

Symposium | Asylum and Mental Disorders : [Symposium 65] Assessment and care for asylum seekers with severe mental health problems

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[Symposium 65] Assessment and care for asylum seekers with severe mental health problems

Moderator: Seline van den Ameele (Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, University Hospital Brugmann, Brussels Collaborative Antwerp Psychiatric Research Institute (CAPRI), Antwerp University, Antwerp)

[SY-65-01] The Voices Not Heard: Asylum seekers' explanatory models of mental illness as elicited by the Cultural Formulation Interview

*Seline van den Ameele^{1,2} (1. Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology, University Hospital Brugmann, Brussels (Belgium), 2. Collaborative Antwerp Psychiatric Research Institute (CAPRI), Antwerp University, Antwerp (Belgium))

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Despite the high prevalence of mental health problems among asylum seekers, they often face barriers to accessing mental healthcare. Lack of understanding of asylum seekers' explanatory models of mental illness appears to be an important barrier. A better understanding of these explanatory models is crucial for ensuring the inclusion of asylum seekers in healthcare services. The Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) might help to explore asylum seekers' explanatory models of mental illness. Based on the results of a research project conducted in Belgium (the ASCOMH-study), we discuss the explanatory models of asylum seekers' mental illness as elicited by the CFI. By a thematic analysis, three core themes characterising asylum seekers' explanatory models were identified: a burden of the past, a disempowering current reality, and a personal position and individual experience. The interplay among pre-, peri- and post-migration experiences, having a continuous impact on asylum seekers' mental health, was highlighted by the themes 'a burden of the past', and 'a disempowering current reality'. The theme 'a personal position and individual experience' involved a very diverse and individual idiom of distress. Participants described a suffering that exceeded their mental capacities, that affected their sense of self, and social relations. Our findings show how the CFI can help asylum seekers and clinical caregivers to improve the understanding of the suffering of asylum seekers in a personal and context-sensitive way. By eliciting the personal idioms of distress, interventions can emerge from asylum seekers' strengths and capacities within their current challenging context.