

Effects of War on Refugee and Non-Refugee Children from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Aim. Preliminary assessment of the impact and the psychological effects of war on optimism of displaced and non-displaced children affected by war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Methods. In 1994, refugee and non-refugee children were randomly selected by NGOs to attend a summer camp on the island of Kor-ula in the Adriatic Sea. A total of 56 children were examined over a six-week period. There were 31 boys and 25 girls, (mean age 10.43 ± 1.16 years). Children were asked to complete the Impact of Events Scale (IES) and Life Orientation Test (LOT). The data was divided to examine refugee versus non-refugee experience, although even the children who were not refugees came from war-torn areas either from Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Results. Refugee children reported a significantly higher impact of war events than non-refugee children. The impact of war did not correlate with an optimistic outlook on the future. Both groups reported the same level of optimism for the future, regardless of whether or not they had experienced the refugee status.

Conclusions: Refugee children's higher responses to IES support the data found in previous studies, according to which refugee experience has a devastating effect on the psychological well-being of children. Refugee children focused on the death of a family member, forced expulsion, or heavy bombardment, while non-refugee children focused solely on bombardment. Thus, the experience of having to flee seems to have a profound impact on children, but it does not affect their outlook on the future.

Key words: child, behavior; displacement (psychology); psychological tests; refugees; stressful events; war