

## **Psychotrauma Related to War and Exile as a Risk Factor for the Development of Dementia of Alzheimer's Type in Refugees**

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**Aim.** To compare the prevalence of dementia of Alzheimer's type in polytraumatized refugees and displaced persons in Croatia with that of control, nontraumatized subjects.

**Methods.** The study was a prospective follow up of 538 refugees and displaced persons of both sexes and aged 45 and more. All of them experienced at least three war-related traumas. The control group consisted of 538 nontraumatized persons of comparable age and sex composition. Dementia of Alzheimer's type was diagnosed by experienced psychiatrists using DSM-III-R and NINCDS-ADRDA criteria.

**Results.** At the beginning of the follow up, the prevalence of dementia of Alzheimer's type was similar in the refugee and control group (1.7% vs. 2.0%, respectively; chi-square=0.203, p>0.05). At the end of the 30-month follow up, the prevalence of dementia significantly increased in the group of refugees but not in the control group (13.6% vs. 2.8%; chi-square=41.632, p<0.001). The increase in the refugee group was statistically significant for all age groups except for those 75 and older. More than two thirds of refugees who developed signs of dementia of Alzheimer's type during the follow-up period had five or more war-related traumatic experiences.

**Conclusion.** War-related psychotrauma may be an important risk factor for the development of dementia of Alzheimer's type. Further studies are required to clarify this hypothesis.

**Key words:** *Alzheimer's disease; dementia; refugees; war*

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