

Iraqi refugees at high risk of brain and nervous system disorders

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New research suggests that a high number of Iraqi refugees are affected by brain and nervous system disorders, including those who are victims of torture and the disabled. The late-breaking research will be presented at the 63rd Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Neurology, April 9 – 16, 2011, in Honolulu.

The United Nations estimates that there are several thousand Iraqi [refugees](#) living in the United States and the number is rising yearly.

"There are an estimated 40 million displaced refugees worldwide and the number of Iraqi refugees continues to grow due to conflicts in the Middle East," said Farrah Mateen, MD, with the Departments of Neurology and International Health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and a member of the American Academy of Neurology. "Our study presents the first results of a large national pilot project by the United Nations to monitor neurological disease in displaced people."

In Jordan in 2010, the United Nations (UN) reported that there were 36,953 registered Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers with 7,621 of those receiving health assistance.

For the study, researchers used a UN database in Jordan. A total of 1,295 refugees were reported to have a brain or [nervous system](#) disorder, or four percent of all registered Iraqi refugees. Of those, 10 percent were disabled.

The study found that five percent of refugees with brain or [nervous system disorders](#) reported a history of torture compared to 3.1 percent of those without a diagnosed brain or nervous system disorder. The most common diagnoses were epilepsy (30 percent), back pain (27 percent) and headache (nearly 12 percent).

Neurologists were involved in 14 percent, or 179, of these cases and health education was available to about 11 percent of refugees with [brain disorders](#).

"Our study highlights the great need for neurological health services, health education regarding neurological disorders and long-term disease management for refugees from war-torn countries," said Mateen.

Provided by American Academy of Neurology

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