

RAS 37

Ymchwiliad i ffoaduriaid a cheiswyr lloches yng Nghymru

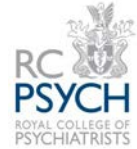
Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

Ymateb gan: Coleg Brenhinol y Seiciatryddion

Response from: Royal College of Psychiatrists

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Consultation Response



DATE: 14 December 2016

RESPONSE OF: THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS in WALES

RESPONSE TO: Inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional medical body responsible for supporting psychiatrists throughout their careers, from training through to retirement, and in setting and raising standards of psychiatry in the United Kingdom.

The College aims to improve the outcomes of people with mental illness, and the mental health of individuals, their families and communities. In order to achieve this, the College sets standards and promotes excellence in psychiatry; leads, represents and supports psychiatrists; improves the scientific understanding of mental illness; works with and advocates for patients, carers and their organisations. Nationally and internationally, the College has a vital role in representing the expertise of the psychiatric profession to governments and other agencies.

RCPsych in Wales is an arm of the Central College, representing over 550 Consultant and Trainee Psychiatrists working in Wales.

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1. The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Wales welcomes the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry into refugees and asylum seekers in Wales and we are pleased to respond. Since 2001, major cities around the country including Wrexham, Cardiff, Newport and Swansea became dispersal areas to ensure that no one area was 'over-burdened' by the obligation to support refugees and asylum seekers. In 2013, the number of people seeking asylum in Wales reached 1,571 with an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 refugees having settled here.ⁱ
2. Asylum seekers and refugees are a highly vulnerable group of people with complex social and health needs. They are fleeing persecution and/or have experienced major traumatic events. Some will have been subjected to multiple and repeated acts of cruelty over a prolonged period of time. They are also likely to have experienced a great deal of loss, whether it be one or several family members, their home, their jobs and their savings. Asylum seekers and refugees are faced with further distress when they enter the UK; waiting indefinitely in detention, with few or no benefits, often no family support, and in unfamiliar surroundings. They typically struggle to find employment and accommodation and many are here with their children or are themselves unaccompanied minors.
3. A large number of refugees and asylum seekers will require the services of the NHS for both their physical and mental health needs. We know that asylum seekers are more likely to develop mental illness than the general population; amongst the most common illnesses are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), severe depression and anxiety. The PTSD rate in this cohort is ten times more than in the general population.ⁱⁱ Mental health services have been treating asylum seekers and refugees for decades yet we struggle to manage the diverse and specific needs of this population as we try to compete with growing demands. The nature of warfare has changed and the political environment responding to an increase in the public's apprehension towards immigrants means that mental health services are faced with an ever fluctuating set of problems and difficulties.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers will have a number of concerns around not just their mental or physical health needs but around their education, housing, employment and welfare needs. Although Welsh Government published its Refugee Inclusion Strategy in 2008, there is still evidence that refugees continue to struggle to access both primary and secondary care services as well as social services. This is largely due to social, cultural, and structural barriers.

5. We are pleased that in the *Together for Mental Health Strategy*, Welsh Government plans to issue a pathway of care ensuring access for refugees and asylum seekers to general mental health and specialist PTSD provision by as early as January 2017 and that this will be supported by a policy for guidance on healthcare provision for refugees and asylum seekers. We would like to stress that the following must be in place in order for the NHS to provide a good service to this vulnerable group:
 - Local services (education, housing, health, employment etc.) must be joined up with particular attention placed on the needs of parents with children and unaccompanied minors.
 - Clinicians must be supported to develop the knowledge, skills, capacity, and leadership to meet the diverse need of this group of people. This would include cultural competency training, the availability of interpreters, and appropriate and adaptable approaches to therapy that focus on a functional recovery (“What do you need to do”) as opposed to an emotion-focused approach (“How does it make you feel”).
 - Service delivery must support the adjustment to life in a foreign country.
 - There must be adequate training for all staff who come into contact with refugees and asylum seekers.
6. We must stress that important work around refugees and asylum seekers is taking place in the College UK-wide. We have an [Asylum Seekers and Refugees Mental Health Network](#) recognising the complexities when treating this unique population. The group is designed to support psychiatrists and it sets out:
 - To allow psychiatrists working with asylum seekers and refugees to maintain an awareness of this changing and evolving area.
 - To provide a source of information on resources for this patient group.
 - To share information on the latest evidence base for treatment.
 - To offer peer support, allowing psychiatrists to share accounts of their clinical experience with this group.
7. The College has set up a dedicated Working Group on asylum seekers and refugees with clear aims and objectives for the coming years. These objectives include promoting research and best practice, developing and delivering training programmes relating to assessing and promoting the mental health needs of

refugees and asylum seekers of all ages, promoting links with other healthcare professionals and organisations, and reacting to relevant events that occur globally. The group is keen to involve the jurisdictions in this work. The group also plans to publish a leaflet on refugees and asylum seekers for the general public. We would like to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the work of the Working Group in due course and are happy to discuss further any of the issues mentioned above.

14 December 2016

ⁱ Wales Migration Partnership Briefing, 2013

ⁱⁱ Fazel et al 2005: Systematic review of prevalence of serious mental disorder in refugees resettled in western countries