

# Immigration & Trauma: Before, During & After

---

Claudia M. Sousa, MSW LICSW

Brockton Neighborhood Health Center

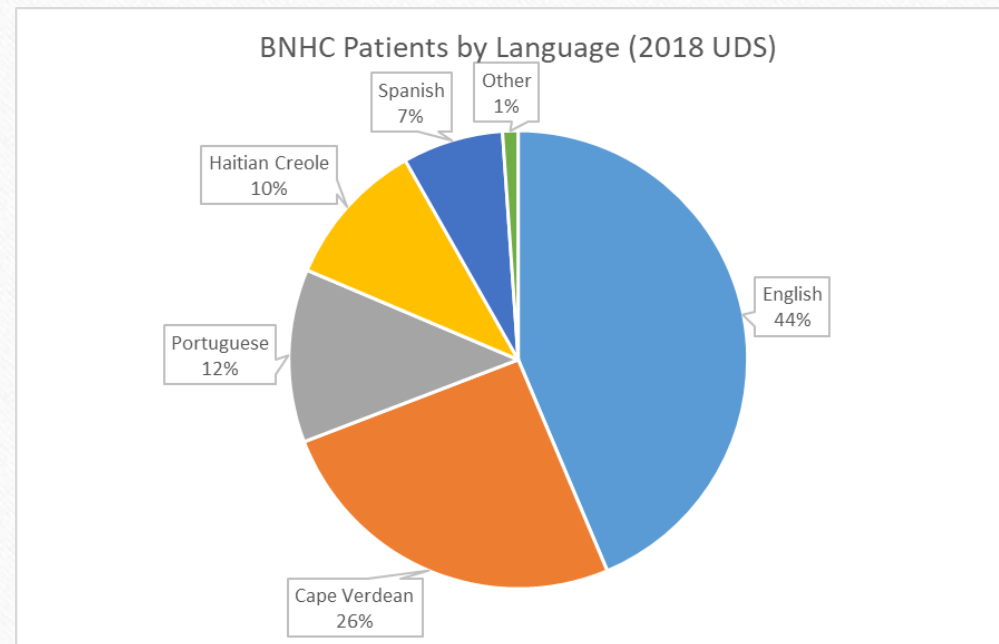
# Objectives

---

- To become familiar with a framework that provides an integrated analysis of experiences of trauma for immigrant communities in three different stages of the immigration process: before, during and after immigration.
- To expand knowledge regarding how to best serve one of the most vulnerable immigrant communities – undocumented immigrants exposed to trauma

# BNHC: A Community Partner

- BNHC scope of services
- Primary care
- Pediatrics
- OBGYN
- Dental
- Ophthalmology
- Behavioral Health
- Infectious disease



# Introduction: Global Context

---

- 65.3 million people forcibly displaced
- 42 million people are seeking refuge globally
- 25 million more expected by 2050 due to climate change
- 21.5 million refugees Over half of whom are **under the age of 18**
  
- Exponential increase on number of people displaced forcefully by poverty, violence and environmental crisis
- **The internalization/globalization of social problems**
- UNHCR – The UN Refugee Agency
- <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

# Massachusetts Immigration Stats

---

- Nearly one in six Massachusetts residents is an immigrant, while one in seven residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.
- In 2015, 1.1 million immigrants (foreign-born individuals) comprised 16.1 percent of the population. Oct 5, 2017

# Massachusetts Immigration Stats

---

- 210,000 undocumented immigrants comprised 19 percent of the immigrant population and 3.1 percent of the total state population in 2014.
- 233,035 people in Massachusetts, including 77,183 born in the United States, lived with at least one undocumented family member between 2010 and 2014.
- During the same period, 1 in 20 children in the state was a U.S.-citizen child living with at least one undocumented family member (66,803 children total).

# Why immigration and Trauma

---

- Undocumented immigrants (refugees/asylum seekers) treated as criminals, unwanted immigrants and easy targets for exploitation
- Immigration = higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse
- Violated human rights / unmet basic needs (food, shelter, health, education...)
- Exponential increase in the last decade of one of the most vulnerable populations: Undocumented women and children immigrant from Latin America

# Overview of basic concepts : Trauma

---

- Trauma
- Potentially Traumatic Event (PTE)
- Vicarious Trauma
- Complex Trauma
- “Maternal Buffer”



# Immigration History

---

- Events experienced prior to immigration
  - ▶ Pushing Factors
    - Hunger, violence, extreme poverty... = Violations to Human Rights
    - Geopolitical and environmental crisis
    - Chronic Exposure to Potentially Traumatic Events (PTEs)
    - Biopsychosocial assessment of life in country of origin
  - ▶ Pulling Factors
    - Employment, health, safety... and to cover other basic human needs



# Immigration History

---

- Pre-departure context
  - ▶Chief determinants of relocation
  - ▶Precipitants
  - ▶Plan
  - ◦Resources, stressors, when, why, how, where, with whom...



# Immigration During

---

- Physical, emotional, financial and other stressors
- Extreme conditions (days, weeks and even months without food or minimal needs covered)
- PTEs such as:
- Extortion, forced labor, overcrowding conditions, dehydration/starvation, mugging, amputations, sexual and physical violence, police and other authorities abuse...

# Immigration during Cont.

---

- Unattended physical and mental illness
- Distance from/loss of support networks, community and physical environment
- Ambiguous loss
- Disenfranchised grief

# Immigration After



- **Resettlement and adjustment**
- Complex process marked by gains, losses and implications particular to the person
- Changes in social location / power & privilege
- Fear of repatriation
- Isolation - rebuilding support networks
- Downturn in socio-economic status vs. The American Dream

# Immigration After

---

- Substandard living conditions
- Lack of fluency in English
- Dystonic ethnic traditions
- Development of support networks
- Avoidance due to trauma
- Trauma exposure can remain predictive of psychological distress five years or more after migration

# Immigration After

---

- Asylum-seeking or any other path to lawful immigrant status
- ▶
- Provision of services by host-country institutions that are foreign to their language and unique cultural idioms of distress
- ▶
- Impact on life of undocumented status
- ▶
- Possible resolutions to undocumented status
- •
- Expert advice – Reliable immigration attorney



# Recommendations

## Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- Assessment
- Evaluate basic needs and client's priorities
- Culturally competent agency/provider
- Services in client's native language



# Recommendations

## Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- Culture and language shape the expression of psychological distress
- Intentional use of languages - primary/native and secondary
- Second language: Anxiety and Symptom Expression
- Impact of trauma on assessment process

# Recommendations

## Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- Assess level of bilingualism and intervene to decrease anxiety associated to lack of fluency in English
- Life narrative as starting place to understand the context where the person is coming from
- History of experiences of oppression and privileges in country of origin

# Recommendations

## Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- Race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs, class, political affiliation... At a micro, mezzo and macro level
- Assess for resilience, strengths, protective factors and coping mechanisms before immigration
- Assess what is valued or not from culture of origin
- Connections and disconnections with community in hosting country

# Recommendations

## Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- DSM 5 - Cultural Formulation Interview Cultural Definition of The Problem; Cultural Perception of the Causes, Context and Support; Cultural Factor Affecting Self-Coping and Past Help Seeking; and Cultural Factor Affecting Current Help Seeking
- DSM 5 - Cultural Concepts of Distress Culturally syntonik behaviors, affects and belief systems can be misunderstood as pathological

# Engagement Recommendations

Restoring Lessons from the field Hope, Rebuilding Lives

---

- **Theoretical & Intervention Models**
- Case Management/mix model
- Narrative Therapy
- Strength-Based Perspective
- Resiliency
- Empowerment

# Engagement recommendations

---

## **Treatment**

- Interdisciplinary team (case manager, mental health provider, PCP, attorney...)
- **Interventions at a Messo & Macro Levels**
- Community Organizing
- Advocacy legal and social welfare for individuals and families

# Resources

---

The Beast (2010). Documentary by Pedro Ultreras

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOw5YEIg-t4>

▶

Nazario, Sonia. (2006) Enrique's Journey: The story of a boy's dangerous odyssey to Reunite with his Mother. NY: Random House. ISBN 978-0-8129-7178-

•

<http://www.enriquesjourney.com/>

▶

PTSD Check List and Scoring (2003) U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

# Resources

---

- TF CBT Web (2005). Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Medical University of South Carolina <https://tfcbt.musc.edu/>
- ▶The DSM 5 and the Cultural Formulation Interview: What It Is and How to Implement It (2017). The Community Technical Assistance Center of New York (CTAC). <http://www.ctacny.org/training/dsm-5-and-cultural-formulation-interview-what-it-and-how-implement-it>



# Resources

---

- A Portrait of Immigrants in New York (2016). OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER Thomas P. DiNapoli, State Comptroller
- 
- [https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/immigration/immigration\\_2016.pdf](https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/immigration/immigration_2016.pdf)
- American Immigration Council (2015) New Americans in New York
- [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/new\\_americans\\_in\\_new\\_york\\_2015.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/new_americans_in_new_york_2015.pdf)
- [https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/infographics/new\\_york\\_infographic\\_2015.png](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/infographics/new_york_infographic_2015.png)
- Dominelli, L. (2010). Globalization, contemporary challenges and social work practice. *International Social Work*. 53(3), 599-612.
- Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

# Q and A

---

