

**REFUGEE MIGRATION TO  
GERMANY:**

**A MAGNIFYING GLASS FOR  
BROADER PUBLIC HEALTH  
CHALLENGES**

**PH\_**  
**LENS**  
Research Group

**PH-LENS**

**WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**No. 07**

**DECEMBER 2023**

**Vulnerability and  
Empowerment:  
Participatory Approaches  
to Health Promotion with  
Refugees (EMPOW)**

Hella von Unger

von Unger, H. (2023). Vulnerability  
and Empowerment: Participatory  
Approaches to Health Promotion  
with Refugees (EMPOW). Bielefeld:  
PH-LENS Working Paper Series No.  
7, 12/2023. DOI:  
<https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2985393>

von Unger, H. (2023)

## Vulnerability and Empowerment: Participatory Approaches to Health Promotion with Refugees (EMPOW)

PH-LENS Working Paper Series No. 7, Version 1.0

Bielefeld, December 2023

General Editors: Razum, O.; Bozorgmehr, K.; von Unger, H.

ISSN: 2702-2676, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2985393>

Gefördert durch



Deutsche  
Forschungsgemeinschaft

PH-LENS is funded by the German Research  
Foundation (DFG).

*Note for Publication* (PH-LENS Working Papers are refereed scholarly papers. Submissions are reviewed by the general editors before a final decision on publication is made.)

*Note to Readers* (The Working Paper Series is a forum for presenting works in progress. Readers should communicate comments on the manuscript directly to the author(s).)

The PH-LENS Working Paper Series is intended to aid the rapid distribution of work in progress, research findings and special lectures by researchers and associates of PH-LENS. Papers aim to stimulate discussion among the worldwide community of scholars, policymakers and practitioners. They are distributed free of charge in PDF format via the PH-LENS website.

The papers can be downloaded from the project website: <https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/gesundheitswissenschaften/forschungsgruppen/ph-lens/>

Unless otherwise noted, this publication is licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.en> and  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode>



PH-LENS „Refugee migration to Germany: a magnifying glass for broader Public Health challenges“

University of Bielefeld

School of Public Health

P. O. Box 100131

33501 Bielefeld, Germany

Phone.: +49 521 106-3837

Email: [oliver.razum@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:oliver.razum@uni-bielefeld.de)



UNIVERSITÄT  
BIELEFELD

Fakultät für  
Gesundheitswissenschaften



UNIVERSITÄT  
BIELEFELD

Faculty of Psychology  
and Sports Science



UNIVERSITÄTS  
KLINIKUM  
HEIDELBERG



TECHNISCHE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
DRESDEN



Alice Salomon Hochschule Berlin  
University of Applied Sciences



Institut für interdisziplinäre  
Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung



# Vulnerability and Empowerment: Participatory Approaches to Health Promotion with Refugees (EMPOW)

Hella von Unger

## Abstract

Forced migration not only poses health risks but also opens avenues for individual agency and collective empowerment among refugees. Existing literature in public health tends to focus *either* on the vulnerability *or* on the resources and potential for health promotion of refugees. The EMPOW project set out to explore the intricate relationship between vulnerability and empowerment through a community-based participatory research approach (CBPR). Within the framework of the research unit FOR 2928 „Refugee Migration to Germany: A Magnifying Glass for Broader Public Health Challenges" (PH-LENS), this initiative delved into refugees' emic perspectives on othering, simultaneously aiming to identify strategies to counteract its adverse effects and promote refugee health against the odds.

The project aimed to a) identify health-related concerns, needs and resources of selected refugee groups, b) develop health promotion initiatives for and with refugee groups, and c) gain a better theoretical understanding of vulnerability, othering and empowerment from their respective standpoints. In accordance with the principles of CBPR, the specific local objectives and methodological procedures were jointly determined with the community partners. Refugees, community organizations and service providers were involved as partners in a multi-sited participatory study. In Munich, a diverse group of newly arrived refugees were trained as peer researchers to conduct a photovoice project and a peer survey in refugee shelters, particularly large AnKER facilities in Bavaria. The results illustrate how social isolation, uncertainty and loneliness were experienced in the COVID 19 pandemic. In Hanover, community partners developed a peer-based digital support network for Arabic and Farsi-speaking refugee women. This proved particularly valuable for bridging gaps in accessing health and social services as well as support in case of gender-based violence. In Berlin, a group mainly consisting of refugees from African countries explored ethical and methodological aspects of participatory health research from a critical perspective. Participatory focus groups were conducted at all study sites to explore the effects of the COVID pandemic on both the fields of study as well as the research collaboration itself. The results add to the methodological debate and to public health literature on refugee health regarding the intersectional vulnerabilities and potentials of empowerment through peer models of health promotion with refugee groups. Limitations of the approach are also discussed in this final project report.

## Zusammenfassung (German)

Fluchtmigration birgt sowohl Gesundheitsrisiken als auch Chancen für individuelle Handlungsfähigkeit und kollektive Selbstermächtigung (Empowerment). Die Fachdiskussion in Public Health konzentriert sich meist *entweder* auf die Verletzlichkeit *oder* die Ressourcen und Potentiale für Gesundheitsförderung bei geflüchteten Personen. Das EMPOW-Projekt hatte zum Ziel, die Verbindung zwischen Vulnerabilität und Empowerment mithilfe einer partizipativen, community-basierten Forschungsmethodik empirisch zu untersuchen und konzeptuell weiter zu

entwickeln. Im Rahmen der Forschungsgruppe FOR 2928 „Refugee Migration to Germany: A Magnifying Glass for Broader Public Health Challenges“ (PH-LENS) erkundete dieses Projekt die emischen Perspektiven von Flüchtlingen zum Thema "Othering", während gleichzeitig Strategien gesucht wurden, um den negativen Auswirkungen entgegenzuwirken und die Gesundheit von geflüchteten Gruppen zu fördern.

Das Projekt hatte das Ziel: a) Gesundheitsbezogene Anliegen, Bedürfnisse und Ressourcen ausgewählter Gruppen mit Fluchterfahrung zu identifizieren, b) Maßnahmen und Initiativen der Gesundheitsförderung für und mit geflüchteten Gruppen zu entwickeln, und c) aus ihrer jeweiligen Perspektive ein besseres theoretisches Verständnis von Verletzlichkeit, Othering und Empowerment gewinnen. Dem Ansatz der partizipativen Forschung entsprechend wurden die genauen Zielsetzungen und methodischen Vorgehensweisen der lokalen Projekte mit den Partner:innen in den Communities gemeinsam festgelegt. Das EMPOW-Projekt fand an drei Standorten im Bundesgebiet statt. In München wurden eine diverse Gruppe von neu angekommenen Flüchtlingen als Peer-Forschende ausgebildet, um ein Photovoice-Projekt und eine Peer-Umfrage in Flüchtlingsunterkünften, insbesondere in großen AnKER-Zentren in Bayern, durchzuführen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, wie soziale Isolation, Unsicherheit und Einsamkeit während der COVID-19-Pandemie erlebt wurden. In Hannover wurde ein peer-basiertes digitales Unterstützungs-Netzwerk für Arabisch- und Farsi-sprechende geflüchtete Frauen aufgebaut. Dies erwies sich als besonders wertvoll, um Lücken im Zugang zu Gesundheits- und Sozialdiensten zu überbrücken sowie Unterstützung bei geschlechtsbezogener Gewalt zu leisten. In Berlin erkundete eine Gruppe von überwiegend geflüchteten Personen aus afrikanischen Ländern ethische und methodologische Aspekte partizipativer Gesundheitsforschung aus einer kritischen Perspektive. An allen Studienstandorten wurden partizipative Fokusgruppen durchgeführt, um die Auswirkungen der COVID 19-Pandemie auf die Forschungszusammenarbeit zu erforschen. Die Ergebnisse tragen sowohl zur methodologischen Debatte als auch zur Literatur über intersektionale Verwundbarkeiten von geflüchteten Personen und Potenziale der Selbstermächtigung durch Peer-Modelle der Gesundheitsförderung in Kontexten nach der Flucht bei. Auch die Grenzen des Ansatzes werden in diesem Abschlussbericht diskutiert.

## 1. Participatory Research Collaboration and Results

### Why focus on vulnerability, empowerment and participation in research?

Vulnerability is a key concept in public health, facilitating the identification of groups in need of special support and protection. However, in its practical application, the concept unfolds ambivalent effects as it tends to be used as a label reinscribing unequal power relations, neglecting within-group heterogeneity while underestimating the agency of members of the group. In this respect, it is closely related to the concept of othering, as used in the PH-LENS Research Unit (Akbulut & Razum 2022). To address these shortcomings of the vulnerability concept, one must explore the individual and collective capacities for agency, empowerment, and resistance within the context of vulnerability (Butler 2016). Thus a dual conceptual focus was placed on vulnerability and empowerment of refugees in the EMPOW project. Furthermore, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was chosen to avoid a deficit-oriented perspective, adhere to the ethical principle of the 'dual imperative' in refugee research, and counteract unintended

othering through methodological means (Odukoya & von Unger 2023, von Unger 2022). In participatory collaborations, community partners are involved in cycles of action and reflection in the collaborative production of knowledge for change (Israel et al. 2018). When research tasks necessitate it, peer researchers receive training for example in methods of data collection and analysis (Nind 2011).

### EMPOW Study Design

The EMPOW project was a multi-sited study with participatory projects in three German cities: Berlin, Hanover and Munich. At each site, a local working group (consisting of approx. 5-15 community partners each) decided on the focus, aims and methods of the local project. Funds were put at their disposal and community participation in the cross-site research activities were supported as well.

As stated in the grant proposal, the overall aims of EMPOW included to (1) identify health-related concerns, needs and resources of selected refugee groups; (2) develop suitable concepts and interventions for community-based, participatory health promotion; and (3) further develop the theoretical concepts of vulnerability, othering and empowerment with special emphasis on the perspectives and experiences of refugees.<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the principles of CBPR (Israel et al. 2018), the specific refugee groups and topics addressed, the objectives and methodological procedures of the research collaboration were jointly determined with the community partners. Refugees, community organizations and service providers were involved as partners in the multi-sited participatory study design.

### EMPOW Munich

In Munich, community involvement was facilitated through a partnership with a service provider of mental health service to refugees (Refugio Munich). A diverse group of 10-15 newly arrived refugees were trained as peer researchers to conduct a photovoice project (Namutebi et al. 2021) and a peer survey with 273 refugees housed in shelters, particularly large AnKER facilities in Bavaria (Huber et al. fc.). The results illustrate how social isolation, uncertainty and loneliness were experienced in the COVID 19 pandemic thereby validating and complementing other findings on the detrimental effects of the pandemic and the shelter system on the (mental) health of refugees in Germany (Jahn et al. 2022, Rast et al. 2021, Razum et al. 2020). The experiences of the peer researchers were considered valuable data and examined through field notes and a focus group. This helped to shed light on the strengths and limitations of using a peer-based approach in health promotion and refugee research, an approach currently gaining vast popularity in Germany (Huber et al fc.; Perplies et al. 2022) and elsewhere (Harting et al. 2021; WHO 2023).

---

<sup>1</sup> A note on terminology in the PH-LENS research unit: when we speak of 'refugees', we mean persons with a history of forced migration seeking protection in Germany. We are aware of the heterogeneity of this group in many respects, be it country of origin, legal status, age, gender, or personal history, and use the term "refugee" merely for better readability.

### EMPOW Hanover

In Hanover, community involvement was facilitated through a partnership with a community-based association for health promotion in Lower Saxony (Landesvereinigung für Gesundheit und Akademie für Sozialmedizin Niedersachsen e.V.). Here, community partners developed a peer-based support network for Arabic and Farsi-speaking refugee women (Mohammadi et al. 2021). Approximately 100 women participated in the social media networks which were supplemented by individual peer consultations and referrals to professional support services. The peer-based initiative proved particularly valuable for bridging gaps in accessing health and social services as well as support in case of gender-based violence. Minutes, field notes and focus group data were analyzed using participatory (Nind 2011) and qualitative methods (Charmaz 2014). The findings show that a peer approach, facilitated through personal outreach and networking via social media, can promote the health of refugee women by enabling communication, building trust, strengthening self-help potentials, and facilitating access to social resources, including social and healthcare services (Mohammadi et al. fc). However, there are also challenges and limitations of the peer approach. As refugee women the peers find themselves in a difficult life situation and their own vulnerability is amplified in the process of listening to the stories of and providing support to other refugees. In conclusion, peer approaches to health promotion are only recommended provided sufficient support structures are in place. The findings also underscore the need to address gender-based violence not only prior to and during, but also following forced migration (Freedman 2016, Keygnaert et al. 2015). Community-based participatory research can play a crucial role in comprehending and promoting women's health, especially when leveraging existing resources and potential for empowerment (Krause 2014, Lindsjö et al. 2021). Yet the analysis illustrates the intricate connection between vulnerability and empowerment as a component of peer approaches (Mohammadi et al. fc). These findings enhance our understanding of health promotion by shedding light on the unintended consequences of participatory processes, especially in the face of the migration regime and the inertia within social structures more generally. Despite the well-meaning efforts of health promotion actors and initiatives employing participatory methodologies, these results underscore the challenges posed by persistent inequalities and the resistance of social realities to change (Duijs et al. 2021, Gugglberger 2018, Paradiso de Sayu & Chanmugam 2016, Pickering et al. 2022, Roura 2021).

### EMPOW Berlin

At the Berlin site, community involvement was facilitated through a community-based organization mainly working with African diasporic communities (Global Empowerment and Development Association, GEDA e.V.). EMPOW Berlin involved a group of refugees, activists, public health specialists and social workers most of whom had migration experience from African countries. This group explored the impact of structural mechanisms of othering in the health sector and the migration regime including racism as well as ethical and methodological aspects of participatory health research from a critical, postcolonial perspective in group discussions. EMPOW Berlin initiated a cross-site working group on research ethics to address the challenges involved in peer research and community participation in the context of the EMPOW project and participatory health research on forced migration more generally. The results of these critical debates will be published shortly (Adams et al. fc.).

## COVID-Related Challenges

The initial proposal encompassed a cross-site analysis of results to develop theories on vulnerability, othering, and empowerment from the standpoint of different refugee groups. Unfortunately, this was largely hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic began shortly after the EMPOW project commenced with drastic consequences for the collaboration. During the pandemic, members of the EMPOW project had no opportunity to meet in person and get to know each other. Most research-related activities, coordination efforts and workshops had to be conducted online in the first two years of the project. This was particularly challenging for community partners who were living in asylum shelters where a lack of WiFi, technology and privacy, amplified by extended quarantine measures, severely hampered online participation. Other community partners who were working for health and social services suffered from work overload which limited their ability to support EMPOW research activities. For all project partners, university-based as well as community-based, unpaid care work, home schooling, sickness experiences, worries about the pandemic and suboptimal “home office” settings further complicated these challenges. As a consequence, we experienced delays in our efforts to establish community-based project structures at the three sites and severe barriers in terms of building trust and moving from partnership-related to research-oriented activities in and across the sites (Huber et al. 2022).

The original plan of the work program of the EMPOW proposal included five work packages (WP):

1. Developing project structures (locally and on the overall project level);
2. Participatory case studies in three sites (Berlin, Hanover, Munich);
3. Capacity building workshops and participatory cross-site analysis;
4. Theorizing vulnerability, empowerment and othering;
5. Dissemination and sustainability.

The COVID pandemic severely affected the research collaboration in all five work packages (03/2020-04/2022). The impact was not only felt vis-à-vis implementing and coordinating a multi-sited study and collecting primary data, but also regarding the establishment of a collaboration between university-based and community-based partners as part of a participatory study for which trusting research relationships are indispensable. As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, the project activities at the three sites and across the sites were delayed and all work packages had to be adjusted: WP 1& 2 could more or less be realized as planned, albeit delayed by 12-18 months. For example, the first meeting of the steering group of the overall EMPOW project (consisting of 6 community partners from the three sites and 3 university-based partners) took place in 2021 after the local working group at the Hanover site had finally been installed. In WP 3 three out of five cross-site workshops had to be conducted online which hampered both the cross-case analysis as well as the theorizing (WP 4). For example, racism evolved as an important component of othering as experienced and articulated by refugee community partners (especially those from African countries) at two sites. Yet, the discussion of this sensitive topic failed in a cross-site workshop due to the lack of a “safe space” in the online meeting of a very diverse group of partners who had never met in person beforehand (a problem we analyzed and shared publicly in Adams

et al. fc., von Unger et al. 2022). WP 5 has been realized in various co-authorship publications as described above. However, the goal of sustainability of the community activities in health promotion with refugees could only be achieved for one (out of two) of the female support networks in Hanover and for the community and advocacy work of the Berlin group where the partner GEDA e.V. had been planning on continuing this work on empowerment all along. At the Munich site, however, EMPOW did not succeed in creating or contributing to sustainable community action.

Furthermore, the PhD project of Anna Huber was delayed and had to be re-designed. Given the immense Covid-related strains on the community partners, the decision was taken to situate the PhD in the affinity, but not within project collaboration. Thus, instead of using data generated as part of the EMPOW collaboration, Anna Huber collected and analyzed additional data on her own (based on expert interviews and document analysis). Her qualitative study investigates the role of NGOs in the migration regime focusing on the controversies surrounding housing policies and shelter accommodation for asylum seekers in Germany using grounded theory methodology. Her dissertation entitled “Partner oder Kritiker? Zur Rolle von NGOs im Migrationsregime” [Partner or adversary? The role of NGOs in the migration regime] (working title) (second supervisor: Prof. Dr. Serhat Karakayali, Leuphana University) will be submitted in early 2024.

### Spaces for Reflexivity

To tackle the COVID-related challenges within the project collaboration with the community partners and project partners in Berlin (GEDA e.V.), Hanover (LVG/AfS e.V.) and Munich (Refugio Munich), we created additional spaces for reflexivity. These included (1) the above mentioned cross-site “working group ethics”, (2) “reflection labs” and (3) participatory focus groups to document and treat our own experience as research data. We analyzed and published the lessons learned (Adams et al. fc.; Huber et al. 2022; von Unger et al. 2022). For example, the “working group ethics” addressed the challenges encountered by the community partners, highlighting the particular strains and burdens placed on them in refugee research in general and in a participatory research study under pandemic conditions in particular. In conclusion, we call for sufficient support structures to enable ethical conduct in peer-based approaches to health promotion and participatory health research with refugees (Adams et al. fc.) thus contributing to a lively debate on the ethics of participatory health research (Groot et al. 2021). The spaces we coined “reflection labs” provided a space for critical self-reflexivity among the university-based partners and added to the methodological debate on reflexivity by illustrating the use of such tool for both supervisory and epistemic purposes in participatory research (von Unger et al. 2022). Participatory focus groups were conducted at all study sites to explore the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic on both the fields of study as well as the research collaboration itself. In total nine (9) focus groups were conducted, recorded, transcribed and analyzed – including one with the LMU team moderated by two community partners. The publication of the results of these focus groups is still ongoing (e.g. Odukoya et al. fc.). The results will add to the methodological debate and to the literature on refugee health regarding the intersectional vulnerabilities and potentials of empowerment through peer models of health promotion with refugee groups.



## Methodological Conclusions

The challenges experienced in the EMPOW project were amplified by the Covid 19 pandemic, they were not, however, caused by it. Instead, they are rooted in social inequities and a basic methodological dilemma: the social inequalities and structurally induced restrictions on the social participation of disadvantaged groups such as refugees can be addressed, analyzed and alleviated, but never dissolved in a project collaboration. As Kelly & van Vlaenderen (1996:1244) aptly put it “The conditions which give rise to the need for participatory methodology are quite the opposite of ideal dialogical conditions.” Participatory research aims to achieve an equal collaboration of community-based and university-based partners to pursue knowledge for change (Israel et al. 2018). By sharing the epistemic power to define the issue, collect and analyze data, knowledge is co-created. However, co-creation must be accompanied by empowerment processes to ensure that the participation of community members is more than strategic (or at worst a manipulative tool) (Wallerstein, 2006). Participatory research is thus a highly ambitious endeavor that comes with a distinct set of opportunities and challenges including a) struggles in coming together as equal partners, b) dangers of perpetuating inequalities, and c) the challenges of navigating complex layers of relations within the community (Anang et al. 2021, Muhammad et al. 2018). These fundamental challenges are especially relevant in the context of refugee research, where the structurally imposed disempowerment of certain partners—namely, those still involved in an asylum procedure and/or fearing deportation—is particularly pronounced. Our methodological contributions shed light on this problem (Odukoya & von Unger 2023, von Unger 2022, von Unger et al. 2022).

In terms of deviations from the original concept and project proposal, digitalization played a much greater role than expected out of necessity – both in the communication and collaboration among project partners and when interacting with refugees in the respective fields. Due to COVID 19, physical meetings and workshops became unfeasible and this situation posed new challenges but also opportunities for participatory research approaches generally (Slingerland et al. 2022). In the EMPOW project, the peer survey conducted in Munich was partially conducted online and the peer-based support network developed in Hanover was mainly based on social media. These online activities were accompanied and supplemented by offline meetings, for example in Hanover where sensitive information was shared in confidential meetings and telephone conversations and the peers also accompanied referrals to professional health and social services. Activities and approaches to quality-enhancing measures ensuring the validity and comprehensibility of our research findings involved repeated feedback loops and participatory collaboration between university-based and community-based partners, close collaboration with a project advisory board consisting of health and migration researchers, human right activists and community organizers, and also the presentation of preliminary results on various scientific conferences and lay forums (see below). We also reflected questions of participatory research through digital means in a podcast (“Highway to health” see project outputs 2.2 below).

## Contributions to the unit PH LENS:

EMPOW took part in meetings and research activities of the research unit PH-LENS, including the interviews on our understanding of othering, the meetings with the International Advisory Board,

and various workshops. We presented at the PH-LENS conference “Paradise or Purgatory” and chaired a workshop on partnership approaches in research for partners of the research unit. EMPOW contributed to the discussions and theory building on othering in PH-LENS – taking a critical stance regarding the proposed concept of “inclusionary othering” and pointing to the stigmatizing and exclusionary effects of implicit assumptions that frame scientific concepts and arguments (such as “health system resilience” which frames migrant groups as stressors). EMPOW in turn benefited from PH-LENS, e.g. through feedback on its progress and the quantitative measures of the peer survey. Collaboration was particularly close with the subproject PROREF which also applied qualitative and participatory methods: in repeated online research workshops methodological feedback and advice were shared. Furthermore, the colleagues from PROREF and OTHER attended the EMPOW closing event in 2022 and shared their expertise in public health, refugee health and women’s health with the community partners and the public.

## 2. Project-Related Outputs and Publications

### 2.1 Organization of scientific events, measures for science communication

- Workshop on participatory methodologies in migrant and refugee health research at the 14<sup>th</sup> European Public Health Conference in 2021 (see below).
- Seminar on vulnerability, empowerment and refugee health at the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress “Armut und Gesundheit”, March 2022, Berlin (see below).
- 2-day workshop on participatory analysis in health research with refugees with Prof. Michaela Hynie (York University, Toronto, Canada), July 2022, Eine-Welt-Haus, Munich.
- Closing event with presentations from all project sites and discussions with experts from communities, service provision and science, Sept 2022 in Hanover (see below).
- Participatory development of a bilingual project website: [www.empow-projekt.de](http://www.empow-projekt.de)
- Various contributions to the (non-scientific) publications of our project partners aiming at their respective professional and lay audiences (see below).

### 2.2 Publications with scientific peer review

- Huber A, von Unger H, Kühner A, Odukoya D & Reiter H (2021, 3. September) Reflection labs: Digital spaces for researcher reflexivity in participatory collaborations. European Sociological Association, 15th Conference of the European Sociological Association.
- Huber A, Krasniqi S, M'Bayo R, Odukoya D, Wächter-Raquet M, & von Unger H (2022) Leben auf engstem Raum – Forschen auf Distanz? Partizipative Gesundheitsforschung mit Geflüchteten in der Corona-Pandemie. [Living in a confined space - researching at a distance? Participatory Health Research with Refugees in the Corona Pandemic]. PH-LENS Working Paper Series No. 2, 7/2022. <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2964075>
- Mohammadi M, Wächter-Racquet M & Odukoya D (2021) Health promotion through digital means: Refugee women using video and social media in times of COVID-19. *Eur J Public Health* 31(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.396>
- Namutebi L, Nakyazze OC, Bamuwayira A, Huber A & Krasniqi S (2021) “Life in the camps makes you sick.” Results of a photovoice project with refugees in Munich, Germany. *Eur J Public Health* 31(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.395>

- Odukoya D, von Unger H (2023) Partizipative Forschung [Participatory Research]. In Berlinghoff M, Glorius B, Kleist O, Scharrer T (Eds). Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung. Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium [Research on forced migration and refugees. Handbook for science and studies]. Nomos: pp. 149-154.
- von Unger H (2021a, 10. Juni) Vulnerability and empowerment in times of COVID-19: Collaborating with refugees as research partners. ZiF Workshop Bielefeld University, Workshop "Paradise or Purgatory? The challenges of accommodating refugees". [https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/\(de\)/ZiF/AG/2021/06-10-Razum\\_Programm.pdf](https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/(de)/ZiF/AG/2021/06-10-Razum_Programm.pdf)
- von Unger H. (2021b, 16. Juni) „Mission impossible? Soziale Wirklichkeit erforschen und verändern durch partizipative Forschung zu Gesundheit nach der Flucht. Universität Kassel. Empirische Forschungsmethoden.
- von Unger H (2021c, 23. Oktober) Othering vermeiden durch Partizipation - Partizipative Ansätze der Gesundheitsforschung für eine diskriminierungsfreie Sprache und Zusammenarbeit., FIDE-Jahrestagung „Chancen, Risiken und Perspektiven der globalen Frauengesundheit -im Zeitalter digitaler Vernetzung“. <https://www.uniklinik-freiburg.de/fide-2021/programm.html>
- von Unger H (2021d, 10.–12. November) Participatory health research with refugees: Voices, experiences, and methodologies., 14th European Public Health Conference. <https://ephconference.eu/dublin-2021-186> and *Eur J Public Health* 31(3). ckab164.394, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.394>
- von Unger H & Huber A (2021, 31. August – 3. September) Participatory research on health promotion with refugees: “Layers of vulnerability” and strategies of adjusting to the Covid-19 pandemic. European Sociological Association, 15th Conference of the European Sociological Association.
- von Unger H, Huber A, Kühner A, Odukoya D, & Reiter H (2022) Reflection Labs: A Space for Researcher Reflexivity in Participatory Collaborations. *Int J Qual Meth* 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221142460>
- von Unger H (2022) Diversifizierung, Reflexivität und Partizipation. Strategien gegen Ver-Änderung in der Forschung [Diversification, reflexivity and participation – strategies against othering in research]. In: Siouti I, Spies T, Tuiden E, von Unger H, Yildiz E (Eds.) Othering in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft: Herausforderungen und Konsequenzen für die Forschungspraxis [Othering in postmigrant society: Challenges and consequences for research practice]. Bielefeld: transcript: pp. 85-106. <https://www.transcript-open.de/doi/10.14361/978383839463086-004>

#### Publications currently under scientific peer review:

- Adams F, Amoah S, Barounga A, Ciza P, Hingst EA, Huber A, Krasniqi S, Mawlawi J, M`Bayo R, Mohammadi M, Narimani P, Neba J, von Unger H, Yapha M (forthcoming) Ethik in der partizipativen Gesundheitsforschung mit Geflüchteten: „Safe spaces“ und Unterstützung für Peers [Ethics in participatory health research with refugees: „safe spaces“ and support for peers]. In: Klingler C, Ranisch R.& Pichl A (Eds) Ethik der Partizipation. transcript Verlag. Open access. *Accepted Oct 20, 2023.*

- Huber A, Al-Daheen A, Azar Z, Fischer O, Krasniqi S, Mayasi L, Mukuna JL, Nakyazze OC, Namutebi L, Sharify Z, Odukoya D, Sylla F & von Unger H (forthcoming) »But loneliness was my greatest challenge« Geflüchtetenunterkünfte in der Covid-19-Pandemie – Ergebnisse einer partizipativen Peer-Befragung [»But loneliness was my greatest challenge« Refugee shelters in the Covid 19 pandemic – Results of a participatory peer survey]. *Submitted to Z'Flucht* (July 17, 2023)
- Mohammadi M, Huber A, Odukoya D, Wächter-Raquet M & von Unger H (forthcoming) Gesundheitsförderung mit geflüchteten Frauen: Stärken und Herausforderungen eines Peer-Ansatzes [Health promotion with refugee women: Strenghts and challenges of a peer approach]. *Submitted to Prävention & Gesundheitsförderung* on Oct 17, 2023.
- Odukoya D, Huber A, Amoah S, Adams F, Bamuwayira A, Mohammadi M & von Unger H (forthcoming) The Covid-19 pandemic and refugee health in Germany: Findings from participatory focus groups. *Submitted to The Qualitative Report* on Sept 17, 2023.

### 2.3 Further publications

- Azar Z, Huber A, Mawlawi J, Odukoya D, von Unger H (2023) Geflüchtetenunterkünfte in der COVID-19-Pandemie partizipativ erforschen – Ergebnisse einer Peer-Befragung [Participatory research on refugee accommodation during the COVID-19 pandemic - results of a peer survey]. *Impulse* 120, 16.
- Azar Z, Huber A, Mawlawi J, Mayasi L (2023, January 12) "Life in the camps makes you sick". Partizipative Forschung mit Geflüchteten in Zeiten von Corona [Participatory research with refugees in times of Corona]. Qualitative Methodengespräche [Lecture series on qualitative methodologies] Department of Sociology, LMU Munich.
- Huber A, Namutebi L, Krasniqi S (2020) Empowerment. Warum Massenunterkünfte krank machen. Jahresbericht Refugio München, <https://www.empow-projekt.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Jahresbericht-Refugio-2020.pdf>
- Huber A, Odukoya D, von Unger H (2020) Gesundheit nach der Flucht –Warum partizipative Forschung angemessen ist. In: *Impulse für Gesundheitsförderung* 106, S.20-21. <https://gesundheit-nds.de/images/pdfs/impulse/LVG-Zeitschrift-Nr106-Web.pdf>
- Mohammadi M, Wächter-Raquet M (2022) Empowerment geflüchteter Frauen am Beispiel des Projektes EMPOW [Empowerment of Refugee Women Using the Example of the EMPOW Project]. *Impulse* 116, 27.
- von Unger H, Hilbrich I (2021) #09 Digitale partizipative Forschung [Digital participatory research, podcast]. In: „Highways to health“ Podcastreihe des LVG AFS Niedersachsen e.V., <https://highways2health.de/podcast/09-digitale-partizipative-forschung.html>

### Presentations at the 27th Congress “Armut und Gesundheit“, 2022, Berlin

- Huber A, Odukoya D, von Unger, H (2022, 24 March): Vulnerabilität, Gesundheit und Empowerment. Partizipative Forschung mit Geflüchteten.
- M'Bayo R, Barounga AK, Hingst E, M'bayoh LY, Yapha M, Amoah S, Adams F, Neba J, Ciza P, Tella C, Narimani P (2022, 24 March) African Voices on Health, vulnerability and empowerment based on lived experience.

Mohammadi M, Amir A, Shafiei N, Alfalah R, Wächter-Raquet M (2022, 24 March) Peer-basierte Gesundheitsförderung mit geflüchteten Frauen über soziale Medien.

Sylla F, Huber A, Krasniqi S (2022, 24 March) "Das Leben in den Lagern macht dich krank." Ergebnisse eines Photovoice-Projekts und einer Befragung.

Presentations at the Closing Conference of the EMPOW Project (2022), Hanover:

Amoah S, von Unger H (2022, Sept 16) Introduction to the EMPOW project: Participatory Research with Refugees in Times of Corona – a "Mission Impossible"?!

Azar Z, Bamuwayira A, Huber A, Mawlawi J (2022, Sept 16) Corona in Bavarian refugee shelters – Photovoice and Peer Survey (EMPOW Munich)

Barounga A, Yapha M, Amoah S (2022, Sept 16) „Empowerment is a joke when society takes everything from you“ Structural Constraints on the Participation of Refugees (EMPOW Berlin)

M'Bayo R, Narimani P, Hingst E, Neba J (2022, Sept 16) Critical Remarks on the Ethics of Participatory Research with Refugees (EMPOW Berlin)

Mohammadi M (2022, Sept 16) Health Promotion with Refugee Women through Social Media (EMPOW Hanover).

*Notes:*

### **LMU Research Team**

- *Anna Huber, MA, Department of Sociology, LMU Munich*
- *Dr. Dennis Odukoya, Department of Sociology, LMU Munich*
- *Student researchers: Ruth Ghebrizghi, Anna-Nathalia Koch, Prisca Ludwig*

### **Project Partners**

- *Global Empowerment and Development Association (GEDA) e.V., Berlin*
- *Landesvereinigung für Gesundheit und Akademie für Sozialmedizin Niedersachsen e.V. (LVG & AfS), Hannover*
- *Refugio Munich*

### **Funding information**

*The project “Vulnerability and Empowerment: Participatory Approaches to Health Promotion with Refugees (EMPOW)” (PI: Prof. Dr. Hella von Unger, LMU Munich) was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) (11/2019-12/2022, UN 263/6-1) as part of the Research Group FOR 2928 “Refugee Migration to Germany: A Magnifying Glass for Broader Public Health Challenges” (PH-LENS).*

### **Research Ethics**

*Ethical questions were actively reflected on in the project collaboration. Ethics review obtained from the Research Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Social Sciences at LMU (GZ 19-02).*

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to express our gratitude to all the individual and organizational partners who supported and contributed to the EMPOW project. Sincerest thanks to the Global Empowerment and Development Association e.V. (GEDA e.V.), the State Association for Health and Academy for Social Medicine Lower Saxony e.V. (LVG & AFS), Refugio Munich, and the administrative office of the Department of Sociology at LMU Munich for their administrative and organizational support, without which our participatory collaboration—amidst, despite, and with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic—would not have been possible.

## References

- Adams, F., Amoah, S., Barounga, A., Ciza, P., Hingst, E.A., Hube, A., Krasniqi, S., Mawlawi, J., M`Bayo, R., Mohammadi, M., Narimani, P., Neba, J., von Unger, H., & Yapha, M. (fc). Ethik in der partizipativen Gesundheitsforschung mit Geflüchteten: „Safe spaces“ und Unterstützung für Peers. In: Klingler, C.; Ranisch, R., & Pichl, A. (Eds). Ethik der Partizipation. transcript Verlag.
- Akbulut N., & Razum, O. (2022). Why Othering should be considered in research on health inequalities: Theoretical perspectives and research needs. *SSM - Population Health* 20, 101286. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2022.101286>
- Anang, P., Gottlieb, N., Putulik, S., Iguptak, S., & Gottlieb, E. (2021). Learning to Fail Better: Reflections on the challenges and risks of community-based participatory mental health research with Inuit youth in Nunavut. *Frontiers in Public Health* 9:604668. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2021.604668
- Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance. In: Butler, J., Gambetti, Z., & Sabsay, L. (Eds). *Vulnerability in Resistance* (pp.12-27). Duke University Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Los Angeles [u.a.]: Sage.
- Duijs, S.E., Baur, V.E., Abma, T.A. (2021). Why action needs compassion: Creating space for experiences of powerlessness and suffering in participatory action research. *Action Research* 19(3):498–517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750319844577>
- Freedman, J. (2016). Sexual and gender-based violence against refugee women: A hidden aspect of the refugee "crisis". *Reprod Health Matters* 24(47):18-26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2016.05.003>
- Groot, B.C., Vink, M., Haveman, A., Huberts, M., Schout, G., Abma, T.A. (2019). Ethics of care in participatory health research: mutual responsibility in collaboration with co-researchers. *Educational Action Res* 27(2):286-302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2018.1450771>
- Gugglberger, L. (2018). Can health promotion also do harm? *Health Promot Int* 33 (4): 557–560, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day060>
- Harting, J., Kruithof, K., Ruijter, L., & Stronks, K. (2022). Participatory research in health promotion: a critical review and illustration of rationales, *Health Promot Int* 37 (suppl 2), ii7–ii20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daac016>
- Hawkins, M.M., Schmitt, M.E., Adebayo, C.T., Weitzel, J., Olukotun, O., Christensen, A.M., Ruiz, A.M., Gilman, K., Quigley, K., Dressel, A., & Mkandawire-Valhmu, L. (2021). Promoting the health of refugee women: a scoping literature review incorporating the social ecological model. *Int J Equity Health* 20(1):45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01387-5>
- Huber, A., Al-Daheen, A., Azar, Z., Fischer, O., Krasniqi, S., Mayasi, L., Mukuna, J.L., Nakyazze, O.C., Namutebi, L., Sharify, Z., Odukoya, D., Sylla, F., & von Unger, H. (fc). »But loneliness was my greatest challenge« Geflüchtetenunterkünfte in der Covid-19-Pandemie – Ergebnisse einer partizipativen Peer-Befragung. *Submitted to Z'Flucht*

- Huber, A., Krasniqi, S., M'Bayo, R., Odukoya, D., Wächter-Raquet, M., & von Unger, H. (2022). Leben auf engstem Raum – Forschen auf Distanz? Partizipative Gesundheitsforschung mit Geflüchteten in der Corona-Pandemie. PH-LENS Working Paper Series. Universität Bielefeld, Bielefeld. <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2964075>
- Ibáñez-Carrasco, F., Watson, J.R., & Tavares, J. (2019). Supporting peer researchers: recommendations from our lived experience/expertise in community-based research in Canada. *Harm Reduct J* 16(1):55. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-019-0322-6>
- Israel, B., Schulz, A., Parker, E., Becker, A., Allen, A., Guzman, R., & Lichtenstein, R. (2018). Critical issues in developing and following community-based participatory research principles. In: Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J., & Minkler, M. (Eds.). *Community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 31–46). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jahn, R., Hintermeier, M., & Bozorgmehr, K. (2022). SARS-CoV-2 attack rate in reception and accommodation centres for asylum seekers during the first wave: Systematic review of outbreak media reports in Germany. *Journal of Migration and Health*, 5(February), 100084. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2022.100084>
- Kelly, K.J., & Van Vlaenderen, H. (1996). Dynamics of participation in a community health project. *Soc Sci Med* 42(9):1235-46. doi: 10.1016/0277-9536(95)00218-9. PMID: 8733194.
- Keygnaert, I., Dias, S.F., Degomme, O., Devillé, W., Kennedy, P., Kováts, A, Meyer, S. de, Vettenburg, N., Roelens, K., Temmerman, M. (2015). Sexual and gender-based violence in the European asylum and reception sector: a perpetuum mobile? *Eur J Public Health* 25(1):90–96. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cku066>
- Krause, U. (2014). Analysis of empowerment of refugee women in camps and settlements. *J of Intern Displacement* 4(1): 28-51
- Lindsjö, C., Sjögren Forss, K., Kumlien, C., & Rämgård, M. (2021). Health promotion focusing on migrant women through a community based participatory research approach. *BMC Womens Health* 21(1):365. doi: 10.1186/s12905-021-01506-y.
- Mohammadi, M., Huber, A., Odukoya, D., Wächter-Raquet, M., & von Unger, H. (fc). Gesundheitsförderung mit geflüchteten Frauen: Stärken und Herausforderungen eines Peer-Ansatzes [Health promotion with refugee women: Strengths and challenges of a peer approach]. *Submitted to Prävention und Gesundheitsförderung*.
- Mohammadi, M., Wächter-Raquet, M., & Odukoya, D. (2021). Health promotion through digital means. Refugee women using video and social media in times of COVID-19. *Eur J Public Health* 31 (Suppl 3), 151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.396>
- Montero-Sieburth, M.A. (2020). Who gives “Voice” or “Empowers Migrants” in Participatory Action Research? Challenges and Solutions. *Migrat Lett* 17(2):211-218. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v17i2.806>
- Muhammad, M., Garzon, C., Reyes, A., & the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (2018). Understanding contemporary racism, power, and privilege and their impacts on CBPR. In: Wallerstein, N., Duran, B., Oetzel, J., & Minkler, M. (Eds.). *Community-based participatory research for health. Advancing social and health equity* (pp. 47–59). John Wiley & Sons.



- Namutebi, L., Nakyazze, O.C., Bamuwayira, A., Huber, A., & Krasniqi, S. (2021). "Life in the camps makes you sick." Results of a photovoice project with refugees in Munich, Germany. *Eur J Public Health* 31 (Suppl 3), 151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.395>
- Nind, M. (2011). Participatory data analysis: a step too far? *Qual Res* 11(4):349–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111404310>
- Odukoya, D., Huber, A., Amoah, S., Adams, F., Bamuwayira, A., Mohammadi, M., & von Unger, H. (fc). The Covid-19 pandemic and refugee health in Germany: Findings from participatory focus groups. *Submitted to The Qualitative Report*.
- Odukoya, D., & von Unger, H. (2023). Partizipative Forschung. In: Scharrer, T., Glorius, B., Kleist, J.O., et al. (Eds). *Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung. Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium* (pp.153-158). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Paradiso de Sayu, R., & Chanmugam, A. (2016). Perceptions of Empowerment Within and Across Partnerships in Community-Based Participatory Research: A Dyadic Interview Analysis. *Qual Heal Res* 26 (1): 105–116.
- Perplies, C., Biddle, L., Benson-Martin, J., Joggerst, B., & Bozorgmehr, K. (2022). Förderung der psychischen Gesundheit von geflüchteten Menschen. Erkenntnisse aus der Implementierung eines gruppenbasierten Peer-Ansatzes im kommunalen Setting. *Präv Gesundheitsf* 17(4):505–511.
- Pickering, C.J., Al-Baldawi, Z., McVean, L., Amany, R.A., Adan, M., Baker, L., Al-Baldawi, Z., & O'Sullivan, T. (2022). "It's Like Youth are Talking Into a Microphone That is not Plugged in": Engaging Youth in Disaster Risk Reduction Through Photovoice. *Qual Health Res* 32 (14), pp. 2126–2146.
- Rast, E., Perplies, C., Biddle, L., & Bozorgmehr, K. (2021). Asylum seekers' experiences with quarantine after arriving in Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Eur J Public Health* 31 (suppl 3) 326 ckab164.863. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckab164.863>
- Razum, O., et al. (2020). Covid-19 in Flüchtlingsunterkünften: ÖGD jetzt weiter stärken, *Gesundheitswesen*, 82 (5), 392-396.
- Roura, M. (2021). The Social Ecology of Power in Participatory Health Research. *Qual Health Res* 31(4):778–788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732320979187>
- Slingerland, G., Murray, M., Lukosch, S., et al. (2022). Participatory Design Going Digital: Challenges and Opportunities for Distributed Place-Making. *Comput Supp Coop Work* 31, 669–700 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-022-09438-3>
- von Unger, H. (2022). Diversifizierung, Reflexivität und Partizipation. Strategien gegen Veränderung in der Forschung. In: Siouti, I., Spies, T., Tüder, E., von Unger, H., & Yildiz, E. (Eds.) *Othering in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft: Herausforderungen und Konsequenzen für die Forschungspraxis* (pp. 85-106). Bielefeld: transcript.
- von Unger, H., Huber, A., Kühner, A., Odukoya, D., & Reiter, H. (2022). Reflection Labs: A Space for Researcher Reflexivity in Participatory Collaborations. *Int J Qual Meth* 21:160940692211424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221142460>

World Health Organization (2023). Promoting the health of refugees and migrants: experiences from around the world. Geneva: WHO, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/promoting-health-refugees-and-migrants-experiences-around-world>.