

## Refugees' mental health is seriously overlooked

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Much more work is needed to help asylum seekers and refugees with mental health problems a report published today suggests.

The issues faced by asylum seekers and refugees in the UK are multi-faceted and complex suggesting that the mental health of many migrants is seriously overlooked.

The Making a Difference project, carried out by the University of Birmingham, was developed to help develop and use evidence to work towards changes in policy.

In wide-ranging and in-depth interviews, leaders from Migrant Community Workers (MCOs) explored refugees' experiences of mental health. Respondents spoke of symptoms including anxiety, insomnia, depression and feeling suicidal.

A range of factors were found to have an impact on mental health, including past experiences of war, persecution and torture as well as sexual violence.

The asylum process was also revealed as detrimental to the mental health of refugees, in particular the length of time it took for a decision to be reached and the associated uncertainty about the future.

Dr Jenny Phillimore who led the project explains: "When migrants first arrive in the UK it is a total culture shock. They are detained, often criminalized, certainly discriminated against and made to feel unwelcome.

"Respondents were shown to have developed a mistrust of the state and experience difficulties understanding how to conduct themselves in UK society."

Another key finding from the project involved support. Few respondents were aware of what support services are available and did not know how to access them.

Counselling was offered sparingly and generally had little relevance to the scale of the problems refugees had experienced. Women were reluctant to speak to white male GPs about the sexual violence they had suffered.

A number of recommendations have emerged from the interviews from both refugees and service providers. Assimilation was a main concern and there were calls for more community centres for social interaction and to reduce feelings of isolation as well as help for refugees to get into work.

Other proposals included awareness raising and educating GPs and counsellors, improving outreach and developing the workforce, including the provision of trained interpreters who understand mental health issues.

Dr Phillimore says: "Much more work is needed to help asylum seekers and refugees with mental health problems. A holistic approach is required together with some consideration of how the asylum system can be made more humane and how service providers might work together."

ENDS

### Notes to Editors

"They do not understand the problem I have" Refugee well being and mental health will be presented at the Centennial Centre in Birmingham on Thursday 21st June.

Dr Jenny Phillimore is a member of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham.

Dr Phillimore is available of interview, please contact the Press Office on 0121 414 6029.

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