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## Officials outline struggles female immigrants face

### Government leaders, nonprofit heads discuss obstacles at Morristown forum

**BY MICHAEL DAIGLE**  
**DAILY RECORD**

MORRISTOWN -- Obtaining housing, escaping sexual and physical abuse, and maneuvering through the maze of the health care system are often daunting for American women, but are immeasurably harder for women new to the country, experts said at a Thursday forum.

A group of 35 women from Morris County nonprofits and government discussed how to make the systems work better for women, especially recent immigrants, at an event sponsored by Wind of the Spirit, the Morristown-based human rights group, and hosted by the Presbyterian Church.

Elizabeth Hall, executive director of Homeless Solutions, said her agency provides transitional and emergency housing for many women with children.

"Fifty percent of our clients are fully employed when they arrive at the shelter," Hall said.

An example of the people her agency helps, Hall said, was a nurse and her daughter. The woman had cared for her dying husband for years, and after his death became depressed.

She and her daughter ended up at the Homeless Solutions shelter where her depression was treated and the pair moved into transitional housing. Six months later, they were in an apartment.

The woman was making \$20 to \$23 an hour as a nurse, Hall said.

That is the living wage in Morris County, and without that level of income, families can not find adequate housing.

#### Language, insurance

Sarah Jane Rath, a reproductive health adviser at a public clinic in Newark run by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, said the health care system is hard enough to work through if a patient speaks English and has insurance, but is nearly impossible for those without insurance.

State law says all patients must be given treatment at local hospital emergency rooms, but the system does not make it easy.

Low-income women cannot often afford to take time off from work, Rath said.


Making one's way through unfamiliar streets even if one can read the street signs is a problem, but in the section of Newark where her clinic is, the buildings often have no signs on them, she said.

The result is missed appointments, lack of health care and outbreaks of such conditions as whooping cough, which is making a comeback among poor residents, Rath said.

#### Cultural clashes

Rupa Khetarpal, a sexual abuse adviser, said that in the East Asian community that has settled in Parsippany, Montville and other towns, overcoming the cultural traditions of new immigrants' home countries is a daunting task.

The patriarchal nature of their old society hampers the reporting of abuse, she said, and in many cases an East Asian woman

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Alison Hunt, director of immigration group Wind of the Spirit, reads a poem and lights a candle to commemorate women's rights during a luncheon about women's issues in Morristown.

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might lose her immigration status if she left her abusive spouse because his work visa does not cover her. Alone, obtaining a special visa is extremely difficult for such women, Khetarpal said.

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