

Displacement and its Impact on Children

Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey

Ozden Pinar Irmak
University of Massachusetts Boston

Migration, Separation and Trauma

- At the end of 2023, of the 117.3 million forcibly displaced people, an estimated 47 million are children below 18 years of age (UNHCR, 2024).
- Between 2018 and 2023, an average of 339,000 children were born as refugees per year (UNHCR, 2024).
- Refugee children may have experienced traumatic events or hardships including
 - War, Violence or persecution
 - Dangerous journeys
 - Loss or separation from family members or death of loved ones
 - Living in refugee camps or displaced in cities
 - Discrimination
 - Limited Schooling
 - Language Barriers
 - Trauma (PTSD, anxiety, depression, other mental health problems)

Trauma among Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey

- Turkey hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees, with 3.7 million people (UNHCR, 2021).
- Approximately 13% of Syrian refugees (501, 352) are children under six years old (DGMM, 2021).
- Young children of Syrian families are vulnerable and at risk for trauma and mental health problems and many Syrian refugee children in Turkey experience war-related trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Özer et al., 2013; Sirin & Sirin-Rogers, 2015).
- Research is scant on early educators' knowledge and experience about trauma and trauma-informed care and practices
- Lack of data and reporting prevent understanding the current state of Syrian refugee children who experienced trauma in early education

A Study on Addressing and Mitigating Trauma among Syrian Refugee Children in Turkish Preschools

- The study was conducted to understand better the capacity of public preschool services in identifying, responding to, and mitigating war-related trauma among young Syrian refugee children in Turkey.
- Turkish public preschool teachers and school counselors were recruited and asked about their attitudes, skills, and perceptions about trauma among Syrian refugee children, trauma-informed care, and practices in Turkish preschools
- Participants included 57 preschool teachers and 28 school counselors in Turkish public preschools.
- An explanatory sequential mixed method research design was used, including a teacher questionnaire and focus groups with preschool teachers and school counselors.

Findings of the Study

- Observed fear/ anxiety, poor social skills and self-regulation, emotional and behavioral problems, depression/ aggression, sadness, and irritability among Syrian refugee children.
- Preschool teachers and school counselors lack knowledge and understanding of trauma and they are not aware of trauma-informed preschool and practices.
- The majority of preschool teachers and school counselors stated that they did not use a specific instrument or assessment to identify the signs and symptoms of trauma among Syrian refugee children
- Preschool teachers and school counselors did not participate in any professional development or in-service training on practices and approaches for Syrian refugee children who were exposed to trauma.
- The majority of preschool teachers did not take any classes related to trauma, trauma-informed care, and trauma-informed practices in college

Practice and Policy Implications

- Preschool teacher education programs should include more courses related to trauma, trauma effects on child development, and well-being in migrant and refugee children.
- In-service training (etc., trauma-informed training, play therapy, art therapy, psychodrama) for educators should be provided in the schools.
- There is a need to implement specific intervention and teaching practices (e.g., peer support groups, culturally responsive activities, interactive storytelling, using music and dance) and also modify classroom settings and lesson plans to support refugee children's mental health.
- Teachers need to know how to apply trauma-informed knowledge with confidence

Thank you!