The Resettlement Experiences of Refugees from El Salvador

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Abstract

Very little research has been done on the resettlement experiences of refugees who belong to minority groups. This paper presents the experiences of 14 refugees from El Salvador, who arrived in Melbourne, Australia in the mid-1980s. It explores the reasons why they became refugees and how their experiences of trauma have affected their resettlement. The participants chosen come from different educational backgrounds and professional work and were interviewed face-to-face in their own language. This was done mainly through story telling so they could express some of the painful experiences of the past. The interviews revealed that they all had varying reasons for fleeing the country and some of their past experiences continue to affect them even after more than 10 years living in Melbourne. One of their greatest difficulties has been the lack of competency in the English language and this has resulted in their being underemployed and unemployed. The lack of English has also contributed to isolation, loneliness, and relating only to people who speak their language. Relevant recommendations have been made to address some of the problems encountered, especially the need to address their experiences of trauma during the initial period of settlement.