Culturally-appropriate Orientation Increases the Effectiveness of Mental Health First Aid Training for Bhutanese Refugees: Results from a Multi-state Program Evaluation

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Poor mental health remains a significant source of morbidity and mortality in the Bhutanese refugee community. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a promising intervention that has been used in other immigrant communities to prepare individuals to recognize and respond to mental health warning signs. This was a non-randomized program evaluation. Using pre- and post-training questionnaires developed for prior evaluations of MHFA, we examined the effectiveness of training offered with and without culturally-appropriate orientation to mental health terminology and concepts (N = 458). Pre- to post-training improvement in ability to recognize schizophrenia, ability to respond to schizophrenia and depression, and the overall mental health literacy was greater for Bhutanese refugees who attended orientation relative to other participants (P < 0.05). In scaling up MHFA training for other immigrant communities, we recommend developing and systematically evaluating culturally-appropriate orientation materials that introduce mental health vocabulary and contextualize mental health concepts.

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