

## ABSTRACT

### Background

Refugees resettled in western countries are about 10 times more likely to have mental health problems than the general population in America. This study aims to identify the ethnic groups arriving in Kentucky with the highest risk factors for developing psychiatric problems.

### Methodology

Three criteria were used to assess risk for mental health problems. These were: a positive score on the Refugee Health Screener-15, witnessing violence or torture, and/or experiencing violence or torture. Data were collected from six refugee health screening sites in Kentucky between October 2012 through March 2015. Based on this data, a secondary analysis of the University of Louisville Refugee Health Database was conducted. Data collected were entered into a research database and analyzed using SPSS and Tableau.

### Results

Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo were the countries with the greatest risk factors for developing mental health problems. Afghans had the highest proportion of positive RHS-15 at 59%, followed by Iraqis at 48%. Those from Sudan had the highest proportion of refugees who experienced torture (36%) and witnessed torture (69%). Among the refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 64% had witnessed violence or torture.

### Conclusion

Refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are among the ethnic groups with the highest susceptibility to develop psychiatric problems. Mental health personnel should be part of the multidisciplinary team that assesses and treats refugees on arrival to the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ In 2012, about 45.2 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes due to persecution, political conflict, violence and/or human right violations. Approximately 15.2 million became refugees, one million are seeking asylum, 23 million are internally displaced.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ The United States has become home to more than 3 million refugees since the development of its resettlement program in 1975.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ In 2013, about 69,986 refugees were resettled in various parts of America.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Between 5%-35% of refugees endure torture and many more of them survive war trauma.
- ❖ The mental health effects of war trauma and torture are devastating and are strongly associated with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or depression.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION, CONTINUED

- ❖ PTSD, anxiety, and depression are the most common mental health issues among refugees.<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ The Refugee Health Screener-15 (RHS-15) is an empirically developed screening instrument for psychiatric conditions in refugee populations.<sup>4</sup>

## OBJECTIVE

This study aims to identify the ethnic groups arriving in Kentucky with highest risk factors for developing psychiatric problems.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Three criteria were used to assess risk for mental health problems. These were: a positive score on the Refugee Health Screener-15, witnessing violence or torture, and/or experiencing violence or torture. Data were collected from six refugee health screening sites in Kentucky between October 2012 and March 2015. Based on this data, a secondary analysis of the University of Louisville Refugee Health Database was conducted. Data collected were entered into a research database and analyzed using SPSS and Tableau.

## RESULTS

A total of 4085 refugees were evaluated between October 2012 through March 2015

**Figure 1.** Documents that refugees coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were the 4 countries with the most refugees who screened positive on the RHS-15. Afghans were the highest proportion of refugees who screened positive on the RHS-15.

**Figure 2.** Depicts that refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the DRC had the highest proportion of people who experienced torture or violence. The Sudanese were the highest proportion of refugees who experienced torture or violence.

**Figure 3.** Illustrates that refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, the DRC, and Somalia had the highest proportion of people who witnessed torture or violence. The Sudanese were the highest proportion of refugees who witnessed torture or violence.

**Figure 4.** Refugees coming from Sudan, Iraq, the DRC, and Afghanistan had the highest proportion of people who screened positive on the RHS-15 and also reported witnessing and experiencing torture and violence.

## RESULTS, CONTINUED

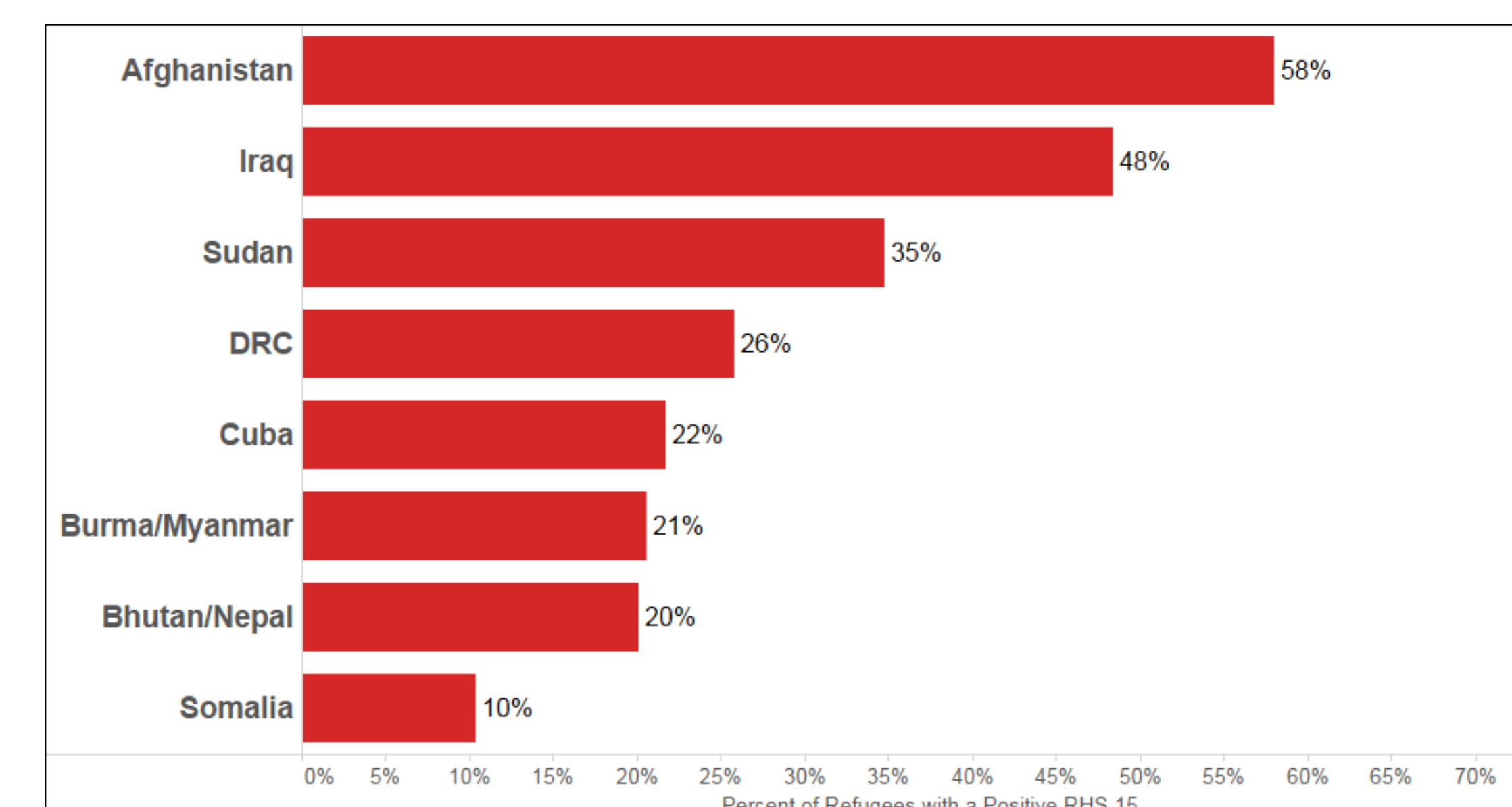


Figure 1 Refugee with a Positive RHS 15 Stratified by Country of Origin

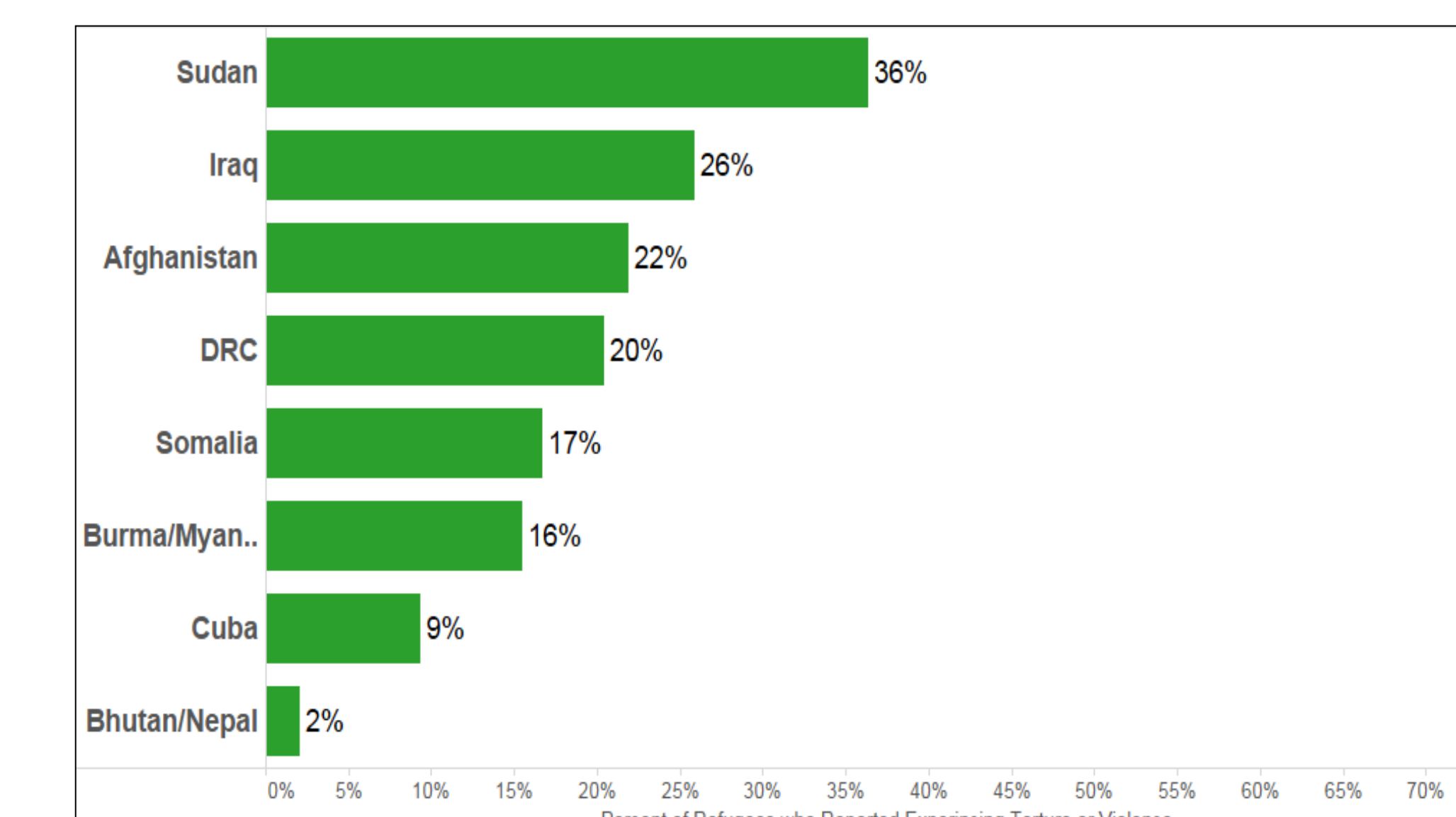


Figure 2 Refugees who experiencing Torture or Violence Stratified by Country of Origin e

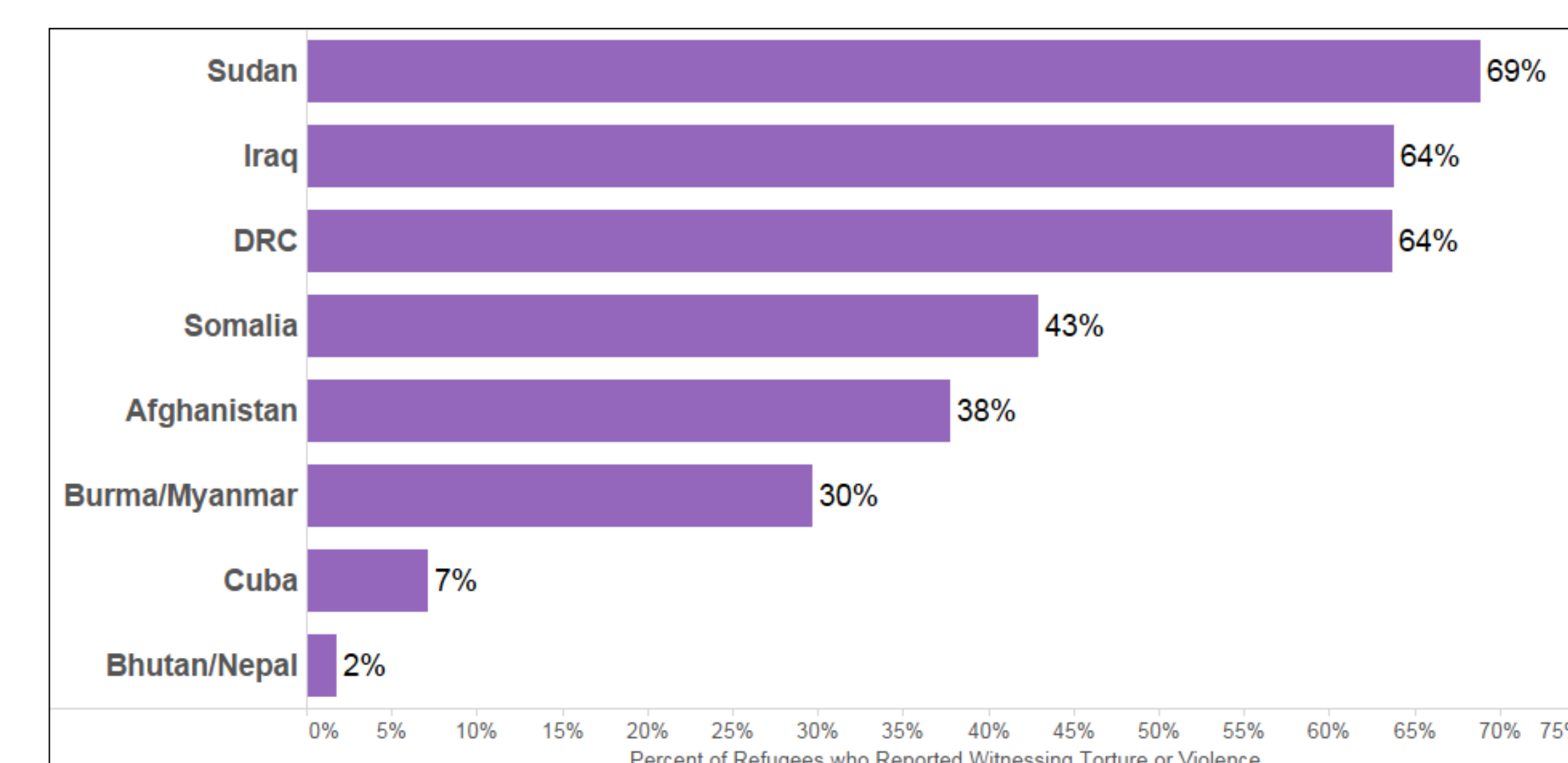


Figure 3 Refugees who Reported Witnessing Torture or Violence Stratified by Country of Origin

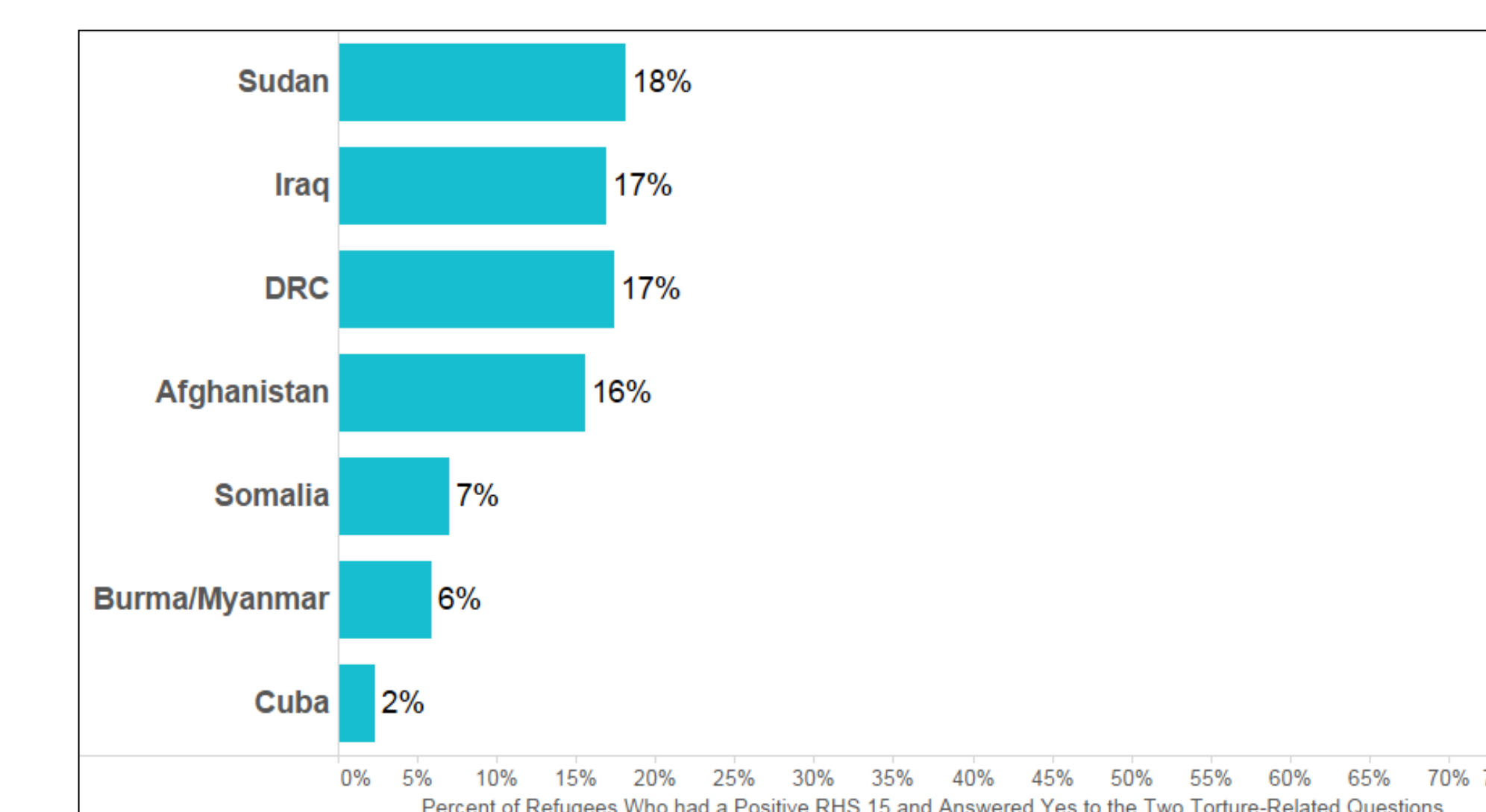


Figure 4 Refugees who had a Positive RHS and answered yes to the Two Tortured-Related Questions Stratified by Country of Origin

## CONCLUSION

Among newly arriving refugees in Kentucky, the Afghans, Iraqis, Sudanese, and Congolese are the ethnic groups with the highest susceptibility to develop psychiatric illness. The pernicious effects of trauma and loss on mental health have been documented in refugees and post-conflict populations.<sup>5</sup> This is further compounded by the added stress that comes from the immigration process, which itself can yield increased risk of emotional problems.<sup>2</sup> It is important that these vulnerable groups of people are identified early in the resettlement process and provided with appropriate assessment and treatment. Early, prompt intervention could prevent risk factors from leading to untreated psychiatric conditions that induce poor social outcomes.

## REFERENCES

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