

Research Directions

Office of Research Services

Refugees Seeking Help

Dr Renu Narchal from the School of Psychology is exploring the relationship between attachment styles and help-seeking behaviour in refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia through collaborative research with the Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre Inc.



‘Help-seeking literature reveals that fewer than one third of distressed individuals seek professional help when in need, and help-seeking is often a last resort option attempted only after other informal channels have failed’, says Dr Narchal. ‘However, we know that seeking help provides protection against a variety of risk factors for physical and mental ill-health. Psychological distress is a significant issue for refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia and migrant resource centres dedicate a large proportion of their resources to helping their clients deal with these issues.’

Individuals differ in their desire and need to seek help. One variable that influences this is ‘attachment’. Our ability to attach to others is formed early in life and remains fairly constant over our life span. This research will explore what effect individual attachment styles have on a person’s ability to build trust, form and maintain relationships, and in turn, what effect these abilities have on help-seeking behaviour in times of emotional distress.

Dr Narchal will administer a series of reliable, valid and standardised psychological scales and questionnaires to African, Afghani and Iraqi adults in order to evaluate their levels of distress, trust and resilience, interpersonal skills and help-seeking intentions. Focus groups will also be formed to allow participants to express their concerns in regards to their immigration experiences, their help-seeking efforts, and perceived barriers to attempts to seek help.

The research is expected to facilitate a better understanding of relationship functioning and improved self-awareness within interpersonal relationships of refugees. It will assist in determining levels of psychological distress and identifying plausible barriers to help-seeking in refugees and humanitarian entrants. This research will also help in identifying possible gaps in service provision with the intent to provide more appropriate strategies.

Project Title: Attachment trust distress and help-seeking in refugees and humanitarian entrants

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