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Environmental pollution & allergy risk factors – a random sample: American refugees vs. immigrants

Background: Allergy is the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in the US and $18 billion per year is spent treating allergies. In 2015, around 35% of Americans suffer from allergies.

Objective: The objective of the study is to determine the prevalence of allergy among refugees versus immigrants; determine risk factors of allergy and self-rated health (SRH) and determine the triggers that environmental pollution has on allergy. We hypothesize that refugees will have higher prevalence of allergy, that it is a predicting risk factor and that refugees will report worse health than immigrants will.

Methods: 7.5% random sample derived from 5,490 Iraqi residents' addresses in Southeast Michigan, resulting in 350 Iraqis (205 refugees emigrated after 1991, and 145 before 1991). Participants responded to an interview in Arabic, using a validated structured survey, which asked about the presence of physician-diagnosed allergies (pre-asthma symptoms; rhinitis; skin allergy; eye allergy; sore throat). We asked if participants were exposed to 15 different elements which exist in the Iraqi environment (E.g. petrochemicals), due to instability.

Results: There were significant differences between refugees and immigrants in most variables. E.g., refugees exposed to environmental pollution (66.9%) more than immigrants (4.1%) did, and reported worse health (59.5%) compared to immigrants (19.3%). Prevalence of all types of allergies was higher among refugees (49.3%) versus immigrants (38.5%) but only three were significant (rhinitis, eyes allergy and sore throat). Logistic regression predicted risk factors for all allergies (refugees, nerve gas, petrochemical fuel and burning trash). In addition, each allergy type predicts several variables, mainly related to environmental pollution and refugees. For good health, the predictors were immigrant, younger age, employed and have no allergy.

Conclusion: The study hypotheses were accepted. Refugees show a higher prevalence of allergy and predictor risk factors, and reported worse health than immigrants did. Additionally, environmental pollution was a risk factor in all types of allergies.

Biography

Hikmet J Jamil received his Medical Degree from Baghdad University. He holds several Postgraduate degrees from England. In 1979, he joined Baghdad University and then in 1998, he joined Wayne State University and in 2015 joined Michigan State University. He has published 20 books and 191 field research articles. He is one of the founders of The International Society of Iraqi Scientists in 2000 and The Al Nahrain International Society of Iraqi Scientists in 2017. He was elected in 2002 as President of International Society of Iraqi Scientists until 2015. He received the Best Teacher Award from Wayne State University in 2006, 2010 and in 2013.

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