Understanding the Needs of Immigrant Clients: Implications for Mental Health Providers
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Overview
Activity
Quiz
Deconstructing Myths
Definitions
Understanding immigration
Immigrant Experience- Factors to consider
Working with immigrants- Clinical implications
Reflective Questions
What do you know about the immigrant population?
What do you wish you knew more about when it comes to working with immigrants?
What are some common stereotypes regarding the immigrant population?
Quiz
https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/c1ca06b5-5bd5-4dcb-a35c-d59d1cb5cbe0 (Lopez, Bialik & Radford, 2018)

DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
MYTH: “Our borders are not safe” or “Our borders are under attack”
FACT: Our border is more secure now than it has been in the past
DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
MYTH: “Immigrants are taking over our country”
FACT: Immigration to the United States has experienced significant decrease over the last few years.
  o The number of unauthorized immigrants living in the US has declined to the level it was in 2004.
  o Out of the approximately 43.3 million immigrants in the United States:
    • 2010-2017: 21%
    • 2000-2009: 28%
    • Before 2000: 57%
    • *66% of unauthorized immigrants in 2017 had been in the country for more than 10 years
(Migration Policy Institute, 2017; Pew Research Institute, 2019)
DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
MYTH: “Illegal immigrants did not migrate legally because they are lazy and/or entitled”
FACT: Many undocumented immigrants do not meet criteria for a legal pathway to immigration
DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
MYTH: “Undocumented immigrants don’t contribute to our country’s economy”
FACT: Undocumented immigrants pay taxes just like everyone else.
DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS
MYTH: “Undocumented immigrants are all criminals”
FACT: Taking away the criminalization attached to “illegal entry,” studies have confirmed that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans.

Other Facts
- Mexican immigrants account for only 26% of total immigrant population
- Only 34% of all Hispanic individuals in the United States identify as immigrant
- In 2016, approximately 18 million children out of the 70 million children under age 18 in the United States lived with at least one immigrant parent. This translates to 26% or roughly 1 out of 4 children. (Zong, J., Batalova, J., & Hallock, 2018)

Introduction: Definitions
- **Migrant**: a person who moves regularly in order to find work.
- **Immigrant**: a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence.
- **Refugees**: a person who has fled his/her country because of violence, conflict or fear of persecution. Engaged in what is sometimes described as “forced migration.”
  - Migration takes place without opportunity for preparation
  - Primarily consist of women, children, and people with disabilities (as cited in Bemak & Chung, 2015).
- **Undocumented immigrants**: a person who resides in the country without any legal documentation.
  - 4.9 of the 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States are of Mexican nationality
  - Over the past few years, millions of individuals have been deported.
    - An estimated 1.5 million individuals of Mexican origin were removed or returned to Mexico from 2014-2016 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2015; 2016)
- **Removal**: “compulsory and confirmed movement of an inadmissible or deportable alien out of the United States based on an order of removal. An alien who is removed has administrative or criminal consequences placed on subsequent reentry owing to the fact of the removal” (U.S., Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2015). Used to be referred to as “Deportation.”
- **Deportation**: Prior to the enactment of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA), the legal process of deporting a foreign national was called deportation. Although this term is still utilized, the official name for deportations is now Removal.
Introduction: Definitions

**Transnational immigrants**: “work, pray, and express their political interests in several contexts rather than in a single nation-state. Some will put down roots in a host country, maintain strong homeland ties, and belong to religious and political movements that span the globe. These allegiances are not antithetical to one another” (Levitt, 2004)

**Transnational families**: May be defined as “families who are separated from each other by international borders and who maintain significant emotional or economic ties in two countries” (Dreby, 2010, p. 5)

- Understanding Migration
- Migration Patterns
  - Historically, the migration pattern has been of the father migrating first (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011).
  - Border enforcement has lengthened the trip durations (Donato & Patterson, 2004).
  - Decline in Mexican unauthorized immigrants entering the country

- Immigrant Experience
  - Pre-migration stressors
    - Can be financial, familial, or associated with pre-migration violence/trauma
    - Immigrant Experience
  - Immigration process
    - Loss and grief
      - It may involve a number of “host of complex stressors that affect the mental health and quality of life” (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008, p. 311)
      - Complex stressors may include:
        - family separation and reunification
        - foregoing relationships in home country
        - the act of border crossing
        - fear of deportation and
        - the power inequalities, prejudice, and discrimination encountered in the host country
      - Immigrant Experience
    - These stressors may cause or exacerbate mental health difficulties, including anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and severe mental illness (American Psychological Association, 2013).
Immigration process is responsible for a greater risk of mental health disorders and suicidality among immigrants (Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009).

**Language Barriers**
- May make it difficult for immigrants to access health-care (Ding & Hargraves, 2009).
- May affect the psychological well-being of immigrants because it may keep immigrants from securing gainful employment (Bemak & Chung, 2008).
- The immigration experience and learning a new language can lead to additional stress related to acculturation (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007).
- May increase experiences of discrimination

**Acculturation/ Acculturative Stress**
- Many factors have been linked to acculturative stress: number of family members living in the U.S., legal status, social support, English proficiency, among others.
- Some of the potential challenges related to acculturation include:
  - Changes in gender roles/expectations
  - Intergenerational conflicts
  - Role reversal
  - Navigating between new culture vs. culture of origin

**Legal Status**
- Fear of deportation- leading to anxiety, stress, negative self-concept
- Affects employment possibilities and access to healthcare services

**Deportation**
- Experiencing the deportation of a loved one
- Personal experience with detention/deportation
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xum3ix_g2jI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xum3ix_g2jI)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsOPbN8ViEg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsOPbN8ViEg)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9zLchnWQcs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9zLchnWQcs)

**Family Separation**
- The length of separation during immigration varies by country of origin and between mothers and fathers (Patel et al., 2016).
- The separation of immigrant children from their fathers has been found to last longer than separation from mothers (Gonzalez, Kula, Gonzalez, & Paik, 2017).
  - [Immigrant Experience- Family Separation Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie (2002):](#)
    - 77% of youth participants reported being separated from their mother for up to 2 yrs; 23% for 2-4 yrs
35% of youth reported being separated from their father for up to 2 years; 33% for 2-4 years and 33% for more than 5 years
A total of 85% of Mexican youth reported being separated from one or both parents during the process of migration
Study shows that levels of depression are higher among immigrant children who experienced separation prior to migration compared to those who migrated with their parents

Immigrant Experience- Family Separation

Dreby (2008)
- Children of migrant men may withdraw emotionally from their fathers
- Children of migrant women may feel they lack intimacy and affection and have been abandoned
- Immigrant Experience- Family Separation

Although family separation and transnationalism is perceived as a common occurrence in families of undocumented immigrants, even immigrants who have found a way to legalize their stay in the United States may “face years-long bureaucratic backlogs as they wait for visas for their spouses and children” (Aronoff, 2008, p. 15)
The following, also contribute to family separations in immigrant families:
  - Reentry bars for those who have lived unauthorized in the U.S.
  - Laws that prevent permanent residents from petitioning for family members
  - Deportations/Detentions

(Enchautegui & Menjivar, 2015)

Impact on Educational Attainment

“Education Gap”
- Children separated from parents during migration were much more likely to have an education gap than immigrant children born in the U.S. or who migrated with parents (12.1%; 4.7%, 4.9%, respectively)
- Impact of migration was greater for children who migrated at older ages or who were separated from their parents during the ages of 13-18.
- Length of separation appeared to have a less significant impact than age at separation. (Gindling & Poggio, 2012)

Impact on Educational Attainment

Dropout Rates
- Regardless of region of origin, dropout rates were higher for students who were separated during migration.
- For Latin American children, dropout rate for children separated from their parents during migration was 40% compared to those who migrated with parents (17%) and 20% for U.S.-born children. (Gindling & Poggio, 2012)
Family Reunification

- Separation and reunification processes involve difficult psychological experiences for both the parents and children.
- Challenges at the time of reunification also occur despite the fact that many parents maintained contact during the separation period through letters, phone calls, or personal visits (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011).

Immigrant Experience

- **Children:**
  - Attachment issues related to separating from the parent(s) and possibly from their primary caretaker [if other than parent], may lead to psychological stress (Dreby 2007; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011)
  - Adjusting to dual-earner household (related to loss of maternal supervision/ less family time)
  - Potential loss of close relationships with extended family
  - Reunification may trigger fear of their children losing their connection to their family as they assimilate to the host culture (Partida, 1996)

- **Parents:**
  - Stress at the time of reunification may stem from adjusting to structural changes resulting from new configurations of roles, boundaries, and communication processes (Bacallao & Smokowski, 2007)

Family Separation - Considerations for providers

- Emotional challenges
- Financial responsibility/ remittances
- Children left behind/ children in U.S.
- Impact of new technology
- Role of family in the decision-making process
- Other recommendations:
  - Encourage the client to describe future goals, specifically related to migration (i.e., are they planning on going back, if so, when? Is family migrating?)
  - Assist the client in exploring the stressors related to living a transnational lifestyle
  - May need to focus on goals related to re-negotiating the relationship with family abroad

Family Reunification - Considerations for providers

Children and adolescents

- Events that contributed to the decision of children to migrate to the U.S.
- What has the adjustment process for the child been like?
- Who migrated with the parents/ who stayed behind?
- Who took the role of care-taker when parents migrated?
- How is the child’s relationship with previous caretaker/ parents?
- What have been the most difficult changes for the child?

Parents

- Events that contributed to the decision of children to migrate to the U.S.
- What has the adjustment process for the parents been like?
Who migrated with the parents/ who stayed behind?
Who took the role of care-taker when parents migrated?
How is the child’s relationship with previous caretaker/ parents?
What have been the most difficult changes for the parents/child?

Working with Immigrants

Use of culturally relevant strategies
Awareness
Self-reflection
Advocacy
Research

Working with Immigrants: Culturally Sensitive Strategies

Psycho-educational activities
- Although other psycho educational topics are important, it is necessary to include information about the counseling process (confidentiality, overall expectations)

Readiness
- Assessing Emotional vs. Practical needs (long vs. short term goals)

Supporting relationships (social networks)
- May include home visits, higher involvement in community and assisting immigrants in forming relationships in their communities

Bilingual services (including bilingual supervision/ on-going training)

Advocacy

Working with Immigrants: Awareness

Increase critical awareness of discrimination, prejudice, and overall experiences of the immigrant population
- Includes learning about:
  - Country of origin- inquiring about what it was like to live there, what does it look like, overall description
  - Pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences
  - Role of family, support network, family left behind
  - Cultural values, customs, and traditions
  - Factors that may contribute to the mental health of immigrants
    - THIS INCLUDES LEARNING ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS impacting this population.

Working with Immigrants: Self-Reflection

Self-reflection includes increased awareness of own:
- Privileges
- Power
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Cultures
- Values
- Biases
- Assumptions
- Worldviews
Stereotypes
- When working with undocumented immigrants, own beliefs about undocumented immigration and immigration law
- Working with Immigrants: Access to Services
  - Higher visibility in the immigrant community
  - Awareness of information required at time of intake
  - Cost of services
  - Services in clients’ native language

Working with Immigrants: Advocacy
- The importance of “acting as an advocate; questioning and challenging policies, rules, regulations, and systems that adversely affect the mental health of immigrants when necessary; and, at times, “rocking the boat.” (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, Sandoval-Perez, 2008)

Working with Immigrants: Other Considerations
- Importance of intersectionality
  - Not all immigrants are undocumented
  - Take into consideration potential differences related to:
    - Racial and ethnic diversity
    - Level of education
    - Language and religious diversity
      (American Psychological Association 2013)

Working with Immigrants: Research
- Need for identifying creative recruitment strategies for future research that minimize the risk of the participants without establishing distance between participants and researchers
- Need for identifying appropriate alternatives for recruiting/protecting undocumented participants

Lastly...
- Given the politically charged atmosphere that currently exists in the United States regarding immigrants, it is crucial that mental health professionals be aware of the impact that the current sociopolitical environment, immigration policies, premigration experiences, postmigration challenges, and various forms of racism and discrimination have on the mental health of immigrant and refugee clients. Counselors can no longer provide professional services with this population without taking into account the complexity and multidimensional factors associated with immigrant populations (Bemak, Chung, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008)
References


Additional Resources

- http://healing-the-immigrant-family.com/2014/02/
- https://americasvoice.org/blog/new-to-immigration-reform-read-faq/