School-based Trauma Systems Therapy for Somali Adolescent Refugees
Partnerships

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Local data: Somali youth mental health needs
Trauma Exposure

• Youth reported having experienced on average 7 traumatic events (range 0-22)

• Trauma took place both prior and post migration
• Nearly 2/3 of youth reported significant PTSD symptoms, and 1/3 screened positive for Full PTSD
Service utilization

Of those with full PTSD, how many sought formal mental health services?

- 6% Sought Mental Health Services
- 94% No services
Bilingual / Bicultural services

There are NO bilingual/bicultural Somali therapists in Massachusetts
Project Plan

*a model for building mental-health service capacity and service use within refugee and immigrant communities*
Our Vision

• All children have access to mental health services that:
  – are offered in an easily-accessible, destigmatized setting
  – are culturally and linguistically appropriate
  – build on the strengths of one’s culture and community

• Families and teachers have the information they need to support youth getting the help they need
Barriers to Care

- Stigma of Mental Illness
- Parents and Teachers are not identifying youth in need of services
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate mental-health services are not available
Stigma

• Interviewer: What do you think it would mean, like say example, if you . . . decided to go and talk to a psychologist. What do you think your friends would think?

• Adolescent: They’d probably think like I am crazy and stuff. And they would look at me different than they used to look at me… They would treat me different than they used to, ‘cause I am different.
Strategy 1: Addressing Stigma

• Provide services at the Lilla G Frederick School
  – Destigmatized setting
  – Proven to be a place that parents and children turn for help
Strategy 1: Addressing Stigma

• Conduct Anti-stigma parent-meetings
  – Community gatherings and verbal communication most effective
Identification of youth in need of services

Interviewer: What do you think [people] would say if someone...was going to see a psychiatrist?

Adolescent: I’ve never experienced somebody crazy, I don’t know. [If people have a problem] they keep it inside. They just keep it inside. They keep it inside like that all the time.

I: So how would you know if someone had a problem

A: You would never know.
Strategy 2: Enhancing capacity of parents and teachers to identify students in need

- Provide parents information on mental health through anti-stigma meetings
Strategy 2: Enhancing capacity of parents and teachers to identify students in need

- Provide teacher in-service trainings on:
  - Somali culture and recent history
  - Trauma and trauma-related symptoms
  - Cultural perceptions of education and mental health
Strategy 3: Implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services

• Trauma Systems Therapy
  – Model of intervention directly addressing social environment and its interface with traumatic stress symptoms
  – Includes integration of service systems

• Key adaptations for Somali refugees
  – Incorporating strengths and perspectives of religion
  – Additional support services for stressors strongly associated with PTSD (acculturation and resettlement)
Strategy 3: Implementing culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services

- Build Somali community capacity to deliver bilingual/bicultural mental health services
  - BU School of Social Work supports training of 2 Somali individuals as clinical social workers
  - Clinical internships at the Lilla G. Frederick provide students with specialized training in trauma treatment
Community, youth and family involvement

- Project built out of quantitative and qualitative data from interviews with parents and adolescents
- Advising board including parents to continue monitoring and overseeing implementation
- Evaluation of program will include parent and child interviews with data feeding back into and informing intervention
- Plan for sustainability involves long-term change in capacity for trauma-informed services delivered to community by members of the community