

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Refugees resettled in western countries are about 10 times more likely to have mental health problems than the general population in America. This study aims to identify the ethnic groups arriving in Kentucky with the highest risk factors for developing psychiatric problems.

**Methodology:** Three criteria were used to assess risk for mental health problems. These were: a positive score on the Refugee Health Screener-15, witnessing violence or torture, and/or experiencing violence or torture. Data were collected from six refugee health screening sites in Kentucky between October 2012 through March 2015. Based on this data, a secondary analysis of the University of Louisville Refugee Health Database was conducted. Data collected were entered into a research database and analyzed using SPSS and Tableau.

**Results:** Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were the countries with the greatest risk factors for developing mental health problems. Afghans had the highest proportion of positive RHS-15 at 59%, followed by Iraqis at 48%. Those from Sudan had the highest proportion of refugees who experienced torture (36%) and witnessed torture (69%). Among the refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 64% had witnessed violence or torture.

**Conclusion:** Refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are among the ethnic groups with the highest susceptibility to develop psychiatric problems. Mental health personnel should be part of the multidisciplinary team that assesses and treats refugees on arrival to the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

- In 2012, about 45.2 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes due to persecution, political conflict, violence and/or human right violations. Approximately 15.2 million became refugees, one million are seeking asylum, 23 million are internally displaced.<sup>1</sup>
- The United States has become home to more than 3 million refugees since the development of its resettlement program in 1975.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2013, about 69,986 refugees were resettled in various parts of America.<sup>3</sup>
- Between 5%-35% of refugees endure torture and many more of them survive war trauma.
- The mental health effects of war trauma and torture are devastating and are strongly associated with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or depression.<sup>2</sup>

## OBJECTIVE

This study aims to identify the ethnic groups arriving in Kentucky with highest risk factors for developing psychiatric problems.

## METHODS

Three criteria were used to assess risk for mental health problems. These were: a positive score on the Refugee Health Screener-15, witnessing violence or torture, and/or experiencing violence or torture. Data were collected from six refugee health screening sites in Kentucky between October 2012 and March 2015. Based on this data, a secondary analysis of the University of Louisville Refugee Health Database was conducted. Data collected were entered into a research database and analyzed using SPSS and Tableau.

## RESULTS

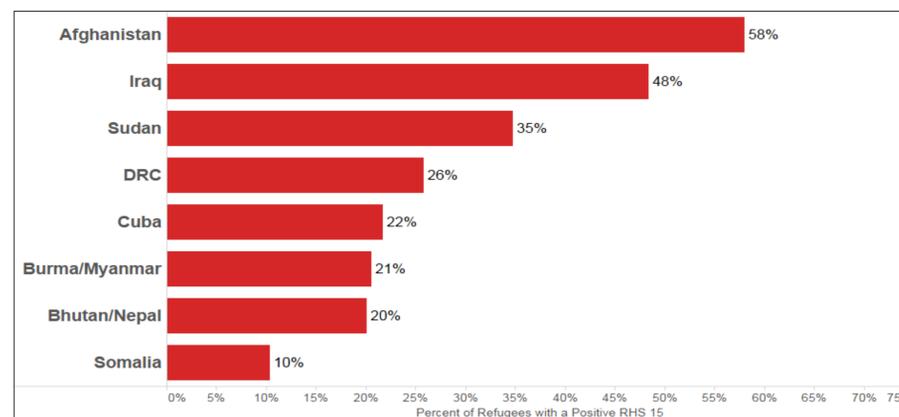
A total of 4,085 refugees were evaluated between October 2012 through March 2015.

**Figure 1.** Documents that refugees coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo(DRC) were the 4 countries with the most refugees who screened positive on the RHS-15. Afghans were the highest proportion of refugees who screened positive on the RHS-15.

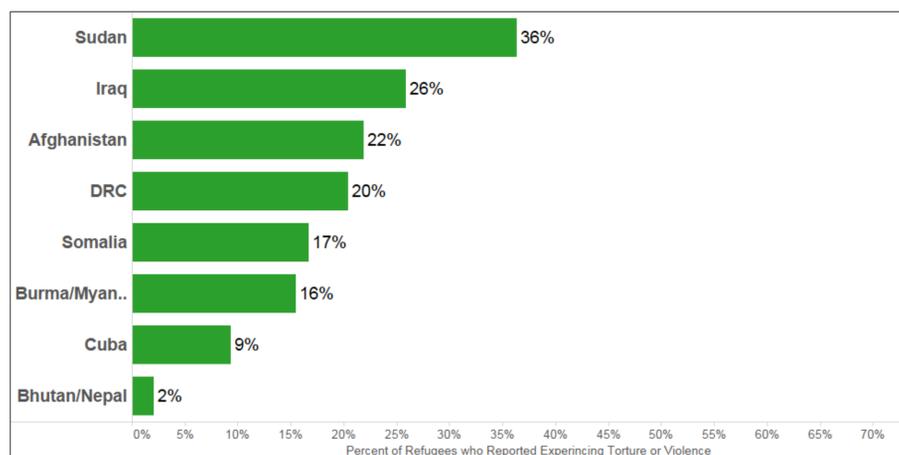
**Figure 2.** Depicts that refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the DRC had the highest proportion of people who experienced torture or violence. The Sudanese were the highest proportion of refugees who experienced torture or violence.

**Figure 3.** Illustrates that refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, the DRC, and Somalia had the highest proportion of people who witnessed torture or violence. The Sudanese were the highest proportion of refugees who witnessed torture or violence.

**Figure 4.** Refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, the DRC, and Afghanistan had the highest proportion of people who screened positive on the RHS-15 and also reported witnessing and experiencing torture and violence.

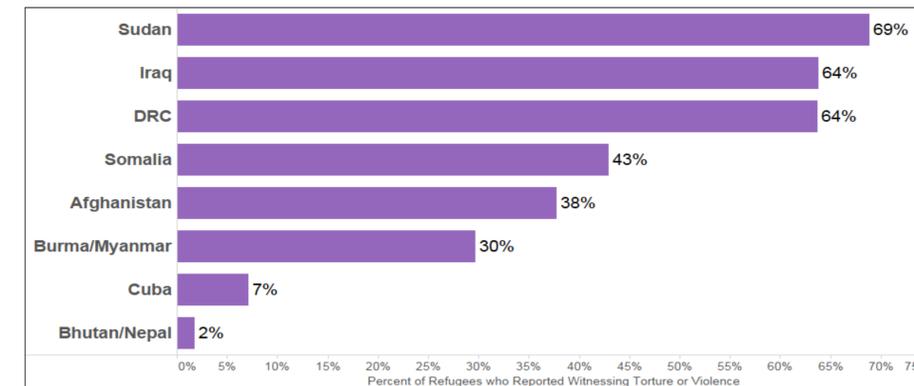


**Figure 1.** Refugee with a Positive RHS 15 Stratified by Country of Origin

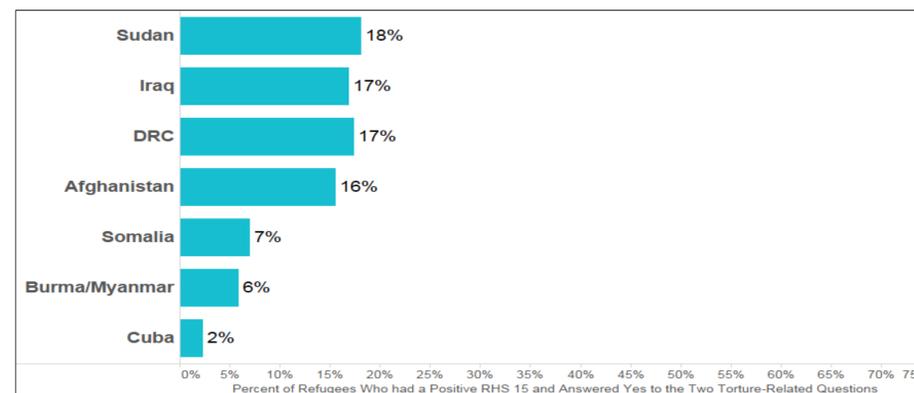


**Figure 2.** Refugees who experiencing Torture or Violence Stratified by Country of Origin

## RESULTS



**Figure 3.** Refugees who Reported Witnessing Torture or Violence Stratified by Country of Origin



**Figure 4.** Refugees who had a Positive RHS and answered yes to the Two Tortured-Related Questions Stratified by Country of Origin

## CONCLUSIONS

Among newly arriving refugees in Kentucky, the Afghans, Iraqis, Sudanese, and Congolese are the ethnic groups with the highest susceptibility to develop psychiatric illness. The pernicious effects of trauma and loss on mental health have been documented in refugees and post-conflict populations.<sup>5</sup> This is further compounded by the added stress that comes from the immigration process, which itself can yield increased risk of emotional problems.<sup>2</sup> It is important that these vulnerable groups of people are identified early in the resettlement process and provided with appropriate assessment and treatment. Early, prompt intervention could prevent risk factors from leading to untreated psychiatric conditions that induce poor social outcomes.

## REFERENCES

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
2. Shannon, P. J., Wieling, E., McCleary, J. S., & Becher, E. Exploring the mental health effects of political trauma with newly arrived refugees. *Qual Health Res* 2015 25.40: 443-457.
3. Office of Refugee Resettlement
4. Hollifield, M., Verbillis-Kolp, S., Farmer, B., Toolson, E. C., Woldehaimanot, T., Yamazaki, J., SooHoo, J., et al. The Refugee Health Screener-15 (RHS-15): development and validation of an instrument for anxiety, depression, and PTSD in refugees. *General hospital psychiatry* 2013 35, 2: 202-209.
5. Nickerson, A., Bryant, R. A., Brooks, R., Steel, Z., Silove, D., & Chen, J. The familial influence of loss and trauma on refugee mental health: a multilevel path analysis. *Journal of traumatic stress* 2011 24,1: 25-33.
6. Pathways to Wellness: Integrating Refugee Health and Well-Being, 2013