Background
Population and Substance Use
- High rates of problematic substance use in refugee populations
- High substance availability in refugee camps contributes to misuse
- Complicated by cultural beliefs and limited interventions

Prior Research and CBPR
- Prior research by CUSOM students via community-based participatory research
- Identified culturally sensitive education intervention to address alcohol misuse, reflecting community concern about issue

Methods
- Study Setup: Approved by the institutional review board, the study aimed to conduct focus groups and alcohol health seminars in a partner community.
- Preliminary Efforts: Researchers interviewed community members and leaders, and attempted community events and outreach over 36 months.
- Challenges Faced: Minimal participant enrollment and engagement hindered the study’s aims.
- Identified Barriers: Themes aligning with published considerations in similar communities emerged, including substance use (especially alcohol) among displaced refugees and Myanmar or Burmese populations.

Results
Community contact history
- Over 36 months, researchers made attempts to engage with community and community members:
  - Community events, including school supply drives, vaccination clinics, game nights
  - Participant recruitment events, with meals provided and in-person interpretation
  - Distributed materials about project, including flyers, posters, newsletters
  - Virtual events
  - Majority of community outreach occurred in partnership with refugee housing complex

Barriers to engagement with CBPR methodologies
- Barriers identified in literature and evident in this study include community definition, community representation, and mutual commitment of and benefit to community and researcher
  - Partnership with housing complex resulted in narrow audience
  - Small number of participants were unlikely to be representative of larger community
  - Intended benefit of study to population not adequately conveyed
  - Additional situational barriers were contributory to inadequate engagement

Future recommendations for community engagement
- Recommendation for successful engagement with communities via CBPR methodologies have been identified in literature
  - Most important recommendation for future work on this study is to understand complexity of community
  - Sufficient relationship-building did not occur
  - Additional time and resources should be spent in establishing trusting relationship with community
  - Future researchers should aim to develop relationships with individuals to advise on culture, best practices, and stigmatized topic

Conclusions
- Stigma, language barriers, gender differences, and difficulties connecting with community leaders hindered participation.
- CBPR barriers included difficulty in identifying and engaging the target community due to resource limitations and uncertainty.
- Situational barriers included COVID-19, community member relocation, loss of a community member, and high staff turnover.
- Future research should prioritize understanding community complexities, building trust, engaging community members for cultural insights, and tailoring communication.

Implications
- CBPR seeks to progress population research to a new equitable standard.
- Barriers between participants and researchers are particularly evident around topics such as substance use, which carry more stigma in certain populations.
- When engaging in CBPR, researchers should investigate known barriers to best serve the community and investigate research questions ethically.

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References: