

## Nutrition, Dental Status and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Underage Refugees in Germany

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**Abstract :** Aim of the Study: Over the last two years, there has been a substantial rise of refugees entering Germany, of which approximately one-third are underage. Little is known about the general state of health such as nutrition, dental status and post-traumatic stress disorder among underage refugees. Our study assesses the general health status of underage refugees based on a large sample cohort. Methods: After ethics board approval, we used a structured questionnaire to collect demographic information and health-related elements in 3 large refugee accommodation centers, focusing on nutritional and dental status, as well as symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder. Main results: A total of 461 minor refugees were included. The majority were boys (54.5%), average age was 8 years. Out of the 8 recorded countries of origin, most children came from Syria (33.6%), followed by Afghanistan (23.2%). Of the participants, 50.3% reported DSM-5 criteria of Posttraumatic stress disorder and presented mental health-related problems. The most frequently reported mental abnormalities were concentration disturbances (15.2%), sleep disorders (6.9%), unclear headaches (5.4%). The majority of the participants showed an unfavorable nutritional and dental status. According to the family, the majority of the children rarely eat healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and fish. However, the majority of these children (over 90%) consume a large quantity of sugary foods and sweetened drinks such as soft drinks and confectionery at least daily. Caries was found in 63% of the minor children included in the study. A large proportion (47%) reported never brushing their teeth. According to the family, 78.3% of refugee children have never been evaluated by a dentist in Germany. The remainder visited a dentist mainly because of unbearable toothache. Conclusions: Minor refugees have specific psychological, nutritional and dental problems that must be considered in order to ensure appropriate medical care. Posttraumatic stress disorder is mainly caused by physical and emotional trauma suffered either during the flight or in the refugee camp in Germany. These data call for widespread screening of psychological, dental and nutritional problems in underage refugees. Dental care of this cohort is completely inadequate. Nutritional programs should focus on educating the families and providing the means to obtain healthy foods for these children.

**Keywords :** children, nutrition, posttraumatic stress disorder, refugee

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