

Article: 0623

Topic: EPW03 - e-Poster Walk Session 03: Cultural Psychiatry, Promotion of Mental Health, Migration and Mental Health of Immigrants, Prevention and Mental Disorders

Evaluation of Cross-cultural Psychiatric Training of Staff in Mental Health Care and Refugee Reception in Sweden

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Introduction: Education about refugees' mental health has so far been limited even for students and professionals within the health and mental health care system in Sweden. Further, there is lack of evidence about which training efforts are effective.

Objectives: Evaluation of the outcomes of locally organised cross-cultural mental health training for staff in refugee reception and health care.

Aims: This naturalistic study aims a) to examine change in perceived knowledge and perceived barriers to their ability to do a good job among course participants before and after the course; b) Explore participants' perception of barriers and success factors in encountering mental illness among refugees before and after the course.

Methods: A mixed method approach, with quantitative data from questionnaires (n = 232) and ten qualitative focus group interviews, was used.

Results: After training, the participants reported that the hindering effect of lack of knowledge on their work decreased significantly from 2.81 (SD1.22) before, to 2.29 (SD1.00) (p < 0.001). Focus group interviews contributed to an understanding of this. According to findings from focus group interviews, after training, the participants shifted from emphasizing communication barriers towards empathy with refugees with mental ill-health.

Conclusion: Training resulted in an increased experienced capacity among participants to understand the social vulnerability of newly-arrived refugees with mental distress. However, the lack of collaboration and the structural barriers between the different organisations were not affected.