5.Q. Workshop: Participatory health research with refugees: Voices, experiences, and methodologies

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The workshop addresses important deficits in public health discourses: a) Refugees are talked about too often and heard too seldom; b) they are the subject of research, but seldom the beneficiaries. Participatory methodologies offer an alternative. Involving refugees as research partners provides an opportunity to share the epistemic power of defining and interpreting reality. Research partners are valued for their skills, knowledge, resources and experience. Furthermore, collaborations aim to both understand and change reality so that communities may also benefit. In practice, participatory health research employs a variety of methods, including narrative, art-based and audio-visual methods. For example, photovoice combines visual data and group discussion: Members of a community take photos of their living environments, discuss them in a group process and analyse their situation to initiate change. Pictures and stories constitute the experiential ground from which new knowledge is gained, criticism is voiced and changes are proposed. When using such tools, it becomes tangible how legal restrictions as well as limited access to health care, education and the labor market decrease the health chances of refugees. Everyday experiences of uncertainty, racism and exclusion (e.g. through housing in segregated camps) pose substantial risks. On the other hand, individual and collective agency exists despite these adverse circumstances. The workshop aims to bring together community partners and researchers to discuss participatory health research with refugees and migrant populations based on three examples from Germany: 1) a photovoice project with refugees in Munich describes the Bavarian camps and shelters from within, showing in pictures and words how they make you sick; 2) a participatory project with female refugees in Hannover shows how digital health promotion through video and social media is developed in times of COVID-19; 3) a participatory project applying community mapping with injecting drug users in Dortmund illustrates how knowledge can be co-created to better tailor harm reduction services to refugee and migrant groups. The first two presentations are
part of a research collaboration on “Vulnerability and empowerment: Participatory approaches to health promotion with refugees” (EMPOW), funded by the German Research Foundation (2019-2022). The third presentation is based on a community-based project on participation, drug use and migration (PaSuMi) funded by the German Ministry of Health (2017-2020). The presentations provide a chance to get inspired by the voices and experiences of community partners and learn from their experience. The benefits and also the challenges of engaging in participatory methodologies are discussed in small groups with workshop participants. A digital forum (chat/padlet) will accompany the workshop to enable further interaction, commentary, and networking during and beyond the conference.

**Key messages:**

- Refugees are important partners in research on refugee health.
- Through participatory methods, the lived experience of refugees constitutes a meaningful starting point for knowledge production and health promotion.