlement process. This includes delivering a wide range of support services, and also welcoming them into the community. When parents and families are able to learn the language, find work, adapt to the new culture and regain control over their lives, then they will be able to move on and find a new sense of belonging. This is the single most important factor for the emotional well-being and successful adaptation of refugee children.

CONCLUSION

Many of the symptoms listed above are similar to those experienced by Australian children who are sexually abused, or have experienced violence in the home. There is overlap between the problems experienced by some young people from CALD backgrounds and some refugees. We are looking at cases of 'compounded risk', at children who are vulnerable for a range of different reasons, and each additional risk compounds their vulnerability and lessens their resilience.

Our challenge as professionals working with refugee students is to learn to identify