

REFUGEE FAMILIES AND CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

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Objectives

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- To gain knowledge of culturally competent practices to serve refugee and immigrant families
- To understand the implications of culture, traditions, and religion in Child Welfare Services.

Refugee

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- People who are outside of their country of nationality or habitual residence, and have a well founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. (UNHCR)

Immigrant

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- Someone who takes up permanent residence in a country other than his or her original homeland. (UNHCR)
- Immigrants come voluntarily under various visas, example: DV Lottery, Work Visas, Business/Trade Visas.

Top 10 Countries of Origin

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- Iraq
- Afghanistan
- Sudan
- Somalia
- DR Congo
- Burundi
- Vietnam
- Turkey
- Angola
- Myanmar

(UNHCR)

Iraqi Refugees

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- Majority of Middle Eastern refugees in San Diego are from Iraq
- Majority of Iraqis are Muslims
- Islam in Arabic means “submission” and especially to Allah’s will and obedience to his law worldwide
- Marriage: In the past, arranged marriages were common. However this practices becoming more rare, as a law was passed that gave authority to a state-appointed judge to overrule the wishes of the father in the event of an early marriage

Iraqi Refugees

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- Language: There are many words in the Arabic language that are violent in nature. Arabs believe words have power. Arabs use a lot of strong words out of fear. They use negative speech that compels negative results.
- Ritual Ashura self mutilation – children of Baghdad

Iraqi Refugees

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- Honor Killings
- Honor Killings in history
- According to different research, Honor Killings were encouraged in ancient Rome, where male family members who did not take actions against female adulteress in their family were “actively persecuted.”
- Human Rights Watch defines Honor Killings as “acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family.”

African Refugees

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- Africa has 53 independent countries
- Very diverse in traditions, culture and language
- Majority of African refugees in San Diego are from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea.
- General cultural traits that are characteristic of most Africans

General African Culture

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- Patriarchal family systems
- Extended family members
- Distinct gender roles
- Multi-lingual
- Keep family issues and concerns within the family system
- Respect for elders; settle disputes
- Children disciplined to protect the family name

Iraqi – Child Welfare Services

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- The Juvenile Justice System in Iraq has suffered from neglect and disruption caused by 25 years of conflicts.
- Acutely aware of the shortcomings within the current system.
- The system addressed the following concerns: corporal punishment in schools, rape and torture of children in jail, and leaving children and teens untreated in jail.

Iraqi – Physical Abuse

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- Slapping
- Hitting
- Burning
- Biting
- Cutting hands
- Pulling hair
- Hitting the head on the wall
- Hitting self with the wall and items
- Punching
- Feeling out of control

Iraqi – Sexual Abuse

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- Repression
- Incest
- Untreated sexual abuse victims
- Shame and Guilt
- Early marriage

Iraqi – Emotional Abuse

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- Domestic Violence
- Untreated mental illness
- Abuse towards siblings
- Belittling and name calling

Iraqi - Neglect

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- Leaving children unsupervised
- Neglecting medical needs for financial reasons
- Medical neglect because of shame

Africa – Child Abuse and Neglect

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- Young children working to help provide for the family
- Large number of unreported cases
- Sexual abuse perpetrators are frequently relatives
- Common because of poverty, oppressed societies, offenders escape punishment by marrying victims or compensating parents.

Africa – Domestic Violence

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- In many countries domestic violence is not a criminal act
- Some women do not want their husbands to be charged; do not want to be stigmatized or face long delay before prosecution
- Fear of husband being deported – loss of head of household
- Changing family dynamics and high levels of stress contributing to increased domestic violence (both in Africa and US)
- Immigrant Power and Control Wheel

African Refugees and CWS

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- No CWS in most countries, therefore do not understand the system
- Lack of understanding of concepts, example Adoption, Reunification
- Children understand system more than parents – call 911 when upset with the parents
- Parents do not speak the language and therefore cannot express their point of view clearly
- Parents feel “abused” by children
- Parents discipline out of “love” and not to “hurt”

African Refugees and CWS

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- Whole community is affected when a child is removed from the home
- Family experiences shame when a child is placed in a foster home – their standing in the community is lowered
- Lack of service providers or community members to assist the family
- Community and family feels powerless; always searching for answers
- Takes longer for the family to engage in services

Prepare Yourself

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- Recognize the source of the solution and engage while investigating the allegation
- Recognize the abusive language and link it to the abusive behavior
- Educate the client about child welfare laws
- Explain the laws here and the effect of child abuse on future behaviors of their children

Prepare Yourself

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- Clarify your assumptions about the families
- Realize your perceptions may vary considerably from the family's
- Accept that a climate of mistrust may exist
- When uncommon events occur consider alternative explanations
- Talk to as many collaterals possible - search out people who may be “cultural bridges”
- When you discover your biases, do not give up – make changes and continue to work

Resources

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- www.unhcr.org (UN Refugee Agency)
- www.iom.org (International Organization of Migration)
- www.theirc.org (International Rescue Committee)
- www.hotpeachpages.net (International Domestic Violence Information in over 70 languages)
- www.endabuse.org (Family Violence Prevention Fund)
- Your local community based organizations
- Your local faith based organizations