

# Refugee Children: The smallest victims of Torture and Trauma

Presented by Kristen Orakwue, LMFT-S  
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Dallas, Texas

# Welcome

## Center for Survivors of Torture Dallas, Texas

Healing international survivors of torture and trauma through counseling and related services.

Founded 1997, CST is the only accredited torture treatment center in Texas and the surrounding states.

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# Refugee Resettlement

## Fort Worth, Texas



- Resettlement
- 10/01/2013- 07/31/2014
  - Dallas county =1814 refugees  
(2<sup>nd</sup> highest)
- Texas = 9,119
  - Refugees in the U.S. as of  
August 15, 2014 = 61, 293

# What are Refugees and Asylum Seekers?

Both face persecution and flee from their home country.

## Refugees

- Establish legal immigration status outside of the United States.
- Receives immediate assistance from resettlement agencies and government.

## Asylum Seekers

- Establish legal immigration status within the United States.
- Receives immediate assistance from lawyers and community.

# Activity

## ‘One Minute’

For weeks you have been listening to adults talk in whispers about the invasions from the north. You have wondered what the big deal is; school, your friends and work are still the same. Well maybe there have been a couple more fights behind the 7-11, and more shots fired at night, but nothing too big.

You lie in bed, wondering if you did your math homework correctly and trying to fall asleep.

Suddenly your older brother bursts into your room and says, “Get your stuff, we have to run!”

You are confused. “Where are we running? What do I take? Can’t we wait till morning?” are thoughts that run through your head.

“Hurry, they are coming, we must run,” your brother yells again.



# What is Torture?

According to the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT):

“For the purposes of this Convention the term ‘torture’ means any act by which **severe pain or suffering**, whether **physical** or **mental**, is **intentionally** inflicted on a person for such purposes as **obtaining** from him or a third person **information** or a **confession**, **punishing** him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed or **intimidating** or **coercing** him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a **public official** or other person acting in an **official capacity**. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

# Common Torture Techniques

- Beating
- Wounding/Maiming
- Burning
- Rape and Sexual Torture
- Asphyxiation
- Forced Postures
- Deprivation
- Sensory Stress
- Threats
- Witnessing Torture of Others
- Pharmacological
- Dental
- Electrical
- Severe Humiliation
- Kidnapping and Disappearances

# What is Trauma?

- An experience that threatens life or physical integrity and that overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope.
- Evokes feelings of fear and helplessness.
- Reactions determined by subjective experience.
- Impacted by developmental and cultural factors.



# When and Why?

## When?

- During War
- During Political Conflicts
- During Ethnic Conflicts
- During Religious Conflicts

## Why?

- To Gain Information
- To Punish
- To Terrorize and Control Society
- Discrimination

# Where and Who?

## Where?

- Home
- Community/Neighborhood
- Schools/Educational Settings
- State Care and Justice Institutions
- Work

## Who?

- Politicians
- Lawyers
- Human Rights Activists
- Teachers
- Doctors
- Business Owners
- Mothers
- Fathers
- Children
- Anyone!

# Refugee Resettlement

## Refugee Camps

- Limited food and water
- Diseases are common
- Dangerous; violence
- School is not guaranteed
- Reliance on aid
- Crowded
- Confined
- Isolated
- Sense of community
- Access to aid
- Awareness projects to increase resources



Kitumba refugee camp near Mpanda, Tanzania

# Common Myths

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Pay Taxes.**

**FACT:** Refugees are subject to the same employment, property, sales, and other taxes as any U.S. citizen. Refugees cannot vote, however.

- **MYTH: Refugees Take Jobs From U.S. Workers.**

**FACT:** Recent evidence by the U.S. Labor Department says "NO" to this myth. Refugees and immigrants also create jobs for U.S. workers because they have a high propensity to start new businesses.

- **MYTH: Refugees come to the U.S. for Economic Reasons.**

**FACT:** Refugees are individuals or families who have come to the U.S. because they were forced to flee their homeland.

- **MYTH: The United States Is The Only Country To Accept Refugees.**

**FACT:** There are 24 countries worldwide involved in refugee resettlement. The major resettlement countries include: Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- **MYTH: Refugees Do Not Contribute or Participate In Society.**

**FACT:** Refugees contribute a great deal to this country through the sharing of their talents, skills, cultures and customs. History indicates that some of our most significant contributors to the U.S. have been refugees and immigrants. And, as noted previously, refugees do pay taxes.

- **MYTH: Refugees Represent a Health Hazard to the American Public.**

**FACT:** There are refugees who have health problems which are a result of the lack of medical care that existed in their country of origin or due to problems they encountered during their flight from persecution. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) closely monitors all admissions and prevents the admission of certain persons with health conditions identified as hazardous to the public.

# Children



# What do children experience?

- Boys- Child Soldiers
- Girls- Sexual Trauma
- Witnessing torture
- Witnessing armed street conflict
- Extreme poverty
- Abandonment
- Child labor

# Case Example

# Effects of Torture on Children

- Posttraumatic Stress Reactions
- Physiological symptoms
- Increased isolation
- Risk
- Fear
- Resilience



# Effects of Torture on Children

## Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

- Sleep Difficulties
  - Lack of restful sleep/ Sleep Disorder
  - Recurrent Nightmares
- Depression/Anxiety Symptoms
  - Apathy and loss of faith in adults
  - Neglect of daily routines/ Avoidance or withdrawal
  - Aggressiveness
  - Fear and anxiety of their environment
  - Problems dealing with strangers
  - Intrusive thoughts or memories
  - Interruption of normal child development and the acquisition of self-capacity

# Effects of Torture on Children

## Physiological Symptoms

- Headaches
- Stomachaches
- Overreaction to injuries

# Struggles for Children

- Academic difficulties
- Behavioral problems
- Relational difficulties
- Acculturation conflicts
- Legal Process

# Struggles for Children

## Academic

- Change in performance
  - Decrease
  - Increase
- Poor retention
- Incomplete homework

# Struggles for Children

## Behavioral

- Withdrawn and Quiet
- Disruptive and Irritable
- Decreased Attention/Concentration
- Anger or Aggression
- Change in interpreting social cues

# Struggles for Children

## Behavioral continued

- Regression
  - Clingy
  - Less independent in work
  - Absenteeism
  - Wetting Pants
  - Baby-talk
  - New Fears

# Struggles for Children

## Relational

- Familial Effects
  - Mental Health of family
  - Living arrangements
  - Inappropriate responsibilities
- Difficulty with Authority
- Friendship Skills
- Identity confusion
- Peer relationships

# Struggles for Children Acculturation

- Language
- Community Environment
- School Environment
- Religion
- Vulnerability of Family

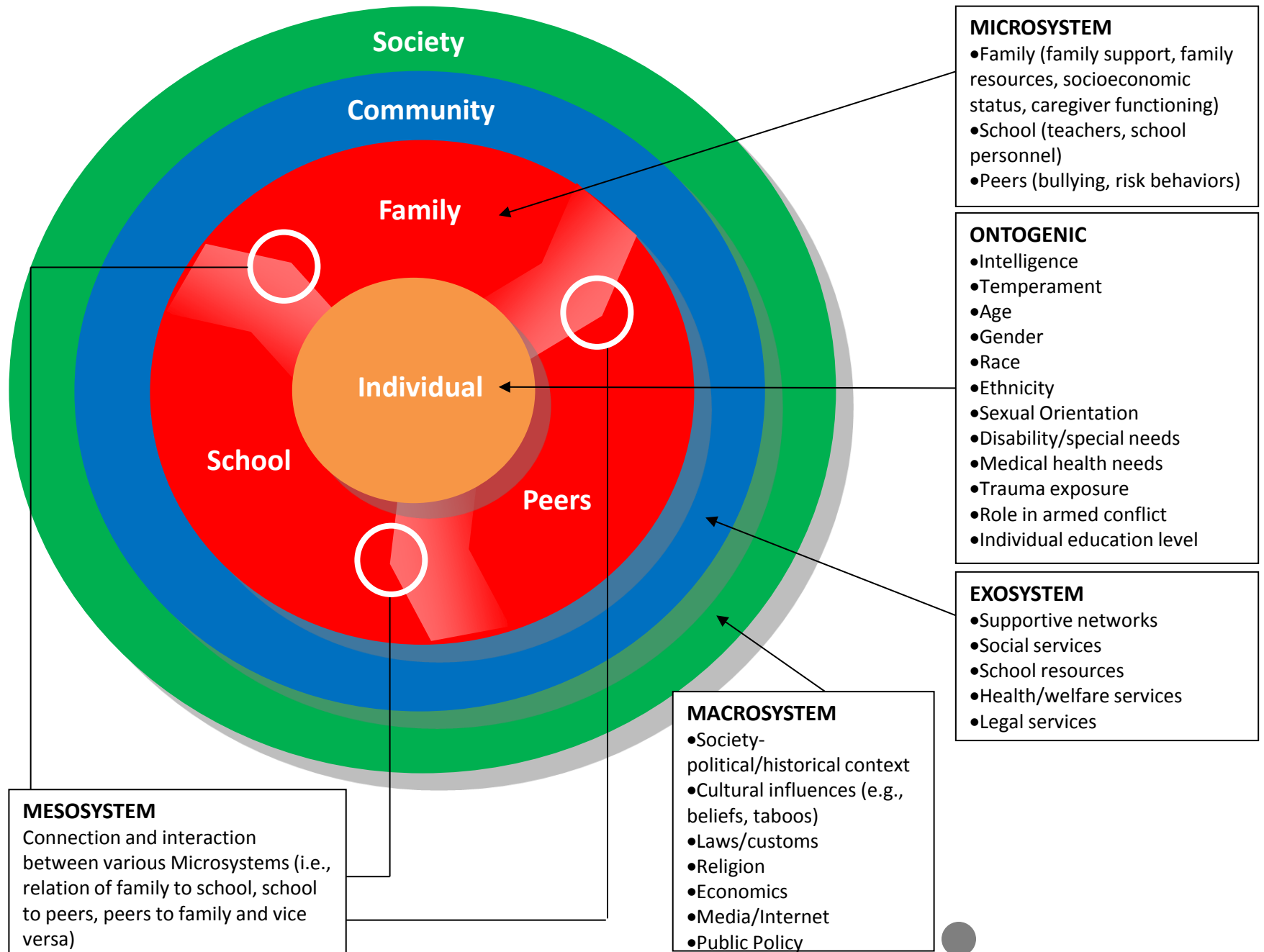


# Struggles for Children

## Legal Process

- Courtroom
- Judge
- Lawyers
- Questioning

So, what can we do about all of  
this?



# What can teachers do?

- Ensure a safe and stable environment
- Create opportunities for awareness
- Student- Centered
  - Open communication
  - Honesty
  - Pro-Social
  - Avoid Labeling
- Involve Parents

# Classroom Management

- Loss Reminders
- Recess
- Expected Behavior
- Involve Counselors and Support Staff
- Seek Community Resources

# Teacher Self Care

## Secondary Trauma

- Why?
- Utilize colleagues
- Attend to Family
- Focus of Self

# Additional Resources

- Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Home Page
- ORR Resource Page
- Refugee Council Refugee Week Teacher's Tool Kit
- United Nations Teacher's Tab
  - (Against All Odds)
- UN Global Review on Refugee Education
- Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS) Toolkit
- BRYCS School Page

# Questions?





# Discussion

What can you do to create awareness in your classroom?



# Contact



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