

Traumatised refugees in desperate need of psychiatric support, says report

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Refugees from countries including Syria and Iraq are suffering serious psychiatric problems according to a new report by Flinders University's Professor Julio Licinio.

Almost half of the current flood of refugees arriving in Germany could be suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), according to a paper co-authored by Flinders University's Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry Julio Licinio.

Professor Licinio, who is a Deputy Director of the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), and Head of its Mind and Brain Theme, was one of six researchers who analysed information gained from a Red Cross camp housing 1,700 [refugees](#) in Dresden.

He and his co-authors wrote that unaccompanied children and youths under 18 years of age arriving in Germany, who comprise around 6% of total refugees, were among the individuals most in need of protection and psychiatric attention.

"Certain traumatic life events have been experienced specifically by children, for example, separation from parents, forced recruitment as child soldiers or having been victims of child trafficking," the paper says.

"Psychiatric care of refugees has posed challenges right from the beginning, particularly the lack of interpreters and of language specific psychometric measuring instruments, as well as unsuitable premises for collecting psychiatric clinical data.

"Furthermore, the general living conditions of the refugees are not acceptable by any medical standards: inappropriate nutrition, lack of temperature regulation (heating/cooling) in the accommodations and deficient hygiene."

The report goes on to say that psychiatric problems are being exacerbated by "hostile and ostracizing utterances from local inhabitants gathering in front of the camps".

It found that more than 10 per cent of refugees could also be suffering permanent changes to their personalities because of their experiences in war torn areas including Syria, Iraq and Eritrea.

"Chronic, unremitting stress can be a source of multiple medical and mental disorders. Refugees are subjected to some of life's most stressful situations both at home and in host countries, and that results in a substantial burden of disease," says Professor Licinio.

"As the refugee crisis snowballs, we need to develop novel and more effective strategies to improve physical and mental health, which is often overlooked, in refugee populations, particularly the young."

More information: E Ullmann et al. Emotional and psychological trauma in refugees arriving in Germany in 2015, *Molecular Psychiatry* (2015). [DOI: 10.1038/mp.2015.164](https://doi.org/10.1038/mp.2015.164)

Provided by Flinders University

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