

Nursing Care Conference 2020: Health and well-being of refugee population amidst the COVID-19 pandemic -Niranjalie Rajapaksa- University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

Niranjalie Rajapaksa

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic affects us all. Though the virus does not discriminate anyone, the measures implemented to contain the virus has been impacted on everyone differently and there is no one size - fits-all solution. Each person has the right to lead a normal life despite where they live and under which circumstances. We should stand united to care for the most vulnerable and in doing so, care for our world and ourselves.

Ever since the first humans appeared, there has been a natural movement of people. Over the past millennia, people have moved vast distances for all kinds of reasons from persecution to war, from earthquakes and floods to famine, or simply driven by curiosity about other people and locations. Even, at a time of fast, convenient and affordable global travel, it can still be extremely difficult for people to flee conflict, persecution, and hardship. No-one expects to become a refugee. Everyone expects tomorrow to be the same as today. But fear can come in moments. It can be the sound of gunfire, the fall of a bomb, a knock at the door. Many of the people forced to flee have just minutes to make vital decisions, to grab what they can and run. Those are desperate choices, made in moments, that they will have to live with for the rest of their lives.

Refugees are among the most affected sub-community in this crisis because of many reasons. Isolation due to lack of support on how to integrate in the new society, language barrier and hostile attitudes that do not get challenged by people in positions of authority, lack of work opportunities, substandard housing conditions, overcrowding, difficulties in accessing social services in the new country, single parents after the death of or separation from their spouse, having to take sole responsibility over their children, difficulties in transportation and mobility due to cost and lack of information, cultural barriers due to differences and lack of services to help explain the new context, limited access to health care, including mental health services, fear of violence, including sexual violence, poor sanitation, limited or no access to money, limited space for recreation and limited access to recreation

facilities are some of them.

It is more important that we should focus on more sustainable solutions. We hope there will always be hope for refugees to re-emerge as normal people and be able to settle in a safe place where they consider it as their own home. We must never give up this hope though travel restrictions are imposed during the pandemic, but collectively work towards helping them to save their lives during this COVID-19 pandemic.

While providing services for them as a part of our project work, I realized that I am already engaged in a fundamental battle. I understood what type of physical or emotional hardships refugees experienced during their flight to safety. Their responses kept me thinking. What if that was me? What if I was on that situation during this pandemic? What if that was my family? I knew I would want someone to do the same for me or my relative if I had to battle against a pandemic while facing with all the hardships in a new country. I am honored to work for them. I am grateful for their inspiration, resilience and the humanity they taught me. They showed me how much we have in common. We all want to live safe, healthy lives and know that our families are okay. We all want to be treated with dignity and respect. And we are all finding different strategies to cope with these strange and frightening times and discovering of hope.

This work is partly presented at 30th World Congress on Nursing and Nursing Care, October 21- 22, 2020.

Niranjalie Rajapaksa
University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka