

## Health promotion through digital means: Refugee women using video and social media in times of COVID-19

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### Background:

Forced migration is particularly hard on women and families. On arrival in host countries, living conditions (e. g. accommodation in camps) and various restrictions connected with the process of seeking asylum severely restrict women's abilities to care for themselves and their families. Gender-based violence is just one of many problems. These problems are exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Methods:

As part of the EMPOW project at the study site in Hannover, Germany, community partners who are female refugees themselves, are committed to improving the health of other refugee women and families. To pursue this aim, a digital network was established using social media. Short videos were created in Farsi and Arabic addressing various aspects relevant to the health of refugee women and families. These include: a) information on hygiene and how to wear a mask to reduce the spread of Corona, b) activities during COVID related lockdown phases (e.g. games to play with children indoors and gymnastics and sports for adults), and c) further questions and answers on general health and health care.

### Results:

More than 80 women have joined the digital network within a few months. The videos are distributed and discussed using WhatsApp groups. The community partners collect health related questions from the participating refugee women, which are then answered by a medical doctor in Farsi. The groups provide an opportunity for mutual exchange and advice regarding women's health and the wellbeing of families.

### Conclusions:

Digital means including short, self-made videos and social media such as WhatsApp groups are valuable means for participatory health promotion with refugee women. Limitations of the digital format are discussed.

### Main messages:

- Refugee women can be reached via social media messages and short video clips.
- Peer-based health promotion holds great value for women and families affected by forced migration.