

# Improving the Health Literacy of Refugee Women: A Pilot Project

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## ABSTRACT

Refugees are at a heightened risk for a number of negative health outcomes including diabetes, obesity, and chronic disease. Due to displacement and acculturation stress, refugees are unlikely to be able to seek necessary information and care requisite to good health. The purpose of this project was to pilot a health literacy training for refugee women that will be delivered by library science students. The goal was twofold: to create a replicable curriculum designed to improve health literacy and outcomes of refugee women and their families, and to promote health librarianship and working with disadvantaged populations to library students. The program was developed by examining scholarly literature, collaborating with experts, and using resources from other programs. Materials were available in English, Spanish, and Swahili. Local refugee resource organizations were contacted to find women that were willing to participate. The students were recruited by the project leader from the Library and Information Science department where she is faculty. Participants were pre- and post-tested immediately before and after the program to demonstrate learning during the project period. Then, they were interviewed after the last class and asked for comprehensive feedback on the relevance and helpfulness of the program to their lives. This feedback will be incorporated heavily into the next iteration of this project, planned for the academic year of 2019 – 2020.

The major accomplishments of this program were as follows:

- Four LIS students participated, all of whom stated that they were more likely to consider health librarianship as a profession and felt that their understanding of programming geared towards disadvantaged populations was greatly increased.
- Twelve immigrant and refugee women from four countries participated. The women reported an increased understanding of the content, increased self-efficacy regarding seeking medical information, and a statistically significant increase in health literacy test scores.
- The participants provided robust feedback relevant to the further development of course content.
- Most importantly, the participants enjoyed the program and seemed truly engaged with the materials. This project did much to increase the comfort of the refugee and immigrant women that participated in the pursuit of health information

## TOPICS

community engagement; social justice; specific populations; education; information needs.