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Pediatric burns in Israeli natives versus asylum seekers living in Israel: Lessons learned

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ABSTRACT

Background: Burn injuries are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the pediatric population.

In early childhood, burns have a wide range of adverse long-term consequences ranging from functional impairment to psychological implications.

Children from low-income and middle-income countries are at a higher risk of suffering from burn injuries. In the last 10 years the population of asylum seekers from low-income countries in Israel has increased dramatically.

About 25,000 or 60% of asylum seekers are living in the Tel Aviv area, making up roughly 6% of the city's total population (about 405,000).

Aim: A retrospective study aimed to profile the pediatric burn injuries treated at the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center over the last 9 years in an effort to examine the distinct characteristics of African asylum seekers who suffer burn injuries in comparison with Israeli nationals.

Patients & Methods: Medical records of 876 patients under the age of 18 years presenting between 2007–2015 were retrospectively reviewed. The parameters collected included gender, causality, total body surface area (TBSA), burn depth and patient outcome.

Conclusions: There was no significant difference regarding: age; male-female ratio; scald-types burns; limb involvement. However, hospitalization and length of hospital stay were significantly higher among asylum seekers, as was family burden. Questions may be raised regarding prevention, education & social support. Our research provides a small glimpse into the world of asylum seekers in Israel. We hope it will serve as a window into the much grander problems that this population faces on a daily basis.

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1. Introduction

Burn injuries are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the pediatric population [1]. Every day, more than

300 children ages 0-19 are treated in emergency rooms for burn-related injuries and two children die as a result of being burned in the United States alone [2].

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Young children are more prone to burns for a variety of reasons, among them: total dependence of adults, inability to comprehend potential danger and lack of preventive education [3,4].

In early childhood in particular, burns can have a wide range of adverse long-term consequences ranging from functional impairment to psychological and social issues [5]. The younger the age of a child at the time of injury, the greater the effect later on [6]. Studies performed around the world show that pediatric burns occur more frequently in developing countries, and are more prevalent among children from low-to middle-income countries [7].

While Israel is a first-world country, over the past ten years, the number of asylum seekers living here has been rising steadily [8]. As of April of 2016, there were 42,147 refugees and asylum seekers living in Israel, of which 92% are from Eritrea or Sudan (30,595 and 8232 respectively). Roughly 25,000 or 60% of asylum seekers are living in Tel Aviv area, making up 6% of the city's total population (about 405,000) [9]. Growing numbers of African natives were forced to leave their homes and their countries to seek asylum in Israel due to local persecution, civil war, and genocide, among other things [10].

Research from around the world has identified several socioeconomic risk factors that might explain the increased incidence of burns in groups of lower socio-economic status, among them: low rate of literacy within the family, overcrowded living conditions, poor supervision of children, a lack of laws and regulations relating to building codes, low prevalence of smoke detectors and wearing of flammable clothing [10].

The objective of our study was to provide recent epidemiological data on pediatric burn injuries at our institution over the last decade in order to identify characteristics unique to asylum seekers in comparison with Israeli nationals in order to improve to prevention, education and social support.

2. Patients and Methods

A retrospective review was performed of all pediatric patients who sustained acute burn injuries from 2007 to 2015. The inclusion criteria were patients aged 0-18 who sought medical treatment due to burn injuries at the Tel-Aviv Sourasky Medical Center.

The clinical data collected focused on patient age, gender, casualty, degree of burn, area of impact, total body surface area (TBSA), number of admissions and duration of hospitalization. The demographics and clinical data were compared between the Israeli natives and asylum seekers.

3. Results

We identified 876 patients, of which 792 were Israeli natives and 84 were asylum seekers, ranging in age from 0 to 18 years who were admitted to the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center.

We categorized the data into five age groups; Fig. 1. The majority of the patients who sustained burn injuries were between the ages of 0-4 years old. 82% (n=69 out of 84) of the injuries among asylum seekers and 46% (n=365 out of 792) of the injuries among native Israelis at the time of admission. Another peak appeared among native Israelis between the ages of 16-18 years old, with 20% of the injuries (n=160 out of 792).

There were more males than females who sustained burn injuries, however the gender distribution between the groups was very similar. The number of incidents among the asylum seekers was 56% (n=47) males and 44% (n=37) females, and among native Israelis it was 55%(n=433) and 45% (n=359), respectively.

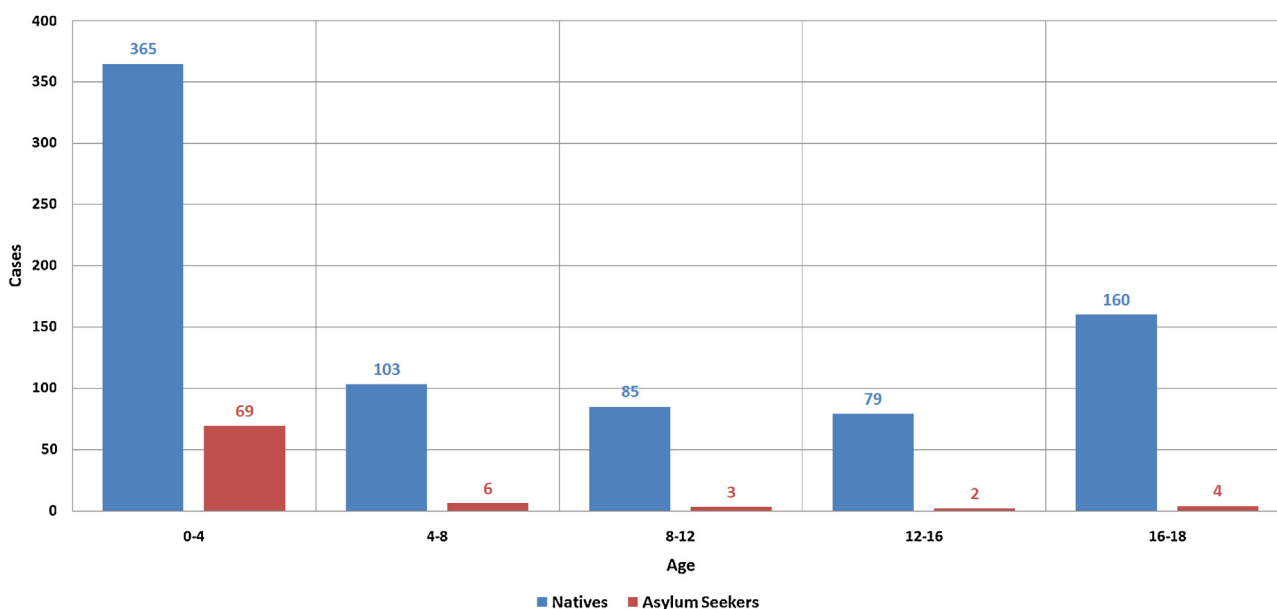


Fig. 1 – Age Distribution.

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