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HRD and Employment Preparation of Women Refugees:

An Integrative Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper explores the HRD and employment preparation of women refugees. As half of any refugee population, women refugees have the potential to greatly contribute to social and economic development of the country of their resettlement, but many remain unemployed or underemployed. The review of literature includes the effectiveness of available refugee employment services, crucial factors for employment, and the various challenges that women refugees face in employment preparation. Implications for HRD research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: HRD, refugees, employment

HRD and Employment Preparation of Women Refugees

In 2013, there were 51.2 million globally displaced persons, among them 16.7 million refugees (UNHCR Global Trends, 2013). The United States ranks second among industrialized countries with a long history of refugee resettlement, welcoming over 3 million refugees since 1975 (Department of State, 2014). In almost all refugee populations, approximately half are women (Martin, 2004). The main priority of refugee resettlement is economic self-sufficiency, which is primarily gained through employment. Though employment assistance is available, women refugees largely remain unemployed or underemployed. As half of the resettling refugee population, these women have the potential to be valuable resources in contributing to the economic and social development of their resettled communities. But without further education or training, women refugees may not have the opportunity to become truly self-sufficient and meaningfully contribute to the sustainable development of their community (Morlang & Watson, 2007). Consequently, this is an issue of concern to human resource development (HRD).

This paper reviews literature concerning the education, training, and employment preparation of women refugees. HRD is discussed in this context as an agent of societal and national development, and not just focused on organizations (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Functioning in this manner, HRD is defined as “any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults’ work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity” (McLean & McLean, 2001).

Exploring the HRD and employment preparation of women refugees is significant in that economic survival of their families depend on their ability to obtain employment (Spero, 1985).

Due to the circumstances of resettling in industrialized countries like the United States, women refugees are expected to contribute to their new lives in a productive manner, either as a sole breadwinner or as one of two income-earners (Davison, 1981; Spero, 1985). Yet, due to the lack of training and skills, many women refugees are poorly equipped to obtain employment, for they typically arrive with limited English proficiency, low levels of formal education, and skills not considered as relevant or transferable (Davison, 1981). Women refugees also hold enormous potential in contributing to economic development. Martin (2004) found that thus far, development-oriented efforts for refugee participants have been focused on refugee men. This is because many of the projects designed to promote community development consisted of large-scale construction and reforestation schemes, which primarily involve employing refugee men. Development-oriented projects and programs in countries of asylum and resettlement are believed to enhance refugee economic independence, reduce the host country's refugee assistance costs, and facilitate returns traditionally through infrastructure improvement (Martin, 2004). Because half of the refugee population comprise of women, failure to take this demographic into account and their high potential to contribute to economic development can have adverse effects on the success of such development-oriented efforts.

This paper first examines how women refugees prepare for employment. This includes a description of the employment services provided by federal, state, and non-profit organizations, how effective these services are in helping women refugees prepare for employment, and what elements are crucial for improving employment prospects. Second, the paper examines the various barriers that women refugees face in their path to gaining employment. Finally, the paper will discuss HRD needs related to employment preparation of women refugees. Based on McLean's definition of HRD and its goals, the discussion will include HRD processes and

activities needed to support the development of women refugees' work-based knowledge, productivity and satisfaction for the purposes of gaining employment and becoming self-sufficient. In becoming self-sufficient, women refugees gain personal benefits as well as contribute to the workforce development of the nation.

Thus, this paper will address the following research questions:

- How do women refugees prepare for employment?
- What barriers do women refugees face in finding employment?
- What are the HRD needs related to the employment preparation of women refugees?

Method

The topic is discussed by providing an integrative literature review related to HRD and employment preparation of women refugees. The integrative literature review aims to review, critique, and synthesize available related literature on the topic in an integrated manner, such that new perspectives of the topic are made (Torraco, 2005). An integrative literature review is an appropriate research method for addressing relatively new or emerging topics where its respective literature has not yet been comprehensively reviewed. Such is the case with the topic on women refugees and employment preparation, which has limited prior research due to the topic's emergent nature. Thus, an integrative literature review would address this gap.

An integrative literature review does not have a standardized format as there is for empirical work (Torraco, 2005). Review articles typically begin with a broad concept of what is known about a topic and wherein potential new knowledge may be generated, sections are arranged by relationship rather than by chronology, and the methods for selecting and reviewing the literature are described.

Two related bodies of literature were reviewed. First, literature on the women refugee population was reviewed to determine refugee origins, demographics, and profiles. Literature for this category was included based on the refugee demographics and profiles resettling in the United States within the last 5 years. Second, literature on employment preparation of women refugees was reviewed. This process included various support systems available for women refugees in their efforts to prepare for employment, and how effective these resources are. Literature on the barriers that women refugees face when preparing for employment was also examined. Literature for this category was included based on the following parameters: federal, state, and community assistance related to refugee employment preparation available in the United States, and employment issues that women refugees face in industrialized resettlement communities. The methods for selecting and reviewing this literature are described next.

In searching for scholarly articles, the following search databases were used: Academic Search Premier, Gender Studies Database, Business Source Complete, Worldcat, and Google Scholar. Key subject terms were used to identify relevant literature. Literature on women refugees and the refugee population in the United States was identified using 9 key subject terms. Literature on employment preparation of women refugees, including literature on various support services and program effectiveness, was identified using 36 key subject terms. Literature search in both areas required using a total of 45 key subject terms.

These 45 key subject terms were used to search databases in addition to the subject descriptors the databases had provided, since a majority of the key subject terms are not listed in the databases' descriptors. For instance, 39 of 45 key subject terms are not listed as descriptors in the Academic Search Premier thesaurus, 42 of 45 key subject terms are not listed as Business

Source Complete descriptors, and 36 of 45 key subject terms are not listed as Gender Studies Database subject terms.

Most of the literature searched was from refereed scholarly journals. The review also included empirically-supported and relevant technical and research reports directly sourced from the websites of independent research centers, federal agencies, and non-profit organizations. A list of the 9 websites reviewed for relevant literature is available from the author upon request. In addition, a university library's online catalog and inter-library resources were used to locate and review relevant literature in print format.

In the next stage of the review, each piece of literature was examined using a staged review and critical analysis. This involved examining its abstracts and full text, analyzing its basic elements, and critiquing its strengths and weaknesses. Literature was not selected if it did not meet the selection criteria listed above, even if it was identified as relevant using the key subject terms. The critical analysis of each piece of selected literature led to a synthesized and more integrated perspective of the topic. The synthesis of related streams of literature could generate new and significant contributions to the current body of knowledge, and a better understanding of the topic. The product of this synthesis, provided at the end of the paper, reflects the relationship of employment preparation factors to women refugees, and implications for HRD research and practice. A total of thirty-one pieces of literature were examined for this integrative literature review.

Women Refugees and Employment

Refugees are persons outside of their country of origin who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group or political opinion, and unable or, because of such fear, are unwilling to return to that country.

This definition extends to persons escaping war, other armed conflict, or generalized violence (UNHCR Global Trends, 2013). Prior to entering countries of asylum such as the United States, the US government must grant these persons refugee status. In contrast, asylees are persons who seek refuge in countries such as the United States for the same reasons as refugees, but have already entered the country on their own as students, tourists, businessmen, or in undocumented status (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012). Once at the port of entry, these persons apply to the Department of Homeland Security for asylum status. Once granted refugee or asylee status, both are classified as part of the “immigrant” or the “foreign-born” population, and may apply for lawful permanent residence or green card after one year of continuous presence in the United States, and citizenship after 5 years (Lyons, 2008; Nwosu, Batalova, & Auclair, 2014). The terms “immigrant” and “foreign born” are used interchangeably to refer to persons with no United States citizenship at birth. Aside from refugees and asylees, other immigrants include naturalized citizens, green card holders, persons on temporary visas, and the unauthorized. In 2012, there were 41 million immigrants in the United States, comprising 16% of the total labor force (Nwosu, et al., 2014).

While refugees are referred to as immigrants, the profile and needs of refugees are distinctly different from the rest of the foreign-born population. Lyons (2008) asserts that refugees are legally authorized to work in the country upon resettlement, and are eligible for the same public benefits and services as US citizens. In addition, refugees are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of the fear of persecution. Thus, refugees are identified as a population in need of protection and resettlement to countries such as the United States. In contrast, other immigrants may not all be legally authorized to work or be eligible for the same public benefits and services as US citizens. Non-refugee immigrants may have made a

conscious choice to enter the country, and can always return to their home countries if they get homesick. For these reasons, refugees are assisted differently from other immigrants, especially in the areas of trauma counseling, housing assistance, medical care, employment services, and integration programs (Lyons, 2008; University of Pittsburgh, 2014).

Between October 2013 and August 2014, the United States admitted 64,120 refugees. The top five groups originated from Iraq, Somalia, Burma, Congo, and Bhutan, and approximately half of them were women (Department of State, 2014; Martin, 2004). The Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reports that refugees generally experience a “successful and rapid economic adjustment in the United States” (ORR, 2011). As of 2011, the employment rate for refugee men was 62%, compared to 42% for women refugees. More refugee men also actively looked for work (73%), compared to the women (53%). Among all refugee arrivals in 2011, the report approximates that 56% found first employment within 6 months after arrival, 22% within 12 months after arrival, and another 22% found first employment more than 12 months after arrival. Despite seemingly positive trends, overall refugee unemployment rates remain much higher than that of the general population (18% versus 8% in 2011), suggesting that economic adjustment continues to be challenging for refugee populations. Further, the ORR report does not provide in-depth details on women’s employment issues, and the underemployed.

More recent refugee groups tend to be more women than men, from more rural homelands, and resettle in urban communities with fewer pre-established community support structures (Magno, 2008). Refugee arrivals in 2011 show that only 34% had completed high school, 16% have college degrees, and 17% indicated the intention to complete a degree upon arrival in the United States (ORR, 2011). The report did not distinguish education levels of

refugee men and women, but other research suggests that women refugees arrive with varying levels of skill, work experience and education (Martin, 2004; Warriner, 2004).

Despite coming from more rural backgrounds, these women have been found to be resilient, debunking the stereotype of the “poor, failing and unmotivated immigrant” (Warriner, 2004). Many are optimistic and determined to rebuild their lives in their new communities by balancing motherhood, being committed students, and pursuing careers. Many women refugees want to work and become more educated. Regardless of marital status, they understand that employment will lead to improved lives for themselves and their families (Warriner, 2004).

Refugee Resettlement Assistance

Upon arriving in the United States, the ORR partners with local resettlement agencies, and non-profit, service-oriented community organizations in resettling refugees in specific communities (Dunman, 2006). Through these organizations, refugees gain access to 3 forms of services to aid in the goal towards self-sufficiency: 1) basic state-administered cash and medical assistance for up to 8 months, 2) non-cash social services for up to 5 years, and 3) other discretionary programs that refugees are enrolled in based on certain needs and criteria. Resettlement services can vary according to the state (Dunman, 2006). For example, refugees with children under age 18 receive additional cash assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), for a federal maximum of 5 years, but specific states may determine shorter time limits (Halpern, 2008). Other refugees assessed as having greater chances of finding quick employment based on motivation levels, English skills, education, previous work experience, physical and mental health are enrolled in the Matching Grant Program, which provides cash assistance for refugees for up to 6 months only (US Government Accountability

Office, 2011). The time limits for state and federal assistance exist to urge refugees to quickly find employment and decrease the use of public assistance (Halpern, 2008).

Local resettlement agencies typically provide social services in the form of basic social integration and employability assistance (Halpern, 2008). Social integration services assist in areas such as housing and trauma counseling. Employability services assist in finding opportunities in education, training, and specific employment preparation.

Education and training assistance. As initial steps towards career advancement, refugees are assisted in finding opportunities for pre-employment training. This includes short-term training such as vocational training, on-the-job-training, or job clubs. For example, some discretionary assistance programs offer short-term vocational skill training for 3 to 4 months in a certified skill (Halpern, 2008). Some agencies may also have a “job club” where refugees practice writing resumes and job applications.

Pre-employment training also includes English as a Second Language (ESL), with particular emphasis on employment-based English (Halpern, 2008). ESL classes are largely offered by independent non-profit organizations and community colleges (Martin, 2004). Though some non-profit community organizations offer free English language literacy training, it can be costly to study for skills re-certification, earn a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED), attend higher education, or pursue other forms of adult education (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2012). Some pre-employment education programs even include financial literacy, where refugees learn basic skills as debit card usage, to more advanced skills such as maintaining credit in the context of the United States financial system (Halpern, 2008). Most of these educational programs have monthly tests that assess various competencies to see whether students are ready for employment (Elkin, Barden, & Mueller, 2008).

Refugees interested in pursuing higher education prior to employment may also consider the Albert Einstein Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI), a scholarship program facilitated through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). DAFI provides educational scholarships to eligible refugee men and women who wish to pursue tertiary education in higher education institutions in resettlement countries or in countries of origin if considering repatriation (Morlang & Watson, 2007).

In addition to offering English literacy and vocational training, some non-profit community organizations also provide cultural orientation and non-formal education for refugees (Magno, 2008; Shriberg, Downs-Karkos, & Weisberg, 2012). Such community organizations help refugees navigate local systems for employment, transportation and financial services, and provide women refugees especially the social networking needed to bring them together to learn informally from each other and to communicate their needs (Lytinen & Kullenberg, 2013; Magno, 2008; Shriberg, et al., 2012).

Effectiveness of education and training assistance. Elkin, et al. (2008) evaluated refugee social service and targeted assistance programs in Sacramento, California for the ORR. The Sacramento refugee programs serviced a refugee population where half were women. The case study did not find evidence that English training led to improved employment outcomes when controlling for other factors, including English ability. However, the study did find that better English ability is associated with higher wages, which is consistent with the findings of the 2011 US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. Sacramento refugees were generally happy with education and training assistance, but complained about large class sizes (40 to 50 students in a class), and the way adult classes were taught because they did not match individual learning styles. The study also found that those who received ESL services, child care support,

and transportation assistance were more likely to consequently receive job search services, and more likely to be refugee men.

Davison (1981) found that some educational classes were not culturally sensitive for women refugees. Educational classes that combine men and women together in the same room may discourage women refugees to attend and participate in class. In attending mixed classes, some women refugees claim to be afraid that men would lose face if the women did better, and other women professed “shyness” in such classes. In addition, some women refugees preferred to participate in learning sessions that were held in informal settings, versus formally organized classes. This is because formal classes required them to seek approval from their husbands, and were perceived to be threatening to cultural beliefs about family unity and male authority.

Furthermore, literacy programs do not sufficiently assess individual learning and progression levels due to lack of resources (Clayton, 2005; Elkin, et al., 2008). Some women refugees with intermediate English skills have expressed frustrations at being placed, by default, in the same classroom as those who were just learning the English alphabet (Clayton, 2005).

Employment assistance. The ORR also assists refugees in other activities related to finding and retaining a job. These services include job search, referral to job opportunities, job placement and follow-ups, and employment skills and aptitude assessment. Translation and interpreter services are also available to help refugees initially communicate with employers or understand work-related documents. Refugees also receive assistance in obtaining Employment Authorization Documents (EADs), which legally permit them to find and keep gainful employment in the United States (Halpern, 2008).

Effectiveness of employment assistance.

Challenges in program quality measurement. In the United States, state-administered refugee assistance programs such as the Wilson/Fish and the Public-Private Partnership programs allow states and voluntary agencies the flexibility to design their programs in ways that offer intensive case management and integrated services to refugees, such as providing cash incentives for early employment, and discretionary grants for eligible refugees (GAO, 2011). Because of the varied approaches used within and between programs, there is little information on how effective these approaches and services are. Different factors are also considered when placing refugees in certain assistance programs, making it difficult to determine whether a program's performance is attributed to specific program approaches or to the different populations served. For instance, a program that serves more families with children may have different employment outcomes than a program that serves fewer families.

Funding may also affect program quality. States may be receiving the same amount of funding for refugee assistance programs despite an increase in refugee arrivals per year. As a result, some states provide employment services for only 1 year instead of the stipulated 5 years (GAO, 2011).

Private versus public. Program quality may also be dependent on whether the refugee services are facilitated through private community organizations, or state-administered. Sargent, Holm, and Moser (1999) conducted a qualitative case study in San Diego that compared a private Catholic charity- funded Wilson/Fish (WF) program with the state's refugee employment services system (RESS). The study found that the WF program helped refugees get jobs faster, had more informal partnerships with potential employers (such that refugees were accompanied to the workplace), had networks that were easier to contact in cases of emergency, and strongly

prioritized finding employment immediately. In contrast, the RESS state program had more formal relationships with employers (such that refugees were “sent” to the workplace), had more bureaucratic and scattered sources of assistance, and more strongly emphasized education prior to employment.

Job search, translation, and access to professional education. In Sacramento, most of all refugees who are enrolled in integrated vocational English and employment services receive basic employment-focused services such as job preparation, resume writing, and interviewing practice (Elkin et al., 2008). However, very few individuals receive intensive job search or placement services within the first few months in the country. Elkin et al. (2008) also found that refugees need more help from employment service providers in translating certifications obtained from their home countries, and with providing access to professional degrees in order to apply for similar jobs as in their countries of origin.

Employability programs via non-profit organizations. Non-profit, private, and service-oriented community organizations play a prominent role in ensuring that refugees access federal and state benefits and services (Dunman, 2006). Research suggests that very few of these non-profit community organizations make the effort to add and better customize assistance programs for women refugees. For example, one such community organization encourages women refugees to participate in the organization’s community activities to help them learn critical knowledge and skills that they would otherwise not obtain through formal education (Magno, 2008). These women informally learn about their new community’s social services, educational systems, and how to interact with women from other cultures and countries while participating in the organization’s community activities. Such community organizations are also avenues for social networking to build support systems and find possible employment (Buck & Silver, 2012;

Warriner, 2004). The existence of such community organizations is evidence that some communities are making more effort to provide non-formal and informal education for women refugees. However, Magno (2008) suggests that these community organizations and other local resettlement agencies need to more strongly collaborate on motivating more newly-arrived women refugees to participate in such community activities, and making smoother transitions between state-administered orientation and programs offered by the community organization.

English-only programs. Warriner (2004) argues that the problem with some of these social programs and services designed to help refugees is that they are only offered in English. In helping refugees become self-sufficient as quickly as possible, some programs assume that 3 months is enough to learn English and find employment. However, many other structural factors influence the ability to find employment, such as long waitlists for ESL classes, a poor labor market, anti-immigration sentiments, lack of affordable childcare, and difficulties with transportation (Davison, 1981; Warriner, 2004).

The education and employment assistance services mentioned above are evidence that help is commonly available to address both refugee men and women's basic needs related to social integration and employability. However, very few services cater specifically to women refugees, not only in vocational and job training, but also in other areas such as literacy in maternal and child issues (Magno, 2008). Davison (1981) asserts that this may be because most programs assume that refugee men are the primary breadwinners, or at least not exclusively women. Thus, such programs intentionally do not segregate classes, provide child care, or offer vocational training deemed suitable for women refugees. The few federally funded programs that do consider particular needs of women refugees provide day care facilities, vocational English, and training in mainly clerical and home economics. Several ESL programs have also

been developed for women refugees, but they are principally aimed at the most “vulnerable” subgroups such as the preliterates, handicapped, and very old, and those with small children who do not want to participate in programs outside the home.

Barriers to Job Preparation and Employment

Despite the availability of educational and training resources for employment preparation, refugee women are less likely to look for work than the men (ORR, 2011). Ninety-two percent of female refugee respondents report that childcare and family responsibilities are the main reasons for not looking for work. Research suggests that the reasons why women refugees do not look for work and/or unsuccessful in finding employment are a combination of personal and societal factors. These are the lack of English skills, lack of relevant skills training, anti-immigrant sentiments, various employer issues, racial and gender discrimination, and personal constraints.

Lack of English skills. For many refugees who resettle in the United States and other countries that use English as their primary language, English literacy is the first step towards adjustment. English proficiency is a crucial factor influencing economic self-sufficiency (GAO, 2011; ORR, 2011; Spero, 1985). Ninety percent of refugees who lacked earnings are found to live in non-English speaking households and are highly dependent on cash assistance (GAO, 2011). However, as refugee women and men improve English proficiency over time, the opportunities to increase their earning potential also improve (ORR, 2011). More women refugees also participate in the labor force as their English skills improve (Spero, 1985). Without distinguishing refugee men from women, the ORR reports that 27% of refugee arrivals in 2011 could speak English fluently. This is a lower percentage considering that 48% of refugee arrivals in 2010 could speak English fluently (ORR, 2011).

Employers put a premium on English language skills when making hiring and promotion decisions (ORR, 2011; Spero, 1985). The inability to communicate in English was rated by employers as the principal impediment to career advancement, even in jobs that reportedly do not require a high level of English (Spero, 1985). In short, the better the English of the refugee, the more likely he/she is to find and keep employment (ORR, 2011). For many women refugees, however, language is a formidable barrier when they first enter industrialized countries (Martin, 2004). Most do not speak English upon arrival. Though they are aware of the availability of English classes and want to attend them, less women refugees enroll in these classes compared to the men. Reasons include practical problems such as the need for day care and transportation. Homebound women with small children may not be able to practice English skills often enough in daily situations and challenges. Some of the classes require the women to have some prior level of formal education, or class schedules may conflict with household or work demands. Not having the opportunity to improve English proficiency puts more women refugees at risk for dead-end jobs or being denied employment opportunities altogether (Spero, 1985).

Lack of relevant skills training. Many refugee women arrive with varying skills that could be transferable, but need to undergo education and skills training to take on new roles, retrain for new and available jobs, or adapt to new qualifications to support themselves and their families (Martin, 2004). Without distinguishing refugee men from women, the ORR reports that only 4% of refugees attended job training classes upon arrival in 2011 (ORR, 2011).

Women refugees benefit from education and skills training because it increases their income-earning potential and fosters self-sufficiency (Martin, 2004). In addition, education and skills training enables women refugees to have some measure of control within their resettled community, provides skills that could be useful even if they return home, increases the chance of

quick adjustment to the new community, and provides some measure of self-respect that may have been lost through unproductive years of exile (Kelley, 1989; Martin, 2004).

Many women refugees also strongly believe that education in vocational skills and English proficiency should precede employment (Elkin et al., 2008; Spero, 1985). This claim is found to be inconsistent with the primary goal of refugee assistance programs, which is to help refugees become self-sufficient as soon as possible (Lyons, 2008). In the process of becoming quickly self-sufficient, refugees are expected to learn English concurrently with vocational training, job search and actual employment in as little as 3 months (Halpern, 2008; Warriner, 2004). This is unrealistic for anyone, especially refugees. Some newly-arrived refugees are illiterate in their native language, have limited prior formal education, and little or no English proficiency. For refugees like these, taking ESL classes concurrently with vocational training, job search or actual employment within federal time limits will be extremely difficult, and often results in sacrificing mastery of English skills they need to achieve genuine, long-term economic self-sufficiency (Dunman, 2006; Elkin et al., 2008; Sargent et al., 1999; Spero, 1985). This is especially challenging for women refugees who are sole breadwinners, traditionally in charge of child care, have significantly less English skills and formal education than men upon arrival, and lack traditional systems of financial and social support (Martin, 2004; Spero, 1985; Warriner, 2004).

Xenophobia. The dislike or fear of immigrants, or xenophobia, occurs most likely when the immigrants possess historical, cultural, reproductive, economic, and racial characteristics that are “alien” to the majority of individuals within a host culture (Marsella, 1997). Xenophobia also extends to prejudices about immigrant skills (based on the way immigrants speak English, dress, and behave), and the attitude that immigrants compete with native-born Americans for

limited resources and livelihood opportunities (Lyytinen & Kullenberg, 2013; Yakushko, 2006;). A xenophobic community also perceives refugees as contributors to rising crime rates, environmental degradation, and the overburdening of state services (Lyytinen & Kullenberg, 2013). A woman refugee's choice to prepare for and find employment may be affected by a community's xenophobic attitudes that perceive her to lack intelligence based on limited English skills, or not having an American accent. Women refugees may be denied jobs, be placed in low-wage, unskilled jobs, or be prohibited from traditional wear or observe traditional practices from their home countries. As a result, women refugees may lose the confidence to pursue employment based on their perception of a xenophobic community (Yakushko, 2006).

Racial and gender discrimination. Adjusting to a new culture is a difficult enough process for all refugees, but xenophobia, racism, and sexism make it particularly challenging for women refugees as they seek employment, training, or participate in other activities of their new country (Clayton, 2005; Martin, 2004). In one research study, a woman refugee applying for a managerial position felt that she did not get the job despite relevant qualifications, English proficiency, and high motivation, because she was a woman, a foreigner, and a refugee (Clayton, 2005).

Employer issues. Employers may perceive the hiring of refugees as risky. Many employers do not know enough about hiring refugees, and are afraid of legal repercussions resulting from hiring refugees without proper documentation (Clayton, 2005; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002).

Further, businesses are driven by performance standards. Thus, employers are reluctant to hire such groups that tend to have relatively poor outcomes due to human capital deficits, such as low basic skills, limited English proficiency, and lack of relevant work experience (Bloom &

Butler, 2007). As a result, many employers seek workers who can communicate in English, and possess what is considered as “relevant” work experience and qualifications, transferable skills, and sufficient knowledge of culture (Clayton, 2005; ORR, 2011; Spero, 1985; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). Often times, employers do not recognize the refugees’ work experience and education that they received from their home countries. Refugees who have earned professional degrees in their home countries often end up in jobs that they are overqualified for, or need to be retrained to have what is accepted as “relevant” work experience and qualifications (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). In their originating countries, many refugee women may have worked in mostly rural or agricultural jobs, skills that may not be transferrable to jobs in urban, industrialized environments (Spero, 1985). If women refugees do not retrain for new and available jobs in their new communities, employers may have no choice but to deny them jobs, or give them unskilled jobs that force women refugees to remain dependent on welfare. Women refugees who have sufficient knowledge of culture may have higher chances of being offered employment compared to those who do not (Clayton, 2005).

Personal barriers. Family and cultural constraints are major personal reasons that women refugees do not pursue education or employment (Martin, 2004; ORR, 2011; Spero, 1985). These constraints may be practical in nature, such as lack of child care and transportation, or insufficient cash assistance to pay for such support. Cultural barriers include traditional beliefs about a woman’s role in the family, accepting work that should be “appropriate for women”, or conflicting perspectives about the value of education and work (Buck & Silver, 2012; Martin, 2004). Attending English classes alongside or before vocational training may mean a radical change in cultural beliefs and lifestyles. Women may have been in traditional gendered roles in their home countries, had limited access to formal education, or find

it more culturally appropriate to attend gender-segregated classes (Davison, 1981; Martin, 2004). Traditional support systems are also important for adjustment to the culture of their new country and attitudes towards work (Buck & Silver, 2012; Spero, 1985).

Even if women refugees meet academic qualifications, the lack of relevant work experience and many rejections by employers may cause feelings of low self-esteem and being undervalued in the labor market (Clayton, 2005). In the process of obtaining employment, many women refugees lose self-confidence and do not know how to overcome feelings of low worth, especially if they lack traditional support systems.

Implications for HRD Research and Practice

It is evident from the review of existing literature that the ability to communicate in English and training for relevant skills plays a central role for women refugees as they prepare for employment. However, women refugees encounter many factors that discourage them to fully participate in educational and employment opportunities. In supporting their journey towards employment and self-sufficiency, HRD strategies should consider these factors when developing approaches, processes and activities that aim to support and increase opportunities of women refugees' work-based knowledge, education, productivity, and satisfaction.

Personal Support

Some of the issues that women refugees face in employment preparation may be easily addressed by their educational providers, such as meeting child care and transportation needs. However, cultural constraints are much more challenging to address as the values about traditional gendered roles and work may be more deeply-rooted in belief systems. HRD strategies should strive to consider and integrate culturally-based values when developing education and employment preparation programs.

Education and Training

Education and training in English and vocational skills are found to be crucial to employment preparation and career advancement. However, a majority of the studies describe formally-facilitated education and training. The administration of non-formal and informal education as stand-alone HRD strategies, or in combination with formal education, training, and social networking, should also be further explored as possible avenues for women refugees to gain relevant knowledge, skills and work experience (Magno, 2008; Shriberg et al., 2012).

Social Networking

Social networking as an HRD strategy should be further explored. Research suggests that as a form of support and communication, social networking can prove valuable in helping women refugees find sources of traditional support, and opportunities for education and employment (Buck & Silver, 2012; Elkin et al., 2008; Magno, 2008; Warriner, 2004). In Sacramento, for instance, 58% of all refugees had found jobs through a friend, relative, or sponsor (Elkin et al., 2008).

Re-conceptualizing the Meaning of Employment

In developing HRD approaches that heavily consider cultural constraints, it may also be important to re-conceptualize the meaning of employment. Refugee economic self-sufficiency programs traditionally conceptualize employment as finding a job outside of the home. For women refugees whose cultures discourage them from participating in outside employment, self-employment may be an option (UNHCR Livelihood, 2012). Self-employment enables women refugees to earn from home (or a business venue where she can work on her own), addresses child care and transportation concerns, and does not compromise cultural beliefs about women working in regular employment. However, income from self-employment is highly variable

compared to the steady income that regular employers provide. Self-employment also assumes that women refugees will leverage on current skills deemed marketable to the new community (UNHCR Livelihood, 2012). For example, recent arrivals of Karen refugee women from Burma have leveraged on their skills in traditional weaving and basket-making as a means of livelihood in Utah (Stephenson, Smith, Gibson, & Watson, 2013). Different HRD strategies apply if women refugees choose to be self-employed. Aside from learning English to communicate with customers and others related to being self-employed, they must also be literate in small business and financial management, train in relevant skills that can generate marketable products and services, and educate themselves in areas that refugees with regular employment need not learn, such as applying for permits, and protecting themselves from theft, extortion, and non-paying customers (UNHCR Livelihood, 2012).

Integrated Community Systems

HRD strategies should also seek to facilitate closer partnerships between educational/training providers, employers, and community development systems. For example, organizations that assess the labor market may share information with educational/training providers, so the latter may provide training of the relevant skills to women refugees (UNHCR Livelihood, 2012). Community organizations must actively educate employers about the hiring of refugees, create recruitment partnerships with each other, and consider transitional employment. Transitional employment as a strategy places women refugees in temporary, wage-paying jobs in non-profit or public agencies, where they receive a range of supports (Bloom & Butler, 2007). States may also strive to include more opportunities for women refugees to work in development-oriented programs, and include bilingual/bicultural women on service agency staff to encourage adequate service access by women refugees (Elkin et al., 2008; Martin, 2004).

By examining the literature on the education, training, and employment of women refugees, this study also attempts to advance the field of HRD as an agent of societal and national development, not just focused on organizations (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Women refugees are among the rapidly growing immigrant population in the United States who lack human capital and have the most difficulty finding employment, primarily due to limited English skills, and non-transferable or lack of relevant education, work experience and/or credentials. Thus, the study draws more attention to HRD's increasing significance in immigration policy issues and its influence on national development in the broadest sense.

In order to gain a more integrated perspective of the topic, contribute to limited prior research, and discuss HRD processes and activities needed to support women refugees in employment preparation, the critical analysis of related streams of literature is synthesized into a table. The synthesis table, provided in Table 1, reflects the relationship of employment preparation factors to women refugees and HRD implications.

Table 1

Employment Preparation Factors, Relationship to Women Refugees, and HRD Implications

Factors for employment preparation	Definition of Factor	Relationship of Factor to Women refugees	Implications for HRD Research and Practice
Personal support	Personal support pertains to forms of assistance that reduce personal barriers to education and employment.	Women refugees are less likely to fully participate in education and employment if their concerns about childcare responsibilities, transportation, and cultural constraints are not addressed (Martin, 2004; Spero, 1985; ORR, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can HRD address women refugees’ cultural constraints on employment preparation?
Education and training	Education and training pertains to activities that facilitate employment-related knowledge and skills. These may be in the form of English language literacy, vocational training, and formal and non-formal forms of education and training.	Women refugees find employment faster, retain jobs, advance in their careers, and earn higher wages if they are proficient in English, increase English fluency over time, and receive relevant vocational training (ORR, 2011; Spero, 1985). Research suggests that non-formal education may also be sources of employment-related knowledge, skill, and experience (Magno, 2008; Shriberg et al., 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is non-formal education/training as an HRD strategy? • How effective is non-formal education/training when combined with formal English language and/or vocational training?

Table 1 (continued)

Factors for employment preparation	Definition of Factor	Relationship of Factor to Women refugees	Implications for HRD Research and Practice
Social networking	Social networking is the ability to access benefits and support, through relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchanges, by virtue of participation in social groups (Lytinen & Kullenberg, 2013).	Research suggests that as a form of support and communication, social networking can prove valuable in helping women refugees find sources of traditional support (such as for child care and transportation), and opportunities for education and employment (Buck and Silver, 2012; Elkin et al., 2008; Magno, 2008; Warriner, 2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is social networking as an HRD strategy? • How can social networking be utilized as an HRD strategy in employment preparation of women refugees?
Re-conceptualizing the meaning of employment	The primary goal of refugee economic self-sufficiency programs is for refugees to find employment, traditionally conceptualized as finding a job outside of the home.	Alternative forms of generating income, such as transitional employment (Bloom & Butler, 2007), and self-employment (UNHCR Livelihood, 2012), may be more suitable to women refugees who face many constraints related to finding and keeping traditional forms of employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are alternative forms of income generation? • What are the HRD needs of women refugees considering transitional employment, self-employment, or other alternative forms of income generation?
Integrated community systems	A community that considers refugee resettlement agencies, educational/training providers, employers, and community development structures as an integrated system.	Close partnerships and linkages between these stakeholders in an integrated community system may provide better support for women refugees preparing for employment, and promote women refugees to work in development-oriented programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the HRD needs of an integrated community system that supports women refugees in preparing for employment? • More research is needed on development-oriented programs for women refugees.

Conclusion

Women refugees have the potential to greatly contribute to the economic and social development of their resettlement communities. However, they face many challenges that could hinder them from fully participating in education and employment opportunities. HRD is in the best position to address education and employment-related needs, and explore further areas for personal, social, and national development through integrated systems.

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