

Mental Health Awareness for Immigrant, Refugee Youth, and International Students



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Declaration of Competing Interests

Lead, Canadian and European Refugee
Health Guidelines

[Canadian Collaboration for Immigrant and
Refugee Health www.ccirhken.ca](http://www.ccirhken.ca)

MSF, WHO, Caretek Consultant

Understanding Mental Health

"What is Mental Health?"

Mental Health is Normal

Mental Health Challenges

Seeking Help: Self-Care

Reducing Stigma

Youth Mental Health

Failing to address youth mental health conditions means conditions will often extend to adulthood

Impaired mental health limits opportunities to lead fulfilling lives

Even before the pandemic, 10–20% of youth worldwide suffered from a mental health disorder, with half of all mental health conditions starting by 14 years of age

One in five youth report thoughts about suicide

(WHO 2018, 2021)

Common Mental Health Issues

Acculturation Stress: adapting, belonging, feeling caught between cultures

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety from violence or conflict

Depression: language barriers, separation from family and friends, feelings of isolation and hopelessness

Anxiety: uncertainty associated with the immigration process

Common Mental Health Challenges

Language Barriers

Family Separation

Discrimination and Prejudice

Bullying

Limited Access to Mental Health Services

Pottie K, Dahal G (2015). Do First Generation Immigrant Adolescents Face Higher Rates of Bullying, Violence and Suicidal Behaviours Than Do Third Generation and Native Born?. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, 17(5), 1557-1566.

Impact of Stigma and Cultural Barriers

Delay in Treatment

Social Isolation/ Suffering in Silence

Poor Mental Health Outcomes: delays lead to more severe mental health issues, decreased quality of life, and even suicidal thoughts and behaviors

Sharing Personal Stories



Narrative and Newcomers

“My biggest challenge while living in Canada is the cold, which is unavoidable and can really take a toll on one's mental health.” -Kofi, a male from Africa

"The other thing that hit me so hard about this country is the loneliness that is so omnipresent. You can go a whole day without people ever acknowledging your existence." - Thierry, a male from Africa

“My positive moments were the cultural diversity I felt in Canada, work opportunities, and all the activities that I could do over here.” -Ayana, a female from Africa

From Struggle to Strength in African and Middle Eastern Newcomers' Integration Stories to Canada: A Participatory Health Research Study. PLoS One Submission

Protective Factors

Social Support: Positive relationships with friends and peers provide emotional and practical help during challenging times, reducing feelings of isolation.

Family Support: A strong family unit offering love, understanding, and encouragement fosters resilience and a sense of belonging.

Community Engagement: Involvement in the community provides a sense of purpose, shared experiences, and a safety net in times of need.

Access to Resources: Easy access to mental health resources and services ensures timely help when required.

Healthy Coping Mechanisms: exercise, mindfulness, and creative activities can enhance mental well-being.

Recognizing Warning Signs

Paying attention to changes in emotions, behavior, and physical health

Watch for anxiety, mood swings, social withdrawal, poor sleep, and a decline in daily functioning

Seeking help or talking to a trusted person is crucial

Thank You! Q&A

