

THE ASYLUM-SEEKER AND REFUGEE EXPERIENCE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA BY USING ARTEFACTS

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THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

- UNHCR (2016) has reported that *“one in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee”*.
- This is at its highest level since the Second World War.



PRIOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH ASYLUM-SEEKERS & REFUGEES

- **The experiences of those who undertake forced migration are often explored using quantitative methodologies (e.g. Bogic, et al., 2015; Hollifield, et al. 2002).**
- **There is a pressing need to understand the ‘lived experiences’ of asylum-seekers and refugees comprehensively and holistically.**
- **Could look at both common and individual lived experiences of being an asylum-seeker and/or refugee to inform appropriate care and intervention.**
- **This would be within the auspices of the BPS (2017) Position Statement on ‘The need for psychosocial care and support for refugees and asylum seekers’**

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Policy

Position statement: The need for psychosocial care and support for refugees and asylum seekers

20 June 2017

Poverty, destitution and worklessness are all detrimental to mental health and, because of this, the mental health and wellbeing of refugees and asylum seekers is particularly vulnerable.



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LITERATURE REVIEW OF PRIOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND/OR REFUGEES

Sample qualitative studies:

- *Shannon, et al. (2015)* - data from 13 focus groups with 111 refugees from Burma, Bhutan, Somalia, and Ethiopia
- *Kelly, et al. (2016)* - IPA of interview data from six refugee mothers in the UK. How participants made sense of, and created meaning around, parenting and family life in the UK. Identified three main themes: loss, self as mother, good with the bad
- Common themes identified by many of the other studies we reviewed included:
 - uncertainty,
 - despair,
 - resignation,
 - the importance of support networks,
 - the significance of continuing events & of holding onto culture from 'back home',
 - and, in a number of studies...hope.

AIM

- **This study sought to explore the lived experiences of asylum-seekers and refugees based in the United Kingdom in an effort to understand the psycho-social challenges and support systems in place for them.**

MEANING-MAKING: INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

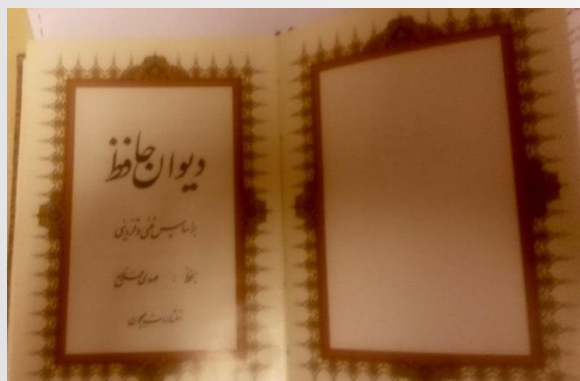
- **'interpretation of meaning for a particular person in a particular context' [Refugees and Asylums seekers] (Smith et al., 2009, p. 196)**
- **IPA is interpretative through a double hermeneutic dynamic. It's a process that happens when 'The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world' (Smith, 2004, p. 40)**
- **Used traditional conventions (e.g. Maltby, Williams, McGarry, & Day, 2014) with IPA of systematically going through:**
- **(1) initial reactions, (2) identification of themes, (3) clustering of themes, (4) summarising and interpreting the themes**

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

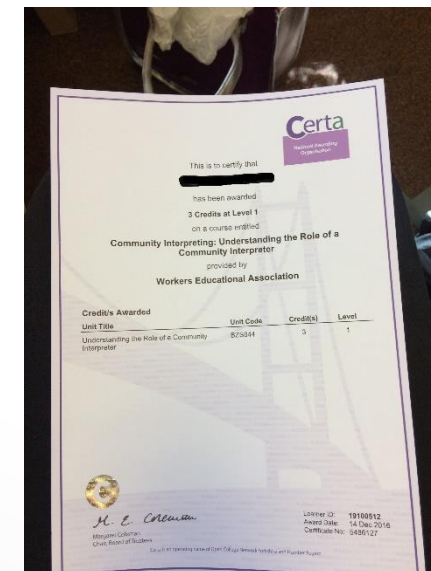
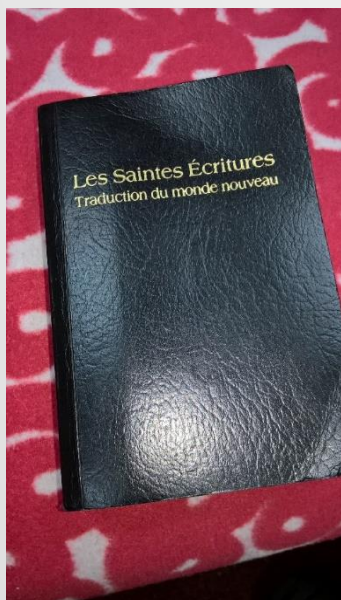
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Countries of origin	Nigeria 4	Guinea 3	Sierra Leone 1	Democratic Republic of Congo 1	Liberia 1	Zimbabwe 1	Iran 1
Age range	28 – 61 years						
Gender	Female 9	Male 3					
Status in UK	Asylum seeker 8	Refugee 3	Other 1				
Place of residence in UK	Leeds 9	Bradford 3					
Time in UK	5-21 years						

TWO INTERVIEWS: IN ONE OF THEM, ARTEFACTS WERE USED



- Intended as a preliminary interview as a 'warm up' to enhance/cultivate rapport
- Sharing artefacts is an intimate process
- A focus, a trigger for memory



TRAINERS

- The shoes that crossed a desert



INTERVIEWER REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

- “Seeing these pair of old Puma shoes and tattered photocopy of a book given to him many years ago by a coach...really made me get a sense of the journey that he had had and how he had weathered different traumatic experiences...I really began to think about empathy as described as walking in the others shoes as if they were your own and I felt quite emotional empathising with his circumstance and experience.”

A PATCHWORK QUILT

- I look at it ... I become hopeful. I become hopeful that I'm still going to make it. I'm still going to win this asylum case.... this one is ... Grandma's Flower Garden. So you find the fabric is printed flowers, and then there's patches like the patios. ... there are paths that you need to follow. So that's why this quilt is like [this]...it represents a journey. (p11).
- I look at my quilt ... it's... although it's dark colours and light colours ... well that's what life is like. You go through some dark patches in life, and you go through some quite, very happy moments in life. (p12).



INTERVIEWER REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

- **The fabric was all donated to her by members of her choir and of her sewing group. The group itself provided her with much support, some structure to her life, an outlet for her loneliness and the powerlessness of the asylum process.**
- **It represented people's generosity to her, even further adding to it being a symbol of hope. She referred to very clearly and decisively picking the quilt up to work one when she felt overwhelmed or down, and that in doing so had prevented becoming depressed and unwell.**

FINDINGS: SUPER-ORDINATE THEMES

**Layers of stress
and trauma**

**Personal
impact**

**Importance of
support**

**Awareness of
development
of self and
identity**

**Importance of
spirituality**

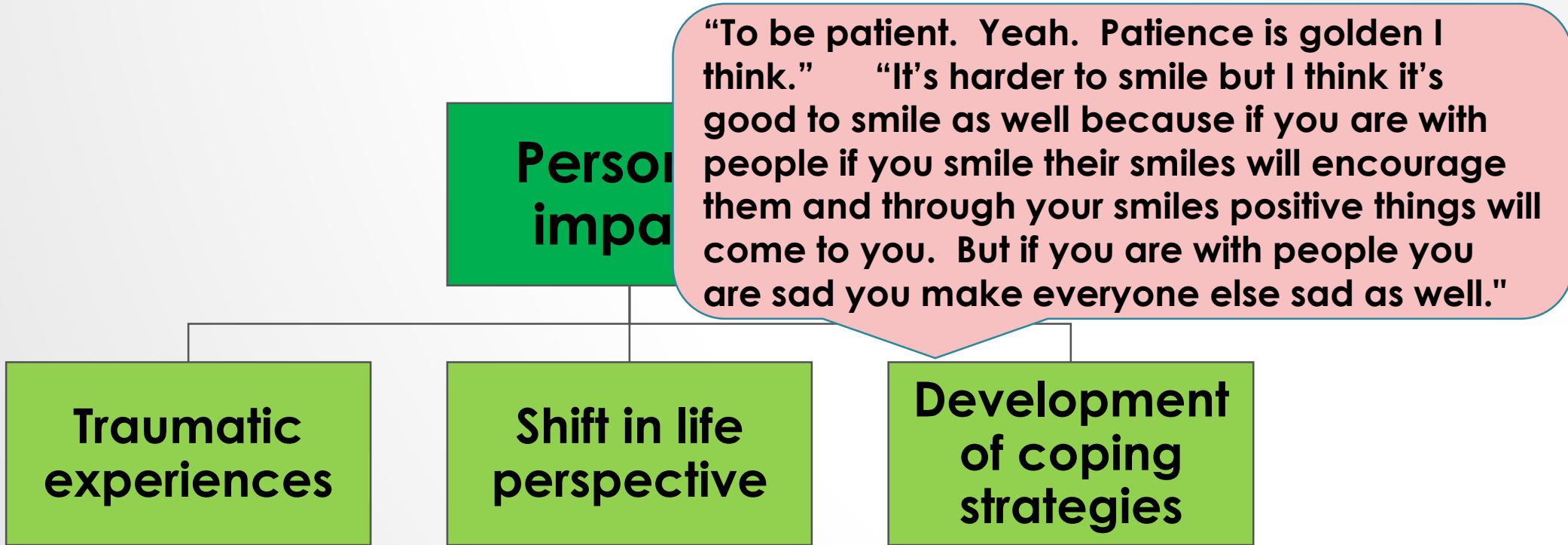
**Development
of resilience**

“I was thinking that the police may come and report us, to deport us... It had a bad impact on me ... after that I felt depressed. And even after I had permission to live, I couldn't open the door to people... I didn't have confidence to go out.”

Identification of the impact of stress and trauma

Pain of asylum seeking process

Dissonance: memories of home, present and uncertainty of future



Importance of support

Cultural valuing
[i.e. singing,
music]

Drawing on
strength of internal
objects

Valuing past and
present
relationships

“Those are the people that matter to me and that’s why I wanted to bring my residential permit card. It matters to me too because it always reminds me of the people who have been there for me.” “There are still good people out there.”

**“I’m just a strong woman
I think. I think I got that
from my Mum.”**

Awareness of self and identity

**Acknowledgement of
personal and familial
identity, maternal
connection**

**Label, stigma and
status [refugee,
asylum seeker,
parent]**

**Appreciation of
strengths and
limitations**

Importance of spirituality

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graph TD; A[Importance of spirituality] --> B[Religion, faith and spirituality]; A --> C[Developing a personal philosophy, drawing from traumatic experiences];
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Religion, faith and spirituality

Developing a personal philosophy, drawing from traumatic experiences

“God can use people to help people...
So being religious helps you do cope with your problems.”
“I believe in God. I know there is a God hiding.” “If I get angry with God that means I’m getting angry with myself.”
“It’s sometimes difficult to understand but, all the same, it’s a life lesson. “

De

“Put the past behind you, and look forward to the future and see what the future brings for you. Give back.” “You listen to other people. You listen to their own life story. You compare yours and their own. Maybe when you listen to other person’s life story maybe it’s even worse than yours.”

**Acceptance and
wanting to
contribute (work)**

Giving to others

**Post-experience
growth &
realignment to an
equilibrium**

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Resilience and Post-traumatic growth are possible following the most extreme circumstances (e.g. torture, murder of family members, loss of almost everything that constitutes “a life”)
- We have shown how some participants were able to be resilient and recover from traumas by:
 - Being aware of layers of stress and trauma
 - Developing coping strategies (in most cases religion)
 - Drawing from supportive objects and relationships
 - Understanding and acceptance of their predicament
 - Therapy and support
 - Developing a spiritual understanding of life experiences
 - Giving back to others and supporting in a similar way to how one has been supported previously.

THANK YOU

WITH MUCH GRATITUDE TO:

- **The participants, who gave of their time to tell their stories.**
- **Staff members in the charitable organisation in West Yorkshire, who work with asylum-seekers and refugees and who were able to promote the study to prospective participants.**
- **Leeds Beckett University, with its Research Cluster scheme, which was able to support us to carry out the study**
- **Nottingham Trent University's Psychology Department for enabling me to present these findings at this conference.**