

Serving Refugees & Immigrants in our Communities

An Article of the OVWA Monthly Highlight Series – June 2019

Generational Trauma and Victimization

This month OVWA highlights the particular needs and challenges in victim advocacy when working with refugees and immigrants. The June 2019 Focus is on working with refugees and immigrants with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Refugees and immigrants often arrive with multiple forms of trauma, which manifests differently in every individual. Refugees undergo different forms of trauma at every stage of the migration process, from life in their home country, to displacement, to resettling here in the United States.

Studies estimate that **approximately 44%** of refugees, immigrants, and asylees in the United States are survivors of torture. By recognizing historical, generational, and cultural trauma in the field of victim advocacy, service providers will better be able to provide trauma-informed care to individuals across cultural and language barriers. Given these concerns, refugees and immigrants are at a high risk of victimization, and might be less likely to access necessary resources or to seek help.

While there are many barriers for clients with refugee and immigrant status, the ability of LEP clients to receive accurate, understandable, and respectful information from both systems and community based organizations is the focus of June's Monthly Highlight.

Barriers to Seeking Services

OVWA, in seeking out best practices in working with refugees and immigrants, consulted with Lara Downing, who manages the Victims of Crime Assistance Program at Community Refugee and Immigration Services (CRIS). This program serves victims of crimes who have Limited English Proficiency; with caseworkers who speak Somali, Spanish, Nepali, Hindi, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, and Kirundi. Lara is a Licensed Social Worker and holds Masters Degrees in Social Work and Linguistics from Ohio State University.

Lara was able to share the following essential insights to help advocates provide the best possible advocacy to victims of these populations.

When working with limited English proficiency (LEP) clients, it is important to remember that English proficiency is a spectrum and that your client is fluent in one or more other languages! Being multilingual comes with many unique strengths for LEP clients. However, there are also multiple barriers that LEP clients face when trying to access services in the U.S., including:

- A fear of police
- Lack of knowledge of services available to them
- Lack of knowledge about systems in the U.S.
- Cultural barriers
- Experience of discrimination
- Immigration status related fears
- Social isolation
- Shame
- Fear for family back home
- Previous/generational/community trauma
- Economic barriers

Importance of Language Access

Language access is critical when working with LEP clients, and it is a civil right that everyone deserves access to. As an advocate, you can help LEP survivors by knowing your agency's policies and be prepared to provide language assistance to clients you work with. You can also help by advocating for more comprehensive language assistance policies in your agency, with other providers and agencies, and for LEP survivors' rights at the local, state, and national level.

Keep in mind that language access is necessary but not the only necessary component of a culturally humble work environment and service provider. In some situations, it may be most appropriate to refer your client to more specialized agencies in cases where your agency cannot provide appropriate services. For example, LEP clients who are Deaf may require specialized care and assistance. Being prepared and knowledgeable about your agency's policies and the work of other existing agencies, helps to build trust and confidence with clients you work with.

In some cases, even when you can understand and interact with an LEP speaker, it is still required to provide interpretation especially in legal or medical situations, where your client would not understand these terms. When speaking with law enforcement, LEP speakers who require interpretation require access to a qualified and unbiased interpreter—not their child, their neighbor, their abuser, or Google Translate. In other situations, an LEP client you are working with might not want an interpreter, especially if they are fluent in English and are confiding in you or reaching out to you for something time-sensitive.

Service Considerations

When interacting with ESL speakers, speak slowly and directly, with pauses to check understanding. Avoid euphemisms, jargon, and idioms. If your client does not understand, rephrase what you are saying rather than repeat what you said again. For example, rather than say “did they flee on foot?” You could ask your client, “Did they run?” The more you interact with LEP clients, the easier it is for your brain to understand and notice different accents! The more we practice, and are aware of our attitudes, biases, and expectations, the easier it will get to assist LEP clients and build relationships built on trust and respect with our clients.

For More Information

OVWA encourages you to consider best practices for working with refugees and immigrants in your county through the information provided here and other National and Statewide LEP, Refugee and Immigrant advocacy programs.

Refugee Behavioral Health

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/refugee-behavioral-health-region-8.pdf>

Health Information in Multiple Languages

<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/languages.html>

American Immigration Council

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-ohio>

Local and National Resources

- **Immigration Advocates**
<https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/search?state=OH>
- **Asha Ray of Hope**
www.asharayofhope.org
- **Asian American Community Services**
www.aacsohio.org
- **CAIR – Columbus**
www.cair-columbus.com
- **Columbus Urban League**
www.cul.org
- **Community Refugee and Immigration Services (CRIS)**
www.crisohio.com
- **Ethiopian Tawahedo Social Services (ETSS)**
www.ethiotss.org
- **Jewish Family Services**
www.jfscolumbus.org
- **Language Line – National Program**
24-Hour: 855-837-8685
- **Muslim Family Services of Ohio**
www.ohiomfs.org
- **Ohio Hispanic Coalition**
www.ohiohispaniccoalition.org
- **Refugee Women in Action**
www.RWIA.org
- **Somali Community Association of Ohio**
www.somaliohio.org
- **US Together**
www.ustogether.us