

*The impact of forced migration on
the family: the case of urban
refugees*

By Karanja Wanyoro

GTZ- Urban Refugees Assistance
Program

Background

- According to UNHCR, Kenya was already hosting 380,968 refugees and asylum seekers by end of October 2009 (45,210) of these live in the urban setting).
- Kenya continues to host the largest number of refugees in Africa. Those who make it to cross our borders represent just a proportion that is able to negotiate their way through the harsh conditions in their countries as well as dangerous transit to this country.
- Most of the asylum seekers are not able to flee as a family, war often erupts unannounced and some family members lose their lives or are maimed leaving surviving members with multiple traumas.

BM CASE

- BM arrived in Kenya at age 13 from DRC. She clearly remembers how her parents were killed by rebels. On the fateful morning, the assailants came to their house announced, gang raped her mother as her dad and siblings watched. They then went ahead to cut her mother in pieces as they tied her father who they also butchered with machetes.

BM CASE

- Seeing that the assailants meant evil, she ran from the house and hid near a live fence and luckily the assailants did not notice her as they vanished from the homestead.
- Full of confusion she wondered what to do next since the entire neighborhood was gravely insecure. Choosing to leave her siblings and walk from the village, a truck driver stopped to assist and she gladly accepted to be moved over to Kenya.

BM CASE

- Her only challenge: she had to pay for transport using her body and on the way she had several sexual contacts with the driver and his loader.
- On arrival she reports at the UNHCR office and receives both medical and psychological assistance from GTZ. Her pregnancy test turns positive. Early interventions assists her in preventing development of severe PTSD.

BM CASE

- To date tracing of her siblings has not yielded positive results and she lives in the distress of not knowing whether they were murdered in the incidence or they are still alive.

The picture

- BMs case is just one of those cases often referred by UNHCR office which shows the agony refugees go through as they seek asylum.
- Often refugees are faced with compounded challenges which affect individuals and families.

Methods/Descriptions:

- 90 clients referred for counseling were offered therapy at individual and group level for a period between 2- 4 months depending on the issues presented. Initial screening of the clients was done by UNCHR then they were referred to GTZ for in-depth assessment and interventions by counselors and social workers.

Methods/Descriptions:

- The content emanating from these sessions was documented and analyzed. Clients engaged in group settings had their presenting issues analyzed first to ascertain that therapy focused on common themes. Therapy groups were mainly for victims of torture, survivors of gender based violence (GBV) and People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

Methods/Descriptions:

- Due to the complexities presented by the clients, assistance ranged from counseling support, transport assistance, financial assistance and food assistance. Some were referred to other agencies for further support in other areas like family tracing.

Results/Findings:

- *Over 70% of the victims of torture did not know the whereabouts of their family members. As such, they lived with anxiety of wondering if their siblings, spouses or parents were alive. Most of the clients were separated with their family members during flight and either met them much later in the country of asylum or have not yet met them.*

Results/Findings:

- *Over 80% of survivors of GBV claimed that they were violated against by people within their families, their spouse in most of the cases. When GBV was perpetrated by a stranger, most of the clients were not able to disclose to their family members for fear of stigma and discrimination.*

Results/Findings:

- ▶ *A significant number of the clients living with HIV attributed their problems to their family members either suspecting that they were infected by their spouses or have been discriminated against by their significant others.*
- ▶ *3 of the clients were forced to hide further from their abusive spouses in the country of asylum. Such were forced to look for protection from their husbands even after being granted asylum.*

Results/Findings:

- *A collective feeling with these clients whatever brought them to therapy was that their families contributed majorly to their state. A deeper feeling was that their family members should endeavor to help them cope with their circumstances much as they received support from agencies.*

Results/Findings:

Challenges resulting from forced migration include:

- Separation of family members
- Loss of family members
- GBV
- Incapacitation in cases of torture or displacement at large
- Loss of livelihoods

Outcomes/Conclusions:

- Forced migration presents a heavy challenge to the family as the family struggles to remain as a unit during asylum seeking. Family cohesion in situations of forced migration is threatened by conflict within and outside the family.
- Focused interventions involving relevant players yield fruits in handling family issues.

Recommendations

- Interventions that promote family reunification and family cohesion needs to be strengthened while dealing with displaced populations.
- *Concerted efforts by agencies to assist displaced populations will come in handy in addressing their increasing demand for holistic psychosocial support.*

THANK YOU