

Social isolation & loneliness among asylum-seeking parents with young children (0-5 years old)

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I will present findings from a qualitative study in Montreal, that aimed to gain a better understanding of the experiences of social isolation and loneliness, key contributors to mental health problems, among asylum seeking families with young children. Using semi-structured interviews, we interviewed 14 families from 11 countries who had children ≤ 5 years old. Social isolation was largely linked to parents' asylum status which contributed to a number of their struggles (poverty, difficulty finding housing, challenges accessing healthcare, family separation, asylum process), and meant they were ineligible for certain benefits and services, particularly subsidized daycare, and as a result left families little time, financial or mental capacity, or support to engage in social interactions. A lack of access to daycare also limited integration of mothers into the workforce and their ability to participate in language courses. Mothers expressed feeling loneliness, which was tied to feelings of sadness and despair due to their precarious situation and uncertain future and having no one to share these worries with, while fathers felt frustrated and spoke

about a sense of responsibility to keep moving forward and overcome the family's challenges. Due to parents' isolation, some children were spending lots of time at home, and consequently were being exposed to their parents' stress, which concerned parents as they felt it was affecting their children's well-being. In contrast, children provided a means for breaking families' isolation, either through their participation in recreational activities or because parents were motivated to have their children integrated into their new society. Religion/religious organizations were also identified as sources of hope and assistance and contributed to families' well-being. Interventions at the policy, community and individual levels are needed to facilitate families' integration and promote social connectedness and belongingness.