

Psychosocial assessment and recognition of refugee children's specific needs: from European asylum and integration policies to healthcare practices

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Situation in Europe

- Persecution, conflicts and human rights violations continue to force people to flee their homes and seek safety in Europe.
- Over 1.3 million asylum seekers in 2016. Half of them are children
- 362,000 migrants risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea
 - 90'000 UM
- Since the beginning of 2017, over 2,700 people are believed to have died or gone missing accross this journey
- These risks do not end once in Europe.
 - Those moving onwards irregularly have reported numerous types of abuse
 - Those engaged in a regular asylum procedure face a long and stressful experience

Resettlement process: needs and answers?

- Those arriving in Europe need :
 - adequate reception and legal assistance
 - access to fair and efficient health care practices
 - Access to school and education
 - Access to social services

particularly those with specific needs, including unaccompanied and separated children

«Overall, there is a need for a comprehensive plan of action that will support long-term solutions to the complex issue of migration [...]» (UNHCR, 2019)

From case management to integration policies

- Promoting psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. But in fact,
 - Emphasize the need of quick language learning and school knowledge catch-up
 - additional stress factor for the whole family
 - Parenting skills are linked to the safety/unsafety of legal status
 - No systematic psychosocial assessment of the child's development, schooling pathway and specific needs,
 - No acknowledgment of the acute and/or chronic health conditions that might prevent learning capacities

Nizar (7;5 yrs old)

- Syrian refugee, resettled in Gva since 1;9 yr; Oriented for a psychological assessment
 - Important difficulties learning French:
 - Affecting speech, writing and counting performances
 - Parent's informations:
 - several forced migrations from Irak to Syria, since he was born, exposed to chronic violent events
 - Normal development as a baby but severe language acquisition delay
 - Severe myopia diagnosed in Syria;
 - no kindergarden, nor school, in Syria -> educational deficit
 - Understimulated : « I didn't want to annoy him ... »
- => Normal or abnormal development?

Bilingual arabic-french assessment

- Verbal skills in mother tongue predict the capacity to learn a new language:
 - counting; naming the days of week; gender labelling; -> vocabulary
 - Telling a story from a book image -> syntax; episodic memory
 - pronunciation;
- Psychomotor exam: ball play; tower construction; legos construction; drawing; copy a geometric figure...

=> cognitive, emotional and social delay

=> Several fears and social anxiety

⇒ Passive attitude, inhibition as a defense mechanism

⇒ improvement/change of attitude between session 1 and 2!

Multifocal assessment and intervention programs.

- Need of collaboration between different service providers:
 - school teacher, social assistant, pediatrician, ophthalmologist, psychologist, and parents
 - Acknowledgement of pre-post migration experiences and living conditions
 - Build a supportive network
 - Share informations and concerns
 - Fix short, middle and long-term objectives
 - Orientation towards special vs mainstream education
- => Wide social-contextual approach; target beyond individual symptomatology!



Thank you for your attention!

