The impact of an introduction to community psychology course on refugee sense of empowerment

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To my Lord, thank you for your full, unstinted, and boundless love

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of an Introduction to Community Psychology course on the empowerment of adult refugees living in Egypt. The course was designed and implemented at a refugee center located in downtown Cairo. For a period of 10 weeks, refugees enrolled in the course conducted a community needs assessment (CNA) to identify the resources and needs of a community in Cairo. The refugee students then designed and implemented a community intervention to help meet the needs of their chosen community. The course sought to empower adult refugees by 1) increasing their knowledge and skill level of the CNA process, 2) building their knowledge of community intervention skills, 3) imparting to them practical and applicable skills in working with communities and groups, 4) giving them the opportunity to effect change in their own communities, and 5) providing them with an opportunity to build relationships across refugee communities. To assess the impact of the course, students completed pretest and posttest scales measuring optimism, self-esteem and self-efficacy along with a retrospective survey assessing learning. Reflective journals kept by students during the course were also analyzed for themes related to learning and empowerment. Results revealed that, overall, the Introduction to Community Psychology course had a meaningful impact on students learning experience but did not significantly impact levels of optimism, self-esteem or self-efficacy. Sixty percent of participants reported a large increase in their knowledge of the steps of conducting a CNA. In addition, a thematic analysis identified four key themes: (a) improved understanding of how to conduct a CNA, (b) key content knowledge of the field of community psychology, (c) empowering learning environment, and (d) greater understanding of how to plan and design a community intervention. The results provide insight into the strengths and challenges of using a community psychology approach to empower refugees.
Keywords: Egypt, refugees, empowerment, community psychology, community needs assessment, community intervention, self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism
The Impact of an Introduction to Community Psychology Course on Refugee Sense of Empowerment

For most people, the term “refugee” evokes the imagery of helpless victims living in remote camps. For a vast proportion of the global refugee population, this is not an accurate description (Hansen, 2016). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than half of the world’s 22.5 million refugees live outside managed camps (2016). Today, immense numbers of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution seek shelter in urban areas (IRC, 2012).

The term refugee is frequently used by policymakers, NGO’s, the media, and in public discourse. The term is often used loosely to describe victims who have been uprooted from their home and are suffering and in need (Ludwig, 2016; Elshokeiry, 2016). However, the commonly used word is linked to a complex and comprehensive set of legal criteria set out in international and refugee treaties (Jacobsen, 2005). The legal definition of a refugee, and most internationally recognized, derives from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hereinafter referred to as ‘1951 Convention’; Kagan, 2002). The 1951 Convention is an official document that outlines the legal protection, aid, and social rights refugees are permitted to receive from the States who have signed it (UNHCR, 2011). It defines a refugee as:

[a] person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual
residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling
to return to it (p. 14).

In this definition, race comprises ethnic groups and groups of shared descent; religion includes
identification with a group that operates under a common doctrine and practices; nationality is
found on citizenship; membership of a particular social group includes groups with similar
characteristics, social standing, upbringing or customs; and lastly political opinion refers to those
with principles and ideologies seen as unfavorable or in opposition to authorities and/or a
government party in control (Elshokeiry, 2016). States that have ratified the 1951 Convention
and/or its 1967 Protocol should refer to the eligibility criteria set out in the Convention when
determining whether a person should be legally recognized as a refugee (UNHCR, 2005).

The 1951 Convention refugee definition is complemented by the *1969 OAU Convention
Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (hereinafter referred to as ‘OAU
Convention’) which state that a refugee is a person who “owing to external aggression,
occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the
whole of his [or her] country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his [or her] place of
habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his [or her] country of origin
or nationality” (UNHCR, 2005, P.6). The refugee definitions provided by the 1951 Convention
and OAU Convention helps differentiate between the word “refugee” in everyday language and
“refugee” from a legal sense (Jacobsen, 2005; Elshokeiry, 2016).

**The Refugee Situation in Egypt**

Egypt ranks among the top five countries with the largest urban refugee population
(Gozdziak and Walter, 2012). By the end of August 2016, Egypt was home to 187,838 registered
refugees and asylum seekers, composed of more than 50 nationalities. While Cairo, the capital
city of Egypt, is host to the vast majority of refugees residing in Egypt, refugees are spread across several Egyptian governorates, including Alexandria, Mansoura, and Damietta (Gozdriak et al., 2012; UNHCR, 2016). As a result of the ongoing violent civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic, presently in its sixth year, immense numbers of Syrians have fled their homeland and have sought protection in Egypt (Howeedy, 2013). Currently, Syrians constitute the largest group of refugees in Egypt, accounting for 62% of the total refugee population. Sudanese refugees form the second-largest group, followed by Ethiopian and Somali refugees (UNHCR, 2016).

Egypt does not employ a camp approach to refugee assistance. Rather, refugees taking up residence in Egypt are self-settled, largely concentrated in urban areas (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014; UNHCR, 2016). In principle, refugees living in metropolitan areas can make use of a wide range of services available to them. Unlike camps, cities can offer greater access to health services, educational and employment opportunities, as well as financial independence. Furthermore, cities can offer refugees both freedom of travel and freedom from the surveillance and control of camp guards (Ayoub et al., 2014). While the geographical proximity of Egypt makes it a desirable destination for numerous refugees, it is largely attractive due to the existence of large resettlement programs, governed by both the UNHCR and private refugee sponsorship programs (Grabska, 2006). The resettlement programs in Egypt acts as a “pull-factor” to asylum-seekers and refugees who arrive in Egypt with prospects of resettlement to countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States (Malek, 2008; Kagan, 2011). Hence, “refugees and asylum seekers tend to view Egypt as a country of transit, a necessary but temporary step on their way to a future in a location with more opportunities” (Malek, 2008, p.6).

At present, UNHCR is the sole entity responsible for asylum activities in Egypt. The process of reception, registration, documentation and refugee status determination (RSD) of
asylum seekers in Egypt are all performed by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2013). Accordingly, an asylum seeker on Egyptian soil must register at and become recognized by UNHCR to obtain legal protection and eligibility for benefits and services in Egypt (Ayoub et al., 2014). Without recognition by UNHCR, asylum seekers are subject to detention and deportation (Malek, 2008). Gaining legal recognition by UNHCR, however, does not guarantee an individual’s protection and well-being. Refugees in Egypt face constant harassment—verbal, physical, and sexual. They are often targeted by police and locals and are questioned, threatened, and beaten. Darker skinned refugees are subject to racial insults and discriminatory practices, such as being overcharged in the markets and by landlords (Grabska, 2006).

Additionally, obtaining refugee status in Egypt does not guarantee full access to rights (Grabska, 2006). The government of Egypt acceded to the 1951 Convention (Hiegemann, 2012). Upon ratification, however, the Egyptian Government made a number of reservations to significant articles that imposed constraints on the rights of refugees (Grabska, 2006; Ayoub et al., 2014). Reservations to Articles 20 and 22-24 have had the greatest impact on the lives of refugees. These reservations oppose articles that state that refugees shall be given the same treatment as nationals concerning elementary education, public relief, and employment. As a result, refugees in Egypt experience manifold and daunting challenges in their efforts to integrate into society (Hiegemann, 2012).

One of the most pressing issues refugees in Egypt face is the lack of employment opportunities (Hiegemann, 2012). For many refugees, if not all, “earning an income becomes a crucial prerequisite to obtaining key livelihood resources such as food, housing, and medical services, since reliance on charity is unsustainable in the long term for refugees” (Ayoub et al., 2014, p. 7). Without an income, it is virtually impossible for refugees to meet their basic needs
and achieve livelihood security. Before a refugee can legally obtain employment, they must first acquire a work permit. Acquiring a work permit, however, is often a complicated and extensive process which requires a sponsoring employer and no competition from an equally qualified Egyptian applicant (Buscher and Heller, 2010, p. 21). Soaring national unemployment rates in Egypt and a declining economy mean that few opportunities are available, preventing many refugees from entering the labor market and securing a livelihood (Buscher et al., 2010). As a result, many refugees are forced to search for work in the informal or “gray” economy, where they are exposed to hazardous working environments, unregulated working hours, and unfair wages (IRC, 2012).

Refugees in Egypt also face barriers in accessing education. Barriers to education include school fees, communication barriers, transportation, discrimination, and difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation. In addition, many educational systems in Egypt are overcrowded, posing significant challenges for refugees who find themselves competing with nationals for limited space (Ensor, 2010). As a result, many refugees look to informal education, non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), or “refugee schools” as a cost-effective alternative to formal educational institutions (Boze, 2015).

The various and numerous challenges refugees experience in relation to employment diminishes their chances of acquiring occupational experience and skills. With little to no work experience, securing a job seems nearly impossible. Through education, refugees can gain vital knowledge and skills that can expand employment opportunities, which will in return give them the opportunity to establish sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families while in their host communities (Hiegemann, 2013; Jenner, 2015).
Egypt: International Legal Context.

The refugee issue cannot be viewed separately from the field of human rights. The care and management of refugees and asylum seekers within a nation are guided not only by refugee treaties but also by core international human rights treaties (Goodwin-Gill, 2014). In principle, the rights and obligations specified under each treaty should be executed and applied to all people residing within the borders of State parties, regardless of their status (Hiegemann, 2013). Egypt, having no national refugee laws, has instead ratified a range of international treaties and conventions which offer a framework for refugee rights as human rights (Kagan, 2011). These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the UN Convention on Migrant Workers and their Families, and the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Grabska, 2006).

The above conventions and treaties to which Egypt is signatory stipulate the rights that refugees are granted and are to enjoy within their host country, such as the right to education (Kagan, 2011). Education for all refugees is granted and protected under both the ICESCR and CRC. Article 13 of the ICESCR specifies:

“States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education….with a view to achieving the full realization of this right: (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; (b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every
appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education…and (d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education” (p. 4-5).

Article 6 of the ISECSR also binds Egypt to recognize the right of everyone to employment. Article 2 of the CRC binds Egypt to respect and safeguard the rights put forward in the Convention to each child within their borders, devoid of any form of discrimination, irrespective of the child’s race, skin color, gender, language, religion, country of origin, or birth status (OHCHR, n.d). Egypt is also bound to Article 19 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which instructs that “all peoples shall be equal; they shall enjoy the same respect and shall have the same rights. Nothing shall justify the domination of a people by another” (p.3). The rights and protections to which refugees in Egypt are due are not fully achieved. Many refugees continue to face restrictions and barriers in accessing primary and secondary education, whether for themselves or their children. Refugees face constant harassment and are subject to discriminatory practices in regard to education, employment, and housing (Hiegemann, 2013; Grabska, 2006).

The rights of refugees have been further restricted by an additional factor. The Egyptian government acceded to the 1951 Convention, as well as to its 1967 Protocol. However, Egypt made reservations to five articles, namely 12(1), 20, 22(1), 23 and 24 (Ayoub et al., 2014). The five articles assured refugees equal treatment with nationals concerning personal status, rationing, public education, public relief, and employment and social security (UNHCR, n.d.). Reservations to Article 22 on free primary education and Article 24 on employment have had a profound impact on the livelihood of refugees in Egypt, as these reservations have made it
virtually impossible for the local integration of refugee populations (Zohry, 2005). Though refugees are allowed to live in their host society, they are merely tolerated, with little chance to fully integrate. Thus, refugees remain on the margins of Egyptian society (Grabska, 2006).

**Application Process for Refugee Status in Egypt.**

An asylum seeker entering Egypt cannot obtain legal protection by applying directly to the Egyptian government. Instead, the refugee status determination process in Egypt is solely conducted by UNHCR (Alexander, 1999; Ayoub et al., 2014). Thus, an asylum seeker in Egypt must register with UNHCR in order to acquire legal protection and assistance. This is in accordance with the 1954 memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between UNHCR and the Egyptian government (Ayoub et al., 2014).

Registration is viewed as a fundamental protection tool, in that it identifies an individual to be “someone of concern” to UNHCR. It is an initial step in legalizing the protection bond between the government of Egypt, UNHCR, and the refugee or asylum seeker. Registration helps to protect the individual from refoulement and forced recruitment, as well as “guarantees” access to basic rights and assistance (UNHCR, 2003). Without recognition by UNHCR, an individual is subject to arrest and deportation by Egyptian authorities (Kagan, 2002).

After registering with UNHCR, an asylum seeker will receive an appointment slip for a registration interview. On average, the waiting period between the completion of the registration form and the registration interview is two months, however, the length of time varies and can take years (UNHCR, 2013; Ayoub et al., 2014). The appointment slip serves as a safeguard between the waiting period, indicating to local authorities that the individual has approached UNHCR and is in the process of refugee status determination. Upon completion of the registration interview, the individual will receive either an asylum-seeker card (yellow card) or
an asylum seeker certificate, which signifies that their application is being processed by UNHCR. Most often, a person will receive the yellow card, however in very specific situations (which UNHCR clarifies to the applicant) the individual will receive the asylum seeker certificate. The person then waits, often for several years, until UNHCR has made a final decision on their refugee claim (UNHCR, 2013).

If the applicant has been accepted, they will ultimately receive a refugee card (blue card), which signifies that UNHCR has recognized them as meeting the legal definition of a ‘refugee’ (as defined by the 1951 Convention) and, accordingly, has granted them legal refugee status (UNHCR, 2013). In case the applicant is denied, they may lodge an appeal to have their case reconsidered, however, they must do so within 30 days from the day they received the rejection notification. If the applicant fails to submit an appeal, does not wish to lodge one, or if the appeal is denied, then their case is closed and they are no longer regarded as “someone of concern” to UNHCR. As such, the UNHCR registration card issued to the denied applicant and/or their family members will be revoked and they receive no assistance, benefits, or legal protection (UNHCR, 2013). Many denied asylum seekers continue to live in Egypt, nonetheless. Yet, with no legal status or protection, they generally experience great difficulties and are subject to abuse, exploitation, and deportation (Ayoub et al., 2014).

The UNHCR registration cards (both yellow and blue) are not equivalent to residential permits in Egypt (Ayoub et al., 2014). In order for an asylum seeker or a refugee to legalize their residency in Egypt, they must follow a three-step process that entails the following: 1) going to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to obtain a reference number, 2) taking the reference number, along with all necessary documents and forms, to the Immigration Department of the Ministry of Interior, and 3) After a period of 10-14 days, they must return back to the Immigration
Department in order to obtain a residence permit (sticker), which is valid for 6 months. This three-step process must be repeated every 6 months for the renewal of the residence permit (UNHCR, 2013).

**Growth of Refugee Applications in Egypt.**

The number of persons applying for refugee status in Egypt greatly increased from January to August 2016. In just eight months, UNHCR-Egypt saw a 70% increase in Syrian applications. The large influx of Syrians in Egypt is largely attributed to the Syrian civil war. The growth of Sudanese persons seeking asylum in Egypt nearly mimics that of the Syrian population, with a 69% increase. UNHCR-Egypt also witnessed a dramatic rise in Ethiopian (139% increase) and Eritrean (149% increase) applications. Lastly, Somali applications increased by 5% (UNHCR, 2016). Key figures for 2017 are not yet available. Figure 1 provides a fuller picture of the growth of refugee applications in Egypt in January and August of 2016.

![Figure 1. Increase in refugee applications at UNHCR-Cairo](source: UNCHR-Egypt statistics (June to August 2016))

**UNHCR’s Three Durable Solutions.**

Perhaps the most controversial topic concerning refugee policy in Egypt is the question of how to ensure a permanent solution for refugees (Kagan, 2011). Refugee status is not intended
to last indefinitely (UNHCR, 2013). The ultimate aim of international refugee protection is to pursue and attain durable solutions for people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and forced to seek refuge across borders (Reach Out Refugee Protection Training Program, 2005). According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (ISAC), a durable solution is attained when internally displaced persons “no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement” (IASC, 2010, p.5). Currently, there are three types of durable solutions offered to refugees: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2013).

**Voluntary Repatriation.** Voluntary repatriation is the decision or right of the individual to return to his or her country of origin (Goodwin-Gill, 2014). Voluntary repatriation involves two components: 1) it must be voluntary and 2) the individual must be well-informed about the state of affairs in their home country prior to making a final decision to return home. Once a refugee states their interest in returning home, UNHCR will then deliver counseling to the individual, in which sufficient information regarding the conditions of their area of return is provided (UNHCR, 2013).

**Local Integration.** Local integration comprises the active participation of refugees and asylum seekers in their host country from a legal, economic, social, educational, and cultural point of view (ECRE, 2002). According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), refugee integration is a process of change that requires a willingness to adapt from both the host society and the “community of concern.” From a refugee point of view, it calls for a readiness and preparedness to adjust to the pace and lifestyle of the host country. From the viewpoint of the host country, it calls for a willingness to recognize refugees as an integral part
of society and as persons who have the potential to make meaningful contributions (2002). This further demands an overhaul in the thinking patterns of individuals and communities who surmise that refugees are nothing more than “heavy burdens,” who will inevitably drain national resources.

Full local integration is considered complete once a refugee is granted citizenship in the society (ECRE, 2002). However, refugees residing in Egypt do not have the right to obtain citizenship; “nationality is granted on the basis of descent (ius sanguinis). This affects the registration of children born to refugees without legal status who are unable to approach their embassy. In this way, the possibility of full integration in Egypt for refugees is effectively ruled out” (Grabska, 2006, p. 292).

**Resettlement to a Third Country.** Resettlement refers to the process by which a refugee gets resettled to a third country. Only legally recognized refugees by UNHCR qualify for resettlement. If UNHCR discerns that a registered asylum seeker has a resettlement need, then refugee status will ultimately be issued to that individual (UNHCR, 2013). Canada, Australia, and the United States are the top resettlement countries (Kagan, 2002). Norway and the United Kingdom have also ranked as focal resettlement countries (UNHC, 2015).

Resettlement is not considered a right of the individual, unlike voluntary repatriation. Thus, numerous refugees worldwide never get resettled (Kagan, 2002). According to UNHCR, roughly 1.5% of the global refugee population actually experience resettlement (2013). The bulk of refugees are not resettled due to limited resettlement places. Additionally, resettlement is only considered for refugees with specific circumstances and needs, with priority given to particularly vulnerable individuals and those with dire needs (Kagan, 2011; UNHCR, 2013). Refugees who are eligible for resettlement to a third country typically fall under the following categories:
• Survivors of torture and/or violence
• Refugees in need of legal and/or physical protection
• Refugees in need of medical and/or psychological care that cannot be met in the host country
• Youth at risk
• Women and girls at risk
• Refugees lacking prospects for alternative durable solutions

Due to the immense number of refugees in Egypt, UNHCR-Egypt does not accept resettlement requests directly from the person of concern. Rather, refugees can have their case reviewed for resettlement through three possible avenues: (1) internal UNHCR referral; UNHCR personnel has the authority to refer cases for resettlement consideration, (2) NGO referral; NGOs in collaboration with UNHCR also have the right to submit and refer cases for review, and (3) file review; UNHCR utilizes an electronic searching system in which files that meet the resettlement criteria of the UNHCR database are identified for UNHCR resettlement staff to review (UNHCR, 2013).

The number of refugees submitted and departed for resettlement has increased markedly over the past years. In 2012, 74,840 refugee cases were submitted for resettlement, of which UNHCR departed 69,252 individuals. In 2013, the number of submissions reached 92,915. Of those, 71,252 departed for resettlement. UNHCR witnessed 103,890 resettlement submissions and 73,330 departures in 2014. Then, in 2015, the number of submissions reached an all-time high of 134,044, in which UNHCR resettled 81,893. The bulk of refugees submitted for resettlement in that year originated from Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq,
Somalia, and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2015). Figure 2 shows the percentage of refugee cases submitted for resettlement by category in 2015.

*Figure 2.* Refugee resettlement submissions by category in 2015 (UNHCR, 2015).

For many refugees living in Egypt, the likelihood of returning to their home country is slim and prospects of local integration into Egypt seem virtually impossible. Thus, many refugees look to resettlement as the last hope (Wirtz, 2015). Despite a large number of refugees with needs in Egypt, many never get resettled. UNHCR’s usage of resettlement from Egypt as a durable solution has fluctuated over the past years. For the majority of the 1990s, UNHCR-Egypt resettled fewer than 300 refugees yearly. Then, in 1998, resettlement departures rose to 1364. In 2004, the number of refugees who departed from Egypt peaked at 4,110. However, during that same year, UNHCR deferred RSD for Sudanese individuals. Thus, Sudanese refugees were prevented from accessing resettlement. As a result, the number of resettlement departures from Egypt dropped for the next two years, falling between 1000 and 2000. The number of refugees resettled continued to decrease, dropping below 200 in 2008 (Kagan, 2011). In January 2016,
UNHCR-Egypt resettled 112 refugees. But in August of the same year, this number grew to 2,488 (UNHCR, 2016).

**Figure 3.** Resettlement submissions and departures from Egypt of January and August 2016

**Background of Refugee Populations in Egypt**

Egypt has a long history of hosting highly diverse refugee populations (Marfleet, 2011). In 1915, Egypt was a safe haven for Armenians fleeing the genocide taking place in the Ottoman Empire. In 1948, Egypt was a refuge to numerous Palestinians who fled the Palestinian war or “The Nakba.” During the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt, specifically Cairo, was host to exiles from independence movements rippling across Africa and the Middle East. An additional inflow of refugees began arriving in Egypt in the 1990s in consequence of the many wars taking place in the Greater Horn of Africa, namely Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (Grabska, 2006).

Since the year 2011, revolutions, unrests, and civil wars have further birthed large population movements, in which Egypt, along with several other countries, have absorbed (Ayoub et al., 2014). Today, Egypt is host to one of the largest urban refugee populations in the
world (Ismail, 2002). Statistics provided by the UNHCR revealed that, as of August 2016, the total number of registered refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt was 187,838. Among these, 62% (116,175 individuals) are Syrians, constituting the largest refugee population in Egypt. Sudanese represent the second-largest group, amounting to 16% (31,200 individuals), followed by 6% (10,941 individuals) of Ethiopians and 4% (7,254 individuals) of Somalis (UNHCR, 2016). Figure 4 gives the number of registered refugee population in Egypt in August of 2016.

**Figure 4.** Registered populations in Egypt as of August 2016

**Syrian Refugees.** The Syrian civil war has generated the world’s largest humanitarian catastrophe since World War II (ECHO, 2017). The relentless conflict, which started in 2011, has already taken the lives of more than a quarter of a million people and has produced a massive population displacement of more than 6 million people. As the war continues to rage, prospects of a safe return home remain diminished for displaced Syrians (Andres-Vinas, Gorevan, Hartberg, Phillips and Saieh, 2015).

The influx of Syrians into Egypt first began at the end of 2011 in response to the civil war (Ayoub et al., 2014). Since then, the registration numbers of Syrian refugees have varied in
harmony with the political changes within Egypt. The overthrow of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi brought about a shift of the Egyptian government that imposed travel restrictions upon Syrian nationals. Prior to the shift of the government, Syrian nationals benefited from an open-door policy, in which they were not required to obtain a visa prior to their arrival. Rather, they received a three-month tourist visa upon their arrival in Egypt. The shaky security conditions of the nation after the regime shift, however, prompted the government to launch measures in which Syrians would be required to obtain a visa prior-to-arrival, as well a security clearance from the Egyptian National Security. The new visa regulation, which came into effect July 2013, halted many Syrian refugees from entering Egypt (Amelia, 2015).

Currently, citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic constitute the largest “population of concern” to UNHCR-Egypt. By the end of August 2016, the number of Syrians registered with UNHCR in Egypt totaled to 116,175 individuals (62% of the total refugee population) (UNHCR, 2016). Numerous Syrians, however, have chosen not to register with UNHCR due to various issues resulting from the political changes post-2013 (Ayoub et al., 2014). This makes it impossible to quantify the actual number of Syrians residing in Egypt. It is estimated, though, that the number could be as high as 300,000 (Joint Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Egypt, 2013). Weekly reports issued in 2014 by UNHCR in Egypt revealed that the majority of Syrian refugees were registered in Cairo, followed by Damietta and Alexandria (UNHCR Egypt Weekly Update Syrian Operation, 2014).

**Sudanese Refugees.** Sudanese once represented the largest refugee group in Egypt (Ahmed and Dibb, 2008), accounting for 76% of the recognized refugee population in 2004 (UNHCR, 2005). At present, Sudanese represent the second largest refugee group in Egypt, constituting 16% of the total refugee population (UNHCR, 2016). Sudanese refugees in Egypt
are made up of various ethnicities, speak different languages, and predominantly consist of Muslims and Christians (Shafie, 2004). They are scattered throughout several Egyptian governorates, including Cairo, Giza, and 6th of October (Jacobsen, 2012).

Egypt and Sudan have historically enjoyed close political and economic relations. Several bilateral agreements were signed between the two countries allowing the free movement of people and goods across the two borders (Shafie, 2004). The 1976 Wali El Nil agreement signed between the two nations permitted Sudanese to enter Egypt without a visa and granted them unrestricted access to education, employment, residency, and ownership of property. In many ways, the Wali El Nil treaty granted Sudanese rights similar to those of Egyptian citizen (Jacobsen, 2012).

The influx of Sudanese arriving into Egypt, due to conflict and war, impelled the Egyptian government to increase their security measures. In 1994, the Egyptian government requested the UNHCR office to carry out vetting for Sudanese asylum seekers. The increased security measures put a strain on the relationship between the Sudanese and Egyptian government. Relations between the two countries further declined in 1995, when Muhammed Hosni Mubarak, the fourth president of Egypt, escaped an assassination attempt purportedly carried out by Sudanese Islamists. To this end, the Egyptian government revoked the Wali El Nil agreement and, accordingly, the rights and special privileges previously granted to Sudanese (Jacobsen, 2012). In 2004, however, the two governments signed the Four Freedoms Agreement. This agreement sought to return back to the Wali El Nil treaty, as it grants citizens of Egypt and Sudan rights to move freely across each other’s border, rights of residency, employment, and ownership of property without a visa requirement. This promises of this agreement, however, has yet to manifest in the lives of most Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. Sudanese find
themselves still applying through the same UNHCR channels as other asylum seekers (Jacobsen, 2012).

**Ethiopian Refugees.** Large population movements from Ethiopia to Egypt first occurred during the “Red Terror Campaign” from 1977-1979 (Shafie, 2004). The campaign, unleashed by former Ethiopian leader Mengistu Mariam, sought the massacre of any and all who opposed the governing body (Wiebel, 2015). A second wave of Ethiopians came in 1991-1992 during the fall of the Mengistu regime. Large numbers of Ethiopians have continued to flee to Egypt due to border conflicts with Eritrea, economic decline, and the suppression of civil liberties (Zohry, 2005).

The vast majority of Ethiopians who fled to Egypt during the early 1990s were educated and skilled single young men, originating mainly from urban areas. In subsequent years, however, education levels among the population declined and more women than men began fleeing to Egypt (Hiegemann, 2013). A large Ethiopian community is still visible in Egypt. By the end of August 2016, there were 10,941 Ethiopian recognized refugees living in Egypt, representing 6 percent of the total recognized refugee population (UNHCR, 2016).

**Somali Refugees.** At present, there are approximately 7,254 recognized Somali refugees living in Egypt. Somalis represent the fourth largest refugee group in Egypt, constituting 4 percent of the total refugee population (UNHCR, 2016). The Somali civil war in 1991 generated a large population movement of Somali refugees to Egypt. The first group of Somali refugees who arrived in Egypt were mainly from urban areas, highly educated, and had qualifications and experience in professional and/or managerial work. Later groups of Somali refugees who arrived from 1999 onwards, however, were mainly from both urban and rural areas and less educated (Zohry, 2005; Hiegemann, 2013).
A vast majority of Somali refugee’s lack income-generating knowledge and skills. Thus, they face significant difficulties in entering the labor market. As a result, many find income opportunities in the informal sector within their communities. In addition, many Somalis depend on remittances sent from family members living in different nation-states, namely the U.S., Europe, and Saudi Arabia (Al-Sharmani, 2003; Hiegemann, 2013). The transferring and receiving of funds to and from one another support household livelihood and well-being (Al-Sharmani, 2003).

**Eritrean Refugees.** To date, Eritrean refugees constitute approximately 3 percent (6,079 individuals) of the total recognized refugee population (UNHCR, 2016). Eritrean communities can be found throughout Cairo. Many share apartments with family members, friends, and even strangers from within the Eritrean community (Ajygin, 2010).

Eritreans began entering into Egypt in waves parallel to Ethiopians. Like numerous Ethiopians, Eritreans fled their home country to escape the “Red Terror” campaign from 1977-1979. Likewise, a large influx of Eritreans arrived in Egypt during the fall of the Mengistu regime. A third wave of Eritreans arrived in Egypt from 1998 to 2000 during border conflicts with Ethiopia (Ajygin, 2010; Zohry, 2005; Shafie, 2004). The more recent Eritrean refugees have been fleeing their homeland primarily due to religious persecution and the repressive regime of current Eritrea president Isaias Afwerki and its practice of military conscription. Eritrea mandates military conscription for young men and women alike. Many Eritreans seek to evade military conscription by fleeing to nearby countries, such as Egypt. The Egyptian government, however, does not recognize the evasion of military service as justification for refugee protection. Thus, many Eritrean refugees are subject to deportation (Ajygin, 2010).

The multiple challenges refugees face in accessing employment opportunities in Egypt restricts them from securing an income and gaining necessary work experience. As a result,
education is the only hope for many refugees to gain relevant and useful knowledge and skills that can lead to increased employment opportunities and income levels. Thus, education appears to be an optimal tool for empowering adult refugees by equipping them with vital knowledge and competencies that will build self-reliance, promote social inclusion, and develop a positive outlook on the future (Hiegemann, 2013; Kirk and Cassity, 2007).

**History of the Concept of Empowerment.**

There is almost universal agreement that education is a tool for refugee empowerment (Changezi and Biseth, 2011). But what do we mean by “empowerment”? The notion of empowerment has its origins in the 1960s and is traced back to such areas as feminism, the Black Power movement, and Gandhism (Simon, 1994; Rudkin, 2003; Cornwall and Brock, 2005). Empowerment was the aim of freedom fighters “who turned their shared sense of identity and common understanding of the sociopolitical roots of their oppression into mandates for social change” (Rudkin, 2003, p. 280). It signified the ability of individuals and groups to join together in order to safeguard and promote their well-being and their right to partake in decision-making processes that directly concerned them (Simon, 1994). Not until the 1976 publication of *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities* by Barbara Solomon was the term formally introduced (Calves, 2009). Solomon asserted that Black people in Black communities in U.S. society had been disregarded and devalued to such a degree that penetrating and immobilizing feelings of powerlessness had become widespread among the group (Solomon, 1976). She suggested empowerment as the goal for social work and developed a framework that would guide social workers in their practice and engagement with Black clients and communities (Petite-Manns, 1978).

Rooted in the experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups, the notion of empowerment is tightly coupled with social justice (Calves, 2009). Social justice can be defined
as the “fair, equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, obligations, and power in society as a whole” (Prilleltensky, 2001, p. 754). It involves concern for the well-being of all persons and the recognition, embracing, and integration of human diversity to create an all-inclusive society (Kloos et al., 2012). Social justice contains two constituent elements: distributive justice and procedural justice. The first, distributive justice, concerns the equitable distribution of resources among members in a society (e.g., money, access to services, education, and employment) (Prilleltensky, 1994). Distributive justice stems from the realization that “misery and happiness are largely dictated by the way material goods and access to services are allocated in society” (Prilleltensky, 1994, p. 360). Contrary to popular belief in North America that everyone has equal opportunity to succeed in life, empowerment promoters contend that there is, de facto, a wealth and power imbalance in society that severely impedes certain individuals and groups from accessing health services, education, and employment. As such, empowerment calls for a shift from mere awareness of the injustice and into action to remedy the imbalance (Prilleltensky, 1994).

The second element of social justice holds equal importance to that of the first. Procedural justice can be defined as the manner by which a fair representation of members in a society participate in decision-making processes concerning affairs that directly affect them. While distributive justice concerns the distribution and ownership of goods and service in a society, procedural justice concerns the participation of members of a society in the processes of planning and implementing programs and policies. Consequently, procedural justice necessitates an overhaul of traditional decision-making structures, whereby decision-making power rests in the hands of a small group of people. It involves enabling one’s voice to be heard and to have an influence in decision-making processes (Kloos et al., 2012). Thus, when we look at initial
concepts of empowerment constructed in the United States, they are fastened in an ideology that gives priority to the perspectives of oppressed peoples (Wise, 2005), enabling them not only to voice themselves, “but also to gain power and overcome the domination to which they were subject” (Calves, 2009, p.5).

**Definition of Empowerment.**

Present-day, the term “empowerment” has taken on a variety of meanings and has become salient to the work of numerous and diverse disciplines, including psychology, education, law, and economics (Simon, 1994). It has also become progressively popular in the terminology of NGOs, the United Nations (UN), and politics (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Although the term is widely used, it is interpreted differently in each discipline and can be understood as an outcome, process, or approach, occurring at a number of different levels, including individual and community (Hiegemann, 2013; Nachshen, 2005). For some, empowerment refers to a collective action, in which members of marginalized or oppressed communities join forces to create social change (Bookman and Morgen, 1988). For others, empowerment represents a method by which individuals are equipped with valuable skills that enable them to generate and sustain an income (Mayoux, 1999). Empowerment can also indicate the degree to which marginalized groups meaningfully participate in building and shaping their own future (Alsop, Bertelsen, Holland, 2006). According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment is unavoidably tied up with “disempowerment” and is thus a process by which individuals who have been denied the opportunity to make choices now become able to make them. The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) developed perhaps one of the most commonly used definitions of empowerment within the community psychology realm:
Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain great access to and over those resources (p.2).

For the purposes of this thesis, the definitions of empowerment from the Cornell Empowerment Group (1989), Hiegemann (2013), Parsons (1998) and Sadan (1997) have been fused to fashion my own understanding of empowerment as an interactive process involving critical reflection and participant engagement, through which individuals in disadvantaged positions acquire key knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to work with communities and groups and increases their access to resources, promotes social inclusion, and creates a sense of ownership. Through empowerment, levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism should be enhanced.

Internalized Oppression

A positive sense of self-worth and self-confidence are vital ingredients of a healthy personal identity. Both overt and covert forms of discrimination damage the self-worth and self-confidence of the person who is the target of such discriminatory actions (Pope and Vasquesz, 2011). People are often discriminated against based on multiple characteristics such as race, gender, age, and/or socio-economic status. Oppressed individuals and groups under constant discrimination may, over time, “adapt to the structure of domination in which they are immersed” (Freire, 1968, p.3) and accept as true, the negative images and misinformation communicated through the dominant group about their particular social group(s) (Griffin, 1997). For example, people of color may accept as true the view that they are less intelligent and less attractive than their White counterparts. Women may believe the view that they are inherently weak and lack leadership skills. When members of oppressed groups internalize negative in-
group messages and stereotypes, it negatively impacts the way the individual thinks and feels about himself or herself. Additionally, it influences the way he or she may feel about and/or interact with other members of their social group (Love, 1998; Williams, 2012). This is known as internalized oppression.

Internalized oppression is a common experience among various groups of people: women, racial/ethnic groups, youth, elderly, and people with disabilities. Internalized oppression has been linked to lower levels of personal and collective self-esteem, depression, feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, and isolation, (David and Derthick, 2014; Foster, 1993; David and Okazaki, 2006). Literature on internalized oppression among refugee groups is scarce. This, however, does not imply that experiences of internalized oppression among refugees do not exist. Refugees commonly encounter discrimination. Dark-skinned refugees in Egypt are subjected to discrimination based on race as well as refugee status. They are often excluded from social settings, rejected by employers, and treated with contempt (Young and Chan, 2015; Noh, Kaspar, and Wickrama, 2007). In Egypt, refugees have limited opportunities for employment and if they are employed, they make low wages (El-Masri, Harvey, and Garwood, 2013). Research on the psychological effects of unemployment show that unemployed persons experience decreased self-esteem and life satisfaction, social isolation and loneliness, stress, and depression (Witte, Rothmann, and Jackson, 2012). Having the desire to work but deprived of opportunities for employment forces many refugees to rely on forms of charity for survival. For many refugees, dependency on charity and the inability to be self-reliant is degrading (UNHCR, 2013).

Education is universally recognized as a key tool in the empowerment of refugees (Hannan, 2008). Through education, refugees can gain increased access to education and
employment, enhanced social inclusion, and a sense of hope for the future (Hiegemann, 2013; Kavuro, n.d.).

**Role of Education in Empowerment.**

Education has immeasurable benefits to refugee students. Education helps refugees enter the labor market by equipping them with applicable knowledge and skills. Refugees with qualifications and/or experience in occupations in demand are more marketable and thus, more likely to secure a job than those who are underqualified and lacking experience (Eriksson, Melander, and Nobel, 1981). Securing a higher-paying job will enable the individual to better support themselves and their family. Thus, education plays an essential role in helping eradicate poverty as it has the power to help lift disadvantaged individuals and groups out of poverty (UNESCO, 2003). The lives of individuals and groups experiencing poverty are often characterized by restriction to resources and powerlessness (European Anti-Poverty Network, n.d.). Additionally, a person living in poverty may experience a loss of hope for the future. Getting out of poverty can suggest that one has attained greater access to and control over resources. Furthermore, getting out of poverty can reassert a sense of hope for the future and thus, increase feelings of empowerment.

Education is not only a key vehicle for refugee integration into the labor market, but it also promotes the social inclusion of refugees into their host society. Many refugees in Egypt live on the margins of Egyptian society, with restricted opportunities to contribute to and participate in social, economic, cultural, and/or political life. Education enables refugees to learn the language(s), culture, traditions, and customs of their host community. Increased cultural knowledge about the host society will help refugees to communicate more effectively both
across diverse cultural groups and diverse environments. Thus, through education, refugees are able to advance both socially and economically in their host society (Kavuro, n.d.).

Research has also demonstrated that education provides physical and cognitive protection for refugees (Kirk and Cassity, 2007). Education transmits life-saving knowledge and skills to refugees, which can safeguard them, especially children, from exploitation and hazardous labor (Kirk et al., 2007; Kavuro, n.d.). Such life-saving knowledge and skills help refugees build a more peaceful future for themselves and their family (UNHCR, 2001). Additionally, education provides psychosocial support to refugees by establishing a sense of normalcy and a positive outlook on the future, as well as through positive social interactions with fellow classmates and caring adults. Education also provides a safe space for refugees to explore, process, and voice their feelings, thoughts, hopes, and anxieties (Kirk et al., 2007). Hence, education appears to be an optimal tool in the empowerment of refugees (Hiegemann, 2013).

**Community Psychology: A Brief Overview**

Many educational programs for refugees in Egypt focus on English language learning. This study focuses on the teaching of community psychology as a means to empower refugees in Egypt. Community psychology is a relatively young sub-field of psychology that is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between individuals and the society in which they live (Rudkin, 2003). Historically, the psychology profession has focused primarily on individual behavior and has been largely concerned with the intrapsychic experiences (perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings) of individuals. Psychology’s focus on the individual has, accordingly, offered individual-level explanations of behavior rather than societal-level explanations. Over the past several decades, however, researchers and scholars have challenged psychology’s traditional approach to understanding human behavior. Several researchers and
scholars, particularly those studying marginalized groups, have posited that psychology’s traditional approach neglects larger ecological and societal contexts (Rudkin, 2003). Additionally, researchers and scholars have argued that psychology’s focus on the individual places emphasis on changing the individual rather than community and societal-level change and is therefore insufficient and inappropriate for addressing problems that are rooted in the social, political, and economic structures that govern a nation. Moving beyond a focus on the individual, community psychology emerged as a new discipline in an attempt to gain a fuller understanding of human behavior (Rudkin, 2003).

Community psychology arose in the 1960’s, as a response to individual-focused health care and psychology practices. The eruption of social change movements in the United States during this time period also contributed to the birth of community psychology. Since its birth, the field has developed significantly and has become recognized as an international discipline, practiced not only in the United States, but in various regions across the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Hong-Kong, South Africa, and India. The field of community psychology examines human behavior in multiple contexts (e.g., cultural, economic, social, political, and historical) and seeks to understand how these multi-layered contexts shape and influence the lives of individuals, organizations, communities, and societies (Rudkin, 2003; Sarason, 1974; Duffy and Wong, 2000). Rooted in the concept of social change, the community psychology perspective acknowledges the inequalities and injustices that stem from deeper and more complex structural problems. Furthermore, it recognizes that these underlying structural problems do indeed affect the behavior and well-being of individuals and communities. Thus, the field directs attention to the larger social contexts that influence human behavior. In this way,
community psychology distinguishes itself from the more traditional psychological approaches that have a more individualistic view of human behavior (Williams and Zlotowitz, 2013).

Community psychology draws upon a number of theories and models for understanding the relationship between individuals and the complex social systems in which they live. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977 and 1979), has become an important guidepost in the community psychology profession (Rudkin, 2003). The Ecological Systems Theory is useful in that it helps shift the focus away from the individual and to the broader, far-reaching social systems. He posited that humans live in different types of environmental systems and that a person’s behavior and development is influenced by each surrounding environment. He identified five different levels of environmental systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1977 and 1979). These levels are briefly described here.

The microsystem, the first surrounding system, refers to the settings closest to a person and the one in which they have direct contact with others. It typically includes home, school, or the workplace. The mesosystem refers to the relationships between microsystems, such as the relationship between home and school or home and the workplace. The exosystem consists of settings that do not contain the person of interest but affects them nonetheless. For example, where a parent works and their employment hours affects a child, even though the child may never interact directly with that parent’s workplace. The macrosystem encompasses the enveloping patterns and structures of a culture. This includes government policies, socio-economic factors, and cultural values. Lastly, the chronosystem refers to major life transitions that occur during a person’s lifespan. This could include moving to a new country, having
children, or historical events such as World War I (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979). Figure 5 provides an illustration of the above description.

Community psychology is often confused with other areas of expertise. While there are many similarities between community psychology and other related fields, there are some notable distinctions. For example, social psychology and community psychology both agree that there are social factors that influence human behavior. Social psychology, however, is largely concerned with how individuals think, feel, and relate to others through social interactions. Community psychology, on the other hand, focuses on larger, more complex social contexts and the ways in which these larger contexts impact the well-being of communities and groups (Rudkin, 2003). Social psychologists study a wide range of topics, such as group dynamics, leadership, conformity, and prejudice (Rudkin, 2003). Community psychologists study and address an array of significant social and mental health problems within larger systemic and ecological contexts. Such problems include (but are not limited to): poverty, homelessness, violence and abuse, drug and alcohol misuse, school dropout, and the oppression of marginalized groups, including racial and ethnic minorities (Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman, 2001).

Community psychology also has much in common with environmental psychology. Both fields are concerned with how humans are affected by their surroundings. Environmental psychology, however, seeks to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and natural environment. This includes material objects, pollution, and natural disasters. Community psychology, contrarily, focuses on socially constructed environments and social issues (Rudkin, 2003). Community psychology is also very similar to social work. Both promote social change, advocate for social justice, and seek to empower and improve the lives of marginalized people. Social workers, however, tend to address needs at the individual and family level rather than at
the organizational or community level. Both social work and community psychology are characterized as applied fields, however, community psychology has a stronger emphasizes on research and theory (Rudkin, 2003).

The community psychology perspective seeks change beyond an individual level. It aims to create social change in systems by focusing on larger contexts that have a far-reaching impact on the well-being of groups and communities. Furthermore, it aims to empower groups, organizations, and communities. This unique perspective was applied as an approach to refugee empowerment in Cairo, Egypt.

*Figure 5. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1977, 1979).*
Course Background

Established in 1979, Refugee Springs (pseudonym) was among one of the first organizations in Egypt dedicated to serving refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrant groups. At its inception, the organization sought to improve the overall quality of life of refugees residing in Egypt through English language teaching and community support. Since then, the organization’s aims and activities have expanded to offer psychosocial services and legal aid, in addition to children and adult education programs. Today, Refugee Springs serves more than 3,000 diverse students and clients yearly, originating from countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Syria, and Ethiopia. Located in downtown Cairo, the organization's purpose is twofold: 1) to deliver high-quality services that aim to meet the unaddressed needs of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt and 2) to provide a safe and welcoming space for displaced individuals to gather together as a community.

The Adult Education Program (AEP) offered by Refugee Springs is accessible to all adult refugees and migrant groups in Cairo. Although Refugee Springs is in constant pursuit of new courses to include in the AEP, it currently offers a wide range of courses, including basic computer skills, graphic design, Arabic literacy, financial literacy, handicrafts and child care. The AEP academic year is divided into three terms, approximately 4 months per term, beginning in January. There is an average of 500 students per academic term. Within the AEP, Refugee Springs offers Professional Development Courses (PDC). PDC are free, high-quality professional training courses that aim to help refugee and migrant populations enhance their employability, build their capacity, and empower them to achieve their goals. PDC includes free courses such as business writing, public speaking, and economic development. PDC is open to all refugees, migrants, and individuals working for such communities who meet the following
criteria: (1) they must be 18 years or older; (2) demonstrate proficiency in English; (3) demonstrate a commitment to learning; (4) must be able to physically attend class sessions; and (4) be currently working or planning to work for the refugee and migrant community. All information has been taken from the organization's website and primary documents.

Beginning in August 2016, meetings were arranged between staff of Refugee Springs and myself regarding the designing and teaching of a course in community psychology. The goal was to apply my knowledge and impart practical skills for community assessment, intervention and evaluation to refugees within PDC. After designing the course, I worked for eight months as a community psychology instructor with adult refugees originating from Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan. The course was taught twice, once in the fall of 2016 and once in the spring of 2017. During this period, I examined the impact the course had on their work in the community and on their sense of psychological empowerment. The Introduction to Community Psychology course marked the first ever community psychology course offered by Refugee Springs.

**Course Description and Objectives.**

The Introduction to Community Psychology course introduced students to key concepts and values of community psychology and engaged them through experiential learning. Experiential learning provided students the opportunity to gain practical experience in identifying and assessing community strengths and needs, designing and implementing a community intervention, and identifying the challenges (e.g., building rapport, time constraints, and unrealistic expectations) and benefits (e.g., community improvement and enhanced sense of social responsibility) associated with community work. To gain practical experience, students were required to work in teams to design and conduct a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) in
a community of their choice in or near Cairo. Accordingly, students had to collect, analyze, and interpret data and then design and implement an intervention in their chosen community. Team A chose to focus on adult refugee women residing in Cairo. Team B focused on unaccompanied youth or “street children” residing in 6th of October. Team A and B designed a survey and collected information using the survey. Students were required to inform community residents that their main goals were to a) gain practical experience in developing and administering a CNA, which includes identifying the resources and needs of the community, and b) gain practical experience in designing and implementing a community intervention. Students were also required to inform community residents that their participation in the survey is voluntary and community residents were asked to not give any personally identifiable information.

Adult refugee women in Cairo indicated that they wanted to better identify the resources available to them in the community. Team A designed and implemented a community intervention that aimed to increase adult refugee women’s awareness of the resources and services available to them in the community. Students developed and distributed a Resource Sheet to adult refugee women in the community, which consisted of a list of organizations, their contact information, location, and a brief description of the resources and services they offer.

Unaccompanied youth residing in 6th of October indicated a need to learn English in order to access quality jobs. Team B designed and implemented a community intervention that aimed to teach unaccompanied youth common English words and phrases. Students developed a booklet containing useful English words and sentences with pronunciation guides and spent time in the community teaching and distributing the booklets.

The course also included critical dialogue and reflection. Students were regularly assigned articles to read before the start of class, in which they were encouraged to write down
any questions and insights they had and come prepared to share and discuss them. Likewise, students engaged in a variety of in-class activities in which they were encouraged to work in groups to share their understandings, observations, and discuss concepts. Students would then join in dialogue with the entire class, which fostered greater peer interaction and classroom unity.

The course also emphasized reflection. Students were required to write a weekly journal reflecting on their learning, observations, goals, accomplishments, and topics they would like to further explore throughout the course. Students could also reflect on their past experiences around community engagement.

Expected student learning outcomes for the course were as follows: (a) discuss some of the approaches/steps and challenges of conducting a community needs assessment; (b) identify standard methods and research techniques (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, interviews) for assessing the needs of a community; (c) demonstrate the ability to create a data collection instrument and analyze and interpret the data; (d) design and implement a culturally appropriate intervention that meets the needs of the target community; and (e) analyze a variety of social issues from an ecological perspective. While these objectives all related to learning, an additional objective, not articulated in the syllabus, was that the course would empower the refugee students.

**Objectives and Significance of Thesis**

The overall objective of the thesis is to evaluate the impact of a course in community psychology on the psychological empowerment of adult refugees living in Egypt. The course sought to empower adult refugees by 1) increasing their knowledge of community intervention skills and their English language fluency, 2) imparting to them practical and applicable skills in working with communities, 3) giving them the opportunity to effect change in their own
communities, and 4) providing them with an opportunity to build relationships across refugee communities. In this thesis, I identify and explore the strengths and challenges of using this community psychology approach to empower refugees in Egypt. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What role does the learning of community psychology values and concepts play in the empowerment of adult refugees living in Egypt?
- What influence does a community psychology approach have on a refugee’s level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism?
- Does the acquisition of knowledge and skills in community needs assessment and intervention empower refugees to work with communities and groups?
- In what ways is an Introduction to Community Psychology course valuable to the refugee community in Egypt?

A considerable body of research exists on the significance of education in the empowerment of refugees. Much of the literature on the education of refugees, however, has focused on English language instruction. The significance of this project is that it focuses on the teaching of community psychology values and concepts as an approach to refugee empowerment. The project is also unique in that little research has been conducted examining the empowerment of refugees in Egypt. Findings from the evaluation of this course can be an impetus for the further utilization and practice of community psychology in working to empower refugees in Egypt.
Methodology

Participants

A total of 26 students (21 males and 5 females) were enrolled in two Introduction to Community Psychology courses. The selection of students was carried out by the coordinator of Refuge Springs and was based on students age, level of commitment, ability to physically attend class sessions, and English proficiency. Student participants were refugees between the ages of 18 and 64 years, with the majority falling into the 25-34 range (53.85%). Participants originated from 7 different countries: Ethiopia (34.62%), Syria (23.08%), Sudan (11.54%), South Sudan (7.69%), Yemen (7.69%), Eritrea (7.69%), and Somalia (7.69%). Twenty-one of the 26 student participants were male, of which 16 (61.54%) held a college/university degree. The remaining male participants had completed secondary or primary school. Three (60%) of the 5 female participants held a college/university degree, with the other having completed secondary or primary school. Overall, approximately 92% of student participants held college/university degrees. Approximately 53% percent of student participants indicated that they had never taken any other courses at Refugee Springs. Additionally, the majority of student participants indicated that they had prior experience in working with refugee communities. The job titles and roles most commonly expressed by refugee students were English instructor, community leader, trainer or volunteer for an NGO, and caseworker.

Materials

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to measure the psychological empowerment of refugee student participants. The goal was to gather information derived from constructed questionnaires, weekly reflective journals, and a retrospective post-survey.
Consent forms were distributed to all students, explaining the purpose of the study, benefits and risks of participation, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. The researcher contact information was also on the consent forms (see Appendices A and B). Consent forms were signed by all who agreed to participate in the study. A Demographic Sheet containing basic demographic information (e.g., gender, age, country of origin, and educational background) was also utilized. On the Demographic Sheet (see Appendix C), participants were also asked to check whether or not they had taken any other courses offered by Refugee Springs.

In the present study, psychological empowerment was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), and Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, and Bridges, 1994). The RSES (Rosenberg, 1965) a widely used instrument, is a 10-item scale that measures global self-esteem by assessing an individual’s overall feelings of worth and acceptance. The RSES (see appendix D) uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (3 points) to strongly disagree (0 points). Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. Once items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 are reversed scored, all ten items should be summed to obtain a total score. Higher scores point to higher self-esteem.

The GSES (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995) is a 10-item scale that measures the strength of an individual’s belief in his or her ability to respond to and control challenging and demanding life situations. Each item has a four-choice response ranging from “Not at all true (1 point)” to “Exactly true (4 points).” Participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. All 10 items are then scored and summed to obtain a total score, which can range from 10 to 40 points. Higher scores indicate a greater generalized sense of self-efficacy. The GSES can also be completed in under 5 minutes (see Appendix E).
The LOT-R (Scheier, Carver, and Bridges, 1994) is a 10-item measure that asks participants to rate statements on a numerical rating scale of 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) in order to measure the extent to which that individual has an optimistic outlook on life versus a pessimistic outlook. The LOT-R is comprised of 3 positive, 3 negative, and 4 filler items. Items corresponding to optimism (items 1, 4, and 10) and pessimism (items 3, 7 and 9) should be summed separately in order to obtain the potential difference between the two. The LOT-R can be completed in under 5 minutes (see Appendix F). Obtaining permission for use of the three scales highlighted above was not required.

In addition to the material highlighted above, students were required to write and submit weekly reflection journals as part of the course. The reflection journals (see appendix G) were utilized to map student’s learning and community experiences throughout the course. Students were asked to reflect on 4 areas relating to: 1) their primary accomplishment(s), 2) observations or insights that were most significant to them, 3) goals they have set for the coming week and the actions they will take to accomplish these goals, and 4) a topic they would like to further explore in class.

Lastly, a retrospective pre-post survey was used. This survey was utilized to assess the level of change in students’ knowledge and skills in community needs assessment and intervention as a direct result of the course (see Appendix H). The survey contains three parts. The first part assessed the level of change in students’ knowledge. Participants were asked to indicate the level of change that had occurred in their knowledge on critical areas of community needs assessment and intervention on a four-choice response scale of “No difference in knowledge” to “Large difference in knowledge” before the onset of the course and after course completion. The second part deals with the level of change in students’ skill level on community
needs assessment and intervention. It follows the same measures as the former section, only students are asked to indicate their level of change on a four-choice response scale of “No difference in skill level” to “Large difference in skill level.” The third section of the survey asked participants to complete the following two sentences:

1. When I think about working with communities, I believe this course had the MOST impact on my ability to ________.

2. When I think about working with communities, I believe this course had the LEAST impact on my ability to ________.

Finally, participants were asked to write any comments and/or suggestion they wish to provide concerning the course or instructor.

**Procedures**

At the inception of the course, students were invited to take part in the evaluation of their course through voluntary participation in the present study. Students were told that the goal of the study was to evaluate the impact of the course on their overall sense of empowerment. Additionally, students were told that the study aimed to assess the overall effectiveness of the course structure and that doing so could improve the learning experiences of prospective students. Consent forms were distributed to all students and were signed by those who agreed to participate. No incentive or extra course credit was offered to student participants. All 15 students agreed to participate in the study. Eleven of the 15 students completed both pre- and post-scales for self-esteem and self-efficacy. One participant was excluded from the LOT-R (optimism) analysis due to incomplete data.

The Introduction to Community Psychology course was held in one of the classrooms located on a college campus. At the inception of the course, all students were handed consent
forms containing information regarding the study. Students were told that the purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of the course on their overall sense of empowerment. In addition, students were told that evaluating the course was essential, in that it would allow the instructor to make any necessary improvements to the course for prospective students. Students were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue their participation from the study at any time. They were informed that their participation or refusal to participate would not affect their academic standing. Students were also told that the same procedures would take place at the end of the course. Participants were encouraged to thoroughly read the consent form and ask any relevant questions.

A pretest-posttest design was used in the study. Pre-test materials included the Demographic Sheet, RSES, GSES, and the LOT-R. Participants were handed materials and were instructed to refrain from writing their name or other personally identifiable information on any of the materials to maintain confidentiality. To match each survey with the participant that submitted it, each participant was assigned a code number that was recorded on the survey once completed. The codebook was stored separately from completed surveys. There was no time limit, however, participants were told that completion of all materials should take approximately 15-20 minutes. Once all the participants were finished, they were given the opportunity to ask any relevant questions regarding the study. Post-test materials included the Demographic Sheet, RSES, GSES, LOT-R, and the Retrospective post-survey.

**Data Analysis**

Data were obtained from constructed questionnaires and weekly reflective journals and were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to better examine the impact of the course on student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. The data for the research study
was not analyzed until after the course was completed. Constructed questionnaires were analyzed using Predictive Analysis Software (PASW) version 18.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) and descriptive statistics were obtained. Weekly reflective journals were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, also known as content analysis, is a commonly used qualitative analytic method that focuses on detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes across a dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002; Jefferson, Martin, and Owens, 2014). The reflective journals were reviewed independently by the primary researcher and codes were given to emerging themes. To establish inter-rater reliability, reflective journals were separately reviewed and coded by a research peer. The reflective journals were examined once again by the primary researcher and minor changes were made as necessary. Retrospective pre-post surveys were analyzed by calculating the percentage of participants who reported a moderate to large difference in knowledge and skill level (part 1 and 2 of the survey) in several critical areas of community needs assessment and intervention as a direct result of the course. Participants’ responses to part 3 of the retrospective pre-post survey were also analyzed using thematic analysis with inter-rater reliability established.

**Results**

A paired samples t-test was carried out to assess whether or not the Introduction to Community Psychology course increased students’ self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. Before conducting the analysis, the assumption of normality was tested. Self-esteem and self-efficacy scores satisfied the assumption, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilks test (p > .05). Pretest scores for optimism differed significantly from normality (p = .002), and thus a paired t-test could not be used, as the distribution did not meet the assumption of normality. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was performed as an alternative to the paired t-test to analyze differences in
optimism scores before and after course participation, as it does not assume normality. The means and standard deviations for all three scales are presented in Table 1.

The RSES ranges from 0-30, with scores between 15-25 considered average. Higher scores suggest higher levels of self-esteem. The mean score for self-esteem at the beginning of the course was 22.46 ($SD = 3.20$). Pretest self-esteem scores fell within a range of 16 to 30, with only one student scoring a 30. Post-test self-esteem scores ($M = 23.40$, $SD = 4.88$) were within a range of 14 to 30, with eight students scoring above 25 and one student scoring below 15. One student experienced a 56.25% increase in their self-esteem levels after course participation. The results of the $t$-test showed that the post-course self-esteem mean was not statistically significantly higher than the pre-course mean, despite the fact that the means were moving in the right direction. Thus, we can conclude that the Introduction to Community Psychology course did not have a significant effect on student’s self-esteem.

The GSES ranges from 0-40, with higher scores suggesting higher levels of self-efficacy. The mean self-efficacy score at the beginning of the course was 31.41 ($SD = 4.74$). The highest pretest self-efficacy score was 40, of which only one participant reported this score. The lowest pretest self-efficacy score was 22. The highest post-test self-efficacy score was 40, of which only one participant reported this score. The lowest posttest self-efficacy score was 24. One participant experienced a near 72% increase in their self-efficacy score after course participation. The difference between the pre-and post-test mean scores ($M = .82$) was found statistically non-significant, even though the mean scores were moving in the right direction.

The LOT-R ranges from 0-24, with higher scores representing a more optimistic outlook on life. The mean score for the LOT-R at the beginning of the course was 15.46 ($SD = 3.77$). The highest score recorded for pretest scores was 20 and the lowest score was 4. Post-test LOT-R
scores were within a range of 10 to 20. One student experienced a 150% increase in their optimism score after course participation. Another student experienced a near 42% increase in their optimism score after course participation. A Wilcoxon signed ranks test showed that the optimism mean score increased after participation in the course ($M=16.73$, $SD=2.96$), with a positive mean rank of 8.06 versus a negative mean rank of 5.30. Overall, results showed an improvement in the mean scores of all three scales after course participation. No statistically significant differences, however, were found. Thus, we can conclude that the Introduction to Community Psychology course did not have a significant effect on student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, or optimism levels.

A Pearson’s correlation coefficient data analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between age and pretest self-efficacy scores, $r = .66$, $n = 19$, $p = .001$. A strong positive correlation was also found between age and posttest self-efficacy scores, $r = .55$, $n = 19$, $p = .01$. This suggests that older participants had higher self-efficacy scores than did the younger participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means and Standard Deviates for Self-esteem, Self-efficacy, and LOT-R</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>22.46</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>31.41</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOT-R</td>
<td>15.46</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Retrospective Pre-Post Survey

Quantitative Data. The students were given a retrospective pre-post survey at the end of the course and were asked to indicate how much their knowledge and skill level in critical areas
of CNA and intervention changed as a direct result of the course. Results of the retrospective pre-post survey showed that 60% (n= 20) of students reported a large difference in knowledge involving the steps of conducting a CNA. Results also showed that 40% of students reported a large difference in knowledge concerning when to conduct a CNA, while 45% of students reported a large difference in knowledge concerning the methods and techniques associated with conducting a CNA. Fifty-five percent of students reported a moderate difference in knowledge pertaining to how to develop goals for a community intervention, while 55% also reported a moderate difference in knowledge relating to the challenges associated with conducting a CNA. Forty percent of students reported a large difference in knowledge relating to how to implement a community intervention.

Overall, the critical area concerning the knowledge of the steps of conducting a CNA had the highest number of reports over all remaining areas, with students indicating a large difference in knowledge. Knowledge of both how to develop goals for a community intervention and challenges associated with conducting a CNA had the second highest number of reports, with students indicating a moderate difference in knowledge. The table below provides a full picture of these results.

Table 2

Number of Students Who Reported the Level of Change in Knowledge on Critical Areas of Community Needs Assessment (CNA) and Community Intervention (CI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical areas</th>
<th>No difference</th>
<th>Small difference</th>
<th>Moderate difference</th>
<th>Large difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When to conduct a CNA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods/techniques used</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps of conducting a CNA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of conducting a CNA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to develop goals for a CI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to change in knowledge, students also reported the level of change in skill level. Results showed that 65% of students reported a large difference in skill level in their ability to conduct a CNA, while the other 30% reported a moderate difference in this skill area. Results also showed that 75% of students reported a moderate difference in skill level in their ability to create an effective data collection instrument. Additionally, 55% of students reported a moderate difference in skill level in their ability to 1) utilize the data from a CNA to design an intervention, 2) design a culturally appropriate intervention, and 3) evaluate a community intervention. Results also revealed that roughly 90% of students reported a large difference in skill level in their ability to work with a team, while 55% reported a large difference in skill level in their ability to be a community leader. The frequency count of students in these critical areas is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical areas</th>
<th>No difference</th>
<th>Small difference</th>
<th>Moderate difference</th>
<th>Large difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design a culturally appropriate CI</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create effective data collection instrument</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a CAN</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize data from CNA to design a program</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a CI</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement a CI</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate a CI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a community leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with a team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze student’s responses to section 3 of the retrospective pre-post survey, which asks students to complete the following two sentences:

1. When I think about working with communities, I believe this course had the MOST impact on my ability to ________.
2. When I think about working with communities, I believe this course had the LEAST impact on my ability to ________.

Thematic analysis of students’ responses revealed that the course most impacted students’ ability to identify and assess community needs. As one student stated, the course “enabled me to assess the needs of my community which is something I lacked before the course.” The course was also seen as impacting students’ ability to “design”, “plan” or “develop” a community intervention.

Weekly Reflective Journals

Weekly reflective journals were also collected from participants. Thematic analysis of students’ responses revealed four major themes. The themes were (a) improved understanding of how to conduct a CNA, (b) key content knowledge of the field of community psychology, (c) empowering learning environment, and (d) greater understanding of how to plan and design a community intervention.

Theme 1: Improved understanding of how to conduct a CNA. This was the largest theme that emerged from data analysis, receiving a total of 28 comments from students. Within this theme, students highlighted gaining knowledge and/or skills in areas concerning the process of conducting a CNA. Students emphasized the planning and organizing phase of the CNA process, as well as data collection methods such as surveys, focus groups, and community
mapping. As one student stated, “I learned how to start practically planning and organizing [for] a community needs assessment...[w]e also learned how to make a survey to know the needs of people and get a clue of how to start solving them.” Another one said that:

I think my observation this week is the assessment’s tools [data collection methods] used in the CNA. [B]efore this class my best knowledge [was] that the focus group [was] the most effective [method] without taking into consideration the advantage[s] and disadvantage[s] of that tool, but now I’m fully aware about which tool I can use or apply, in particular when I have limited time [and] resources. So far, based on the knowledge I have gained, the survey is a suitable one I can use.

**Theme 2: Key content knowledge of the field of community psychology.** This category refers to the concepts, theories, and values integral to the community psychology perspective. Several students gave short responses that included gaining “knowledge” and “learning” on community psychology content. Overall, this theme received 18 comments.

Through thematic analysis, three subthemes emerged: *Core values, Ecological thinking, and Key words and terminology.*

**Subtheme 1: Core values.** This category refers to the values at the core of the discipline of community psychology. Students highlighted gaining knowledge and insight on the “basic values” of community psychology. As one student noted, “I’ve acquired new knowledge about the seven values of community psychology and I’ve seen it working on the ground, like prevention, change, and sharing power.”

**Subtheme 2: Ecological thinking.** Community psychology places ecological thinking center stage in its work. Students noted the Ecological Systems Theory as a significant observation or insight and as one said “The most significant to [me] this week is about [the]
Ecological System and the clarification and relationship [between] every ecological system. Another felt that “The one observation or insight that was most significant to me was [the] Ecological System which I understand in a different aspect and I think it was the [most] important lesson in my life. I realized that a lot of things [are] important and not in our mind[s] to get it.”

**Subtheme 3: Key words and terminology.** Within this category, students noted a deeper understanding of terms and words frequently used within the field of community psychology. Students commented on gaining a more “accurate” or clearer understanding of terms as a result of lecture or discussion. As one said,

> The one observation or insight that was most significant to me is learning about community psychology. Because I don’t have enough capacity [to know] what community means. Therefore, I have got[ten] an accurate and deep understanding. And also I understand about open and closed community. Also getting such kind knowledge will help me to help the vulnerable community members.

Another stated that “My best pleasure that I have seen…was I understood in detail about what community means because previously I used to understand community as something limited in number. So now I’m clear with the definition of community.”

**Theme 2: Empowering learning environment.** This category refers to a teaching approach that is in favor of establishing a learning environment in which students are actively engaged with the course material and their peers. An empowering learning environment enhances social interaction through peer discussion and enables students to take ownership of their learning experience. Overall, this theme received a total of 11 comments from students.
Three subthemes were identified: *Student engagement, ownership of learning, and leadership and teamwork skills*.

**Subtheme 1: Student engagement.** Within this category, students highlighted group “discussion” and instructor-student interactions as a significant observation or insight. This category received a total of 4 comments, with one student saying that [T]he interaction between the students themselves and the instructor. For example when the [instructor] asked to define “what [is a] need?” they [the class] came up with different definition[s] and with more discussions. [T]his process of engaging participants, caused the lecture not [to be] boring but interesting, which created an atmosphere of good engagement. Another made the point that “The one observation or insight that was most significant to me [are the] group discussions [and] how our instructor is explain[ing] to us.”

**Subtheme 2: Ownership of learning.** Ownership of learning refers to students initiating and engaging in learning and/or activities that are directly related to course material but outside of what was assigned to them. Some students noted initiating learning by reading or watching unassigned articles or video clips or re-reading course material. For example, as one student said, “…I’ve read some articles about making a CNA and watched videos about it.” Another said that “[This] past week, I spent [time] re-read[ing] the ‘Ecological Systems Theory’ in order to solidify my understanding about surrounding environments, and how these five levels impact or affect someone[s] development.”

**Subtheme 3: Leadership and teamwork behaviors.** This category refers to students engaging in leadership behaviors within their own community or within their team/group with aims to move the community or team forward. It also refers to teamwork behaviors that aim to enhance team performance in order for the team to accomplish its goals. Some students noted
taking leadership over specific project tasks, such as creating a shared Google Drive document or text messaging group. Others commented on learning how to work effectively with their team members. For example, they said “The one observation or insight that was most significant to me is I learnt how to sharing [sic] with other[s],” and “…I’ve learned how to cooperate with my team members.” One student noted how they were able to take the knowledge and skills learned from the course and educate members within their own community to promote change:

[The one observation or insight that was most significant to me is] is attending the community psychology class and getting good skills every week. And also going back to my community [and] explaining what I’m learning and its importancy [sic] for my community members. Also I am changing my community attitude about or the meaning of community [and] there [sic] needs.

*Theme 3: Greater understanding of how to plan and design a community intervention.*

This theme received seven comments about the knowledge and/or skills gained in planning and designing a community intervention. One student commented that “…todays class was the most interesting where we learned how to design an intervention…” and another stated that “The one observation or insight that was most significant to me is about the level [short-term, intermediate, and long-term] of intervention and the way of how to do [an] intervention.”

*Discussion*

This study sought to answer the following questions:

- What role does the learning of community psychology values and concepts play in the empowerment of adult refugees living in Egypt?

- What influence does a community psychology approach have on a refugee’s level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism?
• Does the acquisition of knowledge and skills in community needs assessment and intervention empower refugees to work with communities and groups?

• In what ways is the Introduction to Community Psychology course valuable to refugee communities in Egypt?

It was found that students who participated in the course acquired considerable knowledge and skills in areas pertinent to the field of community psychology. A paired samples $t$-test and Wilcoxon signed ranks tests were carried out to determine if there were significant differences in student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism before and after the course. Results revealed that the mean scores for self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism increased after course participation. However, this increase was not statistically significant. Results from the retrospective pre-post survey revealed that nearly 60% of students reported gaining a large difference in knowledge involving the steps of conducting a CNA. Results also showed that 65% of students reported gaining a large difference in skill level in their ability to conduct a CNA, while nearly 75% reported a moderate difference in skill level in their ability to create an effective data collection instrument. Finally, results from the weekly reflective journals revealed 4 key themes: (a) improved understanding of how to conduct a CNA, (b) key content knowledge of the field of community psychology, (c) empowering learning environment, and (d) greater understanding of how to plan and design a community intervention.

**Impact of Course on Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Optimism**

In this study, empowerment was defined as an interactive process involving critical reflection and participant engagement, through which individuals in disadvantaged positions acquire key knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to work with communities and groups and increases their access to resources, sense of ownership, and promotes social inclusion.
Through empowerment, levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism should be enhanced. Results from the quantitative analysis revealed that levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism did increase after course participation. However, this increase was not statistically significant. It may be that other factors that affect self-esteem, self-efficacy and optimism were at play here. There are unique and persistent stressors that refugees in Egypt experience that could impede change in levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. Although the course was comprised of a diverse refugee population, many refugees experience common stressful life events and adversities. This could include unemployment, discrimination, harassment, and verbal abuse.

Previous research has supported the relationship between stressful life events and self-esteem. Losing a job, failing to find work, and unemployment are some of the most unpleasant stressful life events and are all associated with lower levels of self-esteem (Emler, 2001). Egypt’s high unemployment rate combined with the daunting process of obtaining a work permit prevent many refugees in Egypt from entering the labor market. As a result, many refugees experience long-term unemployment (Buscher et al., 2010). Muller, Hicks, and Winocur (1993) investigated the psychological well-being of employed and unemployed adults and found that unemployed males and females reported lower levels of self-esteem. Kennedy and McDonald (2006) found comparable results in their study when examining how the stress associated with migration to a new country combined with the stress from periods of unemployment affect the mental health of immigrants. The researchers found unemployment to be significantly associated with poor mental health. Unemployed immigrants reported noticeably poorer mental health than employed immigrants. The effects of unemployment on self-esteem may be further magnified for refugee men living in “societies where employment and financial stability are seen as signs of
masculinity” (Jali, 2009; as cited by Young and Chan, 2015, p. 23). Furthermore, those lacking the resources to manage such stressful life events may experience even greater feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, contributing to lower levels of self-esteem (Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy, 1989).

For many refugees, employment in the informal sector is the only accessible option. Employment in the informal sector, however, has numerous disadvantages. This includes hazardous working environments, odd working hours, and unfair wages (IRC, 2012). Unregulated working conditions may lead to job stress. Job stress can be described as the “physical, mental, and emotional wear and tear brought about by incongruence between the requirement of the job and the capabilities, resources, and needs of the employee to cope with job demands” (Eissa and Khalifa, 2008, p. 77). Job stress can have a negative psychological impact on the lives of individuals experiencing it. This includes depression, anxiety symptoms, and low self-esteem (Eissa et al., 2008). The relationship between self-efficacy and job stress has also been studied. Eissa et al. (2008) investigated the effects of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on job stress among elementary school teachers in Egypt and found that self-efficacy was significantly negatively correlated with job stress. The researchers attributed this finding to the fact that achievement, personal well-being, and the ability to manage stress is enhanced in individuals with high self-efficacy. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy are more inclined to approach tasks as if they are more difficult than what they really are, a belief that stimulates stress.

Stressful life experiences associated with racial discrimination may have also influenced the results of the study. Racial discrimination against darker skinned refugees is prevalent in Egypt. Throughout the course, some students described events of racial discrimination that often
took place right before the start of a course session or after a session concluded. While there does not appear to be any research on the relationship between racial discrimination and self-efficacy within the context of refugees living in Egypt, the link between the two variables has been emphasized in other contexts. Racial discrimination has a profound psychological effect on those who experience it. Exposure to racial discrimination can decrease self-esteem and stimulate anger, depression, and anxiety (Harter, 1997; Chambers, Tull, Fraser, Mutunhu, Sobers, and Niles, 2004). Previous research also suggests that racial discrimination can lower self-efficacy “making it difficult or impossible for the victims of such discrimination to carry out tasks—such as academic, professional, and social tasks—of which they are capable” (Wells, 2016, p. 15).

Not only did several refugee students encounter racial discrimination outside of the classroom, but many witnessed racial bias inside of the classroom from some of their peers. At the inception of the course, it was apparent that a few students harbored unconscious negative racial preconceptions towards certain racial groups that many of their peers identified with. During collaborative discussion, one student spoke of darker skinned people as being lazy and violent. This sparked a respectful and productive dialogue on race, racism, and discrimination in America, Africa, and the Middle East. Students were given the space to openly share personal stories of their experiences with racism and discrimination. Upon hearing these experiences, the student who originally made the comment apologized to the class and instructor, expressing that they were not aware of their racial prejudices. Such adverse racial comments from students were expected. Prior to the implementation of the course, the coordinator of Refugee Springs informed the instructor of the potential issues that could transpire between the diverse refugee groups. The coordinator mentioned that it is not uncommon for incoming refugee groups to only interact with members of their own communities. Nonetheless, such adverse racial comments could have
fostered stress and lead some students to feel and believe that they were not fully capable of carrying out their academic assignments.

The United States presidential election of 2016 may have also influenced the outcome of the study. This election sparked unprecedented mass protests across the United States and abroad. Shortly after candidate Donald Trump (now president) delivered speeches widely regarded as racist and sexist, division broke out, elevating levels of fear and anxiety in individuals and groups across the globe. Once Trump officially became president, he issued a travel ban, targeting six majority-Muslim countries. The “Muslim ban” prevented Muslims from the six countries from entering the US. This “ban” took place during the period of the course, which could have had a larger impact in the lives of participants more than the impact of the course, considering that the majority of participants were Muslim. Throughout the course, the level of fear was evident as students frequently sparked dialogue concerning Donald Trump and his anti-Muslim rhetoric. One student exhibited emotional distress as they shared that due to the turmoil caused by the ban they would no longer be in the process of resettlement to the US. Therefore, the 2016 presidential elections could have resulted in some refugee students feeling less optimistic about their future.

Empowerment could have also been limited because of the length of the course. As mentioned previously, the Introduction to Community Psychology course lasted 10-weeks. Several students gave feedback to the instructor that the course was too short, given the amount of content and materials that the course covered. Some students also expressed that they would have preferred to have class twice a week instead of once a week. Students felt that if the course had been extended past 10 weeks, it would have given them time to further unpack some of the course concepts and ideas. Additionally, many students felt as if they did not have enough time
to design and implement their community interventions in ways they had desired. Given the context of refugee lives in Egypt, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect a 10-week course to have a significant and lasting impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. Perhaps if the course had been extended past 10 weeks, it could have resulted in significant differences in refugee student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. It is notable, however, that despite the length of the course and the context of refugee lives in Egypt, the course did raise self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism levels for most of the refugees in the course. Furthermore, if refugee students are able to enact community psychology in their communities after the course, the impact on self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism may be stronger and more lasting.

**Impact of Course on Knowledge and Skills.**

Results from the weekly reflective journals and retrospective pre-post survey suggest that students who participated in the course acquired considerable knowledge and skills in areas pertinent to the field of community psychology. Analysis of the retrospective pre-post survey showed that 60% of students reported gaining a large difference in knowledge involving the steps of conducting a CNA. This critical area of knowledge received the highest scores from students. This is parallel with results from the weekly reflective journals in that the largest emerging theme was *improved understanding of how to conduct a CNA.*

These results also show that students not only reported the acquisition of knowledge, but they also reported the ability to apply the knowledge gained. Whereas 60% of students reported gaining a large difference in knowledge involving the steps of conducting a CNA, 65% reported a large difference in skill level in their ability to conduct a CNA. These results could be attributed to the course structure and design. The Introduction to Community Psychology course was highly interactive with heavy student engagement. Students not only learned key concepts
and values, but they were given the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills learned in real-world settings. The application of knowledge was illuminated in the thematic analysis of the retrospective pre-post survey, in which students noted that the course had the most impact on their ability and skill to identify and assess the needs of a community.

Both active learning and student engagement play an essential role in adult learning and can take many forms, such as peer group work, student-teacher interactions, and collaborative discussions and assignments (Rabourn, Shoup, and BrckaLorenz, 2015). It has been found that collaborative learning with peers is associated with higher student achievement (Cabrera, Crissman, Bernal, Nora, Terenzini, & Pascarella, 2002); and that student engagement is positively associated with GPA, critical thinking, and retention (Carini, Kuh, and Klein, 2006; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea, 2007; Pascarella, Seifert, and Blaich, 2010).

The Introduction to Community Psychology course was taught using an active and collaborative teaching approach. A key theme that emerged from data analysis of student’s weekly reflective journals was an empowering learning environment. An empowering learning environment refers to a teaching approach that is in favor of establishing a learning environment in which students are actively engaged with the course material and their peers. The course sought to enhance social interaction through peer discussion and encouraged students to take ownership of their learning experience. The course also integrated collaborative assignments and activities. A study conducted by Terenzini, Cabrera, Colbeck, Parente, and Bjorklund (2001) examined the ways in which courses taught using active and collaborative teaching approaches differed from courses taught using traditional lecture approaches. They found that active and collaborative approaches significantly improved student’s communication and group skills, as well as improved students problem-solving skills. Students in the active learning courses also
reported that they were more actively engaged in their own learning and had greater interactions with their peers and instructors both inside and outside of the classroom.

Literature also suggests that meaningful interactions with instructors enhance cognitive development, as well as increases academic performance and student satisfaction (Lau, 2003; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Kim and Sam, 2009). The results found in the current study support this, in that refugee students enrolled in the Introduction to Community Psychology course saw the type of student-instructor interactions as important to learning. When asked what was an insight they had from the day’s class session, one student reported:

[T]he interaction between the students themselves and the instructor. For example when the [instructor] asked to define “what [is a] need?” they [the class] came up with different definition[s] and with more discussions. [T]his process of engaging participants, caused the lecture not [to be] boring but interesting, which created an atmosphere of good engagement.

The course structure and design also fostered a culture of teamwork and created opportunities for students to recognize themselves as leaders. Over the duration of the course, students were required to work in teams in order to plan and conduct a CNA and community intervention. Likewise, students were actively engaged through small group work and discussion. In working in their groups, students were given opportunities to take on leadership roles, such as facilitating group communication and presenting subject content. In this way, the course structure contributed to 90% of students reporting a large difference in skill level in their ability to work with a team. The literature suggests that meaningful interactions with people from diverse backgrounds can improve critical thinking (Antonio, Chang, Hakuta, Kenny, Levin, & Milem, 2004), reduce racial prejudice (Denson, 2009), and increase involvement in leadership
activities (Bowman, 2011). Remarkably, 55% of students reported a large difference in skill level in their ability to be a community leader. This indicates that students felt that they were able to take the knowledge and skills gained back to their communities in order to improve them. Here is where we see education as a tool for empowerment. Through education, refugee students gained substantial knowledge and skills and were made aware of the ways in which such knowledge and skills could be used to improve the health and well-being of communities. Furthermore, through education, refugee students felt empowered to be leaders within their own communities. Thus, education is an essential means of empowering refugees with knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities.

**Significance of Study for Understanding Refugee Empowerment in Egypt**

Past research has emphasized the relationship between education and empowerment. Education is considered a key contributor to the empowerment of individuals and groups. Through education, individuals and groups acquire essential knowledge and skills, which expands their employment opportunities and increases economic and social integration in return (Hiegemann, 2013). Much of the existing literature on the relationship between empowerment and education in the lives of refugees has focused on how empowering English language learning is for refugees. There has also been little study of refugees in the Egyptian context. This study made a unique contribution to the literature by examining the impact of teaching community psychology as a means to refugee empowerment, and also by focusing on refugees living in Egypt.

The results of this study demonstrate that empowerment is a complex process, encompassing multiple levels of psychological, cognitive and behavioral components. The findings of this study have enhanced my understanding of refugee empowerment in Egypt. I
have come to understand refugee empowerment as an active and multidimensional process that involves enabling refugees to initiate positive change and become agents of change within their own communities. Refugees in the Community Psychology course were empowered by the acquisition of new and relevant knowledge and skills, opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills in real-world environments, active and collaborative engagement, and opportunities for leadership. Refugee empowerment then is more than refugees simply gaining knowledge and skills. It involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are relevant and important to their lives. Students expressed that the Introduction to Community Psychology course was both applicable and important to their lives. At the start of the course, students were asked why they were interested in taking the course. Many students communicated that they have a desire to know the needs of their community, however, they did not know the best way to obtain such information. Some commented that once they return to their country of origin, they would be able to better serve their home community. Others expressed that they wanted to gain knowledge about their host community in Egypt and raise awareness of its needs. Lastly, a few others voiced that they wanted to learn how to be effectively involved in community matters. By recognizing the relevance and importance of the course material in their lives, goals, and communities, refugee students were motivated to learn and participate in classroom activities and assignments.

Empowerment involves not only the acquisition of knowledge but the ability to apply the knowledge gained to real-world settings. The course provided instruction on the steps of conducting a CNA and community intervention. Students were then required to take classroom knowledge and apply it in a community in or near Cairo. Knowledge application deepened students learning experience in that it brought relevance and “real-world” meaning to course concepts and ideas. Refugee students were able to see the applicability of the course concepts in
their lives and see it directly working in their communities. Knowledge application was also significant in that it enabled refugees to initiate positive change and become agents of change within their own communities. By conducting a CNA and community intervention, refugee students were able to identify the needs and resources of a surrounding community and design and implement a community intervention to meet those needs. Here is where we can see the relationship between empowerment and social justice. Empowerment is more than becoming aware of the inequalities in society that prevent certain communities and groups from accessing imperative resources, but it is a call to action to remedy such injustices (Prilleltensky, 1994). As refugees gain knowledge, they are empowered to apply it within their own communities with aims to strengthen and improve them.

Additionally, students gained competence in CNA and community intervention skills as a result of having the opportunity to apply classroom knowledge. This was demonstrated in that 65% of students reported gaining a large difference in skill level in their ability to conduct a CNA and 40% reported gaining a large difference in skill level in their ability to develop a community intervention. Thus, providing refugees with opportunities to apply new knowledge and skills in a real-world setting is a key component of refugee empowerment.

The process of refugee empowerment also involves active and collaborative engagement. Active and collaborative engagement is important in that it (a) allows students to be actively engaged in their own learning rather than passively receiving information, which is the case in traditional teaching methods and (b) maximizes peer-to-peer and student-instructor interactions. With the course consisting of such a diverse refugee population, high interactions with peers and the instructor assisted in breaking down barriers and supported the building of cross-cultural relationships. Furthermore, it fostered an atmosphere of teamwork. A few students commented in
their weekly reflective journals that the course positively impacted their ability to work with a team. Likewise, 90% of students reported gaining a large difference in skill level in their ability to work with a team. Additionally, some students commented that they enjoyed the interactions between the students and the instructor.

Lastly, refugee empowerment also includes opportunities for leadership. The course provided opportunities for refugee students to take on a leadership role within their groups. In this way, students had opportunities to be more involved in decision-making. For some students, this involved taking leadership over specific project tasks, such as creating a team schedule, contacting local community members, or presenting class assignments to the instructor and peers. The leadership opportunities presented in the course supported refugee’s efforts to be leaders within their own communities. This was demonstrated in that 55% of students indicated that the course impacted their ability to be a community leader.

This study has shed light on the empowerment process of adult refugees in Egypt. This study is significant for understanding refugee empowerment in that it demonstrates that the teaching of community psychology concepts and methods can empower adult refugees living in Egypt, despite the stressful life events that many refugees in Egypt face. Community psychology plays a unique role in the empowerment of adult refugees in Egypt in that it acts as a tool of social change. The acquisition of community psychology concepts and methods enables refugees to effectively identify and assess community needs so that they can further advance community goals. In this way, the teaching of community psychology helps to build and sustain healthy communities in Egypt. Furthermore, the teaching of community psychology helps to develop community leaders who can effectively work with communities and groups.
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

There were several limitations to this research. First, there is little information available on the teaching of community psychology as a means to empower refugees living in Egypt. The lack of prior research presented some challenges, as there was no established foundation to build on to guide the research project. Due to the lack of literature, this study breaks new ground in examining the impact of the teaching of community psychology practices on the empowerment of adult refugees in Egypt. Furthermore, this study has given impetus for further research.

Another major limitation is the small sample size. A total of 26 refugee students were enrolled into the Introduction to Community Psychology courses. At the inception of the course, all 26 students agreed to participate in the research study. However, only 15 students completed both pre- and post-constructed questionnaires. This is mainly due to student dropouts and incomplete data. The most common factors for students dropping the course were family responsibilities, health issues, and transportation problems. Students who dropped the course expressed to the instructor that they found the course useful and applicable to their lives and community, however, they were simply not in a position to successfully complete the course. The Education Coordinator of Refugee Springs immediately replaced students who dropped the course with students on the waiting list. Given the design of the study, it was not possible to evaluate students who enrolled mid-way through the course. Thus, only students who were present from inception to completion of the course who completed both pre- and post-constructed questionnaires were analyzed.

As a result, the study may have had too few participants to draw a definitive conclusion about the effects of the course on student’s self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism. Research has emphasized the relationship between sample size and statistical power. Statistical power
refers to the power of a statistical test that gives the likelihood that null hypothesis will be rejected (Skrivanek, 2009). According to Houser (2007), a researcher can assure a study has adequate statistical power through the sample size. A small sample size can reduce the power of a study, leading a researcher to draw conclusions that there were no statistically significant results, when in fact there were but the sample size was too small to detect them. Results cannot be generalized to the whole refugee population because of the few participants involved.

Another limitation was the length of the course. The two, 10-week courses were an avenue through which students could gain hands-on experience in conducting a CNA and designing and implementing a community intervention. Students were informed at the inception of the course that the CNA and community intervention would be small in scope, given the course length. However, it was apparent throughout the course that many students aspired to design and implement a large-scale community intervention. For many students, the course was an opportunity to improve and strengthen their own communities. Students felt that a longer course would have given them the time needed to design and implement a larger-scale community intervention that could have had a wider positive impact on the health and well-being of their own communities. It should be noted that the Introduction to Community Psychology course ran for the appropriate length of time, as established by Refugee Springs. Generally, all high-quality training courses offered by Refugee Springs run for 10-weeks at a time. The course was only able to meet once a week for the 10-week period due to a lack of availability of classrooms.

Many refugee education programs in Egypt have limited space and resources. Every academic term, some of the largest education programs in Egypt are able to accommodate only about 600 students from nearly 1000 applicants (Hiegemann, 2013). Many refugees are put on a
waiting list. If such programs obtained additional funding and support, it would enable them to expand their classroom space to accommodate more refugee students. In this way, education could have a greater impact on the empowerment of refugees living in Egypt. Given that education is a key constituent contributing to the empowerment of individuals and groups, it is even more vital to advocate for increased funding for such education programs to advance its mission and vision (Hiegemann, 2013).

Finally, the limited course time along with the political and cultural sensitivity of some topics, presented a challenge because it meant that it was not possible to develop projects related to some of communities and populations that were of interest to the students (e.g., LGBT, non-UNHCR recognized refugees, persons with mental illness). Initially, students had anticipated exploring the needs and resources of such vulnerable communities and groups in Egypt. However, due to safety concerns for both the students and vulnerable populations, students were advised to refrain from selecting controversial issues. The instructor had to ensure that the selected communities, topics, and community interventions were appropriate within the Egyptian context.

Although efforts have been made in this study to document information about the impact of the teaching of community psychology practices on the empowerment of adult refugees in Egypt, important information is still lacking. Additional research is needed to help shape and enhance the future of this subject. While many students expressed that the course expanded their knowledge and skill level in areas that could be useful and applicable to several organizations in their communities, it is uncertain if the course had an impact on student’s ability to access employment. Further study in this area should explore the long-term effects of the teaching of community psychology on refugee student’s ability to access employment opportunities. Further
study in this area should also explore if refugee students have actually applied the knowledge and skills gained from the course in their own communities, now that the course has ended. Furthermore, the level of change that has taken place in refugee communities in Egypt as a result of refugee students going back to their communities with critical knowledge and skills pertinent to the field of community psychology should be explored.

**Conclusion**

Egypt ranks among the top five countries with the largest urban refugee population (Gozdriak et al., 2012). Refugees in Egypt encounter manifold and interrelated challenges. Unemployment, racism, and lack of access to housing and formal education place refugees on the margins of mainstream Egyptian society (Hiegemann, 2013). The restraints and limitations placed upon the rights of refugees greatly inhibits their efforts to secure a livelihood and fully participate in society, leaving them feeling frustrated, weary, and disempowered (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016). This study provides some support for the idea that teaching community psychology to refugees can contribute to mitigating some of these challenges, particularly if that course provides an opportunity for students to have first-hand experience in conducting a community intervention. Overall, the course had a meaningful impact on students’ learning experiences and received positive feedback from both students and the refugee center. Students acquired substantial knowledge and skills in areas pertinent to the field of community psychology, including the ability to create an effective data collection instrument, design a culturally appropriate community intervention, and be a community leader, and most showed an increase in their self-esteem, level of optimism, and self-efficacy after the course. Further research is required to understand the long-term impact on students’ level of empowerment, their ability to access employment, and whether or not they apply the knowledge and skills gained
from the course in their own communities.
References


REFUGEE SENSE OF EMPOWERMENT


http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34


Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

**Project Title:** The Impact of an Introduction to Community Psychology Course on Refugee Sense of Empowerment

**Principal Investigator:** Kamauria Acree

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to assess the impact of the Introduction to Community Psychology course on your overall sense of empowerment, and the findings may be published, presented, or both. The expected duration of your participation is 30 minutes.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked some general questions about your background such as your age and gender. Then you will read a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself in which you will indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. This same procedure will take place at the end of the course experience and will include the same materials, in addition to an Evaluation Course Survey.

* There will not be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

* You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research study, but the researcher hopes to gather information to understand the ways in which this course has impacted you.

* The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the information and data you provide. Consent forms will be kept separate from the demographic sheets and self-report measures. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet, in which only the researcher will have access to. Your name and contact information will not be used and your identity will be protected.

* Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to Kamauria Acree at 01275318294

* Participation in this study is voluntary. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your student standing will not be affected whether or not you participate in this study, as the researcher will not be providing any grades for the course. Staff and other personnel in or at StARS will not have access to the information you provide and will not be involved in the research process. Participation or refusal to participate will not affect your refugee status or any other decision-making processes regarding you by StARS.

Signature

Printed Name

Date
Appendix B

Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

Project Title: The Impact of an Introduction to Community Psychology Course on Refugee Sense of Empowerment

Principal Investigator: Kamauria Acree

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is to assess the impact of the Introduction to Community Psychology course on your overall sense of empowerment, and the findings may be published, presented, or both.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you agree to allow your weekly reflective journals to be used in the study.

*There will not be certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

* You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research study, but the researcher hopes to gather information to understand the ways in which this course has impacted you.

*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. Only the researcher will have access to the information and data you provide. Consent forms will be kept separate from the Weekly Self-Reflective Journals. All data will be kept in a locked cabinet, in which only the researcher will have access to. Your name and contact information will not be used and your identity will be protected.

*Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to Kamauria Acree at 01275318294

**Participation in this study is voluntary. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Your student standing will not be affected whether or not you participate in this study, as the researcher will not be providing any grades for the course. Staff and other personnel in or at StARS will not have access to the information you provide and will not be involved in the research process. Participation or refusal to participate will not affect your refugee status or any other decision-making processes regarding you by StARS.

Signature

Printed Name

Date
Appendix C

Demographic Sheet

Please do not write your name on this form. For the following items, please select the response that is most descriptive of you or fill in the blank as appropriate.

**Gender:** female ☐ male ☐

**Age:**
- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 or older

**Country of origin:**
- ☐ Sudan
- ☐ South Sudan
- ☐ Ethiopia
- ☐ Eritrea
- ☐ Iraq
- ☐ Syria
- ☐ Somalia
- ☐ Kenya
- ☐ Uganda
- ☐ Nigeria
- ☐ Other: ________________________

**Educational Background:**
- ☐ Less than primary school
- ☐ Completed primary school
- ☐ Completed secondary school
- ☐ College/university degree
- ☐ Other: ________________________

**Have you taken any other courses offered by StARS?**
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
### Appendix D

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)**

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. At times I think I am no good at all.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I certainly feel useless at times.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true</th>
<th>Hardly true</th>
<th>Moderately true</th>
<th>Exactly true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)

Instructions:
Please answer the following questions about yourself by indicating the extent of your agreement using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>neutral</td>
<td>agree</td>
<td>strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Be as honest as you can throughout, and try not to let your responses to one question influence your response to other questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. It's easy for me to relax.
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
6. It's important for me to keep busy.
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
8. I don't get upset too easily.
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Scoring:
1. Reverse code items 3, 7, and 9 prior to scoring (0=4) (1=3) (2=2) (3=1) (4=0).
2. Sum items 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, and 10 to obtain an overall score.

Note: Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are filler items only. They are not scored as part of the revised scale.

The revised scale was constructed in order to eliminate two items from the original scale, which dealt more with coping style than with positive expectations for future outcomes. The correlation between the revised scale and the original scale is 95.

Reference:
Appendix G

Weekly Reflective Journal

**Weekly Reflection and Insights**

My primary accomplishments this past week have been:

The one observation or insight that was most significant to me is:

What goal

One topic I would like to discuss further in class or with the instructor is:
## Appendix H

### Retrospective Pre-Post Survey

**Evaluation of Introduction to Community Psychology Course, Fall 2016**

This survey is designed to assess your skill level and knowledge of community needs assessment and intervention. Please check the box (✓) that best reflects how much your knowledge in these areas changed as a result of the course. Your honest answers will help us improve the course for future students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Knowledge of…</th>
<th>No difference in knowledge</th>
<th>Small difference in knowledge</th>
<th>Moderate difference in knowledge</th>
<th>Large difference in knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When to conduct a needs assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods and techniques used for assessing the needs of a community</td>
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<td>The steps of conducting a community needs assessment</td>
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<td>The challenges associated with conducting a community needs assessment</td>
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<td>How to develop goals for a community intervention</td>
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<td>How to implement a community intervention</td>
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</table>
Please check the box (✓) that best reflects how much your skill level in these areas changed as a result of the course. Your honest answers will help us improve the course for future students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Ability to…</th>
<th>No difference in skill level</th>
<th>Small difference in skill level</th>
<th>Moderate difference in skill level</th>
<th>Large difference in skill level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design a culturally appropriate intervention</td>
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<td>Create an effective data collection instrument</td>
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<td>Conduct a community assessment</td>
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<td>Utilize the data from a community assessment to design a program</td>
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<td>Develop a community intervention</td>
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<td>Implement a community intervention</td>
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<td>Evaluate a community intervention</td>
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<td>Be a community leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work with a team</td>
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</table>

Please finish this sentence. When I think about working with communities, I believe that this course had the MOST impact on my ability to:

Please finish this sentence. When I think about working with communities, I believe that this course had the LEAST impact on my ability to:
Comments/Suggestions for the course: