

Perceptions of Barriers to Healthcare among Afghan Refugees/Special Immigrant Visa Holders, Resettlement Agency Affiliates and Healthcare workers in the Denver Area

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Abstract

Background: The United States resettled over 76,000 Afghan nationals since 2021, with 2,000 settling in Colorado. Refugees face numerous barriers to healthcare that exacerbate their high burden of physical and mental health issues (Fisher, 2022). This study investigates perceptions of healthcare barriers among Afghan refugees, resettlement agency affiliates, and healthcare workers to identify shared and unique challenges and inform actionable interventions.

Problem Statement: This study aims to fill this gap by identifying shared and divergent perceptions of healthcare barriers among refugees, resettlement affiliates, and healthcare providers in Denver. By examining these perspectives, the study seeks to provide actionable insights that can guide the development of culturally tailored, equitable healthcare solutions for Afghan refugees.

Methods: A qualitative interview study was conducted using semi-structured interviews (n=15) with refugees, resettlement affiliates, and healthcare providers. Interviews were conducted over an 11 month period in 2023 and 2024 both in-person and through video conferencing. Interviews were analyzed using grounded theory, combining A Priori and emergent coding to identify themes. AtlasTI was used for thematic analysis and coding.

Results: The following five themes emerged in order of prevalence by time discussed: (1) Complexity of the U.S. Healthcare System, (2) Financial/Logistical Constraints, (3) Extended Wait Times for Care, (4) Cultural Taboos and Standards of Care, (5) Language and Communication Barriers. Shared perceptions across groups highlight systemic gaps in healthcare accessibility and equity, while differences in importance and impact indicate possible areas for better understanding and more efficient resource allocation.

Conclusions: Targeted interventions, including the establishment of culturally tailored clinics, technological solutions for enhanced communication, and robust cultural competency training for providers, can improve healthcare utilization and outcomes for Afghan refugees in Denver.