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**Regis University
Regis College
Master of Development Practice**

Advisor/Final Project Faculty Approval Form

Master's Candidate: **Rattana Rode**

Capstone Title: **Social Connectedness for Women's Empowerment: Development Program Proposal to Support AAPI Refugees and Immigrants in Denver, Colorado.**

Presented in the MDP Community Forum on: **May 18th, 2022**

I approve this capstone as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Development Practice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emily Van Houweling".

Advisor Signature

Name: **Emily Van Houweling**

Date: **6/14/22**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nina Miller".

Faculty Reader Signature

Name: **Nina Miller**

Date: **6/14/22**

Social Connectedness for Women's Empowerment: Development Program Proposal to Support
Asian America Pacific Islanders (AAPI) Refugee and Immigrant Women in Denver/Aurora,
Colorado.

Regis University Master of Development Practice

Rattana Rode

June 5th, 2022

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Personal Statement

I was drawn to developing a support program for women who are refugees and immigrants because of my experience of being an immigrant myself. I came to the U.S. from Cambodia when I was 17 years old. With my limited English I encountered some challenges that many newcomers to the U.S. have experienced. My language barrier not only placed me at a disadvantage in socialization with people around my age, but also created dependence on my stepfather to get me to wherever I needed to be. I still remember the feeling of exhaustion and hunger the day that I got lost for an hour trying to walk home from an ESL class because my stepfather could not pick me up after I was done with the class. The language barrier was a cycle of challenge for me. First, it limited my opportunity to make friends. Second, because I had no friends, I did not have the opportunity to practice using my English. I did not have to force myself to fully communicate in English until I left my parent's home to attend college when I was 23 years old.

Cultural differences were also a roadblock to my adaptation. Growing up in a country where women are held to certain expectations and restrictions, the first five years of my life in the U.S. were not easy. When I moved away to college, I broke the first expectation which is that women are not supposed to travel alone and live far from family. Growing up in a society where obedience and being a passive listener is expected in the classroom, I failed to participate fully in my classes. Despite these challenges, my acculturation process was less stressful compared to other immigrant women. My stepfather, who was a law professor, provided an established support in the new country for me. He helped me navigate complicated systems such as getting my driver license, applying for schools, opening a bank account, and access to health care. More importantly he handled all my legal documents and processes in order for me to obtain U.S. citizenship. Besides the assistance that I received from my stepfather, being a young woman

supported by my family made it less complicated for me to assimilate. I did not have to think about childcare and earning money to provide food and housing.

Because of these challenging experiences that I encountered as an immigrant woman, I hope to make adapting to a new country less stressful for new arrivals. I hope to provide new arrivals the support and resources from the community that they are living in to accommodate them in their acculturation process. I would love to give newcomers or recently migrated women space of their own to build their social network and support. By connecting them with other fellow immigrants and refugees they can share experiences and learn coping strategies to integrate into a new country. Social support will help them increase a sense of belonging, increase self-confidence and well-being, and become more aware of available support services. If the program includes host-community volunteers it will give them a chance to practice and learn English at their own pace. Also, it will give them a chance to learn about the social and cultural norms of the host country.

Executive Summary

In the field of women's empowerment and development, many different approaches such as economic empowerment, gender equality, educational and political empowerment have been used. Many of these approaches have been considered effective interventions. As a hub for many refugees and immigrants, resettlement agencies and NGOs in the U.S. have tried to use similar approaches to empower and speed the integration process for immigrants and refugees. Diverse interventions have been incorporated into the resettlement services for refugees while additional support services have been adopted to support immigrants. Those services tend to focus on self-sufficiency, prioritizing wage labor, and using rapid information sessions. However, they may

neglect marginalized groups within the immigrant and refugee population, such as the elderly, women with children, and those who cannot work outside the home.

This paper studies and proposes methods of empowering newly-arrived Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refugee and immigrant women throughout the integration process by increasing social connectedness. I propose a combination of mentorship model with social activities and mini educational workshops to provide necessary support service for these marginalized groups. The program I developed will focus mainly on newly-arrived female refugees and immigrants and those who are identified as homebound. The mentorship model focuses on matching a small group of mentees to mentors who are long-termed residents in the local community. The mentorship model can assist with attaining knowledge of the new culture/community and giving the target population the opportunity to make friendships. Social activities for the full cohort of mentors and the mentees will promote social interaction, build a strong support network, and provide a safe environment for them to process their emotions and share experiences. Mini educational workshops will facilitate knowledge, build skills, and promote awareness of basic information and existing resources that are available in the community that they live in. In developing this program, I have not ignored the importance of recognizing ongoing challenges these groups have been facing, such as affordable housing, transportation, and access to health care. My proposed interventions are not meant to address these challenges directly. However, I hope these interventions will assist in providing a framework towards women's empowerment using social capital principles to address the gap of services that these marginalized groups face.

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review intends to focus on women's empowerment for Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants. Refugees and immigrants face similar challenges in term of acculturation. However, their migration stories are different. The 1951 Refugee Convention defined refugees as someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). On the other hand, immigrants willingly leave their countries for family, financial opportunities, and many other reasons. Given the lack of research on women's empowerment for the AAPI refugees and immigrants, this literature review will look at studies and research concerning women's empowerment across refugee and immigrant populations. I will explore this topic across four different themes in the literature: background of Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants, post-immigration challenges, definitions of empowerment, and interventions/programs utilized to address women's empowerment.

Background

According to the 2010 census, Asian Americans comprised 14.7 million (4.8 percent) of the total U.S. population (Var et al., 2013). In 1965, when changes in immigration legislation took place, the first wave of immigrants from Asia comprised Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Asian Indians (Yang, 1999). The second wave, which was the result of Vietnam War in 1975, was made up of lower socioeconomic status group that included refugees from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (O'Hare, 1992). According to Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (2011), more than one million Southeast Asians refugees had resettled in the U.S. before 2010. The recent political turmoil in Burma has shifted the refugee population

from those three countries to ethnic groups from Burma such as the Karen, the Kareni, and the Chin. Between 2002 and 2013, about 121,100 refugees from Burma arrived in the U.S. (Kim & Kim, 2017). Since 2010, the top three main states that accepted refugees from Asian countries are Texas, California, and New York (Waddell, 2021). Similarly, the three main states that comprises 48 percent of immigrants from Asia, include California (30 percent), New York (9 percent), and Texas (8 percent) (Hanna & Batalova, 2021).

While immigrants and refugees have some similarities, they are generally distinguished by whether they are forced to leave their home country. Political, economic, social, and religious discrimination are the primary causes that force refugees to leave their home countries. Frequently, many refugees who settle in a foreign country arrive having survived traumatic experiences. They have fled from war and violence as well as suffered from torture and human rights violations (Lamba, 2003). Also, they experienced the loss of family members and friends, homes and possessions (Bond, 2010). Many refugees lived in refugee camps awaiting a resettlement in a new country, and this process can take many years (Johnson & Thomson, 2008). Research reveals that refugees are commonly poorer, have lower levels of education and experience more psychiatric illness compared to other immigrants (Frisbie, et al., 2001). Refugees resettle in the U.S. through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which is responsible for providing monetary and medical assistance to refugees for eight months after their arrival (Steimel, 2017).

Immigrants are identified as people who make a conscious decision to leave their home country for a new country with the intention of settling there (International Rescue Committee, 2018). Some immigrants may have existing family already resettled in the U.S. who can provide support post-migration, unlike refugees who may not have had a choice, and usually lack any

kind of resettlement support from families or friends. Also, according to Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok, because acculturation is voluntary for immigrants, they may experience less difficulty than refugees (as cited in Var et al., 2013). Generally, immigrants choose to leave home to explore employment opportunities, education, and better quality of life. Because immigrants are not forcefully displaced, they are free to return home whenever they choose (International Rescue Committee, 2018).

Post-Immigration Challenges

During their resettlement into a new country, refugees and immigrants face a series of post-migration stresses. Both populations must learn how to build and establish new networks in their new home countries while learning a new language and adapting to a new culture. Many may face social exclusion from society and community because of their status and may face discrimination due to their race, language, and/or religion (Hynie et al., 2011). According to Albrecht et al. (2021), immigrant and refugee women encounter similar but greater integration challenges than their male counterparts.

Unrealistic Expectations

In a case study conducted through a program called Women of Care Project, unrealistic expectations, lack of language skills, and coping with cultural differences were listed as challenges faced by immigrant women (Msengi et al., 2015). Unrealistic expectations were described as lifestyle perceived by immigrant women through Hollywood movies and books where women were being portrayed as successful, glamorous, and independent. It can lead women to pursue a better life based on fanciful aspirations (Msengi et al., 2015). It can turn into a stumbling block for women to adapt to the reality of the new culture, but also impacts on their peaceful marriage when their spouse's expectations are with their original culture, but their own aspirations are for more independence.

Different studies have uncovered negative impacts of post-migration on marital conflicts and communication issues among refugee couples. According to Khawaja and Milner (2012) resistance to the new culture while holding on to their original authoritarian and patriarchal role was used as an acculturation strategy by male refugees. As suggested in their finding, Naidoo and Davis (1988) asserted that key source of marital conflict among Canadian South Asian women was a consequence of the expectations that the wife perform motherhood and household duties on top of their employment. Refugees couples from other parts of the world had similar dynamics. For instance, in a study conducted on Ethiopian refugee couples in Canada, husbands were unwilling to take on certain tasks because they felt the tasks belonged to women (Hyman et al., 2008).

A similar study on South Sudanese refugee couples in Australia came to a similar conclusion. Men were found to refrain from assisting women with the household and child rearing because it was contrary to South Sudanese's traditional roles (Khawaja & Milner, 2012). Hyman et al. (2004) found in their study that Ethiopian female refugees sought employment post-migration because it gave them autonomy and a sense of independence. While women perceived this opportunity as a positive thing, their male counterpart perceived it as 'special rights' that were given by the Canadian government that women took advantage of (Hyman et al., 2004). In the same study, the authors found that many women no longer felt obligated to stay in an unsatisfactory relationship as a result of increased independence (Hyman et al., 2004). Women's new role as a household financial contributor created communication issues among refugee families. As participants from a study put it, spouses did not listen and understand each other anymore (McCleary, 2017). This was due to the different work schedules and places that

contribute to couples spending less time together. Therefore, the values of mutual respect, care, and support were lost among spouses.

Language Deficiencies

Language deficiencies hinder immigrant women from interacting with native English speakers, engaging in civic life, integrating into their new community, and accessing resources. While both male and female refugees and immigrants can face the same challenges of social exclusion, women are more likely to be isolated than their male counterparts. According to the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, women are less likely to speak the new language and be working outside the home than men (Morris & Sinott, 2003). This decreases their opportunities to build new social relationship and networks. Batalova and Fix (2010) and Hyman and Dussault (1996) suggested that immigrant women are more likely than men to deal with the harsh reality of trying to survive without a working knowledge of the host language. Language deficiencies create barriers on women who search for employment that is safe to pursue or from securing a well-paying job (Ma & Yeh, 2010). The same challenge also can lead to the lack of knowledge of critical resources such as health care, housing, and welfare services (Hynie et al., 2011). Because of limited language, immigrant women are faced with numerous stressors originating from lack of employment opportunities and social isolation.

Cultural Differences

Raising children in a new and different culture is a distinctive challenge for refugee and immigrant women who are in motherhood roles. Whereas American parents actively engage in children's schooling and allow children a certain degree of autonomy, it is not always the case for many refugee and immigrant parents. Many refugee and immigrant parents find it hard to be accustomed to these new perspectives of children rearing, mainly because they are not equipped with language competency to help and participate in their children's schooling (Msengi et al.,

2015). Also, many parents come from cultures where the beliefs of what makes a good child are opposite of those in many Western countries. For example, back in their home countries fewer restrictions are placed on refugee parents regarding child supervision and care. Children are allowed to play without direct supervision at younger ages as contrast to the practice in the U.S. (McCleary, 2017). Moreover, adjusting to a new culture can affect the power dynamic of the family. For instance, children of refugees and immigrants who are generally equipped with more English skills take the role of translators for their parents who have limited English. Once this role is reversed, the refugee and immigrant parents may experience stress and a sense of loss of control and power (Khamphakdy-Brown et al., 2006).

Empowerment Definition

Noticeably, when discussing empowerment for populations of refugees and immigrants, one needs to keep in mind how empowerment is being communicated and understood cross-culturally. Empowerment is often a goal of immigrant and refugee acculturation programs, yet this is a contested concept. According to Kabeer (1990), empowerment is perceived as individualistic, meaning achieving individual capabilities and free exercise of personal choice. On the other hand, Budgeon (2015) and Kurtis et al. (2016) stressed the collectivistic aspects of empowerment through collective behavior and adherence to cultural norms that emphasize collective growth. Additionally, empowerment can be perceived differently between program implementers and beneficiaries. In a research study conducted by Steimel (2017), ‘empowerment’ was described and understood differently between the staff of the resettlement organizations and the refugee clients. Organizational staff members emphasized ‘empowerment’ for their clients as self-sufficiency which they defined as a type of self-determination in which refugees could determine their own goals and make their own mistakes with organizational support. Meanwhile, organizational refugee clients described ‘empowerment’ in economic,

educational, personal, and family terms (Steimel, 2017). Defining the term of ‘women’s empowerment’ has its own challenges. The concepts of ‘women’s empowerment’ will be explored in the following section with a focus on empowerment’s connection to refugee and immigrant women.

Women’s Empowerment

There are different definitions of women’s empowerment that have been theorized by scholars and researchers from their own perspectives. The term is not only difficult to define, but also represents a broad concept. The history of term empowerment began with radical feminism in the 1970s and was then taken up in the world of international development as explained by Calvès (2009) in the following quote:

The history of the word “empowerment” in the field of development is rooted in a philosophical vision that gives priority to the viewpoints of the oppressed and in a radical critique of the vertical development model in the 1970s. Today, this same concept has become perfectly integrated with the rhetoric of the most influential institutions in international development. The feminists of the Global South, and the radical activists who popularized the term in the 1980s, define empowerment as a multifaceted process of transformation from the bottom up. For them, it is a process that permits women and the poor to gain awareness, individually or collectively, of the dynamics of dominance that marginalize them, and to build up capacities to radically transform inequitable economic, social, and political structures. (Calvès 2009, p. XIII).

In particular, this definition of empowerment as a multifaceted process of transformation from the bottom up, is perfect for working with groups of refugee and immigrant women.

It is essential to consider different aspects of women's empowerment. The terms can have different meanings in relation to socio-culture, economic, and political contexts (Mandal, 2013). According to Kabeer (1999) women's empowerment is a process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability is previously denied to them. In the field of psychology, empowerment (as cited in Huis et al., 2017) is defined as a process that enables people to act on and improve issues that are important for their individual lives, their communities, and their society. In their research concerning how microfinance services help increase women's empowerment, Huis et al. (2017) viewed women's empowerment in three different dimensions: personal, relational (in relation to spouse, family, and community), and societal (in relation to the larger social context).

A distinction must be drawn between women's empowerment in the global North, prioritizing political action, and equality in all aspects of life, and women's empowerment in the global South (Luttrell, 2009). Writing on women's empowerment in the global South is especially important for immigrants and refugees whose lived experience of empowerment and disempowerment in the countries they are fleeing contrasts with new definitions of empowerment in their new homes. Gender equality has been inserted into empowerment in developing countries where the social structure is patriarchal and male-dominated and in which women traditionally have fewer rights (Krause, 2013).

Andrea Cornwall, who is a political anthropologist that specializes in anthropology of gender and sexuality, citizen participation and participatory research, has written several articles on women's empowerment (SOAS University of London, n.d.). According to Cornwall (2016) writings on women's empowerment in 1990s offered three essential insights: (1) they proposed a version of empowerment that is fundamentally about changing power relations; (2) they

suggested a view in which empowerment is relational; (3) they view empowerment as a process—not a fixed state—which makes it difficult to measure outcomes. Women’s empowerment has evolved as an unfolding process of change in consciousness and collective in power in those writings (Cornwall, 2016). Cornwall (2016) further argues that emphasis on assets and structural opportunities as pointed out in earlier studies is not enough. The author suggests two crucial processes that consist of shifts in consciousness and engagement with culturally embedded normative beliefs, understandings and ideas about gender, power and change (Cornwall, 2016). The two processes involve negating normative beliefs and expectations that restrict women into subordination and dependency. It also includes women coming together to share experiences that provide solidarity and help shifting the process in which they view themselves and their entitlements, both as individuals and as people who share something in common (Cornwall, 2016).

Social empowerment is listed as one of approaches for women’s empowerment in Mandal’s writing. It is defined as an enabling force that strengthens women’s social relation and their position in social structure and where social discriminations based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender is addressed (Mandal, 2013). For the purpose of this project, women’s empowerment will be based on social empowerment principles that consider empowerment as a collective, active, multidimensional process which enables women to realize their full identify and powers in all spheres of life (Sahay, 1998).

Interventions/Programs Used to Address Women’s empowerment

Women’s empowerment can be achieved through a vast array of methods. According to Mandal (2013), it can be done through the means of:

Acquiring assets and properties – economic, social, physical, and intellectual; by
attaining education – conventional, vocational, scientific, legal, technical, astrological,

and astronomical; by holding white-collar jobs as well as increasing entrepreneurial qualities; enhancing personality and exposure of mass-media and by holding various high posts in national, state, or local level institutions. (Mandal, 2013, p. 24).

In recent years, policies, social programs, and services have been developed and provided by state agencies and non-profit organizations to address women's empowerment. Interventions that focus on housing, employment, legal status, language, health, and education have been well known and implemented to try to address women's needs and promote successful integration for immigrants and refugees into new countries. While gaining employment and obtaining desired education is the most efficient way for successful social economic integration, it does not necessarily mean it is obtainable for all. Groups of people such as immigrant and refugee women who are unskilled, illiterate, or elderly who are unable to find work or lack resources to attain education are at risk for social isolation. Furthermore, immigrants and refugees might not have a positive experience with the education system or be able to pay for post-secondary studies. For the population focused on in this literature review, interventions for women's empowerment will be looked at through programs developed and implemented by non-profit organizations to strengthen women's position in the areas of finance, education, and non-work initiatives. Program interventions such as economic and educational empowerment have been utilized to assist refugee and immigrants to gain skills and knowledge. Non-work initiatives, such as peer support groups, community gardens, and mentoring, are interventions that have recently been introduced to address support for underserved populations. We will explore these three sectors under economic empowerment, leadership/educational empowerment, and social support for women's empowerment because they will provide insights into what successful empowerment programs look like for this particular group of immigrants and refugees.

Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment focuses on providing people the appropriate skills, capabilities, resources, and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods (Luttrell, 2009). In recent years, one of the ways that the concept of women's empowerment is being pursued in developing countries by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is through microcredit lending. Microcredit has been used strategically to empower women by giving them access to loans that have low interest rates and without the requirement to prove collateral. This approach takes into consideration the recognition that rural women earn their livelihood from different economic activities besides waged labor (Copelton, 2007). This sort of program is generally provided to women who do not wish to seek employment, but rather use their personal skills to have their own businesses. Similar approaches have also been used to promote women's empowerment for particular population groups residing in the U.S. Organizations like the Refugee Women's Network. Under their economic empower program, the organization provide services to refugee and immigrant women through work readiness training, financial literacy, technical assistance, and networking opportunities and events (Refugee Women's Network., n.d.).

Leadership/Educational Empowerment

Another individualist approach to women's empowerment is an attempt to promote leadership for professional women and women in higher education. Education is often perceived as essential means of empowering women with knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to participate fully in the development process. For example, the Wise Organization offers programs such as academic support and life and leadership skills training to refugee and immigrant young girls. Under its *Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership* program, academic mentorship is introduced to 6th-12th graders while *We Lead* program offers support to young

refugee and immigrant women to succeed in college and post-secondary programs (Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment, n.d.).

Social Support for Women's Empowerment

Despite existing supported programs to assist newcomers in the area of language, skills, and cultural norms, certain vulnerable populations are inevitably left out. This group consists of isolated immigrant women with childcare responsibilities, refugees dealing with trauma and mental health issues as well as newcomers who are unskilled, illiterate, or elderly (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020). This is a group of people who might not be able to seek employment or do not wish to obtain higher education. The Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE) study on refugee integration identified strong progress in ten different areas of refugee integration as refugees spent more time in the U.S. (Colorado Refugee Services Program, 2016). However, the same study also found that integration was lowest for stay-at-home mothers and older men and women, specifically those who did not work (CRSP). Moreover, findings from the same study showed that organizations that acts as hubs for refugees and immigrants to socialize did not seem to have generated friendships with those not from their own ethnic groups (CRSP).

In recent research, the topic of social support has been brought up as a part of holistic approach to reduce exclusion and to empower this population. Social support, as defined by Finfgel-Connett (2005), is instrumental support that consists of tangible assistance such as childcare, food or money and emotional support includes listening behavior, encouragement, distraction, and other means of easing distress. Cohen (2004) added that social support can be informational support which refers to the providing of the advice and information necessary for resolving problems or difficulties. Kazemipur (2006) asserted that immigrant women gravitate toward social support groups as a result of emotional, social, cultural, education, and economic adjustments. Msengi et al. (2015) echoed this perspective by adding that a support group, as

opposed to many individual friendships, can help its members generate increased numbers of solutions and ideas which provide women with a variety of choices for dealing with their problems. As suggested in a report from Migration Policy Institute, non-work initiative programs can boost social ties and can be a promising practice that target refugee and vulnerable groups who are faced with social isolation (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020). The initiative includes activities as diverse as sports, arts, and community gardening, to mentorship and peer-to-peer programs.

Employment and education can improve self-esteem, build confidence, improve mental health, and foster important social interactions that boost integration outcomes. However, in their absence, it is vital to create alternative ways for socially isolated populations, who never find traditional employment or have no capacity to seek higher education, to participate meaningfully in their host communities and successfully establish roots in their new home. Social interconnectedness has been proven in various studies across the globe as an important factor for reducing social isolation, to improve access to health care and information, as well as improving self-confidence and mental health outcomes (Simich et al, 2005 & Ornert, 2020). It also provides a safe space and opportunities for women who are not active in the labor market or attending schools to discuss and share common experience and create a support network and trust (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020). Thus, in this literature review social support will be used as an alternative way to address service gaps for socially isolated immigrant and refugee women.

Social Support Interventions

Different studies have been conducted on the social support interventions as a tool to increase immigrant and refugee women's general sense of well-being, reduce social exclusion, and overcome barriers of integration and acculturation. In this section, the success and challenges of social support interventions will be examined through various studies across the globe.

Mentoring Program

A pilot program called “The Women of Care Program” was conducted with groups of refugee and immigrant women who were new to a community located in the Midwest region of the U.S. (Msengi et al., 2015). It was a year-long program in which newly arrived women were matched with native born volunteers who act as a conversational partner/friend while participating in collective group activities to showcase their culture and traditions. Participants in the program reported several benefits that they received from being a part of this support group. The support group gave them opportunities to share and learn in culturally sensitive and relevant ways to cope with their feelings of stress and depression (Msengi et al., 2015). As a result, the program helped them improve their mental and emotional wellness as well as a general sense of well-being for themselves, their children, and extended family members (Msengi et al., 2015). Also, the support group provided a space for them to connect with those with similar experiences which helped to alleviate pain and difficulties related to acculturation process (Msengi et al., 2015). A similar study called Women on the Move was conducted in Australia focused on providing personal and settlement mentoring to refugee women. Participants in the study reported an increase in their confidence and independence as a result of the support that they received (Bond, 2010). The benefits also applied to mentor participants who reported better understanding of the refugee experience, issues, and their needs and of another culture as well as practicing their communication skills, and increased their empathy and compassion (Bond, 2010).

Nevertheless, the studies addressed several challenges of the programs. Matching refugees with mentors and match retention was one of the most challenging steps in this pilot program (Bond, 2010). Some matches were not successful, and those happened when mentors and participants had different expectations. For example, mentees demanded more support than

the mentors were able to provide. Frequent contact and short notice for extra assistance were some of the examples (Bond, 2010). Different priorities perceived by both parties led to difficulty in coordinating schedules for home visits and social activities. Cultural expectations on the role and place of the women were other challenges noted. Furthermore, not all mentees' families approved of the program, and mentors were sometimes faced with unwelcome attitude when conducting home visits (Bond, 2010).

Digital and Social Media to Build Social Capital

Various studies on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) found that it helped addressing isolation by assisting in language learning, making information available in immigrants' native language, and helping them connect to the cultural practice of both host and home communities (Ornert, 2020). Walker, Koh, Wollersheim, and Liamputtongs (2014) conducted a study on how a mobile phone-assisted health promotion program can support social connectedness among refugee women in Australia. The study revealed that free-phone calls and peer support training strengthened personal relationships. The study also found that the program provided emotional, informational, and practical assistance; as a result, it helped decrease acculturative stress at both individual and societal levels (Walker et al., 2014).

A similar study has been done with Syrian refugees in Germany regarding the role of online communication in promoting social connectedness. The study found that the usage of ICT had a positive impact on refugees' social inclusion. It allowed communication between friends and family that made refugees feel emotionally supported, and empowered refugees to communicate through the use of translation app (Almohamed & Zhang, 2017). Yet, access to ICT, IT literacy and skills, and the ability to pay for the services are considerations that need to be taken account of for this type of program (Ornert, 2020).

Peer Support Program

According to Im and Rosenberg (2016), peer-based interventions can promote participant involvement, create bonds between peer facilitators and participants, and empower collective and support social inclusion. Badali, Grande, and Mardikian (2017) examined a peer support program called the Promise of Partnership, offered to Arabic-speaking refugees in Ontario, Canada. Weekly discussions over a 12- week period, conducted by a native Arabic speaker to encourage active listening and sharing lived experience. The study of this program found that peer support helped refugees overcome isolation while gaining knowledge of norms and social skills necessary to integrate in the host community as well as build hope and self-confidence (Baldali et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the study consisted of mixed gender participants and hopefully took into consideration gender roles and social norms for both men and women. Most women's empowerment programs make it inclusive to women so that their ideas and needs are considered and respected. Also, it provides women a safe environment to share and express their opinions regardless of cultural norms.

Community Gardens

Community gardens have long been used to bring together people in the neighborhood and establish social ties. Garden projects can give refugees and immigrants an opportunity to grow their own food while developing a sense of community (Ornert, 2020). Moreover, they provide refugees and immigrants from rural areas a space to express their agricultural skills and experiences. Research has shown that community gardens can boost both physical and emotional health (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2020). The benefits of community garden were discussed in Hartwig and Mason (2016) for their ability to support social connections and build social networks. In their search on the effects of community gardens on the wellbeing of vulnerable groups such as refugees, Malmberg Dyg, Christensen and Petersen (2019) concluded that that participation may

have a positive impact on both physical health and wellbeing. The positive impacts at an individual level include self-esteem, independence, and personal control. The impact at the social level consists of relationships, social connections, as well as developing a community around the neighborhood. A research project conducted on refugee gardening projects, primarily serving Karen and Bhutanese refugees hosted by churches in Minnesota showed physical and emotional benefits as well as a strengthened sense of identity (Hartwig and Mason, 2016). The same study also noted that mental and emotional benefits were particularly significant for female participants.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment is crucial in a country's development, both for developing and developed countries. However, women's empowerment is a complex concept that has multiple dimensions. It is comprised of many aspects of life that include social status, financial situations, family relations, emotional, and physical health. Different programs and services such as job and language training, youth mentorship for young scholars, and legal assistance have been developed and carried out by state agencies and non-profit organizations to address the issues of acculturation and integration. In the U.S., integrating socially isolated populations such as refugee and migrant women has often been neglected.

Although refugees and immigrants of both genders face similar challenges after their migration, immigrant and refugee women have been known to face double barriers. The double barriers include unrealistic expectations, lack of language skills, tension with their spouse in adapting to new norms for women/mothers and coping with cultural differences. While it is important to address the economic and educational issues of women's empowerment, it is also crucial to consider additional challenges that women face post-migration. Research has unveiled the negative impacts of post-migration such as social isolation, increased stress, and risks of

mental health issues. While social networks are clearly recognized as important by different scholars, little progress has occurred in developing opportunities for the development of social capital (Goodson and Pillimore, 2008). Even though social capital can be developed from clusters of refugees and immigrants who live in the same neighborhoods or apartment buildings, the interactions do not always guarantee fruitful friendships that can build emotional support or information sharing of available resources. Furthermore, the existing programs tend to exclude the most vulnerable groups such as elderly and women with children.

Although the literature on women's empowerment for female AAPI refugees and immigrants within the U.S. is lacking, I will use research on women's empowerment together with research on Asian immigrants and refugees to develop a social connectedness project with activities that can assist AAPI women who are immigrants and refugees to the United States with feeling empowered in their new surroundings. The program will address post-immigration challenges by developing a social support for women's empowerment through interventions combining the mentoring model and collective activities such as listening and answering sessions provided by guest speakers, cultural orientation, and field trips.

Community and Contexts

This pilot is being developed for AAPI female refugees and immigrants in Denver/Aurora, Colorado. Currently, the U.S. has accepted more resettled refugees than any other country in the world. In Colorado alone, the State accepted 2,367 refugees in 2010 and has accepted on average 1,420 annually since 1980. Between 1980-2019, approximately 63,541 refugees and asylees resettled in Colorado (Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs, 2019). As of 2018, there are 549,181 immigrants (262,992 women) which comprises 10 percent of the Colorado population (American Immigration Council, 2020). According to the 2016 American Community Survey,

there are 231,392 Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) individuals in Colorado, 52% of whom are immigrants or refugees (American Fact Finder, 2017). In Aurora, people originating from Vietnam, Korea, India, and the Philippines comprised a quarter of the immigrant and refugee population. In Aurora, 55% of individuals who speak Asian and/or Pacific Islander languages at home have limited English proficiency (LEP), and 18.1% are living below the poverty level (City of Aurora, 2016). Barriers of culture, language, and marginalization can further prevent these individuals from accessing the services they need to lead abundant and healthy lives.

The state of Colorado has several programs and agencies that support both target populations. For instance, the Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA) has worked to promote greater awareness and integration of immigrant and refugee residents in Denver. The DOIRA has formed partnerships with various nonprofits, community-based organizations, residents, and government agencies to create and carry out policies, practices and programs that influence the various paths of immigrant integration. Programs developed under this partnership include Integration Sponsorship Program, My City Academy, Community Engagement, and Language Access Program. In 2021, the DOIRA granted 28 organizations a total of \$25,500 supporting them in carrying out events and activities that brought together newcomers and host community (Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs, 2021). Although the amount awarded was about \$1,000 per organization, the grant allowed some organizations to conduct meaningful activities for people in the community. For example, Denver Housing Authority Sun Valley, who was one of the 2020 grantees, used the money to create cookbooks, conducted a photovoice project, and a mural project (DOIRA, n.d.). The cookbooks showcased a variety of recipes from different cultures together with stories of where

they came from and what the recipes meant to each participant. The cookbook project allowed an opportunity to promote diversity and social cohesion. While these grants supported various community-based activities, few of them were women focused. Moreover, the City of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (OIIA) have dedicated their resources to promote successful integration of immigrants and refugees into Aurora's civic, economic, and cultural life. It has been a co-sponsor for ethnic festivals, sports tournaments and the annual Global Fest that attracts 10,000 people a year (City of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, n.d.). The OIIA also provide support to the Village Exchange Center who acts as a one-stop shop for immigrants and refugees seeking the information and assistance they need to help them integrate into their community. Recently, the OIIA adopted its 10-year integration plan that places priority on the integration of its international residents.

Currently, there are four well known resettlement agencies in the Denver who provide resettlement assistance and services to refugees in the Denver/Aurora and surrounding areas: the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM), the African Community Center (ACC), and the Jewish Family Services (JFS). These agencies assist refugees in obtaining public benefits, housing, food, clothing, pocket money, transportation, employment, school enrollment, medical screening, and medical enrollment within the first six months of their arrival. In addition, there are numerous non-profit organizations that provide additional services such as classes for English as a Second Language, legal aid, housing, vocational training, and job readiness, to newly arrived and long-term refugees and immigrants. A few examples of these organizations are: Asian Pacific Development Center, Project Worthmore, Emily Griffith Technical College, Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, and Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network, etc.

The following programs were identified through research and interviews. “We Can Do It!” is one of the programs developed by the IRC in 2018 that has a goal to create a safe environment for women to connect with others. Since the creation of the program, 55 women from 12 different countries have been served (Horvath & Kikoen, 2021). The program activities include arts and crafts (painting, candle making, dancing etc.) as well as outdoor activities like hiking, biking, snowshoeing, and ice skating. ACC has developed a Women’s Empowerment Program that combines sewing classes, job training, and lessons on topics such as childcare and women’s health. “We Made This,” a 12-week sewing class provided to female refugees who are ACC’s clients, is advertised as employment skills training program. However, learning from the interview that I conducted, the program also includes social activities such as field trips for the program participants. For the coming year, the program is going to emphasize socialization opportunities for its participants rather than viewing it as a job training program. The ACC also introduced a women’s health program that includes topics such as domestic violence and how to use checks from public food assistance programs to support Arab women who were not involved in other services. These women’s empowerment programs empower women by reducing social isolation, increasing social skills, and giving these women tools and knowledge to function more successfully in Denver.

Lastly, similar to the two programs described above, the LFSRM has offered a program called Pamoja Early Childhood Education Workforce Program. The program uses a cohort model to coach women in early childhood education. The classes are provided in four different languages: Swahili, Arabic, Farsi, and Karen. The Pamoja program is a unique program because it has used different combinations of techniques to make sure the program is run successfully. Those techniques include the use of interpreters, its collaboration with Spring Institute to provide

one intensive English class, and one-on-one mentors to its participants to make sure they have proper support to finish their certificate. Nevertheless, the program faces many challenges, such as having women dropping out from the program because of English proficiency.

There are different existing organizations and agencies that work to provide support and services to refugees and immigrants. However, most of their programs focus on self-sufficiency and work-related initiatives. Mentorship programs that are designed to help with assimilation and build a sense of belonging in the community tend to focus on family. Also, those programs also tend to be restricted mainly to female refugees or groups who are already enrolled with or members of the program providers. Closure to the public limits the opportunities for those who would like to participate but are not members or current clients of the organizations. Moreover, existing information for programs that are designed to assist female refugees and immigrants are not easy to identify. The IRC women's program, We Can Do It, is an example of a women's empowerment program that uses different mediums to prevent social isolation, to process traumatic experience, and to cultivate a holistic wellbeing. What we can learn from the program is how simple group activities can promote social cohesion, promote women's well-being, and a sense of belonging. The program did not require a lot of resources, and women had a fun time, felt safe and comfortable to participate.

The partner of this pilot program is Asian Pacific Development Center (APDC) which is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation based in Aurora, Colorado, providing integrated services to refugees and immigrants in Aurora and surrounding areas. APDC was established in 1980 when a large number of refugees began to resettle in Colorado after the Vietnam War. A group of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) leaders comprising social workers, attorneys, psychologists, and psychiatrists became concerned about these newcomers and their high

prevalence of mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. To address this need and concern, the group formed APDC and opened a mental health clinic. The clinic recruited and trained AAPI community members to provide culturally and linguistically responsive assistance to the newcomers. Its current mission is powered by its rich heritage of AANHPI advocacy and exists today to serve and support all immigrant and refugee communities with a whole health, community-based engagement approach through health, education, and advocacy. Through its 40 years involvement, ADPC has expanded its services and assistance to more than just AAPI refugees and immigrants. Currently, the organization is comprised of five different departments providing the following direct services:

- Behavioral Health
- Adult Education
- Colorado Language Connection (interpretation and translation services)
- Victim Assistance
- Youth Leadership Academy

These integrated services aim to improve the whole health concept. For example, internal referrals are made between departments to make sure that community members receive sufficient assistance. The organization also has worked with partner organizations to host different community events/activities. ADPC in collaboration with Denver Urban Gardens turned a plot of land located behind the APDC into a community garden. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, the community garden was a successful project in bringing diverse groups together. Students and clients who were the participants of the community garden were seen exchanging/sharing/selling the produce that they grew in their garden plots. The Adult Education department hosts an annual talent show where different cultures and traditions were shown and shared. It also collaborated with Youth Leadership Academy department to host outdoor events/field trips to strengthen parents and children's relationships. Teej festival was put together

by the Behavioral Clinic every year for female clients and community members. At times, there is a lack of communication between departments that prevent internal collaboration; more collaboration would be more beneficial for clients. The name of the organization itself sometimes has drawn confusion about its identity and services provided to the community. Despite its name, APDC serves all immigrants and refugees and for many years has been serving over 50 different nationalities.

Stakeholder Analysis

Type of stakeholder	Name of Person/org. and short description	Relationship to project	Incentive, motivation, risks	How to engage
NGOs (Resettlement Agencies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ECDC/African Community Center ● International Rescue Committee ● Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains ● Jewish Family Services <p>Manage resettlement and provide support to refugees from different countries.</p>	<p>Learn from their support services for refugees.</p> <p>Potential partners for program referrals and assistant in recruiting program participants and volunteers.</p>	<p>To support successful integration for refugees in the community they live in.</p> <p>May not have resources or time to engage with new programs.</p> <p>May see new programs as aligned with their mission and a way to fill existing service gaps or view them as a threat/competitor for funds.</p>	<p>Engage early to explain what the program is about, the benefits, and get feedback.</p> <p>Collaborate from early stages, establish rapport, build trust, and coordination of services and information sharing around the client base.</p>
NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foundation for Sustainable Urban Communities (Be Well Program) ● Denver Sister Cities International ● Global Bhutanese Community Colorado ● Spirit of Cambodia 	<p>Learn about their specific program/events, ones that strengthen cultural and social network, as well as how they work with the population they serve.</p> <p>Could also be potential funders.</p>	<p>Interest in sharing the success of their program/organizations.</p> <p>May not be interested in women's empowerment.</p> <p>May see new programs as aligned with their mission and helping them to fill programming gaps or view them as a threat/competition.</p>	<p>Inform and seek feedback. Apply for funding if applicable.</p>
NGOs (Immigrants and refugees focused NGOs)	Asian Pacific Development Center, Emily Griffith, Spring	Learn from their existing programs, populations that	Interest in proving more opportunities to immigrants and	Engage early to explain what the program is about,

	Institute, Village Exchange Center, Project Worthmore Provide different support services (job readiness, adult education, ESL, health, advocacy etc.) to refugees and immigrants.	they work with, and service gaps per their perspectives. Potentials places to recruit program participants and places to refer program participants to for additional and professional support/services. Potential program partners.	refugees, interest in women's empowerment. May see new programs as aligned with their mission and a way to fill existing service gaps or view them as a threat/competition.	the benefits, and get feedback. Collaborate from early stage, establish rapport, and build trust.
Local Associations/Churches/Temples	Cambodian Temple	Potentials places to recruit program participants.	May not be interested in women's empowerment.	Inform seek feedback update.
Local government organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs: provides Immigrant Integration Mini-Grant Program that bring newcomers and receiving communities together through social and cultural events. • City of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. • Asian Chambers of Commerce. • Colorado Asian Culture and Education Network: provides support and services to local Asian communities through various activities. 	Potential funders and partners.	Align with their mission in supporting integration of refugees and immigrants. Willing to support small project that bridge immigrants and receiving communities. May have different focuses or limited resources. May see new programs as aligned with their mission and a way to fill existing service gaps or view them as a threat/competition.	Inform, explain the benefits and who it serves. Apply for funding. Keep updated.

Needs Assessment

To assess the needs for the newly arrived female refugees and immigrants, and to collect information on existing resources as well as challenges, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews and designed and distributed a survey.

Method: Semi-constructed Interviews

Key-informant interviews were done with professionals and community leaders who have worked with target populations. All interviews were done in English and transcribed later to identify helpful comments and recurring themes. The purpose of the interviews was to gather

perspectives for a possible future initiative that will be beneficial and supportive for newly arrived female refugees and immigrants. There were eight interviewees in total, six females and two males. Four of them are white-native born Americans. Two of them are female refugees who are community leaders in their community. One of the interviewees is a female immigrant while the other one identified herself as a Pacific Islander. The interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Microsoft Word Transcribe and re-listening to the audio recording.

A series of questions were utilized to guide the conversation during each interview. Those questions were designed to gather responses on interviewees' perspectives on service gaps, barriers and challenges for refugees and immigrant to participate in different programs, the concept of women's empowerment, and what needs to be improved in terms of support services. What I found during the interviews were that the interviewees rarely answered the questions directly. Some of them expressed their fear in sharing their thoughts when gender roles and women's empowerment were brought up, and most interviewees were unable to clearly define the term 'empowerment'. The responses from the interviews are categorized into following themes:

- Overview of needs and existing services/supports
 - Service needs for newly arrived refugees (focus on immediate needs such as employment, housing, and insurance)
 - Service Needs for long-term resettled refugees and immigrants (where to get food, finding connection to their ethnic community)
 - Existing programs specifically designed for women
 - Access and barriers to existing social support networks
- Challenges
 - General barriers and challenges
 - Challenges for people to participate or seeking assistance from support services
 - The differences for men versus women
- Gender roles and social norms and concept of women's empowerment
 - Recommendations from respondents

Method: Survey

The survey contained 13 questions that were distributed via Caresnetwork which is a listserv that comprises professionals who have worked with the target populations. Of the 13 questions in total, four are in the form of multiple choice and nine are open-ended questions. The open-ended responses from the survey were analyzed using a Constant Comparative Analysis format. They were then grouped by frequency. Some categories appeared across all interviews and other categories only appeared once. The responses from the survey will be used as additional data that corresponds with the themes that came up in the interviews.

Overview of needs and existing services/supports

Service needs for newly arrivals

Participants in the interviews described job placement, housing, medical, language training, and cash assistance as some of the comprehensive services provided to resettled refugees for the first six months after their arrival in the U.S. Attaining employment was stressed as a vital path to self-sufficiency and successful resettlement, and it was something that needed to be achieved as quickly as possible. Resettlement agencies were also responsible for providing cultural orientation to the new arrivals. Individual and family mentorship and co-sponsorship programs are utilized to assist the refugees with community orientation and finding friendship. For instance, the First Friend program has been used both by the IRC and the ACC to support the new arrivals. As one interviewee explained,

(We have) a primary program for mentorship called First Friends, and so it's kind of a model where we match a volunteer individual or a family with a refugee individual or refugee family and we ask them to spend about a minimum of six months working together, and usually it would be like the first initial six months. Once the refugee arrives to the U.S., they have a lot of tasks and appointments to take care of. So yeah, we would provide pretty extensive training to those volunteers. [Interviewee #4]

Translation/interpretation services were brought up often because many new arrivals have limited English proficiency or speak no English at all. Most new arrivals need access to affordable or free ESL programs, and many need a higher level of education to secure employment. One interviewee, who is a recent immigrant to the U.S., pointed out that refugees have greater needs than immigrants. For instance, for immigrants, it is usually their choice to relocate, so they arrive with a mindset and plans. They understand that they might need to look for a job and figure out other needs in order to assimilate well in the new country.

Service needs for long term resettled refugees and immigrants

For those new arrivals who have been in the U.S. past the initial resettlement period, transportation, housing, education, and health came up often as important needs. Two interviewees brought up the needs of knowing where to access food and finding connections to their ethnic communities. These responses corresponded with the responses from the survey regarding services that would be beneficial for refugees and immigrants. Besides the service needs mentioned above, serviced providers listed access to physical and mental health, and adequate translation/interpretation services as primary needs for more established immigrants and refugees.

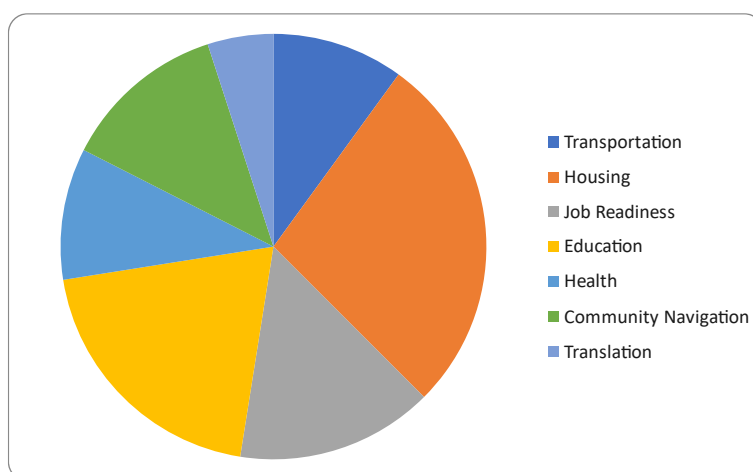


Figure 1. Chart showing the frequency of survey response for the type of support services that would be beneficial to new arrivals.

Existing services/programs that support refugee and immigrant women

According to the survey responses, 39 percent knew of existing programs that focused on women. The women's groups, Girl's Empowerment for 1st Generation Teens, as well as sexual health clinics are some of the examples provided in the survey. Nevertheless, during the interviews, I discovered there were more existing programs designed for women. For example, the IRC has a women's group called "We Can Do It!" The program's goal is to provide a safe environment for women to connect with others, give them tools, and a medium to process their traumas.

Interviewees associated with the ACC discussed the women's programs that the organization has adopted. Women on the Move was one of the first women programs that used the social connectedness approach. However, the program has ended, and the ACC has turned the focus of the program to providing one-on-one assistance to women. The organization's current women's program, which uses a social bonding approach is called "We Made This." As an interviewee further explained about the program,

We Made This was just a women's sewing program, learning and coming together to socialize. Then, we got funding from the state for some years that made it a work program. We've realized it isn't what we want it to be. That's not where we're going. The most important thing that women come for is to socialize. They feel more comfortable to talk to others while their hands are busy. They make friends. We had teatime, field trips in the community. We're on break right now because of funding and COVID. We're steering away from the work, because really it's the lowest integration women who come here." [Interviewee # 5]

Other programs supporting mothers are being adopted by the LFSM. Pamoja Early Childhood Education Workforce Program is an example. The program started out as a social group for women and has shifted into a career pathway program as women showed more interest in attaining professional employment. As an interview explained,

Originally, we looked at social bonding and social bridging, so we think they should have a mentor who they can really connect and do activities with. Then, we sort of move into the huge education path and started working in a cohort model. [Interviewee # 2]

Both of these programs are made available to existing clients. The programs were not open to the public, though “We Made This” program did make a few exceptions that allowed non-clients and males to join the program. Because all interviewees have worked mostly with refugee populations, there is no information about existing programs designed for immigrant women.

How people access support network and the barriers to that access

According to the survey responses, refugees and immigrants have access to their support network through personal connections, schools, job training/employment, support programs for refugee and immigrants, resettlement agencies, faith-based spaces, and social media. Participants in the interviews added that associations and community events (such as cultural new year’s celebrations) are other outlets for people seeking a social support network from their ethnic communities.

Barriers

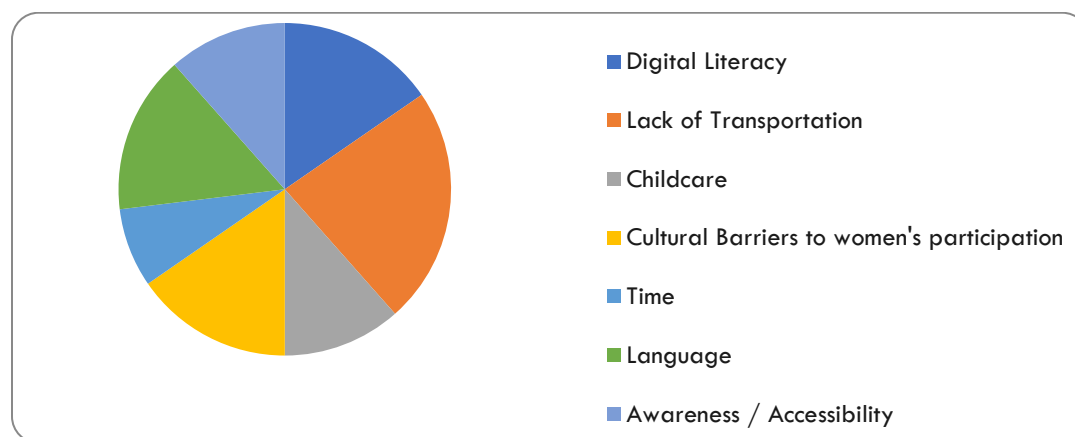


Figure 2. Chart showing the frequency of survey responses for the type of barriers to accessing support networks

Transportation, childcare, and cultural barriers were noted as the top three challenges to seeking social support networks by the respondents both in the survey and interviews. Lack of reliable source of transportation can limit newcomers from checking out local stores or faith-

based places that their friend suggested. Language and digital literacy were also described as other main challenges. Not having English competency makes it difficult for people to ask questions and get the information that they want. While many consider social media as a mean to connect to a support network, several interviewees pointed out how that some people might not be equipped with digital literacy that allow them access to social media. This is another factor to keep in mind when it comes to connecting to one's ethnic community for support. Also, when people of the same ethnicity are grouped together, their sense of belonging is not automatic. As one interviewee explained,

People in Asia they come from different places, different backgrounds, and different socioeconomic status, too. So, you're one country, one people, that's true, but you're from different areas, different class, so different biases...So, it's different, different attitude, different cultural backgrounds, and we're all from one country. So, how do you expect to have a support system here? Even if you're from one country, but it's so diverse in Asia? So, it's a wrong assumption to think that just because you are from the same country and they speak the same language, it doesn't mean that you are going to belong in that group. [Interviewee #8]

Challenges

Both responses from the survey and the interviewees noted common challenges that refugees and immigrants have been facing. Those common challenges include access to transportation, affordable housing, communication/language, and case management. Although several interviewees felt that refugees face greater barriers due to language deficiency and fear. Language deficiency makes it hard for many refugees to navigate the U.S. public systems such as immigration, social security, health care, and food stamps by themselves which normally cause dependency on others. It also doesn't allow them to have the experience or easy access they need to use other resources that are available to them.

Transportation was repeatedly pointed out by the interviewees as a challenge that both refugees and immigrants face. It limited where they go and creates a fear of exploring other

places. Some organizations tried to address this problem by providing a hands-on bus training. Someone from the organization would go with and show them how to use the bus system. However, when organizations are faced with huge number of newcomers to serve, it was hard for them to provide this sort of training to everyone. Another transportation related issue is that not many of newcomers are aware or know how to use other transportation options such as ride-sharing apps or taxis. With the huge number of refugees resettled at the same time, the case management that a lot of newcomers need assistance with, can be limited as well. Some respondents recognized that inadequate funding affects service providers in several ways. It limits their ability to provide follow-up for clients, delay access to other services, and ability to provide adequate and culturally appropriate translation/interpretation service for clients.

Challenges for people to participate or seeking assistance from respondents' programs

Many of the service providers interviewed felt that newcomers have difficulty participating in their programs due to lack awareness of available services, language and transportation limitations, time, stigma, and cultural barriers/family dynamics. Learning how to use public transportation or learning how to drive as well as acquiring driver licenses were perceived as barriers for people to participate fully in the programs offered to them. It is expensive and can take years for those who have no experience driving in their home country to get a permit, pass the driving test, and own a car. Time is another obstacle for some women who have children to fully participate and benefit from the program. As one interview stated,

(We) start class from 9 to noon, but sometimes someone shows up at 11. Yeah,...because we cannot say you need to come this time, you need to go this time because they have kids and take the bus. There were no consequences for not coming other than you wouldn't graduate and get your sewing machine and your certificate. Then they just re-enroll. [Interviewee #4]

Moreover, the discrepancy between newcomers' expectations and the reality of their new life in the U.S., and the resulting disappointment were noted by several interviewees. Two

interviewees commented on challenges for staff in providing services to the newcomers, and one of them is meeting the volunteers' and clients' expectations. Because most volunteers who participate in mentorship program are native born, they are not aware or familiar with the lengthy process of immigration system and public benefits. As a result, they put pressure on staff to make things happen quickly for the families that they were connected to. The other challenge is how the volunteers see their roles as saviors rather than assistants. An interviewee described the challenge,

I think another challenge is, you know, volunteers just overstepping or trying to kind of come in and like view themselves as like they're saving this family and they're trying to do everything for them. We addressed that in our training quite a bit, where we explain their role is not to come in and just handle everything for the family because that's not setting them up for long term success. (We) Try to address that in training, but it's an ongoing challenge with mentorship like that. [Interviewee # 3]

From this needs assessment, I found that I will have to work closely with the mentors/volunteers to help them understand their roles better.

The disappointment that many newcomers have experienced due to the discrepancy between expectations and reality occurs most often with housing and transportation. Many newcomers were not aware of the expensive housing situation prior to their arrival. The disappointment happens post resettlement when they learned their available options did not match with their expectations. This also proves to be harder for newcomers who never experienced homeownership or are coming from refugee camps. The other issue that the service providers face is providing appropriate transportation options for program participants. Some program participants would not want to take public transportation. Once they learned about other options such as taxi and Uber, they expected it to be provided to them. This expectation presented a challenge for service providers because it is expensive, and they do not have the capacity to accommodate every client with this kind of request. Also, the default of dependency

on staff was described as normal and expected from newcomers. For instance, many newcomers who never had a job before were not aware of the process of applying and getting a job. Thus, they expected service providers to give them a job or rely on them completely for job searching and applications.

Men vs. Women

Men and women who are new arrivals have different experiences and face different barriers. Some service agencies have a general assumption that men would want to work more than women. For example, when a family of newcomers arrived, men were assumed to be head of the household, and the man would be the person who would want to acquire an employment as soon as possible. The expectations that women with children do not want to work and that they should stay home, limits their ability to access resources and may prejudice providers against offering resources. Whereas men could use that time and opportunity to make broader decisions to access resources. In a related topic, childcare was also described as an additional barrier for clients who are single women or single parents. Furthermore, seeking or being available to seek employment can impact on the new arrival's ability to learn a new language. For women who are homebound, integration and learning English tends to be delayed. When men are more likely to go to work, they are forced to speak English at work. Whereas, when women have to stay home with the kids, they are not forced to go out and speak English.

Interviewees also pointed out several specific norms and cultural differences that are impediments to women rather than men. Learning how to take public transportation or to drive is not always an option for women who are from conservative societies. For instance, some husbands felt uncomfortable sending their wives on the bus alone or having their wives sitting next to a male driving instructor in a car. The same barrier also limits women's participation in programs that are beneficial to them. A Service provider shared that some husbands would not

want their wives going somewhere alone in their new environment. It is something that one needs to keep in mind when they want to invite women to participate in a program. Women are also expected to be home at certain hours. For example, one interviewee shared how her program participants can only come directly to where the program was held and then must go home. The husbands would watch the time that they leave and arrive to their house. Also, in the new country, women are still expected to adhere to traditional and gender roles that they faced at home while taking additional roles in the new country. One interviewee shared,

.... Challenges that I see between women and men are their role expectations. Where I come from, women are expected to lead the household, so they stay at home. They take care of the kids and they run whatever errands that is applicable to the household. Whereas men are assumed to be the leaders of the family, they make masculine decisions where they go to the office, they make the money and, etc.”
[Interviewee #6]

Another female interviewee shared a similar thought,

There are challenges between women and men...Americans, here they think it's equal. Men and women can divide the roles. But in Asia, especially the immigrants, there are still very traditional roles. men do men's job women do women...I feel like the women have more issues than men because the men just focus on where do I find a job? How do I put food on the table? I feel like women have more issues. [Interviewee #8]

Gender roles and social norms and concept of women's empowerment

The respondents from the survey described women's empowerment using the following vocabularies: confidence, power, resilience, communication, and decision-making. Various responses were provided by the interviewees when the term 'women's empowerment' was brought up. Many responses were raised under the context of gender roles/social norms and cultural differences. The respondents shared their perceptions of empowerment as outsiders (using experience working with refugee women) and insiders (sharing from personal experience). Under the context of social norms, women's empowerment was mentioned alongside the concept of disempowering men. For instance, some of the new roles that women

have taken, such as those in leadership positions, create conflict with gender roles and social norms in their new community. As an interviewee shared,

There isn't a term that I know of because women empowerment is really not something that I grew up learning about. There is an expression in our culture where we say men in our household are the head and the women are the shoulders because the women job is to support the men. The neck supports the head to stay upright. So, when it comes to women empowerment, you're thinking about women taking over that head and making the decisions within a family. And sometimes that's not always something we are happy about. women are known to be humble. They should keep their voice down and to listen more.” [Interviewee #6]

Another interviewee added,

First men felt offended. (They) think it was the wrong choice to come to the U.S. because here ladies have more opportunities and they (the men) wanted to take control back like their life back home, follow the same old culture. Everything changed when they go to the U.S.” [Interviewee #7]

Some respondents explained that many refugee and immigrant women perceive concepts of equality and the greater opportunities that they experience in the U.S. as empowerment. Women felt empowered because they believe they can do the same things that men can do. For instance, they realize that they could go out and earn money just like men do, and they do not have to wait for men to provide what they need. The opportunity not to be homebound 24 hours and having access to learning and speaking English were described as ways to empower non-working women. Hesitancy due to difficulty in explaining concepts of empowerment were noted from respondents who are native born. One of the male interviewees vaguely described empowerment in terms of assistance to help clients achieve self-sufficiency while how a client might view empowerment was not mentioned. Another male interviewee explained that in his opinion his organization does not have in-depth knowledge and the most appropriate measures to focus on empowerment.

Another thing to take into consideration is how refugees and immigrants view empowerment versus Westerners. As one interviewee who is a recent immigrant from Southeast Asia put it,

Empowerment is for western thing not for from where I'm from...Asian country no such thing. You can't be empowered to do stuff, you're bound by culture and tradition. Tradition dictates that you follow your elders...There's no such thing as empowerment. So, you come to America and people empower you with stuff just suddenly like Oh, I don't know what to do. That's a cultural difference." [Interviewee #8]

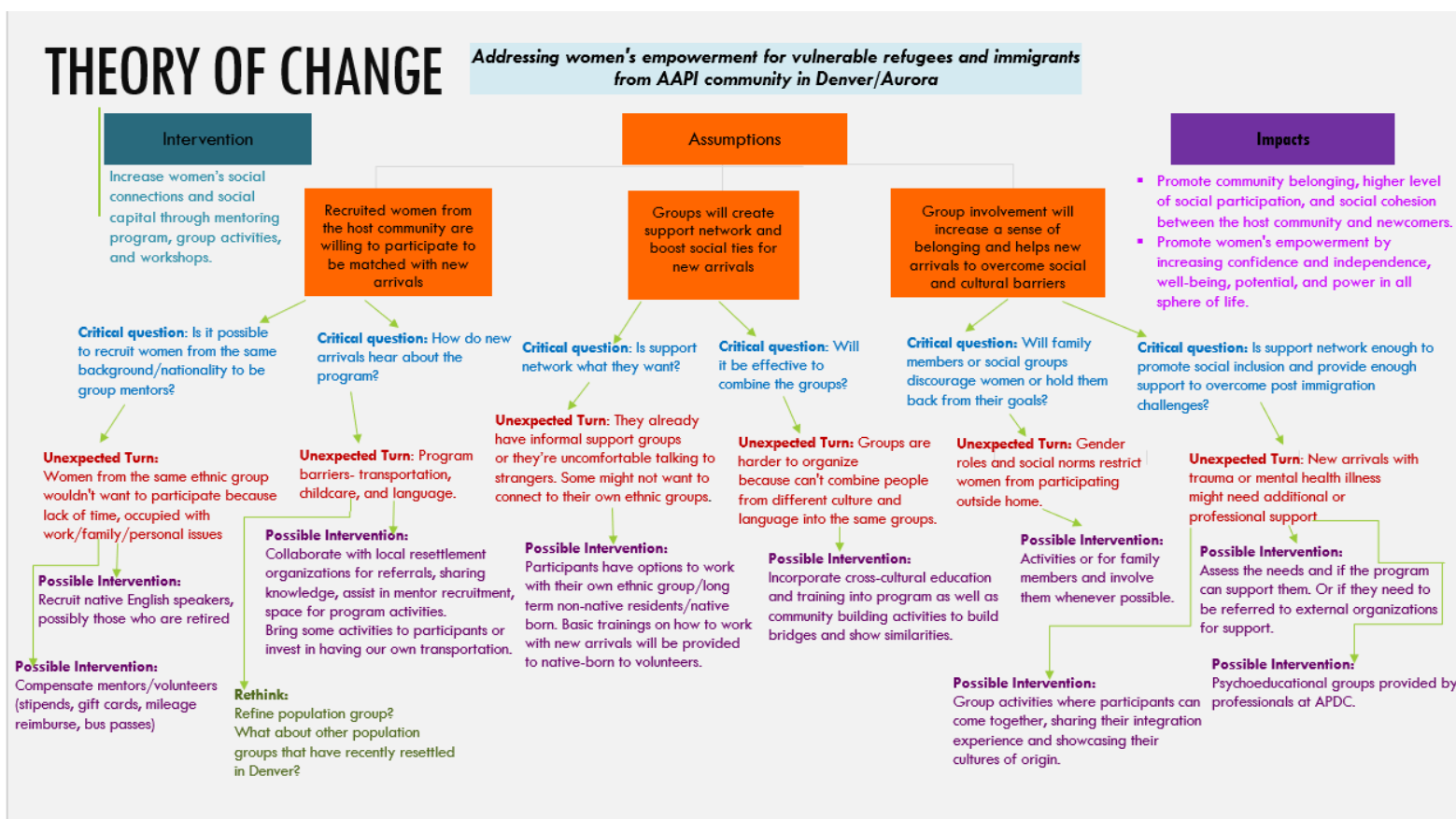
The statement provided by interviewee number eight is an essential perspective for me to keep in mind throughout the program design and implementation. 'Empowerment' is a familiar term in the U.S. and has been used to justify some program interventions. It is important for program implementers to recognize that in some cultures the term 'empowerment' might not exist. As explained in interviewee number eight's statement, some people are bound by culture and tradition. For example, in Asia, people are obedient and have high respect for their elders in the household. It would be disrespectful and disobedient if a younger generation in the household exhibits an attitude that contests or contradict the existing power structure.

Respondents from the interviews shared the following recommendations to effectively serve and provide services to refugee and immigrant populations.

- Using Community Navigators as facilitators in sharing and teaching information to target community: Native-born staff can design curriculum, put material and presentation together, and provide guidance to members of the target community. It would be more beneficial to have someone from the community to lead the discussion/session. The approach of having an insider rather than outsider going in to convey the message/information to target community would be more acceptable to the participants.

- Provide home visits whenever possible. Home visits can be beneficial for follow up, assess the needs, and learning more about existing challenges. For instance, an interviewee shared how her organization decided to conduct home visits that included semi-structure interviews to conduct needs assessment. The responses that they gathered helped them plan a project that address the needs that were raised during the interviews. Thus, interview maybe a better approach than conducting surveys.
- Let participants choose timing: a time that fits with their schedule when you want them to join a program and ensure they have reliable transportation, or someone helps them give hands-on experience in taking public transportation so that they can attend the program.
- Conduct workshops at familiar place, a space that women feel comfortable to participate and share. One can also investigate the option of using a community member's home and compensate them for using their space.
- Looking at cohort model- support each other.

Theory of Change (ToC)



Theory of Change background and intervention

The primary goal of many support services focused on immigrants and refugees is to build self-sufficiency. Especially for newly arrived refugees, self-sufficiency programs are focused on finding rapid employment. The process also tends to focus on males who are normally assumed to be the head of the household. Married women, especially those with children or those who do not express a desire to work, are likely to be overlooked by support services. Employment has benefits besides self-sufficiency as it is a way for new arrivals to improve their English and help them build a sense of control over their life in a new country. Also, people with employment tend to have more mobility and independence since they have to learn how to use public transportation or have their own transportation and have to develop the

ability to navigate many new systems. Although non-working groups still can have similar experiences through their participation in English as Second Language classes or attending community events, they do not have many opportunities or much space for social interaction.

This pilot program aims to promote women's empowerment using the principles of social capital and social connectedness as interventions. It is designed to benefit immigrant and refugee women who arrived less than two years ago to the Denver/Aurora area, while offering longtime residents the opportunity to meet and better understand newcomer's experience, needs, and cultures. The program will be built on a support/educational group concept that will provide a support network while helping immigrant and refugee women to integrate and adapt to their surroundings. The program interventions will include mentorship programs, mini-workshops, and social activities that offer pathways for developing language skills, increasing awareness of existing resources, and creating a safe environment to share knowledge and experience. The mentors will be volunteers who are local or native-born and/or foreign born with long-term resident status. The program intends to use these interventions to smooth integration while bridging relationships between the host community and the newcomers.

Theory of Change Assumptions

One contributing factor to the success of this program relies on the assumption that the program successfully matches the host community members to the newly-arrived female refugees and immigrants. Good matching would encourage a healthy mentoring relationship that is useful for improving access to community resources and build communities' connectedness for new arrivals. While a mentorship model encourages friendship building and providing space and opportunities for the newcomers to engage in their new community and become aware of existing resources, potential barriers such as transportation, childcare, and language might reduce

their desire to participate. These challenges were supported by my findings in the survey and interviews as described under the needs assessment. Moreover, recruiting mentors who have the same background/nationality as the participants may be a challenge. Some foreign-born mentors might feel uncomfortable because they do not believe they are equipped with enough knowledge to be a mentor, or they lack time or are occupied with work/family/personal issues.

To mitigate this challenge, initial collaboration and rapport would be established with local resettlement agencies and non-profits that work with both populations. They would act as potential partners for referrals, sharing knowledge, assist with the recruitment of volunteer mentors, and lending space for program activities. The other possible intervention would be recruiting local native English speakers who are retired or have more time to devote to this program. Also, bringing the program to locations as close as possible to the participants and the mentors or invest in having our own vehicle would help encourage more participation and reduce transportation issues. Compensations in the form of stipends/gift cards, mileage reimburse, and bus passes will be provided to mentors/volunteers to assist them in building friendships and social activities with their mentees.

To realize the impacts that the program wants to achieve, the program activities are designed to create the intended support network and boost social ties for new arrivals, with an emphasis on connecting new arrivals to members of their own ethnic groups. The concern for this assumption is the belief that people would want to connect or receive support from people within their ethnic group. One of the interviewees shared how she does not feel that she belongs in her own ethnic group due to the perceptions of class differences that people experienced in their home country. A potential challenge of dividing mentors and mentees based on ethnicity could be that people with similar ethnic backgrounds might have different life conditions and

experiences which makes mentoring relationships difficult to organize and increases the risk that they might fail to work together. On the other hand, combining groups of different ethnicities can be hard to achieve due to language and cultural differences. Nevertheless, potential challenges caused by cultural aspects will be expected and will be studied and analyzed from the beginning and throughout project implementation. Moreover, to diminish other potential challenges mentors and mentees will be match best on their proximity, similar demographic (age, religion, race etc.), or personality type. Also, basic training on how to work with new arrivals will be provided to mentors/volunteers, and community building activities for mentors and mentees to build bridges and show similarities.

Group involvement and social/educational activities increase a sense of belonging and help new arrivals to overcome social and cultural barriers they may face while transitioning into a new country. Nevertheless, gender roles and social norms might restrict or discourage women from participating in activities outside their home. Moreover, the social support network might not be sufficient to help new arrivals overcome many barriers that they may face. Some additional challenges that need to be considered are how refugees who lived in camps, might have additional needs due to past traumatic life experiences. To tackle this prospective challenge, basic mental health education workshops would be included in the program activities and referrals would be made to partner organizations who provide long term clinical services for mental health patients.

Theory of Change Goals

The primary goal of the program is to increase social connection and social capital that will help to improve access to community resources and build communities' connectedness for newly arrived female refugees and immigrants. The program intends to continue to incorporate

different social and group activities and workshops to boost social ties aimed at increasing a sense of belonging and reducing social isolation to enable a better integration process for newly arrived female refugees and immigrants. Ultimately, there are two impacts that the program is trying to achieve. In the long run, the program eventually will promote community belonging for the newcomers, increase higher level of social participation, and build social cohesion between the host community and new arrivals. This in turn will help promote women's empowerment by increasing their confidence and independence (for example, using public transportation, making a doctor's appointment, accessing public benefits, etc.), well-being, potential, and power in all spheres of life.

Program Description

This program aims to promote women's empowerment using social capital principles and community connectedness as interventions. As mentioned in the Theory of Change, the program interventions will include mentorship program, social activities, and mini educational workshops. It is designed to benefit AAPI immigrant and refugee women who arrived less than two years ago to the Denver/Aurora area, while at the same time offering longtime residents the opportunity to meet and better understand newcomer's experience, needs, and cultures. It will be launched as a one-year pilot program in collaboration with APDC.

Due to budget and time restrictions, the first year of this pilot program is exclusively developed for women. Because the program solely focuses on women, the following key questions will be taken into consideration during and after program implementation for women to fully participate in the program: Would the program cause marital conflicts/tension for the participants? If so, how could we mitigate this problem? What are buy-ins for the participants' spouses? Should we involve them? If so, how and when should we bring the spouses in? To

address some of these key questions, spouses/partners will be encouraged to participate in some monthly meetings for mentors and mentees. This will provide opportunities for spouses/partners to have a better understanding of the program and to recognize the benefits of participation. Moreover, having some of the guest speakers from the participant's ethnic groups may help building trust and make spouses feel comfortable having women participating in the program. Another opportunity for spouses and children of the participants to be part of the program is to include them in several of the program's group activities (community garden, field trip to the zoo, state parks, or museums) and the end of program celebration. Some of the group activities can be modified to be more family centered if, in the future, the program participants are comfortable involving their families.

Mentors/volunteers are one of the essential components to this program. However, there are some potential challenges that need to be considered. For example, a few interviewees from the needs assessment showed hesitancy when asked if they would like to participate in the mentorship program. The hesitancy was due to their lack of confidence and unfamiliarity with the local community's culture, norms, and resources. To mitigate pressure the term 'mentor' might create and to place value on a friendly and simple version of mentorship, the mentoring program will be called 'My Friend.' Also, to successfully recruit and encourage participation from prospective mentors/volunteers, following incentives will be provided:

- Program orientation and trainings (see details in *Activities*)
- Compensation (bus passes/mileage reimbursement, gift cards/stipends for conducting activities with mentees)
- Certificates of participation
- Benefits and skills learned from the program (opportunity to give back and learn from other cultures, promote self-esteem, build leadership, and communication skills, etc.)
- Additional support as needed

Goal: Increase social connection and social capital that will help to improve access to local community resources and reduce isolation for newly arrived female refugees and immigrants.

Objectives:

- Program participants will increase social connectedness, access to information regarding U.S. cultural customs and local services, and higher participation in the host community.
- Program participants build social support networks that provide reliable support for their integration progress and overcome barriers they face in transitioning into a new country.
- Strengthen program participants' capacity in decision making and enhance their sense of well-being, confidence, and a sense of belonging in the wider community.

Activities

The participants in this project are divided into two different groups. The first group consists of female volunteers who are local/native born Americans and/or long-term resettled refugees and immigrants. The second group is comprised newly-arrived female refugees and immigrants who have been resettled in their community for two years or less. The project will launch as a one-year pilot program in collaboration with APDC which is an organization that works with both refugees and immigrants. I will serve as the Program Coordinator. As a Program Coordinator, I will be responsible for overall strategic responsibility including designing the curriculum for the project, recruiting sponsors/donors, applying for grants, assisting in monitoring/implementing/evaluating the project, developing referral mechanisms, and hiring additional staff. A part-time Community Organizer will be hired to assist in recruitment and community outreach, provide training and supports to mentors/volunteers, and organize and coordinate logistics for culturally appropriate social activities. Guest speakers will include community leaders from different institutions such as religious organizations, associations, and officials from the State government. Facilitators for mini workshops will be different groups of

people who either volunteer their time and knowledge or those who have provided services to non-profit organizations at reasonable rates.

The activities for the program include the following:

Mentorship Program (My Friend)

- Volunteers from local community (native born and long-term resettled refugees and immigrants, require 6 months commitment.). Criteria for matching will be developed to produce good matches.
- Provide cultural orientation (examine newcomers' culture, addressing key differences in the U.S.)
- Basic training about how to work with and assist new arrivals (roles and responsibility, effective mentoring, and how to establish boundaries)
- Training on basic settlement support (learning about public and immigrant/refugee systems)
- Training with social workers/psychologists on how to work with mentees with trauma or mental health illness
- Potential topics/activities that mentors can do or talk about with mentees
- A list of existing resources/organizations (this would also help new residents to Denver/Aurora to engage in the mentorship program) that mentors can use to assist mentees or for making referrals
- Shadowing community navigators during home visits (optional)
- Check-in, meetings, and conduct activities 2-3 per month
- Report on the process for evaluation purposes
- A monthly meeting for all mentors and mentees (invite guest speakers, either from the local community or ethnic community, to share experience and resources).

Community/Group Activities

Criteria to choose the activities for a given group would include budget, time, personnel, and seasons.

- Participate in community garden (every Spring and Summer)
- Volunteers at different organizations
- Cooking classes, recipe sharing, potluck (including Fall harvest potluck)
- Arts and crafts
- Yoga and exercises
- Field trips (library, hiking, museums, gardens, state parks, zoo-family trip)
- Tea socials
- Music and dance
- Photo-voice presentations, Story sharing
- Conversation groups

Small Workshops/Discussions

- Conduct monthly if funding and time permits
- CU nursing students will speak on nutrition and screen for women's health.
- Basic computers and ICT (typing, create e-mail accounts, surf the web, apps to help improve English skills, texting, using camera on their phone)
- Scam protection
- Navigating the public-school systems for parents (how to ask questions/concerns at teacher meetings).
- Substance abuse and domestic violence
- Wellness and mental health check in (stress management sessions)
- Self-care/relaxation techniques.
- Health care system and social services. Do's and Don'ts of U.S. welfare system, and what are cultural expectations (similarities and differences)
- Basic financial education (how to open a bank account, credit cards/check cashing/payday loans)
- Access and usage of public transportation
- Babysitting training, rules, and regulations

Partners

The primary partner of this project will be APDC since the organization has an established relationship with the AAPI community. Additional partners will include the four resettlement agencies. They will be partners in sharing information on existing resources, coordinating of services and information sharing around the client base, and establishing connections to other potential partners in the community such as workshop facilities/facilitators and community leaders. The three resettlement agencies (the IRC, the LFSRM, and the ACC) together with the Colorado Refugee Services Program established an initiative called Colorado Refugee Connect (CRC). The CRC is a website that serves as a hub for social bridging projects that support refugee integration. Thus, this project will aim to be a part of this collaboration, using its platform to publicize and share event information. Moreover, the CRC provides a list of speakers from different communities and organizations that serve these populations. Thus, it will be a good resource to find appropriate speakers for the program as well as a place to search for event sponsorships.

In addition, it is vital for this program to receive support from governmental agencies in both areas (Denver and Aurora). Because APDC is located in Aurora area (though it serves populations from Denver and surrounding areas), the other partner to consider is City of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (OIIA). In its 10-year strategic plan, the OIIA will continue its efforts to support and promote the cultural celebrations and events of its immigrant and refugee communities. Thus, the OIIA will be an essential partner in developing and carrying out cultural programs that benefit immigrant and refugee communities. The Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA) will be another state agency partner to this program. The DOIRA have already worked with and supported non-profit organizations to be their partners in providing the necessary services to refugee and immigrant communities. Other non-profit organizations in the surrounding area such as Village Exchange Center, Mango House, and Project Worthmore can be potential partners for this project as well.

Although currently there are existing programs from LFSRM and ACC for women, those programs focus on employment and job training. What makes this pilot program different from the existing ones would be its core focus on non-work initiatives that target both immigrant and refugee women. This program will create opportunities for its partners to exchange knowledge, experience, technical capacity, and collaboration in celebrating the life experiences of the same population that we serve. Also, this program will be playing a role as a resource for referrals and fill in service gaps that are not supported by its partners. Thus, cooperation with other organizations that focus on serving and empowering refugees and immigrants will widen and strengthen support services for hard-to-reach groups.

Sustainability

The sustainability of this program will depend on support from partnerships and funding from the State of Colorado as well as partner organizations. Although integration using social bridging is recognized as vital for the acculturation process and to build a sense of belonging, funding has been heavily focused on quick assimilation processes such as employment, job readiness, and housing. Thus, to sustain this program, partners and other agencies that work with these populations need to recognize the importance of having this type of program and then prioritize it because it is a core part of the resettlement program. The program impacts will be used to advocate to the State government for refugee and immigrant programs that focus on non-work initiatives. It will be based on the need to address a service gap and to address policies that encourage engagement for women at risk of social isolation in the community, enhance local volunteering opportunities, and promote cross-cultural communication and social harmony. The program will emphasize maintaining collaborative relationships with the four main resettlement agencies and continue to seek more collaborative partnerships that focus on both target populations.

Many studies outside the U.S. have shown that mentorship programs and social inclusion benefit both host communities and newcomers. This program intends to encourage communities' responsiveness in welcoming refugees and immigrants' presence and in helping to integrate them into the community. In the long term this will benefit the society as whole and boost economic growth. According to the focus groups conducted in 2015 by the OIIA, immigrants and refugees expressed a strong desire to give back to the community. Thus, adopting programs that allow immigrants and refugees to participate in giving back to the community was recommended. This pilot program would provide the opportunity that was recommended in their findings. In

addition, the alumni of the program will be encouraged to participate as mentors and future guest speakers for the new cohorts. The initial cohort can act as ambassadors for the program and find new participants through their own networks. The other approach to program sustainability is to develop fundraising activities using the talents, knowledge, and experience of the program participants. The program will also take the advantage of the OIIA's 10-year plan by being part of its cultural programs while seeking sponsorship on certain community activities that involve art related events and cultural celebration of local immigrant and refugee communities. Lastly, the program will incorporate feedback from all stakeholders involved to improve program activities, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation that continue to benefit both the host community and the recipients of the program.

Evaluation

Different academic articles have addressed the challenges in measuring impacts of women's empowerment as the notion of empowerment itself can be perceived and defined in different ways due to numerous components and contexts that constitute the definition. For the purpose of this program and based on the findings from needs assessment, the evaluation of 'empowerment' will be measured in the form of changes in self-confidence, self-esteem, decision making, and resilience.

The evaluation will be conducted using following methods and collected from following groups.

Group Categories	Assessment/Evaluation Methods
Program participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre and post questionnaires regarding the needs and satisfaction of the program. • Focus groups will also be conducted to get feedback on improvements and program activities for future groups. • Short surveys will be conducted after each workshop and group activities. • Observations will be noted and carried out during workshop/activities to record participants' behaviors and reactions.
Mentors/Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre and post questionnaires on satisfaction and to collect feedback to gain their perspectives of the effectiveness and challenges of the program activities and the mentorship model. • Using record keeping tracking progress, retention rate, and hours invested by the mentors/volunteers.
Staff/Workshop Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre and post questionnaires on satisfaction and to collect feedback to gain their perspectives of the effectiveness and challenges of the overall program and the workshops. • Observations will be carried out during workshop/activities to record their behavior and interactions to the program activities.

Information gathered from observations, recording keeping, feedback, and surveys will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program design and identify areas for improvement. Overall data collected from the evaluation will be shared with the program's stakeholders and the general public in the form of annual reports and newsletters that will be published and shared on APDC's website and social media. Testimonials from program participants and volunteers will be used to develop a case for support to attract current and potential donors and prospective participants and volunteers. As I researched academic articles for the literature review, I found a

lack of available research/studies that concentrate on social support for women's empowerment in the U.S. Thus, I will take the data gathered from the evaluation process and share the results with the communities/organizations who work with female refugees and immigrants to better address their needs.

Implementation

Timeline

Due to restrictions on in-person gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic, the program will initiate in the beginning of 2023.

July-December 2022: Fund raising campaigns, reaching out to potential donors, apply for grants.

2023

January: Recruitment of participants and volunteers. Advertisements via website, social media, flyers at different agencies, and through word of mouth. Hire additional staff.

February: - Mentor and mentee matching process. Training for mentors and volunteers.

- Introduction: cultural and program orientation/barriers and expectations.

March: Initiate mentorship program, Community Garden activities, pre survey conducted.

April: Mentorship monthly meeting (report on progress and activities). Workshop: health care system and social services. Do's and Don'ts of U.S. welfare system, and what are cultural expectations (similarities and differences).

May: Start conversation group and photovoice project, mentorship monthly meeting.

June: Workshop with the CU nursing students- CU nursing students will speak on nutrition and screen for women's health.

July: Conduct a field trip, wellness, and mental health check in (stress management sessions), Self-care/relaxation techniques.

August: Take part in Global Feast (performance, food, and art), basic financial education (how to open a bank account, credit cards).

September: Mentorship monthly meeting, basic computers, and ICT (typing, create e-mail accounts, surf the web, apps to help improve English skills, texting, using camera on their 28 2phone).

October: Wrap up mentorship program. Workshop: Substance abuse and domestic violence.

November: Conduct evaluation sessions, discussions (interviews and focus groups), and program recommendations.

December: Celebration- Final gathering of women, families, mentors/volunteers, and supporters to celebrate end of program. Testimonial sharing: how program makes a difference in participant's lives. Hope to use this approach to recruit prospective supporters and volunteers.

Capacity

The success of this program will depend on the goodwill of unpaid volunteers (mentors, other volunteers, or guest speakers) and rely on existing resources provided by its partner organization APDC (such as space to conduct the program, office equipment, and office space for staff, etc.). The program will also need to have a full time Program Coordinator and a part-time Community Organizer to implement and carry out the program activities. As mentioned in the program description section, the Program Coordinator's role will include but is not limited to:

- Developing resources such as training curriculum and systems to manage mentors and program activities
- Establishing and promoting the program to involved stakeholders
- Soliciting funding
- Overseeing monitoring/implementing/evaluating stage of the project
- Hiring additional staff

The Community Organizer will play a different role from their traditional responsibilities and roles. He/she will assist in:

- Recruitment and community outreach
- Training and providing support to mentors/volunteer
- Organizing and coordinating culturally appropriate social activities

Non-staff

- Workshop facilitators
- Interpreters
- Volunteers to perform some administrative support such as filing and collecting progress reports from mentors and assist in social activities and workshops.
- Intern who will provide support in monitoring and assistance in program evaluation.

Others:

- Supplies/Materials for group activities and workshops

- Office supplies for staff and other work related
- Transportation (for field trip, bus passes for program participants)
- Space rental

Funding

The following table include estimated costs for the program.

Needs	Cost
Program coordinator	\$43,800
Community organizer	\$37,440
Refreshments for meetings	\$400-\$500
Workshop Facilitators	\$0-\$1500
Materials for group activities	\$500
Transportation for group activities	\$720
Space rental	\$0-\$2000

The total estimated cost will be heavily supported by grants and funding from the State government. Fundraising to conduct the pilot and to support other activities will also be utilized. Supplies and materials for program activities will be solicited from local business and individuals.

The following is a list of potential grants, donors, and sources of funding to support the program:

- Colorado Health Foundation, Colorado Trust, Denver Foundation and Colorado Refugee Services Program
- City of Aurora Office of International and Immigrant Affairs
- The Agency for Human Rights & Community Partnerships (HRCP):
<https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directories/Human-Rights-Community-Partnerships/Funding-Opportunities>
- Immigrant Integration Sponsorship Program
- <https://www.denvergov.org/Government/Agencies-Departments-Offices/Agencies-Departments-Offices-Directories/Human-Rights-Community-Partnerships/Divisions-Offices/Office-of-Immigrant-Refugee-Affairs/Immigrant-Integration-Sponsorship-Program>
- Center of Inclusions and Belonging
- <https://inclusion.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/content/open-call-bridging-communities-projects?emci=c00546a4-3584-ec11-94f6-281878b85110&emdi=b66baebf-c285-ec11-94f6-281878b85110&ceid=9426853>

Conclusion

Through my own integration experience as an immigrant in the U.S., I recognized the importance of having social support networks to help with the acculturation process. Using information that I learned through my research and my commitment to women's empowerment, I knew I wanted to develop a program that uses social connectedness to empower women. The literature review in this paper indicates that newly-arrived refugees and immigrants have complex needs and face significant barriers to resettlement. Challenges such as unrealistic expectations, lack of language skills, and cultural differences are some of the issues resettlement agencies and non-profit organizations face in assisting immigrants and refugees. Programs such as job placement, job readiness, English as Second Language classes, and cultural orientation are common approaches to help refugees and immigrants to become self-sufficient and integrate into their new communities. Although these existing services have been greatly beneficial to newcomers, they may overlook groups such as the elderly, women with children, and those who cannot work, and further marginalize these groups.

Economic and leadership/educational empowerment are widely used in both the Global North and South as tools and interventions to promote women's empowerment. Through their studies, both Banulescu-Bogdan (2020) and Msengi et al. (2015) identified social support as a holistic approach to promote social inclusion and to empower newly-arrived female refugees and immigrants. Using information from the literature review and my personal experience as an immigrant, I propose a program based on social capital principals to promote social connection that will help improve access to community resources and build communities' connectedness for newly-arrived female refugees and immigrants in the Denver/Aurora area. Combining a mentorship model with social activities and mini educational workshops, the program is designed to have two major impacts. First, it aims to promote women's empowerment by

increasing participants' confidence, independence, well-being, potential, and power in all spheres of life. Second, this program intends to promote community belonging, higher levels of social participation, and social cohesion between the newcomers and the host community. To help address and mitigate possible challenges in implementing this program and to achieve the desired impacts, the Theory of Change created for this program evolved continuously while designing the program. This process was important to ensure the needs of the refugees and immigrants were considered and the challenges and mitigations were addressed. Ultimately, this program will generate rich collaborations between non-profit organizations, who share common goals, working together to provide the best care and support for marginalized members of the refugee and immigrant population.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. How long have you been working with refugees and immigrants in the AAPI community?
 - ☐ Less than a year
 - ☐ 1-3 years
 - ☐ 8 years
 - ☐ 10 years+
2. Which group do you work with most?
 - ☐ Female refugees and immigrants
 - ☐ Male refugees and immigrants
 - ☐ Both groups
3. Please list the top three support services that would be beneficial for new arrivals (i.e., job readiness, housing, education, transportation, etc.).
4. Using your experience working with refugees and immigrants, what are the service gaps you have identified? (What types of services are needed, but have not been met? What are the challenges in providing these services?)

5. Does your organization have services specifically designed to help female refugees and immigrants? If no, skip to question 6.
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 5a. Please list the service/s or program/s that focus on female refugees and immigrants.

6. Elderly women and women with children who are recent immigrants and refugees may have different needs. How does your organization support these marginalized groups or what kinds of programs have you heard about that target these groups?

7. From your own experience, what are the barriers to providing support that refugee and immigrant women need?

8. How do resettled women think about empowerment? Is there a different term they might use?

9. What are the challenges to participation in your program that support refugees and/or immigrants (i.e., childcare, transportation, language, etc.)?

10. A social support network is essential and can be part of a daily life for some women in the country that they are from. Have the women you work with had the opportunity to be a part of a social network in their new community?

- If yes, please provide additional details in question 10a.
- If no, please provide additional details in question 10b.
- I don't know.

10a. Where did they find it (i.e., personal networks, through services provided through your programs, etc.)?

10b. What would be the barriers for them to access the social support network?

11. Based on your work experience, how do gender roles, social norms, and power dynamics in a refugee's household play a role in women's participation in activities outside their homes?

12. Are you aware of any additional programs provided to male participants alongside programs targeting women? If so, please list the name and a short description below.

13. Is there anything you would like to add about your work with the AAPI community that I have not asked about?

Appendix B

Interview Questions Version 1

1. Name, title and how long have you been doing the job you have?
2. Nationality of population you work with?
3. People that come seek your help, gender age, and marital status
4. What level of education they had back home?
5. What kind of job/professions they are seeking?
6. What are the challenges? Any success stories?
7. Identify any service gaps or everything is good?
8. Do women who are resettled understand empowerment?
9. What kinds of challenges you noticed in term of gender roles when it comes to job searching?
10. How do you think about women empowerment? What is your agency role in promoting women empowerment?
11. How do services reach/target marginalized groups (women with children/elderly)?
12. How are existing resources available differently for women and men?
13. Power dynamics in their own household- how gender roles and social norms play a role in women's participation in activities outside their homes?

Interview Questions Version 2

1. Name, title and how long have you been doing the job you have?
2. What are the priorities for the participants in term of support that they need from their community? What are the different priorities between new arrivals and long-term resettled populations?
3. What are the service gaps?
4. How do services reach/target marginalized groups (women with children/elderly)?
5. How are existing resources available differently for women and men?
6. What are the challenges for different groups to participate (transportation, childcare, time, finance, language) in this kind of program?
7. Would the program beneficiaries have access to the program's benefits regardless of their race and religion?
8. How do immigrant and refugee women view empowerment? Do they understand the "empowerment" concept? does it exist in their own language?
9. How do organizations that work with refugees and immigrant perceive "empowerment?"
10. Power dynamics in their own household- how gender roles and social norms play a role in women's participation in activities outside their homes?
11. How have their spouses/siblings/parents reacted to their new roles in the new country?