



Children, young people and families who have experienced forced migration: psychological conceptualisations of distress and psychosocial interventions.

The intent of this online seminar (webinar); to deconstruct the concepts of ‘mental health’ and ‘psychosocial support’ in relation to ‘the forced migrant’, using the lens of critical psychology to problematise Western psychology and the tendency to homogenise and pathologise this population.

This was the sixth in a series of seminars supported by the BME-Migrant Advisory Group for safeguarding children and young people (B-MAG) and partners UEL Centre for Social Work Research (CSWR) and The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK (VCF). Dr Claire Marshall, Senior Lecturer at the University of East London (c.marshall@uel.ac.uk) was invited to present on her work with migrant children, young people and families, followed by an open discussion.

Dr Marshall focused her talk on the psychological conceptualisation of distress and psychosocial interventions, and responses to forced migration from state and non-state actors, with a particular focus on psychosocial interventions and coordination. When considering working with young people and their families in distress, culturally appropriate paradigms should inform psychosocial interventions. Rather than one kind of psychology serving as both the benchmark from which experience is defined and the premise on which intervention is deemed ‘helpful’, ‘local practices’ should not only be consulted, they should be privileged. She discussed the need for evidence-based psychosocial interventions. Attachment/ Regulation Theory and the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) were also presented, with considerations as to how these theories might inform work in various contexts with children, young people and families who have experienced forced migration.

Refugees are generally spoken about in terms of numbers, some 70-80,000 persons, facing forced migration or displaced, including refugee children, that touches all aspects of human life. For those fleeing persecution, there are 3 options; to flee to (1) neighbouring areas, (2) urban areas, often leading to destitution, or (3) to risk life by travelling to another country. When comparing the exorbitant costs of migrating via the smuggler route (£1,000 equivalent) versus low cost airlines (approx £100 equivalent) it is difficult to comprehend the lack of common sense measures towards opening legal routes for migrants to use and benefit from their skills, and to avoid the ongoing ill health continuum. Turning to the subject of quality advocacy work with migrant families, highlighted that much of the positive approaches could be improved, especially within multi-agency teams, if, as suggested by one recipient of such service, “*next time, if they could just ask what we want, first...*”

Dr Marshall’s presentation was emotive, enlightening and well received, leading to interactive discussions on a broad range of related issues, including that the western concept leads to highly educated, successful persons experiencing unanticipated levels of discrimination on arrival to the UK, and the impact of negative narratives and dehumanising experiences within an increasingly hostile environment. The position placed on people forced to take illegal routes because there are no legal channels, and the option to provide ‘refugee’ visas would appear to be a political decision when common sense approaches are muted. Also highlighted was the approach to developing young people, aged 13-18, their development stages and how to assess, and the need for these young people to be able to regulate before intervention can be effective. Social workers are required to fill the gaps when these young people not meeting the higher thresholds for CAMHS interventions followed by discussion around advocacy and the level of trust between BME communities and the institutions, and how much of this could be attributed to the first migrant generation, the colonial legacy and oppressive systems.

For additional information about our work to safeguard children and young people at BME-Migrant Advisory Group (B-MAG) do visit us at <https://bmaqsafeguardingcyp.com>