

# “If I was a bird I would gather up my children and fly far from here”: The lived experiences, information needs, and information seeking behavior of resettled refugees from the Central African Republic in two communities in the United States

Natalia Taylor Bowdoin, Associate Professor, University of South Carolina Aiken

nataliab@usca.edu

Presented in absentia by Jean S. Kanengoni, Doctoral Student, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

jeansk2@illinois.edu

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**ABSTRACT:** The Central African Republic (CAR), already one of the poorest countries in the world at the turn of the millennium, has now experienced severe social unrest and human displacement for over a decade. As a result, CAR refugees arriving in the United States are one of the most disadvantaged refugee groups the U.S. has yet seen. The majority arrive speaking only Sango and have little education or work history outside of subsistence farming, have high instances of single parent families, and often present major health concerns. CAR refugees are at such a disadvantage and focused so entirely on basic survival that some resettlement agency personnel predict it will be an entire generation before they are on solid footing. Understanding the exact nature of their information needs and the extent to which these needs are currently being met is vital if we are to ensure they receive a more solid foundation in their new communities. This poster presents the initial results of a study examining the information needs and information seeking behavior of 39 resettled CAR refugees living in two communities (Worcester, Massachusetts and Clarkston, Georgia) based on extensive interviews with the participants carried out in March and April, 2015.

## Original Objectives of Study

1. Compare the information needs of CAR refugees in the U.S. with studies that have identified needs of refugee groups from other countries and to identify unique elements particular to the CAR situation.
2. Categorize the information needs of CAR refugees in ways that will benefit refugee resettlement agencies, other non-governmental agencies, libraries and other information providers that are assisting this population (or those from similar conflict situations) in adjusting to life in the U.S.
3. Identify whether differences in information seeking behavior and information needs among this population correlate with the amount of time spent in the U.S., the extent of the support network the individual has in the community, gender and age differences.
4. Determine the extent of the need for CAR refugees to obtain information about their home country, what sources and networks they use to obtain this information and uses to which they put this information.

## The Central African Republic: A Brief Overview

The Central African Republic (CAR) is a former French colony which gained independence in 1960. The CAR is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 187 out of 188 countries in the 2015 UNDP Human Development Index.

While the CAR has experienced political instability and turmoil for the past thirty years, a successful coup in 2013 plunged the country into extreme violence and resulted in massive displacement of the population. At the height of the conflict over a fifth of the population was displaced either internally or as refugees.

## Methodology

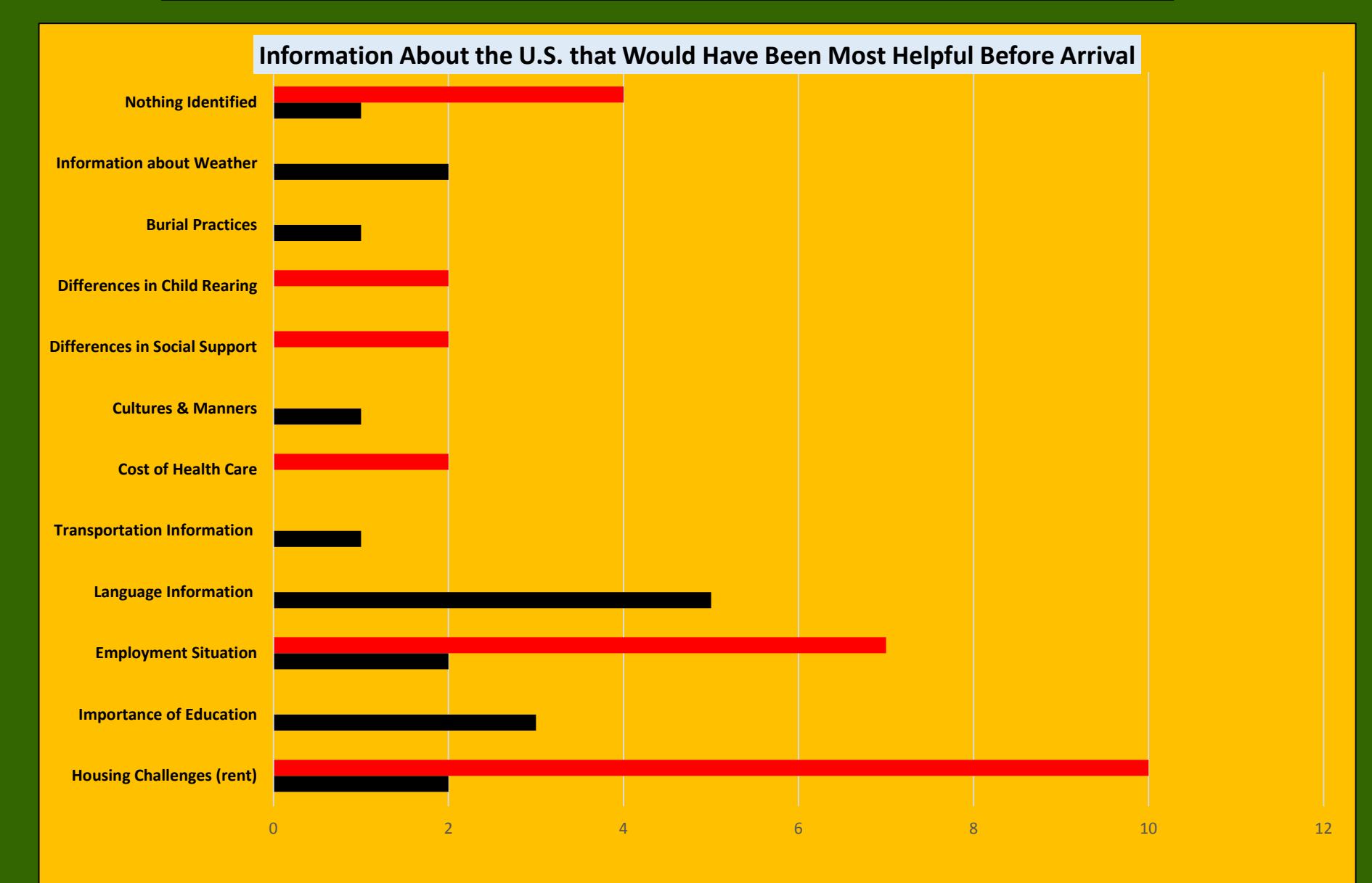
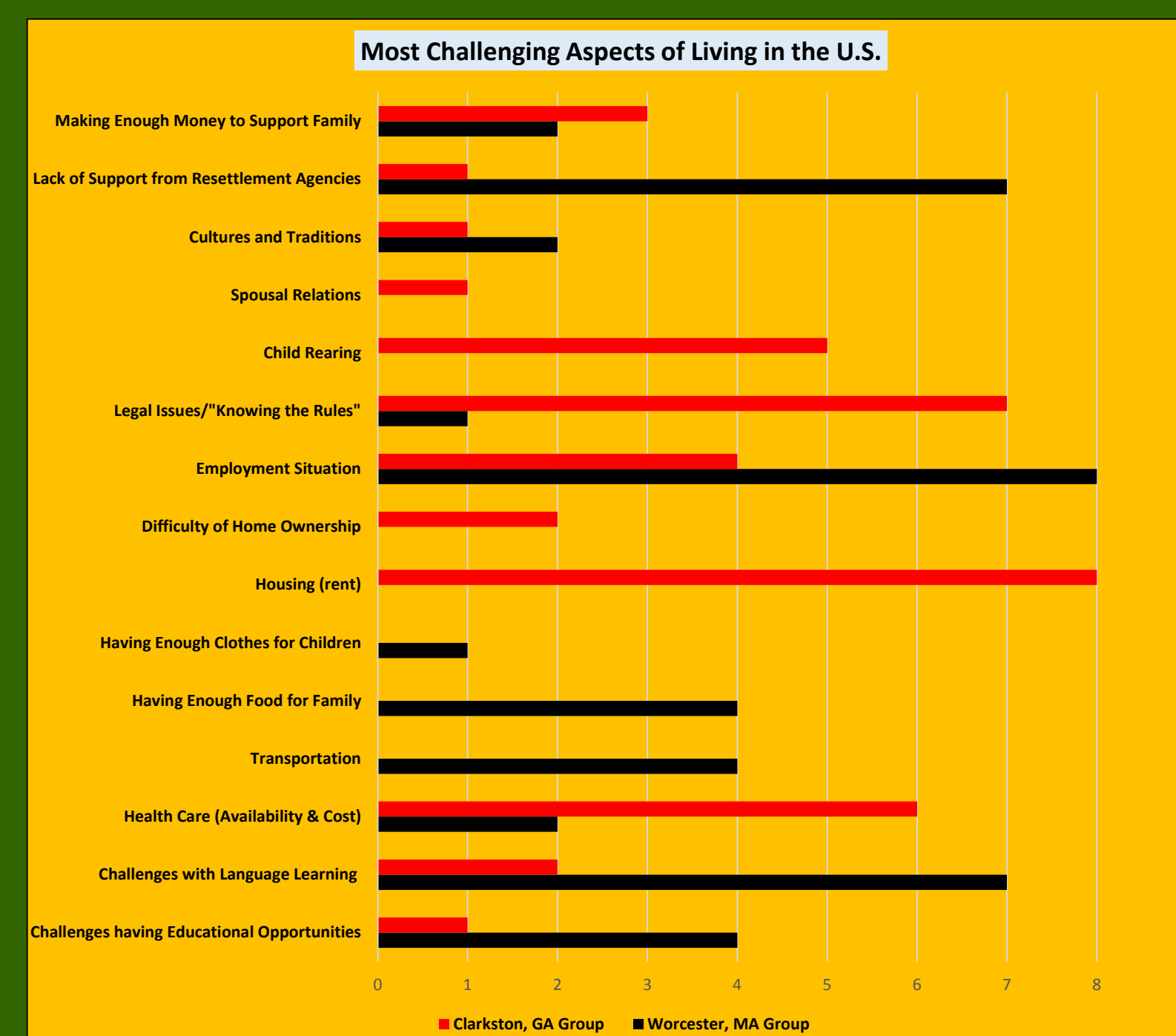
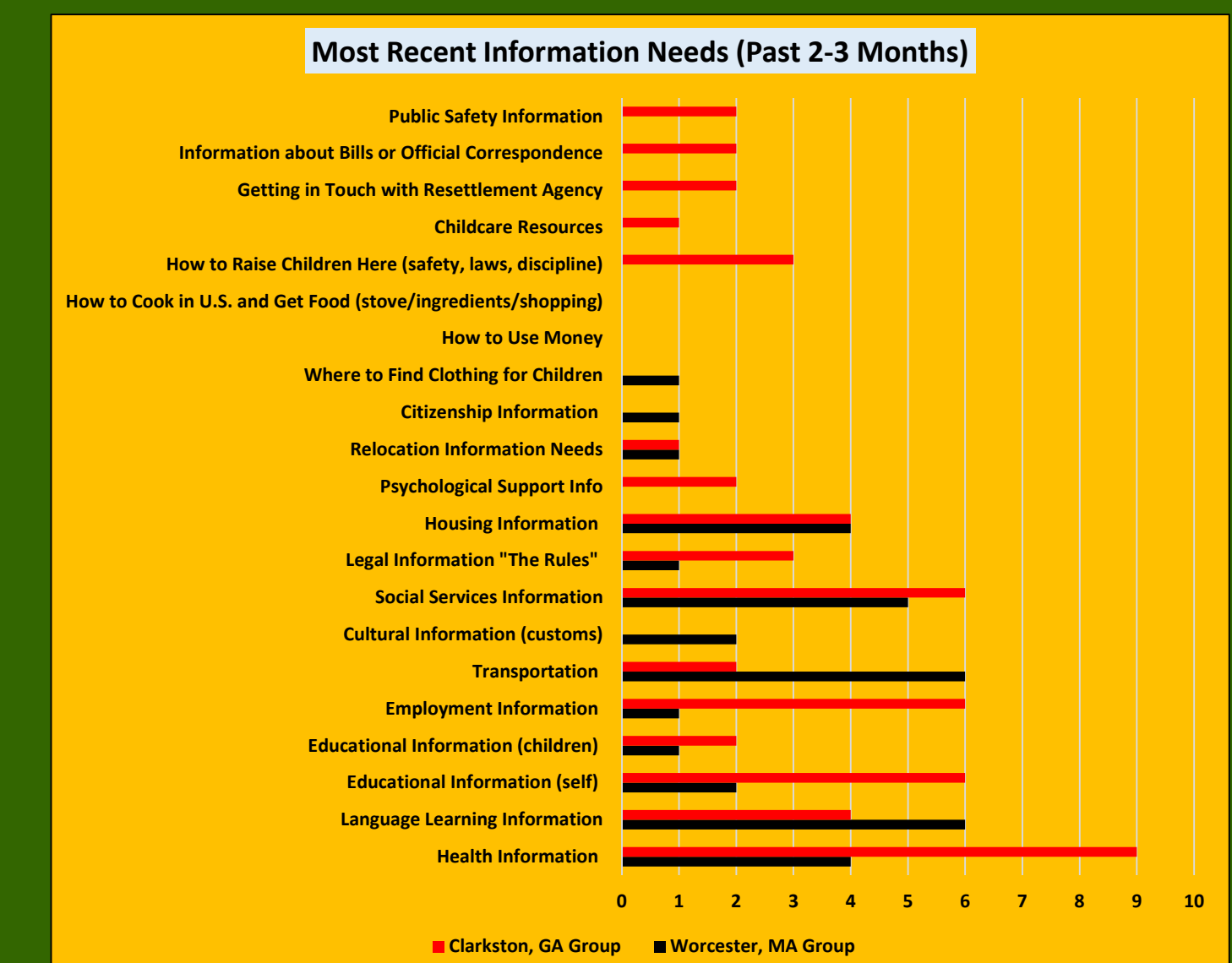
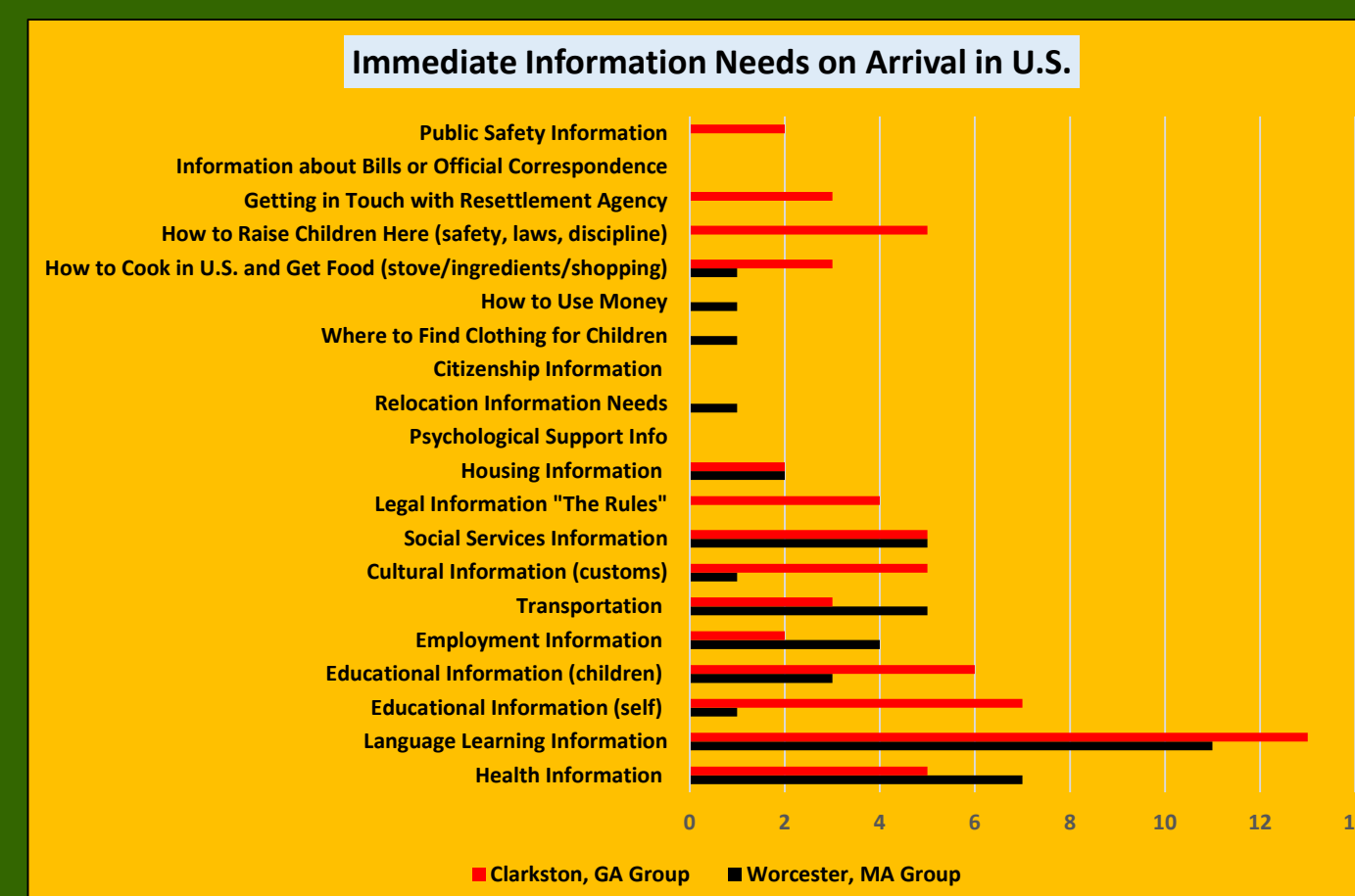
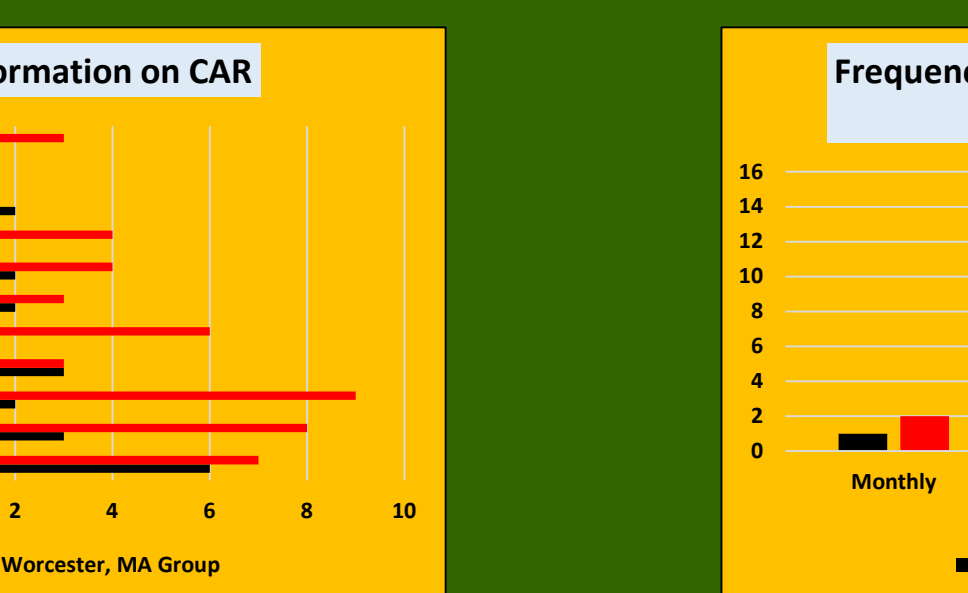
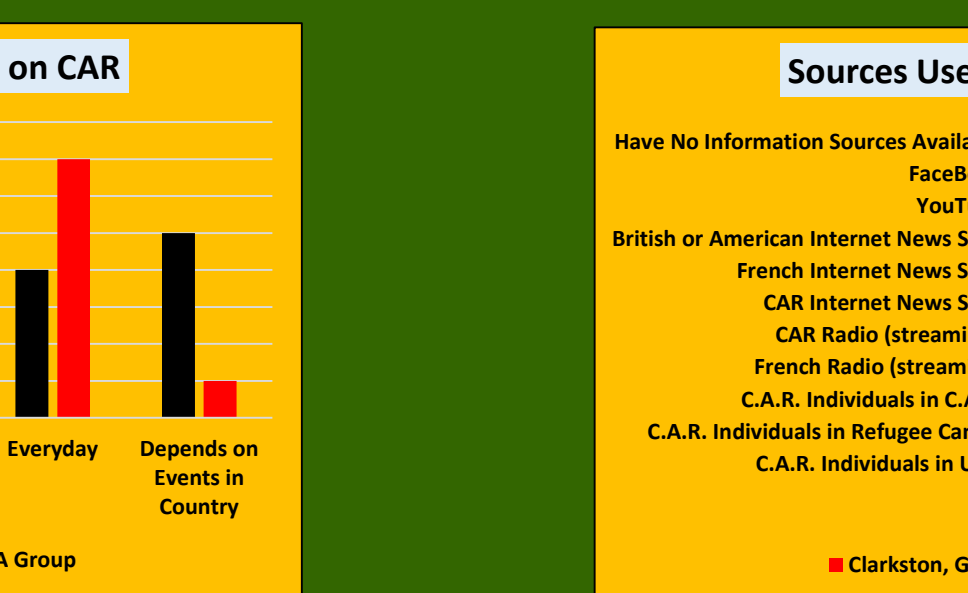
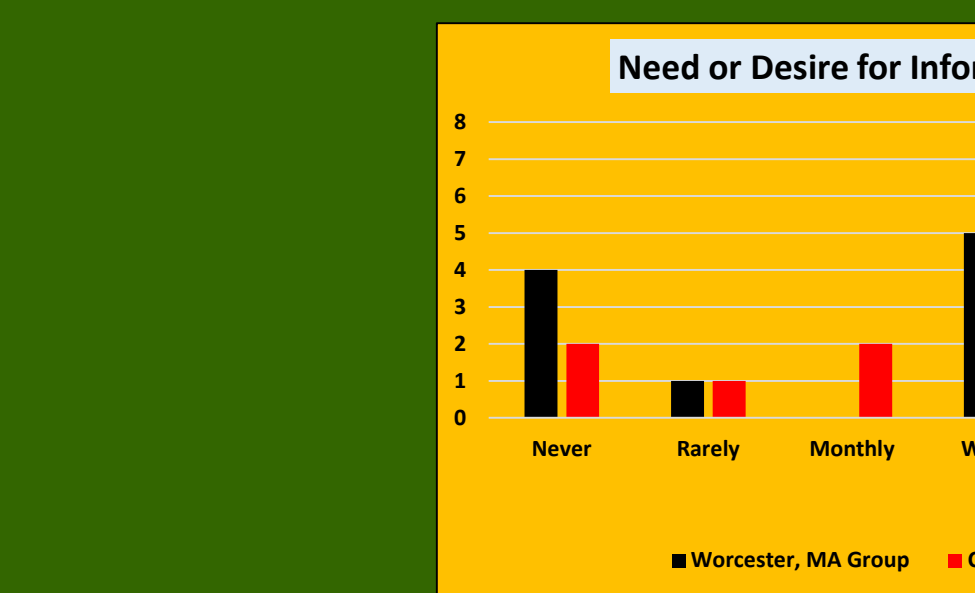
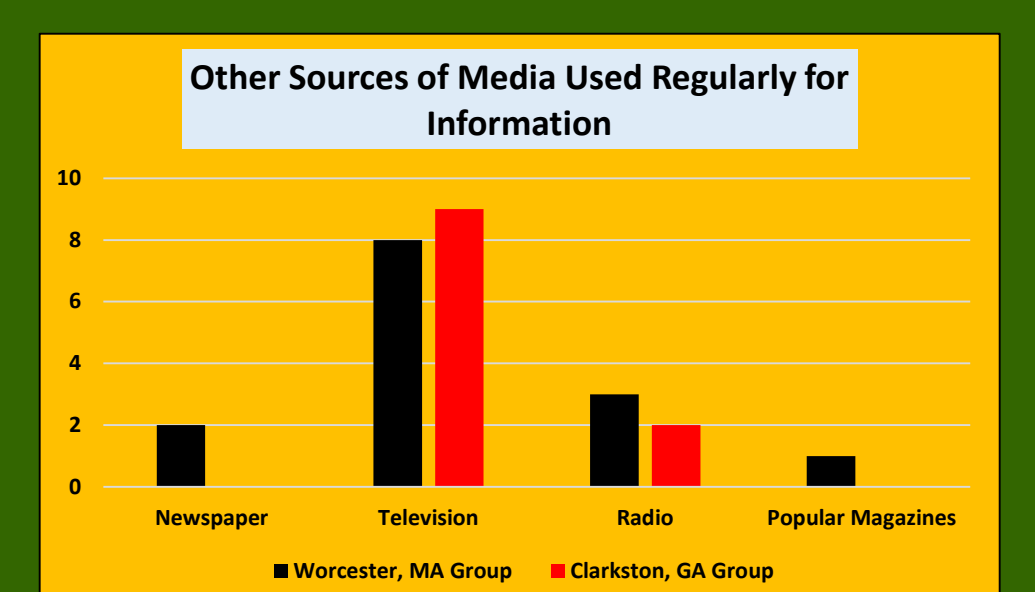
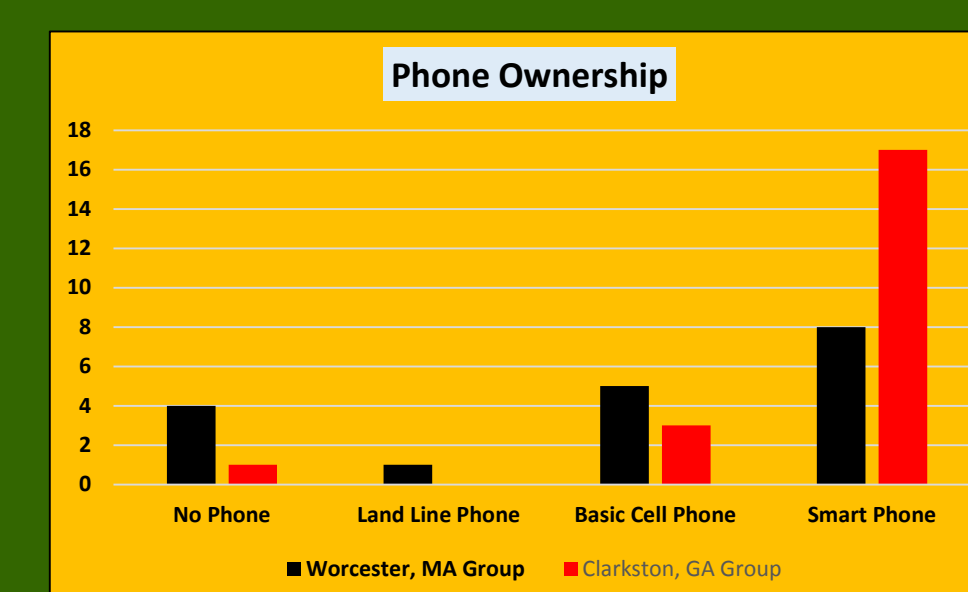
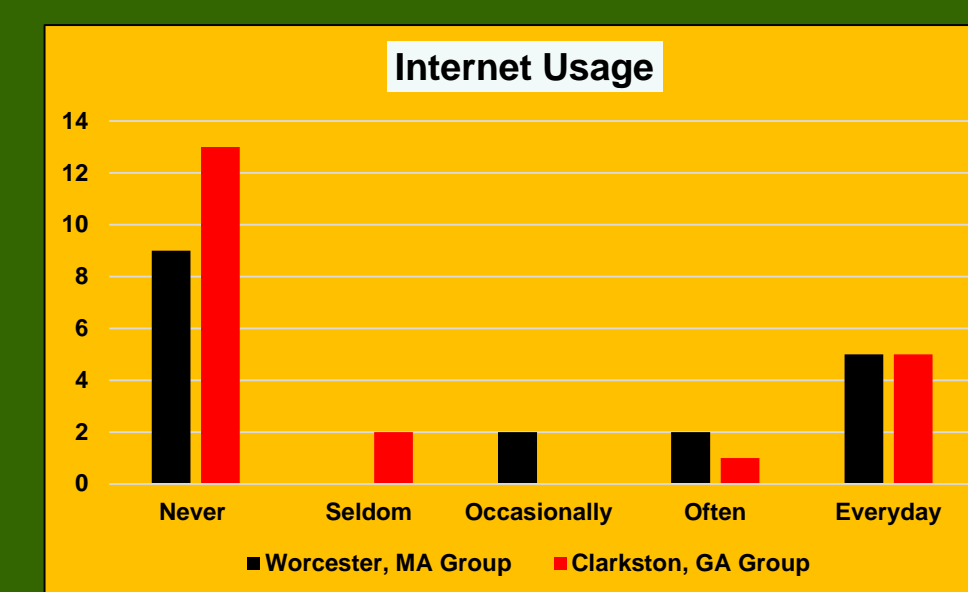
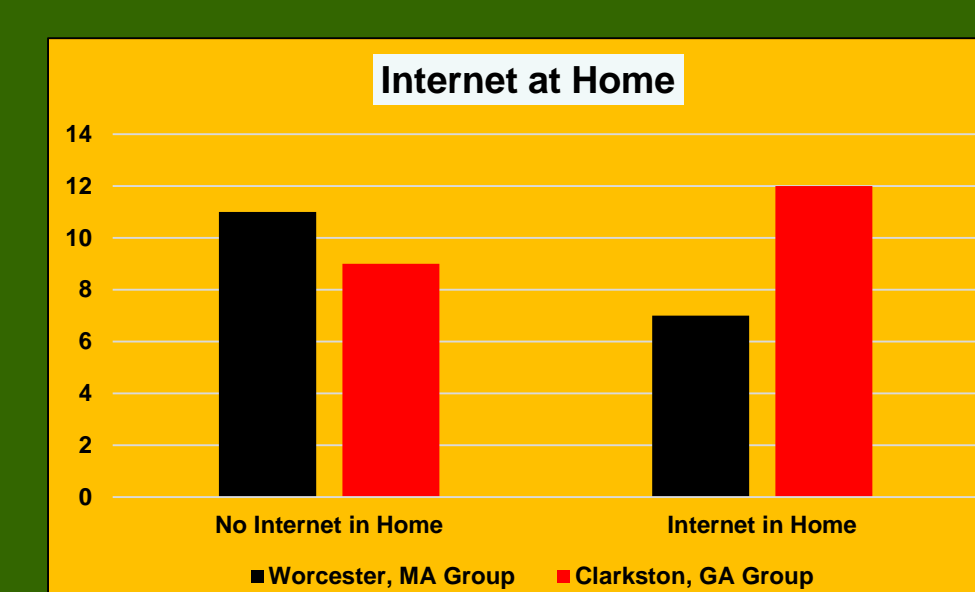
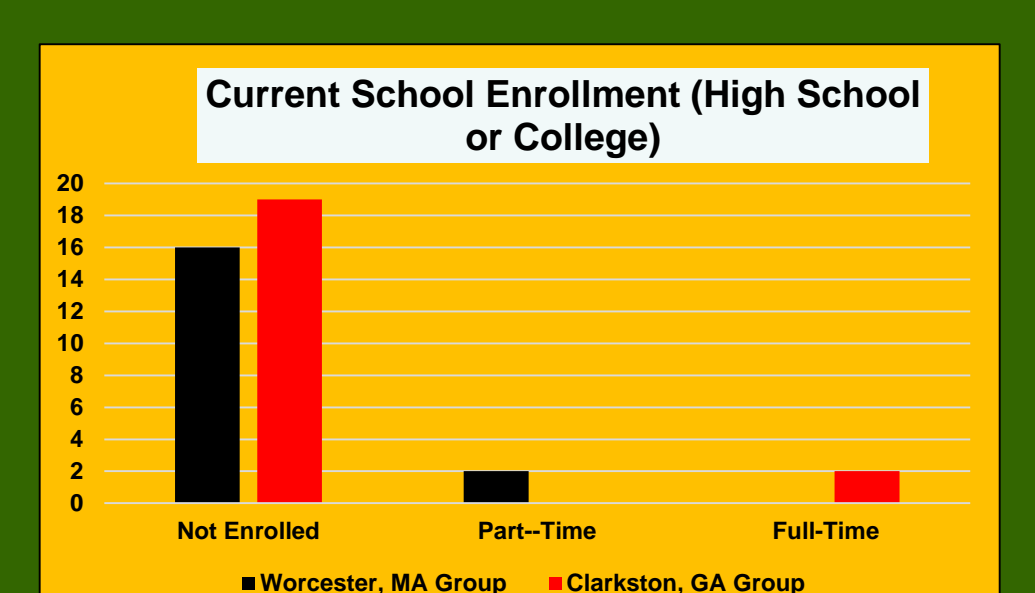
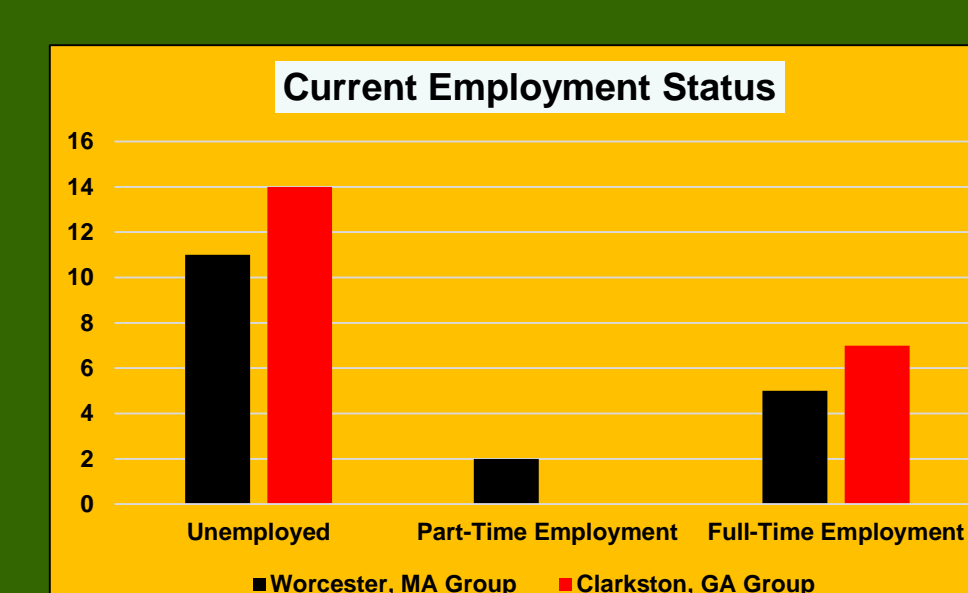
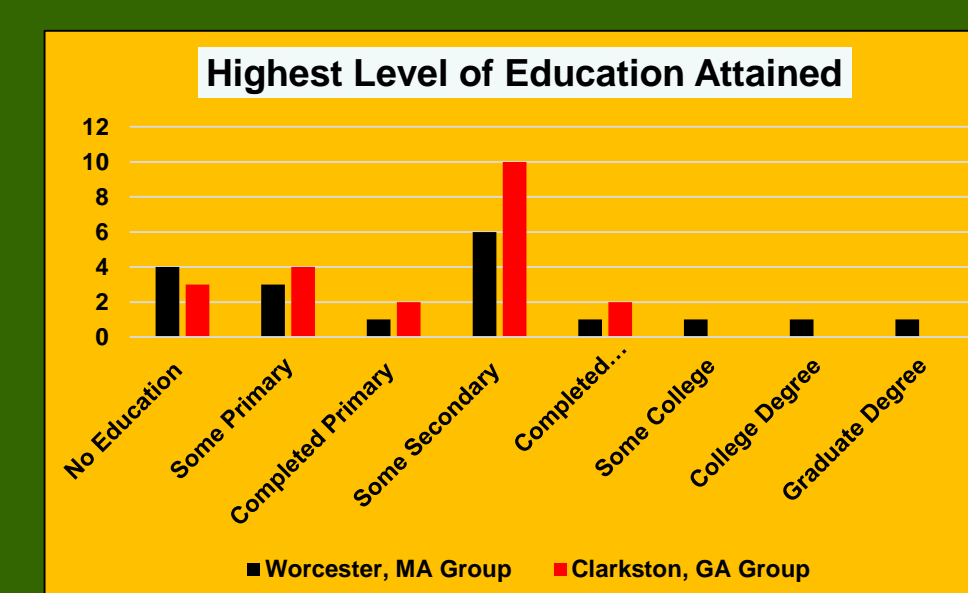
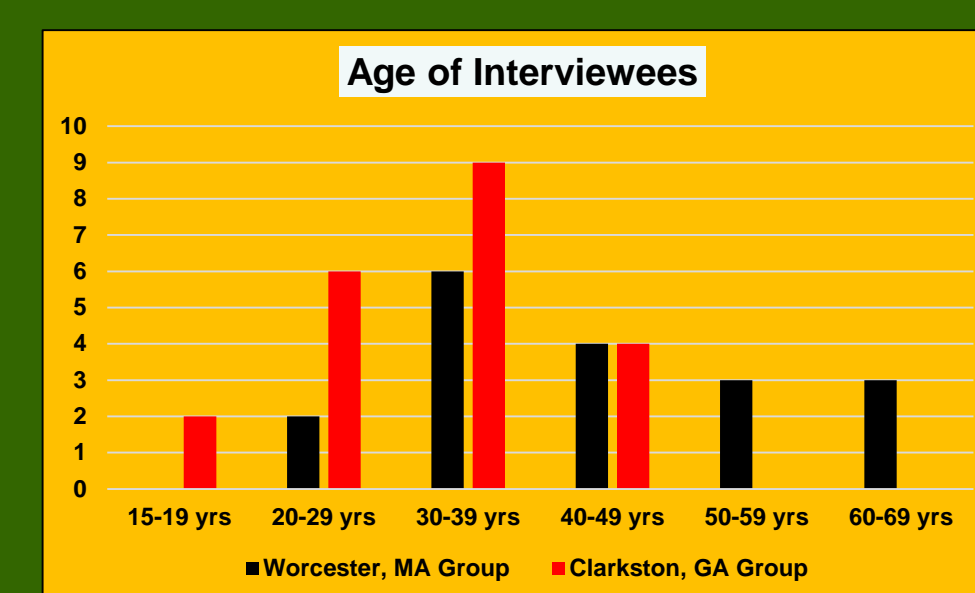
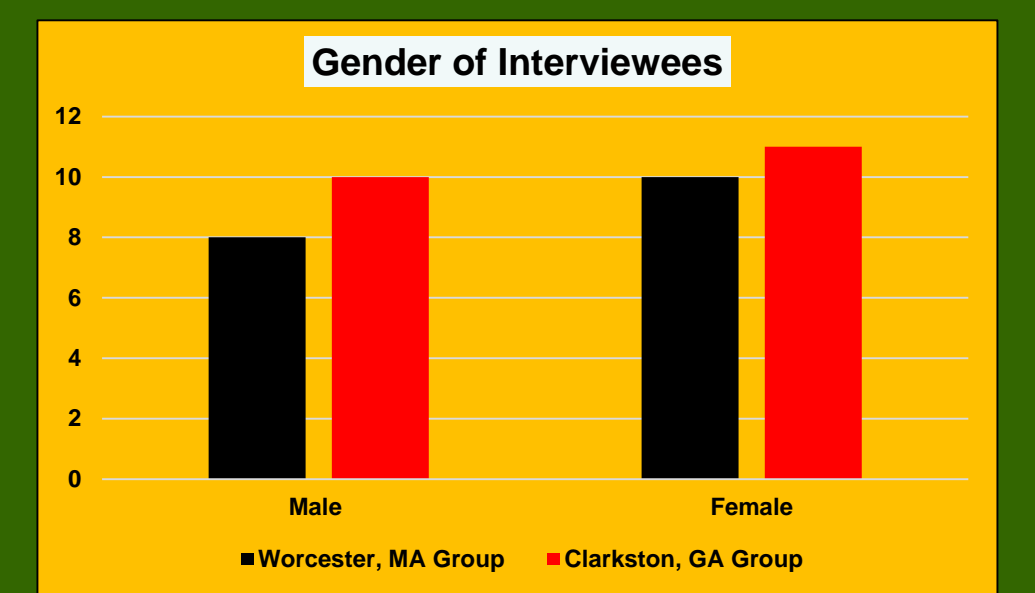
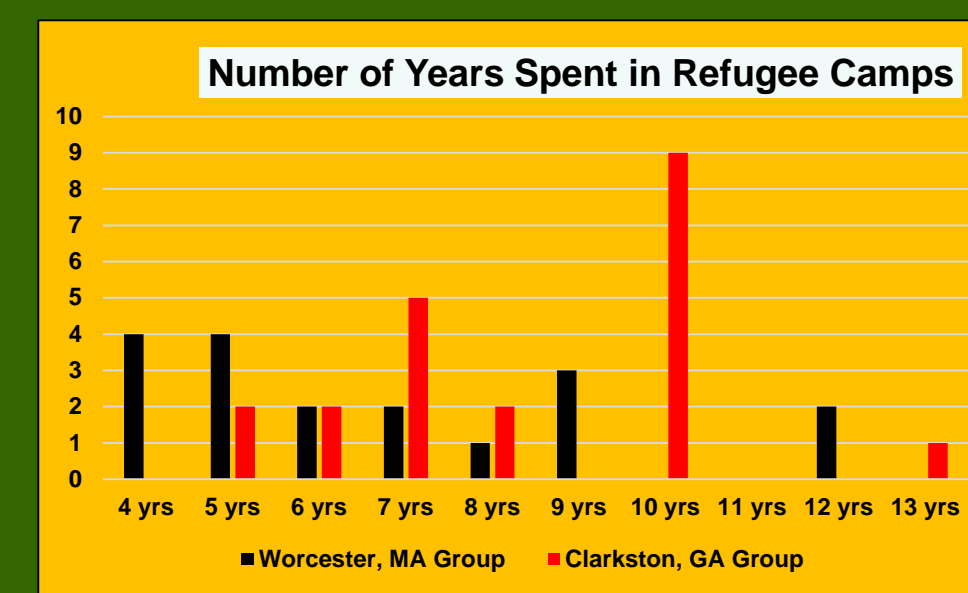
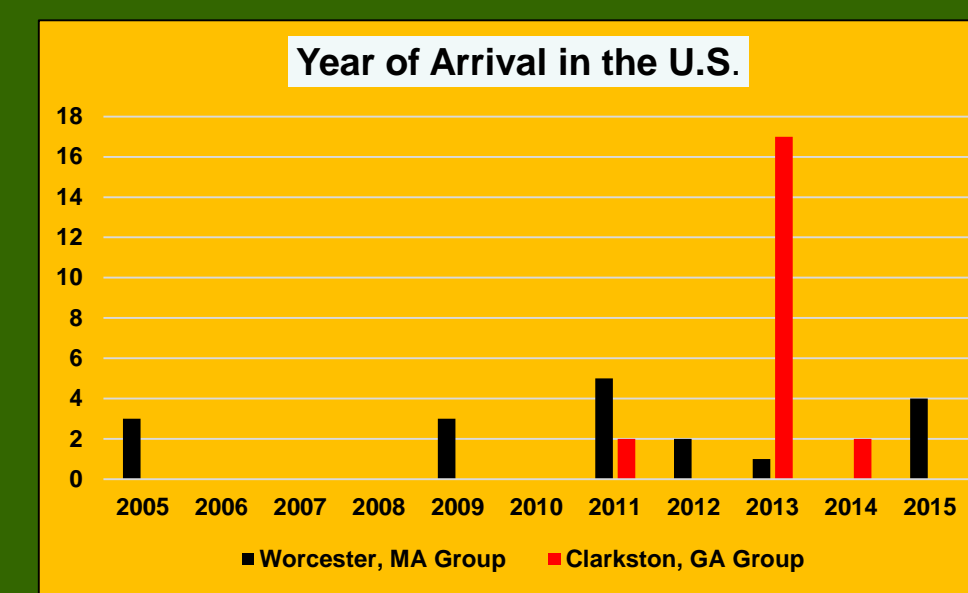
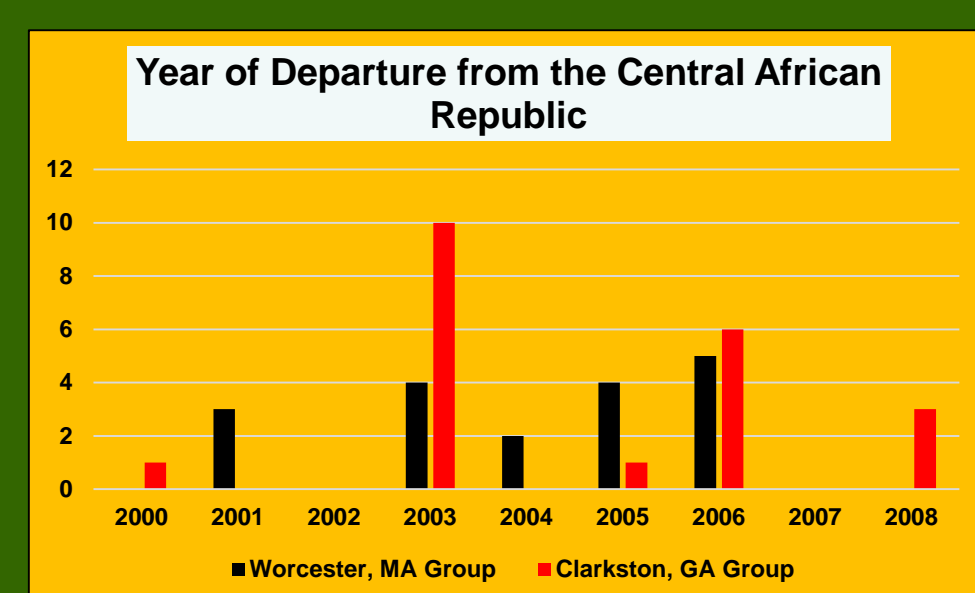
- Identified and interviewed 39 resettled refugees from the Central African Republic living in two communities in the United States (Clarkston, Georgia and Worcester, Massachusetts) during March and April, 2015. A total of 41 hours of interviews were recorded.
- Participants received a modest monetary payment for their participation in the study. Participants were identified through networks of former Peace Corps Volunteers and CAR diaspora community members. Interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to 3 hours.
- Interviews were conducted primarily in Sango and French with occasional uses of English.
- The interview instrument consisted of 31 questions covering 4 areas:
  - Basic Demographic Information & Background
  - Information Practices (Types, Sources, Quality, Experience)
  - Extent of Support Networks
  - Concluding perceptions of information needs and challenges in the U.S.
- Interviews were transcribed and are in the process of being coded for a more phenomenological approach to the research study.



Movement of Interviewees as Refugees Leaving the C.A.R.



Life in the C.A.R. – Life in the U.S.



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For feedback or questions please contact Natalia Bowdoin at [nataliab@usca.edu](mailto:nataliab@usca.edu) or 1-803-641-3492. Thank you.