

SURVIVING WAR, SURVIVING PEACE SESSION 2

ADOLESCENT REFUGEES

Suggested time – 90 minutes

Session content

Gender and the refugee experience
Refugee girls
Reproductive health problems
Refugee boys
Child Soldiers
Separated Children
Inadequate Schooling

Session outcomes

At the end of the session, participants will be able to demonstrate an appreciation of:

- The ways in which the refugee experience differs for girls and boys
- The extent of rape and sexual abuse of refugee girls and young women
- The reproductive health problems that refugee girls and young women can experience
- Problems experienced by refugee boys and young men
- The experience of child soldiers and the impact of this on children and young people
- Issues affecting separated children
- Issues related to interrupted and minimal education

“This picture shows us a young girl, raped during the war in her country. She is alone without any family member, so, she cries always.”



“Now she tries to do her domestic work alone, but always thinking about her life, her future, etc...”

Drawn and described by a young girl in Shekole Camp, Ethiopia, telling her own story.

Participant handouts

- Copies of PowerPoint slides for Session 2, printed as handouts
- Copies of background readings for Session 2, preferably previously distributed to participants as pre-reading.

Materials needed

- DVD *Surviving War, Surviving Peace*
- PowerPoint presentation for Session 2
- Data projector and laptop with external speakers or DVD player, TV monitor and OHP
- Plain flipchart and marker pens

Session Structure

Display slide 1 – The particular risks and needs of refugee students

- Tell participants that in this session they will examine the particular experiences of refugee children and young people and discuss their resultant needs.
- Explain that the session will focus on :
 - Gender differences
 - Child soldiers
 - Children separated from family, and
 - Disrupted education.

Play Surviving War, Surviving Peace Session 2

- Discuss the issues canvassed in the video.
- Remind the groups that most of the refugees currently arriving in Australia are coming from these camps.

Display slide 2 – Gender differences

Use the following notes to exemplify gender differences in young people:

- There are marked differences in the experience of refugee girls and boys, young women and young men. These are over and above the gender differences which occur in all societies.
- Women and girls experience conflict, flight and resettlement differently from men and boys, because of:
 - Physical difference
 - Gender roles and responsibilities – women support families and strive to maintain their culture in refugee camps and places of transit. Often men are killed or absent fighting
 - Cultural reasons – many refugee communities are strongly patriarchal, and the harsh reality of camps can exacerbate this
 - Access to education – in some refugee communities, refugee girls have traditionally had little access to education and this continues in camps

Display slide 3 – Common experiences for refugee girls

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section b.)

Use the following notes to present the information in this slide:

- Girls are primary targets of sexual violence and exploitation by fighting forces, peace-keepers and others and may be:
 - exposed to potentially harmful traditional practices such as genital mutilation and forced marriage
 - recruited to serve with an armed group
 - coerced into prostitution
 - physically abused
 - forced to assume responsibilities for younger siblings and other members of the household.
- As a result of this exploitation, girls have a high risk of early, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Because of the conflict and the harsh life in camps, young girls often:
 - become heads of households
 - stay home to look after younger siblings
 - are unable to attend school
 - Are forced into early marriage
 - suffer forced impregnation
 - are trafficked
 - have to undertake survival sex (prostitution)

Display slide 4

- Allow participants a minute to read the slide.
- Point out that these feelings of guilt do not easily dissipate.

Display slide 5 – Reproductive health problems

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section c.)

Use the following notes to speak about reproductive health problems:

- Many refugee girls suffer from:
 - reproductive health problems,
 - psychological trauma and
 - high rates of mortality.

Refugee girls are vulnerable to:

- unwanted, early pregnancy
- unsafe abortions
- maternal mortality because they are too young to bear children
- contracting STIs including HIV/AIDS

Display slide 6 – Common experiences for refugee boys

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section d.)

Use the following notes to present the experiences of refugee boys:

- Refugee boys:
 - often lose their fathers and significant other male role models. Most refugee camps hold significantly more women than men. Men are often fighting in the conflict which caused the family to flee, or have been killed in conflict, or are in hiding.
 - experience a loss of cultural identity which defines how boys and men should behave.
 - become accustomed to the violence which is prevalent in camps so that it becomes a “norm” in their lives.
 - May be forced to take adult responsibilities at a very early age, caring for siblings and sometime for their mother and grandparents.

- Many boys are taken as child soldiers. It is estimated that there are currently over 300 000 child soldiers in the world.

Display slide 7 – Child soldiers

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section e.)

Use the following notes to present information about child soldiers:

- Child soldiers are forced to witness and take part in terrible atrocities including torture and killing.
- Others are abducted and forced to work as combatants or do forced labour.
- Girls are forced to work as soldiers and sex slaves.
- Children who have been child soldiers need specialised debriefing and rehabilitation before they can resume a normal life.

Display slide 8 – Separated children

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section f.)

Use the following notes to present information about separated children:

- Children and young people sometimes lose contact with their parents and family during the refugee journey.
- Separated children also need special care and attention:
- Some are:
 - orphaned
 - separated by the chaos of conflict
 - kidnapped as child soldiers or sex slaves.
 - resettled in Australia as unaccompanied minors.

- They may be fostered by extended family members, or members of their communities, often young people little older than they are.
- Often they manage incredibly well – but some don't.
- They need special care otherwise they can fall between the cracks of both societies.

Display slide 9 – Disrupted education

(This slide is referenced to Session 2 background readings, Section g.)

Use the following notes to describe likely schooling experiences:

- Many refugee children and young people will have had very limited experience of schooling, especially if they have come from refugee camps.
- Refugee camp experience:
 - Many camps only have primary schools
 - Schools are usually understaffed with a student teacher ration of up to 100:1
 - There are few text books, or even basics such as pencils and paper
 - Teachers are often not formally qualified, and have often only finished primary school themselves.
 - In many camps, the teaching style is authoritarian and based on rote learning.
- Australian school experience
 - Many refugee children need to “learn how to learn” in an Australian school
 - If they are unhappy at school they will not resettle well.

Display slide 10 – Getting an education in Sierra Leone

- Allow participants a minute to read.
- Indicate that refugees who have not experienced refugee camps may also have limited prior schooling.

Discussion

- Note that refugee children often keep these experiences locked inside them.
- Ask the group to:
 - Discuss the implications for the children and young people of keeping these secrets as they try to adapt to a new school in a new culture.
 - Suggest ways in which the fact that we know that they MAY have had some of these experiences can be conveyed to the children in a way that is accepting and respectful, and a door is opened for them to seek help.
 - Suggest ways in which other students can be sensitized to the refugee experience without suggesting that all their peers who are refugees have necessarily experienced the worst of these horrors.

Activity

- Form participants into small groups. Give half of the groups the case study about the refugee girl and half the case study about the refugee boy. The case studies are on the next page.
- Ask them to role play an interview between a school counsellor and the child in the case study, who is now having great difficulties adapting to life in Australia.
- Ask the groups to discuss the role play and identify the barriers which will have to be faced and the sensitivities which must be acknowledged.
- Share the feedback from the role plays with the larger group.

Display slide 11

- Conclude the session by summarizing the gender differences between refugee boys and girls.

Case studies

Case Study 1 - ALI'S STORY

I was born in a village in central Afghanistan. I lived there with my father, my mother and my older brother. I had two married sisters who also lived in the village with their husbands and children. I am of the Hazara tribe and all the other people in our village were Hazara. The Taliban who ran the government did not like the Hazara people. My father was headman of our village and had a good shop at the front of our house. My brother worked with him. My father also owned some land outside the village that he rented to a farmer. I worked for my uncle selling things like combs and jewellery to the women door to door.

One day when I was seventeen a group of Taliban armed with guns arrived in our village in their trucks to take the young men away to join their army. My father and some of the older men tried to defend our village with the weapons they had. They did not want the Taliban to take the young men away. My brave father was shot and killed in the main street. My older brother fled and we did not hear from him. I don't know where he is.

The Taliban took all the young men including me in their trucks to an old fort outside the village. They told us that unless we joined their army they would beat us. The Taliban had just killed my father – I refused to join their army. So they beat me and kicked me and humiliated me and kept me in the fort. I don't know how long I was there.

When the Taliban left our village I was very sick for a long time and my mother and sisters had to look after me. My mother decided to sell our farmland and her jewellery and get me out of Afghanistan. She somehow arranged for me to go with a man to a country north of Afghanistan by truck. I don't remember much about this journey, as I was still sick. From that country he arranged for me to fly to Indonesia and then to take a fishing boat to Australia.

I was in a Detention Centre for many months and then I was granted a Temporary Protection Visa.

Case Study 2 - Amina's Story

I was 8 when bombs hit our village in the south of Sudan. My father was killed and I ran with my mother my sister and three of my brothers. We ran over the mountains and the militia followed us and shot my oldest brother – he died the next morning. Then they raped my mother and my sister – I saw it happen - and in the morning my sister had disappeared. We have not heard from her since.

We went to a refugee camp. There was never enough food and we could only get a can of water twice a day. I had to go and queue at the taps. We had to walk so far to get firewood. It was very hot and very dangerous. We had no money for vegetables or soap or sanitary things. At night men were always coming around our hut because they knew there was no father. My mother used to put thorn bushes across the door. We were always scared going about in the camp, and had to be in the hut before it got dark.

I had friends in the camp, and some of my family were there, so we had some fun sometimes. My Mother let me go to school with my brothers. She said that education would be our way to freedom.

When I was 14 one night a group of men came to our hut. They beat my brothers and raped my mum and me. I had a baby. When this happened, UNHCR helped us to come to Australia. My mum looks after my baby. People think she is my sister.

I like it in Australia, it is safe here, and we have food and things, but I miss my friends and family. I am trying hard at school but it is very difficult. Mum gets very sad and cries a lot. My brothers are happy, and one of them is doing very well at school but they are out all the time and I get very lonely.

Display slide 11

Use the following notes to present this slide:

- Ask participants if they are able to identify particular needs of girls in resettlement.
- This is very important when working with refugee girls, who may require special sensitivity and understanding and may not respond to male service providers.
- Young men may prefer a male worker, but this is not always the case.
- Girls and boys respond best to people who they feel to be caring and non-judgmental.
- While refugee students are resilient, there will be times when the resilience is weak or breaks down temporarily.
- Teachers and counsellors should do all that is possible to create an environment which is safe and secure for refugee students. It is also important to be aware of the support structures which are in place if they need specialist help and assistance.

Activity

- Ask participants to brainstorm a list of places where they could refer refugee students if they were worried about them. Put the list on butchers paper on the wall. If they cannot think of anywhere, identify where you or they can go and find out what is available.

