

# Improving Reproductive Health Among Afghan and Arab Refugees Through Innovative Reproductive Health Literacy Training

Maha Rauf, BS<sup>1</sup>, Zahra Goliaei, MD, MPH, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Israa Al-Jumaa, BS<sup>1</sup>, Asiya Yama, BS<sup>1</sup>, Heike Thiel de Bocanegra, PhD, MPH<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of California Irvine, School of Medicine, <sup>2</sup>Touro University, School of Medicine, Public Health Program



## Background

- Upon arrival to the United States, preventative health screenings and well-woman care are not prioritized by Afghan and Arab refugee women.
- Low literacy, lack of health literacy, cultural beliefs around reproductive health and unfamiliarity with the US health care system require an innovative approach to discussing sexual and reproductive health.
- There is a scarcity of native language facilitators who are experienced in educating refugee women on sexual and reproductive health (SRH).
- The Refugee Reproductive Health Network (ReproNet) developed and implemented reproductive health literacy (RHL) trainings for Afghan and Arab immigrants to the United States.
- In a previous study, we found that involvement with local refugee groups facilitated refugee women's openness to engage in virtual platforms. Women also expressed a strong preference for groups that were all women.

**Afghan and Arab refugee women actively participate in reproductive health literacy training when it is offered in a culturally sensitive environment.**

## Research Question

Will refugee women attend and engage in reproductive health literacy trainings that address cervical cancer, family planning, and maternal health?

## Innovative approaches

### A. Digital media:

- Pre-recorded videos in Dari, Pashto, or Arabic translated from English, mirroring the English original. PowerPoints and scripts reviewed carefully for medical and linguistic accuracy. Available on YouTube.
- Dari, Pashto, and Arabic audio-recording of interactive Cervical Cancer Prevention tool.
- Provided facilitators with key points and visuals on a reproductive health topic, reducing preparation time.
- Mirrored English version tells non-native speaking facilitators what participants just heard and where to stop for questions.

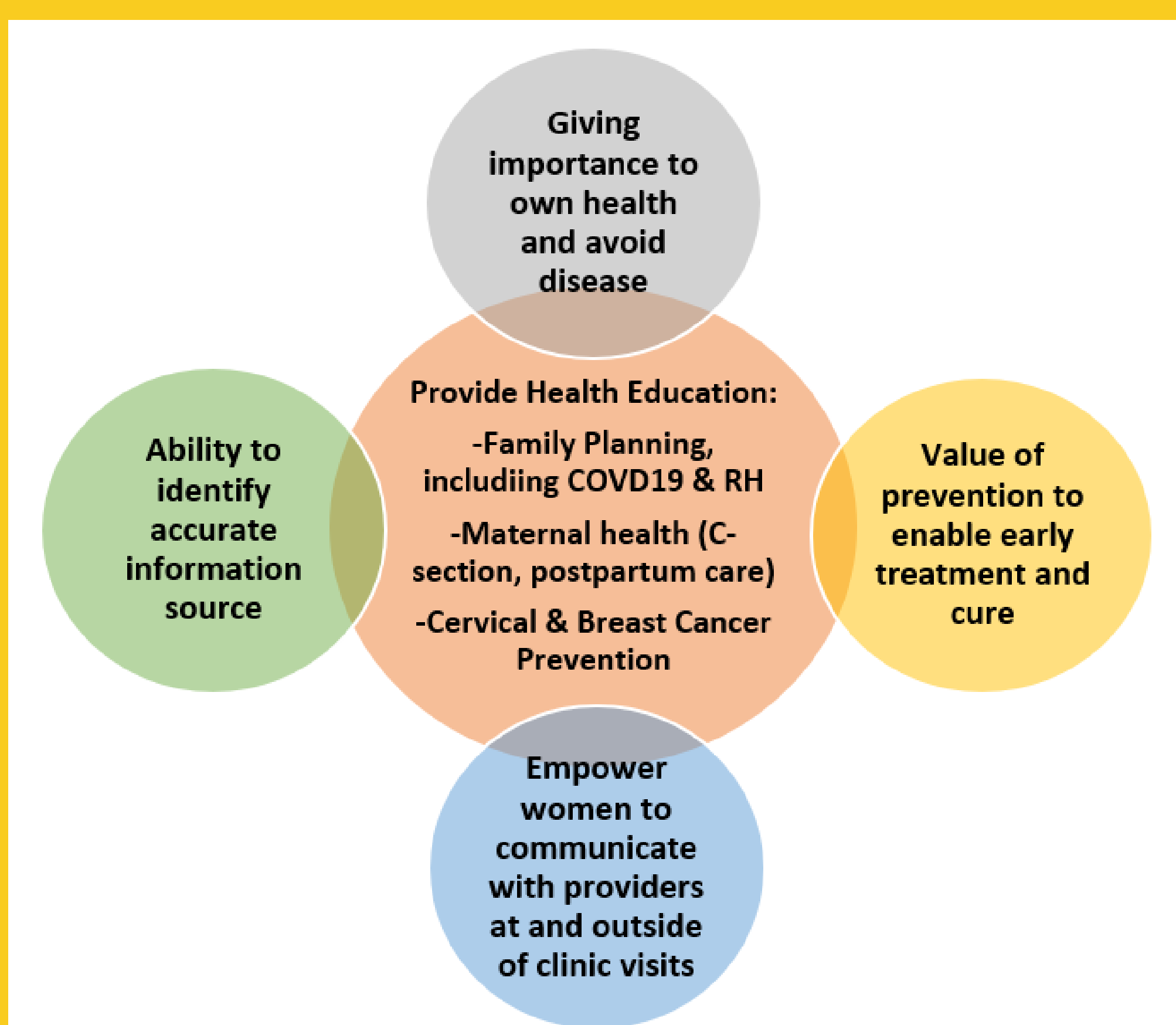
### B. Focus on Health Literacy

- Health education as a way to stress importance of prevention, self-care, communication with provider, and evaluating accuracy of health information.

## Conclusion

- Addressing reproductive health during refugee resettlement normalizes conversations on reproductive health and empowers women.
- Digital component of the intervention is scalable and alleviates scarcity of female native-speaking facilitators.
- Digital health resources alleviate potential discomfort in addressing sexual reproductive health topics.
- It is Important to have content with cultural and linguistic appropriateness.
- **Next steps:** Analyze data from pre- and post-tests quantitatively to assess improvements in RHL.

## Reproductive Health Literacy Approach



## Funding

National Library of Medicine, G08 LM014109; Patient Centered Outcome Research Institute 14471-UCI-IC

## Methodology

- In 2023, training series were offered at Sacramento Public Library locations and at refugee resettlement agencies to 319 participants.
- Topics were requested by refugee women and included: Cervical cancer, family planning/pregnancy loss, and maternal health/postpartum care.
- Sessions were limited to females only and held online via Zoom or at the public library.
- Sessions emphasized a learner-centered, culturally sensitive approach with focus on health literacy, self-care and self-advocacy.



## Contact Information

Dr. Heike Thiel de Bocanegra  
Email: [hthiel@hs.uci.edu](mailto:hthiel@hs.uci.edu)



References available upon request.