

## **Title of Project:** Improving Health Outcomes for the Karen Community: Understanding Perceived Barriers to Exercise

### **Project Description:**

Recent studies have found that refugees, defined by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, n.d.) as people or individuals who have fled their homes and crossed international borders to seek safety in another country, experience high health disparities among minorities. Since 1980, genocide, oppression, and ethnic cleansing have forced millions of refugees to immigrate to the United States, which has one of the world's largest refugee resettlement programs (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Between 2002 and 2016, Nebraska welcomed 10,418 refugees from 48 countries (Nebraska Refugee Health Report, 2020). Nebraska has the largest refugee population from Myanmar, with 4,481 refugees between 2002 and 2016 (Nebraska Refugee Health Report, 2020). The Karen people are an ethnic group from Myanmar among Nebraska's largest refugee groups and will be the population of interest for this study.

In 2017, the Nebraska Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity (OHDHE) conducted a statewide Refugee Needs Assessment Survey to identify key risk factors for refugee populations. The study found that the top barriers to accessing healthcare were culture and language barriers, financial constraints, and insurance coverage (University of Nebraska Medical Center, 2017). Another study revealed that as refugees stay longer in the United States, they are likely to adopt unhealthy lifestyle habits as a part of acculturation (Nebraska Refugee Health Report, 2020). While these chronic diseases are preventable, cultural and linguistic barriers, the lack of knowledge and understanding of the U.S. healthcare system, and a lack of educational and public health awareness continue to impede refugees' health, including the Karen community.

Based on the research question, "What are the perceived barriers to exercise among the adult Karen population in Omaha?", we aim to increase the understanding and awareness of refugees' health challenges and develop culturally sensitive interventions that promote better health outcomes.

### **Activities, Process, or Methodology:**

This mixed-method study aims to investigate the perceived barriers to exercise among the adult Karen population throughout Omaha. A total of 100 surveys will be collected from Karen participants over 19 years of age and living in Omaha, NE. Overall, there will be two phases to the study over a period of 6-7 months.

In the first phase, the researcher will host two listening sessions. The first session is to hear from 7 community members, preferably people who live, work, and are involved in the community. The researcher will ask questions about Karen refugee health, from the barriers and challenges to accessing healthcare to how they would like to be supported and improved to see better health outcomes for the community. Afterward, the researcher will draft questions for primary survey data and volunteers from the Karen Student Association at UNO and Karen Society of Nebraska will help translate survey questions during this process. The researcher will also attend community events and use scholarly articles and media to develop thoughtful, well-rounded questions. The questionnaire will vary from the participant's former and current zip to their belief or knowledge about exercise and dieting. Once the researcher compiles questions for the survey, they will consult with the mentor and make changes. Next, the researcher will host a second listening session where 5 community members different from the first group will review and give constructive feedback on the survey questions.

**Instrumentation:** The survey questionnaires will be based on the ideas and input from the first listening sessions. The questions will be divided into 3-5 themed categories and primarily consist of multiple-choice options. Each theme will have 5-10 questions relevant to a specific topic. For example, if the theme is participant demographics, questions may include age, zip code, place of birth, employment status, or marital status. The questionnaires aim to gather information about opportunities and needs for potential health programs or health prevention without causing harm to individuals. The face validity of the questions will be tested before finalizing the survey and collecting data.

In the second phase of the research project, the student researcher, mentor, and volunteer translators will meet to review the feedback and make changes to the survey and the translation. Next, the student will start the recruitment process and collect data based on the recommendations from listening session groups. The researcher will make informative posters, call, email, and visit local Karen places to advertise the research. The researcher will also collect the survey data at offices, local stores and businesses, and events organized by the Karen community. Once the researcher reaches 100 participants, the researcher and mentor will conclude the survey collection and prepare for the UNO Research and Creative Activity Fair in March 2025.

As a follow-up, the researcher will share the research result with participants interested in learning more about the study result. Depending on the FUSE grant policy, the student may create a Facebook page to share the result with the community members in the Karen language because not everyone, especially adults, has email accounts for follow-up or updates.

### **Project Timeline:**

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Details</b>
After project approved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student meet with advisors to plan and carry out the project</li> <li>• Recruiting community member and Karen volunteers</li> <li>• Reserve spaces at UNO for listening session and meetings.</li> </ul>
April – Early June: First phase of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruit and hold the first listening session with 7 community members</li> <li>• Researchers compile research survey questions and recruit volunteer translators</li> <li>• Hold the second listening session and update survey questions</li> </ul>
June 2024 - September 2024: Second phase of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making flyers, calling, emailing, and visiting local places to and collecting data.</li> <li>• Evaluate survey and continues to collect survey if necessary</li> </ul>
October 2024 - January 2025: Evaluating and preparing for the Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Advisor to understand and evaluate survey result</li> <li>• Preparation for presentation and practice speaking and sharing information with audience</li> </ul>
Day of the Fair and follow up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present the project at the UNO Research and Creative Activity Fair in March 2025</li> <li>• Follow up with participants</li> </ul>

### **Student/Faculty Mentor Roles:**

The mentor for this project is Dr. Richard Stacy, a professor at the School of Health and Kinesiology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He will support this project by using his research experience to provide and suggest changes to guide the student's research question, "What are the perceived barriers to exercise among the adult Karen population in Omaha?" He will also meet with the student monthly for a checkup or, when we both think it necessary, give feedback about the project proposal, progress, and research paper. Overall, Dr. Stacy will keep the student accountable and guide the student to conduct research experience that increases understanding and awareness of refugees' health challenges. Eventually, the student aims to develop culturally sensitive interventions that promote better health outcomes.

**Budget and Budget Justification:**

Amount requested: \$2300

Budget amount	Details
\$300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A \$25 gift card for community member at listening session</li><li>• 7 community members in first session</li><li>• 5 community members in second session</li></ul>
\$2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student Stipend</li><li>• Student will take hours off from job to organize the 2 listening sessions and collecting data.</li><li>• Collect data for 10 – 20 hours per week for 3-4 months</li><li>• Approximately 20 hours of recruiting from calling, emailing, and visiting places and putting up posters.</li><li>• Approximately 10 – 20 hours to compile survey questions</li><li>• Create posters for recruitment.</li><li>• Recruit volunteers to help translate survey questions.</li></ul>

## References:

In addition to the citations below, more readings may be found during the process that might be useful to the project. As for now, this is a list of references that will be used.

Department of Health and Human Service (2020). Nebraska Refugee Health Report

2020. <https://dhhs.ne.gov/Reports/Nebraska%20Refugee%20Health%20Report%202020.pdf>

Resettlement in the United States. UNHCR US. (n.d.). <https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/resettlement-united-states/>

UNHCR. What is a refugee?. (n.d.). <https://www.unhcr.org/what-refugee#:~:text=The%201951%20Refugee%20Convention%20is,group%2C%20or%20political%20opinion.%E2%80%9D>

University of Nebraska Medical Center (2017). Refugee health needs assessment in Omaha, Nebraska. <https://www.unmc.edu/publichealth/crhd/about/Refugee-Health-Needs-Assessment-in-Omaha,-Nebraska-Report-2017.pdf>

U.S. Department of State. (2023, February 3). *Fact sheet - Launch of welcome corps- private sponsorship of refugees - United States department of state*. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/aunch-of-the-welcome-corps-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-2/#:~:text=The%20Welcome%20Corps%20is%20the,assistance%20to%20newly%20arriving%20refugees>



SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND KINESIOLOGY

September 20, 2023

UNO FUSE Grant Committee

Dear Colleagues:

I am happy to write in support of Paw Thlay Wah in a FUSE Research Study to address the research question, What Are The Barriers To Exercise Among The Adult Karen Population in Omaha, Nebraska? Paw Thlay Wah is a junior with a major in Public Health. I have had or currently have her in multiple courses in our Public Health program. It is through these courses that she and I have discussed many times the need to address this research question and others among the refugee communities here.

Paw Thlay is an outstanding student as her 3.45 GPA will attest. She assumes a leadership role in most classes and is currently the President of UNO Student Public Health Association. I have no doubts that she will employ her talents and her drive toward the completion of this important study.

I have read her research proposal carefully and found it to be timely, very important, and carefully laid out. Findings from this mixed methods study will assist public health professionals and refugee assistance programmers to develop effective interventions.

I am pleased that she has asked me to be her sponsor and advisor throughout this project. I think it is a sound proposal and I look forward to working with her. Please let me know if you have any questions for me. I recommend funding of this project with no reservations.

Thank you very much.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard D. Stacy".

Richard D. Stacy, Ed.D., M.P.H.  
Professor of Public Health