

Afghan children seeking asylum in the UK: PTSD symptoms minimized for those children placed in foster care

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study indicates that about one-third of asylum-seeking Afghan children who arrive in the UK without their parents or a guardian are likely to be experience symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. However, they also found those in foster care were less likely to be suffering from PTSD than those in shared accommodation with other asylum-seekers and refugees.

The research by Oxford University looked at boys or young men aged between 13 and 18 years old. The study suggests that of this group, teenagers in foster care were less likely to be suffering from post-traumatic stress and this could be because those in foster care received more support.

Published in the [Journal of Traumatic Stress](#), this is the largest study to examine the prevalence of probable PTSD amongst unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK, and is the first ever to examine this among Afghan unaccompanied asylum-seekers. This is despite the fact that Afghans are the largest group of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK. Although around half of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the UK are from Afghanistan, there is very limited evidence on the state of their mental health, notes the study.

The study finds that the proportion of Afghans in this group likely to be suffering from post traumatic stress (34 per cent) is roughly in line with other studies of unaccompanied child asylum-seekers, but is notably higher than rates in the general population.

Researcher Professor Paul Montgomery, from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention at the University of Oxford, said: 'Although Afghan children are the biggest group of unaccompanied asylum-seekers in the UK, this is the first and largest robust study to look at how their mental health is affected by what they have been through.'

'Perhaps one of the most significant findings of this study is the mediating influence that foster carers have in this.'

'In examining the [mental health](#) of this vulnerable group of teenagers, we found that those in foster care did best. We believe this is because they received a higher level of support than those in shared accommodation.'

'We hope that these findings can inform future intervention policies concerning unaccompanied asylum-seekers.'

The study also points out that six out of every ten (62%) of the Afghan children did not report symptoms relating to [PTSD](#) and most of the children stayed in a relatively good mental state, suggesting a high level

of resilience. They suggest that more research needs to be done into the resilience perspective to increase our understanding of the protective mechanisms at work for this at-risk population.

Researcher Dr Israel Bronstein, from the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, said: 'The resilience shown by most of the children is quite a surprising finding. Considering everything they have gone through: from the tumultuous experiences of war to the dangers of getting from Afghanistan to the UK.

'Once they are here, they have then to cope with financial worries, learn a new language, and they are living in a country very different to their own. And all this is done without the support of their parents. Yet despite these hugely stressful and often traumatic events, these results suggest that most of the children probably don't suffer from post-traumatic stress. The resilience aspect to this is certainly something that warrants further research in future studies concerning asylum-seekers and refugees.'

The researchers worked closely with the UK Border Agency and a local authority to gain access to the Afghan unaccompanied child asylum-seekers. The study's findings are based on self-reporting from 222 [Afghans](#), who completed validated questionnaires. Interpreters in Pashtun and Dari languages were present throughout the process. Out of the group studied, 62 per cent were in [foster care](#) and 37 per cent were in shared living arrangements which included a very small number in emergency accommodation awaiting placements.

More information: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jts.21740/abstract

Provided by Oxford University

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