

Mental Health Conditions in the Colorado Refugee and Immigrant Community

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Abstract

Background: Upon entry to Colorado, immigrants and refugees undergo several health exams including the Domestic Medical Exam (DME) and the Refugee Health Screening-15 (RHS-15) tool, used to screen for mental health conditions (MHC). With the millions of refugees and immigrants worldwide, many of whom come from war-torn countries, there are several health issues to be expected, including mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. This study aimed to assess the prevalence of mental health conditions upon entry in refugees relocated to Colorado.

Methods: A cross-sectional study of immigrants who arrived in Colorado between 2009-2020 was conducted. 17,516 immigrants were screened for physical and mental health using the DME and the RHS-15, respectively, within 90 days of entry to the US. SAS 3.8 was used to evaluate the prevalence and determinants of the presence of at least one mental health condition. Logistic regression and multivariate regression using PROC GENMOD were performed to determine which characteristics were significantly associated with MHC.

Results: Of the 17,516 subjects screened for MHC, 16,073 (91.76%) screened positive for at least one condition. Age, history of trauma, and arrival year were significant in the crude analysis. In the adjusted analysis, geographic region of origin and immigration status were significantly associated with MHC's with adjusted prevalence ratios (95% CIs) of 0.03 (0.01, 0.05) and -0.05 (-0.08, -0.04) respectively.

Conclusion: Geographic region of origin and immigration status are significant risk factors for mental health conditions. Further research on potential confounding and mediating factors should be done to understand the relationships between the determinants of MHC's upon entry, which is critical to inform screening strategies and the design, tailoring, and implementation of interventions.