

Mohamed – expanded vignette

Mohamed is a 45-year-old Iraqi man and is a Shiite Muslim. He is married and is the father of three children – a 14-year-old son, a 12-year-old daughter, and a 9-year-old son. Mohamed was trained as an engineer in Iraq and worked in a government ministry for 10 years before he was persecuted, detained, and tortured for his opposition to Sadaam Hussein's regime. Mohamed was detained for 14 months in an Iraqi prison during which time he experienced beatings, electrical shocks, and sexual torture. Upon Mohamed's release from prison, he went into hiding and was able to flee to Saudi Arabia where he lived in a refugee camp for three years. After Mohamed's flight from Iraq, his wife and children were targeted and threatened and his wife was detained and tortured for six months in an attempt to get information about Mohamed. During this time, the children were taken into hiding by extended family members. Upon his wife's release, she and the children were also able to flee the country and were reunited with Mohamed. The family speaks very little about their persecution and torture in Iraq and the time they were separated. They were resettled to the United States 3 years ago and received assistance from a resettlement agency for 6 months after their arrival but continue to struggle with issues of acculturation, trauma, and self-sufficiency.

Mohamed's psychological symptoms, include concentration problems, fear of those with authority, anger issues, shame, and hyperarousal. He also suffers from severe back pain as the result of beatings during his torture. His psychological and physical symptoms have affected his ability to maintain employment. Mohamed's sense of responsibility to care for his wife who suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, and physical ailments as the result of her torture also impede his ability to provide for the family as he feels he needs to be home to care for her during the day when the children are at school. The jobs he has been able to obtain have been low-wage jobs outside of his field. He has considered moving out of state to find work but his wife refuses to move because she feels comfortable in their home and this has caused tension between the two of them. He is considering leaving the family behind to look for work elsewhere.

The family lives in a three-bedroom subsidized apartment and also receives food support from the county economic assistance agency. Mohamed's children have done well academically in school and have become fluent in English. The daughter has had behavioral issues in school and has difficulty taking direction from teachers. She is also the person who acts as the caregiver for her ailing mother while Mohamed works at night. Mohamed's wife speaks minimal English and the children often act as her interpreters when she needs to interact with others, including medical providers and county benefit workers. The children have tried to make friends and develop a social network but their mother is fearful of all other Iraqis and wants no contact with them. She is also apprehensive to have them out of her sight when they return from school. This limits the children's ability to develop relationships outside of school. Mohamed does occasionally attend mosque but the rest of the family does not due to his wife's fear. The family does maintain their faith practices at home and their Islamic faith is an important aspect of their family life.

Mohamed did attend English Language Learner classes to supplement the English he learned before coming to the U.S. and he has become proficient in English. He is currently struggling to provide for his family financially and emotionally and was referred to your torture treatment program by his employment counselor who is feeling overwhelmed with how to help Mohamed maintain employment due to his symptoms and current stressors.