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Access to Health Care among Somali Forced Migrants in Johannesburg

Rebecca Pursell

Abstract

Objective: To identify and investigate barriers faced by Somali forced migrants when accessing health care in Johannesburg. In particular, the study seeks to compare perceptions of health personnel and migrants as to the nature of such access constraints.

Design and Methods: The study made use of semi-structured and in-depth interviews with a snowball sample of health personnel and migrants. Ten health personnel were interviewed and twenty migrants (ten male and ten female).

Results: Constraints of language and xenophobia were identified by both health personnel and forced migrant interviewed. Constraints related to the shortage of resources and the poor functioning of the referral system are experienced by all users of the public health system, irrespective of their nationality. No mention was made of traditional or allopathic medicine.

Conclusions: There exists a gap between the access to health care guaranteed in the Refugees Act and practices at facility level. There are many similarities across interviews in the constraints identified by migrants and some agreement in the constraints identified by migrants and health personnel. These results confirm that migrants experience a fairly severe level of constraint when attempting to utilize formal health care services in Johannesburg.