“If I was able to acquire that piece of land, is there something I can’t do?”

− assessing effects of the Women Economic Empowerment Program on the psychological empowerment of HIV positive women in Ngong, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out whether the Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP) targeted at HIV positive women in Ngong, Kenya, empowers its participants psychologically. The research data consists of ten interviews conducted in 2015 in Ngong with women who were recently enrolled in the 18-month program and women who had recently graduated from the program. The field work also included systematic observation. A qualitative content analysis was performed on the interview material, and the impact of the program on the participants’ psychological empowerment was analyzed in terms of the interviewees’ feelings of self-confidence/beliefs in self-efficacy, self-respect, and acceptance. The results show that the newly-graduated participants demonstrate higher levels of self-confidence and stronger beliefs in self-efficacy than the newly-enrolled, framing their own hard work as the most important factor affecting whether they will accomplish their goals in life. The newly-graduated also experience higher levels of self-respect. The newly-graduated experience higher levels of acceptance than the newly-enrolled women when dealing with stigmatizing relationships. Based on these findings, the WEEP program is argued to empower its participants psychologically. Inspirational leadership, capacity building activities, experience of goal success, and the program as a space for emotional peer support were identified as some of the factors and processes behind the result. The results can, with consideration, be generalized to contexts with similar target groups and organizational goals and settings.
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Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 5
  1.1 Purpose of the study ........................................................................................................ 6
  1.2 Outline of the thesis ........................................................................................................ 7
2 THE KENYAN CONTEXT ..................................................................................................... 8
  2.1 The social context of HIV/AIDS ..................................................................................... 8
  2.2 Living Positive Kenya and the Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP) .... 9
3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ......................................................................................... 12
  3.1 Human development paradigm and the capability approach ........................................ 12
  3.2 Concept of empowerment ............................................................................................... 14
    3.2.1 Defining empowerment ........................................................................................... 14
    3.2.2 Dimensions of empowerment ................................................................................. 17
    3.2.3 Empirical studies of empowerment ....................................................................... 19
    3.2.4 Analysis framework for psychological empowerment ........................................ 21
4 METHOD .............................................................................................................................. 25
  4.1 Case selection .................................................................................................................. 25
  4.2 Data: interviews and observation .................................................................................. 26
5 ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................ 30
  5.1 Self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy ................................................................. 30
  5.2 Self-respect .................................................................................................................... 34
  5.3 Acceptance ..................................................................................................................... 37
  5.4 Behind the scenes: Identifying empowering processes in the program ....................... 41
6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION .............................................................................................. 45
REFERENCES
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE
1 INTRODUCTION

During the latest decades several aspects of global human development have taken important steps to a positive direction: the number of people living in extreme poverty in 2015 has declined by more than 50 % from 1990, new HIV infections have fallen by approximately 40 %, and gender equality has increased (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015). As a whole, people are now healthier, wealthier, and better-educated than earlier. However, over 800 million people continue to live in extreme poverty and millions of people live with HIV/AIDS, Sub-Saharan Africa being the hardest-hit area. Kenya, located in eastern Sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the countries where poverty essentially hinders millions of people from experiencing a sense of well-being empowerment in their everyday lives. The country has the HIV prevalence rate of 6 % among adults aged 15 to 49 (UNAIDS 2013), and over 45 % of the Kenyan population are extremely poor (UNDP Kenya 2015).

Poverty combined with a positive HIV status is a framework exceptionally challenging for women who bear the burden of triple discrimination in their everyday life. The state failing to provide equal opportunities and support for all of its citizens, Living Positive Kenya (LPK) is one of the community-based organization working with HIV positive women who are marginalized in the society because of their status. The Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP) operated by LPK is an 18-month program aiming at physical, psychological and economic empowerment for the participants.

Empowerment is today perceived as a central component in advancing global human development and the word is frequently used in the language of development projects at different levels both inside and outside of academics. It is a rich concept entailing several dimensions. However, empowerment research has, dictated by data availability, to a large extent focused on measuring empowerment in terms of its economic dimension at different levels (Narayan 2005:20). The social and especially the psychological dimensions of empowerment have only recently started to get attention in the field of development despite the fact that belief in one’s own efficacy, which is an important aspect of psychological empowerment, is part of an individual’s subjective well-being, which in turn is an important factor when measuring the quality of life of societies (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005). Indeed,
research carried out in non-developing country settings has found that social and personal resources in general seem to be more strongly related to subjective well-being than material resources are (Diener & Fujita 1995). This suggests a closer examination of the mechanisms and measures of psychological empowerment also in developing country settings.

1.1 Purpose of the study

This study aims to enrich development as well as empowerment research by bringing in the point of view of psychological empowerment. It presents an analysis of some of the effects that the Kenyan Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP) has on the lives of the HIV positive women who participate in it. More precisely, to find out if the program engenders a change in its participants the study will attempt to answer the following research question: Has the Women Economic Empowerment Program in Ngong empowered its graduates psychologically? More specifically, the study seeks to identify demonstrations of psychological empowerment in the lives of the women having participated in the program. The research question will be answered by performing a content analysis on interview data collected in the field. The study is primarily explanatory, and process-tracing will be done where possible.

Grasping different dimensions of empowerment is essential, since it is known that empowerment can improve development effectiveness even at the individual project level (Narayan 2005:4). However, minor non-state development actors working for local development often lack the resources to evaluate the programs they are running. Therefore, the results of the study ideally provide valuable new knowledge for future planning for LPK as well as when examining community development programs in other Sub-Saharan countries with similar contexts. This way the study attempts to answer the call for connecting empowerment theory more clearly to empowerment practice and program development (Perkins 1995:788).

Having women’s empowerment in the focus is relevant since it is by now a generally stated fact that investing in women’s capacity benefits not only benefits the women themselves but also the whole society, and this at a higher level than investing in men. Consequently, women’s empowerment can be seen as an essential constitute of human development. This is
reflected also in the newly-adopted global Sustainable development goals where one of the goals focuses on promoting gender equality (UN: Sustainable development goals, 2016).

This study focuses on measuring outcomes in psychological empowerment that participants have experienced at the individual level. Furthermore, the study does not attempt to measure to what extent the participants are empowered but focuses on different demonstrations of empowerment raised by the interviewees. Thus, the study does not attempt to paint a comprehensive picture of all the different dimensions of empowerment; for instance, the economic aspect of the program is not actively examined.

1.2 Outline of the thesis

After this introduction, a concise presentation of the Kenyan context and the Women Economic Empowerment program is given in chapter 2. Chapter 3 presents and discusses the theoretical background for the study, including the capability approach and the concept of empowerment. The analysis framework can be found in this chapter. The discussion on the method, including case selection and data collection can be found in chapter 4. Chapter 5 consists of the analysis of the interview material. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the results and the results are accompanied by a concluding discussion. Generalizability and suggestions for future research ware covered here.
2 THE KENYAN CONTEXT

In this chapter I will briefly describe the social context of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. Moreover, the purpose and goals of Living Positive Kenya (LPK) and the Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP) will be summarized.

2.1 The social context of HIV/AIDS

Kenya is a country with the population of 45.5 million (UNdata 2016). Located in East Africa, it is one of the Sub-Saharan countries with a considerable HIV prevalence rate; in the case of Kenya, the prevalence revolves around 6 % among adults aged 15 to 49 (UNAIDS 2013), translating to approximately 2.7 million Kenyans. The virus being a stigmatized issue, there is, however, reason to believe that the actual prevalence rate is likely to be higher than the statistical one. HIV/AIDS, together with tuberculosis and malaria, constitutes part of a relatively heavy burden of communicable diseases facing the country (Smart Global Health 2016). Partially due to health challenges, the life expectancy at birth is approximately 61 years, and 27.8 % of the adult population is illiterate (UNDP: Human Development Reports 2015). These factors and figures, among others, are reflected in the global Human Development Index, in which Kenya is ranks 145th among the approximately 200 countries of the world (ibid.).

People living with HIV in Kenya are likely to face some type of discrimination in some context during their lives. As is common concerning distribution of information, especially the rural areas can be found to suffer from lack of access to correct information on the virus. Also during the fieldwork in Ngong, a town of approximately 130 000 inhabitants, it was commonly heard from the staff as well as the interviewees that people are often under the false belief that an individual with the virus is likely to die in a short period of time after having contracted it. The false belief is effectively sustained by the fact that access to medicine can be a challenge to many underprivileged HIV positive. Therefore relatively sudden deterioration of health and sudden deaths are witnessed also in Ngong. Based on discussions with key staff at Living Positive Kenya, lack of accurate information is a challenge in general, as there are many who do not know how the virus is contracted or that taking appropriate medication on a regular basis enables one to live a life, in many aspects
comparable to a life of a person without the virus. These misconceptions can be seen effectively sustaining stigmatizing attitudes, discrimination, and isolation towards HIV positive, but also shame and self-stigma among the HIV positive themselves.

Kenya being a patriarchal society, being a woman and HIV positive brings together two underprivileged statuses in an individual. Therefore, the Kenyan society reflects the observation that ‘women’ as a disempowered category is cross-cutting with other disempowered categories of the society instead of just being one category alongside others (Malhotra and Schuler 2005:71–72). In the case of participants in the WEEP program in Ngong, poverty is added to the equation, and structural social and economic dependence on men has contributed to the challenges faced by the women in the present moment. According to Mary Wanderi, the founder and leader of LPK, a typical case is that a poor family has invested in the sons’ education whereas the daughters in the family have remained uneducated. Furthermore, the girls do not, according to her, typically inherit the family land and therefore remain poor also in the adulthood. According to Wanderi, it is not uncommon that some women have few other alternatives than to rely on drugs, alcohol or prostitution in some form, and these risky behaviors are known to increase the risk of HIV transmission. In case of getting diagnosed as HIV positive, it is not, according to Wanderi and based on the discussions with the participants at LPK, uncommon that women in this position are rejected and abandoned by their families. Also self-stigma occurs. Additionally, Wanderi pointed out that many of the women who participate in the activities of LPK, did not spend their childhood in a slum but moved there later, sometimes because greater acceptance of, but also incentives to, the controversial lifestyle lead by the individual can be found in the slum. The phenomenon is reflected in that Wanderi estimates a clear majority of the households in the slums to be female-headed single households.

2.2 Living Positive Kenya and the Women Economic Empowerment Program (WEEP)

Living Positive Kenya (LPK) is a non-profit community based organization (CBO) and it operates in the Ngong district, Kajiado County, located approximately 30 km to the southwest from Nairobi. All the operations of LPK aim at empowering women infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and often living in Gichagi and Mathare slums in Ngong division in the Rift valley, outskirts of Nairobi. According to the organization, its mission is to “improve the
physical and psychological health as well as empowering the women socioeconomically” (Living Positive Kenya: Narrative 2014). According to the organization, it has a threefold approach to combating HIV/AIDS and poverty: physical, psychosocial and economic empowerment (ibid.). More specifically, four objectives have been listed concerning the operations of LPK:

1) “To promote health among HIV infect women and change negative health and nutritional habits”
2) “To empower women psychologically to become strong to fight situations and live a positive life”
3) “To empower women to reach economic independence”
4) “Education, HIV/AIDS and Prevention”

One of the objectives being psychological empowerment of the participants, there is a rationale for this study to be carried out in this context. The objectives of LPK are reached through different program activities designed for the participants. A comprehensive operation of LPK is the 18-month Women Economic Empowerment Program (W.E.E.P.), which is also in the focus of this study. According to LPK, “the WEEP program is an initiative to save HIV-positive women from their life of rejection and poverty through empowering them to live sustainable livelihoods” (Living Positive Kenya 2016). The second objective is also directly linked to WEEP in that part of its demonstrations is: “The WEEP graduates and the women in the support group are able to hold their heads up high ---”.

The WEEP program consists of three phases of six months each, and they are HIV intervention, skill building, and business plan development. In the first phase the participants are ensured access to basic health services, and psycho-social support, and the focus is on stabilizing the physical and mental health of the participants. The second phase revolves around learning concrete skills, among them tailoring, beadwork, and baking. According to the founder and director of LPK, Mary Wanderi, the theme for this phase of the program is sustainability. In the third phase has the focus on development of business plans for the participants, and the activities include building a plan together, teaching business skills, and supporting the participants in this process, and the theme of the third phase, according to Wanderi, is thriving. In practice, these phases can be seen intertwining with each other. In addition, some of the repetitive components of the program also include microfinance saving, Bible study, English as well as practicing income-generating activities (IGA). Finally, a new WEEP class is named a peer mentor among the women who have graduated earlier.
In the beginning: the social workers at LPK find out about an HIV positive woman who needs help, and they go to see her. The social workers offer the woman nutritional or other help that is needed and go to see her on a regular basis. Once the woman is feeling better, she is encouraged to join the support group now gathering once a month, earlier once a week, at LPK. The support group is open to any woman who is HIV positive and one can attend the group whenever possible. A new WEEP class, on the contrary, is an intensive course requiring a commitment of 18 months. It starts every 1.5 years and a class usually has seven participants. The participants are chosen by LPK staff. Single mothers, mothers with several children, women without an income as well as women with a low CD4 count\(^1\) are considered those most in need of enrolling in the program. At the same time the potential participants need to be considered motivated enough to commit to 18 months in the program. The participants are usually chosen from among the women who are already familiar with the organization prior to the WEEP program.

\(^1\) CD4 count is a number of blood cells that is an important indicator for the state of health for an HIV positive person. The lower the CD4 count is, the poorer the state of health of the individual is and she is more receptive to infections. (AIDS.gov 2016)
3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter will present theoretical background relevant for the study. The concept of human development and the core of it, the capability approach, will be presented. Moreover, definitions of empowerment will be presented and conceptualization of empowerment relevant to development research will be introduced. Finally, I will have a look at empirical studies of empowerment and present the framework for the analysis of the material in this study.

3.1 Human development paradigm and the capability approach

Development research has a long tradition of defining development in terms of financial means. However, the Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen introduced the world to his ‘capability approach’ in the 1980’s, and a paradigm shift employing this approach started to take place in the beginning of the 90s. Sen based his theory on the fact that GNP per capita does not automatically correlate with the quality of life of the people, and therefore economic prosperity per se is not the actual end we want to strive for in order to improve our quality of life (Sen 1990:42). The capability approach is today a central approach to human development and is employed in the Human Development Index that measures education, health, and wealth. Development is seen and discussed from the standpoint of the capability approach also in this thesis.

The foundations for the capability approach were formulated by Amartya Sen and his theory was developed further by philosopher Martha Nussbaum. The capability approach is a wide normative framework most prominently used in the field of development studies but also in other fields to evaluate for example the phenomenon of individual well-being and social change (Robeyns 2005:94). In the core of the approach is the concept of capabilities of the individual that reflect the freedom that the individual has in choosing between different ways of living (Sen 1990:44), that is, what the individual in fact is able to be and to do in her life (Robeyns 2005:94). Amartya Sen has then conceptualized poverty in terms of capabilities not being economic deprivation but more inclusively deprivation in the human being’s capability to live a good life. Development is then, according to the capability approach seen in terms of expansion of that capability, meaning increased freedom of the individual to make informed
choices concerning their lives. (see Sen 1999) Sen also emphasizes that this freedom should be valued as something intrinsically important instead of only seeing it as an instrument for achieving something else (Sen 1990:44). Furthermore, the approach emphasizes the role of agency in advancing human development. Agency is defined as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Sen 1985:206). Increased agency, then, entails that people have more freedom to do and to achieve things they consider valuable (Trommlerová et al. 2015:1). In general, the approach emphasizes the importance of quality of life to that of only financial means.

The capability approach has later been developed further by other scholars of whom philosopher Martha Nussbaum and her work are the most well-known (Robeyns 2005:103). Nussbaum built on her joint work with Sen on the capability approach and introduced it to a list of ten central human capabilities. Even though Sen and Nussbaum disagree on some aspects of the approach (see Nussbaum 2011), they both share the idea of human dignity and every person being an end in itself (Nussbaum 2000:72–73). Nussbaum’s list of capabilities comprising the quality of life of an individual are: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one’s environment (2000:78–80). She points out that the capabilities can realize differently in different contexts, but that they can, however, be seen as crossing cultural boundaries (2000:76–77). Nussbaum clearly states that the ten central capabilities “—are not just instrumental to further pursuits: they are held to have value in themselves, in making the life that includes them fully human” (Nussbaum 2000:74).

Nussbaum makes a distinction between basic capabilities, internal capabilities, and combined capabilities. In her listing, basic capabilities are innate capabilities in the sense that they are ready to function when a child is born (ex. hearing) or rudimentary but with time convertible into a function (ex. capability for speech). Internal capabilities, in their turn, can be seen as “developed states of the person herself”. This developed state is then achieved either simply with time (ex. capability of sexual functioning) or, as most often is the case, with the help of surrounding support (ex. freedom of speech). Finally, combined capabilities are internal capabilities but they have a favorable environment so that individuals can exercise them. Nussbaum points out that the distinction between internal and combined capabilities is not always clearly visible (Nussbaum 2000:84–85). In any case, she argues that the capabilities constructing her list of central capabilities list are all combined capabilities (ibid. p. 86).
As discussed earlier, the capability approach raises the freedom of the individual to the center of development (Sen 1999). The capability approach, in its turn, can be seen as a framework within which it is possible to evaluate or conceptualize poverty and thus also development (Robeyns 2005:94). This study examines the freedom of the individual to make informed choices in their lives, and thus capability expansion, through the concept of empowerment. Therefore, the next section focuses on the concept of empowerment.

3.2 Concept of empowerment

In this section I will discuss some of the most central ways of defining empowerment as well as its conceptualization with focus on psychological empowerment. Furthermore, empirical studies of empowerment relevant to this study will be presented. Finally, the analysis framework employed in this study will be presented.

3.2.1 Defining empowerment

Interest in empowerment as a phenomenon started to increase gradually from the 1970’s in several areas of social sciences (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995:571–572). Since then, it has been discussed across disciplines including at least psychology, sociology, development, anthropology, public health, political science and education (ibid.). Consequently, it has been defined in a myriad of ways of which many are not always unambiguous, and the academic community has not agreed on a universal definition of empowerment.

This study focuses on examining empowerment with a psychological emphasis. Psychological empowerment is commonly seen in terms of an individual’s self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy (Narayan 2005); more precisely, psychological empowerment can be defined as “—people’s beliefs that they have the resources, energy, and competence to accomplish important goals” (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005:125). The concept of psychological empowerment has also been defined in broader terms. Zimmerman emphasizes that, instead of only focusing on the mind of the individual, the study of his/her behavior should be included (Zimmerman 1995:582, footnote). Thus, psychological empowerment can include “—beliefs that goals can be achieved, awareness about resources and factors that hinder or
enhance one’s efforts to achieve those goals, and efforts to fulfill the goals” (Zimmerman 1995:582). Following this definition, psychological empowerment consists of an intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral component (Zimmerman 1995). The intrapersonal component focuses on the individual’s view of themselves, the interactional component covers the understanding that the individual has about their community, and the behavioral component refers to concrete actions taken by the individuals to influence outcomes in their life (Zimmerman 1995). The intrapersonal component in Zimmerman’s categorization to a large extent captures the content of the definition that Diener and Biswas-Diener, in line with the general tendency, uses for psychological empowerment as a whole. Finally, Rowlands (1997:13–14) sees empowerment as increase in power and has divided the power into four categories. This is especially worth noting since one of the categories, ‘power from within’, touches upon the psychological dimension.

In this study psychological empowerment is defined drawing on the definitions presented above so that the definition of psychological empowerment is two-fold: people viewing themselves as worthy individuals and with beliefs that they have the capabilities to accomplish important goals in their lives. It can then be deduced from the definition that a psychologically empowered person is a person who views herself as a worthy individual and believes that she has the capabilities to accomplish important goals in her life. The first part is added in order to clearly verbalize and therefore emphasize the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment. The view of oneself can be seen to be of special importance in the context of the study, and using this definition does not restrict its examination to beliefs about accomplishing goals. The behavioral component distinguished by Zimmerman (1995) has been left out in order to clarify the focus on the individual’s thinking instead of both thinking and acting.

Besides the psychological emphasis, empowerment has been defined in academic literature in narrow or broad terms and from different points of views and with different focuses. Indeed, Ibrahim and Alkire (2007:380–382) have listed out 29 definitions and concepts for empowerment found at use. Sometimes empowerment in general is defined with words like autonomy, self-direction, self-confidence and self-worth (Narayan 2005:3), and these definitions Despite self-confidence arguably being an essential part of empowerment, such definitions can be criticized for their narrow scope focusing only on these single concepts famous from psychology (ex. Perkins and Zimmerman 1995) and at the same time letting the
reader assume that empowerment as a whole does not entails other dimensions. Concerning more comprehensive ways of defining empowerment, the word has been defined with different emphasis. For example Rappaport, a pioneer on conceptualization, research and practical application of empowerment (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995:577), focus on the individual and talks about “a process through which individuals gain mastery over things that are important and present in their lives in one way or another (Rappaport 1987:122). An idea of a change can be spotted when empowerment is discussed as “expansion in people’s ability” to do something (ex. Kabeer 1999:437) or as “expansion of freedom” (ex. Narayan 2005:4).

Empowerment is often talked about in terms of women empowerment in the context of development. Women empowerment can be defined as “---the development of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status” (Akomolafe 2006; summarized by Danjuma et al. 2011:8965). The current study focuses on examining the development of mental capacity of women and in that sense it can be seen as a study on women’s empowerment. It can be noted, however, that it does not use indicators that to some extent could be explicitly defined as gender-specific, which is typical when talking about women empowerment.

Criticism of the use of the word ‘empowerment’ surfaces frequently in academic literature on the topic; for instance Perkins and Zimmerman have pointed out the construct being “often inadequately conceptualized and loosely defined” (1995:572). Indeed, it is not uncommon to see the word being used without a clear definition, including the academic contexts. The occasional fuzziness and calls for clear definitions also applies to international development discourse where empowerment is frequently discussed. To avoid the problem in this study, the following sub-section will attempt to place the focus area of this study, psychological empowerment, in relation to various ways of conceptualizing empowerment.

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2 see for example Eyben and Nabier-Moore (2009) for discussion on exploiting the generic nature of ‘empowerment’ in the development discourse
3.2.2 Dimensions of empowerment

In academic literature empowerment is often divided into two components: one that focuses on the external conditions and one that focuses on the internal capabilities of an individual. These components are sometimes called ‘opportunity structure’ and ‘agency’ respectively (Alsop et al. 2006, Narayan 2005), and sometimes ‘external empowerment’ and ‘internal empowerment’ (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005:125–126). The two-fold division is often visible also in definitions of empowerment. Sometimes it is not clear. The contents of both categories between the different labels vary to some extent. The common idea behind these divisions is, however, that they together enable a whole realization of empowerment. Also Narayan sees empowerment as interplay of external factors and internal factors, and she has named these two as ‘opportunity structure’ and ‘agency of the poor’ (Narayan 2005). Furthermore, she divides the first category into sub-categories of ‘institutional climate’ and ‘social and political structures’ whereas the second category consists of sub-categories of ‘individual assets and capabilities’, and ‘collective assets and capabilities’ (ibid.). Psychological empowerment, which is the focus of this study, deals with the internal dimension of empowerment. It touches upon Narayan’s category of ‘individual assets and capabilities’ which, besides material assets, includes various human capabilities (ex. good health), political capabilities (ex. access to information), social capabilities (ex. social belonging), and psychological capabilities (ex. self-esteem and self-confidence) (Narayan 2005:10). Some of the capabilities in the list can be seen as intersecting with Nussbaum’s (2000) list of central capabilities presented in the earlier section. This can be seen as emphasizing the link between the individual’s well-being and empowerment. In general, Narayan’s categories can be criticized for partial ambiguousness in that some of the factors affecting empowerment that are listed as individual assets and capabilities can be rather seen as either parts constituting the definition of empowerment or as both, i.e. definitions and causes, at the same time. This critique could be addressed to several sources discussing empowerment.

One way to try to clarify what are the very constitutes of the phenomenon of empowerment and what are not, is to look for differences between empowering processes and empowering outcomes; this kind of general distinction is suggested by Zimmerman (2000:46). Actions,
activities, or structures can then be empowering whereas the outcome of these processes can result in that a person is empowered (Perkins & Zimmerman 1995:570; from Swift & Levin 1987). Thus, empowerment can be seen both as a process and as an end result. In this study the psychological empowerment is primarily examined as empowered outcomes, which is also visible in the chosen definition of psychological empowerment that was presented earlier. Zimmerman suggests that when focusing on empowered outcomes, empowerment can be operationalized in order to study if the activities designed to empower people have actually worked and in what ways these people are empowered (Zimmerman 2000:46), and this study aims at doing that. The empowerment puzzle presented along this section defines a framework within which empowerment can be examined with focus on the psychological dimension. Alternatively, for example the economic or the political dimension could be chosen as a similar focus.

The psychological dimension has long been neglected in empowerment research, but correlations and causalities have been hypothesized. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005:135) talk about ‘goal success’, and they suggest a process that starts with good events which then lead to positive emotions for the individual and finally to self-confidence, which they define as an aspect of psychological empowerment. Therefore, according to them, when people experience successful events in their lives it empowers them psychologically, and a psychologically empowered person can easier believe in future success, i.e. the person believes in his or her own self-efficacy. This is then a self-reinforcing loop for the individual. (ibid.) Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) argue that psychological empowerment partially results from experiences of success. The two scholars, however, emphasize that positive emotions and empowerment are two separate things and should be treated as such. According to them, the difference between the two is evident in that positive emotions arise from one specific incident or area but the self-confidence, a facet of psychological empowerment, following from those emotions can then reflect on several areas of life (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005:136). Furthermore, positive emotions indeed seem to be a prerequisite to self-confidence but do not automatically result in feelings of self-confidence in the case of severely depressed individuals, for instance (ibid.).

The directions of correlations presented by Diener & Biswas-Diener are rarely straightforward, which is understandable in the light of the fact that the correlations at least in some parts are more of pioneering hypothesizing and still waiting to be tested. Due to the
multifaceted nature of the correlations, it at some points remains unclear, whether the scholars consider self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy to be part of the very content of being psychologically empowered or rather feelings leading to something called psychological empowerment. The distinction between the broader concept of empowerment and a specific part of it, psychological empowerment, is not always explicitly pronounced. In general, the ambiguous use of the two concepts can be identified as a common challenge occurring in academic literature on psychological empowerment, and it partially yet again surfaces the very challenge of defining empowerment. In the present study, self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy, for instance, are treated as constitutes of psychological empowerment instead of something leading to psychological empowerment.

The role of the psychological dimension in the bigger picture of empowerment has been argued to be essential. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) argue that for empowerment to take place, the causal force of people’s beliefs about their own efficacy must be there and included and that objective resources alone are therefore not enough. Since psychological empowerment, i.e. internal empowerment, does not automatically follow even when external empowering structures are in place, various supporting actions may be needed. In order to help disempowered individuals to gain the feeling of empowerment among restricting cultural beliefs and practices, Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005:136) raise the need of education, role models, and something they call “positive mood inductions”. Finally, psychological empowerment can also be seen as part of what constitutes subjective well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005:125). The following section identifies empirical studies of empowerment as well as more specifically psychological empowerment.

3.2.3 Empirical studies of empowerment

Empirical studies of empowerment in the context of development studies are typically large-scale studies using quantitative data (ex. Trommlerová et al. 2015). In these kinds of studies various socio-demographic such as age and education or socioeconomic factors such as working for income are typically tested against different aspects of women’s empowerment; ex. Pambè et al. (2014) have examined the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and two aspects of women’s empowerment in Burkina Faso: decision-making in the household and experience of domestic violence. The studies then often operate with indicators
at the household level. Furthermore, the studies usually operate with correlations instead of finding causalities (Trommlerová et al. 2015:3). In general, empowerment is often studied as women empowerment in the context of development and the kinds of studies usually include indicators that to some extent can be defined as gender-specific, ex. domestic violence in the above mentioned example.

Empowerment in the context of development have most often been examined in terms of economic empowerment partly due to a better availability of data than for the study of psychological aspects (Narayan 2005:20). Earlier research has shown, for instance, that skill acquisition and capacity building go hand in hand with women’s empowerment. Danjuma et al (2011) studied how skill acquisition and capacity building affect women’s empowerment in an education center in the context of Nigeria. Interestingly, skill acquisition showed a low positive correlation with women’s economic empowerment while capacity building showed a high positive correlation with women’s economic empowerment (ibid.).

Psychological aspects of empowerment have long been neglected in development contexts, and there is not an abundance of qualitative case studies with focus on psychological empowerment. An example of a case study applying qualitative methods is that by Ferguson and Kepe (2011) who found that cooperatives in south-western Uganda created a sense of empowerment among the members including confidence.

There is evidence from the field of psychology that psychological empowerment is necessary for action to take place. In fact, individuals’ future performance has been found to change when their beliefs about their self-efficacy are first manipulated (Bandura 1995). Therefore, psychological empowerment plays a causal role in itself instead of being just a byproduct of a chain of other causalities, which Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005:137–138) also point out. As an interesting causality, McAvay, Seeman, and Rodin (1996) found that individuals’ feelings of empowerment get a boost when these individuals get emotional social support. Therefore, this social factor plays a role in promoting psychological empowerment. Diener and Fujita (1995) found that self-confidence, which is an important aspect of psychological empowerment, predicted life satisfaction more strongly than material resources or social resources. Concerning empowering environments, community psychologists Maton and Salem (1995) have found four characteristics that are common to empowering organizations:
inspirational leadership, a strengths-based belief system, mutual support, and an opportunity role structure. The findings can prove to be comparable also to the context of this study.

### 3.2.4 Analysis framework for psychological empowerment

The hypothesis in this study is that the Women Economic Empowerment Program empowers its participants psychologically during the 18 months of its duration. For the hypothesis to hold there should be a difference in that the women who have recently graduated from the program ought to feel psychologically empowered or more so compared to the women who are in their early stages in the program. This section gives an overview of the analysis framework that is used in this study to compare psychological empowerment between the two categories of interviewees.

Since there is no established analysis framework on psychological empowerment easily applicable, the analysis framework for this study is constructed based on the most relevant theory of empowerment and psychological empowerment. The context-specific nature of the phenomenon was taken into account by consulting key staff at Living Positive Kenya on central goals that the program has as well as the most common challenges that the participants are facing. Three analysis categories of psychological empowerment were identified for the analysis.

**Self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy**

As the first indicator for psychological empowerment, I focus on examining the interviewees’ beliefs in their own self-efficacy, which is in line with the definition of psychological empowerment by Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005). In more concrete terms, I want to find out if the respondents believe that they can achieve their goals in life. I operationalize this based on Zimmerman’s (1995) intrapersonal and interpersonal component. This means that I ask in the interviews which goals the respondent has in her life. Furthermore, I ask what, in her opinion, is needed for her to be able to accomplish those goals. Finally I ask how the respondent feels about achieving those goals.

For the purposes of this study, the aspects of self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy have been coupled in the analysis framework. An individual who is self-confident most likely by
definition believes in her own efficacy, and an individual believing in her own self-efficacy is necessarily experiencing the level of self-confidence necessary for those beliefs. Thus, the two are mutually inclusive and a split between them for the purposes of this analysis would be rather arbitrary.

**Self-respect**

The second analysis category chosen for this analysis is the interviewees’ feelings of self-respect which is a synonym to self-esteem. Common feelings that are linked to an individual’s experience of self-respect include feelings of pride and shame (Hewitt 2009). Therefore I will ask the respondents if they can recall a recent moment of pride in their lives (see appendix 1). If the respondent can easily recall a moment of pride, it is interpreted as an indication of self-respect. If the respondent expresses feelings of shame, it is an indication of low level of self-respect. Moreover, I will look for signs of these feelings in other narratives and comments that the interviewees share during the interviews. Since women’s empowerment has been seen demonstrating as higher levels of social recognition (Akomolafe 2006), I will also ask the respondents if they feel that they are respected by other people. This approach is chosen because there is reason to believe that the interviewees’ view of other people’s attitudes towards them may reflect their own view of themselves.

**Acceptance**

The third aspect of psychological empowerment chosen for this study is acceptance. I will examine this by using an operationalization by Ibrahim and Alkire as a starting point. The two scholars have, among the other categories, operationalized Rowlands’ (1997) category of ‘power from within’ that captures the psychological dimension of empowerment. This category was operationalized as the ability to change by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007), which they link to enhanced self-acceptance. Using this as an inspiration, I will look for signs of each respondent’s actual ability to induce change in one’s life, i.e. I will have a look at aspects that the interviewees have already been able to change. Stigma around HIV being a challenge for HIV positive individuals in Kenya, I have chosen to focus on the interviewees’ ability to deal with their past and stigmatized relationships in their lives. The issue of family relations was raised when central staff at Living Positive Kenya was consulted on key challenges of the clients. This kind of acceptance is closely linked to another empowerment outcome that Perkins and Zimmerman call for ‘situation-specific perceived control’ (1995:570).
Each interviewee will be asked about their relationships with their family members. If the relationship is experienced as energy-consuming and challenging, the respondent may not have found a way with herself to deal with that relationship and has therefore not completely accepted her situation as it is at the moment. If the respondent seems calm when telling about her relationship and indicates that she is content with how it is at the moment, the respondent has likely found a way to deal with the relationship and is able to accept her situation as it is and is able to direct her energy to other things.

This study focuses on dealing with psychological empowerment as outcomes. However, empowering processes are also traced when possible in order to enrich the understanding of the possible effects of the WEEP program. Identification of factors behind the possible empowerment is carried out based on the interview contents as well participant observations while in the field. The identification is not meant to be exhaustive and for example the economic factors are not actively focused on. The purpose of the study is primarily comparative, and no attempt to distinguish absolute levels of psychological empowerment is made; instead it is of primary interest whether increase in psychological empowerment can be found followed by participation in the program.

Some of the indicators that are proposed do not prove to be applicable to the context of this study. An example of such indicator is the ability to change by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007). It originally aims at finding out if the person is willing to change some or any aspects in her life and if the individuals are actually able to contribute to that change (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007:394). However, the indicator can be criticized for not providing clear guidelines for the interpretation of answers and therefore it has not been directly applied in this study. The indicator of decision-making in the household, commonly employed in research on women’s empowerment, is not ideally applicable in this study because the majority of the interviewees are heads of single households.

When analyzing the material, I go through the transcribed records of the ten interviews and pay attention to comments that shed light to the three aspects of psychological empowerment chosen for this study. Special focus will be put on the answers given to the category-specific questions. Furthermore, I will make a comparison between the answers of those new to the program and those who already have graduated. Considering the multifaceted nature of the human mind, the chosen categories are necessarily to a certain extent mutually intersecting.
Consequently, single observations that are of interest may be pointed out also in the analysis context other than the primary context would be, when they are considered relevant. In addition to previously presented, I have used parts of Wang and Zhang’s (2012) scale for their study on psychological empowerment among teachers as an inspiration.
4 METHOD

This study aims to answer the following research question: *Has the Women Economic Empowerment Program in Ngong empowered its graduates psychologically?* In order to answer the question, the study takes on a qualitative approach and employs a content analysis on interview material. In this chapter the case selection as well as the choice of method will be discussed. Furthermore, the process of data collection will be described.

4.1 Case selection

The Women Economic Empowerment Program was chosen as the case for this study because its characteristics provide an ideal setting for various kinds of longitudinal comparative studies in the field of local development. Firstly, a limited amount of women is chosen for each class for the purpose of enrolling the whole course, which enables for a setting of clearly defined groups. Secondly, the program is intensive, which in general gives a reason to hypothesize that the chosen groups indeed is remarkably affected by the content and the settings of the program. Having two clearly defined, closed groups who have enrolled the same high intensity course is an ideal setting for comparing these two groups since the setting isolates for several potentially affecting factors. Thirdly, the case was chosen for this study of empowerment because the program itself lists out health and empowerment in different forms as the main goals of the program. Therefore, examining if the program activities promote those goals is of high relevance. Followed by this, the results of the study ideally not only make a minor contribution to a body of empowerment research but can also have social utility.

The case selection is in line with recommendations given in the field of empowerment research. The program being a grass-roots intervention, it ought to provide a more concrete example of empowerment than examining large-scale interventions, as Perkins (1995:789) lines out on facilitating the application of empowerment research. Furthermore, a study that produces practical empirical information can contribute to clarifying the various demonstrations of the multifaceted phenomenon of empowerment (ibid.).
4.2 Data: interviews and observation

For the purpose of collecting the data, I conducted two months of field work in the town of Ngong, located in Kajiado County in Kenya. The main research data for the study consists of ten semi-structured interviews conducted with women affiliated with the Women Economic Empowerment Program. I interviewed women from two different categories: women who had been enrolled in the program only a couple of weeks prior to the time of the interviews and women who had graduated approximately two months prior to the time of the interviews. This was done in order to compare and grasp the before-after change that the program possibly realizes in the participants and thus to shed more light to the effects of the program. A longitudinal study with the same group of interviewees being the ideal research design for examining changes in the individual level, it is not in the scope of this study. Having these two, to a high extent, comparable categories of newly-enrolled and newly-graduates can therefore be seen as a good way of creating a comparative setting in this case.

I initiated the field study by observing the everyday activities of the program, which provided me with essential first-hand knowledge on the context of the study. I talked about the program with people who had been and were working with it and who have the expertise so that I could understand the process as well as possible. Furthermore, I joined the social workers for home visits and follow-up visits in order to get an understanding of the everyday life of the women involved with LPK. The languages spoken during the visits were mainly Swahili and Kikuyu. I had a chance to pose specific questions to some of the clients, and the social workers were able to give me a rough interpretation of the answers in English. Furthermore, the social workers summarized some of the discussions that were had during our visits. Observation and informal discussions with LPK staff as well as the clients gave me the benefit of developing and adapting interview questions that capture the relevant dimensions of empowerment in the best way possible to the specific context. Besides numerous informal discussions, one comprehensive pilot interview was carried out for the purpose of testing the interview guide. I also got a chance to get to know the respondents and vice versa prior to the interviews, which was an essential facilitating factor. I being a white European conducting a field study in Kenya, my presence during a longer period of time ought to have decreased some of the potential interviewer effects.
In general, cooperating with program staff and the clients on a daily basis permeated every step of the field study and the people were considered as essential co-participants whenever possible, which is in line with recommendations for qualitative in-depth studies of empowerment (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995:578). Thus, empowerment values were paid attention to not only in the substance of the research but also in the implementation of the field study (ibid.). Moreover, there is reason to believe that having a partnership between the researcher and the clients potentially improves the quality of research including the level of its utility, since cooperation makes the needs of the community known (Perkins 1995:784).

After the first weeks of observation and discussions, I presented the purpose of the study in general terms for the potential respondents and expressed my desire to interview each of them for the study. Each potential interviewee, 14 all in all, was given a choice to either participate or not, and they could give their written consent by signing a printed consent form compiled for the purpose. In the beginning all 14 women expressed their willingness to be interviewed. However, four of the newly-graduated women finally exercised their right to choose and chose not to be interviewed. Reasons for the decision can be speculated. For some of the women a thought of discussing matters that can be experienced highly personal could have been the reason to say no. Some women may have had other, non-related personal reasons for not participating. When scheduling the interviews, the schedules of each interviewee were taken as a start point and the interviews were carried out in a time and place most suitable for each interviewee.

The choice of interviewees was made in a logical manner. Since the study seeks to capture effects brought by the WEEP program, two groups of women were invited to be interviewed: the women who had just graduated and the women who were just enrolled in the program some weeks before the data collection. There were seven women in each group. These two groups were chosen because the 1,5 year difference between the start point for each group would best bring out possible differences in the interview answers between women from respective groups. Each group being of suitable size, there was no need to employ random selection; instead, each person choosing to be interviewed was interviewed. By the time I arrived in the field, there were 30 graduated women and 7 women who had just started the program. Due to the limited scope of this study, the focus was put on the two above mentioned groups instead of including other, earlier graduated groups in the study.
Out of the fourteen potential interviewees, ten women finally agreed to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted within approximately three weeks, and the length of each interview varies from 35 minutes to 75 minutes, depending on the length of the answers and whether the interviewee speaks English or Swahili or Kikuyu or a combination of the two or three, when the interpreter was needed. The interview guide for the interviews consisted of two parts. First, the respondent was invited to share her personal story. Second, the respondent was posed questions about topics related to psychological empowerment. In practice, the two parts were in most of the cases intertwined depending on the content of the personal story. Each of the interviews was recorded with a voice recorder, and I made written notes during the interviews. None of the interviewees chose to stay anonymous.

Since the women from the program only know basics of English and I speak very little Swahili, the role of the interpreter was essential and enabled the conduct of the study. The person for the task was found through the networks of the organization. Not being an employee of LPK, he was not directly affiliated with the organization and therefore filled the important criteria of impartiality. The person chosen for the task is a community health worker by profession and had been working in the area where the interviews were conducted. Therefore, he was a familiar face among the clients in the area and acquainted with everyday challenges of people living with HIV, which increased the trust of the interviewees for the study. Moreover, his knowledge of the demography of the area enabled us to visit the interviewees conveniently as a team of two. It is always important to acknowledge the possible effect of having a male interpreter when discussing with women of a culture applying traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures. Considering the fact that the clients in this context are used to having both female and male health workers and discussing even some delicate issues with either ones, there is reason to believe that the effect is not of remarkable nature. The benefits of the chosen interpreter were estimated to outweigh the possible disadvantage concerning the gender issue.

The choice of using interviews as data follows the guideline according to which an empowerment approach to topics concerning community development can be seen as benefiting from employment of qualitative research methods (ex. Maton & Salem 1995). Since the qualitative approach not only addresses the economic but can also address the social, physical, and political context (Perkins 1995:771), it has the potential to provide a more comprehensive picture of the context in question. Furthermore, the fact that the level of
literacy among the clients of LPK varies supports, for practical reasons, the choice of oral information transfer instead of for example printed questionnaires. Finally, using life stories and semi-structured interviews as the main data gave the respondents a level of freedom to raise aspects that could have gone unnoticed in case of using a fully structured interview guide for the purpose of collecting the data. The choice of using interviews with the participants of the WEEP program as the main data instead of focusing on descriptions by staff was based on the strong belief that people experiencing the empowerment are the best experts to describe the aspects and feeling of empowerment in their own words and based on their experiences. The study therefore, following the recommendations presented in community development literature (Perkins 1995:791) strongly leans on descriptions of empowerment coming from the people who themselves stand in the middle of social change.
5 ANALYSIS

This section presents a content analysis of the interview material based on the three categories of the analysis framework that are self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy, self-respect and self-acceptance (presented in section 3.2.4.). Furthermore, identification of possible processes and causes of psychological empowerment within the WEEP program will be carried out. The results of the analysis will be summarized in chapter 6.

5.1 Self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy

Concerning beliefs in self-efficacy, the interviewees were asked about their goals in life, what they thought is needed for them to accomplish those goals, and how they feel about achieving those goals. Firstly, the respondents were asked which goals they have in life. The contents prove to be generally similar for everybody. The following quotation summarizes the general themes in the answers:

_Carol Wanjiko_: “So my goal in life is to give my children an education, that they live a better life. I don't want them to say 'I wish my father was here so that he could give an education'. I want them to depend on me and I would also like to have my own plot that I can build them their own house that they don't pay rent to anyone. And I would also like to have my own business that I will use to cater for all my needs.”

As the answer from one of the newly-enrolled quoted above, most answers revolve around the interviewee’s children, and they hope that the children get to live a better life than they themselves have and that the children can get an education. Furthermore, several respondents are hoping to have their own business in the future as well as a non-rental house.

Secondly, each respondent was asked about the factors that, according to them, hinder and facilitate respectively them at the moment in accomplishing their goals. When compared answers from the newly-enrolled and the graduates, interesting differences in the answers can be found. Interviewees in both groups mention the issue of capital as a hindrance, but for newly-graduates, that is the _only_ aspect they mention whereas for the newly-enrolled that is one of the many aspects that are listed out. Besides lack of capital, some of the hindrances listed out by the newly-enrolled were health problems and lack of important skills. The amount of problems is highlighted by the fact that one of the newly-enrolled interviewees
finds thinking of a facilitating factor in her life impossible, and she reports having several problems in her life:

Mary Wanjiro: “I had problems of getting work so I couldn't provide for my family and also my first-born child sleeps in the chair, in the couch so I'm always ashamed about it. Right now the bed that I'm using is even broken so sometimes we are sleeping we will just fall down.”

The previous quote shows that the respondent’s thoughts are very tied to her present situation and the practical problems in her everyday life. Furthermore, she explicitly expresses her feelings of shame because of the situation she is in. Her choosing to raise these details indicates that the negative feelings are present in her thinking. In more general terms, the fact that the newly-enrolled find more hindrances in their present life than the newly-graduates can logically indicate that negative feelings are more frequently present in the everyday life of these women compared to the newly-graduated women. Based on the interview answers, the newly-graduates see fewer hindrances in their lives, which ought to give more space to positive feelings. Considering that an individual’s positive moods in one area of life seem to lead to a more general feeling of self-confidence (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005:125), it can be argued that the newly-graduated feel more self-confident than the newly-enrolled and therefore most likely more empowered psychologically.

When the respondents are asked about the factors helping them at the moment to achieve their goals, some differences between the two groups can be spotted. The majority of the newly-enrolled women tell that some skills that they already have is the biggest asset for them at the moment. Furthermore, some of the newly-enrolled women mention the central role of the WEEP program already at this point of the enrollment. The following quote is an example of such an answer.

Interviewer: “In your opinion, do you have things in your life at the moment that already help you to achieve those goals, something you already have?”

Carol Wanjiko: “Right now I'm praying to God the he gives me the strength to continue acquiring the skills that I'm getting here for sewing because if I get the skills I can be able to start for myself and since I have no other course, this is my first one.”

In the quotation the interviewee expresses that she is acquiring skills at the WEEP class and that she sees it as a factor contributing to her achieving her goals. The interviewee emphasizes
the important role of the class for her future. Similarly to the previous quote, enrollment in the WEEP class and especially the concrete skills appear as a lifeline for several of the newly-enrolled women. In general, the good things that the newly-enrolled see in their lives at the moment appear to be tightly linked to enrollment in the WEEP class and the self-efficacy is restricted to this context. The answers from the newly-graduated, on the contrary, reflect a certain level of self-sufficiency. One of the graduates describes her present abilities in the following way:

**Interviewer:** “--- what would you say are the things that you already have in your life that make it easier for you to achieve those goals?

**Felistas:** “I have to be hard-working, don't have to sleep and pity for myself. I just have to kick the blankets away --- .”

In the previous short quote the interviewee summarizes what she already has and what, according to her, already helps her to accomplish her goals. The quote can be seen reflecting self-determination and the interviewee experiences that it is precisely her own agency that is already helping her in accomplishing her goals.

Thirdly, each respondent was asked what, in her opinion, is needed in order for her to achieve those goals, as well as what, in her opinion, possibly hinders or helps her at the moment to achieve those goals. Each of the newly-enrolled women as well as the newly-graduated women had an answer to what they need in order to achieve their goals. This underlines that all of them reflect on their context and personal situation. However, what is more interesting, are the actual contents of the answers where a clear difference between the two groups can be found. The most common thing that the newly-enrolled listed as needing was the capital, whereas none of the graduates mentioned capital as an important thing that was needed. Instead, every graduate listed their own hard work as the first thing that is needed in order for them to accomplish their goals, whereas only one of the newly-enrolled mentioned the importance of “being active and taking care of myself”, as she formulated it. Bearing the context of the study in mind, the difference between the answers ought not to primarily indicate that the newly-graduated women do not have challenges earning enough income in their everyday life. This is supported by the fact that two out of three graduates report experiencing moments when they feel that they do not have enough money. Instead, the
difference rather underlines the difference in the way of thinking between the two groups. The general way of thinking for the newly-graduates can be demonstrated with the following quote from an interview with one of the women.

**Interviewer:** "In your opinion, what do you have to have to achieve your goals?"

**Felistas:** “So I already have acquired the land, so my main concern now is the materials to start building the houses. For me to achieve that I have to be hard-working, wake up early in the morning and see that all my businesses are running smoothly.”

**Interviewer:** “Would you say that the things you are doing at the moment will lead you to your goals?”

**Felistas:** “They can, because if I was able to acquire that piece of land, is there something I can’t do?”

In the previous quote the respondent describes herself as an active agent in accomplishing her goals. The answer emphasized the decisive role of the respondent’s own actions. The newly-enrolled, on the contrary, seem to be more focused on the general fact that there is lack of money. It can be argued that this framing of the answers by the newly-graduates demonstrates their beliefs in their own self-efficacy. Furthermore, the interviewee in the quote is able to describe in relatively concrete terms what she needs to do in order to achieve her goals. That can be seen as a clear indication of her believed ability to achieve her goals.

Finally, each respondent was asked if they believe that they can achieve their goals. Each of the respondents in both groups say that they think realizing their goals is possible. Based on the general tendency of the interview answers, the answers should, however, be taken with certain cautiousness. It should be remembered that the interview situation always may affect the answers, and also the respondents, who do not experience strong beliefs in self-efficacy at that point of their lives, feel tempted to demonstrate that this is the case. The same naturally applies to the group of newly-graduates. When looking at the big picture of each interview, it can be argued that more support to beliefs in self-efficacy can be found among the newly-graduates. For some of the newly-enrolled, the positive answer to the question of achieving one’s goals strongly contrasts the general mood that is reflected in many other comments during the interview. The general tone in the interviews with the newly-graduates, in contrary, could be described as rather optimistic and self-confident. The last part of the previous quote,
“---if I was able to acquire that piece of land, is there something I can’t do?” gives a good example of the self-confidence surfacing in the interview answers. Also another newly-graduate comments on her situation with self-confidence, saying “---when I cannot find some customers today, the other day the customers come”.

A mechanism, visible here, that can partially explain the arguably high level of self-confidence of the newly-graduates is the experience of what Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005) call ‘goal success’. In the earlier quote the interviewee has gained a positive experience from acquiring the land, and now she is able to believe that she can also achieve her other goals. Another newly-graduated interviewee explains that, with the graduation, she felt good because she had “achieved something”. Therefore the WEEP graduation itself contributes to a positive loop of success for the participants. In general, there is reason to believe that the newly-graduated, after having completed the program, have experienced more success and that heightens their beliefs in self-efficacy and makes them confident. Consequently, beliefs in future success are facilitated.

5.2 Self-respect

Concerning feelings of self-respect, each interviewee was asked if she feels at the moment that she is respected by other people. Everyone was also asked about their recent moments of pride. Interestingly, all ten interviewees report feeling that they are respected by other people. When asked why the interviewee believes that this is the case, the answers slightly vary. In the case of the newly-enrolled, the answers typically revolve around the issues of self-care and baring responsibility as the following quotes show. Both of these quotes are direct answers to the question “Would you say that you are respected by other people” and they are from two of the women who are newly-enrolled in the program.

**Interviewer:** Would you say that you are respected by other people?

**Ann:** Yeah, they normally respect me because of how I have kept me, yeah. I'm caring for myself and my children.

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**Mary Wanjiko:** "Yeah. Every day people usually say that I am respected by other people because I have been with my family. Yeah. Any kind of condition that is
there I have never let them down or let them go. I am always with them. So everybody around me respects me for that.”

The first interviewee sees the respect coming from the fact that she is a responsible mother and also a person who takes care of herself. Also the second interviewee underlines the fact that she has stayed loyal to her responsibilities and not given up even during the hard times. It seems that the respondents see themselves as respected when they are able to do fundamental tasks just like everybody else. Based on this, it can be argued that measure for respect for these interviewees is primarily set by the external structures and expectations. The answers follow this pattern especially among the newly-enrolled. Furthermore, it can be stated from the quotes that the respect the women experience is clearly based on aspects that have already existed in their lives prior to entering the program. When compared to answers from some of the newly-graduates, it can be seen that they verbalize the issue of respect in a different way. The following two quotes are from two newly-graduates and both quotes are answers to the same question.

**Interviewer:** Would you say that you are respected by other people?

**Lydia:** “Yeah, because for now I have respect in myself and happy with myself and what I'm doing. The people are respecting me and since the time I went to work there I was thinking that they will never come at my shop because they know my status and give me some work. And since I went there I have never had them say anything about me. They are always happy, they greet me well. That's why I know they respect me. They never...they have forgotten about my status.”

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**Felistas:** “Yes, completely. The respect is that from oneself so I respect myself. --”

In the first quote, the interviewee tells that she was first afraid that people would not respect her as a new shop owner, but that her fears proved to be wrong. She also mentions she nowadays respects herself and her livelihood. Therefore, two interesting things can be noted when looking at the first quote. Firstly, the example she describes is strongly linked to the program, since one of its objectives is that the women will be able to start a business towards the end of the 1,5 year enrolment period. Thus, it can be argued that the program has enabled the interviewee to feel respected in a completely new domain of life, and there is reason to believe that she now feels more respected than before the program. Secondly, she gives self-
respect as the very reason for why she now feels that she is respected by others. The second interviewee gives the same explanation to her feeling of respect; indeed, she goes as far as defining respect as something that comes from within. This kind of verbalization was not strongly present in the reference group. Based on the interviews it is not possible to utter with complete certainty that the newly-enrolled women would not reflect on respect the same way as the newly-graduated. However, this kind of direct and active verbalization can be seen as a sign of developed awareness and understanding of the role of positive view of oneself. Once the individual becomes aware of this, she has the potential to take advantage of this knowledge also in the future whatever the situation. Based on the active awareness, it can be argued that the newly-graduated also, in fact, have developed a stronger sense of self-respect than the newly-enrolled. Thus, it can be argued that the WEEP program has empowered its participants psychologically in terms of self-respect.

Concerning feelings of pride, each interviewee was asked if they can remember a moment recently when they felt especially proud of themselves. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked which things about themselves they would proudly share with anybody. Each of the newly-graduated was able to answer both questions whereas some of the newly-enrolled struggled to think of something about themselves that they would be proud to share with other people. This can indicate that these individuals experience less pride of their actions at the moment. It is, of course, important to keep in mind that a question can, in theory, be experienced as difficult for other reasons.

Concerning incidents that the interviewees report feeling proud of, a variety of things can be found. Some of the newly-enrolled refer to things in further past whereas some others choose to raise an example from their short time in the WEEP class. In the following quote one of the newly-enrolled women shares her moments of pride.

**Maria:** “I'm always happy whenever I hear that there are visitors or interns coming here at LPK since Mum always calls me and tells me there is a little business here. You can get a little something for yourself.”

**Interviewer:** ”So you feel proud when she asks you?”

**Maria:** “Yes.”
In the previous quote the interviewee refers to her skill of braiding hair. She tells that she feels pride every time the leader of the organization, to whom she refers as Mum, invites her to braid hair for visitor at the organization. Based on her comment, it can be understood that she interprets this gesture as a sign of appreciation from the leader towards her. Most importantly, the example she chooses to share is closely linked to being enrolled in the WEEP class. This indicates that she primarily experiences feelings of pride in this context. The same applies to some other newly-enrolled women. When compared to the answers of the newly-graduates, both groups give answers that are linked to the WEEP class. However, not just some but each of the newly-graduated women choose to raise a moment or an incident of pride in life that is linked to the WEEP program. In the following quote a newly-graduated interviewee shares her sources of pride.

**Interviewer**: “--- can you remember a situation recently when you felt especially proud of yourself?”

**Lydia**: ”I’m extremely happy because I graduated at the WEEP class. That is a thing that makes me proud of myself. Because it has helped me to go on with my life.”

**Interviewer**: “What about, what would be the things about you that you would like everybody to know about you? What are the things that you are proud of?”

**Lydia**: “It would be the things that I’ve gone through and where I am right now.”

In the previous dialogue the interviewee tells that the fact that she has graduated from the WEEP program makes her feel proud of herself. Furthermore, she expresses pride of the change that has happened in her life during the latest years. Interestingly, two out of the three newly-graduated mention the graduation as their point of pride. The graduation ceremony occurred approximately two months prior to the time of the interviews and it can be classified as a recent event and therefore easily recalled. This, however, ought not to diminish the argument that being a graduate is of special importance in these individuals’ lives and gives them feelings of pride possibly stronger than most other aspects of their lives.

### 5.3 Acceptance

One of the challenges for HIV positive people living in Kenya is the stigmatization experienced because of the positive status. Finding a way to deal with stigma and complicated
relationships even with the closest relatives is therefore an important constitute of acceptance of their of one’s own situation for HIV positive individuals in the context of this study. I have looked for signs of self-acceptance by focusing especially on the interviewees’ narratives about stigmatizing relationships in their lives.

Hearing the stories on stigma from the interviewees gives an idea of the nature and scope of the problem of stigmatization. Each respondent was asked how their relationship with family is at the moment. The stories of stigmatization also surface as part of women’s life stories that they shared during the occasion. Both newly-enrolled women and newly-graduated women reported having experience difficult relationships with their relatives and friends because of stigmatizing attitudes and behavior from the part of the family. In the following quote one of the newly-enrolled women shares her memories of the time after her closest relatives found out about her status.

Carol Wanjiko: “Yeah, so now my mother also told the rest of my siblings not to even come close to me. So even the utensils that I would use, the spoons, the plates and the cups, they would be kept separate from the rest. So my siblings now started even beating my children so I asked my mother: ‘What do you want from me?’ So she told me: ‘When I come back in the evening I don't want to find you here.’”

In the quote the interviewee describes the very concrete ways of stigmatization by her family after she had disclosed her status to her family, including separate utensils and physical violence. It is evident that the person was suddenly treated very differently, and the situation eventually developed into such that she was not wanted in the house but was forced to leave. Another newly-enrolled respondent shares the story of her and her brother and expresses her sadness over how the brother, according to her, is not reachable anymore after he found out about her status, which shows that stigmatization can also be subtle. These examples are, with some exceptions, relatively representative to interviewees in both groups and this can be stated when comparing it to the following quote by one of the newly-graduated women in which she shares her experiences of stigmatization.

Lydia: “And when I was there it was very difficult because my mum would not take me into the house and she used to separate the things that I was using to eat. She gave me a room in our house and the things that I would be using for food. --- I was not talking to anyone and when people visited our house, mum would tell them that I was a burden to her, and I was not talking to anyone.”
In the previous quote the interviewee tells about her time while she was staying at her parents’ place after finding out she was HIV positive. She describes in detail how her mother would treat her differently because of her status by separating and isolating her in their everyday life in a way similar to what the newly-enrolled have experienced. The starting points for the both groups of women have therefore, in general, been relatively similar. However, differences between the two groups can be spotted when placing the described experiences on a time span. An example of this is the case of the newly-enrolled interviewee who was quoted earlier. She mentions later in the interview that her mother indeed has separated her from the rest of the family and that this is the prevailing state at the time of the interview still. Based on what she tells as well as the way she tell about what has happened, it can be stated that the situation is still fresh and it can be argued that the respondent has not yet found a way to deal with the situation. A similar impression could be gotten from a number of other cases shared by the newly-enrolled. The interviews reveal that some of the close relationships that the newly-graduates have can also be challenging. However, the stories by two out of three of the newly-graduated interviewees reflect that the attitude of the interviewees towards the situation is different compared to the general tendency among the newly-enrolled. In the following quote one of the newly-graduated women describes her present way of dealing with a challenging relationship and the role of the WEEP program in this.

Lydia: “--- we were given psychosocial and being told to forgive everyone, even if it's the one who has infected us or separated us we should forgive them. So to me I was encouraged and since we were having Bible study we were told to forget and forgive everyone who has said anything about us. And I started showing them that I was now ready to accept them again even if they were not ready. I was visiting them at home and when I went to their homes they saw that I had nothing in my heart that I was taking them very wrong. So, although for now I cannot get all that close to them because of the way they have taken me in we use to talk with each other although I know that I cannot tell them anything about me.”

In the previous quote the respondent describes her relationship to her family at the time of the interview. She describes how she has found a way to forgive her family after they have mistreated her before and she refers to the psychosocial counseling given in the WEEP class as a transformative factor in her changing her attitude towards her family. Furthermore, she expresses her awareness of the attitude that the family members still have and, based on the quote, sees her own attitude as the decisive factor in dealing with the relationship to her
family. Consequently, she expresses that she has found the tools for dealing with the situation. In general, the interviewee’s way of telling about the relationship reflects a feeling of calmness. The forgiveness towards the relatives can also be seen as reflecting the interviewee’s high level of acceptance and also self-acceptance to a certain extent.

The interviews show that the ways of dealing with stigmatized or potentially stigmatized relationships to family members can be various as the following quote shows.

 Felistas: “We are four siblings, three girls and one guy, but nobody in my family knows about my status. Because for my mother it's hard understanding or even accepting somebody that is HIV positive...yes, so I've never told them. So, maybe if they want to know they come and know for themselves. The time I wanted to share it with my mother I saw that she could not accept it, so I did not.”

In the previous quote another newly-graduated interviewee describes her relationship with her family and tells that she has not disclosed her status to them. Based on what she says it seems clear that she does not experience self-stigma anymore and for that part would be able to share her situation with her relatives. However, the mother’s stigma towards HIV positive and the interviewee’s knowledge of this seems to be the reason for why she has chosen not to disclose her status to her family. Her saying “----maybe if they want to know they come and know for themselves” indicates that she herself, despite having wanted to disclose her status earlier, is now in peace with the state of the things.

It is good to bear in mind that relationships between people are always unique and several factors play a role in how they develop. Furthermore, more time in average has passed since the newly-graduated interviewees found out about their status compared to the newly-enrolled. However, it can be argued based on the previous quotes that the newly-graduates have made an active choice in their way of dealing with stigmatizing relationships with their family and they can now be in peace with their choices whereas comments from several newly-enrolled interviewees reflect frustration and sadness around those relationships. This indicates that the newly-graduates have come further in processing their relationships and finding ways to deal with them. Thus, it can be argued that the WEEP program has played an important role in giving the participants tools for dealing with stigmatized relationships and has thus empowered the participants psychologically in terms of acceptance and even self-acceptance. The role of the program is highlighted in that one of the interviewees above directly refers to some of the programs activities as being essential to her attitude towards her relatives today.
As the previous quotes show, the process of going through the program does not always enable the graduates to restore their relationship to their relatives or sometimes even disclose their status to them. Looking back to the division by Narayan (2005) of factors affecting empowerment, stigmatizing attitudes can be seen here as an external factor diminishing empowerment. Despite the analysis of the external factors being outside of the scope of this study, it can be pointed out that external stigma, as the external factors in general, can be with difficulty affected by one individual only. The role of internal capabilities, i.e. self-acceptance, was therefore highlighted in feeling empowered in this context.

5.4 Behind the scenes: Identifying empowering processes in the program

As underlined earlier in the text, the focus of this study has indeed been on empowered outcomes. However, a look at some empowering processes is able to increase our understanding of why the WEEP program seems to empower its participants psychologically.

One powerful mechanism that can be spotted inside of LPK is the inspirational and motivational leader that the organization has. Based on the two-month observation carried out, it can be stated that the leader as well as other staff are in close connection to the participants of the WEEP class on a daily basis. The participants were continuously greeted happily by the staff and short casual discussions were carried out whenever possible. The newly-enrolled women were naturally treated as peer human beings by the staff. Furthermore, it could be noticed that the leader of the organization continuously showed her encouragement to the women with small subtle acts. These included contributing to the group’s microfinance saving with a symbolic amount of money as well as casually praising a product that a woman is working on in the sewing class. These observations are supported by comments from the interviews. In the following quote one of the newly-enrolled interviewees shares her personal moment of pride.

Carol M.: “So when I was in class I sew two pieces of cloth together. When Mary came she saw it was good. She asked me to go buy a zip so I did come and put a zip on it. It became a very nice purse, and somebody saw me with it and asked me to make one for that person ----. I did not know how to make it...yeah, so now I ended up knowing I can do it, something I did not know.”
In the precedent quote the interviewee describes a situation when she managed to do something she did not know she was capable of. The role of the leader’s subtle encouragement becomes clear in her telling how “---Mary came she saw it was good” and how “she asked me to go buy a zip”. The words of the leader encouraged the interviewee to go buy that zip and after that one person from the staff expressed her interest in buying a purse similar to the one the participant had made. Thus, the inspiration coming from the leader as well as the staff in general lead to the interviewee experiencing feelings of self-efficacy already in the beginning of the program. The interviews also show that the fact that the leader showed appreciation towards them when accepting them to the program has played an important role in them starting to believe in their self-worth and abilities. Finding inspirational and supportive leadership in the context of LPK also gives support to Maton and Salem’s (1995) finding that inspirational leadership is common to empowering organizations.

In earlier empirical research capacity building has been found to show a high positive correlation with women’s economic empowerment (Danjuma et al. 2011). Capacity building in different forms is also an important part of the WEEP class in that the participants learn business skills, professional skills, and psychosocial skills, among many others. Based on the interviews, it can be argued that capacity building, at least in this context, also goes hand in hand with psychological empowerment. In the following quote one of the newly-graduated women tells what she is proud to share about herself with anybody.

**Felistas:** "I let people know that I can do any work that is accorded to me. I prepare my soap from here, I bake my own cakes. Whenever I'm called to do any kind of work I don't say 'I can't', I just go and work for that person."

In the previous quote the interviewee tells that she is proud of the skills that she has acquired in the WEEP class and that now constitute part of her livelihood. Furthermore, the last sentence can be seen as reflecting the confidence that the interviewee now has after having acquired these skills. Another newly-graduated interviewee tells how her view of her own situation is now different from the time she found out about her status.

**Elizabeth:** “---you can live and you can work for yourself because I thought when one had HIV you cannot work, you cannot do anything to support a family but I've come to realize, even with HIV you can do anything, yeah.”
The interviewee tells that she has learned that she is capable of living a normal life being HIV positive. There is reason to believe that the capacity building activities such as the psychosocial counseling as well as acquiring professional skills have contributed to the interviewees’ regained feeling of self-confidence and that way psychological empowerment.

When trying to understand why the WEEP program seems to empower its participants psychologically it is important to recognize the role of peer support. According to Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005:136), positive emotions in at least one area are a prerequisite to a general feeling of self-confidence which is an aspect of psychological empowerment. A central mechanism producing these positive emotions in the program seems to be peer support. Based on the interviews, the newly-enrolled as well as the newly-graduated women have positive experiences from having the women by their side in the class. When asked, how she feels while at LPK, one of the newly-enrolled interviewees gives the following answer:

**Mary Wanjiko:** “I'm always happy and I can always come and share problems with my friends here. That way I don't feel lonely because when you don't have any friends or even your family it tends to get a bit lonely. So when I'm here I feel happy and relaxed.”

In the quote the interviewee describes that she feels happy and relaxed while among others who are in a similar situation as she is. The reason for this, according to her, is that the group of people with similar challenges enables her to share her problems with the others. It could be understood from the quote that the peers are better able to understand one’s feelings than anybody else. Another interviewee tells: “We laugh, we share stories so I forget about the issues that I have.” In general, comments from several interviewees indicate that the women can feel just like everybody else while in the group, and the participants feel that they can open up about the things in their lives and these encounters produce positive moods. Having peer support also allows the group members to feel sense of affiliation, and some of the interviewees underline this aspect. Sense of affiliation has also been listed by Nussbaum (2000) as an aspect constituting an individual’s well-being. In the following quote a newly-graduated interviewee describes the meaning of her group to her.

**Lydia:** “And when I was in WEEP class we were going to psychosocials and we were being asked to share our stories. --- I came to realize I have another family there in the support group because when I was sick they could take care of me. And
when I was feeling afraid, they were my friends, they were my sisters and they could look after me ---. When I was with them I was very free with them.”

In the quote the interviewee compares the WEEP group she had to a family. Her biological family is not close to her anymore because of stigmatization, and she experiences that the group takes care of her in a way similar to family members. It becomes that she has gotten several kinds of support from the group. Her saying that she feels free with the others could refer to her feeling that she is just like everybody else and can be herself in the others’ company. This can contribute to feelings of self-acceptance. The comments are supported by observations. The group members could often be seen preparing and having lunch together at LPK, and informal socializing and discussions with other group members as well as peer mentors from a previous class were common. Thus, it can be argued that one of the mechanisms enhancing psychological empowerment is that the WEEP program provides a space for emotional social support, which has been found to boost individuals’ feelings of empowerment (McAvay, Seeman, and Rodin 1996). The finding goes in line with that Maton and Salem (1995) have found mutual support to be one of the characteristics that is common to empowering organizations.
6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the Women Economic Empowerment Program empowers its participants psychologically. Prior to the study it was hypothesized that women who have gone through the 18-month long program are psychologically more empowered compared to women who have not yet gone through the program. For the purpose of finding out if this is the case a comparative qualitative study was carried out. Three individual in-depth interviews were conducted with women who had recently graduated from the WEEP program at the time of the field study and seven individual in-depth interviews were conducted with a reference group of women who had recently entered the same program at the time of the field study. Psychological empowerment of the interviewees was examined in terms of three aspects: self-confidence/beliefs in self-efficacy, self-respect, and self-acceptance.

The analysis indicates that the women who have recently graduated from the WEEP program experience higher levels of self-confidence and stronger beliefs in self-efficacy than the women who have only recently entered the program. Each interviewee did say she feels good about achieving her goals. A more nuanced analysis, however, showed that the newly-graduated interviewees saw fewer hindrances in accomplishing their goals than the newly-enrolled interviewees. The more positive view that the newly-graduated have of their situation indicates higher levels of self-confidence. The things that the newly-enrolled already found helping them in accomplishing their goals were closely linked to enrollment in the program, which underlines the empowering role of the program. Also their self-efficacy seemed to be restricted to the context of the program. The newly-enrolled experienced their self-efficacy depending on their finances. The newly-graduated, on the contrary, framed their own agency and hard work as the single most important thing in accomplishing their goals, which indicates self-confidence and strong beliefs in self-efficacy. Based on these findings, it can, thus, be stated that the WEEP program has empowered its participants psychologically in terms of self-confidence and beliefs in self-efficacy.

Concerning self-respect, it can be uttered with careful certainty that the newly-graduated women experience a higher level of self-respect than the newly-enrolled women. Each interviewee expressed that they feel they are respected by other people, interpreted as
reflecting their own feelings of self-respect. The reasoning to feeling respected shows a difference between the two groups. The newly-enrolled primarily report gaining the feeling of respect from being able to live according to external expectations formed by the society. The newly-graduated, on the contrary, actively verbalize that their feeling of respect is initiated in their own self-respect, which is a statement to a stronger feeling of self-respect than the newly-enrolled have. This is supported by the fact that some of the newly-enrolled interviewees experienced difficulties in expressing points of pride in themselves. The newly-graduated did not have these difficulties, which points to a positive effect of the program. The role of the WEEP program is furthermore heightened in that two out of the three newly-graduated interviewees chose to raise their graduation from the program as their moment of pride. Based on these findings, it can be argued that the program therefore enhances the participants’ psychological empowerment in terms of self-respect.

Finally, the analysis showed that the newly-graduated interviewees experience higher levels of acceptance than the newly-enrolled women when dealing with stigmatizing relationships. Based on the interviews, among the newly-enrolled women feelings of frustration and sadness could be spotted to a relatively large extent linked to their relationships with their family. This indicates that they had not yet found a way of dealing with those challenging relationships. The newly-graduated, on the contrary, demonstrated an attitude marked by peacefulness and forgiveness when talking about their stigmatized relationships with their relatives. This indicates that they had made an active choice in their attitude and found ways of dealing with the relationships. These findings and testimonies from the interviewees indicate that the WEEP program has been an important transformative factor in changing the newly-graduates’ attitudes; especially the psychosocial counseling was mentioned as an important source of learning forgiveness. Thus, it can be argued that the WEEP program has empowered its participants psychologically in terms of self-acceptance. To summarize the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the Women Economic Empowerment Program as a whole has empowered its participants psychologically. LPK being a community-based organization, the result lends support to Zimmerman’s (1995:570) suggestion that participation in community organizations is an empowering process for individuals.

A concise tracing of potentially empowering processes and factors in the WEEP program both clarified and underlined the results. First, an inspirational leader and supportive staff were identified as a central factor in enhancing the participants’ self-worth and beliefs in self-
efficacy. Inspirational leadership is also a characteristic found by Maton and Salem (1995) to be common to empowering organizations. Second, various kinds of capacity building activities, i.e. psychosocial counseling and professional skills were identified as contributors to feelings of pride and higher levels of self-confidence among the participants. Capacity building was therefore found to correlate with psychological empowerment in this context. Finally, the setting of the WEEP program as well as the physical space of LPK was identified as a space for emotional support for the participants. In line with earlier findings (McAvay, Seeman, and Rodin 1996), emotional social support was found to raise feelings of empowerment among individuals; being a member of a peer group was identified to increase feelings of self-acceptance, sense of affiliation as well as positive emotions, which potentially lead to feelings of self-confidence (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005:136). Finally, goal success (Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005) was identified and discussed in the context of self-confidence and self-efficacy as partially explaining the higher levels of psychological empowerment among the newly-graduated respondents.

When interpreting the results, the WEEP program can be found to empower its participants psychologically. Also a general difference in empowerment between the two groups can be identified. However, the fact that some answers from the newly-enrolled indicate levels of psychological empowerment not distinguishable from those of the newly-graduated women should be noted. This can reflect that not just the realization of the 18-month empowerment program but already the mere knowledge of the fact that one is chosen and able to go through the program makes the person feel more optimistic about her situation. It is fully probable that the very entrance to the program provides a certain type of positive mood induction for its participants, which can be confused with a more general self-confidence (see Diener and Biswas-Diener 2005). This specific effect could be potentially isolated by choosing a reference category of women who are not connected to the program. With another selection, however, other potentially affecting factors could surface. Furthermore, it becomes visible in some analytical comments by the newly-graduated interviewees that a longer time is likely needed for a more profound experience of psychological empowerment to develop.

It should be kept in mind that there is always a possibility of selection bias in the original process of picking the participants to the program. It may be that women who are relatively more motivated and empowered already in the beginning may also be more likely to participate (acknowledged by ex. Hashemi et al. 1996:639), which is possible also in the
context of this study. It is known that the participants for the WEEP program are chosen based on several factors including a high number of children and lack of sustainable livelihood, which ought to diminish the effect of self-selection to a certain extent. By only selecting women associated with the program to be interviewed, the possible differences in the motivation between the two interview categories were minimized. Therefore, this factor ought not to have a significant effect when comparing the two categories of participants. This may have not been the case in the scenario in which the reference group would be chosen randomly from outside the program.

Four out of the seven newly graduated women finally declined to be interviewed. Therefore there is always the question of whether the answers from the four declined women would have affected the results and how. In addition, it could be in the interest of some interviewees to paint a positive picture of their feelings that way praising the organization, even if they, in reality, would not experience such optimism at the moment. There is no specific reason to assume that the views of those three remaining women who were interviewed would not to a large extent represent the general tendencies among the newly-graduates. However, a relatively small sample of the group should be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

Concerning generalizability, the context of the study should be kept in mind. The focus of the study being qualitative, the amount of people interviewed is necessarily limited. The substance of the findings can certainly be expected to be relatively similar in other contexts where inspirational leaderships, peer support and various forms of capacity building are present. The results of the study could be generalized to the contexts of small community-based organizations that work with HIV positive women.

The interviews provided a myriad of interesting opening for more detailed discussion. For future research it could be fruitful to have a third interview category consisting of women who already graduated from the WEEP program a while ago. This way it the empowering impact of the program could be traced further. In order to maximize the comparability of the answers, it would be intriguing to pose the exact same questions at the time of the graduation to those women who had now started in the program. Also, the women who were now newly-graduated could be interviewed again in a year. The economic aspect of the program would need to be investigated further in order to be able to trace parts of the endogeneity of the phenomenon of psychological empowerment.
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Primary sources


Secondary sources


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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) Presentation + how the interview will advance

2) Background information of respondent:
   - name, age, children + who do you live with

3) Personal story
   - Can you remember how was your everyday life before you found out about your HIV status?
   - How do you feel now when you think about that time?
   - Could you describe me your normal day?

4) Self-confidence / Self-efficacy / Self-determination
   - Tell me about your goals in life.
   - In your opinion, what do you have to have to achieve those goals?
   - In your opinion, what hinders you from trying to achieve your goals right now?
   - In your opinion, what helps you at the moment to try to achieve those goals?
   - How do you feel about achieving those goals?
   - Do you experience moments when you don’t have enough money? What are your thoughts then?
   - Now I would like you to daydream a bit. If you didn’t need to think about money, what would be your ambition in life?
   - Tell me about a situation recently when you felt especially proud of yourself. What about it made you feel proud?

5) Self-esteem / self-respect
   - If you were to meet somebody who doesn’t know anything about you, how would you describe yourself to that person?
   - What would be the things about you that you would like everybody to know?
   - Would you say that you are respected by other people?
   - Could you describe your relationship with your relatives? How do you feel about it?
   - Could you describe your relationship with people who were close to you before you found out about your status? How do you feel about it?

6) Future / Self-efficacy
   - Tell me how you feel when you think about your future.
   - Is there anything you would like to change in your life?
   - What would you like to change?
   - Who do you think will contribute most to that change?
   - How would you compare your life before you started in WEEP and now?