

Strict Danish Refugee Policies as Social-environmental Stressors Affecting Syrian Refugees' Mental Health in Denmark

FIRST SEMESTER PROJECT

GROUP 3

Group Members:

Moneth Villanueva

Adeline Ponteras

Iana Cuznetova

Ella Järvinen

Supervisor:

Laust Schouenborg

Number of Characters:

108,149

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
A. Problem Area	2
B. Brief Summary Of The Danish Aliens' Consolidation Act No. 239, Section 7	2
C. Research Question	3
PROJECT DESIGN	3
METHODOLOGY	5
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	5
A. Mental Health and Refugees	6
i. Employment and Financial Resources	7
ii. Resettlement	7
iii. Social Life and Support	8
iv. Discrimination	8
B. Refugee Policies	9
CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	11
A. The Sociology of Mental Health	11
B. Social Environment and the Social Stress Theory	12
C. Refugee and Asylum Seekers	14
D. Zero Asylum Seekers in Denmark	14
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	15
A. Separation from Immediate Family Members	16
B. Fear of Persecution	18
C. Regret over Life, Education and/or Work in Denmark	22
CONCLUSION	26
Implications of the study	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This project aims to analyze how Denmark's declaration of Syria 'safe' despite the contrasting ongoing reality and the rigid application of the amended Danish Alien's Act of 2019 section 7 affect Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark.

Methods: The sociological approach to mental health is used throughout the project. The focal point is how rigid Danish refugee policies as a part of refugees' post-migration social environment potentially influence their psychological state. Secondary interview data were collected from different online sources such as news articles and video documentaries to serve as bases for the analysis which followed the thematic approach. The bases for the choice of the main themes are the Social Stress Theory and the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) discussed in the conceptual framework.

Findings: The existing literature suggests a connection between strict refugee policies and refugees' mental health. Moreover, based on the SRRS, the secondary interview data gathered show that Syrian refugees in Denmark have been experiencing recurring social stressors and chronic strains since the declaration of Syria as 'safe' in 2019. These so-called stressors impact their psychological health.

Conclusion: Based on the scholarly studies collected in the review of related literature, there is a direct relationship between refugees' mental health and strict refugee policies that are a part of refugees' post-migration social environment. Specifically, the social-environmental stresses caused by Denmark's announcement of Syria 'safe' and the rigid application of refugee legislations like the Danish Alien's Act section 7.3 have detrimental effects on Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark. However, these are just contributing factors to their psychological conditions; and that there is no single element, such as a policy, that can influence one's mental state. Additionally, we discovered that these variables trigger the Syrian refugees' previous fears and experienced traumas. This group of individuals fear losing their residency in Denmark because they worry about returning to Syria and enduring the same traumatic events they have been avoiding. Their will to stay in Denmark is rooted in their determination to secure their safety away from their unfortunate past.

Keywords: refugees – asylum seekers – mental health – post-migration stressors – social-environmental factors – Social Stress Theory – Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS)

INTRODUCTION

A. Problem Area

The refugee crisis has been an international humanitarian concern since 2011 when the Syrian war commenced. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022), approximately 103 million people worldwide are already forcibly displaced because of persecution, conflict, terror, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order. Since mid-2022, there have been around 4.9 million asylum seekers and 32.5 million refugees globally (UNHCR, 2022). Individuals from the Syrian Arab Republic, comprising roughly 6.8 million of the population, are the largest among these groups (UNHCR, 2022). These statistics inspired the authors of this research to investigate the Syrian refugee crisis in relation to the Danish context.

The problem we aim to explore in this paper is well expressed in the following quote:

“34,000 Syrian refugees have been granted a permit to stay in Denmark since the war in Syria broke out in 2011” (Hunter, 2021). By now many are working, studying, mastering the Danish language fluently, and feeling strongly attached to Denmark, however, only a few hundred have been granted permanent residency so far.” (European Commission, 2022).

Denmark has been giving shelter to asylum seekers and refugees from different countries for more than 30 years (Nordics Info, n.d.). In 2021, approximately 20,000 Syrians were residing in Denmark - the highest number among all the refugee groups (Statista, 2021). Despite this, the truth is that the Syrian refugee population has been decreasing, especially since 2019, when Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced that the government wants zero asylum seekers in Denmark (Bendixen, 2021). Furthermore, in the same year, the authorities declared Syria, especially the Damascus area, as 'safe' for refugees to return to despite the UN, the EU, and other organizations stating the opposite (The Syria Campaign, n.d.).

As a result, approximately 1,200 Syrian refugees from the Damascus region could no longer renew their residence permits in 2019 (Strzyżyńska, 2022). They were compelled to return to their home country following the amended clause 7.3 of the Danish Alien's Consolidation Act (general temporary protection status), notwithstanding the reports of sexual violence, torture, and imprisonment (Nielsen, 2020). Therefore, different protests and humanitarian articles discussing Denmark's hostile refugee policies and refugee rights have been increasing since. In this project, we aim to investigate how these strict Danish refugee legislations act as post-migration social-environmental stressors affecting Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark.

B. Brief Summary Of The Danish Aliens' Consolidation Act No. 239, Section 7

Denmark is a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. This meeting with 149 states aimed to protect refugee rights and secure the legal responsibilities of signatories to ensure their safety (UNHCR, n.d.). Nevertheless, these rights and how they are interpreted, and applied can fluctuate depending on the state authorities' perspectives, reflected in the non-identical asylum conditions among and within different countries (Hynie, 2018).

As a signatory, Denmark has been fulfilling the convention's refugee regulations by integrating them into the Danish Aliens' Consolidation Act No. 239 Section 7. Before 2015, there was an opportunity for refugees to stay in the country permanently. However, in 2015, the Danish parliament passed a new protection status for article 7.3, mainly targeting Syrian refugees. This amendment emphasized that refugees will only be granted temporary residence in Denmark. It constitutes weaker protection than article 7.2 as it targets refugees who do not have an individual asylum motive but have fled because of the general situation in their country of origin. Since the change, around 1/3 of all refugees have been granted residency in Denmark under section 7.3 status (Bendixen, 2021). Consequently, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Denmark dropped steadily to just over 1,500 applicants in 2020 from a peak of more than 21,000 in 2015 (Skydsgaard, 2021).

The amendment of clause 7.3 is a part of the series of legislative amendments the Danish government has been implementing, leading to Mette Frederiksen's announcement of wanting zero asylum seekers in Denmark in 2019. The latest push towards this 'zero asylum seekers policy' is the controversial Danish law of establishing asylum centers in a third country such as Rwanda (Skydsgaard, 2021). It means that Denmark and Africa are in the process of establishing a program that would allow asylum seekers who arrive in Denmark to be transferred to Rwanda for the consideration of their asylum applications (EU/Schengen, 2022). Rasmus Stoklund, the government party's immigration speaker, stated, "If you apply for asylum in Denmark, you know that you will be sent back to a country outside Europe, and therefore we hope that people will stop seeking asylum in Denmark" (Adami, 2021).

C. Research Question

To assist us in studying the subject of this project, we have developed the following research question:

How do the rigid Danish refugee policies and the declaration of Syria as 'safe' act as social-environmental stressors that affect Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark?

PROJECT DESIGN

This section describes how this research study is structured. Firstly, the problem area is presented. It focuses on how the strict Danish refugee policies, specifically section 7.3 of the Alien's Consolidation Act, and the government's declaration of Syria as safe act as additional post-migration stressors affecting Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark. It is vital to note that the emphasis is not on these factors being isolated or the only variables which affect the refugees' mental health. They are rather studied as contributors to the social stress that these groups of people experience in Denmark, which may have an impact on their psychological well-being.

The methods applied to the project are then presented. Subsequently, 20 pieces of related scholarly literature from the years 2019 to 2022 were chosen, gathered, and reviewed to have an overview of the existing reality regarding the subject. The review of the related literature is done in two parts. The first part focuses on the studies regarding the mental

health of refugees, and the second section discusses the effects of Danish refugee policies on refugees and asylum seekers in Denmark. These two sections serve as an outline of the current perspectives on refugee policies' impacts on refugee mental health. These findings, including a collection of secondary interview data from different online sources, are then used as bases for the later parts of the study.

The next chapter presents this project's theoretical and conceptual framework. Here, it is explained that the sociological perspective, specifically the Social Stress Theory, is used in understanding and analyzing the possible effects of clause 7.3 of the Alien's Consolidation Act and the authorities' declaration of Damascus as safe on Syrian refugees' psychological well-being. Furthermore, in the analysis section, inductive and thematic approaches are used. 34 interview answers from secondary online sources were gathered, analyzed, and categorized under three main themes based on the social stressors listed in the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) of the Social Stress Theory presented in the conceptual framework. However, the findings may not represent the Syrian refugee population, especially considering that the data collected depended only on the worst cases illustrated on social media and television. Finally, the study ends with a conclusion answering the research question.

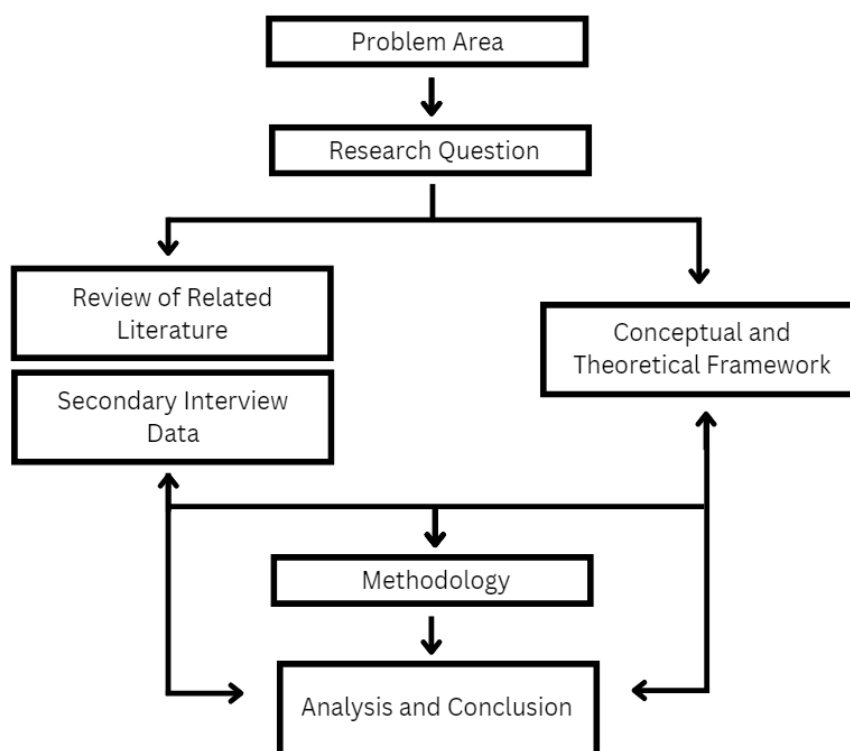


Figure 1. Project Design, Source: Own

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methods used to approach the project are presented. These techniques were chosen as they were deemed suitable for theorizing how the strict Danish refugee policies, specifically section 7.3 of the Alien's Consolidation Act, and the government's declaration of Syria as safe, affect Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark.

After finalizing the problem area and formulating the research question, the aim was to search for scholarly empirical studies reporting on factors affecting refugees' mental health and well-being. Here, a systematic review approach to the literature was chosen. This approach was found to be particularly interesting to utilize as it is often seen as an accompaniment to evidence-based practices. It aims to abolish possible biases by reviewing a large number of materials based on all available evidence in a specific domain (Griffith University, 2022).

The search strategy started with brainstorming several sets of terms that are connected to the research problem. These terms include refugees, mental health disorders (e.g. PTSD, PTSS, anxiety, depression), refugee policy, and social environmental factors (e.g. health and safety, education, society, etc.). All these sets were then inserted into a VENN diagram to set a visual representation. Here, the focus of interest was directed only on the intersections of the sets (refugees + mental health disorders, refugees + refugee policies, refugees + society, and so on), which further helped in finding the relevant literature to address the research problem. This so-called "bedraggled daisy" approach paved the way to optimized time and efficiency when the research was commencing. Specific search terms such as 'Syrian refugees', 'mental health', 'refugee policy and mental health', 'Syrian refugees mental health Denmark', and different combinations of these words were applied to find relevant related literature in the following electronic databases: Roskilde University's library, Rex, Google Scholar, Det Kongelige Bibliotek (soeg.dk), one.com, and JSTOR, among others. As a part of the systematic review, references included in the articles found were also utilized to assist in finding more related literature.

To get more insights, it was also decided that the project must review how interest groups (NGOs or IGOs) and the Syrian refugee society perceive this regulation. Moreover, the sociological concepts and perspectives on mental health, which are explained in the conceptual framework and the secondary data gathered for the project, are used in the analysis chapter as frameworks to answer the research question. Lastly, the Zotero research tool was used to assist in accurately applying citations, references, and bibliography.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is an exploration of the existing scholarly studies related to the research problem concerning the effects of strict Danish refugee policies on Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark. This collected information will then assist in facilitating the analysis in the later part of this paper. The literature review is done in a thematic and chronological structure with (1) mental health and (2) refugee policies as the two main themes.

A. Mental Health and Refugees

The concept of mental health is defined and understood in various ways. Up to now, there is no coherent and precise interpretation of what it really means (Scheid, 2009). For instance, Isaac Ray (1893), the founder of the American Psychiatric Association, provided a definition of the term mental hygiene as *"the art of preserving the mind against all incidents and influences calculated to deteriorate its qualities, impair its energies, or derange its movements"* (Wallace, 1995). On the other hand, sociologists believe that mental health is associated with an individual's social life which includes that person's level of social integration, inequality in society, and different valuable collective belief systems (Horwitz, 2009).

Most of the data gathered here show the prevalence of mental health issues amongst refugees with PTSD and depression being the most mentioned and studied (Gleeson et al., 2020; Hynie, 2018). Data show that refugees have higher mental health issues rates than the general population (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022). According to the European Journal of Psychopathology, the most common pre-migration traumas are war (85%) and exposure to potentially life-threatening situations (79%). However, to what extent these life circumstances lead to poor mental health problems and to which trauma exposure characteristics directly impact PTSD and psychiatric co-morbid severity among Syrian refugees, based on the studies, is still unclear (Gleeson et al., 2020).

Nickerson also mentioned that the strong association between PTSD, anxiety and depression symptoms was shown by refugees who were exposed to traumas (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022). Lived experiences of trauma are defined in relation to experiences 'living in a war-affected area; the experience of the death of someone close; experiencing life-threatening accident; experiencing life-threatening accident of a someone close; experiencing someone close's torture; experiencing the abduction or being taken hostage of someone close; experiencing torture; and experiencing someone else's torture, beating or sexual abuse' (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022). It also became crucial to address these issues to ensure the integration of refugees into their new environments. According to the UNHCR, refugees go through several stages that can influence future mental problems:

- **Pre-migration:** direct exposure to armed conflict, violence, poverty or persecution.
- **Migration travel:** exposure to challenging and life-threatening conditions during their migration to the host country.
- **Post-migration:** barriers to accessing health care and other services to meet their basic needs as well as poor living conditions, separation from family members and support networks, possible uncertainty regarding immigration status, or in some cases immigration detention.
- **Integration and settlement:** unemployment, language barriers, assimilation difficulties, challenges to cultural, religious, and gender identities, changing policies in host countries, racism and exclusion, and possible deportation.

Some scholars have similar points of view regarding the mental health of refugees despite their different fields of study. For instance, many scholars argue that the mental health of refugees is expressed in symptoms of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), resulting from the social traumas experienced in their home country. These scholars say that there is a strong relationship between the complexity of trauma and psychological disorder: the more types of traumas to which participants were exposed, the greater the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression symptoms they exhibited (Nickerson et al., 2015). These studies discuss the types and frequency of pre-migration trauma in relation to refugees' post-migration mental health conditions. Among the 20 scholarly studies collected, the following are the most mentioned variables that affect refugees' mental well-being:

I. Employment and Financial Resources

Financial freedom is an important factor that is found to be linked to the mental health of refugees and asylum seekers after resettling in their host countries. Refugees, as they left their home countries with only survival in mind, may not be able to provide proper documentation of their educational attainment or evidence of previous job experiences which may be vital in seeking employment. On top of this, they must learn to speak the language of their host countries and await to be given the right to work legally. This situation, unfortunately, leads to unemployment for a lot of refugees and asylum seekers. Research shows that unemployment does not only affect an individual's mental health, but also has 'an impact on one's status and sense of self-worth.' (Hynie, 2018). In addition, it also adds symptoms of depression (Gleeson et al., 2020).

II. Resettlement

When it comes to resettlement, the topic of mental health issues is viewed differently from one study to another. A study by Hynie (2018) shows that "overcrowding and inadequate housing have consistently been linked to poorer mental health outcomes in the general population." (Hynie, 2018). On top of that, refugees are most likely to receive poor quality resettlement and experience overcrowding since they cannot afford to pay for adequate housing, in relation to the first variable which is unemployment and lack of financial resources in host countries (Hynie, 2018). Moreover, significantly mentioned in studies is that the short validity of residence permits among refugees is related to increased PTSD symptoms (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022; Kashani, 2021). An analysis of Denmark's Immigration and Integration Policies concerning refugees and asylum seekers by Kashani even mentioned displacement as a process of grief having to deal with the loss of the life they've known and lived, people they know, and leaving their homeland which could all be contributing factors to the existence of mental health issues among refugees and asylum seekers (Kashani, 2021).

On the other hand, Kashani (2021) further mentions that although the traumatic experiences of Syrian refugees in their pre-, during and post-migration experiences contribute to poor mental health outcomes, they also have "positive effects of 'potentially traumatizing experiences on cognitive-cultural integration.'" This means that those traumas encourage Syrian refugees to settle, stay, and integrate into their host countries such as Denmark (Kashani, 2021). Additionally, an analysis made by Hynie mentions that the

duration of displacement is linked to poorer mental health among refugees and asylum seekers. The longer the duration of being placed in a highly stressful environment gradually deteriorates their mental health condition (Hynie, 2018).

Contrastingly, Gleeson (2020) in his study relating to post-migration factors and mental health outcomes of refugees, found that residency is not a variable that affects the mental health of refugees. He mentioned that "loneliness, discrimination, and communication or language problems" are the factors that constitute the issues in refugee resettlement. Furthermore, the sense of safety and security is associated with the improvement of refugee mental health (Gleeson et al., 2020).

III. Social Life and Support

Separation from family and social circles is also one of the most mentioned variables of poor mental health conditions among refugees and asylum seekers (Eiset et al., 2020; Hynie, 2018; Solberg et al., 2021). This includes the timeline from pre-, mid-, and post-migration settings (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022; Kashani, 2021; Solberg et al., 2021).

In her research where she followed refugees up to five years after their displacement, Hynie (2018) found that the separation of family members contributed to stress among refugees and is an essential factor in mental health disorders such as depression. Although separation from family shows a negative effect on refugees' mental health, some studies suggest that being with one's family causes additional stress because of the refugees' poor economic condition in the host country (Aysazci-Cakar et al., 2022). Furthermore, integration and socialization in their host country could be affected due to their pre-existing psychological conditions caused by their displacement. This issue is considered a significant factor in refugees' social integration in the host country which includes learning the language, finding employment, and fitting into the society's norms and culture (Kashani, 2021).

Tinghög et al. (2017) also stresses that the separation of refugee families brings guilt and powerlessness in relation to their "inability to protect their families from difficulties back home" (Gleeson et al., 2020). Refugees coming from the Middle East have strong family ties as part of their culture, meaning that they become emotionally dependent on members of their family. It affects them as a unit which means that if one member is experiencing trauma, it results in all the other family members feeling it (Cheung Chung et al., 2018).

IV. Discrimination

Refugees in Denmark have been found to have a high level of PTSD (Andersen et al., 2020). One study shows that for every 1,000 Syrian refugees, there are 87 cases of PTSD (Eiset et al., 2020). Scholars argue that restrictive policies have a negative influence on mental health. They stated examples where refugees are represented as the main problem such as in the context of Denmark. The Danish government removed chances for refugees to have permanent residency until an unforeseeable future (Kashani, 2021). In this context, the refugee does not perceive a sense of belonging in the host country which is considered a source of stress. The Lancet Global Health Restrictive highlighted that policies, including those pertaining to temporary visas, detention, and reduced access to welfare support, are linked to a greater risk of poor general and mental health, as well as mortality among

migrants, relative to native populations and migrants who did not experience such restriction (Juárez et al., 2019). Therefore, it is believed that Denmark's temporary integration approach to refugees will develop poorer overall refugee health compared to that of countries with an assimilationist approach (e.g., Sweden and Norway) (Dunlavy et al., 2021).

As mentioned, a refugee's mental well-being is highly affected by the hospitality, the extent of feeling welcomed, and the 'experienced hostility' in the host country (Hynie, 2018). Hynie (2018) indicates that high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression are linked to the daily intake of hostility and discrimination among Colombian refugees in Ecuador. This shows that mental health issues are not only affected by internal variables but also external ones (Hynie, 2018). A study by Jannesari et al. (2020) gained evidence which suggests that discrimination and social isolation are associated with the increase in mental health disorders among refugees and asylum seekers. It is suggested that the rise in discrimination due to anti-immigrant sentiments and restrictive policies on the freedom and entitlements of asylum seekers worldwide would lead to adverse outcomes in their mental health (Jannesari et al., 2020). Contrastingly, Hynie (2018) cited that refugees eventually cope and recover, and the level of distress lessens within a year of resettlement in the host country. The post-migration situation of these refugees highly affects their mental health all throughout resettlement and moving forward to their integration into their host countries (Hynie, 2018).

B. *Refugee Policies*

A study by Canning (2021) shows that recent refugee policies are leaning away from the integration of refugees. For instance, in Denmark, a General Health Assessment (GHA) used to be provided to all newly arrived refugees as a part of their integration into Danish society. However, it is now only being offered optionally to all newly resettled refugees in Aarhus and Copenhagen after some legislative amendments made in the Danish Integration Act in 2016 (Andersen et al., 2020). Canning (2021) mentions that "asylum systems across Europe are 'hostile environments' for migrant groups, and that it is acknowledged by academics and practitioners since the 2015 refugee reception crises (Canning, 2021). This research also shows that restrictive policies affect not only the refugees and asylum seekers but also the workers in the system who accommodate and assist them in person. Restrictive asylum systems and refugee policies have taken away the human in this supposedly humanitarian act (Canning, 2021). Contrastingly, scholars with a focus on the socio-political point of view argue that traumas have a point of departure in the refugees' home country. Their findings show that refugee mental health is affected by pre-migration experiences and post-migration challenges caused by the social environmental factors in the land of settlement (host country) (Murray, 2021).

The Danish Aliens' Consolidation Act No. 239 (2019) states that national security is the fundamental concept on which policies are constructed (The Danish Immigration Service & SIRI, 2022). It is reflected in the concurrent intentions of the Danish immigration politics which aim to protect Denmark's national integrity by restricting the number of refugees from seeking protection in the country. The policies L87, L50, L153, and L180 can potentially devastate refugees' psychological conditions by increasing their insecurities and

uncertainties (Kashani, 2021). "The whole idea of establishing refugee camps was to pressure people to go back. To give up their hopes of staying in Denmark." (Murray, 2021). For instance, the policy L180, and the Aliens' Consolidation Act of 2019, emphasize returning refugees to their country when the situation in their homeland allows it, regardless of how many years they have been working and living in Denmark (Kashani, 2021).

Denmark stands out from the other Nordic countries as having more restrictive integration policies across all studied policy domains (Canning, 2021). It is classified by the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) as an unfavorable policy environment for refugee integration (Dunlavy, 2021). The country uses the strategy of 'negative nation branding' with the aim to decrease the number of asylum seekers opting to come to Denmark. Moreover, it makes it harder for refugees to stay. This paradigm shift was initiated by the former minister for integration Inger Støjberg and has since been echoed by other politicians which eventually led to the prime minister's announcement of the government wanting zero asylum seekers in Denmark (colloquially termed as the Zero Asylum Seekers Policy) (Strzyżyńska, 2022). The end goal is to make the country an 'unattractive' destination for asylum seekers and refugees (Tømming & Tømming, 2022).

An analysis of the Danish immigration and integration policies by Kashani (2021) highlighted policies that target exclusion towards asylum seekers and refugees. Policy L87, which focuses on family reunification and residency permits, argues that refugees threaten Danish society. This policy includes decreasing welfare benefits and postponing family reunification as a solution to making Denmark less attractive and eventually decreasing the population of refugees, which may lead to 'ethnic cohesion.' L50 is an amendment concerning religious leaders and preachers coming to Denmark. This policy requires religious leaders to undergo classes in Danish family law, freedom, and democracy and sign a declaration of commitment to Danish laws. In Kashani's analysis, this policy suggests that Denmark fears religious cohesion, and threats to security, believing that the radicalization of second-generation refugees who failed to integrate into Danish society happens in their sacred spaces. Policies L153 (2017) and L180 (2018) are concerned with refugee residency permits and requests. Through these policies, the protection of the state against violence is given one year at a time and re-evaluated with every application. The researcher argues that these policies are implemented to keep refugees 'under surveillance' (Tømming & Tømming, 2022).

Tømming & Tømming (2022) also reiterates that refugee policies in Denmark have leaned away from integration making refugees insecure about vital key elements such as employment and social opportunities to succeed in their host countries. The authors suggest that the life of refugees in Denmark is that of a precariat - a social class who lives in uncertainty and lack of security and that this becomes their identity as a group. Refugees, as the precariat, show insecurity in aspects of their lives living in a temporary headspace. As the authors mention, most of their interviewees do not see the effectiveness of the integration process, and all of them spoke out about "a level of insecurity due to their weak connection to the labor market as the work they were put to do result in either no permanent position or offered no opportunity for upward mobility" (Tømming & Tømming, 2022, 62). They also expressed their economic insecurity, and that even while working hard and contributing to Danish society, they are still deemed as 'failed citizens'. This perception, and the fact that their residency in Denmark is only temporary limit the extent of their social

integration (Tømming & Tømming, 2022). Furthermore, the authors cite that these experiences sum up to a “feeling of helplessness and defeat as their lives, no matter how hard they tried, seemed unchangeable” (Tømming & Tømming, 2022, 62).

In addition, research by Jacobsen reiterates that clause 7.3 of the Aliens Consolidation Act (2019) serves “as a legal mechanism of socio-spatial and temporal b/ordering that works through an intimate register, produces a series of displacements, and limits refugees’ access to protection under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the amending 1967 Protocol (hereinafter ‘the 1951 Convention’)” (Jacobsen, 2022, p. 820). This analysis suggests that section 7.3 risks the refugees being once more displaced from the life they have built in Denmark and once again being forcibly ‘returned’ to the place they have escaped from (Jacobsen, 2022).

As a result of this review of related literature, it is discovered that there are a good number of existing scholarly studies discussing the effects of refugee policies on refugee mental health. The findings show that stern policies seem to have adverse effects on refugees’ psychological state. However, there is a lot more to explore on whether strict Danish refugee policies influence refugee mental health which is where the topic of this study lies. There is yet a study to be made studying the mental health of Syrian refugees affected since the Danish government’s declaration of Syria as ‘safe’.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mental health and illness can be viewed through different fields of study. However, in this research, the sociological perspective on mental health is specifically deployed which means analyzing the impacts of social and environmental factors on a person’s psychological well-being. The vital concepts and theories applied in this study are operationalized in this chapter to assist in understanding the entirety of the project. Here, it is discussed how an individual’s mental health can be affected by the social environment the person is exposed to.

A. The Sociology of Mental Health

In this study, the sociological approach to mental health which mainly emphasizes the study of mental disorders is used. The perspective of mental health discusses how society, its structures, and reactions affect human behavior and can result in mental health issues (Scheid, 2009). In other words, the social context is essential in how psychological disorders are experienced, diagnosed, and treated (Scheid, 2009). According to (Henriksen et al., 2020), mental health can be divided into three categories: a) clinical mental health disorders, b) subclinical mental ill health, and c) the human condition. Clinical mental health disorders are the most known psychological disorders because they are evaluated and diagnosed by healthcare professionals through various psychological examinations. They become “official” but treatable with the help of experts in the field. The second category, subclinical mental ill health, consists of any psychological conditions which are not extreme or critical enough to be recognized clinically. Lastly, the human condition denotes the recurrent feelings and experiences of distress and hardships which are a part of being alive (Henriksen et al., 2020).

The focus of this study is not on the clinical aspect as diagnoses are executed by professionals in the psychiatric field. Instead, this research aims to understand how the human condition which consists of everyday social environmental trials is associated with mental health disorders. According to the World Health Organization (2022), those who are subjected to unfortunate conditions such as violence, inequality, trauma, and poverty, have an increased risk of developing psychiatric conditions. Furthermore, WHO emphasized that anybody struggling with a mental illness needs enough social support and available medical treatments (World Health Organisation, n.d.).

The Social Stress Theory explores the best or most common ways of coping with stress. Coping means an individual's efforts to either avoid stressors or minimize the perceived stress (Mossakowski, 2014). Sociologists have named several resources for coping, which include social support from friends and/or family, higher self-esteem, and the overall sense of being in control of one's own life (Mossakowski, 2014). Unfortunately, lack of access to these things is not uncommon in refugees as loneliness and isolation have also been frequently observed among them. Things that contribute to a sense of being isolated include discrimination which might be ethnicity- or religion based, as well as the apparent communication problems that come with language barriers (Schwartz & Meyer, 2010).

B. Social Environment and the Social Stress Theory

The social environment is defined as the various physical, social, and cultural interactions and conditions a person is exposed to. It is the whole society that comprises the government, power relations, social inequality, race relations, social and economic systems, cultural beliefs, etc. (Barnett & Casper, 2001). According to Emile Durkheim, one of the considered fathers of modern sociology, the society we live in consists of 'social facts' which are everything in the society that is external to us, and affect how we live, feel, behave, and think. They are realities outside our control which can impact our behavior and way of life. Social facts are a part of an individual's social environment which include norms, laws and regulations, values, beliefs, and traditions (Dillon, 2014). Durkheim believed that when these facts make people feel that they are a part of society, the sense of belonging emerges which is vital to and positively affects social integration (Dillo, 2014).

Modern studies support the notion that social integration is vital to an individual's psychological health. For instance, Thoits (2009) stated that healthy interactions and the frequency of social contact with other people in the community play a big role in the promotion of good mental health. People who are integrated socially are better at surviving and coping with any kind of unfortunate experiences (House et al., 1988). They receive more support from their relationships which helps strengthen their mental health.

The aim of this research is to study how refugees' social environment impacts their mental health. The focal point is on how strict Danish policies, specifically the Alien's Consolidation Act of 2019 section 7.3 and the government's declaration of Syria as safe, act as additional social stressors which influence the affected refugees' psychological state in Denmark.

The sociological lens applied to explore and understand the problem area is referred to as the Social Stress Theory by Hans Selye (1936). This theoretical concept suggests that mental

health can be affected by various social, environmental, and economic stressors and that socially disadvantaged groups are more vulnerable to increased stress levels (Schwartz & Meyer, 2010). It claims that exposure to severe negative or chronic social stressors and strains negatively impacts an individual's mental health. Here, the terms 'stress' or 'stressor' mainly refer to significant happenings in a person's life which also include severe and constantly recurring strains which can result to negative psychological conditions (Thoits, 2009). The theory proposes that *"Ongoing difficulties (sometimes called chronic strains) are almost as important as severe negative events in predicting depression"* (Thoits, 2009, p. 110). *"In other words, acute events, and chronic strains (the latter defined as environmental demands that require repeated or daily readjustments in behavior over long periods of time) are causally implicated in various forms of mental illness, from mild to severe.* Moreover, 'hassles' are also considered by researchers as a type of stressor that may cause negative mental health condition (Kanner et al., 1980). The term 'hassles' refers to minor circumstances that one needs to deal with and may affect behavior, such as missing the train and misplacing a valuable.

As a development of the Social Stress Theory, Holmes and Rahe (1967) created a questionnaire called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) which lists 40 different social stressors, particularly major life happenings, and daily hassles. The events listed on the scale are considered as stressful episodes in life where major behavioral and emotional adjustments are needed. The SRRS assumes that those who experienced more stressful life situations and scored higher on the scale suffer more stress and have an increased risk of acquiring mental health disorders (Mossakowski, 2014). Examples of these life happenings include the death of a close family member, significant personal injury, or illness, or serving a jail term (Mossakowski, 2014). In this research, the Social Stress Theory (combined with the SRRS) is used as the framework to comprehend how the declaration of Syria safe and the stern application of the clause 7.3¹ contribute to Syrian refugees' mental health conditions in Denmark. Examples of post-migration social strains observed in Syrian refugees in Denmark include the unpleasant living conditions in refugee camps, separation from or death of loved ones, inability to find a job, prejudices (racism and xenophobia), and most importantly, the thought of having one's Danish residence permit revoked anytime, among others.

To further establish the standpoint of this study, the social environmental factors are divided into two categories: (1) pre-migration and (2) post-migration, with only the latter as our focal point. Pre-migration social environmental factors include all the circumstances refugees have experienced in their home country, such as persecution, violence, sexual harassment, death of loved ones in the war, etc. On the contrary, social environmental determinants in the post-migration stage comprise the conditions refugees are exposed to in their home country (i.e., in this research, Denmark), including living conditions, cultural differences, integration policies, etc.

¹ Refer to page 2, the Brief Summary of the Danish Aliens' Consolidation Act No. 239, Section 7

C. Refugee and Asylum Seekers

In this study, we define the term “refugee” as a person, regardless of race and nationality, who leaves his home country and seeks protection in another because he is compelled to due to fear of aggression, persecution, violence, or disaster in his homeland (United Nations, n.d.). Moreover, an “asylum seeker” refers to an individual who is forced to leave his country due to violations of human rights, life-threatening conditions, or because not doing so would lead to persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, or political beliefs (Amnesty International, n.d.). Refugees are protected by international laws such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. This regulation states that *“a refugee should not be returned to a country where he or she faces serious threats to his or her life or freedom”* In this study, we focus specifically on Syrian refugees. They are permanent residents of Syria who had to flee the country in 2011 because of the Syrian civil war (UNHCR, 2022).

According to the Danish immigration service, Syrian refugees can apply for asylum in Denmark if they meet the following condition: (1) being outside the country of one’s nationality, and (2) having a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” (The Danish Immigration Service, n.d.-a). According to the Danish Alien’s Act of 2019 section 7, Syrian refugees can only be granted temporary residence permits in Denmark, and their right to reside in the country terminates when they are no longer in need of protection. Thus, when the Danish government declared Syria as ‘safe’ in 2019, the above-mentioned legislative clause was applied to revoke the residence permits of thousands of Syrian refugees in Denmark. Before the amendments made in section 7 of this act, refugees were granted residence permits with the possibility of being granted a permanent one (The Danish Immigration Service, n.d.-b). The changes made were in line with the authorities’ announcement of not wanting any asylum seekers in Denmark in 2019.

D. Zero Asylum Seekers in Denmark

The Zero Asylum Seekers Policy is a term coined to refer to the Danish government’s goal of not having any asylum seekers apply for refuge in Denmark. It is a series of legislative changes implemented by the authorities to ensure that asylum-seeking and staying as a refugee in Denmark becomes challenging enough to eventually encourage nobody to seek shelter as a refugee in the country (European Commission, 2022). One of these amendments was clause 7.3 of the Danish Alien’s Consolidation Act of 2019, which emphasizes that refugees’ residency in Denmark is only temporary as long as the alien is at risk of suffering from violence, torture, and other unfortunate circumstances in his home country (Ministry of Immigration and Integration, 2019). This objective became more explicit when, in 2019, prime minister Mette Frederiksen publicly declared the government’s commitment to having ‘zero asylum seekers’ in Denmark (Strzyżyńska, 2022).

This history started in 2015 when the war in Syria broke out, and several Syrians travelled to Europe to seek safe shelter (Singhvi, 2022). Due to this influx, the Danish government decided to initiate a regulation that allowed Syrian refugees to temporarily reside in the country until Syria’s situation improves and it is considered safe enough to return to (Singhvi, 2022). Unfortunately, this legislation was not designed to safeguard and support refugees’

long-term integration and residence (European Commission, 2022). Thus, in 2019, when the Danish government finally declared the Damascus region in Syria safe for return, several Syrian refugees' residence permits were revoked. This decision was made despite many controversies regarding the actual security situation in Syria. Furthermore, according to Ritzau (2022), 11 out of 12 sources do not agree with Denmark's claim that Damascus is safe, which still does not stop the authorities from following (Ritzau/The Local, 2021). Niels Erik Hansen, a human rights lawyer, interprets this act by the Danish government as a tactic to push for the zero-asylum vision in Denmark by showing those asylum seekers who wish to come to Denmark, that they most likely will be sent home and they should rather seek asylum elsewhere (VICE News, 2021).

The most recent initiative of the Danish government towards having zero asylum seekers in Denmark started in 2021. The proposal was to enable processing of asylum seekers in third-world countries outside Europe, for instance, Rwanda, to avoid having to protect them in Denmark. According to Rasmus Stoklund, the government party's immigration speaker, "If you apply for asylum in Denmark, you know that you will be sent back to a country outside Europe, and therefore we hope that people will stop seeking asylum in Denmark" (Specia, 2021). However, this project's focal point is not on this latest initiative. The goal of this research is to explore how the strict refugee policies in Denmark, most specifically the amendments made in section 7 of the Danish Alien's Consolidation Act and the declaration of Syria 'safe' affect Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Existing research studies suggest a correlation between strict refugee policies and refugee mental health. Specifically, in Denmark, a series of changes in legislation have been introduced making asylum seeking and being a refugee in the country more challenging (European Commission, 2022). These amendments are colloquially known as the 'Zero Asylum Seekers Policy' (Strzyżyńska, 2022). As a result, Syrian refugees in Denmark have been experiencing post-migration stressors and social-environmental challenges which may affect their mental health.

This chapter aims to analyze how Syrian refugees' thoughts and social environmental experiences since the new policy was implemented are associated with their psychological health. 33 secondary interview data were collected from 41 different online news articles, television reports, and documentaries dating from 2019 to the present. This information was then analyzed to find patterns or recurring themes. Furthermore, the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967) was used as a framework to identify themes in the analysis. This scale consists of 43 life events ranked based on their stress value. For instance, some experiences may have a long-lasting impact on mental and physical health, while others exert only a short-term influence. According to the scale, individuals who have suffered from the loss of close family members have a higher risk of experiencing a higher amount of stress than those who have encountered changes in work conditions (Thoits, 2009). The same stress score can refer to different life events in different

individuals. The stress score scale generalizes the possible outcomes which can lead to mood, illness, depression, and other mental disorders (Thoits, 2009).

The following section presents and analyzes all the collected interview data by categorizing them into three main themes based on the SRRS: (1) separation from immediate family members, (2) fear of persecution, and (3) regret over life, education, or work in Denmark.

A. Separation from Immediate Family Members

Based on the collected data, the sentiment of separation from one's family is the most mentioned and expressed among the interviewees. Syrian refugees who have been granted protection under section 7.3 of the Danish Alien's Act of 2019 are only granted temporary protection. They are allowed to stay in the country if there is still a general threat in their home country. However, in 2019, the government of Denmark decided to declare Damascus 'safe' and used this as a ground to reject a number of Syrian refugees' residency applications following section 7.3. As a result, families are separated (or at risk to be separated) since applications for residency in Denmark are done individually, not as a family.

"I'm afraid they'll separate me from my family or separate my family from me. That they'll give me a residence permit while they won't give my family residence permit" – Aya Abu-Daher (Poulton et al./ Guardian News and Media, 2022).

Aya has been the face of resistance against this policy since her story broke out in the Danish media in 2021. She escaped from the war in Syria and came to Denmark with her family in 2015. She then integrated with society, learned the language, and began her studies. Unfortunately, in March 2021, a few months before her student exams, she received a letter from the government stating the rejection of her residency in Denmark.

"We're still talking about the regime that I fled from, and they are still there. And the things I experienced under his regime; I will never want to experience again. So therefore, I would rather die here, than go back and experience it all again. Plus, I have no one left there, I have no family. I have no house because my house was bombed. Also, I only have bad memories from there" – Aya Abu-Daher (Poulton et al./ Guardian News and Media, 2022).

A lot of Syrian refugees come to Denmark either with their family or follow a family member. Like Aya, most Syrian refugees have their living family members with them in the country without anybody left alive in Syria because of the war. This sentiment is shared by Faeza Satouf who is the only one in her family to receive a residency rejection letter from the government.

"I was very upset, and I started to cry. It is not safe to return. They come with an inhuman refusal. Here I am doing an education, I am doing a job, and I feel that I can make a lot of dreams come true. My life is here, and I have seen nothing but war in Syria. This is where my dreams can come true. My family is here in Denmark, my house is here, why should I return? I can't do that" – Faeza Satouf (Friis, 2021).

Another Syrian refugee who is the only one in her family to receive a rejection letter is Sahar Elrifai. She was in tears and clear distress in a video interview conducted by DW News right when she received her rejection letter.

"They say I was rejected. My residence permit won't be renewed. My mother and younger brother could stay. I am the only one being expelled,"

"When I was in Syria there were battles and bombs. Here I feel much safer, I have my family here and this is where I grew up. I am part of the Danish society" – Sahar Elrifai (DW News, 2022).

In a follow-up article by B.T. about her battle to stay in Denmark, Sahar refuses to leave Denmark voluntarily. Since she was confined in an asylum detention center, she has been suffering from lack of sleep and sorrow over missing her mother.

"I can't sleep at night. The thoughts just keep running: When am I going home to my mother? When will I get a residence permit again? When will it end? I can't stop it" – Sahar Elrifai (Patscheider, 2022).

Both Ghalia and Mariam Karim also mention lack of sleep. This can be interpreted as a sign of stress as they think about all the challenging situations brought about by Denmark's announcement of Damascus as safe. Mariam, who is also pregnant and recently got married, shares that she has no mental capacity to prepare the room for her unborn child.

"Before the decision, we had a lot of plans, but I don't have the energy to think about them. I have stress every day and I have difficulty sleeping at night" – Mariam Karim (Martensen & Sircic, 2022).

Furthermore, Ghalia mentions how she feels about not having any control over her life as a result of the Danish authorities' announcement of wanting zero asylum seekers in the country.

"I'm right back to that point when I first arrived in Denmark and feel helpless all the time,"

"I have no control over my life and I feel like I haven't done anything to deserve this" – Ghalia (McKernan et al., 2021).

All the Syrian interviewees mentioned above integrated, studied, and had jobs in Denmark, but now they are unable to continue studying and working because of the rejection of their residency permits. The refusal does not allow them to do anything else but appeal or voluntarily return to Syria. They have all done what was expected of them as refugees which is to integrate and contribute to Danish society, but nothing is enough. Their integration, education, and working status in Denmark can be interpreted as signals of coping. It means that they have gained social environmental resources which supported and motivated them to go on with their new life in Denmark despite their unfortunate past experiences. Unfortunately, the declaration of Damascus as 'safe' despite the contradicting reality and the application of the Danish Alien's Act Section 7.3 to Syrian refugees' residency permits take

away this vital support system they need to cope and live soundly in the country. Furthermore, these legislations force them back to the state they were in before which caused them pre-migration traumas.

Additionally, in the SRRS, the theme of separation from one's family members can be equally associated with marital separation, death of a family member or close friend, leaving home, change in living conditions, and change in residence. As Thoits (2009) mentions, family and friends are vital social coping channels for individuals. Undeniably, the legislations discussed in this section results in the separation of family members which can therefore be interpreted as a stress factor for many Syrian refugees. Lack of or no access to support systems and coping strategies can cause problems with mental health.

B. *Fear of Persecution*

Another evident recurring pattern observed from the collected interview data is the fear of persecution or being arrested and put to jail in Syria once the refugees return home (Amnesty International, 2022). "These people fear, with good reason, being sent back to imprisonment, torture and, in the worst case, death" (Amnesty International, 2022). And already now, the uncertain waiting major human consequences.

The Assad regime and its loyalists view Syrian refugees as traitors and dissidents. Human rights monitors have identified cases of returnees being harassed, detained without any charge, tortured, and even disappearing ((Hergel & Houborg, 2021), 2021). Thousands of Syrians searched and found safety in Denmark, and now the fear of returning to Assad's regime raises terror in their eyes and soul. These concerns are expressed by Ibrahim Satouf, who fears that his daughter will face the same experience he once encountered.

"This is how we sat in prison. We were 115 men in a room the size of this living room. We couldn't move. Every day the guards came with a bucket of potatoes. There was one for each day. In one corner of the room, there was a hole. It was the toilet," (Hergel & Houborg, 2021).

"If you had experienced what I have experienced, you would let your daughter travel," (Hergel & Houborg, 2021).

"What should I say? She is my daughter. No father in the world would send his daughter back to a country where we have experienced what we have experienced. I carried her on my shoulders when I was going there" – Ibrahim (Hergel & Houborg, 2021).

Ibrahim's daughter, Faeza, addressed the following statement to the Danish authorities:

"I would like to tell them that they have no idea what they are talking about. They have never sat in an apartment that has been searched. They have never lived under Assad. Never sat in a class where close friends were killed and had to walk over dead bodies to getaway" – Faeza (Hergel & Houborg, 2021).

Another Syrian refugee couple, Omar and Al-Natour who have two sons, arrived in Denmark in 2014. They have established a decent life in Denmark and acquired a small business:

"My husband and I opened a shop selling Arabic products, it was going well. Then I decided to resume my studies, but now everything has just stopped," says Al-Natour, who "just wants to get (her) life back" (The Times of India, 2021).

However, the thought of the rejection of their residence permits raised many criticisms towards the Danish government. Amnesty International stated that Syrian security forces "use of violence against dozens of refugees who returned home" (The Local, 2021). Meanwhile, the Danish authorities claim Syria is safe to return to despite this ongoing reality.

"Going back to Syria means going to prison, or even death, since we're opposed to Bashar al-Assad. He's a criminal" – Al-Natour (The Times of India, 2021).

A similar perspective was expressed by Dania Al Kholi, a refugee from Damascus who has been living in Kolding since 2015. During an interview with the Danish press, she confidently answered the following:

- Do you think you risk being killed in Syria? "Yes"

- What makes you think that? *"In the eyes of the Syrian regime, we have turned our backs on the regime. We are either tortured or arrested. Assad has said that those who have turned their backs on the country are traitors. He has killed so many people and sent so many to flight, and you can't trust him and think he won't do anything to us" – Dania Al Kholi (Kristiansen, 2021).*

Additionally, Dania has expressed her uncertainties about her future once she returns to Syria.

"We have lost our house; it has been bombed and all our friends and family have left the country. But I can't think about it. I never think of going back because I know it would be dangerous for me and my family" (Kristiansen, 2021).

"It is a temporary residence permit, we knew that, but we had expected to be sent back only when there is complete peace in Syria. You cannot pull Damascus out of the pile and say it is safe, while all other parts of the country are not" (Kristiansen, 2021).

According to the SRRS model, the fear of being arrested and put to jail is a social-environmental stressor that can cause mental harm. Therefore, the following responses, on top of the existing fear of prison and torture, have shown anxiety symptoms expressed in stress, lack of sleep, and other health problems.

Raima, a Syrian teenager, has expressed herself through her letter dedicated to the prime minister where she mentioned:

“There is an anxiety that sits in me and many other people whose lives relate to a temporary residence permit. Anxiety that sits in people who are waiting for an answer from the Danish Immigration Service as to whether they can renew their residence permit. Anxiety that results from the stability we lack in our lives. An anxiety you do not consider when you make decisions that affect us and our lives. The anxiety is greatest among people who have been refused an extension of their residence permit. 205 Syrians have received this, including my closest friend and classmate, Aya Abu-Daher. I tried to describe the anxiety in Aya and people in her situation in my poem 'Repatriation ticket',” – Raima (Pye, 2021).

She has also stated that anxiety is present among her close friend Aya and other Syrians she met through the Danish Refugee Council Youth (DFUNK) organization:

“I can see the anxiety in Aya's eyes. The fear of returning to dictatorship. The fear of not being able to put on his student cap. I can see the anxiety among many of my friends and the young people I meet in our organization DFUNK. They feel at home in Denmark, but fear that at some point they will also be rejected due to the current immigration policy, where integration does not count. Denmark does not even send its diplomats to Syria because the Danish embassy in Damascus is not safe. Why then send Syrian citizens?” – Raima (Pye, 2021).

On top of that, an equivalent reaction to the possibility of returning to Syria has triggered deep depression and health problems for 53-year-old Nabil Alkhatib. According to an article from Politiken, one night before Nabil's hearing at the court, he collapsed, and his arm muscles cramped which might have happened because of excessive stress (Bolliger et al., 2022). He, therefore, ended up at a hospital in Copenhagen.

“Wires are attached to his torso to measure his heart rate. He grimaces and tries to position himself in a less painful position” – Nabil (Bolliger et al., 2022).

According to Alkhatib, he was doing well until a year ago. He had gained protection status in Denmark after leaving Syria. He hoped to start a new life with his wife Faten and their four children. But later, his temporary residence permit was cancelled by the Danish government. Alkhatib has been afraid of being sent back to Syria ever since (Bolliger, 2022).

“He suffers from depression and difficulty concentrating and has had to give-up his job in a logistics company” – Nabil (Bolliger et al., 2022).

Haitham Kurdi, a 61-year-old Syrian in Denmark, also received a rejection of his residence permit. At the Kaershovedgaard deportation center, evidence shows that he has grown depressed, developed tics, and barely eats (Peltier & Nielsen, 2022).

“Being here is like dying slowly,” – Kurdi Haitham (Peltier & Nielsen, 2022).

The reporters further write about what Kurdi's experience,

“In a recent interview from his shabby room at the Kaershovedgaard center in the town of Ikast in northern Denmark, where some asylum seekers who have been

rejected are held. But the prospect of returning to Syria is so terrifying, he said, that he would never go back” (Peltier & Nielsen, 2022).

Another challenge began in February 2021 when the Danish immigration authorities revoked Mohammed Tarek’s residency. This 58-year-old Syrian was, unfortunately, the only one among his family members who lost his residency in Denmark. This decision filled him with anxiety and fear and even mentions that his health became worse after the problems with his residency status begun. Furthermore, since the rejection of his residency, Mohammed also lost his right to work in the country (Alfred & Holst, 2022).

“I’m psychologically tired; I have diabetes, cholesterol, and blood pressure” (Alfred & Holst, 2022).

“We are under psychological and economic pressure—we can’t breathe, for now, the anxious wait continues” (Alfred & Holst, 2022).

Mohammed does not need to read articles regarding the risks of returning to Syria because he has already lost family members there. He knows what to expect.

“We fled the murderous regime; we participated in demonstrations in Denmark against the regime; how can we return now? If we are detained, we won’t have guarantees over our lives,” – Mohammed Tarek (Alfred & Holst, 2022)

Sahar Elrifai is a 21-year-old student in Denmark whose residency application process is not yet finalized. However, in her interview, she emphasized that the thought of being forced to go back to Syria makes her constantly stressed (Patscheider, 2022).

“They don’t know anything about what I’ve experienced and what it was like in Syria. There were bombs in front of our apartment, and people were shouting and screaming. It is not safe in Syria as long as Bashar al-Assad sits there” – Sahar Elrifai (Patscheider, 2022)

Most of these people are not yet sent back to Syria. However, as they await their appeal in deportation camps, their memories of the war, violence, death, and the trauma they experienced before their migration, are returning because of the announcement. Furthermore, these traumatic pre-migration realities may become present again.

Another case worth mentioning is the case of 26-year-old Tarek Kelani. He admitted that his traumatizing pre-migration experiences and his challenging journey to Denmark have caused him PTSD (Kelani, 2021).

“I have personally been through an incomprehensibly traumatizing journey on my way to Denmark, where I was kidnapped, sold, starved, shot at and imprisoned. I’m working on getting over that” – Tarek (Kelani, 2021).

Moreover, Tarek implied that sending him to Assad would not help maintain his mental health and sanity. Additionally, he mentioned that there is something that Danish citizens are presumably unaware of, but that the politicians probably know:

"The generals and troops in Assad's army brandish us as traitors and threaten to kill and persecute us if we ever leave. A well-known general in Syria has stated: "You must not come back because even if the state forgives you, we will not personally do it" (Alfred & Holst, 2022).

"Here, Danish politicians expect me to obey Danish legislation and say "Oh, damn it. I couldn't prove that I will be killed in Syria, too bad man. But I'd rather obey Danish legislation and travel down to my death" (Kelani, 2021).

However, Tarek mentions that many issues are captured with this policy. The Syrian refugees' security once they go back to Syria cannot be guaranteed by the Danish authorities. As many mentioned above, Assad's dictatorial regime and his promises cannot be trusted.

"It has been established that Assad is a war criminal and the Hitler of our time, which is why no agreement with him is guaranteed or binding" – Tarek (Kelani, 2021).

"If my residence permit is revoked tomorrow, based on my failure to document that my life is in danger in Syria, then I must choose between rotting in a deportation center or traveling down to my death in Syria" – Tarek (Kelani, 2021).

Being a refugee means being displaced suddenly, and often violently. Based on the gathered responses, these refugees are all marked by the trauma they experienced back home. Having their residency in Denmark revoked makes them feel profoundly helpless and forced to return to Assad's regime. This can go far beyond the diagnostic category of PTSD. Trauma is seen in all the responses. It is expressed in fear of persecution, and uncertainty about their safety with the gruesome thoughts of suffering from the same unfortunate past events again.

In the SRRS framework, the jail term is on the top of the scale. Concurrently, it is also one of the main recurring social stressors for Syrian refugees. According to the interviewees, being arrested and serving jail term is most likely to occur once they return to Syria since people who have left the country are seen as traitors by Assad's regime. These findings support our argument that the declaration of Damascus 'safe', and the austere application of refugee policies in Denmark have detrimental effects on the Syrian refugees' mental health. However, as the data were generated through already existing interviews and articles, the possibility of them being biased is high as we could have accessed only the worst cases.

C. Regret over Life, Education and/or Work in Denmark

Restarting life again and experiencing the same pre-migration stresses they have endured before having been putting a strain on the Syrian refugees in Denmark. Most interviewees mentioned putting their life, education, and work on hold because of this policy. For instance, Jasmin stood by her family outside the Danish Parliament and protested Denmark's inflexible refugee policies.

"Denmark loves to make international headlines about positive things about life here. Like the fact that it's supposed to be the happiest country in the world. But the fact that the happiest country in the world is destroying the lives of the most brutalized people in the world" – Jasmin (France 24 English, 2021).

Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe (1967) mentioned the importance of events in a person's life as grounds for crucial behavioral adjustments. Furthermore, they found that consistent and repeated adjustments to one's behavior have detrimental effects on an individual's capacity to cope and adapt, which can cause negative consequences on physical and mental health (Thoits, 2009).

Brown and Harris found that recurring unfortunate happenings and chronic strains lead individuals to increased risks of developing mental illnesses such as depression. In addition, they discovered that ongoing life challenges are as crucial as acute adverse circumstances in predicting psychological disorders (Thoits, 2009). They recognized that "acute events and chronic strains (the latter defined as environmental demands that require repeated or daily readjustments in behavior over long periods) are causally implicated in various forms of mental illness, from mild to severe" (Thoits, 2009, p. 110).

"It is as if the Danish immigration services has bombed my dream, just as Bashar al-Assad bombed our homes. Only this time the bombing is psychological" – Asmaa al-Natour (Peltier & Nielsen, 2021).

Asmaa's statement resembles much stress from dealing with traumas. She recalls her home being bombed by Assad, which has affected her not only physically, but also emotionally. Asmaa witnessed multiple deaths, while she longed, and fought for her survival. She compared her pre-migration trauma to her new social environmental reality in Denmark. The announcement of Syria 'safe' is bringing Syrian refugees back to where they started; to where all their traumas originated. Therefore, we can assume that the main reason behind their will to stay in Denmark, and their resistance to going back to Syria, are rooted in their pre-migration traumatic experiences. This means that they do not want to experience the same unfortunate circumstances in their home country again.

Aya also shares the same dilemma of being put into limbo. Only because she voiced out through the Danish media her resistance to going back to Syria in 2021, that she was able to re-appeal her residency and be granted a permit to stay in Denmark.

"Am I really in this situation again? Will there be a day where it all starts over? I lose my residency permit and they say yes Syria is safe again and I have to leave Denmark. No I won't. I simply won't. This has been a bad chapter in my life, and I really want to move on. But after I read this letter, I cannot move on. I'm really sad. I don't know how to describe my feelings right now. I'm happy because I've been granted a residence permit. But I'm still thinking, it is valid until 15th July 2023. And it ends when you no longer need protection. I can't. I can't move on with my life now. I hope I can. But I can't right now" – Aya Abu-Daher (Poulton et al./ Guardian News and Media, 2022).

In a follow-up article, Aya mentioned that she has put her dream of pursuing an education in nursing on hold and is currently working full-time for the possibility of applying for permanent residency after 3 years and 6 months of full-time work.

"I am not angry with anyone from Denmark. Denmark has given me a lot of help, they gave me a home and a safe place to sleep. But I am mad about some rules. For me, it is sometimes a bit difficult to live as a refugee in Denmark, especially the part about Denmark being for those who can and want to, but all of a sudden, no, Denmark is not for those who can and want to" – Aya Abu-Daher (Seidelin & Jonasdottir, 2022).

"Because it's not very cool to live in something that's temporary. You want us to integrate, but it's not easy when you can't get on with your life and don't know if you'll be kicked out before two years have passed. On the one hand, you are told that you have to do everything like the Danes, but on the other hand, you cannot start a proper life because you are constantly afraid of being thrown out" – Aya Abu-Daher (Korsgaard, 2022).

However, speaking through the media against the regime, and garnering attention for it does not guarantee a residency extension from the Refugee Board. Some just leave in regret of choosing Denmark to seek asylum in.

"You will waste your time and then you will be sent back,"

"I never want to go back to the Assad regime. They (immigration authorities) say that there is no danger in Syria. But that's a lie" – Syrian Nadia Almasri (Jensen & Wulff, 2022).

Since 1999, refugees have been protected by the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (European Commission, n.d.). The CEAS ensures that all EU member countries have equal responsibility of welcoming asylum seekers in a fair way and that no matter where the applicant applies, the outcome is the same. However, there are some flaws with the CEAS, as displayed during the 2015 migration crisis. Two of the main problems were that the processing of applications took too long, and some member states were unable to handle or commit to dealing with the uncontrolled arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. This led to differences in the criteria for granting protection, and the responsibility for managing migration was not shared fairly between EU states. Furthermore, the Dublin system also entails that refugees can only apply for asylum from one EU country, and if they ever re-apply asylum to another EU country, they will most likely be sent back to the first country they were granted asylum for (Jensen & Wulff, 2022).

"Some girls are having to quit their education as their parents are too worried that they'll be arrested or taken hostage by armed criminal groups or the regime. I won't go back there — I'd rather go to another country to try to seek asylum there." – Eilaf Alakkad (The Syria Campaign, 2021).

In a 2019 report by the Danish Immigration Service, there has been a record of 593 requests from other European countries to send back Syrians who fled Denmark. If they will be forced

to leave Denmark and be sent back to Syria, the Alkale family (Bilal the father, his wife Sawsan Doungham and two children Said and Majed) whose residencies in Denmark have been revoked, said that they would still take a chance and move to another European country even if they risk being sent back to Denmark (France 24, 2021). This point of view is also shared by other Syrian refugees.

"If I have to leave, I will go to any other country than Syria" – Mohammed Tarek (Alfred & Holst, 2022).

This action of moving to another EU country to seek asylum can be interpreted as a coping strategy for refugees who are dealing with the constant stresses caused by Danish policies. Bashir, a refugee, even mentioned that he regrets seeking asylum in Denmark instead of another country (Ogilvie, 2022). The head of asylums at the Danish Refugee Council, Eva Singer, said that they have been receiving a high volume of concerned calls from Syrian refugees who already have permanent residency and citizenship in Denmark because they fear that they might be included in this policy and will be sent back to Syria (Jensen & Wulff, 2022).

Anyhow, not all Syrians want to stay in Denmark; at least until they know that Syria is safe to return to. In an interview by Matthew Cassel of VICE News, he asked Susan Bashour if she regrets coming to Denmark with her two children. She responded with clear distress and tears falling down her face:

"Yes. Because of my children not because of me because I think that I destroyed their future when I chose to stay here" – Susan Bashour (VICE News, 2021).

She further stated that she would voluntarily go back to Syria and take her kids with her if their safety is without a doubt 100% secured. She emphasized that as long as Assad is in power, Syria is never truly safe. Like how Asmaa referred to the bombs in Syria, Susan also mentioned the same feeling of the bombs destroying their homes as the same with the announcement destroying the life they have built in Denmark.

"No. It's my country. If I know that it's safe, I will take my children and go back. But I know it's not safe for them to go back to Syria,"

"We were sitting in our home back in Syria. We had a day off and a car bomb blew everything up. Everyone was shocked. The doors were blown off. So, the same thing happened here, it's not a bomb exploding, but the news we got from the (Danish Immigration) court is the same thing. Everything we've done, everything we've made, everything we've built over three years in a foreign country, it's not easy seeing a person come and destroy it just like that. It's hard" – Susan Bashour (VICE News, 2021).

Susan's daughter, Tulip Bashour, who also received the rejection letter from the Danish Immigration Service, stated that they would rather take a chance to seek asylum in another European country than go back to Syria.

"And unfortunately, I know that it's going to be hard for me, but I think it's going to be less hard than traveling to Syria because I am sure that I will be alive and not arrested or killed by the Syrian government. And I can't expect anything, but I feel so bad and terrible because I know that the decision, they're going to take is going to change my destiny and this is what I am afraid of" – Tulip Bashour (VICE News, 2021).

In the SRRS, Holmes and Rahe have accounted for change, in work hours or conditions, change in residence, change in schools, and change in social activities as social stressors in a person's life. All these can be related to what many Syrian refugees have been dealing with because of the announcement – change in residence, work, plans, education, language, and social activities.

"My children do not speak Arabic. They speak Danish. I hope Danes understand that they feel Danish and cannot just be sent to Syria. We have learned your culture, rules, and language. If we are sent home, we are lost" – Edres Mostafa Mostafa (Eisenhardt et al., 2021).

According to Thoits (2009), the more life events a person experience in a short time frame, the greater the probability of sickness, and/or even death. Furthermore, mental health scholars suggest that it can be linked to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and generalized states of psychological distress (Thoits, 2009). Since the refugees are deprived of their rights to stay and are not able to do anything in Denmark, they develop stress symptoms. In this case, the need to pause or restart their life, education, and work all over again as an implication of the announcement can greatly affect their mental health.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to determine whether Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark is detrimentally affected by the austerity of Danish refugee policies. In particular, the focal point was to learn how the declaration of the Damascus region of Syria 'safe' and the application of the amended Danish Alien's Act section 7.3 influence their psychological well-being.

Firstly, the conclusion is that based on the scholarly studies collected in the review of related literature, there is a direct relationship between refugees' mental health and stern refugee policies which are a part of refugees' post-migration social environment. Research shows that many of these individuals, as they arrive in their host countries, already suffer from anxiety, depression, and PTSD because of their exposure to pre-migration traumatic experiences. When these individuals apply for asylum in another country such as Denmark, they are bound to follow specific rules pertaining to variables such as the waiting period for the approval of their residence permits and their integration into the host country's culture and society. According to studies, unfortunately, the asylum-seeking process perpetuates stress and worsens refugees' mental health as the procedure subject's asylum seekers to long waiting periods which can last for months or years. During this period, an asylum seeker is likely to have a social status that is among the lowest and most disadvantaged in the

country making the individuals in question vulnerable to chronic strains such as financial difficulties and uncertainties with their residence.

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, refugees should be protected and not be forced to return to their homeland, where they are at risk of experiencing severe life hazards or threats to freedom. Denmark has followed this regulation for many years under the Danish Alien Act section 7 until its government, in 2019, announced prematurely that the war in Syria has ceased despite its contradicting reality. Clause 7.3 states that refugees can only stay in Denmark if they need shelter from violence, persecution, and other harassment. Thus, the declaration of the Damascus region 'safe' resulted in thousands of Syrian refugees' residence permits being revoked. As a further consequence, this announcement left thousands of Syrian refugees worrying about their and their families' safety and losing their established lives in Denmark.

As shown in the analysis chapter, the 33 Syrian refugees interviewed after the declaration have been suffering from what the SRRS framework refers to as 'social stressors' and 'daily hassles'. All of them have been experiencing various kinds of stress due to the rejection of their residency in Denmark. Examples of these are contributors to or symptoms of anxiety such as lack of sleep, recurring financial difficulties, constant fear of separation from loved ones, and being forced to return to Syria, where they are at risk of getting persecuted, harassed, and/or even killed. According to the Social Stress Theory, acute adverse events, and chronic strains, like what the interviewees have been suffering from, put individuals at much higher risk of developing mental disorders, which can vary in severity. As also mentioned in the conceptual framework, recurring difficulties which can also be referred to as chronic strains, are as crucial as extreme unfortunate events in anticipating various mental disorders such as schizophrenia, anxiety attacks, depression, and generalized distress. In conclusion, the social environmental stresses caused by Denmark's announcement of Syria 'safe', and the stern application of refugee legislations such as the Danish Alien's Act section 7.3, have detrimental effects on Syrian refugees' mental health in Denmark. However, it is crucial to remember that these factors are only contributors to their psychological conditions; that there is no single element such as a policy that can influence one's mental state.

Additionally, it can be deduced that the variables mentioned above are just triggers of the Syrian refugees' previous fears and experienced traumas; thus, the issue does not lie solely in their inability to stay in the country. The conclusion is that these groups of people are afraid of losing their residency because they fear returning to Syria and enduring the same traumatic events they have been wanting to move on from and forget. Their will to stay in Denmark is rooted in their determination to secure their safety away from their unfortunate past. It is, however, essential to note that the findings and conclusions have their limitations, thus may not be representative of the whole Syrian population. Here are a few reasons: (1) the data was collected from secondary sources, which might have only shown the worst cases, (2) the influence of social environmental stressors varies from one individual to another because of differences in personalities and levels of social support, (3) every Syrian refugee was not affected by the announcement; in 2019, only 1,200 former residents of Damascus got their residency permits revoked although their whole population is 35,325, and (4) the SRRS framework used in the analysis has its limitations such as missing a lot of

other important social life events which can have an impact on an individual's mental health; for instance, it only includes the death of a spouse and loved ones, but does not include (forced) separation from them as a social stressor. Therefore, it is recommended that the SRRS framework be developed to cover a broader range of social life events that apply regardless of one's age, gender, or nationality.

Implications of the study

As mentioned in the introduction and the analysis, Denmark has been constantly changing its stance on refugees and asylum seekers depending on the will of the ruling leaders. Thus, as foreigners in the country who are subjects to the government's legislations, it is inevitable that refugees must follow whatever rules are set which include having their residency in the country ending when they do not expect it to. For now, applying for court appeals may help them remedy the existing issue as they are allowed to do so to get a reconsideration of their residence permits. Furthermore, as the Danish authorities can be replaced, it is also possible that the previous government decisions be amended depending on the new leaders' plans and perspectives. Though despite these facts, we recommend that any amendment to policies as such should only be applied to new applicants as continuously changing policies and applying them to everybody creates a big amount of uncertainty and chronic stress to any individual which is not helpful for maintaining sound mental health.

When it comes to the theory applied, the Social Stress Theory seems to be a good fit for analyzing groups of people which is what was done in this research. However, if the research allowed collection of primary data, a humanistic theoretical perspective could have been used to account how individual Syrian refugees cope with stress, hardships and overcome mental illnesses. A different perspective on this topic could also be conducted using a political lens as to why the Danish government declared Syria 'safe' despite the ongoing reality, or why they have been implementing such austere refugee policies in the country. The approach could still have been sociological but looking at other factors such as xenophobia and racism in the country.

Considering the existing scholarly studies, it is safe to state that, except for the use of a different approach and theory, there are similarities in our findings and that of the others. Furthermore, as we have not found any research focusing on the mental health of Syrian refugees in Denmark after the declaration of the Damascus region 'safe', this paper may be able to provide new knowledge to the academic community which can hopefully be beneficial for other researchers in the future. Finally, we conclude that Denmark's declaration of Syria as 'safe', despite the ongoing reality, and the application of the amended Danish Alien's Act of 2019 section 7.3, seem to be calculated moves to assist the government's vision of having 'zero' asylums in Denmark since 2019. The announcement became a legal ground to revoke many Syrian refugees' residence permits which is simultaneously an effective strategy to discourage future asylum seekers to apply in Denmark. This is something that can be further studied in a different research project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adami, M. (2021). Danish refugee law draws criticism from UN, EU – POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/denmark-refugee-law-asylum-migration-un-eu-international-protection/>
- Alfred, C., & Holst, B. (2022, January 11). How Denmark's hard line on Syrian refugees is an aid group's ethical dilemma. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2022/1/11/how-Denmark-hard-line-Syrian-refugees-aid-group-ethical-dilemma>
- Amnesty International. (n.d.). Refugees, Asylum-seekers and Migrants. Amnesty International. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>
- Amnesty International. (2022). Torture is barbaric, inhumane and has no place in society. Amnesty International. Retrieved December 17, 2022, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/torture/>
- Andersen, M. H., Kruse, A., Frederiksen, H. W., Ahmadi, A., & Norredam, M. (2020). Health status of refugees newly resettled in Denmark. *Danish Medical Journal*.
- Aysazci-Cakar, F., Schroder, T., & Hunt, N. (2022). A systematic review of prevalence and correlates of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety in displaced Syrian population. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, 10, 100397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadr.2022.100397>
- Barnett, E., & Casper, M. (2001, March). A definition of social environment. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/6f0b5190278f071b3ce9827bb6e95438/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=41804>
- Bendixen, M. C. (2021). Temporary protection status 7.3. refugees.dk. <http://refugees.dk/en/facts/legislation-and-definitions/more-about-art-7-3-temporary-protection-status/>
- Bendixen, M. C. (2021, January 20). Denmark: Lowest number of asylum seekers ever | European Website on Integration. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/denmark-lowest-number-asylum-seekers-ever_en
- Bendixen, M. C. (2021, June 10). Denmark: Muslim private schools found to better promote child integration than public schools | European Website on Integration. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/denmark-muslim-private-schools-found-better-promote-child-integration-public-schools_en
- Bolliger, M., Verschwele, L., Popp, M., & Katt, M. (2022, January 13). Flere Hundrede Syrere er Flygtet ud af Danmark, fordi de Ikke Føler Sig Trygge eller kan Lide Forholdene. *Politiken*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from https://politiken.dk/udland/art8562695/Flere-hundrede-syrere-er-flygtet-ud-af-Danmark-fordi-de-ikke-f%C3%B8ler-sig-trygge-eller-kan-lide-forholdenefbclid=IwAR13HPTYMROqTbTUxSZkVBUmt5fvk2ZjXhXG1cSqtW_OrVx-DQyVSi0SWsY
- Canning, V. (2021). Managing Expectations: Impacts of Hostile Migration Policies on Practitioners in Britain, Denmark and Sweden. *Social Sciences*, 10(2), 65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10020065>
- Cheung Chung, M., AlQarni, N., AlMazrouei, M., Al Muhairi, S., Shakra, M., Mitchell, B., Al Mazrouei, S., & Al Hashimi, S. (2018). The impact of trauma exposure characteristics on post-traumatic stress disorder and psychiatric co-morbidity among Syrian

- refugees. *Psychiatry Research*, 259, 310–315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2017.10.035>
- Dillon, M. (2014). *Introduction to Sociological Theory Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century (Second)*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Dunlavy, A. (2021). Health outcomes in young adulthood among former child refugees in Denmark, Norway and Sweden: A cross-country comparative study. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14034948211031408>
- DW News. (2022). Young women in Denmark face deportation to Syria. YouTube. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from Young women in Denmark face deportation to Syria | Focus on Europe
- Eisenhardt, A. K., Christensen, M. R., & Simonsen, T. B. (2021, May 28). Syriske Flygtninge Forlanger svar Fra Politikerne: "i Deres øjne er vi bare en indvandrerstrøm". *Politiken*. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from <https://politiken.dk/debat/art8226212/%C2%BBi-deres-%C3%B8jne-er-vi-bare-en-indvandrerstr%C3%B8m%C2%AB>
- Eiset, A. H., Aoun, M. P., Haddad, R. S., Naja, W. J., Fuursted, K., Nielsen, H. V., Stensvold, C. R., Nielsen, M. S., Gottlieb, A., Frydenberg, M., & Wejse, C. (2020). Asylum seekers' and Refugees' Changing Health (ARCH) study protocol: An observational study in Lebanon and Denmark to assess health implications of long-distance migration on communicable and non-communicable diseases and mental health. *BMJ Open*, 10(5), e034412.
- EU/Schengen. (2022). Denmark & Rwanda Sign Declaration on Possible Transfer of Asylum Seekers. SchengenVisaInfo.Com.
- European Commission. (2022, June 23). Denmark: Changes to asylum practice and residence permits | European Website on Integration. https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/denmark-changes-asylum-practice-and-residence-permits_en
- France 24. (2021, December 3). Stuck in limbo, Syrians in Denmark suffer unbearable wait. France 24. Retrieved December 5, 2022, from <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211203-stuck-in-limbo-syrians-in-denmark-suffer-unbearable-wait>
- France 24 English. (2021). Denmark's tightening of immigration policy causes concern for Syrian refugees. YouTube. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from Denmark's tightening of immigration policy causes concern for Syrian refugees • FRANCE 24 English
- Friis, K. S. H. (2021, April 3). 25-årig udvist af Danmark: Frygter at Blive Anholdt. *www.bt.dk*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.bt.dk/samfund/25-aarig-udvist-af-danmark-frygter-at-blive-anholdt>
- Gleeson, C., Frost, R., Sherwood, L., Shevlin, M., Hyland, P., Halpin, R., Murphy, J., & Silove, D. (2020). Post-migration factors and mental health outcomes in asylum-seeking and refugee populations: A systematic review. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 11, 1793567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2020.1793567>
- Griffith University. (2022, November 1). Introduction—Systematic style literature reviews for education and social sciences—Library guides at Griffith University. <https://libraryguides.griffith.edu.au/systematic-literature-reviews-for-education>
- Henriksen, K., Schinke, R., Moesch, K., McCann, S., Parham, W. D., Larsen, C. H., & Terry, P. (2020). Consensus statement on improving the mental health of high performance athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 18(5), 553–560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1570473>

- Hergel, O., & Houborg, J. (2021, April 18). Far, Stedmor og søster kan blive i Danmark, men 25-årige Faeza Satouf er udvist Til Damaskus. Politiken. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://politiken.dk/indland/art8173975/Far-stedmor-og-s%C3%B8ster-kan-blive-i-Danmark-men-25-%C3%A5rige-Faeza-Satouf-er-udvist-til-Damaskus?fbclid=IwAR2PbOyjYimL7yZohatBjKfktqGjy5EpE8UTod4Qi1PLeA3mPTp1IX-Bg4>
- Horwitz, A. V. (2009a). An Overview of Sociological Perspectives on the Definitions, Causes, and Responses to Mental Health and Illness (Chapter 1)—A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/handbook-for-the-study-of-mental-health/an-overview-of-sociological-perspectives-on-the-definitions-causes-and-responses-to-mental-health-and-illness/64714C2D04EB374F30D3EE3A806604E8>
- Horwitz, A. V. (2009b). An Overview of Sociological Perspectives on the Definitions, Causes, and Responses to Mental Health and Illness. In T. L. Scheid & T. N. Brown (Eds.), *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health* (2nd ed., pp. 6–19). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511984945.004>
- House, J. S., Landis, K. R., & Umberson, D. (1988). Social relationships and health. *Science* (New York, N.Y.), 241(4865), 540–545. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.3399889>
- Hunter, L. (2021). “It’s safe to go home”: Denmark strips residency permits of Syrian refugees—The Post. <https://cphpost.dk/?p=123897>
- Hynie, M. (2018). The Social Determinants of Refugee Mental Health in the Post-Migration Context: A Critical Review. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 63(5), 297–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717746666>
- Jacobsen, M. H. (2022). Precarious (Dis)Placement: Temporality and the Legal Rewriting of Refugee Protection in Denmark. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 112(3), 819–827. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2021.1999199>
- Jannesari, S., Hatch, S., Prina, M., & Oram, S. (2020). Post-migration social–environmental factors associated with mental health problems among asylum seekers: A systematic review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 22(5), 1055–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-020-01025-2>
- Jensen, J. H., & Wulff, M. L. (2022, August 1). Syrere Forlader danmark I Stor Stil: "Det bekræfter, at Danmarks Asylpolitik Har en indirekte afskrækkelseeffekt". Politiken. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from <https://politiken.dk/indland/art8809746/%C2%BBDet-bekr%C3%A6fter-at-Danmarks-asylpolitik-har-en-indirekte-afskr%C3%A6kkelseeffekt%C2%AB>
- Juárez, S. P., Honkaniemi, H., Dunlavy, A. C., Aldridge, R. W., Barreto, M. L., Katikireddi, S. V., & Rostila, M. (2019). Effects of non-health-targeted policies on migrant health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*, 7(4), e420–e435. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(18\)30560-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(18)30560-6)
- Kanner, A., Coyne, J., Schaefer, C., & Lazarus, R. (1980). Comparison of Two Modes of Stress Measurement: Daily Hassles and Uplifts Versus Major Life Events. https://webs.wofford.edu/boppkl/coursefiles/psy150/labs/SocialLab/Kanner81_Hassles%20and%20Uplifts.pdf
- Kashani, M. (2021). Politics of exclusion: A WPR Analysis of Denmark’s Immigration and Integration Policies concerning refugees and asylum seekers. *Digitale Vetenskapliga Arkivet*. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1591113&dsid=9912>

- Kelani, T. (2021). Som syrer skal jeg vælge, om jeg vil bryde loven eller rejse ned til den sikre død | Information. <https://www.information.dk/debat/2021/04/syrer-vaelge-bryde-loven-rejse-sikre-doed>
- Korsgaard, S. (2022, August 7). Aya skal igen se sin fremtid afgjort I et brev I E-boks. men Følelserne for danmark er de samme. Politiken. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://politiken.dk/debat/art8897303/Aya-skal-igen-se-sin-fremtid-afgjort-i-et-brev-i-e-boks.-Men-f%C3%B8lelserne-for-Danmark-er-de-samme?fbclid=IwAR0ydAuZ4vUslukJHDZzC5NOOK9VEM-SP9q44BreRDoRpOFc2syknn3cj-U>
- Kristiansen, O. L. (2021). Syrisk flygtning: »Jeg fik et brev fra Udlændingestyrelsen den 9. februar og tænkte bare: Hvorfor?«. Information. <https://www.information.dk/moti/2021/04/syrisk-flygtning-fik-brev-udlaendingestyrelsen-9-februar-taenkte-bare-hvorfor>
- Martensen, M. M., & Sircic, A. (2022, October 11). Syriske Kvinder I Uddannelse og Arbejde Skal forlade landet. men Deres Forældre og brødre må blive. DR. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/folketingsvalg/syriske-kvinder-i-uddannelse-og-arbejde-skal-forlade-landet-men-deres>
- McKernan, B., Swash, R., & Kelly, A. (2021, July 29). Denmark could face legal action over attempts to return Syrian refugees. The Guardian. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jul/29/denmark-faces-legal-action-over-attempts-to-return-syrian-refugees>
- Ministry of Immigration and Integration. (2019). Consolidation Act No. 239 of 10 March 2019. The Danish Immigration Service | The Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI). <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/uk-UA/Legislation/Legislation>
- Mossakowski, K. N. (2014). Stress and Mental Illness. In W. C. Cockerham, R. Dingwall, & S. Quah (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Health, Illness, Behavior, and Society* (pp. 1–5). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118410868.wbehibs358>
- Murray, A. (2021, May 19). Denmark asylum: The Syrian refugees no longer welcome to stay. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57156835>
- Nickerson, A., Bryant, R.A., Schnyder, U., Schick, M., Mueller, J., Morina, N., 2015. Emotion dysregulation mediates the relationship between trauma exposure, post-migration living difficulties and psychological outcomes in traumatized refugees. *J. Affect. Disord.* 173, 185–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.10.043>
- Nielsen, E. G. (2020). Deeming Damascus 'safe': The Aspiration of Danish State Actors to 'Return' Syrian Nationals to the Damascus Region. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1481719/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Nordics Info, A. U. (n.d.). Danish immigration policy, 1970-1992. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/danish-immigration-policy-1970-1992-1>
- Ogilvie, F. (2022, February 17). Afghan, Syrian refugees face uncertain future in Denmark. Migration | Al Jazeera. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/2/17/afghan-syrian-refugees-face-uncertain-future-in-denmark>
- Patscheider, C. S. (2022, September 10). 21-årige Sahar Bor med terrordømte på kærshovedgård: 'Jeg tør ikke gå alene'. www.bt.dk. Retrieved December 1, 2022,

- from <https://www.bt.dk/krimi/21-aarige-sahar-bor-med-terrordoen-paa-kaershovedgaard-jeg-toer-ikke-gaa-alene>
- Peltier, E., & Nielsen, J. (2021, April 14). They 'bombed my dream': Denmark strips some Syrians of residency status. *The New York Times*. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/14/world/europe/denmark-syrian-residence-permits.html>
- Poulton et al./ Guardian News and Media. (2022). Sending Aya Back: the Syrian teen facing deportation in Denmark. *The Guardian*. Retrieved December 2, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2022/may/24/sending-aya-back-the-syrian-teen-facing-deportation-in-denmark-documentary>.
- Pye, M. (2021, November 1). Denmark—Borders closed! | Yle Areena. Yle. <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50926913>
- Ritzau/The Local. (2021, April 22). Denmark's Syria report: 11 out of 12 sources reject conclusion, leaving only Assad general in support. *The Local Denmark*. <https://www.thelocal.dk/20210422/denmarks-syria-report-11-out-of-12-sources-reject-conclusion-leaving-only-assad-general-in-support/>
- Scheid, T. L. (2009). *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health: Social Contexts, Theories, and Systems* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511984945>
- Schwartz, S., & Meyer, I. H. (2010). Mental health disparities research: The impact of within and between group analyses on tests of social stress hypotheses. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(8), 1111–1118. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.11.032>
- Seidelin, L., & Jonasdottir, L. (2022, April 29). Aya Abu-Daher Vil læse til sygeplejerske. Hun prøver ikke at tænke på, at Hendes Opholdstilladelse Kun Gælder Til Næste sommer. *Politiken*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://politiken.dk/indland/art8733123/Aya-Abu-Daher-vil-l%C3%A6se-til-sygeplejerske.-Hun-pr%C3%B8ver-ikke-at-t%C3%A6nke-p%C3%A5-at-hendes-opholdstilladelse-kun-g%C3%A6lder-til-n%C3%A6ste-sommer-fbclid=IwAR1Wvcvyjpig51pqBqhxFzdYpRIS4T247pSTNj3B002blz7LEKNIBM3-OGI>
- Singhvi, A. (2022, June 25). Denmark's Zero Asylum Policy and the Plight of Syrian Women Refugees | Oxford Political Review | OPR. <https://oxfordpoliticalreview.com/2022/06/25/denmarks-zero-asylum-policy-and-the-plight-of-syrian-women-refugees%ef%bf%bc/>
- Skydsgaard, N. (2021, June 3). Denmark passes law to process asylum seekers outside Europe. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/denmark-agrees-law-deport-asylum-seekers-outside-europe-2021-06-03/>
- Solberg, Ø., Sengoelge, M., Nissen, A., Saboonchi, F. Coping in Limbo? The Moderating Role of Coping Strategies in the Relationship between Post-Migration Stress and Well-Being during the Asylum-Seeking Process. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2021, 18, 1004. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031004>
- Specia, M. (2021, June 3). Denmark Would Push Asylum Seekers Outside Europe for Processing. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/03/world/europe/denmark-asylum-process.html>
- Statista. (2021). Denmark: Refugees by country of origin 2021 | Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1306452/number-refugees-denmark-country-origin/>

- Strzyżyńska, W. (2022, May 25). 'Zero asylum seekers': Denmark forces refugees to return to Syria. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/25/zero-asylum-seekers-denmark-forces-refugees-to-return-to-syria>
- The Danish Immigration Service. (n.d.-a). New to Denmark. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Applying/Asylum/Adult%20asylum%20applicant>
- The Danish Immigration Service. (n.d.-b). New to Denmark. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/You-want-to-extend/Asylum/Refugee-or-an-ordinary-quota-refugee>
- The Danish Immigration Service & SIRI. (2022, September 28). Legislation. New to Denmark. <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/uk-UA/Lovstof/legislation>
- The Syria Campaign. (n.d.). Tell Denmark: Protect Syrian refugees. The Syria Campaign. Retrieved December 11, 2022, from <https://act.thesyriacampaign.org/sign/syria-not-safe-denmark>
- The Syria Campaign. (2021, April 28). Denmark's policy on Syrian refugees is impacting women and older people. *Medium*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://thesyriacampaign.medium.com/denmarks-decision-to-revoke-the-residencies-of-syrian-refugees-is-disproportionately-impacting-ad4b20cc68d2>
- The Times Of India. (2021, December 3). Stuck in limbo, Syrians in Denmark suffer unbearable wait - Times of India. *The Times of India*. Retrieved December 1, 2022, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/europe/stuck-in-limbo-syrians-in-denmark-suffer-unbearable-wait/articleshow/88063749.cms>
- Thoits, P. A. (2009). Sociological Approaches to Mental Illness. In T. L. Scheid & T. N. Brown (Eds.), *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health* (2nd ed., pp. 106–124). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511984945.009>
- Tinghög, P., Malm, A., Arwidson, C., Sigvardsson, E., Lundin, A., & Saboonchi, F. (2017). Prevalence of mental ill health, traumas and postmigration stress among refugees from Syria resettled in Sweden after 2011: A population based survey. *BMJ Open*, 7(12)
- Tømming, W. D., & Tømming, M. D. (2022). *Integrate While You Can: Precarity, Integration and the Anti-Immigrant Policy In Denmark*. Roskilde University.
- UNHCR. (n.d.). UNHCR - The 1951 Refugee Convention. UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency. Retrieved December 13, 2022, from <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>
- UNHCR. (2022, July 8). Syria Refugee Crisis Explained. <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>
- United Nations. (n.d.-a). Definitions | Refugees and Migrants. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>
- United Nations. (n.d.-b). WHO: World Health Organisation—Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2013/09/who-world-health-organisation/>
- VICE News. (2021, June 18). Denmark Is Leading Europe's Anti-Immigration Policies—YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpkBKEPxze4&ab_channel=VICENews
- Wallace, M. (1995). *Origins of Mental Health* | Johns Hopkins | Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/departments/mental-health/about/origins-of-mental-health>

- World Health Organization. (n.d.). Promoting mental health. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/promoting-mental-health>
- World Health Organization. (2022, June 17). Mental health: Strengthening our response. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

Study Portfolio for 1st semester

This is your group study portfolio for 1st semester. Below you should reflect upon the learning process you have been through in relation to your 1st semester project. You must do this in connection to three main criteria:

- Competences in problem orientated project learning (PPL)
- Competences in project work
- Reflections about the role of feedback

This is a prerequisite for participation in basis project 1 exam. You find information on Moodle about when and how to submit the study portfolio

Personal information

Names:	Adeline Claire Eslabon Ponteras Moneth Therese Esteva Villanueva Iana Cuznetova Ella Illona Järvinen
Student numbers:	76260 76611 76297 7628
House:	SIB
Project group: (Group number)	V2227187362

Competences in PPL

The following answers should reflect your experiences of PPL and project work.

1. In your own words please explain PPL

Problem-oriented project learning or PPL is an approach to studying where real-life problems act as the focal point for research. In this method, students identify existing issues that they deem important for developing a better understanding and wider perspective of the world's realities. The emphasis of this learning starts with what the researchers suppose as valuable or critical matters that individuals encounter or experience that need solving, development, or different interpretations. In PPL, one must be able to utilize and integrate the interdisciplinarity of the various courses/subjects presented during the semester. Lastly, PPL promotes teamwork and collaboration between the group members and the supervisor/s and helps develop new knowledge useful to other future scholarly endeavors.

2. How have you worked with PPL in your project?

Since the semester started, we aimed to apply our learnings from the classroom to our group project – from the problem formulation to how we search for data, write, and work with and as a team. Firstly, we chose a real-life issue that needs addressing and we wanted to solve as a group. Then, we identified and developed the problem area which involved gathering information from a variety of trusted sources. We also searched for and collected relevant scholarly literature to facilitate our brainstorming process. Secondly, we decided on what concepts, theories, and methods to use for analyzing the collected information. We investigated the problem with the existing data and identified its underlying causes, existing or possible impacts, and potential solutions. The writing and research tasks were divided, but everything was discussed and agreed upon along the way. We always made sure that everybody in the group was on the same page and up to date with any new or edited information. As we dealt with the issue and discovered more about it, we adjusted the problem, its formulation, and design as we deemed fit for the data and findings we had. PPL served as a vital framework for us ensuring that we had a good grasp of the subject; that we were progressing and were on track with reaching the project's objectives and the school deadlines.

Competences in project work

1. Working with others: What competences have you gained in your group work and how will you use these in future group work?

As this is our first project work at RUC, we mostly learned how to write an academic research paper while working and adjusting with our similarities and differences as groupmates. We realized how essential it is to not just know what to write, but also to ensure that everybody in the team is included and heard in every decision made. It was challenging to work with different personalities, learning styles, preferences, and work ethics in our group, yet we are confident to say that we did a good job in creating an inclusive and well-functioning team. We say 'team' not just 'group' because we collaborated, shared a bond, and we had common goals; one of which is to do our best and hopefully get a good grade for this project. Our team was able to: (1) learn how to use Teams more (a practical knowledge nowadays), (2) realized the importance of cooperating/communicating with our supervisor and team members regularly, (3) write a scholarly paper, (4) and manage/balance our personal and academic lives. Furthermore, we learned to prioritize what is the most necessary in relation to our goals, be patient, understand and communicate properly with the different people in our group. We were also able to work with our individual competencies and utilize them for the benefit of the project. We learned to compromise, compensate for each other's shortcomings, and help each other out as a good functional team should.

2. What role did your supervisor have in your learning process?

We are very grateful to have Laust as our supervisor. He has been our greatest guide and inspiration to go on with our problem area. He has given us tips and a blueprint on what and how to properly write our project. He was always ready to answer our questions, give us insights, and provide detailed feedbacks to assist us in proceeding with every stage of

the process. Whenever we experienced some confusions or hit a plateau in our work, he made sure to give us an inspiring push so we can move forward as smoothly as possible. Laust never made us feel that we did not do enough. Instead, he emphasized our strengths and motivated us, always ensuring that we would do good. He was the light of our project.

3. Process evaluation: What have you learnt about project work in terms of the process and how will you use this in the future?

Firstly, we learned the importance of time management and teamwork; that we are a team, and we all need to have the same goals and priorities and should make them in line with our school deadlines. We learned to set aside differences and be on the same page, managing our schedules in association with our teammates. Furthermore, we managed to separate academic work and personal thoughts which helped us in accepting peer and supervisor feedbacks. Our team worked well without compromising the quality of the research we wanted to do and the special bond and friendship we have made outside of the project work. Additionally, we were able to hone our academic skills and social competencies as individuals and as a group while learning from each other. We realized that effective task designation is important and efficient but also critical. It needs constant and clear communication between the members of the group, as well as the dedication, engagement, and motivation of each team member and the supervisor; that even just having one member who does not participate can affect the result of the project. We aim to apply these learnings and realizations to all the other group projects in store for us in the future. Hopefully, we will still be able to manage with new groupmates and new tasks to solve.

Feedback reflections

1. What types of feedback have you experienced this semester?

We received a lot of comments from our supervisor, and peers who had the opportunity to read our paper or were interested in the topic. Some were professional, straightforward, constructive, and helpful while others were objective, biased, and suggestive. Laust, our supervisor, gave us some positive feedbacks. For instance, he commended us for having written a lot for the midterm evaluation, and for doing well with the timing and the ideas we had during the process of writing the paper. We, of course, also received some constructive ones from him regarding how our problem area and thoughts were constructed which served as frameworks for us to improve the project. We have always been open to criticisms and asking for comments from our supervisor, and always discussed as a team how to apply them for the benefit of the project. Moreover, we always made sure to consider each other's thoughts and insights while doing our tasks. We would tell each other whether we agree or not, compromised when needed, and wrote the entire paper with all our ideas combined.

2. Giving feedback: who have you given feedback to, and how did you make sure to give constructive feedback instead of critique?

We gave feedback to our opponent group, and some groups at the beginning of the BP1 class. Firstly, we read their writings individually, gathered all our comments, and discussed them within our group to have a collective thought. We filtered which among our evaluations were constructive and formulated a unified assessment and set of feedbacks to give to our assigned peer group. When giving the feedbacks, we always tried applying the 'sandwich style' where would make sure to lessen the effect of the negative comments by starting and ending with the positive ones. We believe that this approach makes providing and receiving feedback less uncomfortable and more constructive.

3. Receiving feedback: who have given you feedback, and how have you used these in your project work?

We received feedbacks both from our peers and from Laust, our supervisor. Whenever they were given to us, we always started with reading them and discussing as a group what we think of and how we understand the comments. We filtered the feedbacks and identified the ones that were constructive and related to our subject and project goals. We then did our best to apply and integrate the constructive feedbacks to our project – rewriting several times to find the best way to construct our paper. However, in some instances, we rejected some constructive feedbacks after contemplating and deciding as a group that taking them in would compromise the project or redirect it away from where we want our paper to be. We realized that not all the time the person giving feedback understands our point which makes the comment invalid. In this case, we instead made sure that we expressed our points, ideas, and messages better and more clearly in the paper, so our readers would not be misled.
