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# Photovoice: Assessing Barriers To Health Among Maine's Somalian Refugee Women

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***Photovoice:  
A Visual Narrative into  
the Perceived Health of  
Maine Refugee Women***

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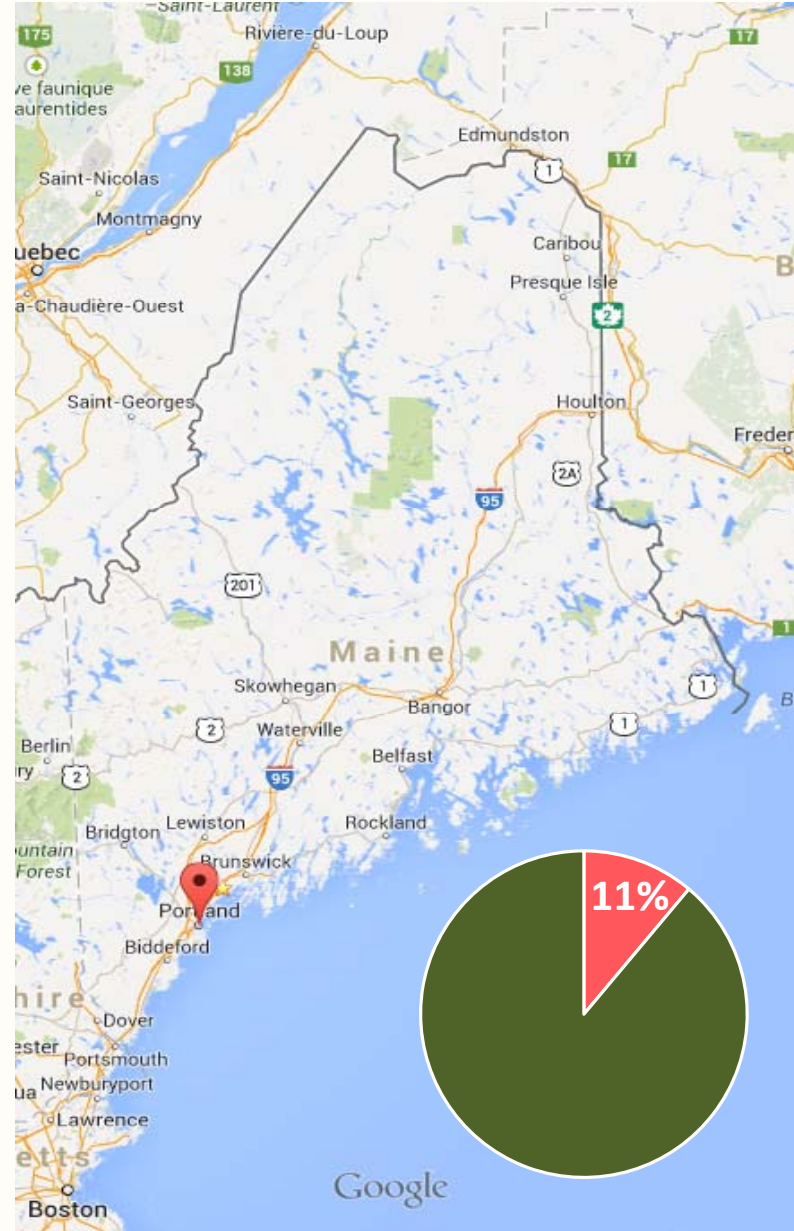


# What is Photovoice?



- 'Participatory photography', or Community-based participatory research
- Caroline Wang, developed Photovoice in the 1990s to help women in rural Chinese villages communicate health concerns
- A **collaborative approach** between the researchers and community members
- Share experiences, ideas, & strategies for change with the greater community and potential **policy shapers**

- Portland, Maine is a major resettlement area for **refugee and asylum-seeking individuals**, who according to the US Censes (2008-2012), account for approximately 11.2% of the city's population.
- This population faces **major barriers**- language, housing, transportation, and cultural barriers, along with a host of other issues.
- There is a **deficit in information** regarding health disparities among African immigrants (Pavlish, Noor, & Brandt, 2010), which can lead to medical facilities and providers lacking in **cultural competence** and **understanding** in perceptions of health.



# Our Research Questions

- To seek an alternative and creative strategy to **strengthen communication** between health professionals and our community's refugee population in the hopes of improving health and social services.
- To deepen our understanding of the **barriers to health** faced by refugee women in Maine, that may not be immediately apparent or remain unaddressed by health professionals and policy makers.



- What are the public health issues faced?
- How do Somali refugee women define health?
- What strengthens or inhibits the community's access to health?

# Our Methods

- Portland Community Health Center in the Riverton Community
- Strategies: recruitment, interpretation, cultural brokerage, IPEC Mini Grant funding, budgeting
- Participants: Three adult refugee women living in the Riverton Community



Collaboration between UNE (Lily Bottino and Collyn Baeder), PCHP (Kira Maas), and interpreter/cultural broker (Saharo Sharif-Isaack)



# Timeline



- **Orientation Meeting:** 2-3 hours. Open-ended interview guide, photography education, informed consent
- **Photo-taking:** Participants given 1 month to take pictures, during this time, primary researcher available for assistance
- **Photovoice Workshop:** 2-3 hours. Group gathers to discuss photography, add descriptions to chosen photos, and strategize on interventions
- **Presentation:** 1-2 hours at Riverton Community Center. Community members, UNE members, and PCHC gather to appreciate and reflect on exhibited photography

*Workshop structure is derived from "Collective Leadership Works. Keeping healthy: Strategies for reflection and learning. [www.theinnovationcenter.org](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org)*

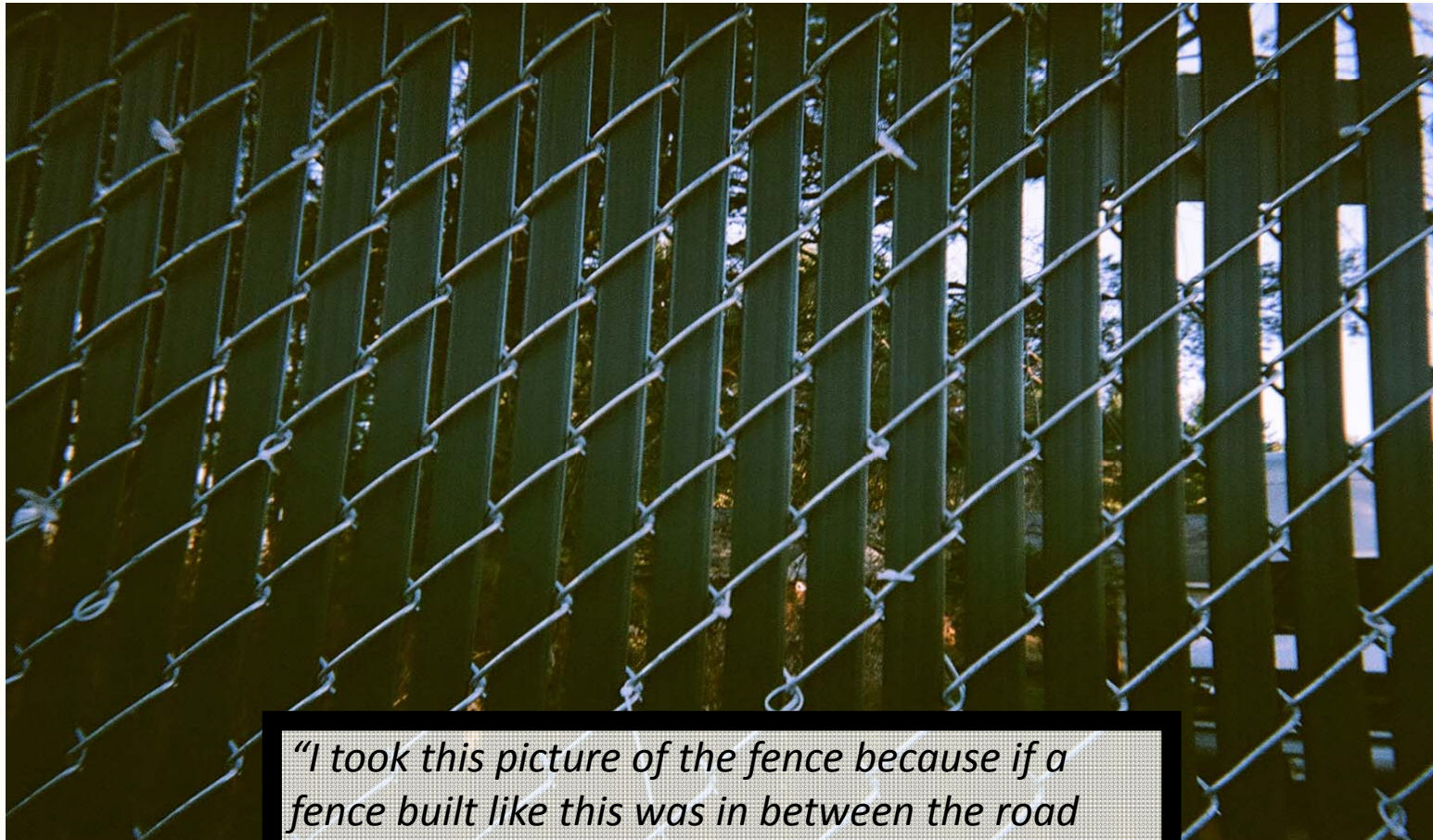
# The Outcomes

- 27 photos identifying barriers/strengths in accessing health exhibited
- In-depth discussion, collaborative strategizing
- Strengthening communication between the Riverton Community, UNE, and the Portland Community Health Center
- Attention from the greater Maine community



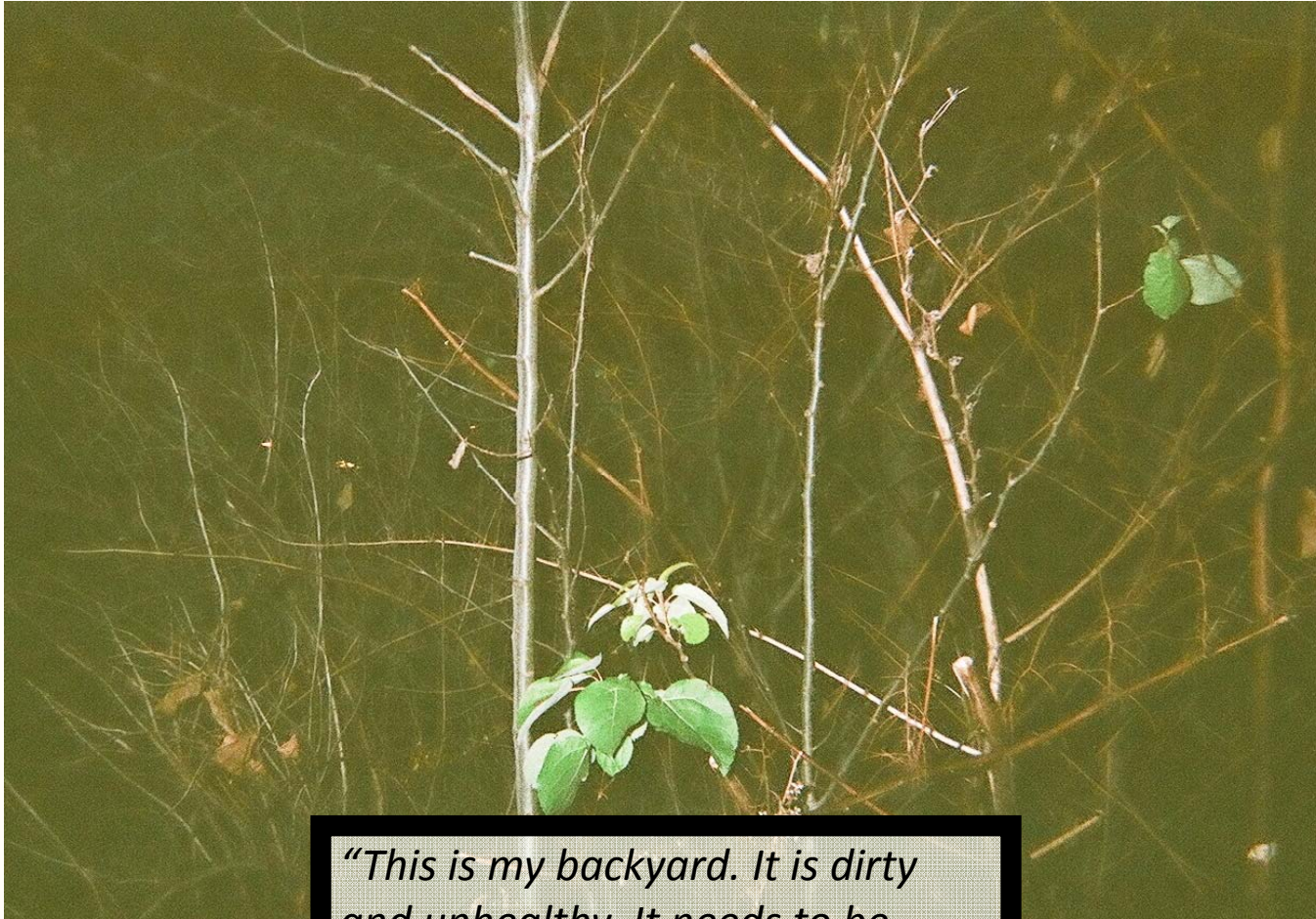


# Challenging Assumptions



*"I took this picture of the fence because if a fence built like this was in between the road and the playground, it would be safer for the children to play."*

# Challenging Assumptions



*"This is my backyard. It is dirty and unhealthy. It needs to be cleaned."*

*Themes Identified:*

# Exercise & Culture

- **Cultural practices, values, and attire** were identified as barriers to physical activity
- Opportunities for gatherings of women



*"To me, exercise is important. I would like a place to exercise."*

*Themes Identified:*

# Exercise & Weather

- **Cold weather** was identified as a major barrier to physical exercise
- The photographs described alternative, limited means to incorporate physical activity into their lives



*"These are the stairs in my house. That is my place to exercise when it's cold out. But now since I'm not feeling good it bothers me."*

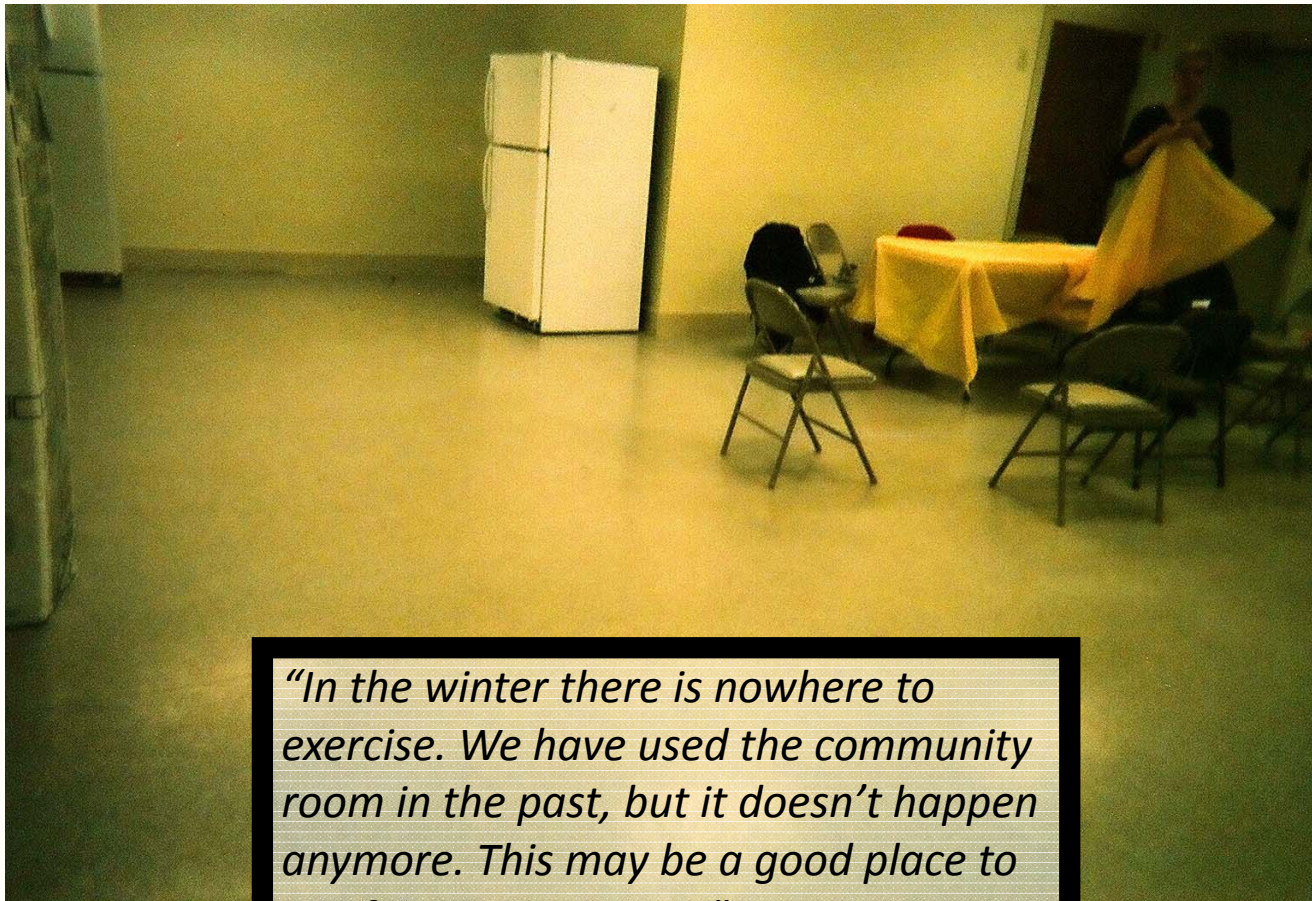


*"This is a beautiful place to walk and relax."*

Themes Identified:

# Exercise

- The community room was identified as a potential **exercise space**.

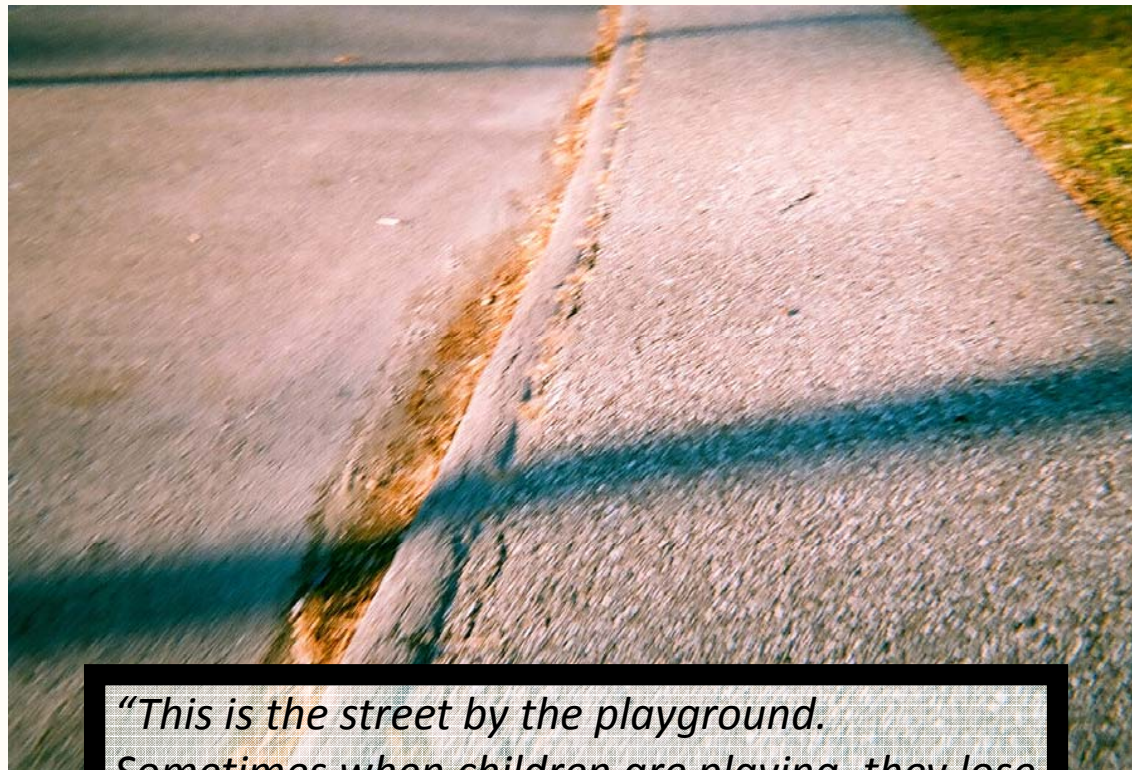


*"In the winter there is nowhere to exercise. We have used the community room in the past, but it doesn't happen anymore. This may be a good place to use for exercise again."*

*Themes Identified:*

# Community Safety

- Identified the **need for interventions** (e.g. fences) to make the community safer



*“This is the street by the playground.  
Sometimes when children are playing, they lose  
a ball in the street while cars are driving by.”*

*Themes Identified:*

# Community Safety

- **Littering** was identified as safety concern (broken bottles, cigarettes)
- Individual duty vs. community responsibility



*"Portland Housing Authority should clean this. I usually clean as much as I can in my backyard."*



*"Someone littered a pack of cigarettes on the street. I took this picture because this is dangerous for my children, who might try to eat them, or even try to smoke them. That is unhealthy."*

Themes Identified:

# Autonomy

- Self-determination vs. the inability to control one's environment
- The process helped to **express feelings** of transition, loss, lack of control
- The ability to **control** the lens



*"If I had my own store, I would use decorations like this to attract people."*



*"This is a multicultural store. I used to have a store like this back home, and it reminds me of this. One day I might have a store like this in the future."*



# Discussion and Questions



Thank you for your time.  
Please feel free to share your thoughts and questions.