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THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN IRELAND

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Introduction: Asylum seekers and refugees (ASR) are commonly portrayed as opportunists who came to Ireland to fraudulently scrounge off the Irish public. Such views and the consequent exclusion and discrimination they experience can aggravate their mental health risks and reduce their willingness to seek professional help.

Objectives: To identify the mental health risks faced by ASR and outline specific measures to improve their situation.

Aims: Through available hardcopy and online literature

1/ Assess and evaluate impact of asylum seeking and refugee integration process on ASR psychiatric problems in Ireland.

2/ Assess and evaluate knowledge and understanding of ASR mental health status; effects of segregation from local communities due to living in isolated 'centres' and no employment entitlement; communication and cultural integration difficulties; impact of exclusion and/or (racial) discrimination; apprehension of alien mental health system and treatment process; differing outcome expectations held by ASR and mental health specialists; and fear of being stigmatised by peers.

Methods: Rigorous review of relevant and applicable hardcopy and internet literature in English language since 2000.

Results: ASR mental health problems associated are generally multi-dimensional. In addition to 'normal' stresses, many ASR are haunted by past hardships, experience exclusion and integration difficulties and endure a highly stressful asylum process.

Conclusion: ASR require additional, specifically targeted mental health assistance and services that respect and understand their particular needs. Mental health services should work with the asylum process and other relevant socio-economic sectors to develop programmes to tackle potential ASR mental health concerns.