

Needs, Rights, and Well Being of Migrant Children and Youth

Dina Birman
University of Miami



Scope of Migration



- 244 million world wide
- Average age of migrants
- Immigrant children and children of immigrants
- Sending and receiving countries
- Largest Diasporas
- Migrant communities are transnational and heterolocal

Types of Migrants



- Investors and transnationals
- Economic migrants
- Refugees (~=41 million)
 - Larger share of refugees are children
 - Push – pull continuum
 - Asylum seekers or refugees?
- The particularly vulnerable:
 - Asylum seekers
 - Unaccompanied minors
 - Victims of trafficking

Developmental Issues in Migration



- Acculturation vs. Enculturation
- Second generation children (of immigrant parents) have experiences similar to immigrant children
- Vulnerabilities:
 - Cognitive and emotional development
 - family separations
 - schooling interruptions
- Strengths:
 - Cognitive advantages of bilingualism
 - culture brokers/boundary spanners
- Rights of the child

Stress in the Migrant Experience



- Migration
- Acculturation
- Trauma

Migration Stress for Children



- Stressors associated with moving to a new place
- Family separations and disruptions
 - Deportations
- Impact on children of stress experienced by parents
- School transitions

Acculturative Stress for Children



- Stressors associated with living in a new culture
- “culture shock”
- Acculturation Gaps
 - Culture/language brokering
- Identity issues
- Context:
 - Discrimination
 - Cultural enclaves

Traumatic Stress



- Stressors associated with traumatic events experienced/witnessed
- Pre and post migration (though generally focus is on pre-migration, en route, and in countries of first asylum)
- Examples:
 - Birman, D., Beehler, S., et al. (2008). International Family Adult and Child Enhancement Services: A community-based comprehensive services model for refugee children in resettlement. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78, 121-132.
 - Beehler, S., Birman, D., & Campbell, R. (2012) The Effectiveness of Cultural Adjustment and Trauma Services (CATS): A comprehensive, school-based mental health intervention for immigrant youth. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50, 155-168. DOI 10.1007/s10464-011-9486-2

Birman, Beehler et al (2008)

IFACES Events experienced or witnessed:



Event	Children (N=64)	Parents (N=58)
Lack of food/water	31 (49%)	37 (64%)
Ill health, no access to medical care	26 (41%)	28 (48%)
Lack of shelter	36 (56%)	35 (60%)
Imprisonment	8 (13%)	19 (33%)
Serious Injury	14 (22%)	24 (41%)
Combat situation	18 (28%)	39 (67%)
Brainwashing	1 (2%)	5 (9%)
Rape/sexual assault	3 (5%)	14 (24%)

Traumatic Events experienced or witnessed (2) (Children M=4.5; Parents 8.4)



Event	Children (N=64)	Parents (N=58)
Forced isolation from others	24 (38%)	30 (52%)
Being close to death	21 (33%)	30 (52%)
Forced separation from family members	40 (63%)	44 (76%)
Murder of family/friend	10 (16%)	33 (57%)
Unnatural death of family/friend	9 (14%)	31 (53%)
Murder of stranger(s)	10 (16%)	34 (59%)
Lost/kidnapped	9 (14%)	18 (31%)
Torture	5 (8%)	17 (29%)

Beehler, Birman, & Campbell (2012) IINJ Traumatic Events Experienced (M=4)



- Community violence 84 (56.8%)
- Loss/bereavement 76 (51.4%)
- Physical maltreatment/abuse/assault 65 (43.6%)
- Domestic violence 50 (33.8%)
- School violence 48 (32.4%)
- Emotional maltreatment/abuse 39 (26.2%)
- Sexual maltreatment/abuse/assault 39 (26.2%)
- Illness/medical 32 (21.6%)
- War/political violence 32 (21.6%)
- Serious injury/accident 29 (19.6%)
- Impaired caregiver 24 (16.2%)
- Natural disaster 22 (14.9%)
- Extreme interpersonal violence 16 (10.8%)
- Neglect 10 (6.8%)
- Forced displacement 5 (3.4%)
- Kidnapping 1 (0.7%)

IFACES: Other traumatic experiences



- Post migration: death of sibling, imprisonment of mother, foster care, possible conviction of mother
- Deceived into forced servitude
- Domestic violence
- Extremely frightened of deportation where he is at risk of being killed
- Death of a parent
- Home ransacked
- Asylum case pending
- Lived with drug dealer
- Living alone
- Lost leg, threat of soldiers
- Military shootings
- Parents argue
- Community violence in current neighborhood

Current Stressors



Acculturation

Emphasis on Self sufficiency

Learning a new language

Employment

Housing

Poverty

Loss of natural supports- extended family, community

Lack of knowledge with School system

Psychological Issues



- “Refugees” is not a diagnostic category
- Not everyone has PTSD
- Difficulties differentiating cultural adjustment from developmental disabilities, unresolved trauma or other mental disorders.
- Current Stressors (migration and acculturation) and needs related to resettlement are primary
- **Need for comprehensive services**

Opportunities for intervention:



- Mental Health from prevention to intervention
- Support for families
- Mentoring: youth and family programs
- Schooling and the Right to Education
 - Schooling during migration/displacement
 - Specialized “newcomer” programs
 - Bilingual education and heritage language support