

Supporting Evidence for Implementation # 4:

“If I speak English, what am I? I am full man, me”: Emotional impact and barriers for refugees and asylum seekers learning English

APA Reference:

Salvo, T., & Williams, A. C. de C. (2017). “If I speak english, what am I? I am full man, me”: Emotional impact and barriers for refugees and asylum seekers learning english. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 54(5–6), 733–755.
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Level of Evidence:

Level IV: Empirical Study

Summary:

Upon arrival to the United States, refugees face a plethora of hardships. One of the toughest issues to overcome, is the language barrier. Being able to understand, read, write, or interpret anything in English is extremely overwhelming for so many people. The language barrier is something that many refugees identify as biggest obstacle to overcome in the United States. The goal of this study is to analyze the impact the language barrier has on people’s emotional well-being and what factors may help along or prevent them from learning English (Salvo & Williams, 2017, p. 733).

Open-ended, semi-structured were conducted following the collection of demographic background information of each participant. Interviews covered topics such as “the participants’ experience of learning English and their experience of speaking English,

including any changes over time; impact of language proficiency on well-being; concerns about learning the language; and family and community members' views and knowledge of English" (Salvo & Williams, 2017, p. 737). The primary intervention method included the attendance of a structured English class and also practicing at home. Results of the study concluded participants felt like their independence was affected, "a sense of accomplishment" when successful, and a want for further changes, (Salvo & Williams, 2017, p. 741). Specific barriers were also determined to be individuals' minds "not in peace to learn", not being presented with opportunities to converse in English, and a fear of being perceived as not smart for not knowing English, (Salvo & Williams, 2017, p. 742).

This study shed light into the lived experiences of how many feel upon seeking refuge in an English speaking country. While it is a very exciting thing and people know it is the best decision for themselves, once here, the hardships have the potential to take more of a toll on people than they originally anticipate. Providing psychological support within a supportive environment to those learning English may help reverse some adverse feelings so many experience (Salvo & Williams, 2017, p. 750).

The information this study presents is pertinent for us to know 1) what the women in our group are currently going through or went through upon arrival to the United States and 2) how we can best support those who are still learning English. The biggest part of this intervention was to support the use of English within the context of an occupation, cooking. The study suggested that providing a supportive learning environment could best help facilitate the learning process for individuals. Group leaders went in with this goal.

A supportive environment was created by pairing the learning process with a preferred activity, encouraging a language exchange (so group leaders could learn some Nepali as well), and by surrounding them with familiar and encouraging faces. All women seemed to enjoy themselves and their sense of accomplishment was evident upon the final “test” to determine which English words were retained. While we only taught words, and not full phrases or structured English, the words presented had meaning to them specifically (being related to cooking) and if they were ever at a store and ever needed items to make the MoMos, they could recall the English words and request help in the store.