IDENTIFICATION OF HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOURS AMONG ADOLESCENT REFUGEES RESETTLING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Hirani K1,2, Cherian S2,3, Mutch R1,2,3,4, Payne D1,2,4

1Department of Adolescent Medicine and Eating Disorders, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Perth, Western Australia, Australia
2School of Paediatrics and Child Health, University of Western Australia, Perth, Western Australia, Australia
3Refugee Health Service, Department of General Paediatrics, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, Perth, Western Australia, Australia
4Telethon Kids Institute, Perth, Western Australia, Australia

Background
Mortality and morbidity in adolescents largely result from health risk behaviours which can be identified with the use of psychosocial assessments.1 Traumatic stressors in childhood and adolescence are associated with poor health outcomes in later life.2 Adolescent refugees encounter traumatic stressors and are at risk of developing psychosocial problems.2 Despite a constantly growing population of resettling adolescent refugees, limited data exist nationally.

Aim
To analyse the frequency and range of health risk behaviours in adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia (WA), utilising an adolescent health questionnaire.

Methodology
Refugees aged ≥12 years attending the Princess Margaret Hospital Refugee Health Service (RHS) over 12 months were recruited. Sociodemographic data were obtained. Standardised psychosocial assessments based on the "Home, Education/Eating, Activities, Drugs, Sexuality, Suicide/mental health" framework were undertaken using interpreters where required.4 Health concerns identified were managed by provision of counselling and/or referral for follow-up to various services.

Results
128 eligible adolescent refugees presented to the RHS during the study period and were contacted for recruitment on the day of clinic or via telephone. 122 were contactable and agreed to participate in the study. 99% of adolescents were interviewed independently. 65% of adolescents and 79% of guardians required an interpreter.

Follow-up of areas of concern
42% of adolescents required counselling for various health risk behaviours. 66% of adolescents were referred for follow-up to various services: medical (22%), mental health (29%), social (50%), educational (20%), allied health (10%) & community programs (21%).

Limitations
There were adolescents within the study group that originated from the same family. There is potential recall bias as data were collected from recollection of past events.

Conclusions
Adolescent refugees resettling in WA are ethnically diverse and the majority have undergone prolonged and traumatic refugee journeys. There is a significant burden of psychosocial issues in this cohort which can be identified using a standardised psychosocial assessment tool. Measures should be taken to improve the psychosocial health of adolescent refugees.

Recommendations

References