

# The Impact of Social Isolation on Refugee Youth

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Identify the impact of prolonged social isolation experienced by refugee youth (aged 16 to 24) during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Explore the coping mechanisms used by refugee youth to overcome the effects.
- Develop an evidence-informed resilience model for similar situations in the future.



## METHODOLOGY

This peer-engaged systematic literature review was conducted between March 2022-February 2023, following Cochrane Review principles and PRISMA structure. Eight databases including Medline (Ovid), Embase (Ovid), APA PsycINFO (Ovid), and CINAHL were consulted. The open access databases were also searched by snowball sampling approach from the bibliography of the searched articles.

## Social Isolation Impacts on **5 DIMENSIONS** of Refugee Youth's Health

**01**

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

Restrictions on outdoor activities limited mobility and physical activity. Some refugee youth developed issues with sleep, digestion, and dental health. Access to healthcare became a challenge.



**02**

### MENTAL HEALTH

The rate of depression, anxiety, and PTSD increased after experiencing loneliness, social isolation, and lockdowns. Pre-existing mental health conditions from past trauma worsened.



**03**

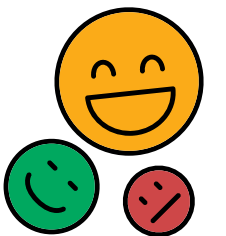
### SOCIAL HEALTH

Lockdown measures prevented refugee youth from connecting with their social network, and they felt more lonely. Refugee youth had fewer opportunities to learn about school, work, culture, and their new country.

**04**

### EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Feelings of worry, fear, and sadness arose due to social isolation and physical distancing. Refugee youth experienced a mix of family support and family conflict. Stress increased with financial hardship and food insecurity.



**05**

### SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Religion and spirituality helped some refugee youth cope with the pandemic. Prayer and spiritual practices were a source of hope and comfort.



## What Youth Did While In Social Isolation

- Reading
- Journaling
- Drawing
- Learning new skills
- Prayer
- Online chatting
- Staying with family
- Videogames
- Household chores

## Coping Mechanisms

### Personal Level

- Optimism and positive identity
- A sense of purpose and emotional well-being
- Finding outlets for emotions
- Building self-efficacy
- Trust and belief in self
- Adaptability
- Acceptance of uncertainties

### Family & Community Level

- Socializing and networking virtually
- Promoting a sense of belonging
- Supporting the community
- Finding support from family and friends
- Supportive environment from peers and the community

### System Level

- Promoting navigation and access to support and services
- Government policy support for refugee youths' settlement and education.

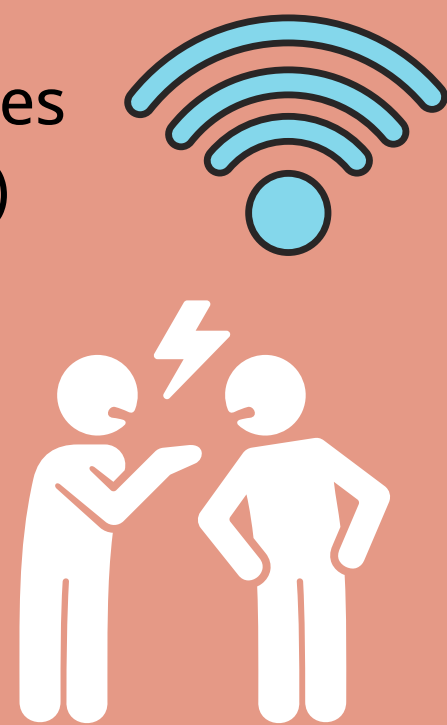


## Mediators and Barriers for Coping and Resiliency

### Barriers

#### Individual

- Access to internet and devices
- Self-criticism (guilt & shame)
- Social withdrawal
- Tobacco use
- Familial conflict
- Conflict among peers



#### Societal

- Social determinants of health
- Lack of social connection with others
- Avoidance or distrust of services

### Impacting Factors



Gender  
Disability  
Language  
Income



Discrimination

Social distancing/lockdown measures  
Access to Institutional support and services  
(Education, Health, Settlement, Financial)

## Recommendations for Developing Resiliency

### Personal Level

- Support safe in-person and online spaces for youth to connect with peers.
- Support refugee youth to grow their positive coping strategies, including optimism, acceptance of uncertainty, and a sense of purpose.
- Build self-efficacy against denial defensiveness.

### Family & Community Level

- Support at family and community levels to create opportunity to foster resiliency.
- Provide a personal space for creating opportunities for thriving them as selves.
- Support their capacity building for repressive defensiveness and optimistic motivation.

### System Level

- Coordinated health and settlement policy
- Timely and culturally sensitive social supports by government and non-governmental organizations.
- On-going peer-engaged research