

# Refugee women and healthcare: a community clinic experience

## Opinion

In California's Greater Sacramento area there is a neighborhood clinic that provides free healthcare services to the community by a culturally and linguistically diverse voluntary team of healthcare professionals and students. The authors volunteer in the center and noted that many of the patients served represented resettled refugees. It is, however, the female refugees from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria that present with the greatest healthcare disparity and needs. Ongoing political conflicts and wars have caused soaring levels of forced displacement resulting in more than 65.3million displaced individuals worldwide (UNHCR, 2015). The United States of America continues to host the highest number of refugees who are resettled within this world region (UNHCR, 2015). Consequently, California's Greater Sacramento area has seen an increase in the number of refugees arriving from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria and other regions. From October 2008 to August 2014, the United States received nearly half a million refugees with 12% resettling in California.<sup>1</sup> California's Sacramento County has the third largest number of refugees,<sup>2</sup> and more than half of these populations are women.

Female refugees are at the highest risk for health problems due to a lack of language, transportation, limited education, social isolation, culture and religious differences, discrimination, healthcare disparity and male gate keeping.<sup>3-6</sup> The refugees are striving to overcome pre-resettlement trauma due to the horror of war, and intense grief over loss of loved ones and homeland. They also face the difficult task of acculturating to a new country. The authors recommend that other local communities engage in the provision of culturally and linguistically competent educational programs, social support, employment opportunities, and healthcare services to local refugee populations.

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Nassrine Nouredine RN,<sup>1</sup> Darla K Hagge<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Nursing, California State University Sacramento, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology, California State University Sacramento, USA

**Correspondence:** Nassrine Nouredine RN, Department of Nursing, California State University Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, 95819, United States of America, Tel (916) 501-4958, Fax (916) 489-5510, Email Nouredinen@csus.edu

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