

**Faculty:** Shayesteh Jahanfar, Associate Professor, School of Medicine

**Project Locations:** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Dates:** Early May-late August

**Project Title:** Reproductive health of immigrant women in Malaysia

**Project Details:** The total population of Malaysia, according to the 2019 Current Population Survey, is about 32.7 million individuals; of the total population, 3.43 million--or approximately 10%--are immigrants. It is also estimated that the population of immigrants will increase by as much as 2.9% every year. As one of the biggest economies in Southeast Asia, Malaysia is an attractive destination for workers from neighboring countries seeking better wages and employment. Although policies have been implemented with the intention of increasing healthcare coverage for immigrants, there is still a divide in healthcare among immigrant populations in the United States. Participants at the "Migrant and Refugee Health in Malaysia workshop, Kuala Lumpur, 9-10 November 2017" scoped these challenges within the regional ASEAN context, identifying gaps in knowledge and practical steps forward to improve the evidence base in Malaysia. Both documented and undocumented female immigrants often work in industries that do not offer health insurance. Additionally, these individuals may not speak the local language, thus are more likely to have reduced access to culturally and linguistically competent reproductive health information and services. As a result, access to affordable, quality reproductive health care is of significant concern to these women. Unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and opioid use is found increasingly common among immigrant populations. Interestingly, rates of sexual activity in youth in some immigrant populations are lower than in no-immigrant youth; however, fewer resources for obtaining quality health care and education and reproductive health services result in subsequent higher teen pregnancy rates. There are significant racial and ethnic disparities that result in higher rates of STIs and opioid use in racial and ethnic minorities. It has been proven that those who engage in opioid use are less likely to utilize reproductive health services or seek these services.

Public health approaches to promote reproductive health are productive due to use of scientifically tested and proven interventions; these interventions often involve the community and increase self-efficacy in these communities to improve health outcomes. Life skills approach, social marketing and franchising as well as reproductive health campaigns are some successful interventions that have shown positive outcomes among vulnerable populations. To the best of our knowledge, evidence surrounding reproductive health knowledge and utilization of reproductive health services among immigrant populations is scarce.

This study aims at obtaining the level of reproductive health knowledge among immigrants and investigating the reproductive health services utilization among this vulnerable population. We also aim to investigate the impact of vocational workshops--to teach women how to create and market handcrafted products--on improving reproductive health and utilization.

- AIM 1: To assess knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about reproductive health within immigrant populations living in the state of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- AIM 2: To investigate the association between knowledge and utilization of sexual and reproductive healthcare services, contraceptive knowledge, and socio-demographic characteristics and social capital among immigrant women in the state of Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

Research Strategy: First, we aim to assess immigrant women's knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding reproductive health and reproductive health services available to them. To achieve this goal, immigrant women (n=60, ages 18-50) will be interviewed to explore their knowledge and attitudes about reproductive health, and beliefs towards the use of reproductive health services. Topics to be covered will include sources of information on sexual and reproductive health, knowledge on sexual and reproductive health services, reproductive health outcomes, protective or risky sexual behaviors, thoughts on discrimination, questions about participants' sex lives and sexual experiences, experience and knowledge of family planning, and knowledge of accessible opportunities and reproductive health services in their place of residence. Second, we aim at investigating the association between knowledge and utilization of sexual and reproductive healthcare services, contraceptive knowledge, and socio-demographic characteristics and the scale of measuring social capital among immigrant women in Malaysia. To obtain this objective, we will use a quantitative questionnaire adopted from previous studies.<sup>34-40</sup> The questionnaire contains 30 questions, covering the following themes: socio-demographic issues, self-rated somatic and mental health, use and knowledge of healthcare services, exposure to violence, social capital including trust and social participation, lifestyle factors such as alcohol and tobacco use, and nutrition and physical activity. The questions will be modified based on the data obtained from the qualitative part of the current study and will then be tested in focus group discussions with immigrant women to ensure its cultural pertinence. The questionnaire is initially written in English. Thereafter, it will be translated into Chinese, Malay, Hindu, then will be independently back-translated into English. It will be pilot tested before being finalized.

**Tasks and Responsibilities of Research Assistant:**

1. Training with Dr. Wong on how to interview study subjects.
2. Interview immigrant women using a standard questionnaire.
3. Visit local immigrants' houses or places of residence to understand the culture and appreciate the challenges and difficulties of women in reaching out to reproductive health services.
4. Analyze the collected data and wrote a draft of a publishable manuscript to be submitted to a journal and to be presented in a virtual conference.

**Qualifications:**

1. Interest in public health research
2. Familiarity with descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analysis

**Description of Field Site:**

Kuala Lumpur is the capital of Malaysia. It is a modern city with all the amenities you can imagine; however, university life is simple.

**Housing in Malaysia:** Students will be housed in a hostel close to the University of Malaya. The student will be responsible to select and secure their housing. The housing features all the amenities expected in a hostel. Student will live with other interns and youth in a guarded environment. Information about room rate for international students in residential college can be found [here](#). Off-campus accommodations guide can be found [here](#).