



RACP Foundation Research Awards

FINAL REPORT

Project / Program Title	The medical and psychosocial health of adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia	
Name	Dr Kajal Subhash Hirani	
Award Received	2018 Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation Research Entry Scholarship	
Report Date	9 March 2019	
Chief Investigator / Supervisor		
Administering Institution	University of Western Australia	
Funding Period	Start Date:	15 February 2018
	Finish Date:	15 February 2019

PROJECT SUMMARY

International concern exists regarding the large number of people displaced worldwide by war and conflict. Approximately half of all refugees are aged less than 18 years. Knowledge regarding the health of adolescent refugees resettling in Australia is however lacking.

Adolescence is a time of health risk during which an individual may experiment with risky behaviours. Adolescents from refugee backgrounds may have also been exposed to traumatic events during their journey. Lack of healthcare access and poor living conditions further increase their risk of illness and they may continue to experience stressful events as they attempt to adapt a new lifestyle. Early identification and management of health issues and risks is important to treat and prevent these problems carrying on into adult life.

This is the first study in Australia to describe in detail the extent of the health problems, both physical and psychological, affecting adolescents arriving in Western Australia as refugees. Adolescent refugees aged 12 years and above, attending the Refugee Health Service at Princess Margaret Hospital over a 12-month period, were interviewed in depth about their health and associated behaviours. Additional health information was obtained from their medical notes.

There were 122 adolescents in this study who were all found to have experienced multiple traumatic stressors including death/separation of family members, immigration detention and prolonged stay in refugee camps. During the interviews, all adolescents were identified to have one or more health concerns related their home environment, education, eating behaviours, peer group activities, sexuality and mental health issues. These included financial problems, previous interrupted education, poor body image, lack of friends and social isolation, lack of reproductive health knowledge and sadness/worries. Adolescents also had a range of medical problems that included infections, chronic disease/disability, nutritional deficiencies and sexual health problems.

This study has helped highlight the complex health problems of adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia. Healthcare services and health professionals can use this knowledge to improve the health and wellbeing of this vulnerable population.

PROJECT AIMS / OBJECTIVES

This project constitutes a PhD that is being conducted by the award recipient, Dr Kajal Hirani. There are four parts to the PhD with the following aims:

Part 1

- Identify the burden of health risk behaviours among culturally diverse adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia (WA) using a standardised adolescent health questionnaire, and investigate the feasibility of this approach
- Describe the sociodemographic characteristics of this population.

Part 2

- Investigate the burden of medical health issues among adolescent refugees resettling in WA, utilising standardised medical assessments
- Identify socioeconomic health determinants within the families of the study group.

Part 3

- Identify emotional and behavioural attributes of adolescent refugees resettling in WA using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).
- Assess the impact of these attributes on the young person's life using the impact supplement of the SDQ.

Part 4

- Describe the practical, legal and ethical complexities associated with conducting research in adolescent refugees.
- Provide practical recommendations to address the above issues.

Adolescent refugees attending the Refugee Health Service (RHS) at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH) had been recruited for the research study and data collected previously from February 2015 to February 2016 for 122 participants. Part 1 of the PhD study had been completed and published in Archives of Disease in Childhood in 2016 (Hirani K, et al. Identification of health risk behaviours among adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia. Arch Dis Child. 2018; 103:240-246).

The following were completed in February 2018 – February 2019 during the time of the RACP award:

- Data entry for part 2 of the PhD was completed and statistical analysis performed. A manuscript describing the outcomes was written and has been published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood (Hirani K, et al. Medical needs of adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia. Arch Dis Child 2018;0:1–4. doi:10.1136/archdischild-2018-315105).
- Data entry for part 3 was completed and statistical analysis performed. A manuscript is currently being prepared describing the outcomes.
- Data entry relevant to part 4 of the study has been completed and statistical analysis performed. A manuscript regarding this topic has been prepared and submitted to the Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health for consideration for publication (currently under peer review).

- PhD thesis preparation (as a series of papers) was commenced and currently ongoing with a plan for completion by May 2019.

SIGNIFICANCE AND OUTCOMES

The majority of adolescent refugees resettling in WA are referred to the RHS. Through the recruitment of a large proportion (95%) of adolescents attending the RHS during the study period, adolescent-specific, comprehensive population data for refugees resettling in WA has been obtained.

As a result of the findings from this project, a large proportion of adolescent refugees resettling in WA were identified to have medical and psychosocial health concerns following comprehensive health assessment and provided with appropriate management. The research has also helped to identify and address gaps in resources for adolescents at the new Perth Children's Hospital. The study has already led to the improvement of clinical service delivery to adolescents attending the RHS by improving medical and psychosocial health screening to identify and manage health issues early during resettlement.

The publications describing the findings of study have provided recommendations for health professionals and health services to improve healthcare delivery to adolescent refugees resettling in high-income countries. The outcomes of the research can provide direction to conduct further targeted research in identified areas of need and begin to guide national policy development in this field. Presentation of the research at international conferences has enabled further dissemination of the results of the study to international experts in the field.

The outcomes from this study provide further evidence to support the RACP's strong stance for the need to improve healthcare in youth populations as well as refugees/asylum-seekers.

PUBLICATIONS / PRESENTATIONS

The research was selected for the following oral presentations at international conferences by Dr Kajal Hirani:

- Society of Adolescent Health and Medicine Annual Meeting 2018, Seattle, USA (March 2018)
 - Hot topic: Understanding and Improving the Health Status of Adolescent Refugees Resettling in High Income Countries
- The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, East African Research in Progress Meeting, Moshi, Tanzania (September 2018)
 - Health profiles of resettling adolescent refugees of African origin

The RACP Foundation and Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation were acknowledged during these presentations for the support provided for the research through award of the scholarship.

Outcomes from part 2 of the research have been published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood:

- Hirani K, et al. Medical needs of adolescent refugees resettling in Western Australia. Arch Dis Child 2018;0:1–4.doi:10.1136/archdischild-2018-315105.

A second manuscript entitled "Complexities of conducting research on adolescent refugees resettling in Australia" has been submitted for publication to the Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health and is currently under peer review.