

INTRODUCTION

- Refugees as individuals who are unable to return to their country of origin due to fear of prosecution for reasons such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group [1].
- Pre-pandemic studies indicated that "one in five" refugees deal with mental health issues due to prior experiences relating to war, violence, and prosecution [2].
- Due to past experiences with violence and lifetime trauma, refugee communities are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OBJECTIVE

- The objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health of East African and Middle Eastern Refugees in San Diego.

METHODS

- A cross-sectional study was conducted between April and May 2022 among the East African & Middle Eastern refugees (n=120).
- In partnership with a local organization (Somali Family Service) surveys were shared via SimpleText messaging system as well as social media platforms (twitter, instagram) and the organizations website
- Measures: Study included questions based on demographics, refugee experience, and perceived impacts of the pandemic on everyday life.
- Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted

RESULTS

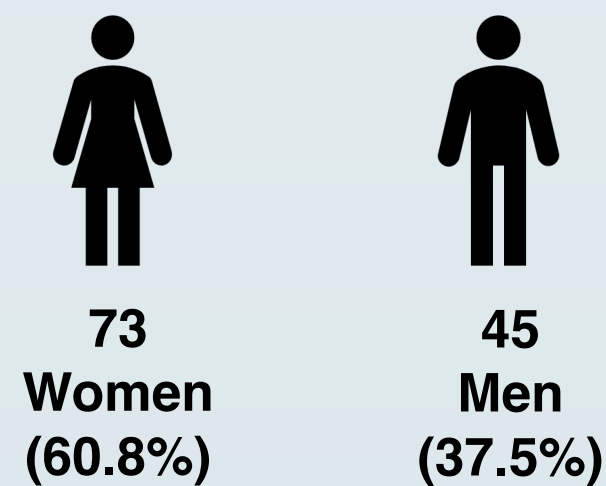
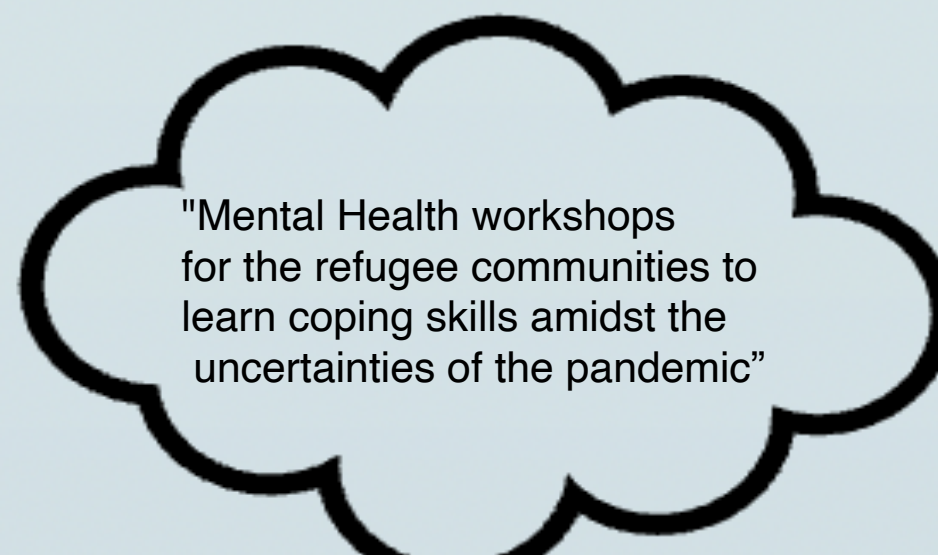


Table 1: Characteristics of Study participants

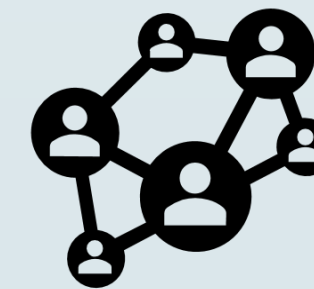
	% (N)
Age	
18-24	32.5 (39)
25-34	41.7 (50)
35-44	14.2 (17)
45-54	5.8 (7)
55-64	5.8 (7)
Refugee Community	
Somali	29.2 (35)
Swahili	22.5 (27)
Arab	24.2 (29)
Afghan	24.2 (29)
Refugee Experience (yrs)	
<1 Year	12.5 (15)
1-5 Years	40.0 (48)
6-10 Years	20.0 (24)
11-15 Years	17.5 (21)
16-20 Years	6.7 (8)
>20 Years	3.3 (4)



59.2% (n=71) strongly agreed and believed that the pandemic increased stress within refugee communities in San Diego



44.2% (53) strongly agreed and believed that because of the pandemic social connectivity among refugees decreased

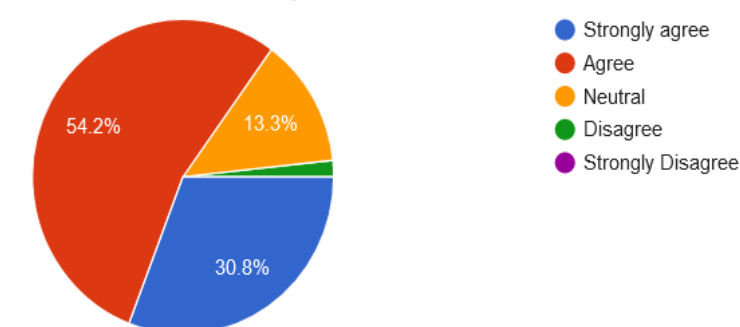


57.5% (69) agreed and believed that academic performance decreased among refugee as a result of the pandemic



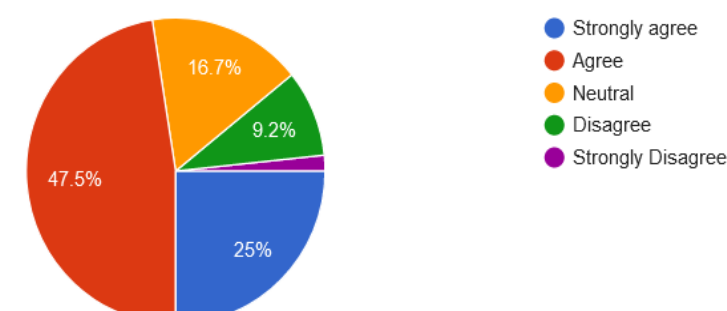
5. Do you believe that due to the COVID-19 pandemic refugees deal with suppressed/unhealthy emotions?

120 responses



7. Do you believe that the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for refugees to be optimistic about their future?

120 responses



CONCLUSIONS

- Participants perceived that mental health of refugees in San Diego declined during the pandemic
- Participants agree that more mental health services should be allocated to refugees
- Further research is required to measure the impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of refugees



POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Mental health services and resources allocated to refugees
- Community interventions for mental health education and awareness
- Support groups where refugees can share their prior experience

REFERENCES

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). Q&A: 'before the pandemic, Refugee Mental Health was severely overlooked. now it's a full-blown crisis'. UNHCR. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2020/10/5f7ec72a4/qa-pandemic-refugee-mental-health-severely-overlooked-its-full-blown-crisis.html>
2. Brickhill-Atkinson M, Hauck FR. Impact of COVID-19 on Resettled Refugees. Prim Care. 2021 Mar;48 (1): 57-66. Doi: 10.1016/j.jpoc.2020.10.001. Epub 2020 Oct 6.