



Refugee & Immigrant Center
ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF UTAH

Challenges and Solutions: Refugee Women-at-Risk in Salt Lake City, Utah

Caitlin G. McDonald, M.A.

Refugee Women's Empowerment Coordinator

"I am not free while any woman is unfree, even if her shackles are different from my own."

-Audre Lorde



Sensitivity – Things to Know

- A refugee is someone who *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of her nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail herself of the protection of that country."*
- When they cross into a second country, they may integrate into an urban area, or live in camps—sometimes for years, even decades, before a durable solution is found for them.
- UNHCR considers a woman at risk if she has protection problems particular to her gender and lacks effective protection normally provided by male family members.



Why women?

- Refugee women may suffer from a range of threats to their personal security, including risk of expulsion, refoulement, or sexual and gender-based violence.
- Participants in the US Resettlement Program generally consider any case of a single mother and children to be a woman-at-risk because they face significant economic and social challenges after resettlement.
- Salt Lake City is the second largest resettlement site in the country for women-at-risk without US ties. The city also has the highest proportion of single mothers and women-at-risk among all resettlement communities. From 2010 to June 2012, 153 of the 174 women-at-risk to resettle in Utah were placed there by the national voluntary agencies. Women-at-risk comprise nearly 8% of the total number of refugees resettled in Utah during that period.
- Among the expected refugees resettled in the U.S. between 2014 and 2019, at least 20% are expected to be women-at-risk.



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

“Resettlement and Women-at-Risk: Can the Risk Be Reduced?”

- With only one wage earner in a family with young children, it is almost impossible for a single mother to earn enough to move her family out of poverty without additional support.
- The competing demands on her time and energy to assist her children in their resettlement and adjustment can make her own integration that much slower. Taking care of her children’s needs often take priority over her own.
- Without adequate English (including reading and writing), women enter into low skilled jobs with low salaries. To move beyond this initial employment, women will need to improve their English which in turn generally requires taking classes in addition to their work. Even when classes are available, they may not be able to attend without someone to care for their children while they are out of the house.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

IDVSA

INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT
Center for Social Work Research, School of Social Work



North Carolina
Agricultural and Technical
State University

“The Continuity of Risk: A Three-City Study of Congolese Women-at-Risk Resettled in the U.S.”

Lexington, KY, Salt Lake City, UT, San Antonio, TX

- Out of 57 participants (28 women and 12 service providers), Salt Lake City had the largest number with 21 total study participants.
- Congolese women come to the U.S. with experiences of significant trauma, needing long-term access to trauma-informed services.
- Once resettled, women felt alone, lonely, and socially isolated.
- Study participants experienced a loss of power as mothers.
- Women were in a state of precarious survival and expressed serious challenges with having sufficient income to pay for basic needs.
- Women felt an overall sense of safety and food security in the U.S.
- Service providers revealed unmet expectations of the women-at-risk resettlement category.



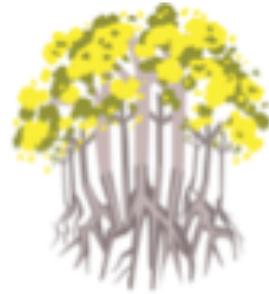
Resettlement Issues

- Inability to detect early signs of illness
- Lack of financial skills (e.g. budgeting for monthly bills)
- Inadequate grocery shopping skills
- Mental health issues (e.g. Post Traumatic Stress)
- Concerns for friends and family left behind
- Inappropriate dress (including dressing according to the weather)
- Lack of understanding of U.S. school system and involvement
- Home management (e.g. cleaning, laundry, heating and cooling)
- Unfamiliarity with “Western” culture
 - Intolerance for non-English speakers, intolerance for cultural or religious differences
 - Ignorance of cultural, religious differences related to gender
 - History of gender-based discrimination
 - Differences in gender roles/expectations between refugee community and host community

Our Mission

Our purpose is to help at-risk refugee mothers to achieve self-reliance, have the confidence to be a voice in the community, and be empowered to act for their children.





Utah Refugee Women's Initiative

Who we are

We are a group of refugee women, service providers, and advocates who have come together around our common work promoting the unique needs and interests of refugee women in our community.

What we do

To be a platform for women who identify as or with refugees to celebrate strengths, identify challenges, and be equipped with tools and resources to build safe and fulfilling lives in Utah.

Our approach

The Utah Refugee Women's Initiative promotes the interests of refugee women by working at the ground level and at the institutional level to:

- Advocate for the voice of refugee women to be heard in community programs and policies;
- Link women and resources; and
- Provide education and build partnerships that enhance services and opportunities for refugee women.

Women United



Women United **Car Maintenance Workshop**

Ask questions about how your car works,
learn to change a tire, and more!

Saturday, August 29th at 10am

Sunnyvale Neighborhood Center
(585 West 3900 South, Suite #2)





The need for mentors

- Formal mentorship programs are based on the premise of providing opportunities for new friendships, also identify key areas for one-on-one orientation. Mentors are often seen as “cultural brokers,” helping the new arrival to meet her basic needs, while also helping her to navigate in a new culture and adjust to different norms, laws and systems.
- The abundance vs. lack of safe and supportive social connections can be the difference between recovery and a path toward self-reliance versus despair and isolation leading to deprivation.



Single Mother Initiative

- currently have 13 specially-trained volunteer mentors matched with single mothers, 12 out of whom are female
- sending out assessments every 6 weeks for both parties

Volunteer Activities

- English language practice
- Assistance with everyday errands and integrating into the community
 - Navigating public transit
 - Getting a library card and learning how to check out books
 - Budgeting, grocery shopping
- Support in difficult situations
 - Getting their car fixed, insurance, etc.
 - Helping children with homework
- Friendship



Next Steps

- Prioritize single mothers for family mentor volunteer program
 - Train volunteers specifically for women-at-risk
 - Emphasize continued assessment and communication
- Specialized training on sexual and domestic violence and human trafficking resources for all case workers
 - Make available appropriate female case workers for special circumstances
- Utilize community groups (i.e. Women United) to provide safe space for refugee women to gather and participate in activities relevant to their needs



Contacts and References

1. UNHCR Report: “Resettlement and Women-at-Risk: Can the Risk Be Reduced?” January 2013
2. University of Texas at Austin IDVSA: “The Continuity of Risk: A Three-City Study of Congolese Women-at-Risk Resettled in the U.S.” September 2014

Caitlin McDonald, Refugee Women’s Empowerment Coordinator
caitlin.asianassociationofutah@gmail.com

Annette Harris, Social Services Supervisor
annetteh@aau-slc.org