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Neuroendocrinology and Mental Health Consequences of War-Related Trauma: An Illustrative Review

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The objective of the study is to summarize research on refugees and related immigrants in regards to stress responses measured by cortisol levels and to identify physiological and psychological responses that promote and hinder the transition of resettlement.

- Refugees and similar immigrants experience traumatic events before and after resettlement.
- The Family Stress Model (Masarik & Conger, 2017) was used to describe the stress pathways that hinder educational outcomes in youth as well as factors that promote resilience (Figures 1 and 2).
- The variables being assessed: cortisol responses, coping strategies, PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), and the type of trauma.

### II. Method

- We searched and selected articles for review through scholarly databases (e.g., PsycINFO).
- Selection criteria:
  - Cortisol measurements (either saliva or plasma collections)
  - Psychological variables (e.g. coping styles, stress responses)
  - Victims of war-related trauma including refugees and other immigrants, but excluding war veterans.

### III. Key Points

- There were many inconsistencies within cortisol responses and coping strategies.
- Cortisol levels in participants who were diagnosed with PTSD, or met the PTSD classification were lowered or blunted in response to reminder cues.
- Inconsistent data was found regarding the type of trauma experienced and cortisol levels (i.e. different traumas sometimes showed lower/higher cortisol responses however some groups did not differ).
- Plasma and saliva collections differed in which plasma collection of cortisol levels typically did not detect immediate changes.

### IV. Issues in Research

- Timing of cortisol responses were measured inconsistently throughout the included research.
- There was a lack of control groups that matched the population samples.
- The issues that refugees and similar immigrants faced are often challenges encountered before as well as after the resettlement process.
- Refugees often rely on self-coping strategies as well as community support to overcome the obstacles of resettlement therefore, community attitudes on refugee resettlement can act as powerful barriers or offer successful opportunities during transition (Portes, 1995).
- There is a gap in research of trauma type (adult vs. child).

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**References**


