

Trauma in refugee children

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High prevalence of symptoms of post-traumatic stress in children of refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds

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Child Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

- **Short (10 item) questionnaire**
- **Validated screen children for symptoms of PTSD**
- **Screened children ≥ 6 years**
- **HARK Clinic: April 2015-December 2016**

Numbers

- **365 children presented to HARK**
- **198 (54%) children eligible**
- **63 of 198 (32%) completed the CTQ**
- **31 (49%) males**
- **Median age 11 years (IQR 8–14)**

Results

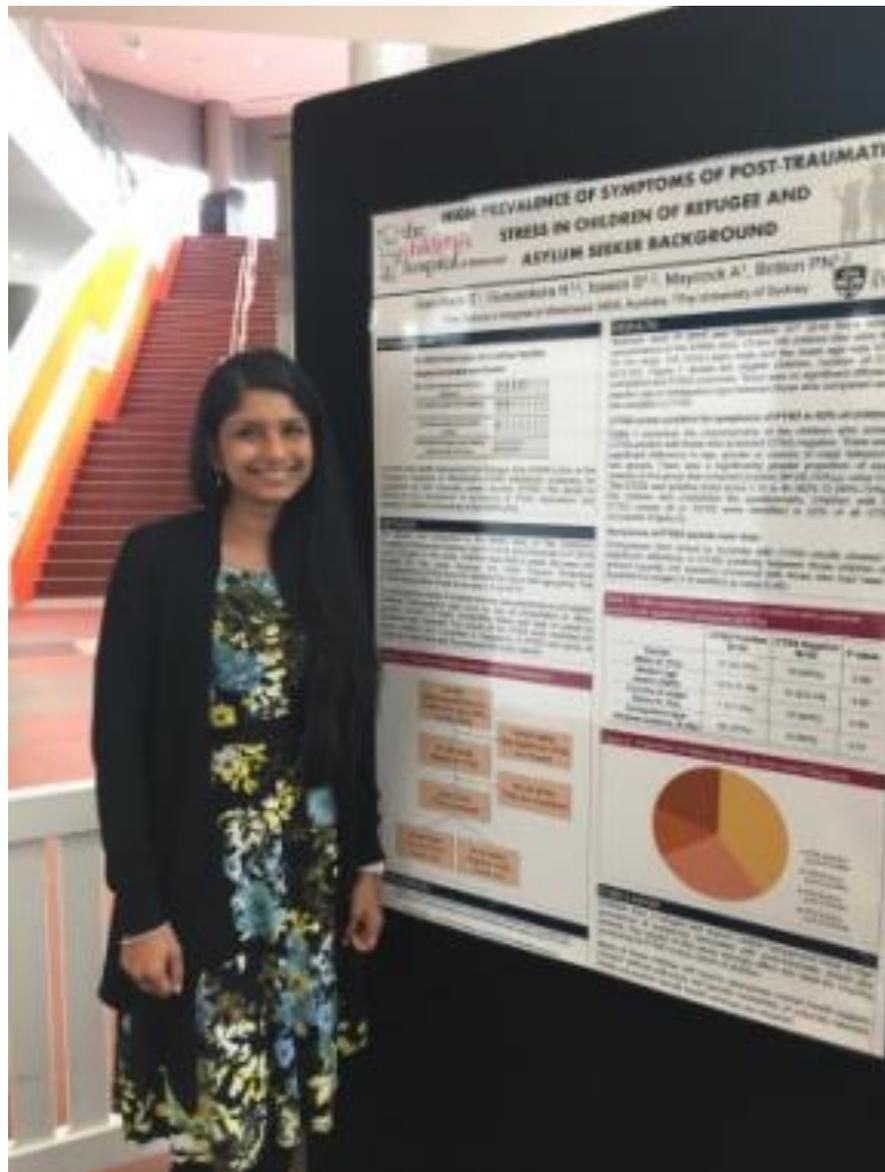
- **CTQ positive (score ≥ 5) in 40 (63%; 95% CI 50–75%)**

Limitations

- **Only a third completed the questionnaire**
- **Positive screen does not mean PTSD**

Implications

- **Need for screening**
- **Need for validation**
- **Need for psychological/psychiatric services**



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Pervasive refusal syndrome

- **Bryan Lask et al. Arch Dis Child 1991; 66: 866-9.**
- **4 girls, aged between 9 and 15**
- **profound and pervasive refusal to eat, drink, walk, talk or care for themselves over a period of several months**
- **potentially life-threatening**

Diagnostic criteria for pervasive refusal syndrome

- Clear food refusal and weight loss
- Social withdrawal and school refusal
- Partial or complete refusal in two or more of: mobilisation, speaking, attention to self-care
- Active and angry resistance to help or encouragement
- No organic condition
- No other psychiatric illness **[Nunn & Thompson 1996]**

Review of pervasive refusal syndrome

- **Mainly girls**
- **Mainly 8-15**
- **Refuse food and drink**
- **Refuse self-care**
- **Slow recovery (a year or more)** **[Lask 2004]**

Pervasive refusal syndrome and refugees

- **Described in refugee children in Europe**
- **Increasingly described in Nauru**

11 year old girl

- **5 years on Nauru**
- **Refusing food and drink for over a month**
- **Increasing withdrawal: not washing, bed-bound**
- **Transferred on court order with mother**
- **Father left behind**

On arrival

- **12 hour flight**
- **Brisbane: “no visa”**
- **Not eaten or drunk all day**
- **Thin, withdrawn**

Progress

- **Shared single room on adolescent ward**
- **Four guards outside room, often one inside**
- **“Duty of care”**
- **Nasogastric tube feeding**

Continued progress

- **Lawyers: Community detention**
- **Group sessions, school**
- **Gradual recovery, challenged other guards**
- **Two months: young couple from Nauru met her**

Nauru

- **Multiple children with pervasive refusal syndrome**
- **Mainly girls, some boys**
- **Lawyers acting, Government opposing**
- **Difficulty finding beds**

Conclusions

- **Much to be done**
- **Children off Nauru**
- **Massive support in hospital and community**