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Barriers to Education and Employment among Arabic Speaking Refugee and Immigrant Women

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Currently, 25.9 million migrants are internationally displaced worldwide as refugees. Since 1975, the United States has welcomed approximately 3 million refugees for resettlement from countries all over the world. The resettlement process in the United States is complex, and lengthy. It involves three parts: two years of prescreening and security clearance, placement via national agencies into a community, and transition. During the transition phase, which lasts only a few months, includes interim financial support, medical assistance, employment services, and some English language learning.

During the Refugee resettlement process, women are often subject to discriminatory policies which put them at risk of a difficult transition. They often arrive with little English language proficiency and the cultural expectation that they are to fulfill the role as family caregiver, limiting their ability to access and participate in education and employment. There are many other factors that have not yet been investigated, such as transportation, fear of discrimination, and lack of a previous education, that may also be acting as barriers.

This study aims to extend and contextualize previous findings documenting the barriers Arabic-speaking refugee and immigrant women face with regards to gaining education and employment. Through telephone-based surveys, we examined the social situations, barriers, and assets to gaining education and employment among Arabic speaking refugee and immigrant women (N=50) in North Carolina. Findings include barriers to education and employment such as: the need for childcare; English proficiency; and lack of transportation. Assets include connections to community and special skills such as cooking and sewing. We discuss the implications of these findings for community members and health practitioners to better assist this population in a successful resettlement process.