

Determinants of Quality of Life Among Refugees Aging Out of Place

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Abstract : Aging Out of Place refers to the physical and emotional experience of growing older in a foreign or unfamiliar environment. Refugees flee their home countries and migrate to foreign countries such as the United States for safety. The emotional and psychological distress experienced by refugees who are compelled to leave their home countries can compromise their ability to adapt to new countries, thereby affecting their well-being. In particular, implications of immigration may be felt more acutely in later life stages, especially when life-long attachments have been made in the country of origin. However, aging studies in the United States have failed to conceptualize refugee aging experiences, more so for refugees who entered the country as adults. Specifically, little is known about the quality of life among aging refugees. Research studies on whether the quality of life varies among refugees by sociodemographic factors are limited. Research studies examining the role of social connectedness in aging refugees' quality of life are also sparse. As such, the present study seeks to investigate the sociodemographic (i.e., age, sex, country of origin, and length of residence) and social connection factors associated with quality of life among aging refugees. The study consisted of a total of 108 participants from ages 50 years and above. The refugees represented in the study were from Bhutan, Burundi, and Somalia and were recruited from an upper Midwestern region of the United States. The participants completed an in-depth survey assessing social factors and well-being. Hierarchical regression was used for analysis. The results showed that females, older individuals, and refugees who were from Africa reported lower quality of life. Length of residence was not associated with quality of life. Furthermore, when controlling for sociodemographic factors, greater social integration was significantly associated with a higher quality of life, whereas lower loneliness was significantly associated with a higher quality of life. The results also indicated a significant interaction between loneliness and sex in predicting quality of life. This suggests that greater loneliness was associated with reduced quality of life for female refugees but not males. The present study highlights cultural variations within refugee groups which is important in determining how host communities can best support aging refugees' well-being and develop social programs that can effectively cater to issues of aging among refugees.

Keywords : aging refugees, quality of life, social integration, migration and integration

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