

Mental health in forcibly displaced populations: is it linked to human rights violations?



Dr Kalliopi (Kelly) Roussi – Senior Researcher/ Proofreader

Human Rights Day

Human Rights day is celebrated on the 10th of December. The United Nations campaign emphasises that the human rights are **positive** (bring joy, happiness, safety), **essential** (everyday constants shared by everyone in this world) and **attainable**, beginning from everyday actions and choices and scaling up to collective actions and movements.¹



The problem

Forcibly displaced populations (FDPs) face serious mental health conditions.² A systematic review and meta-analysis assessed the prevalence of mental health among FDPs and the association between mental health conditions and human rights violations.²



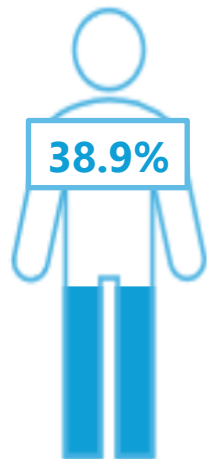
Methodology

- Systematic review and meta-analysis
- Human rights violation assessment: **Global Peace Index** (GPI)
- Outcomes assessed: prevalence of mental health outcomes
- Sensitivity analysis



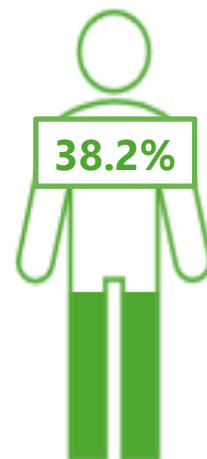
Low GPI = country is very peaceful; High GPI = high degree of violence

Results



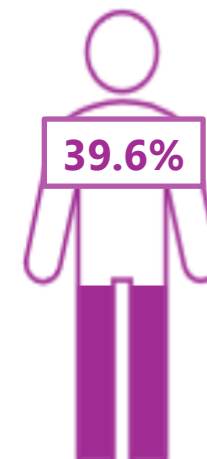
Anxiety

Significantly **higher rates in countries with very low GPI** (39.84%), compared with countries with high, moderate and low GPI (16.09%).



Depression

Trend for higher rates in countries with very low (41.07%) and moderate/high GPI (41.30%), than low GPI (26.67%), **not statistically significant** relationship with GPI.



PTSD

Trend for higher rates in countries with moderate/high GPI (48.41%) vs low GPI (40.58%), **not statistically significant**.

Discussion

- As most included studies were cross-sectional, the findings indicate associations rather than causation.
- Anxiety, depression and PTSD were each estimated to affect around 40% of FDPs, although this review does not directly compare these groups with non-displaced populations.
- Taken together, these findings point to a **substantial mental health burden among FDPs**, which now number close to 120 million people worldwide,³ particularly in environments where human rights violations are more likely. This underscores the scale of an often under-recognised global mental health challenge.

References

1. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-rights-day>
2. Sisenop F, Chatarajupalli P, Bain PA, Kaade H, Lindert J. Human rights violations are associated with forcibly displaced population's mental health-a systematic review and meta-analysis. Front Public Health. 2025;12:1454331. Published 2025 Jan 16. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2024.1454331
3. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/forcibly-displaced-pops.html>