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Author(s): Adenike Ruth O Taiwo-Pala

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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN  
REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKING WOMEN IN  
A NOTHERN TOWN IN THE UK

By:

Adenike R.O. Taiwo-Pala

A

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Work

April, 2012

Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth Harlow

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN  
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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to gain an insight into the experiences of African women refugees and asylum seekers, in order to provide an in-depth perspective of their experiences since arriving in the UK.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit 5 participants in a northern town in the UK; this means participants were selected due to their specific characteristics to fit in with the study design. The main criteria for the subjects of the study were that they are African women refugees or asylum seekers, aged 21 and above.

Participants were recruited through a drop-in centre in a northern town in the UK and were interviewed in the English Language, using semi-structured interviews in order to generate in-depth information. The interviews were hand written as the women in the study did not consent to tape recording as originally planned. However, this allowed a deeper flow of information, and I was able to immerse myself in the interview contexts and gained a robust understanding of the responses.

Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method for analysis.

Major interpretation from this study revealed themes of restricted access to state welfare provisions as well as employment restrictions. The study further reveals other themes such as, communication difficulties, racism, uncertainties, powerlessness, segregation and isolation, provision of help through voluntary organisations, choice of destination and finally theme of peace and safety.

The themes in this study reflect existing academic literature on asylum seekers. However, this research added to the existing body of knowledge by exploring how women who participated in the study felt about the UK. They believed it is more peaceful and secure than where they have come from. They also believe that the UK is a good choice of destination based on the justice and welfare system, also because their countries were colonised by the UK.

The main limitation of this study was that the samples were small and not representative of all African women refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Therefore, recommendations are made for a larger scale project that will gather information from more refugees and asylum seeking women. This research should look for examples of lack of social and economic engagement within the environment and the community. It should compare the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in different parts of the UK in order to ascertain the impact of current dispersal policy on asylum seekers in the UK. Moreover, studies that examine the long-term effects of the entire asylum processes on health and well-being of asylum seekers in the UK are also deemed important.

Finally, recommendations are made that Social Workers who work with these groups of people should endeavour to work in an anti-discriminatory way and try as much as possible to offer emotional support in form of counselling services for these groups of individuals.

## Declaration

'I certify:

1. That the Dissertation is my own account, based upon work actually carried out by me and that all the sources of material, not resulting from own investigation; including observational information has been clearly indicated.

2. That no part of the work incorporate in the Dissertation is a quotation from published or unpublished sources, except where it has been clearly acknowledged as such. And that any specific direction or advice received is also properly acknowledged.'

Name: Adenike R.O.Taiwo-Pala

Signed:

Date:

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the things I have learnt from reading and writing of books is the fact that no man is an island. No one lives entirely on his own knowledge. We all live to serve others. In writing this project, I have gathered inspiration from many sources. I have received help from books, newspapers, magazines, journals, public libraries and other relevant literature.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

“My initial problem was someone to share my feelings or to talk to, no money, no support and the distress was almost unbearable as I was going from one place to another trying to register my asylum application through one Africa community center and was later directed to where I could get a solicitor who helped to file my asylum application” (Maria, 2011; not her real name).

This study begins with the above quote from an interview with an African woman asylum seeker in a northern town in the UK. The use of the quote is important, as it captures the basis of the study. The process also fulfils the overarching aim of the study, which is to raise the voices of African women refugee and asylum seekers in the UK by providing an in-depth perspective of their living experiences since their arrival.

In the quotation above, the interviewee expressed personal frustration and uncertainty about her experience.

“Social Work research usually focuses on marginalised groups or people who hold limited social power and seeks to bring about social change that enhances human well-being” (Dominelli, 2005, p. 229). She stated further that primarily research must add value so that others learn from the results. This is especially true of the anti-discriminatory values of social work, which are to inform the wider community about issues that may not otherwise be prominent.

A Social Worker has statutory duties, underpinned by professional codes and personal values to support the most vulnerable members of society (Brayne & Carr, 2005). This research therefore, attempts to captures the awareness of African women experiences during and after the asylum seeking processes and on the other hand aims to achieve the following:



- To explore the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum- seeking Women in order to provide an in-depth perspective of their living experiences since arriving in the UK.
- To establish whether the asylum system promotes the needs of these women in such area as health, housing, employment, education and their general well-being.
- To identify any area of challenges faced by these women.

The process of seeking asylum in the UK is complex and people with right to remain have different status available to them which are subject to change as the law changes (Clayton, 2010).

For the sake of clarity, it is worthwhile defining the following key terms:

**Asylum:**

This is the protection given by one country to people from another country, who are often fleeing persecution, conflict, political unrest, war or torture under the united nation convention of 1951(Harvey, 2000).

**Asylum Seeker:**

According to the UN Convention on the status of Refugees (1951), an asylum seeker is a person requesting asylum or refugee status whose application has not yet been decided. They must show that they have a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

**Refugee:**

Refugee status is given to persons outside their country of nationality who are unwilling to return to it due to a fear of persecution. Many people flee persecution and reach the UK, but only those who successfully claim political asylum are recognised as refugees by the British Government under the terms of the UN Convention (Fell and Hayes, 2007).

**New Migrant:**

This is a broad term used to refer to people who have come to live in the UK for whatever reasons be it social, economic as well as those seeking asylum, especially from countries that do not have large established community presence in the UK already. (Harvey, 2000).

The aims and objectives of this research are addressed throughout chapter one of the thesis. This also includes the definition of the key terms. Chapter two reviews several relevant literatures by different authors on the subject matter, while Chapter three discusses the research strategy and methodology as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter four employs thematic analysis to explore all the data that were gathered from the study. Themes that emerged from the participants' stories were pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experiences; themes and sub-themes that emerged were explored. The final chapter provides brief discussions on the themes, followed by conclusions and recommendations for future researchers and social workers who hope to work in the social work field with refugee and asylum seekers.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter is on the review of literature, with a particular focus on African migration pattern as well as experiences of asylum seekers in the UK, while asylum policies in the UK are explored.

Daniel Franklin, a European Editor of 'The Economist' in 1993, described a day in the life of a middle class Londoner in the following expressions:

“First thing in the morning, the newspaper is delivered by the Indian who run the corner shop (nobody in the area could be bothered to do such an early service anymore). Then the cleaner arrives; she is Polish and will in time almost certainly return home. The walk to the underground station takes him past the restaurant run by Chinese, Italians, Indians and a Jewish bakery. He buys his underground tickets from a West Indian. He arrives at the office, where the security guard is Irish. He shares room with a South African, the secretary is Canadian, and his ultimate boss is a Rhodesian. Most days he has lunch at the local Italian restaurant or sandwich bar and supper is often a pizza delivered by any one of a dozen of nationalities, but never British. This example happens to be my own, but I have no reason not to believe that it is not fairly typical” (<http://www.economist.com>).

The editor's description demonstrates the state of British society today. Nevertheless, Immigration continues to be one of the most central issues for the British public. It is always in the newspapers and it is often the subject of intense political debate (Cohen, 2006).

Historically and specifically up until the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, movements and settlements into and out of Britain were relatively subjected to limited or no form of control. The freedom of movement was largely due to the high emigration of Britons in search of opportunities and accumulation of wealth both in the colonies and in the USA.

The consequence of this large-scale movement combined with the high demands for manpower by the industrial revolution taken place in Europe at that time, was the reciprocating demand for people in the form of labour, which was constantly in need of replenishing (Cohen, 2006).

Hence during this time, the process of granting asylum was met with a rather minimal opposition, which coincidentally corroborated with the dominant ideology of political freedom and encouragement of free trade.

As a whole asylum at this time “fulfilled dual function, serving the interests of the capitalist class while legitimatizing it. It was also a show of strength indicating to the states from which people fled that they had no claims on their citizens once they have entered Britain” (Schuster, 2003:p81).

In addition, granting settlement or refuge was a “cheap way of asserting moral superiority.....which became current at that time, placing North Europeans at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of races” (Schuster, 2003:p81). Such still permeates the mental of the British and Western society in the present day.

## **AFRICAN MIGRATION AND EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN THE UK**

Africa has been a significant asylum sending region. Based on the 2001 census, African people constitute about 0.8 per cent of the general population of the UK and 1.4 per cent of the children (National Statistics, 2003). The city of London was the main place of residence i.e. more people tend to reside in London than other places with about 78 per cent of Africans living in the capital. Between 1950s and 1960s, African immigrants were mostly people from commonwealth countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria; this was in response to post-war labour shortages. Also during the last two decades, the African people settling in Britain have come from a wider

range of countries, some with different colonial histories and/or experience of extreme political turmoil. Over the years, African people have come to Britain for varied reasons i.e. to study, to join family members or to seek asylum (Mason, 2003).

African families' experiences in Britain are influenced by their social-economic circumstances. (Aymer, 2003). According to the 2001 census, Black African or 'Black other' communities were likely to live in low income households (National Statistics, 2008). Thus, African families are proportionally more likely to live in poverty than many of the other communities in Britain. It was suggested that Victoria Climbié may have come to Britain to escape chronic poverty (Laming, 2003). It has been noted that many families will retain connections with family members in Africa and some may endure increased financial constraints because of the need to support their families in more dire circumstance in their countries of origin (Anane- Agyei, 2002).

Anane- Agyei, (2002) submits that Immigration and asylum status will determine income, employment opportunities and access to support services for many African people in Britain today. When considering the heterogeneity of African people, religion, language and ethnic origins also need to be recognised. African people have varied religious beliefs, with Islam and Christianity being particularly significant in the lives of many African families.

There are some evidences in the literature to suggest that social workers and other professionals struggle to manage the complex needs and social circumstances of many African families according to Okitikpi and Aymer's, (2003) in their study of intervention with African refugee families; they found that social workers often felt

overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the families' traumatic experiences and complex needs.

The lack of systematic data focusing specifically on the experiences of asylum seekers may reflect, in part, the special obstacles to studying that population (Gilberth and Koser, 2006). Systematic sampling is difficult since asylum seekers are not listed on electoral rolls, in telephone directories, or on accessible registers, they argued.

Asylum seekers who have been persecuted by authorities in the past are understandably wary of researchers inquiring into their backgrounds (Gilbert and Koser, 2006). Furthermore, language and cultural barriers make the collection of accurate data more difficult, especially if the sample includes subjects from diverse language groups.

Generally, asylum seekers face bureaucratic hurdles before they are permitted to become permanent residents and many do not succeed and are at risk of deportation (Ndirangu and Evans, 2008). Nevertheless, asylum seekers constitute a vulnerable population due to a host of pre and post-migration risk factors. Pre-migration factors include torture and refugee trauma, which may result in mental and physical illness (Goldfeld, Mollica, Pesavento and Farone, 1988).

Asylum seekers often come from conflict areas, without access to adequate health and other services (Dumper, 2006). Post-migration factors include: detention, the length of the asylum procedure, language barriers, and the lack of knowledge about the new healthcare system (Bischoff, Bovier and Rrustemi, 2003). In addition to past trauma exposure and displacement, asylum seekers live in a state of insecurity and are faced with the constant fear of repatriation (Becker and Silove, 1993).

Burnett and Peel (2001) in the literature review 'Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: Health Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees', found that one in six refugees had a physical health problem severe enough to affect their lives and two thirds had experienced anxiety or depression. Although they provided useful information on the health needs of asylum seekers, it would have been beneficial if their information were based on empirical data. Health needs are just one aspect of the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees; there are other needs that constitute their experiences such as, social and economic needs. There is the need for a holistic approach when looking at the experiences and not just an aspect Dumper (2008) argued.

In terms of women asylum seekers fleeing persecution there is no gender specific law in the UNHCR although Home Office statistics show that in 2006, 30% of asylum seekers were women coming to the UK (Ceneda and Palmer, 2006). In British Law there is no gender sensitive law however the UNHCR drew up a set of gender guidelines in 1991. Despite the request from the EU Parliament that all nations incorporate them into their laws, many countries have not managed it; the UK has only given some additional recognition of female asylum seekers to their asylum policies but has not yet fully integrated it into their laws (Dumper, 2008).

According to Crawley (2001) the guidelines recognise that women might have been persecuted because of their association with a political group, that gender-specific persecution specifically affects women such as sexual violence, family/domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and punishment for disobeying social traditions. Other reasons for persecution might be through law or non-conforming to social and

religious convention and then suffering abuse as a consequence in her private life without state protection also substantiates persecution. Dumper, however, suggested that procedural matters should allow women to request for a female interviewer, interpreter or a legal representative.

Moreover caseworkers should be sensitive with women that might have been sexually assaulted as trauma can result in memory loss, lack of concentration and confusion.

Crawley (2001) said that women's experience of persecution was often different from that of men, yet this was not necessarily taken into account in asylum determination.

Procedures might be based on the model of an asylum seeker as a young man engaged in fairly formal political activity against the state, and an assumption that political cultures in the countries of origin were the same as in Western Europe.

In the same vein, Ceneda and Palmer, (2006) attests that Women's experience of harm often was left out when their political activity had taken the form of providing food and shelter, or taking messages. She further argued that lack of recognition that gender identity itself (such as how she behaves, what she wears or who she associates with) might be a political issue.

Western governments often considered sexual violence against women as 'personal' rather than within the public sphere, even when connected to political aims and even when there were implications for how a woman was treated in society following rape and violence Ceneda and Palmer, (2006) stressed further.



Although evidence shows that violence against women is present across all race, cultures and social classes the impact it has on women differs due to the often varying service responses to women from different cultural backgrounds and to different forms of violence against women (Krug, Dahlberg & Mercy, 2002). Constraints created by structural inequalities like gender, race, culture, class and state policies do reflect in the experiences of African women asylum seekers who are victims of violence. However, this is against the early feminist perspectives on domestic violence that have been criticised for viewing gender as the only explanatory factor for difference in access to services by victims of domestic abuse. In one of the critiques of this perspective, Raj and Silverman (2002) maintained that the fear of racial discrimination could act as barriers hindering women from accessing services or reporting occurrence of domestic violence.

Different literature on the extent and reason for violence and ways of dealing with it is from the western point of view and has regarded women as one homogeneous group (Fell and Hayes, 2007). Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been an awareness of the cultural context in which domestic violence occurs against women.

Researchers have attended to this aspect and made effort to construct suitable interventions (Yick and Oomen- Early, 2008).

Kasturirangan, Krishnan & Riger (2004) proposes that with consideration for the role of cultural context, theoretical researchers have disputed that domestic violence against women is associated with cultural values and norms that defines masculinity as authority over women. That definition, which views women as inferior to men, gives social legitimacy to male dominance over their wives, even to the point of violence. Although those values and norms expose a patriarchal perspective that is

present in every society, that perception is rampant among certain groups that do not define domestic violence against women as a social problem (Raj and Silverman, 2002).

### **ASYLUM POLICY IN UK**

The UK has a long tradition of providing asylum. Since the UK has signed the UN Convention Relating to the Status of refugees (1951), the 1967 Protocol and the European Convention on Human Rights (1950), guarantees protection for asylum seekers and refugees. In the UK, refugees have usually sought to regularise their immigration status by applying for political asylum. The asylum determination process is managed by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) of the Home Office (Rutter, 2006).

Similarly, the first UK immigration controls were brought in by the 1905 Aliens Act, largely triggered by social panic caused by an inflow of Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe fleeing persecution and economic pressures. The Act set out four grounds on which people could be refused entry to Britain; the diseased, the insane, criminals and those likely to be a burden on public funds' (Sales 2007, p. 135).

The development of the welfare state was progressing and the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act and 1911 National Insurance Act both included conditions on residence and citizenship (Sales, 2007), demonstrating an early preoccupation with the impact of immigration on available resources. With the First World War came more restrictive legislation; the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act enabled the Home Secretary to enforce registration and deportation of aliens, and distinguished between 'friendly' and 'enemy' aliens, based solely on a person's nationality (Sales 2007, p. 136).

Policy on immigration and nationality during the post-war period was aimed at addressing an economic and cultural crisis in Britain, and has been described as;

‘the creation of a policymaking elite that manipulated notions of identity and definitions of citizenship and managed public opinion in order to preserve a constructed national identity’ (Paul 1997, cited in Sales, 2007, p. 138).

Although Britain needed immigration to satisfy its labour shortages, restrictions were still put upon who would be allowed to enter; according to the 1949 Population Commission Report only those who were ‘of good human stock and not prevented by their religion or race from intermarrying with the host population and becoming merged in it’ (Malik 1996, p. 20) would be suitable.

Britain was in the process of extending its identity globally, and the 1948 Nationality Act gave citizenship rights to all citizens of British colonies and the Commonwealth (Sales, 2007).

When black people from the West Indies and other colonies began to arrive in the UK seeking work, the issue of black white race relations came to the forefront; and a series of race related riots during the 1950s revealed an escalation of public opinion in favour of further controls on immigration (Sales, 2007).

An overview of the recent legislative background clearly shows that the process Britain has in place for dealing with applications for refugee status and supporting those awaiting a decision is one which is designed to discourage and prevent integration with mainstream life in Britain (Dumper, 2006). She argued that this is based on the assumption that people seeking asylum are undesirable for Britain, as ‘since the 1990s, waves of legislation have...attacked the asylum seeker and

enshrined in law the idea that many seekers of refuge are bogus, illegitimate, problematic, costly and a threat to British life' (Fell & Hayes, 2007, p134).

Bloch (2000) opined that the nature of British immigration and asylum law and policy is one of the major barriers to refugee integration. For example, Bloch (2000) conducted 160 interviews about settlement with refugees and found that the direction of social policy concerning refugees and asylum seekers has had a negative impact on participation in society, eroding access to social and economic institutions and adversely affecting integration.

The author asserts that this is linked to the lack of a sense of citizenship for immigrants who are denied equal access to the labour market and housing (Bloch, 2000). This link between asylum policy and social exclusion is summarised well in a discussion of contemporary debates around asylum and welfare, as follows: exclusion normally entails not being able to achieve acceptance and participation in one or more of the following ways: accepted levels of material well-being and social benefits; commonly held legal and social rights; and a positive opinion of status and identity. These are precisely those areas from which asylum seekers are currently excluded (Harvey, 2000).

By the mid-1980s, asylum applications had increased substantially. The UK adopted the newly introduced Carrier Sanctions with the passage of the Immigration Carriers' Liability Act 1987 (Rutter, 2006). Heavy fines were imposed on all carriers who transported people to the UK without the appropriate documentation. In the same year, the government enacted changes to social security regulations, restricting the benefits paid to asylum seekers to a level of 90 per cent of that granted to other claimants.

The year 1989 marked a turning point, with the start of an asylum migration of Somalis, Turkish Kurds, Congolese and Angolans. Within the UK Government, asylum started to be viewed as a policy problem and since 1989, the government has moved towards changing asylum policy; hence, proposals for asylum legislation were introduced (Rutter, 2006).

The Asylum and (Appeals) Act (1993) amended housing entitlements for asylum seekers. They lost their right to be accepted as 'homeless' and in need of social housing if they had any other accommodation 'however temporary'. Also, while an asylum case was being determined, no asylum seeking household could be offered a secure social housing tenancy; instead, they could only be offered temporary housing (Rutter, 2006).

It also further restricted the rights of asylum seekers to social housing, barring them from being placed on a waiting list (Healey, 2010).

The new legislation attracted legal challenges, invoking the National Assistance Act (1948), the Children Act (1989), the Children Act (Scotland) (1995) and the Social Work (Scotland) Act (1968). These were successful and made local authorities responsible for supporting asylum seekers who had been denied benefits. They were given a cash allowance and some form of temporary accommodation (Rutter, 2006).

This legislation further changed the way that asylum seekers were housed and supported in the UK. It removed their right to income support as well as sustenance under the National Assistance Act (1948), the Children Act (1989) and their equivalents in Scotland. Asylum seekers also lost their right to housing under the homeless persons' provision.

The 1996 Act marked the point when asylum seekers began to be housed outside London, often in hostels or poor quality hotels. Asylum seekers were usually accompanied by such negative media coverage, in the local and national press, that the public could only feel concern about the demonised newcomers (ICAR, 2004a, in Rutter, 2006).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN AND METHODS**

This chapter discusses the methodology used to obtain and analyse the collected data. This covers the methods chosen to collect and analyse the data, as well as the reasons for choosing these methods. The chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and ethical considerations of the research.

Methods according to Bryman (2008) can be referred to as instruments employed by researchers to gather information and analyse data. The selection of method will be based on the type of information to explore. A qualitative approach was used in my research rather than quantitative because the aim of my research was to look at emotions and opinions which are difficult to quantify. Due to the fundamental nature of this research; I am interested in how people see certain aspects of their lives (McLaughlin, 2007). I needed a more flexible approach than a quantitative paradigm; an approach that is open and responsive to the subject' views.

#### **Design**

The research employed a qualitative strategy, using semi-structured interviews:

- To explore the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum- seeking Women in order to provide an in-depth perspective of their living experiences since arriving in the UK.

- To establish whether the asylum system promotes the needs of these women in such area as health, housing, employment, education and their general well-being.
- To identify any area of challenges faced by these women

### **Sampling**

Purposive non-probability strategy was employed, meaning participants were selected due to their specific characteristics to fit in with the study design (Sarantakos, 2005). The main criteria for the subjects of the study were that they are African women refugee or asylum seekers, spoke English, and are aged 21 and above.

Contacts were made through a drop- in centre of an agency which is currently located in a northern town in the UK, where the researcher did her first 100 days placement.

Five African women were recruited; one of the women has been granted a leave to remain in the country while the remaining four are still waiting for decisions on their asylum claims. **Each person was given a pseudonym.**

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

According to McLaughlin (2007) understanding human behaviour is determined by interactions and how participants interpret meaning to the interactions.

Interviews are the most appropriate way in which to study how people construct their identity and culture as it enables depth and flow of conversations and responses



(Silverman, 2006). Interviews should be open-ended and informal; either face-to-face or a group interview.

Two major reasons for using interviews are outlined by Banister (1994): Interviews enable the researcher to gain subjective meanings rather than obtaining responses within a standard format.

Semi-structured interviews according to May (2001) are consistent with the qualitative research characteristics because it allows participants to answer questions without feeling constrained by preformulated questions within a limited range of answers.

Semi-structured interviewing allows flexibility in the formation of questions and I was able to employ a variety of questioning techniques such as direct and indirect questioning, follow up and probing questions (Bryman, 2001). Probing could be misconstrued as leading a respondent to answer in a certain way but I support May's (2001) arguments that it allows the respondent to clarify or amplify the answer given.

A semi-structured interview was adopted in eliciting information from 5 participants about their experiences since arriving in the UK. Participants were interviewed individually between October and November, 2011 on the first floor in a quiet room at a drop-in centre in a northern town in the UK. The interview with each participant lasted within an hour and a half.

All interviews were hand written by myself as the women in the study did not consent to tape recording as originally planned. However, this allowed a deeper information gathering from the participants and allowed me to immerse myself in the interview contents and gain a robust understanding of the responses.

Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method for analysis; this involved grouping and tabulating of responses into themes and sub themes (Bryman, 2008; Golafshani, 2003; Aronson, 1992).

## **Ethics**

The interview with individual participant took place in a place where they felt most comfortable; that is, the centre where they access services. The choice for this is because, the setting does not only has facilities to provide a quiet room but is also compatible with health and safety requirements for both the researcher and the participants.

Ethical approval was gained through the University Ethics Committee (see appendix one and two). Additional approval was sought through the management of the centre of the interview venue (see appendix three).

Each participant was provided with an information sheet detailing the purpose of the research, their rights to withdraw from the research at any time (please see appendix four). Participants were then asked to sign an informed consent form confirming that, their consent have been given (please see appendix five). I explained to them how all information collected will be destroyed after the completion of my studies according to the 1998 Data Protection Act. However I reiterated how the public could access the published thesis and that I could not guarantee how the published thesis could be used by others in future (Allan and Skinner, 1991).

It was important not to force participants who had previously sought asylum to talk about painful and distressing experiences. I made clear they would not have to

discuss personal problems. Discussions surrounding reasons for coming to the UK was minimal as I noticed that the women were very wary in disclosing information in relations to this. Participants were reassured of anonymity and confidentiality regarding all the information provided.

I remained with each of the participants after the interview to ensure they were alright, in case they were distressed by the interview, and for them to ask any questions. I reiterated the fact that participation was voluntary, so that they did not feel under pressure to stay, answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable, or tell me what they thought I would want to hear.

### **Issue of power**

Temple and Moran (2006) submitted that gender and race relationship are still the basis of which power distribution is based. Therefore, choosing members of these research groups to participate does not change this practice.

Crucial to this power relationship between the researcher and the researched therefore is the due consideration that must be given to the unequal cultural, religious, economic, social and political positions occupied by both parties (Silverman, 1997). This is to ensure that the myths and stereotypical practices that pre-dominate the society are reduced as far as is possible.

Each researcher including myself, have our own thoughts, feelings and opinions upon the research topic. It should be noted that as a member of the 'ethnically classified minority group' (Pyett, 2001) as well as being a woman researching women, both of us are socially constructed within the patriarchal gendered roles

which will also impact upon our participation in the research process and the interpretation of the data generated. Therefore, neither the researcher nor the participants is lesser nor superior and should not be treated as such.

Temple and Moran (2006) suggest the importance of matching the gender, ethnicity and immigration status of the researcher to those of the researched as a way of levelling of these differences. While acknowledging these differences reduce the dominant position of the researcher within the same society, (Hayes and Humphreys, 2004). However, Phoenix (2001) warns that matching of interviewees with interviewers on particular characteristics may not necessarily produce 'better' or 'richer data than not matching.

Overall, the issue of gender and cultural background does not however guarantee that they will not feel powerless. Consequently, I became a reflexive researcher, by addressing the elements in my own background, whether personal or societal which will contribute to my chosen research method and interpretation of data generated. Therefore, not being an asylum seeker in this case, would place, my knowledge of the lived experiences of the researched as minimal.

### **Reflexivity**

To be honest, I realised I have been bombarded with negative image of asylum seekers since I have been in this country; always thinking, why are they here, are they genuinely fleeing persecution or why have they decided to come to a country where they are not welcome for whom they are, but only tolerate them due to human rights fundamental requirements. I keep asking questions about all the negative images of asylum seekers in this society; the structure of the society includes legislations which is not in the asylum seekers best interest and treats them in a

rushed and hurried ways as though they are a problem which needed to be solved quickly.

On reflection, I realised that if I had been an asylum seeker and had been through all that the women in this study have been through; will I still think in same way? I realised that I should just count myself as a privilege individual who was fortunate enough to have been in the country without having so 'many restrictions' as these women.

Listening to the women's story made me sometimes feel uncomfortable with emotions. However I did not allow my emotion to overshadow the research process. This is because expression of emotions might destroy effective work between client and worker (Lishman, 1995). I maintained a non-judgemental attitude throughout the interview and accurately recorded all the data generated.

Conversely, since I am a black African woman, researching black African women; the women might withhold certain information or even over-exaggerates certain information to gain sympathy, so I am not in a position to question the truth of the account of their stories. Therefore I am not in any way saying that what these women are saying is the absolute truth or not; I am only presenting and interpreting the stories as told by the participants. I did not attempt to produce the 'truth' but to interpret their accounts and reflect lived experiences.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study was that the samples were small and not representative of all African women refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. It was

not unusual for asylum seekers to be reluctant to give personal information and be suspicious of the purposes of an external study (Gilbert & Koser, 2006). This was confirmed during the interview when they found it difficult to answer certain questions. Probably they were quite suspicious of the purpose of the study and responded in a way they feel is appropriate and not necessarily honest.

Nevertheless their suspicious attitudes toward the study were reasonable due to the protection of individual rights.

This study has used service users who were accessing services from certain organisations as samples; one of the consequences of this was the exclusion of many African women refugees and asylum seekers who never attended this centre. Furthermore, since my participants were recruited through this centre; where the women access help and support. So, they might answer certain questions in a way that will not make them lose the support they are receiving at the centre, or answer in a way that will make the researcher solicit for more help on their behalf.

Difficulty in failing to keep several appointments is another indication that the women might find it difficult to talk to researchers about their experiences; I was aiming to interview six participants originally, however five participants were eventually interviewed, the sixth woman did not show up even after several efforts were made in meeting her.

Most of the participants were very wary of what they say even when they were assured of anonymity. They felt they couldn't trust me with some information and therefore refuse to give consent to tape recording which was initially designed as part of the interview process. Hence, notes were made throughout the interview.

Although, the spoken English of the women I interviewed was of a relatively good level as I could understand them and they understand me. However there could still be a potential for miscommunication and a lack of understanding which has hindered me from exploring some issues.

Furthermore, as stated earlier that only one of my participants has been granted a leave to remain in the country while the remaining four are still waiting for decisions regarding their asylum claims. There is therefore a possibility, that the study may be biased towards a negative report.

However, this research is by no means attempting to be representative of the African women refugees and asylum seeking population, but rather to examine the in-depth accounts in the light of the published literature.

Although many critics are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research, Frameworks for ensuring rigour in this form of work have been in existence for many years. Lincoln and Guba, (1985)'s constructs, in particular, have won considerable favour and has formed the focus of this research. Here researchers seek to satisfy four criteria: In addressing credibility, the researcher has attempted to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny has been presented. To allow transferability, the researcher has provided sufficient detail of the context of the interview for readers to be able to decide whether the prevailing environment is similar to another situation with which he or she is familiar and whether the findings can justifiably be applied to the other setting.

The meeting of the dependability criterion is difficult in qualitative work (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Notwithstanding, the researcher of this study has strived to enable a future investigator to repeat the study. An account of the work was maintained throughout the research process which includes the aim and objectives, interview questions as well as the data generated from the study.

Finally, to achieve confirmability, the researcher has taken steps to demonstrate that findings that emerged from the data are not her own predispositions by accurately recording all the data generated from the research.

It is difficult to measure the validity of an account of people's opinions and thoughts and I support Richardson's (1994) call for a development in thinking surrounding issues of validation. As she argues 'I have worked in a post-modernist way that does not claim to be seeking one 'truth' but rather in a way which:

"Blurs genre, probed lives experiences, enacts sciences, creates a female imagery, breaks down dualism and inscribes emotional response as valid, deconstructs the myth of the emotion-free social science and makes a space for partiality, self-reflexivity, tension and difference" (p.695).

Finally, by reading and re-reading the interview and applying the open coding strategy, a number of themes and sub themes emerged through the interview.

**However, I could not pursue all of these themes due to academic requirement regarding word limit for this study and deadline for submission.**



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEMES FROM THE WOMEN'S STORIES

This chapter provides discussions on the themes and sub-themes from the women's stories. I aim to identify each of these themes and provide examples from the raw data to support these themes.

Participants were asked to tell their story through a semi-structured interview questions which asked about their experiences since arriving in the UK, to challenges they have faced so far, and their hope for the future.

**Please see appendix six for full lists of the interview questions.**

Foremost, I am going to provide background information about the individual women that were interviewed. **Please note that the Pseudonyms have been adopted to preserve anonymity:**

1. Magugu is from East Africa. She came to the country in 2008 to apply for asylum for 'fleeing a forced marriage to a traditional chief'. Her asylum claim is still pending.
2. Shazza is from North Africa. She came into the country in 2007 to claim asylum because she was 'fleeing political persecution'. Shazza has two children (a boy and a girl). She is still waiting for a decision on her asylum claim; she was refused once but has filed an appeal on the decision to the Home Office.

3. Rekiya is from East Africa. She fled her country in 2006 because of war. She has one daughter. Her asylum claim is on-going.
4. Abigail is from West Africa, fleeing Female Genital Mutilation; she arrived in the country in 2006. She has no children and her asylum claim has been refused twice. She has however made a fresh application.
5. Maria is from West Africa, she came to join her husband in 2000, became an overstayer, left husband to file an application for an asylum claim for reasons of domestic violence. She was granted a refugee status in 2009. Maria has one daughter.

The following are the themes and sub- themes that emerged from the interviews:

### **1. Uncertainties**

The analysis of the interview reveals that all of the participants do share a similar experience which is centred on their statuses as a refugee or asylum seekers.

Major themes from the interviews were that participants have generally experienced a very negative initial period in the new environment. For them, the process of waiting for a decision on their asylum claims and not knowing when final decisions on their cases would be made is viewed as a moment of uncertainty.

Throughout the interview, uncertainties were a common theme among the women. It was discovered that the women were faced daily with uncertainty and anxiety in relation to the following:

- (a) Their future

(b) Their children's future (education, wellbeing)

(c) The whole asylum process (dispersal system, outcome of claims).

The following are the participants' comments from the interviews:

Rekiya: I was always living in doubt as everyday passed until the lady solicitor came to listen to my story and filed my application.

Shazza: I don't even know what the future holds for my children. They cannot go out to play with other children out there.

Abigail: I have been refused twice, I have appealed again, but I haven't heard anything since then.

Magugu: You cannot really tell as there is no answer yet. I have been here since 2008. My worry now is that I don't know what the future holds.

Maria: It took them nine solid years before they finally considered me. It was not a nice experience when you don't know what you are up to.

Shazza: I arrived in the UK in 2007, and up till now the government is still on my case. So it is difficult for me to give a time scale.

Rekiya: My case is still on-going. My main concern is my daughter. I don't know my fate and I hope they do not refuse my application because someone could be sent back home if they refuse.

The above theme supports the findings of Becker and Silove (1993) which revealed that asylum seekers live in a state of insecurity and are faced with constant fear of repatriations.

Also, the women's inability to consent to tape recording and my chasing up the participants for numbers of weeks in order to conduct the interviews is another clear

indication that they are very wary of researchers; the women did not show up on many occasions as arranged for interviews which was another indication that they are faced with doubt, lack of security and uncertainty as well as lack of trust on professionals and the system.

Furthermore, the experience discovered is in line with the study carried out by Gilbert and Koser (2006) as well as the study conducted by Burnet and peel (2001), which demonstrated that asylum seekers have experienced anxiety and depression, often resulting from fear and uncertainty. However, this study did not discover that the women interviewed have experienced depression.

## **2. Choice of destination**

Another overarching theme is choice of destination due to global movement of people from one region of the world to another; all of these women except one have travelled from one country to another before they finally made it to the UK. These journeys according to them took several days and even months before they finally reached their target destination (UK). Sub themes that emerged as the reasons for their choice of destinations are as follows:

### **(a) Colonial past:**

Maria: I chose to come to UK because they are our colonial masters.

Shazza: After all this is our mother land

Rekiya: I think they owe a duty of care to us as a citizen of commonwealth state you know.

Abigail: The UK is part of the commonwealth country and close to France where I first escaped to and later came to UK with the help of a friend who knew somebody who could help you get to UK.

The findings revealed that majority of the women were determined to come to the UK based on the colonial past, according to them, the choice of UK was based on the fact that their countries have been colonised by the UK. Maria said, 'there is global movement of people from one region of the world to another, they do come to our country and we come to theirs'. Abigail said she has travelled from her home country to France and finally crossed over to the UK and feels she would be well received and accepted based on believe that they (her country) have a link to the UK based on colonial past.

Sub theme of relationship between Africa and UK were prominent throughout the interviews. All my participants are from British colonies as well as members of the Commonwealth States. For example, Maria and Abigail are from West African British colonies, Magugu and Rekiya are from East African countries that were colonised by Britain, while Shazza is from a North African country that was colonised by Britain.

Many of the participants were of the opinion that the UK played a major factor in Africa history as most African countries were seen as British colonies, in which they referred to as their mother land (referring to UK as their mother land, implies that the UK (mother land) owes them protection as a mother would protect her child.

Thereby they felt that the host country own a duty of care to them as a mother due to the linkages to the colonial era, as well as being citizens of commonwealth states; this is due to the fact that the UK is one of the signatories to the 1951 Geneva convention.

Up until the turn of the twentieth century Britain had no controls on its borders, which determined who could and could not enter the country. It is only over the last hundred years that legal restrictions have been put in place to determine who is eligible to enter and remain in the UK; Britain in particular dominated global markets at the beginning of the twentieth century, this meant there was both an increased need and increased availability of cheap labour; this saw the influx of migrants into the country (Clayton, 2010).

Black immigrants were allowed into the countries to provide valuable, but cheap labour like, constructions of bridges, railway lines, pipelines etc., which helped Britain in its domination of the global markets (Hayes, 2004).

However, due to the influx of migrants, Britain however deemed it paramount to reduce the numbers of people who come to the country by placing restrictions on those 'who can and cannot' enter the country anymore. Those who were considered as draining the countries resources were removed, leaving only those who were termed as 'deserving' and 'fit for both war and work' (Hayes, 2004).

This restricted any citizen from the Commonwealth having an automatic right to migrate to the UK; instead entry was dependent on a government issued employment voucher (Brammer, 2007; Clayton, 2010).

### **(b) Welfare System**

Another important reason for their choice of destination is based on the welfare system in the UK which the participants opined would provide them with a better life than they have had in their country of origin. According to the participants comments:

Magugu: This country is good; you eat free food when you first came.

Rekiya: They were given my daughter free milk and the Red Cross was given us food voucher and clothing items.

Shazza: They give you everything free in this country, but you must have papers.

Maria: Everything was free initially when the women society helped me.

Abigail: I came to the country because the person who helped me with the papers said they will take good care of me here.

The participants' comments however stressed the link between immigration and welfare as these participants seemed to choose the UK based on the welfare system.

However, they were disappointed because, they have been restricted from accessing most of the welfare benefits due to eligibility criteria as well as different legislation and laws prohibiting the 'undeserves and the outsiders' from accessing benefits that were meant for the 'deservers and the insiders (Hayes, 2002).

Different people have been targeted throughout the last century and blamed for the source of the nation's social and economic problems; It became paramount that those who drained the country's resources were removed leaving only those who were deserving and 'fit for both war and work' (Hayes, 2004) as entitled to welfare benefits. Moreover Black workers were only seen as being beneficial in the short term providing cheap labour and not as long-term residents, consequently this impacted on their rights to welfare benefits.

### **(c) Justice System**

From the interviews, it was apparent that the participants chose the UK based on the justice system. They expressed their view that unlike in their native country, there is fair trial and justice:

Magugu: I have not been to the UK before, but I was told to go to the UK, that they will help to fight my case because they are against forced marriages.

Maria: If it were to be Africa, nobody will listen to your stories, but the women society helped me a lot. They fought for me to have my papers because of the way my husband was treating me. In fact there is law (meaning justice) in this country.

Rekiya: I came to this country because they said there is human right. In Africa there is no human right, our leaders do what they want. Nobody can take them to court.

### **3. Restricted access to Welfare Benefits**

The structure of the welfare state is a key element in determining one's status. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the government has continued to steadily increase restrictions on welfare provisions. This prevents those deemed as outsiders from obtaining any necessary support (Hayes, 2002).

During the interviews, the women were asked about the help they have received so far since arriving in the UK.

Their responses showed that they have received minimal supports from the state. The reasons for this however' might be due to their ineligibility to the state benefits due to their individual status. All of the women except Maria (however, Maria shared her experiences before she attained the present status) who has recently been granted leave to remain expressed their individual experiences when they try to access any welfare services/ benefits:



Shazza: I was asked to bring papers before they could register me and my children with the local GP.

Magugu: I am not entitled to any benefit because I don't have papers.

Abigail: When I applied and passed the interview to further my studies. I was disqualified because I am not entitle to free education

Rekiya: They said we (herself and her daughter) are not entitle to any public fund' I don't even understand what this means.

Maria: I could not work, I could not claim any benefits because of my immigration status, but I think things have changed now that I have been granted.

The above revelation showed the state in which asylum seekers who are yet to be granted leave to remain has to live in the UK until they are granted leave to remain in the country. I discovered from interviewing these women that in contrary to their opinion on one of the reasons for coming to seek asylum in the UK based on the believe that 'they will help you' or 'they will take good care of you when you get there', 'the UK is a generous country who will help you with everything you need' as Shazza said in frustration that, 'when I was coming to the country, I was told that the UK government will help me with everything that I need, now that I am here all they asked for is 'papers, papers', before they help with anything'.

It is well documented that over the past century the provision of welfare to those who are deemed by the state as having no status has been systematically reduced (Geddes, 2000 and Hayes, 2002).

Within the literature review it was discussed that as well as controlling the country's borders, an internal set of controls exist. These internal controls dictate who

deserves welfare provision and who does not. Throughout history various groups have been labelled as undeserving and as a result of this have suffered, receiving only initial support from the state. One reason for restricting welfare provision is to deter outsiders burdening the home nation with extra costs and consequently putting the nation at a disadvantage. Today it is the asylum seeker who is presumed to be an outsider, a problem to the nation and undeserving of any welfare support (Harvey, 2000).

My interpretations of the data strongly support this; the women expressed that they had difficulties accessing any services that were more than the initial services provided; the women were only provided initial health screening to ascertain they do not have any communicable diseases. For example, Magugu narrated how the doctor who did her initial health check turned her request to be examined for a back problem down, but was told by the doctor that she should wait because 'today is only for tuberculosis'. She said she however found it difficult to see a doctor regarding the problem.

"Social conditions today such as unemployment and housing issues are often referred to as 'reasons' for not allowing immigrants into the country, except the 'best ones who can contribute positively to the economy' it is becoming increasingly rare to read an article which looks at the rights of immigrants or asylum seekers, aiming to look at what persecution they have suffered, or the benefits they have brought into the country. Rather, it is the problems they have brought into the country, such as being a burden unto the economy that have always been spoken of" (Dumper, 2008).

#### 4. **Powerlessness:**

The women expressed their experiences in relation to the following:

##### **(a) Inability to challenge unprofessional practices**

Women asylum seekers are powerless in the country because of their immigration status. Participants expressed their view that they are powerless to complain for

example, Magugu and Rekiya explained that 'there was no one who will seriously listen to their complaint and fear deportation if they do voice out their opinion'. For example Magugu said, 'who are we to challenge them'. Magugu re-emphasised her comments to show that most times she felt powerless to challenge the official decisions or challenge the way she has been treated. When asked further why she said this, her response was that 'they can do and undo' which implicitly means they have the power to accept or send her back to her home country.

Asylum and immigration status seemed to be a great issue based on the interviews with all these women. All the participants expressed their inabilities to challenge different officials and professionals due to their statuses, despite all the unsatisfactory comments/treatments they have received.

They constantly throughout the interview referred to themselves as 'who are we to challenge them' despite the complaints they made when asked about their challenges so far; as they were unable to challenge the unprofessional practices they had experienced during their various encounters with some professionals and government officials. For example references were made to how they were treated in detention and some unfavourable comments by the officials as well as different agencies they have been to for help or support.

It was obvious among these women that, their challenging these officials over these practices might negatively influenced the decision in their asylum claim, and or prohibit them from receiving the support they are receiving as they are desperate for survival as they prefer the minimal support they are receiving in their host country, than going back to their country as they pointed out that even though they were

treated badly they are still happy to continue living here in as much as they can live here in peace:

Maria: We cannot challenge them (referring to UK government officials). They are in their country, so they do what they like to us.

Abigail: You know we treat these people like kings when they come to us, but now that we are here they treat us like nobody (out of anger, Abigail cited an example in her country whereby people from the UK were referred to and offered jobs as expatriates, and accorded preferential treatments, whereas in this country, foreigners are not treated as such).

Rekiya: It is not their fault, it is the fault of our leaders who cannot fight for us like their leaders fight for them.

Rekiya said this to emphasize bad leadership from her home country as she thought that the host country's leaders have fought for the nation to get to where they are today. Rekiya cited an example whereby if any British citizen is having problems in a foreign land; the UK government will fight tooth and nail to help the citizen unlike the leaders from their home country that doesn't care about their citizens.

### **(b) Lack of choices**

Shazza said "This immigration people do what they like, not what we like. When asked further why, she said that 'you should know better' (referring to me). When prompted further to find out what she meant by the statement; she said 'you do not have the freedom to make your own decisions, they just treat you like slaves; The expression here connotes the way participant see herself, probably due to how she

has been treated/or perhaps due to the treatment she has received since arriving in the country.

Abigail said 'they separated me and my friend, Now; I have no family here, no friend'. She continues...they just do what they like, not what we want". The women's comments portrayed a state of powerlessness, loss and isolation as well as a state of being controlled against their desire. However this is the situation they have to face due to the new asylum system.

The participants expressed their feelings in relation to the following:

### **(i) Accommodation**

Having no choice in where you can live was acknowledged as a key form of control by these women.

The women openly expressed their lack of choice regarding the accommodation process. Having no choice in where you can live was acknowledged as a key form of lack of choice:

Shazza: You don't have choice in deciding where you can live. When I complained about this, they said you have to present a good reason.

Magugu: When I left X town, I had to live with three other ladies in a shared accommodation, after about 3 months, I was moved from that accommodation again to another one because one of the ladies had a baby. I think they should move the lady and her baby not all of us.

Rekiya: The accommodation people moved me from where I was attending an ESOL class [English for Speakers of Other Language]. I have to travel for

more than one hour a day to and from the class, but who am I to challenge them.

Maria: The agents who came to relocate us said they are only acting on orders, so we cannot challenge them.

## **(ii) Legal representation**

A clear majority of the women in my study expressed similar desire to acquire their own legal representations instead of the ones assigned to them through the asylum bureaucratic processes. Doubt and lack of trust were commonly expressed by most of these women towards the legal representatives that were officially assigned to them. The feelings of mistrust of the asylum process itself are clearly expressed by all the women. They expressed their anxiety and scepticism towards the prospects of receiving a state assigned legal aids:

Abigail: You know, it is good to know who will be representing you, I mean you know them and they know you, then they will be able to represent you well. I think I would have won the case if they have given me a solicitor that understands me better.

Maria: You cannot choose a lawyer that you want; you only take what they give you.

Shazza: They chose for you what they want to represent you in the court, not what you want. I think they did it on purpose.

Magugu: You don't always get a good solicitor who can fight for you. If you tell them that you want to change your solicitor, they will tell you that you have to wait a bit longer because you are only entitle to one solicitor or you can hire a solicitor and pay for yourself. But, where will I get the money?

Rekiya: You cannot challenge their decisions to give you a solicitor. Who are we to challenge them?

### **(iii) Voucher System**

Abigail: I always get Morrison voucher to buy what I want but I can't use it in any other supermarket.

Rekiya: The voucher is very bad because you have to spend all because you don't get change back. It is only enough to buy things for my daughter.

Maria: Morrison is very expensive, but you don't have a choice, because someone has to use the voucher to buy things there or lose it.

Shazza: When you get the voucher, you have to finish everything whether you like it or not because you can't get any change back.

### **(iv) Monitoring and restrictions of movement:**

The women commented that their movements are restricted:

Shazza: They monitor all your movement, camera, camera, everywhere you go.

Rekiya: You are not allowed to go to your country or anywhere until they decide your case.

Maria: I have to report and sign at the station every week as if you are a criminal, which I hate doing.

Magugu: They take your photos, take your finger prints like a criminal and monitor you everywhere.

**(v) Food:**

Maria: You know the kind of food they were giving us was quite different to what you are used to.

Magugu: Any time you want to eat, you have to go to an open place where everyone eats together even when you are not hungry, you can't keep the food till when you are hungry.

Rekiya: You can't say no to the food. It means you don't eat until the next day

The responses above stress the controlling effect the whole asylum process has on asylum seekers. For example one woman talks about wanting to move house but says that this is not a choice she could make by herself, Instead she says the housing agency need a reason that they consider is good enough before they allow her and her daughter to move. She emphasised the control and power the agency has over her family. The woman demonstrates that moving to live in a town of her choice was not a decision that she can make, she has to abide by the rules according to the dispersal system, because the decision lies solely on those who control the dispersal system.

These women's story further confirms the report of the study carried out by Bischoff, Bovler and Rustemi (2003). In their studies they found that asylum seekers are powerless to complain and subsequently service providers including health care staff are liable to discriminate against them and provide substandard treatment.



The state of powerlessness from the findings also supports the findings of Anane-Agyei (2002) that asylum seekers endure increase hardship and are powerless because of their circumstances.

**(c) Segregation and Isolation.**

Segregation and Isolation by the immigration system and not having the freedom to make one own choice or decision is apparent through the women's stories.

Being separated from loved ones is a major factor from the women's story that contributes to the emotion of isolation, sadness and loss.

This appeared to be the consequences of fleeing their country of origin for one reason or the other (war, political unrest, violence, etc.) coupled with the dispersal system's policy in their host country which further segregated them from the new friends they have made during the asylum process and thereby, distorting the relationship they have established in the host country:

Maria: I want to move closer to my child's school. But they won't change that unless you provide a strong reason to change your house.

Rekiya: They move all of us (asylum seekers) to different areas.

Magugu: I have no family here, no friends, no relation, the only friend I made before they scattered us, have been moved back to the first place.

Abigail: It is very isolating here, I missed my family a lot, they have deported my friend who we use to do everything together when we were in the camp.

The dispersal policy leaves asylum seekers isolated from the local community and sometimes unable to integrate with other asylum seekers because there is no one in

the area who speaks the same language as theirs. The findings from the interviews support this notion of isolation as the women expressed feeling 'isolated' 'sad' 'lonely' and missing their family.

Although there was no suggestion in these findings, there is evidence from other research that the dispersal system negatively impacts on the health of asylum seekers. It leaves them more ill, physically weaker and with more mental health issues than when they first arrived into the UK (Terrence Higgins Trust, 2003).

## **5. Racism**

Media reports of asylum seekers being at the brunt of racial harassment and encountering hostility from host communities are not uncommon (Morris, 2007).

It was discovered that these women have faced racism based on ignorance and hostility both at local and institutional level. Rekiya said that people call her names in the local area whenever she goes out to buy things with her daughter, she however said, 'although it is better now than when I first came to the country'

Another instance cited by Abigail was when the local boys threw stones into their house, because they are known as asylum seekers in the area.

In a speech (November 29, 2003) Naboth Muchopa said "there is much hostility towards asylum seekers. Factors contributing to this hostility include local tensions, no local consultation, high unemployment and bad housing, ill planned dispersal, negative and inaccurate media coverage and inflammatory statements by politicians, such as David Blunkett's call for separate education for asylum seeker youngsters and reference to "swamping" our schools".

Racial prejudice is characterised by negative thoughts and feelings about a particular group. Racism translates this into actions, in which people belonging to that group are treated less favourably. Institutional racism is embedded in the culture of institutions and agencies of society such as the police force and the education system. It is very damaging but is often hidden and almost impossible to prove, Muchopa (2003) stressed further that the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry focussed on institutional racism in the police force and made recommendations for public institutions.

Asylum seekers, having already experienced oppression and violence, find racism towards them is commonplace. Participants expressed their views in the following ways:

Maria: They call me different names (off record). Anyway, they are in their country, what do you expect.

Rekiya: You know when people call you names just because you are in the country to seek asylum.

Abigail: A group of boys from the local community where we live came to throw stones, and shouted asylum seekers! A very big one hit the window and shattered the sitting area, but luckily no one was injured. We were asked to call the police by the neighbours, all of us living in the house looked at ourselves; we couldn't call the police because all of us were asylum seekers. It was the next door neighbour who called the police.

Shazza: Oh my God, I remembered when our house was burgled. When the police came, instead of the police to support us because we were physically

distressed, they were asking us questions like; when did you come to live here, your date of birth, do you have papers, are you asylum seekers? etc.

Magugu: When I complained that I don't like the way I was treated. The officer told me 'go back to your country.

## **6. Loss of Social Status**

Using Valtonen, (2008) suggestion that individuals' sense of their social position and social status are important in examining their ability to generate feelings of progression in establishing and engaging 'relations with the surrounding society'.

Loss of social status was another major issue experienced by most of the participants in this study. They all expressed their inability to work or further their education as evident of loss of status, which they have had in their different countries of origin. However, due to their immigration statuses in their host country, are finding it difficult to cope due to the following:

### **(a) Employment restrictions:**

The findings in this study also revealed another prominent theme of awareness of the participants involvement in the mainstream economic activities which is based on the employment restrictions imposed by the Asylum and Immigration Acts, which leads to loss of social status and their inability to make personal choices as they seem to compensate for the deficiencies through a survival mechanism that is based on self-reliance which were developed among members to navigate to areas where they could find help and easy access to services.

Shazza: I want to work and contribute to the community which I can not do now.

Rekiya: The first thing is to get a get a job, a decent accommodation, because we are presently staying in a shared accommodation (referring to her daughter and herself), take care of my daughter and live a better live like other people in the community. I further asked her what she meant by other people in the community; she said that I should understand better. When asked to expantiate further she said, 'honestly I do not like the way I am living at the moment, you are not free, you cannot work nor participate in community activities.

Magugu: My plan is to sort out my papers, and enrolled in the university, get a good job which i cannot do now because of my papers. I can then bring my sister here as I dont know what is happening to her now'.

### **(b) Lack of recognition of educational/professional qualifications**

Most of the women expressed their frustrations of either being a professional or graduates in their country of origin. However were frustrated because they are not recognised as such in their host country:

Maria: I am a graduate in my country, but that is useless now because nobody recognises that or even asks for your qualification.

Magugu: People in this country only see you as asylum seeker; they don't see anything good in you.

Abigail: I have been working as a banker back home, but now you are useless, just because you are here to seek asylum.

Shazza: I was a professional fashion designer in North Africa, I went to fashion school, (she boasted to me that she can sew anything) people there will miss me a lot because they know my worth, but here, nobody wants to know.

They also felt their lives are forgotten and wasted; they spoke of having little or no power over their lives and of having contributions to make to the society but will go unused because no one cares about what happen to them or know whether they exist.

Shazza: I want to go to university, but they said I should bring papers

Rekiya: I also asked the solicitor how I can find work or something like that to keep me busy, but he only said I should just be patient.

Abigail: I am not just a mere asylum seeker; I was a professional back home. I was valuable, but here, things are different, you are not allowed to do anything.

## **7. Provision of help through Voluntary Agencies**

The interviews reveal that though, the women's pre- migration's believe was that they will automatically receive help from the state government (statutory provisions) irrespective of their status. However, this dream became shattered as they were excluded from receiving statutory benefits.

Therefore, most of the women in this study were only able to receive help and support within the voluntary agencies:

Magugu: I received help and financial support from the Africa community who helped me to file my asylum application.

Rekiya: I have received help from the red cross who gave us food stuff and clothing materials for both myself and my daughter.

Maria: They (Women Aid) do always give me £15 vouchers with other asylum seekers which I used to take care of my little daughter.

Abigail : This centre (referring to the interview venue) has been very helpful with lots of information on helps we could receive and our entitlements.

Shazza: They helped (referring to the centre where the interview took place) to register my children in the day care centre locally as i was turned down before because of papers. This has been very helpful and serve as a sort of relieve as my children were able to play with other children in the community.

The participants' stories further confirmed the submissions of Wren (2007) and Dumper (2008) that, mainstream service providers, including primary healthcare, education and Social care fail to provide a satisfactory service to asylum seekers and that there is a long standing history of voluntary and community organisations taking on the responsibility to fill in the gaps.

The role of the main statutory services is well defined by government legislation, especially in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Statutory agencies find that they are now caught up in the immigration process and practitioners are required to investigate individual's immigration status (Cohen, 2002).

Cohen maintained that, this has forced them to move away from their benevolent role towards the role of a gatekeeper of resources restricting welfare. The role of the voluntary sector has always been more blurred (Wren, 2004), however unlike statutory services this does mean voluntary agencies are 'comparatively free from the procedural and legal constraints now inherent in many statutory agencies.' (Fell,

2004). This allows voluntary workers to offer some of the support that is lacking elsewhere and works with asylum seekers as advocates, providers and facilitators accessing help (Cohen, 2002).

## **8. Communication difficulties:**

### **(a) Language difficulties**

One of the key issues which surrounded the situations of the five people I have interviewed is their inability to understand or communicate effectively in English language. The five women interviewed speak different African languages; three of my participants came to the country with minimal knowledge of the English language; for example, Magugu and Rekiya are from East Africa and only speak their native language fluently. However, they have improved on their mastery/understanding of the language due to various ESOL classes. They however, narrated how they found it difficult initially to understand or speak English Language fluently.

Rekiya laughed and said rhetorically 'do you think you can get to anywhere in this country if you don't know their language'?

Shazza who is from North Africa, feels that because she went to a 'school of fashion' in her home country, thereby prides herself as someone who has acquired competency in English Language recalled her first experience when she was new in the country, and some ladies at the clinic were laughing at her because she could not understand the meaning of A&E (although, she said 'she could have understood better if the ladies have said 'Accident and Emergency').

Maria and Abigail are from West African countries, although they speak English language fluently; according to them, they are graduates of Agricultural science



and Accounting respectively. Having said that however, both said they have been having communication difficulties in the country. According to them, they are either struggling in understanding different people and officials they have come across or feel the officials don't understand them. This was viewed by most of the women as a probable reason they have had negative experiences regarding their cases.

### **(c) Being misunderstood**

The women explained that they have been misunderstood since arriving in the UK due to lack of cultural awareness. Majority of them sight an example where they don't understand some of what is acceptable or not acceptable in the host country (norms). Their encounters with different professionals in the country have been seen as lack of awareness of their own culture.

The lack of cultural awareness was seen by the women as the reasons why some professionals formed a negative perception or believe on their persons, or their claims. According to them; this must have had a negative impact on the decisions or outcomes of their claims, or the treatments they have been receiving so far:

Abigail: I was told to stop shouting when I was trying to explain why I was late to the centre where you have to report and sign every week. I told her I was not shouting that, that was my voice but she looks at me in a certain manner.

Maria: I tried to explain to the officer all that I have gone through during the asylum claim, but he said he doesn't believe due to my facial expression. What has facial expression got to do with you being misunderstood?

Shazza: They said I was not telling the truth because I was not looking into the eyes of the immigration man.

Rekiya: The man at Liverpool said that I don't believe your story, that no credibility or something like that, just because I was looking down. He said I was thinking of what to say next, you know this is bad because they don't really know us' I think you understand? (She was talking to the researcher).

Abigail said 'I don't understand why they said pardon, pardon, whenever (people she has come across) I am trying to ask questions or explain myself'.

In likewise manner, Maria explained how an Indian pharmacist has saved her life in 2003, when she was given a wrong medication by a General Practitioner (GP). Maria said she had visited the surgery to complain of an ailment, but was given a medication for a different ailment (Maria did not however, want to go any further about the discussion as she said to me that 'it was not something she found funny, up till now, as she believes something terrible would have happened to her'). In her opinion, she said the GP should have asked her for more explanation or even calls someone who understood her better to interpret her ailments.

Rekiya feels that she has been treated badly by most of the officials, because 'the moment you speak and they know you are not British, they don't want to listen to you any further'.

In annoyance, Maria has said that 'they should appreciate the fact that we can even speak their language! Can they even speak ours'? (She was asking me in expectation of a positive response).

According to Abigail, she finds it difficult to understand what people are saying when they are too fast or speaking in unfamiliar accents.

Rekiya retorted that 'they should not judge people with English language after all we were not born to speak English'

The situation according to them poses a dilemma to their inability to access many needed services. It could also serve as a contributory factor in their inability to effectively function within their community. Although they have tried to overcome these barriers by registering for ESOL [English for Speakers of other Languages] courses through the help of some voluntary organisations, however, they are still constrained due to various legislations put in place because of their immigration status. This according to them is frustrating their effort to develop a community relation in their host country.

The problem of language is further emphasised by the fact that, the participants' inability to read in the local language denies them of a speedy learning experience that is desperately needed for a reasonable level of settlement and active community involvement. According to Rekiya, 'they gave me long notes to read that I don't even understand'.

They cited examples whereby official documentation was provided to the participants without any supporting provision of a translated script of the language they understand. This they said prevented them to comprehend some of the requirements of those policies put in place to promote any effective resettling programme in place by the government.

## **9. Peace and Safety**

Most of the participants expressed to me their general willingness to settle in the UK. It is not however clear to me whether this was as a result of progressive feeling of place of attachment towards their host country or mainly due to primary goal of seeking international protection.

This is because, when the women were asked questions about their experiences since arriving in the UK, and their plans for now, as well as their hope for the future. Their responses however suggested, that they have developed feelings of attachments to their host country; four of the women except one responses showed an implied construction of UK as a place of relative peace and freedom in sharp contrast of their experiences back home (native countries). For example:

Maria: All I want is a peace of mind. At least there is peace of mind in this country. This is now my home anyway.

Shazza: At least you can do things here and not be afraid of people coming to kill you. So when I have my papers I will finally settle down in this country.

Magugu: I missed home a lot, but I am glad I left that man, now I am relieved, and I like this country because it is peaceful.

Abigail: My plan is to sort out my immigration status and to live in peace without fear of being detained or sent back to your country as the home office has turned down my application twice.

Furthermore, through the interview questions, in order to fulfil the aim and objectives of the research, the participants were allowed to define their own resettlement goals in their host country, rather than these being assumed by the researcher. The goals reported by the participants during the interviews were employment, education, better life, the ability to retain their own culture, family reunification and ability to contribute positively to their host community (country). According to them, the host country has been adopted as their new homes where they could find peace.

Irrespective of the treatment they are receiving in the host country they still preferred to stay in the host country, rather than going back to where they were fleeing from,

for one reasons or another. These reasons according to them are peace, justice, and security.

In this chapter, I have discussed the themes and sub-theme that emerged within the context of published literature. The next chapter focuses on conclusion and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides conclusion and recommendations base on the themes from the study. Since I have discussed all of these themes in the previous chapter, therefore I will only be providing a brief analysis on these themes due to academic requirement regarding the length of this dissertation as well as deadline for submission.

The study's themes highlight welfare restrictions and loss of social status due to employment restrictions and lack of recognition of educational/professional qualifications, which causes a lot of anger and frustration among these women.

Other challenges faced by refugee and asylum seekers in this study include, uncertainties, communication difficulties, racism, segregation and isolation, powerlessness while provision of helps through voluntary organisations is highlighted as helps they have received so far. Choice of destinations was discussed as reasons for coming to the UK and finally theme of peace and safety were acknowledged by the participants as reasons they want to remain in the UK.

Using the women's story in this study showed that, the sources of distress and anxiety resulted from lack of knowledge about one's state or situation, inability to connect with the immediate host environment and the long asylum process.

During the months of doing participant interviews, I became personally aware of the heightened levels of anxiety that some of the participants experienced as they continued to wait in uncertain state, either for news concerning their individual applications or the fear of deportation as a result of a rejected asylum application.

In the course of analysing the data, I have taken a cue from Eastmond's (2007) discussions that meaning is generated through stories and also that meaning is attached to a phenomenon, which is being experienced. I have therefore endeavoured in the analysis to show how the individual asylum seekers themselves, made sense of their experiences through the stories and accounts of the events they narrated.

This experience of segregation and isolation was interpreted by some as symbolic of their current status, of not belonging anywhere, whereas, others regarded the lack of cultural or social support in the new environment as a sign of social rejection and exclusion.

Overall, the women in this study have acknowledged the fact that there is 'peace and safety' in this country and hoped to settle and adopt UK as a place of 'final refuge' irrespective of the challenges they have faced so far, since arriving in this country in comparison of UK to their home country with reference to peace and security. Shazza therefore concluded that 'Peace transcends all other things'.

This finding has therefore, made my research a 'unique one' having compared this experience with similar studies in the published literature on asylum seekers; there have been many negative reports in the literature on the experiences of asylum seekers in the UK.

Building on Thompson (1997) who recognises how the society we live interlinks within the personal, social and structural levels. His PCS analysis aims to describe how these levels interlink:

Through the understanding of how our personal and social relations affect our structural settings and how our structural settings affect our personal and social behaviour, hence we can see how discrimination arises.

The P level refers to the personal or psychological level where our thoughts and feelings take place and where our prejudices become fixed. It is the area where we think things through and decide how we view issues and what our ideas and expectations are.

The feelings of uncertainty which lead to anxiety, stress and fear are present in how majority of the women interviewed expressed their lived experiences in the UK.

Powerlessness was also expressed by the participants which is causing their angers and frustrations; the women have concluded that 'we have to accept what they say'. One of the major reasons is the lack of choices over their impending relocations to various dispersal locations in UK as well as the whole asylum process.

The women had faced racism, ignorance, and intolerance and felt they are powerless, yet they keep tight lips because they are afraid that giving a voice may have a negative effect on their asylum claim.

The C level is the culture in which we live in where we have a shared ways of thinking and doing things with our friends and associates, for example our routines and conversations. It is the area where we share the same outlooks on life and follow the same patterns of living. We conform at this level to a pattern of behaviour that we



perceive as 'normal'. Therefore, something that is done outside is often seen as abnormal or deviant. The women explained that they have been misunderstood since arriving in the UK due to lack of cultural awareness. Majority of them site an example where they don't understand some of what is acceptable or not acceptable in the host country (norms). Their encounters with different professionals in the country have been seen as lack of awareness of their own culture.

The lack of cultural awareness was seen by the women as the reasons why some professionals formed a negative perception or believe on their persons, or their claims. According to them; this must have had a negative impact on the decisions or outcomes of their claims, or the treatments they have been receiving so far. These women's limited use of English and inability to communicate or understand different professionals they have come across have been a major challenge to them. This was strongly expressed by all my participants, each of them finding it difficult to understand information or people finding it difficult to understand them.

The culture of the society is affected by media propaganda displaying negative images of asylum seekers, thus resulting in uneasiness among the general public towards these vulnerable groups.

The S level is the structure of the society we live in. it is a place where oppression and discrimination is 'sewn-in to' the fabric of society and institutionalised into political and legal area. Thus, the legislation formed and policies that are written in the work place and the running of our institutions which we conform to everyday become our 'norms' in life (Thompson, 1997, p. 20).

The structure of the society includes legislations which is not in the asylum seekers best interest and treats them in a rushed and hurried ways as though they are a problem which needed to be solved quickly. They are not given the time they need within the legal proceedings for real effort to be made to understand the circumstances which have led them into the country.

The government's strategy for integration accepts that learning English is essential for individuals to avoid being segregated ([www.refugeecouncil.org](http://www.refugeecouncil.org). UK). Yet, in this statement the government is only including immigrants who have already been legally accepted to stay long-term.

Frequently changing immigration legislation and policy-making has been key to the Home Office achieving its aim in providing a system, albeit second rate of support for asylum seekers. By not giving asylum seekers opportunities to learn English will allow them to remain segregated and invisible, the country will therefore be responsible for the problems, which may follow this. The only integration the government encourages is integration that is presumed will be of benefit to the nation (Dumper, 2008).

Historically the role of a social worker is one that strives to empower individuals, protect and provide welfare, social work has been 'explicit in its stand on anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice' (Humphries, 2002). Yet, within the immigration arena, where there is great scope to practice using these skills and values there is increasingly a negative culture of restriction and gate keeping. The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act changed social workers responsibilities in immigration to one of an investigator. The act ensured that welfare services, education and health co-operated

with the Home Office and were legally obliged to ask service users their immigration status (Humphries 2002).

By understanding how these three areas interlock, we can then understand how the society we live in shapes our thoughts and opinions. It is important that we are aware of how we can oppress others with our ways of thinking sometimes without even realising we are doing so. The language we use and the assumptions we make based on limited understanding of certain issues can all contribute to stereotyping and discrimination of certain groups of people.

Fonow and Cook (1991) state that only when we recognise our own concern and affectedness within society, then communication at a deeper level can begin to take place.

Our thoughts and reasoning must challenge these notions and not simply allow them to become fixed stereotypes within our minds. We must not always accept the views created within our society whenever these views are wrong without endeavouring to seek to understand the reality of the situations asylum seekers are in and aim to 'swim against the present tide' as suggested by Dumper (2008).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

I have found in my study that the experiences of anxiety and uncertainties can indeed be alleviated if asylum seekers are engaged in meaningful activities, and are made to feel as part of the society, whilst they wait for decisions on their asylum claims.

I have also found from my research that a sense of belonging for all the asylum seekers in this study, which were expressed through various forms is highly essential by allowing asylum seekers in actual practices of involvements in social and economic activities whilst waiting for decisions of their asylum claims.

My experience during this research has exposed to me the lives of individuals in UK, who are daily engaged with the uncertainty of forming relationships of belonging; In the process of doing this research, I found that the heightened experience of uncertainty that is present throughout the period of waiting for asylum, intensify the sense of impermanent to individual lives, and impedes on efforts to remake new social associations and a sense of belonging in the host country.

Given the sample size of this study, recommendations are made for a larger scale project that will gather information from more refugees and asylum seeking women. This research should look for examples of lack of social and economic engagement within the community and the environment. It should compare the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in different parts of the UK in order to ascertain the impact of current dispersal policy on asylum seekers. Moreover, studies that examine the long-term effects of the entire asylum process on physical and emotional well-being of asylum seekers in the UK are also deemed important.

Such studies can go a long way to investigate impacts of the asylum process on the successes of possible integration into the mainstream of the UK society, especially for those who, after long waits, are finally granted asylum; for example, Maria in this study.

In light of this research, the current dispersal policy which is done on a no choice basis for asylum seekers, should be reviewed if possible, because, it adds to the already difficult experiences of the entire asylum process. In my opinion, this practice is a continuation of the experiences of displacement for most refugees and asylum-seeking women in the UK.

Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that individuals, who experienced anxiety and uncertainty as a result of their experiences of volatilities and displacements, should not be subjected to further practices of formal exclusion, physical and social isolation.

“Should we move beyond the debate about ‘the burden of public services’, ‘stealing our jobs’, ‘stealing our tax-payers money’ ‘Asylum killer on the loose’ or ‘go back home illegal’? Should Britain treat them as workers or as human beings? Should Britain uphold the rights of workers in regardless of their immigration status? On the other hand, the government should develop a strategy that takes into account the different stages of the legal process that works with and encourages those waiting a decision on their status to use their time effectively and not lose their skills while awaiting a decision” (Flanagan, 2003).

The general pictorial of the African community is that there is no agency providing any consistent and dependable services that facilitate the inclusion of African women refugees and asylum seekers in northern town in the UK.

Government should consider placing an African link-worker within a centrally- located advice centre, which provides National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to offer advice, emotional support, capacity building, and signposting asylum seekers to

other appropriate services and agencies in northern town; this is necessary, as this is not presently applicable.

Furthermore, the Government could develop a partnership project that will train asylum seekers to volunteer within the local communities. The training courses will build upon their existing qualifications/skills and incorporates language training and appropriate support that asylum seekers need.

In the long term, the skills they acquire may assist them in seeking employment once they receive a decision on their status. Such as Maria, Abigail and Shazza who are highly qualified and have invaluable skills from their country of origin; with some support on language training and development could transfer such into the different professions they will occupy within the country.

Asylum seekers (including those waiting for decisions on their asylum claims) should be able to work thus reducing the burden of welfare dependency on the state.

The participants in this study are not only desperate to work, but also want to understand the British culture in order to aid meaningful integration and participation in the society. Therefore, there should be more progress on recognising the qualifications and experience of asylum seekers; providing conversion courses and competence testing is necessary where appropriate. This will enable asylum seekers to live as independently and productively as they can in any given circumstances, so that they are able to find meaningful employment in the UK once they receive a decision on their status.

The government's decision to prevent asylum seekers from working whilst awaiting decisions deprives the UK of additional skills and enormous talents that these groups of people possess. Consequently depriving the UK from generating additional tax income and it costs the UK more in welfare support.

Susan Anderson from Confederation of British Industry said,

'Migrants to the UK bring valuable skills and ideas with them and help to fill job vacancies where British people are unable or unwilling to do so.'

She also said,

'Their taxes help pay our public services and our pensions, long after many migrants have returned home. Their presence also helps keep inflation low at time when there are many forces pushing the other way.' (BBC News on 3rd January 2007 as cited in Dumper, 2008)'

Above all, Social workers in the field of immigration and asylum should not be part of the 'structural oppressors' therefore, advocacy and empowerment must be key features of our work (Dominelli, 2005). We must endeavour to work with these vulnerable groups of people by showing them empathy, respect, and unconditional positive regards without being judgemental or bias towards them; we should not look or ask questions on 'why are they here?' 'are they 'bogus' or real?' but rather try and support them with the best possible ways and try to accept the fact that 'now that they are here, what can we do to support them' because not all asylum seekers are 'bogus' as commonly believed. We should bear in mind that, if we are not part of the solution, we should at least not be part of the problem as suggested by Thompson (1997).

Social Workers should strive to offer asylum seekers physical and emotional support (counselling services) and signpost them to appropriate services that could cater for their general well-being.

Furthermore, there is need for social service teams to refrain from overly engaging in agencies and systems that reinforce discriminatory practice. Instead partnership work with voluntary agencies should be promoted, as they are less constrained by policy and procedures which further segregate or isolate asylum seekers such as the Red Cross referred to by the women in this study.

The development of this project has enhanced my knowledge of the different experiences of African asylum seeking women in the UK. It also made me to understand clearly the usefulness of carrying out interview; to be able to gather thorough and in-depth information needed to carry out a good research in a sensitive topic such as this. This has enabled me to draw on and contribute to the development of the growing body of knowledge and evidence-based practice.

Finally, I have learnt that time management is crucial to delivering a good project. As time was never enough to undertake all the necessary work needed to carry out this project fully.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix one:

### UNIVERSITY ETHICAL APPLICATION



University of Chester

Faculty of Health and Social Care

Research Ethics Committee

**Applying to the Faculty of Health and Social Care**

**Research Ethics Committee**

### **Application form**

Please use the guidance notes to assist you in completing this application for ethical approval. The boxes will automatically enlarge to allow you to complete each section as fully as possible.

**1. Name of lead researcher and applicant [please see attached CV]**

Adenike Taiwo- Pala

**2. Contact Details**

**Address-**

**Daytime phone**

**Mobile-**

**e-mail address-** @chester.ac.uk

**preferred e-mail -**

**3. Full and short title**

**Full title:** Exploring the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum- seeking women in the UK

Short title: N/A

**4. Additional researchers**

N/A

**5. Supervisory/mentoring arrangements;**

Elizabeth Harlow

University of Chester

**6. Have you obtained/will you require ethical approval from another source?**

Written permission has been obtained from the agency where I did my placement (this is where I will be interviewing the participants). Please see attached.

## **7. Research outline , including:**

### **Brief outline of study, aims, objectives and literature used in research proposal:**

Kolthoff and Singer states that the idea of asylum seeking has been traditionally based on a framework of male experiences (Kolthoff and Singer, 2007).

There are suggestions that policies and procedures for asylum seekers are developed around this framework, resulting in a male-oriented system with little sensitivity to the issues that women face when claiming asylum (Dumper, 2008, Crawley, 2001, Bloch, 2000). For these reasons and more, it is significant that more focus should be on the increasing number of women who are in the UK to seek asylum.

Therefore, this research attempts to capture the awareness of women experiences during and after the asylum seeking processes and on the other hand aims to achieve the following:

- To explore the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum- seeking Women in order to provide an in-depth perspective of their living experiences since arriving in a northern town in the UK.
- To establish whether the asylum system promotes the needs of these women in such area as health, housing, employment, education and their general well-being.
- To identify any area of challenges faced by these women

Burnett and Peel, (2001) in the literature review 'Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Britain: Health Needs of Asylum Seekers and Refugees', found that one in six refugees had a physical health problem severe enough to affect their lives and two thirds had experienced anxiety or depression.

There is some evidence in the literature to suggest that social workers and other professionals struggle to manage the complex needs and social circumstances of many African families according to Okitikpi and Aymer's, (2003) in their study of intervention with African refugee families; they found that social workers often felt overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the families' traumatic experiences and

complex needs.

### **Data Collection, analysis and rationale**

Qualitative methodology will be used to conduct my research. Qualitative research has been compared to quantitative research and described as more in depth and therefore better when analysing emotions and experiences (McLaughlin, 2007).

In general qualitative research focuses on small numbers of cases; there are questions as to how these cases can be fully representative? However Williams (2000) argues that of course qualitative research cannot be representative of all cases but it can help to formulate theories and reasoning.

Experimental bias is another limitation, minimising personal views will assure that the social reality is presented and not what the researcher wants to be portrayed or imagined as the truth; whilst truth is abstract concept difficult to be measured, and this research will seek to interpret the meaning of respondents with regards to their experiences.

It is natural that respondents may get on well with the researcher better than others; there is therefore the risk that they will then answer the questions differently (Sarantakos, 2005). This may be a particular risk in this piece of research especially as I knew some of the women already. Therefore to prevent my own values influencing the data I will be conscious of minimising the effect bias could have by accurately recording the data that would be generated from this research.

Overall, qualitative research provides me with a flexible framework in which I can collect data. I do not want to be restricted with strict predefined ideas because I can not predict what the women would discuss with me.

### **SAMPLING**

The researcher intends to carry out a semi-structure interview with 6 volunteers who are African refugee or asylum –seeking women aged 21 and above in Northern town in the UK about their experiences individually, the interview with each participant will last for approximately one hour, however, depending on the amount of data gathered during the interview, there may be a need to interview the women on more than one occasion to gather enough rich data for the study.

Two major reasons for using interviews are outlined by Banister 1994: Interviews enable the

researcher to gain subjective meanings rather than obtaining responses within a standard format and it enables depth and flow of conversations and responses.

The semi-structured interview often uses some prepared questions by the interviewer and allows the interviewee to expand on their answers (Cardwell, 2000). The interviewer may change the way of questioning to either redirect the conversation or leave out some inappropriate questions during the interview. Semi-structured interviews will be chosen for this research.

### **Procedures**

To carry out this effectively, purposive non-probability strategy of snowball sampling would be employed. Participants are aimed to be contacted through a drop-in centre which is currently located in the Northern town in UK. (This is the agency where the researcher did her first 100 days placement).

In order to be able to analyse the semi-structure interviews, the dialogue between the researcher and participants would be recorded on tape with consent from the research participants transcribed. This supports the statement of Punch, (2005) that recordings offer a more complete representation of what was said.

The audio recordings will be labelled accordingly (all in pseudonyms to preserve identity in conformity to confidentiality)

To reflect both general requisites such as the Data protection Act, 1998 legislation and provision offered by a consent agreement signed by the research participants.

The data will be locked in cabinet and all files will be locked in password protected computer.

Once the 6 semi –structure interviews have been transcribed, it shall be open- coded. Open-coding according to Babbie, (2010) is when researchers work with their data line by line, in order to identify themes and categories that seem of interest.

Once the researcher begins to identify several key reoccurring themes, researcher can then start to focus coding the data. Focused coding involves going through the data line by line but this time focusing on the key themes identified in the open coding process (Babbie, 2010).

Another method of analysing the interview transcripts is by using Content Analysis. This is

very helpful by simply counting how often a particular theme is mentioned by the interviewees, this can assist the researcher to attribute negative, positive or emotionally neutral indicators to those reoccurring themes (Berg, 2001).

Given the size of the study, all analysis of the semi-structure interviews can be embarked on manually. This means that the use of specific qualitative research computer software programme may not be necessary. **(Word count- 966)**

**List here what you need to add to the ethical application:**

**Please see attached:**

- Researcher's CV,
- Letter of approval from the director of programme in the agency where the interview will be conducted,
- Participants' information sheet
- Participants' consent form.

### **Ethical issues**

This research will involve participants sharing their personal experiences in relations to asylum seeking in UK. On gaining the approval of the university ethics committee, I intend to obtain permission from the agency before I carry out the research at the drop-in centre where I did my year one placement. Each participant will be requested to give their full and informed consent as well as understanding their rights to withdraw from the research. The consent will be voluntary and without any form of force. Due to the sensitivity of the questions that might be asked, participants will be given enough time to decide whether they want to participate or not and can withdraw from participating whenever they deem so (Kumar, 2005).

The informed consent form will also detail how information gathered will be used, who will have access to the information collected, where data collected shall be stored as well as who the data collected shall be disseminated to.

This research will not share the information gathered for other purposes than for academic purposes only. The 1998 Data Protection Act has laid down the regulations for the appropriate gathering and storing of personal data (Denscombe, 2003). All information collected will be locked in cabinet and all files will be locked in password protected computer until the completion of course of study. Although, all information collected will be destroyed thereafter, however I will explain to them how the public could access the published thesis and that I cannot guarantee how the published thesis could be used by others in future. (Allan and Skinner, 1991).

The information will be kept anonymous by the use of pseudonyms and will ensure that the participants' names or other identifying information will not be included on any documentation used to ensure confidentiality. I will also obtain permission before I quote any words from their comments in my written work (please see consent form attached). I will give them pseudonyms and removed all identity information to ensure confidentiality.

The interviews are intended to take place on the first floor of the agency where I did my placement. The choice for this is because, the setting does not only has facilities to provide a quiet room but is also compatible with health and safety requirements for both the researcher and the participants. Also this setting offer the opportunity to the researcher of being able to carry out these one-time interviews at a time that coincides with the participants existing visits, this arrangement is more convenient for both the researcher and participants as it reduces the amount of times invested on the part of participants.

Similarly, consideration will be given to those who are vulnerable especially those who might have experienced violence or have suffered short or long term psychological effect due to torture and persecution by working with them sensitively given my own good counselling background, (I have worked as a professional counsellor for many years before the commencement of this course of study. Please see C.V) and also by the use of open-ended questions rather than restrict the participants to answer closed questions. However, they will be re-assured that they are not under any obligation to answer certain questions that might upset them and that they are free to withdraw from participating at any time they deem so.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the fact that people are vulnerable does not imply that they should not be studied. If ethics mean they are never studied, then their views will never be heard hence their conditions might not be improved. This is a complex situation for researchers where ethical issues are possibilities to impede the overall benefit (Kumar, 2005).

Ethical practice in relation to other people is fundamental and importantly concerned with the impact on those who are involved in the research processes (Kumar, 2005)

Kumar (2005) further stresses that there are no simple answers to this complex situation. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to ensure that informed consent are given and candid discussion about the implication of participation in the study will be of help to resolve ethical issues and reduce risk to the minimal. This research will not cause

any discomfort or harm to the participants, it will rather empower these women, in liberating their voices.

Given that this research will be conducted on the subject of people who have limited social power, this leads us to question whether this disempowers the researched group.

According to Esterberg, (2002) researchers need to address the power relationship that are entrenched in research by emphasizing that researchers tend to be of a higher social class than the participant, however, one's own class positioning is a subjective matter and as such research participants may not consider themselves to be of lower or higher class than the researcher and vis-à-vis.

In conclusion, Social worker has statutory duties, underpinned by professional codes and personal values to support the most vulnerable members of society (Brayne and Carr, 2005). As a prospective social worker, empowerment and positive contribution to social change is paramount to good social work practice. **(Word count: 847).**

**Study timings:**

- AUGUST: Submission of research proposal
- SEPTEMBER: Obtain ethical approval from the agency/Obtain ethical approval from university ethics board
- OCTOBER: Further review of literature/Data collection
- NOVEMBER: Data analysis/Dissemination Of finding
- DECEMBER: Writing of dissertation
- JANUARY: Submission of dissertation

**9. Form RO1**

I have completed a Form RO1      No

(If yes, please attach a copy to this application for reference)



## 10. Signatures

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge, I have accurately provided all the relevant information to the RESC for their consideration of your proposal. I also agree to provide a supplementary application if it becomes necessary to utilise additional data collection methods and to inform the RESC if the nature of my proposed study changes significantly.

Signature..... Date.....

- If you are a student, please ask your supervisor to sign and date your application to indicate that their approval of your proposal.

Supervisor's signature ..... Date.....

**Appendix two:**

**ETHICAL APPROVAL GRANTED**

EMW/bh

26<sup>th</sup> October 2011



University of  
Chester

Faculty of Health and Social Care

Tel 01244 511000  
Fax 01244 511270

Dear Adinike

**Ethical Approval Granted**

**FH&SC Ethics Number:** RESC0711-302  
**Course of Study:** MA Social Work  
**Supervisor:** Elizabeth Harlow  
**Student Number:** 0800950

I am pleased to inform you that the Research Ethics Sub Committee of the Faculty of Health and Social Care have approved your project "Exploring the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum-seeking women in the UK."

Approval is subject to the above and following conditions:

1. That you provide a brief report for the sub-committee on the completion of your project.
2. That you inform the sub-committee of any substantive changes to the project.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well in the completion of your project. If you require any further assistance please contact Barbara Holliday on 01244 511117 or by email [b.holliday@chester.ac.uk](mailto:b.holliday@chester.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Mason-Whitehead'.

**Professor Elizabeth Mason-Whitehead**  
Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Sub-Committee

cc Research Knowledge Transfer Office  
cc Academic Supervisor

---

University of Chester, Riverside, Castle Drive, Chester, CH1 1SL

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**Appendix three:**

**LETTER TO THE MANAGER OF THE AGENCY (PLACE OF INTERVIEW)**

Dear Madam,

**RE: A Study of the experiences of African refugees and asylum-seeking Women in a northern in the UK.**

As you know, I am studying MA Social Work at University of Chester.

I am in the process of completing my master's degree, and I am planning to explore a study on the experiences of Refugees and Asylum-Seeking women in East Manchester as my thesis project.

In this study, I will be exploring an insight of the living experiences of African women refugees and asylum seekers.

I knew that you have given me a verbal permission during our last discussion; however, I would like to acknowledge your written consent to interview these service user groups during one of the drop-in sessions in the organisation.

To preserve the confidentiality, the names of participants, and any identifiable information, and also the name of other professionals, staff members and the organisation will be identified only by pseudonyms.

On completion, the master thesis will be placed in the University of Chester library and you can access this if you want.

Please sign this copy of the letter to confirm your consent. A second copy is provided for your records.

By signing this letter, you are giving me permission to conduct an interview with the service users who volunteer to participate in this research in your organisation.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me on or by e-mail to **@chester.ac.uk or my dissertation supervisor; Professor Elizabeth Harlow**

**Kind Regards,**

**Adenike Taiwo-Pala,**

**MA Social Work student, University of Chester.**

**Name:** .....

**Signature:** .....

**Date** .....

## **Appendix four:**

### **PARTICIPANTS' INFORMATION SHEET**



Hi,

My name is Adenike Taiwo-Pala. I am a MA student, studying Social Work at University of Chester. As a social work student, I am required to write a dissertation in fulfilment of the award of MA in Social Work. Therefore, the title of my research is: **Exploring the Experiences of African Refugee and Asylum-seeking Women in the UK.**

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to have a more in-depth understanding of the living experiences of African women who are refugees or asylum seekers in the UK.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are a female African Refugee or Asylum seeker in the UK.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

If you agree to be interviewed, I would like to set a mutually agreeable time to interview you. The interview will last for approximately one hour, with your permission the interview will be audio taped.

#### **Confidentiality**

Please be reassured that all the information you give me will be anonymous and will remain confidential. No names, addresses or other identifiable personal information will be used.

The data will be analysed independently by me and no one will see any of the individual records. Also, the data will be stored securely in locked cabinet. I will preserve your anonymity by giving them pseudonyms.

#### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

Please note that a written report will be produced at the end of the project, which will be submitted to the University of Chester for academic purposes only.

#### **Risk and benefit of being in the study**

Please be aware that by agreeing to take part you will be contributing to my learning and there is no financial or personal benefit attached to this. Therefore, agreeing to take part is totally voluntary and you will be able to opt out of the research at any time if you do not feel comfortable with the questions that would be asked.

If you feel uncomfortable talking about your past experiences; if the questions are too personal, then you have no obligation to answer the question. You are absolutely free to end the interview whenever you want.

If you are happy to take part in the research, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact: Elizabeth Harlow, University of Chester

Many Thanks.

**Appendix five**

**PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM**



University of  
Chester

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**Title of Project: Exploring the experiences of African Refugee and Asylum-seeking women in the UK.**

**Name of Researcher: Adenike Taiwo-Pala**

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participants' information sheet, dated .....2011 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights being affected.
3. I agree to take part in the above study and also agree for my anonymized comments to be used in research reports and any subsequent publications
4. I agree for my comments/contributions to be audio-taped
5. I do not agree for my comments/contributions to be audio-taped

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person taking consent  
(if different from researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Adenike Taiwo-Pala  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

**Appendix six:**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULES AND QUESTIONS**



University of  
Chester

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**SCHEDULE -**

Organisation Name -

Date of Interview –

Time of Interview –

Duration of the Interview –

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Q1. Name of interviewee

-----

Q2. Country of birth

-----

Q3. Date of birth

-----

Q4. Arrival date in the UK

-----

Q5. What led to your decision to seek asylum in the UK?

-----

Q6. Time taken for asylum claim to be accepted

-----

These are semi-structured questions, prompts or follow on questions will be used.

I hope to ask them open questions which will be tailored towards their experiences like:

- What made you seek asylum in the UK and not somewhere else?
- Tell me your experiences since arriving in UK/what have been your experiences since arriving in UK?

- What challenges have you experienced since arriving/what have been your challenges so far?
- What helps have you received since arriving/what do you find helpful since arrival?
- What are your plans for now?
- What are your plans for the future?
- Is there anything you want to tell me that we haven't covered?