

## **Statement**

**Parallel event “Student Engaged Learning to empower mountain women and girls”  
63<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women  
Laila Mitchell, member, Utah International Mountain Forum,  
a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University**

Hello, my name is Laila Mitchell. I began my involvement with UIMF by promoting events through social media. I attend UIMF events and post a live-stream video on UIMF’s Facebook page for our global audience. I am working with Hailee and other students under UVU’s engaged learning model, towards advocating for sustainable mountain development. I have also studied issues facing Utah’s women, and would like to address the critical issue of how the opioid crisis currently spreading across the U.S. impacts Utah’s women.

In general, the United States is a major consumer of opioids. Congressman Ernest Istook expresses how the rise of synthetic drugs has reached a crisis level. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Fentanyl, a painkiller often used during childbirth, has surpassed heroin, oxycodone and hydrocodone as the most deadly opioid. While Utah’s opioid problems are not as severe as other parts of the nation, such as the Appalachian mountains, where states still have the highest overdose rates, opioids are still a major issue for Utah. According to Utah’s Public Health Data report, drug overdose is the leading cause of deaths in Utah

A major concern in Utah is the impact opioids have on women and children. Opioid misuse during pregnancy has led to the issue of withdrawal syndromes in newborns. Marcela Smid, a maternal-fetal specialist with the University of Utah Health Hospitals and Clinics shared how maternal death is a growing problem among pregnant and postpartum women with opioid use disorders. There are many situations in which mothers try to decrease or stop drug use but “That stress, coupled with the stress of having a new baby, or dealing with postpartum depression can lead to misuse, overdose, and possibly death.”

Utah has taken action towards improvement and prevention by working with The Utah Statewide Information and Analysis Center, The United States Drug Enforcement Administration and pharmaceuticals, by incorporating active security, providing “take back” days-where the DEA will take and properly dispose of unused drugs-, and issue more control over prescribed drugs.

A Utah’s Department of Public Safety information analyst, Stephen Gilley, who leads Utah’s Drug Monitoring Initiative, recently spoke in one of my classes about Utah’s goals of reducing overdose deaths. With help from the Statewide Information and Analysis fusion center they have been able to spot emerging threats from information that is collected at emergency rooms and from poison control centers, medical examiner’s reports, forensic labs and police stations, which has helped to decrease opioid related issues in the state.

Through the engaged learning model, I have been able to network with individuals and specialists who are involved in the efforts of improving the lives of women impacted by the opioid crisis; this has inspired me to pursue a career path in relation to my National Security major that will allow me to continue my research and allow me to make a difference in the lives of women experiencing opioid related issues throughout Utah.

