

"Can we ever sleep in peace?":

Resettlement experiences of Burundian Refugees in an East Tennessee Community

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Presenter Disclosures

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The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

Background

- The *Healing Transitions* project focuses primarily on the arrival and transition of Burundi refugees who have survived in Tanzanian refugee camps since 1972.
- Over 500,000 Burundians have been granted refugee status.
- The U.S. has received over 8,000 Burundians since 2007. 10,000 were originally approved in 2006.
- Knoxville currently has 46 families, comprised of almost 200 Burundians who have arrived since 2007.

Healing Transitions

Healing Transitions is a project that aims to assess short- and long-term transition needs of refugees and the. Some of the main objectives of the project are as follows:

- To assess how social and contextual factors such as acculturation, poverty, demographic factors, social support, and impact of trauma affect refugees' healthy integration to dominant culture
- To conduct interviews with individuals who interface directly with the refugee population in Knoxville, Tennessee to establish perceived needs and level of cultural competency
- To establish an effective intervention model for newly-arriving refugees to promote positive assimilation behaviors to familial and systemic environments
- To develop directed training interventions based on initial needs assessment data for the refugee population in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Methodology:

Community Based Participatory Research

- Identification and Recruitment
 - Homogenous Sampling/ Purposeful Convenience
- 6 Focus Group Interviews (n=39)
- Transcription, translation, back translation
- Analysis
 - In vivo/Socially constructed themes
 - Developed families/ categories of data
 - Looked for prevalent, inter-related and consistent themes

Qualitative Question Pool

1. Tell us about your trip from Africa to the United States.
2. Now that you are here, what is different about the United States than what you were told?
3. What do you like about living in the United States?
4. Describe problems you have had since you arrived in Knoxville.
5. Tell us what would make your community a better place to live.
6. What do you worry about for your family?
7. How did you get information about how to take care of your family when you were in Africa?
8. How do you get information about how to take care of your family in the United States?
9. What do you think we should know to help you live better in the United States?
10. What are your hopes for your children here in the United States?
11. What would you like your children to experience in the United States?
12. What would you like your children to learn?
13. What would you like your children's teachers to know about them? About you?
14. What would you like your children's teachers to know about their journey to the United States? About your journey to the United States?
15. How can your child's experience at school be better?

Generalized Outcomes of Focus Groups:

- Language proficiency
- Transportation/mobility
- Social isolation
- Lack of education/literacy
- Economics
- Lack of income/employment
 - Cost of living
 - Pre-flight misconceptions/miscommunication
- Sadness- “I am so sad”
- Fear
- Guilt
- Gratitude
- Want to go home

4 Emerging and overarching categories or code families

- Loss of Family/ Social Structure,
- Inaccessible Resources,
- Role of Powerful Others,
- and Broken Expectations

Loss of family

- Grief about leaving some family members at home, particularly children and siblings over 18 years. ***“How can a child be denied this right to be with his mother? He is still so young. I will never see him again.”***
- Guilt that they were selected to come but others were not. ***“Our children will die there while we will live.” “You are here, lucky. The person is there, suffering.”***
- Social ties among the Burundians have been impacted due to residential placement throughout the city as well as the country. ***“For many years, we were side by side in the camps. Now we have no way to see our family and friends. They are far away. We cannot be with each other.”***

Inaccessible Resources

- They feel forgotten and unsupported. ***“[The resettlement agency] will not help us anymore. We do not have someone to show us the way. We do not know the language. We do not know where to go or what to do. We are like a child who is left in the desert”.***
- It is very difficult to learn English, there are not enough classes and many of them work when the classes that are available are in session. ***“How do we learn English? We who work must work many hours to help those who cannot work.”***
- For those who have a sponsor (church or individual to assist for 1 year beyond resettlement agency), their lives are much easier than those who do not. ***“Many of us do not have a sponsor. This is very difficult. The families who do have a sponsor get many things. I have only 3 chairs in my apartment. I do not have a sponsor.”***

Role of Powerful Others

- Expressions of excitement that they were selected to come to the U.S. **“America is our mother, we are truly blessed.”**
- They hope that their children will not have to live the life they have had in Africa. **“We want our children to be American. We cannot ever be American. Our children will not be African and suffer.”**
- Role of God, Americans, the refugee resettlement agency, the researcher are perceived to be the holders of their future. Consistent messages such as **“You are our mother, and we are but little children. You can decide for us where we are to go, what we are to do. We cannot live without you to care for us.”**
- Turned over power or self-efficacy to those they perceived were more powerful. **“We are like children who you are trying to leave in the streets. We are holding on to your leg as you try to walk away.”**

Broken Expectations

- “She” (specific description of person informing) told them that they would be cared for by the U.S. government for 5 years. (later clarified that their understanding was that this included support for basic needs and full education.) ***“ She said that we are not going to work on lands, and that we are going to rest for 5 years because we have been fleeing and running away for so many years, and that now we deserve peace and rest. She is the one who said all of these words.”***
- They feel betrayed because they would have never left the camps if they knew this 5 year commitment was not true. ***“They lie to all of us.”***
- That all children were promised an education, but the older ones (17 and older) were denied an education in the public school system. ***“Now they [the older children] are lost.”***
- They must pay back a debt for each family member’s travel to the U.S. to the U.S. government. ***“How can my family live. I must pay the U.S. government over \$10,000 beginning in 3 months. They never tell us this in the camp.”***

Next Steps

- Goal:
 - ✓ Accordingly, the goal is to develop an assessment tool that will identify the key resources (and the patterns of the loss and gain of such resources) of Burundian refugees who have been resettled in the U.S.

Thank you!

