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Migration and Mental health : *A Journey of Challenges and Resilience*

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This blog explores the overlooked mental health challenges faced by migrants throughout their journey. There is no international definition referring to migrant but mostly agreed to define this category of person as :

“ A person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. This definition covers both international and internal migrants”

International Organization for Migration

Migration can be driven by voluntary motives such as seeking better opportunities, to gain access to more rights or to reunite with their family members, or by forced circumstances like war, persecution, or economic hardship. Throughout their journey, migrants often endure dangerous journeys and face legal, social, and psychological hardships.

In this article we will trace the different stages of the migration process to understand what may be the causes of the deterioration in the psychological conditions of migrants and what solutions or measures can be taken to prevent this.

Key Numbers and statistics

Given by United Nations High Commissioner for refugees statistics



122.6 MILLION

Forcibly displaced people globally in mid 2024

68.3 MILLION

Including this amount of internally displaced people

37.9 MILLION

Are refugees

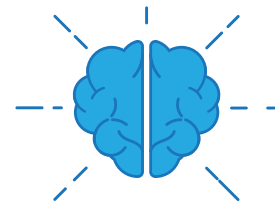
8 MILLION

Asylum seekers

5.8 MILLION

Others needing international protection

There are at least four key stages in the migration process that can have an impact on an individual's psychological state:



During the pre-migration stage, the migrants may face some difficulties in their living conditions : lack of access to education and personal or economic development, limited access to basic rights, exposure to conflict, persecutions, natural disasters, etc.

These stressors often create a strong motivation to migrate, but they also contribute to a psychological burden that may persist throughout the migration journey.

The second largest stage of stress is the transit process, especially in the case of irregular migration. This is a phase that exposes individuals to life-threatening situations and risks to their physical and mental well-being (such as violence, detention, lack of access to healthcare, malnutrition), among others.

These traumatic experiences can severely impact both physical and mental health, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

At their arrival in the host country, many migrants face new challenges : this involves the loss of social networks due to emigration (isolation, heightened feelings of loneliness), lower living conditions, precariousness, and an uncertain legal status (living in limbo). In some countries, their legal status may not grant them access to healthcare, housing, or financial assistance for basic needs like food.

Finally once settled, individuals may face some challenges related to their integration in the society. They may experience discrimination, racism, and feelings of exclusion from society. This can lead to continued precarity and a reinforced sense of isolation due to the absence of family and friends. Additionally, the cultural differences in the host country can lead to culture shock, further intensifying the feeling of not being accepted.

According to the [World Health Organization](#) many studies have shown a prevalence of depression, anxiety, Post-traumatic stress disorders and suicide among refugees and migrants than host populations.

Some protective measures to implement in order to reduce the risk of developing a mental health illness :

According to the recommendations of the World Health Organization here are some protective measures that states or social workers can promote to reduce the risk of developing mental health conditions among the migrant population.

This can involve several sectors of society : social services (for food and housing access), security services including basic human rights and human dignity protected by the police (protection against discriminatory treatment). By ensuring their legal rights and offering services that insure their protection (lawyers, legal advisors) it could contribute to a sense of legal security.

Push factors

Not enough jobs
Few opportunities
Primitive conditions

Desertification
Famine or drought
Political fear or persecution
Slavery or forced labor
Poor medical care
Loss of wealth
Natural disasters
Death threats
Lack of political or religious freedom
pollution, poor housing
Landlord/tenant issues
Bullying
Discrimination
Poor chances of marrying
War

Pull factors

Job opportunities
Better living conditions
Political and/or religious freedom
Enjoyment
Education
Better medical care
Attractive climates
Security
Family links
Industry
Better chances of marrying

"Study about the "push and pull factors" Lee (1966) provided the "push-pull theory", [National Library of Medicine](#)

Access to education is also a fundamental component to take into consideration. Whether for children or adults this would be beneficial by giving them opportunities to develop new skills and also to strengthen their position in the society (learning new languages, developing a new social network). All agreed to say that access to education can minimize isolation and significantly enhance the chances of successful integration.

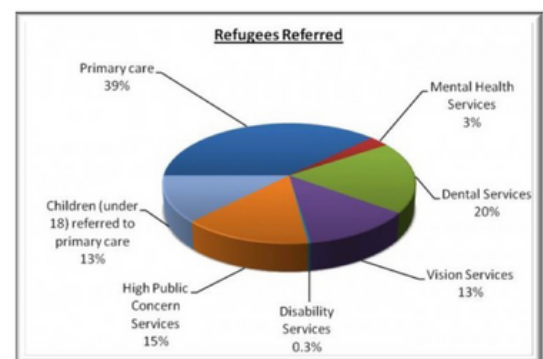
We also saw some benefits from the implementation of community support actions to allow social inclusion of individuals who may feel alone after leaving their social and family support.

People who are in contact with migrants or asylum seekers should be informed about mental illnesses and the conditions and factors that can lead to mental health issues. Studies in the field shows that sometimes refugees may have barriers to seek care for several reasons : due to beliefs that being diagnosed with a mental health condition will interfere in their jobs research or in their house research.

But also it is important to acknowledge and address cultural stigmas around mental health. In some communities, mental health conditions are strongly stigmatized and may be interpreted through a spiritual or religious lens—such as the belief that a person is under the influence of an invisible or supernatural threat. These cultural beliefs can discourage individuals from seeking help due to cultural values surrounding silence/disclosure.

it is important to create a space of understanding and security to help them express themselves and find solutions.

Finally, the statistics (see the graphic) show that care for mental problems remains marginal among migrant populations. As we have seen, this is due to a reluctance on their part, but also to the fact that care for migrants is often focused on physical health, leaving aside the mental side.



@ credits : ORR Refugee Health Newsletter, 2013

To conclude and as said by the United Nations University. “The mental healthcare of migrants without legal status should be considered a non-deferrable obligation for states, one that must be satisfied immediately rather than provided for later”. Mental health issues should be taken into consideration in order to understand the global migration patterns.

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