

HANNAH BARLOW: ADVOCATING FOR RURAL AND TARAHUMARA WOMEN AT CSW62

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As part of the student team from Utah Valley University (UVU) I was able to participate at the 62nd session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) in New York on March 19-21, 2018. Since the CSW62 priority theme was: “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls,” it was a great opportunity for me to share with the rest of the world a story about my involvement as a student engaged learning with communities and women who face many challenges of the modern life in remote mountain areas of Mexico.



Hannah Barlow (third from the right) during the presentation at the side event at CSW62

I had the opportunity to help Dr. Lynn England perform research on the Tarahumara women in Mexico. This indigenous Indian civilization lived in the mountains of Chihuahua and have fought to maintain their culture in an otherwise developing country. As we worked with the

women in these communities we were able to see that they were able to keep much of their culture intact, but it created a life of poverty for them.

The Tarahumara are a collectivist community, meaning they share the crops they grow and the meat they have with the entire village. Beginning in the 1980's resources in the mountains became scarce and many of the Tarahumara migrated to the cities of Chihuahua. We interviewed 50 Tarahumara women about their move out of the mountains into the cities. We found that some of them temporarily migrate to the city during the spring and fall and others move permanently. Those who migrate to the cities for a few months each year, work agriculture jobs to support their family and community. The families that choose to leave the mountains permanently work low skill, poor wage jobs.

The women we interviewed moved to the cities so their children can go to school, have better health care, and better future. We learned that in response to this permanent migration, the Mexican government has created neighborhoods called colonias for the Tarahumara. The Mexican government also established bilingual schools for the children that provided breakfasts and lunches for the children. In addition, the government offers payments to families who allow their girls to attend school regularly.

Through the interviewing process I was able to get a glimpse of the Tarahumara women's lives since they've migrated. This gave me what I feel is real life experience in the job field that I am pursuing. Many of the women reported that this new living situation left them lonely with little social or economic support. They are treated by most Mexicans as inferior. As a Psychology major, this gave me real life experience in listening to another person who needed social support. I got to experience giving that kind of support by listening to whatever was on their mind.

Sharing this research with others during both a side and parallel events at the UN, reinforced how imperative it is to give these Tarahumara women the support that they are lacking. Finding solutions to help these women deal with their lack of economic and social support could truly change their living situations and help them feel like they belong. While participating at CSW62 we had the opportunity to visit one of the UN specialized branches, the liaison office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN). This was an agency I had never heard of and wished I had known about it sooner.

I think that the FAO-UN is an agency that could help the Tarahumara women receive stronger economic support. FAO-UN specializes in making agriculture more productive and inclusive. The FAO-UN could truly empower the Tarahumara women and community by helping them find useful jobs that are necessary and important to the Mexican people as well as the Tarahumara. This would enable the Tarahumara to feel needed and supported as well as help them feel like they belong. With the help of the FAO-UN, the Tarahumara have the potential to develop a meaningful and supportive relationship with the Mexican community.

My time at the UN gave me more insight and increased my determination to continue pursuing my educational and occupational goals to become a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). It showed me how essential and significant the field of social work is. At the UN, I was able to learn about the broad, various opportunities that are available to me as I work towards and become a LCSW. It created a greater understanding of the great influence I could have in the lives of women and children throughout the world as a social worker. That is why I want to become a LCSW, to make a difference in the life of at least one woman and the UN showed me that this goal is realistic and crucial.

Hannah Barlow, Utah Valley University student