|  |
| --- |
| **Title of Research Presentation** Social Support and Wellbeing among women from refugee backgrounds settling in Australia |
| **Background/Objectives**  Supporting people from refugee backgrounds to settle in Australia rests within a complex social and political context. Pre and post migration issues can be multiplied for women for whom gender based violence as well as continuing gendered inequalities in settlement pose deep seated personal challenges. Given these circumstances, social support for this community is an obvious area of importance. Yet there has been very little research regarding the value of social support for refugee women. This paper presents the results of a mixed method study which describes the relationships between social networks and mental health and post-migration living difficulties among a group of refugee women who settled in Australia between 2013 and 2015.  **Methods**  This project was carried out in partnership with a refugee settlement agency (ACCESS Community Services) who assisted in the recruitment of 104 women aged over 18 years in the early phase of settlement in Australia. Eighty-eight of the women settled under the Women-at-Risk visa (204) with the remaining 16 under the more general Humanitarian visa (200). Qualitative data is drawn from semi-structured interviews aided by graphical data drawn from sociograms. Quantitative data is derived from the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, Hopkins Symptom Checklist and the Post-migration Living Difficulties Checklist.  **Results**  The results demonstrate strong associations between social networks and both mental health outcomes and post-migration living difficulties. Anxiety, depression and trauma along with post-migration difficulties were significantly associated with social support. Social support from children at home as well as from family and friends across the globe were all found to be significant parts of the women’s social support universe.  **Discussion**  The findings demonstrate that social support is critical in assisting refugee women to deal with the impacts of forced migration. Social support has long been recognised as a foundation of health promotion, yet there is relatively little knowledge to drive this area of practice forward particularly in the area of refugee settlement. The study presented here provides some important pointers toward ways in which health promotion practice can better contribute to the needs of people from refugee backgrounds.  **Keywords**  Refugees, mental health, social networks, social support |