The Final Oral Examination for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Social Dimensions of Health

Caitlin Wake
2010 University of East Anglia MA
2006 University of Victoria BFA

“Forced Migration, Urbanization and Health: Exploring Social Determinants of Health Among Refugee Women in Malaysia”

Friday, March 28th, 2014
1:00 PM
UVC A207a (University Centre, second floor).

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Margot Wilson, (Department of Anthropology)
Supervisor
Dr. Trevor Hancock, (School of Public Health and Social Policy)
Co-Supervisor
Dr. Scott Watson, (Department of Political Science)
Outside Member

External Examiner:
Dr. Nicole Berry, Faculty of Health Sciences, SFU

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Graham McDonough, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic
Abstract

The susceptibility of individuals to illness and disease is greatly influenced by context specific social determinants of health (SDH), yet there is a dearth of literature pertaining to SDH among refugees, particularly those residing in urban areas. The purpose of this study was to identify and generate empirical evidence on SDH among female refugees in Malaysia. It focused specifically on Rohingya refugees, a stateless and persecuted Muslim minority from Myanmar. Intersectionality formed the theoretical foundation of the study, which utilized a qualitative research design and employed an exploratory, applied research approach. Data were collected using qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews and document analysis), and analysed using thematic analysis. The study was undertaken in affiliation with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and had two primary outputs: it provided UNHCR with information and recommendations to inform context-specific program and policy development, and it generated rich empirical findings that contribute to the nascent evidence base on SDH in the context of forced migration. Results indicate that key factors affecting the health and wellbeing of Rohingya women include: their journey from Myanmar to Malaysia, income, employment, food security, transportation, the physical environment, UNHCR, security issues, education, religion, healthcare, and social capital/the social safety net. These interacted, overlapped and compounded each other, forming a ‘web of interrelated factors’ that affected participants’ health. Findings provide insight into the instrumental role of the sociopolitical context in structuring the lives of urban refugee women, and emphasize the importance of extending current discourse beyond refugee women’s needs and vulnerabilities to consider their resilience and agency in situations of significant hardship.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2012 International Development Research Centre (Canada) Doctoral Award
2011 Irving K. Barber One World Scholarship
2011 Graham Branton Co-operative Education Award
2011 Thouvenelle Scholarship
2011 Student International Activities Fund Grant
2011 C.A.R.E Housing Society Global Citizen Education Travel Award
2010 University of Victoria Faculty of Graduate Studies Doctoral Fellowship
2010 Travel Grant, Sir Philip Reckitt Educational Trust
2009 University of East Anglia School of Development Award for International Students

Presentations


Publications