

# Exploring the Impact of Trauma on the Mental Health of Immigrants and Refugees

Santiago Grande, MSW

Magnus Mfoafo-M'Carthy, PhD

# Overview

- Introduction
- Experiences
- Case studies
  - 1) Somali immigrant's story
  - 2) Iraqi immigrant's story
- Discussions

# Introduction

- What is your definition of trauma?
- How does it affect the individual?
- How does it affect the community?
- How can an individual overcome trauma?
- How can a community overcome trauma?

# Introduction

- Traumatic could be described as an event or series of events that has profound and long lasting physical, psychological and social effects on a person, community or society as a whole.

Examples- War, torture, abuse and acts of God like hurricanes and storms, etc

- Trauma renders the victim helpless, dependent, and devoid of human connection

# Trauma and the immigrant

- How does it affect the immigrant?
- Three traumatic periods that characterize the immigrants experience:
  - Pre-migration
  - Migration
  - Post migration

# Healthy immigrant?

- Is there a difference between the healthy immigrant and the traumatized immigrant?
  - What are the signs of a healthy?
  - What are the signs of a traumatized immigrant?

# Trauma and the immigrant

Video Nonprofits to Know™: Center for Victims of  
Torture

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwVmW6JlKLo>

# Case Study 1

P is a 25 year old single woman of Somali background. She was kidnapped as a child in her native country. As a young teenager, she was gang raped. The baby from the rape died and she had a second child as a result of another rape. She was eventually re-united with family and finally moved to Canada.

P was recently charged with attacking a roommate with a knife for mocking her about her past rapes.



# Discussion

- How would you diagnose P?
- What pre-existing community resources could P make use of?
- What kinds of services would you as a clinician provide P.?
- What would the content of the meetings, debriefings, or support be?

# Case Study # 2

- J is a 36 year old male of Iraqi background. His refusal to participate in Saddam's wars cost him his ears and was tortured numerous times by the military. He eventually escaped and relocated to Canada. He is having difficulty connecting with service providers who find him very 'demanding' and having a sense of entitlement. Effort has been made to connect him with his ethnic community but that did not work out as he did not want to have anything to do with his community. He goes out of his way to help people but does not want to be helped. He has attempted suicide numerous times and threatened to hurt others in the past.

# Discussion

- What pre-existing community resources could J make use of?
- What kinds of services would you as a clinician provide to J.?
- What would the content of the meetings or debriefings?

# Conclusion

- Develop a common vision among programs serving immigrant groups and mainstream service providers – break the barrier that mainstream is more professional
- Increase refugee access to mainstream services
- Mainstream services become more inclusive of diverse population



Thank You!