Asylum seekers’ mental health in the Finnish Asylum Seekers Health and Wellbeing Survey (TERTTU)
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Background:
Asylum seekers have major health and well-being burdens, including mental health. However, there is a lack of population-based survey data on the health status and service needs of asylum seekers in Europe. The TERTTU-project was launched to fill these information gaps and to develop the current health examination protocol for assessing the health, well-being and need for health care services, including mental health, of newly arrived asylum seekers.

Methods:
As part of the TERTTU-project, systematic, nationally representative data was collected in 2018 by conducting a health examination and a face-to-face interview survey in reception centers in Finland (n = 1087). The sample was drawn from the Finnish Immigration Services electronic asylum database. Mental health was assessed with the HSCL and PROTECT questionnaires (SDQ among the children), along with questions of potentially traumatic experiences.

Results:
39% (95% CI 35,6-42,6) of the adults had current severe depressive and anxiety symptoms, 50% (95% CI 46,9-53,9) had an increased risk for PTSD, and 83% (95% CI 80,0-85,3) had experienced at least one potentially traumatic event before arriving to Finland. The most common psychosocial symptoms among 2-6 year-olds were behavioral symptoms (49%) and difficulties in peer relationships (37%). Difficulties in peer relationships were also common among 7-17 year-olds (49%), followed by challenges in the emotional domain (42%).

Conclusions:
Potentially traumatic experiences and mental health problems are common among asylum seekers in Finland. Based on the survey-data, a national health examination protocol will be developed in 2019 to improve assessment and identification and to enable systematic health monitoring and evidence-based development of services for asylum seekers. A common health examination protocol will also unify practices across reception centers all over the country.

Key messages:
- Potentially traumatic experiences and mental health problems are common among asylum seekers in Finland.
- A national health examination protocol allows for the early identification of vulnerable groups and individuals.