Assessing Nutritional Status of Refugees in Israel

Jamie Diamond, MD/MPH Class of 2016
University of Miami Department of Public Health Sciences, Miller School of Medicine
Dr. Zohar Mor, The Ministry of Health Refugee Clinic, Tel Aviv, Israel

Project Background

• In the past decade, 60,000 Eritrean and Sudanese refugees have immigrated to Israel to seek asylum
• Refugees receive temporary residence permits in Israel but have no legal citizenship rights including employment and healthcare
• Majority of refugees reside in southern Tel Aviv, near the Central Bus Station

The Ministry of Health Refugee Clinic

• Mission: Provide free or heavily subsidized medical services to refugees and migrant workers not covered by Israeli National Health Care system
• Founded in 2008, it is currently the sole healthcare facility in Israel where refugees are eligible to receive medical treatment
• Clinic funded by the Israeli Ministry of Health

Fieldwork Objectives

• Identify the process by which migrants are integrated into the Israeli healthcare system, and what biases or challenges are faced in obtaining accessible and adequate health care
• Learn about the nutritional status of African immigrants and the socioeconomic and cultural impact on their ability to consume healthier food choices
• Understand the design and implementation of population surveys including appropriate language, bias elimination, necessary groundwork, and effective distribution techniques
• Understand how survey data could be utilized to influence policy decisions and implement changes that will allow for easier access to healthy food for the refugees

Survey Examples

Survey in English (for Sudanese):
Dear Sir,
I am trying to learn about nutrition habits of migrants arriving from Sudan and Eritrea to Israel. The results of this study will enable me to recommend to the Ministry of Health and other welfare agencies about ways to improve the nutrition and health of your community.
Please mark the appropriate response which fits you most. This questionnaire is to be completed anonymously, so I would ask you to be honest. If you have any questions, you can try and ask me.
Thanks

Survey in Arabic (for Sudanese):

Survey in Tigrinya (for Eritreans):

Activities

• Organize educational classes to teach immigrant men about nutritional cooking techniques, balanced meals and how to eat healthier in Israel, their adopted home
• Provide access for refugees to fresh and healthier foods by opening more farmers markets or grocery stores in the Southern Tel Aviv area
• Create a strategy for aid organizations who work in the community to distribute meals to refugees who are most in need
• Develop partnerships between the immigrants and Ministry of Health officials for more effective communication

Intervention Recommendations

• Learned the practical implications of Israeli National Healthcare System and how it excludes non-citizens such as Sudanese and Eritrean refugees
• Observed the importance of providing preventative care to all members of a society in order to avoid overwhelming hospitals and government debt
• Discovered that survey design and distribution requires a combination of precise wording and proper technique in order to collect accurate data
• Learned about survey data limitations including social desirability bias and communication barriers
• Gained understanding of the timeline required to collect and analyze survey data which is used to implement policy and physical changes to benefit communities

Insights Gained

• Researched the refugee situation via interviews, internet resources, and field experiences in order to learn about the refugees’ humanitarian crisis, with a focus on their nutritional status and access to healthcare
• Worked with Dr. Zohar Mor from the Ministry of Health to update survey content and distribution in accordance with evidence-based survey strategies
• Collected 110 surveys; 72 in Tigrinya, 33 in Arabic and 5 in English
• Created partnerships with agencies that provide aid to the refugee population in order to create strategies for more effective and continued survey distribution
• Provided recommendations for policy changes that can be used following data analysis to provide for more secure access to food and improved nutrition for immigrants

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