



**STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES
IN SERVING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE
POPULATIONS WITH SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES**

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Overview

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Definitions
- Risk Factors associated with substance use in immigrants and refugees
- Barriers and challenges to seeking and/or engaging in treatment
- Strategies/Interventions to increase health outcomes when treating immigrant and refugee clients.

Introduction

“Every day, all over the world, people make one of the most difficult decisions in their lives: to leave their homes in search of a safer, better life” (*Who is a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker?* 2024).

Leaving their homes marks the beginning of a very long, difficult, scary, and traumatic journey, where they surmount lots of obstacles, experience setbacks, discouragements and many other hardships. In addition to all this, they don't know what is to be expected on the other side, and for some people it is if they even make it to the other side. It is a journey that leaves people with deep cuts, wounds and scars. Even though people are longing for a better, safer life, some of the traumatic experiences they encounter on the way may trigger the onset of substance use and/or mental health issues or may aggravate already existing conditions, therefore making it very hard to achieve or sustain the better life they have been pursuing.

As immigration keeps growing on a very fast pace across the whole US, I am sure that many of us, if not all of us have worked with immigrant and/or refugee clients before. And I wonder what are some of the challenges you may have experienced when working with these populations. This webinar is intended to help us Addiction and Mental Health Professionals learn risk factors associated with substance use in these clients and hopefully identify strategies to help increase healthy outcomes out of treatment

Objectives

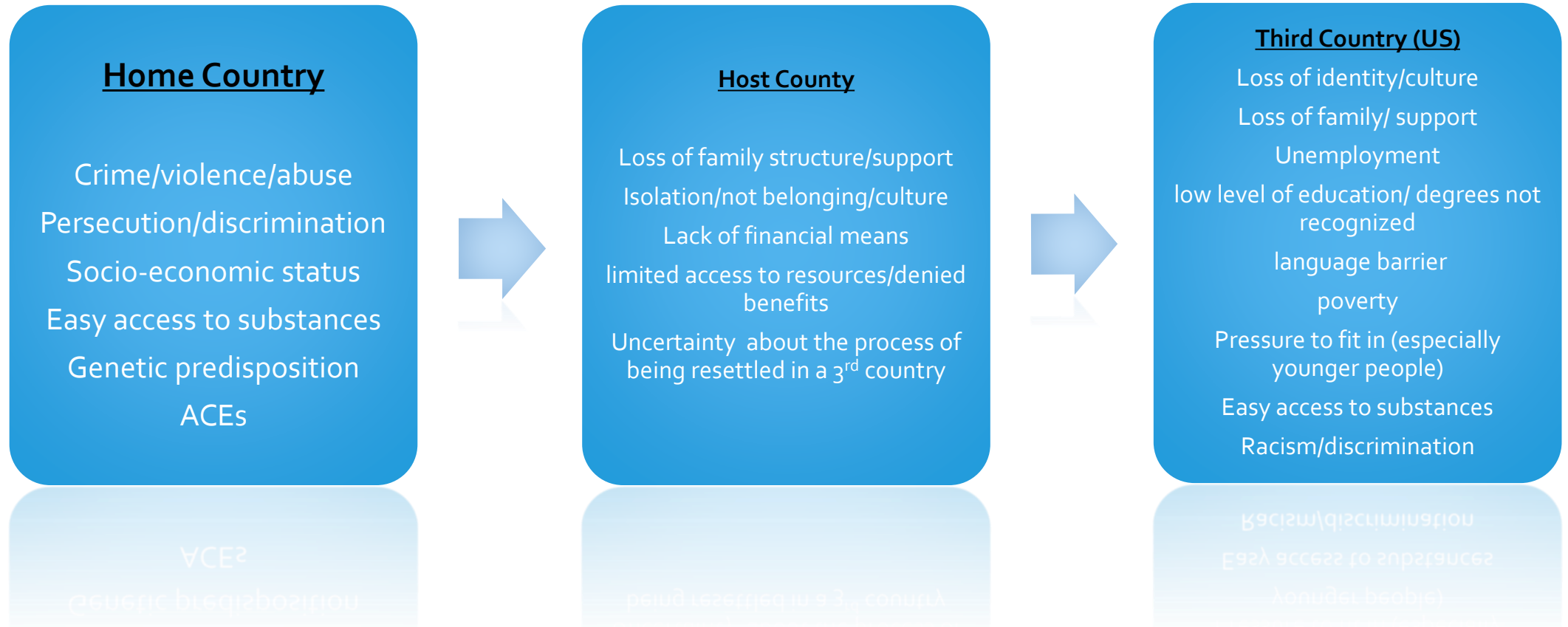
At the end of the Webinar, participants will be able to:

- Gain a better understanding of cultural and social risk factors influencing substance abuse in Immigrant and Refugee populations
- Learn about specific barriers and challenges to seeking and/or engaging in treatment for substance use in the refugee and immigration populations
- Identify strategies to adapt therapeutic interventions to cater to those specific cultural and social challenges/barriers faced by immigrant and refugee populations seeking treatment for substance use.

Definitions

- **A refugee** is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection. (*Who is a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker?* 2024).
- **An asylum seeker** is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum. (*Who is a refugee, a migrant or an asylum seeker?* 2024).
- **An immigrant** is someone who makes a conscious decision to leave his or her home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there. (*Migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants: What's the difference?*).
- <https://youtu.be/hiujzFNgHcE?si=NWQ5TGGS71KfyKt8>

Risks factors associated with substance abuse



Barriers and challenges to seeking and/or engaging in treatment

- Failure to recognize signs and symptoms of substance abuse
- Difficulties to understand/link negative outcomes with substance abuse
- Co-occurring disorders
- Shame/Fear of facing stigma
- Lack of culturally appropriate treatment settings and accommodations
- Limited trained providers from various immigrant and refugee backgrounds
- Social determinants of health/Health disparities
- Fear of legal consequences (e.g. CPS)

Strategies/Interventions to increase health outcomes in treatment

- Provide safety, validate and empower
- Identify and emphasize on protective factors, Individual strengths
- Identify individual specific needs
- Community-based outreach/Faith-based connections
- Family connections and dynamics
- Focus on identifying the problems the family wishes to address

Strategies/Interventions to increase health outcomes in treatment (Cont.)

- Acknowledge and respect cultural values and beliefs
- Establish a trusting therapeutic relationship
- Increase culturally appropriate treatment settings and accommodations
- Convey information in an understandable language/terms
- Provide interpreting services and translated materials as needed.
- Remove barriers to equitable and inclusive access to resources

Strategies/Interventions to increase health outcomes in treatment

- When working with immigrants and refugees, it is important to focus on models that are inclusive of the family and systemic values (i.e., multiple causal factors, multidirectionality) because familial relationships promote protective factors for immigrants (Kim, Zane, & Hong, 2002).
- Immigrant and refugee peoples may be in need of special consideration for potential differences in family structure and dynamics, religious considerations, language challenges, collectivism/individualism, hierarchy, gender roles, acculturation, and ethnic identity exploration (Rastogi & Wadhwa, 2006).

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THANK YOU!