

∞ Helping the Helpers:  
Exploring Caregiver Strain and Strategies While Serving Refugees



- ∞ Cheryl Wolf, PhD, Assistant Professor, Counseling
- ∞ Dawn Garrett-Wright, PhD, Associate Professor, Nursing
- ∞ Sandra Starks, EdD, Professor, Social Work

∞ Western Kentucky University

∞ Overview

∞ Refugees arrive from violent, impoverished, and war-torn countries; they **depend on staff** to assist with their transition, language barriers, and other challenges.

∞ Learn the results of a study examining the stress, coping strategies, community resources, training, and support of staff serving refugees in three community agencies.

∞ Overview: Refugees

∞ Est. 13 million in 2014 worldwide

∞ They move to another country save their lives or freedom from armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, etc.

∞ No protection from their own state; their own government may be threatening to persecute them.

∞ Seeking refuge in new country

∞ Presentation Goals

Summarize qualitative research results examining caregiver strain for those serving refugees including:

∞ Sources of and the consequences of job stress

∞ Positive and negative coping strategies

∞ Available and needed community resources

∞ Needed training and support

∞ Research Project Overview

∞ 4 Focus groups utilizing semi structured interview questions

- September 2015 (2) and January 2016 (2)

∞ 27 participants from 3 agencies:

- International Center
- Housing Authority of Bowling Green
- Community Action of Southern Kentucky

∞ Data analyzed with thematic analysis by 3 researchers

∞ Most Stressful Part of Your Job

∞ **Client dependency** for both for new clients and those who had been in U.S. longer

∞ **Deadlines** within own agency and for client resources

∞ **Lack of resources** or difficulty in accessing resources for clients; healthcare and employment were areas where problems often occurred

∞ **Language issues** leading to difficulty accessing employment, healthcare, and education for refugees

∞ **Safety** issues included concerns from staff members' families about working with refugee population and backlash from community members.

∞ Consequences of Job Stress

∞ **Physical concerns**

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Overeating/unhealthy eating
- Hair loss
- Getting sick more often

∞ **Mental and emotional issue**

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability ("Being meaner")
- Crying

- “Nervous breakdown”

- ∞ External Stressors in Addition to Job Stress

- ∞ **Family** stress including maintaining energy for and connection with children and spouses

- ∞ **School** including academic pressures and advancing their own education

- ∞ **Other** personal activities such as church or civic activities

- ∞ Dealing with Stress

- ∞ Positive Coping

- ∞ Trying to maintain balance;  
“let it go”

- ∞ Take a break and “step away”

- ∞ Attending church or faith-based activities

- ∞ Playing a game

- ∞ Turning to the team/group for support

- ∞ Negative Coping

- ∞ Eating to relieve stress

- ∞ Use of alcohol

- ∞ Use of caffeine in excess

- ∞ Helpful Community Resources

- ∞ International Center

- ∞ Housing Authority of BG

- ∞ Community Action

- ∞ Leyda Becker  
(City of Bowling Green)

- ∞ Family resource centers at local schools

- ∞ Some local physician offices

- ∞

- ∞ DCBS

- ∞ BRADD

- ∞ Churches

- ∞ Needed Community Resources
- ∞ Language services
- ∞ Provider training on refugee issues/needs for local medical personnel
- ∞ Easier access for currently available services (KTAP, job training, etc.)
- ∞ Education for refugees
  - On local and US culture
  - Career training & ESL classes
- ∞ Transportation for services
- ∞ Employment for refugees
- ∞ More time and funding to provider services
  - More case managers
  - More translators
- ∞ Areas for Training and Support
- ∞ Greater understanding of **available resources**
- ∞ **Consolidating services** between agencies
- ∞ Providing training for agency staff and local community about **needs and cultural background of new refugees**
- ∞ **Career planning services** for refugees to maximize job fit (education, experience, skills)
- ∞ Training for agency staff on **increasing programs and funding** for refugees (i.e. grant writing)
- ∞ **Acknowledgement** for the great work of those serving our refugee population
- ∞ Grant-funded Training Provided

Provided caregiver training

- ∞ A stress reduction workshop
- ∞ Crisis and trauma training
- ∞ Grant writing

∞ Discussion of Services Available

Helped facilitate discussions between agencies including:

∞ Identified unique resources each agency provided to streamline efforts and reduce redundancy.

∞ Discover new areas for partnerships and collaboration in the future.

∞ Reestablish monthly/quarterly meetings between agencies.

∞ Questions

∞ Find this Online

The handouts for this presentation  
are available at:

[www.CherylPenceWolf.com/presentations](http://www.CherylPenceWolf.com/presentations)

or contact

Cheryl.Wolf@wku.edu  
Dawn.Garrett@wku.edu  
Saundra.Starks@wku.edu