

3.Q. Oral presentations: Migrant health and the COVID-19 pandemic

Asylum seekers' and refugees' understanding of government restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background:

Asylum seekers and refugees risk poorer public health information and difficulties to follow measures during the COVID-19 pandemic because of language, cultural, administrative barriers and social insecurity. We investigate their attitudes and knowledge about COVID-19 measures.

Methods:

A cross-sectional survey conducted between August and October 2020 in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland. The 24 questions covered health literacy, perception of the pandemic, understanding of health measures and adherence to conspiracy theories. The questionnaire was translated into the ten most common languages. It was distributed online through social networks of charitable and public organisations and in paper in asylum centres. Associations between participants responses and their characteristics were studied using multivariable logistic regressions.

Results:

The 242 respondents had a mean age of 33 years, 63% were men and 42% had low health literacy. They were 16% asylum seekers, 45% temporarily admitted persons, 12% refugees and 26% rejected asylum seekers. All languages were used.

Self-reported adherence to recommendations was 82%. Respectively, 39% and 31% of participants reported sleep disorders or fear of dying. Adjusted for age, gender, health literacy and French language skills, rejected asylum seekers were less worried about the pandemic (aOR 0.37, $p = 0.007$) and more sensitive to conspiracy theories (aOR 3.47, $p = 0.006$) than other respondents. They also reported lower adherence to recommendations (aOR 0.45, $p = 0.034$).

Conclusions:

We contribute new knowledge about a varied group of vulnerable persons under precarious conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The network based multi-language survey combining online and center based distribution was useful but also tedious. Our results highlight the low health literacy of asylum seekers and refugees and their deep concerns about the pandemic. Public health messages should be adapted to rejected asylum seekers.

Key messages:

- Asylum seekers and refugees have deep concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic (including sleep disorders and fear of dying) but a low health literacy.
- Public health messages should be adapted to socially vulnerable groups, especially rejected asylum seekers.