

## **A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MENTALLY ILL IRAQI REFUGEES' RELATIVES' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR CARING ROLE AND OF RECEIVING ASSISTANCE FROM THE COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

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Ethnic minority groups are relatively more vulnerable to mental illness problems, and the mentally ill people from ethnic minority groups and their families do not use the support offers from the community mental health services to the same degree as ethnic people. Family members from Middle Eastern minority groups have a very central role in caring for a mentally ill relative. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge about how relatives of Iraqi mentally ill persons experience their role as a relative.

The design of the study was semi-structured qualitative interviews and the sample consisted of seven relatives of Iraqi mental health outpatients.

The relatives' everyday life was marked by the feeling of isolation caused by 24-hour commitment at home, (self-) stigma, and their own and the families' psychological and social problems. Their explanation of what could help them and the mentally ill person to get better was to break the isolation, but this was rendered impossible because of their obligation to be the main (and only) caregiver. The help the relatives needed was support for their children, and a trusting continual relationship with a professional who could help them monitor the mentally ill person and help them carry their burden of being an isolated relative.