

Refugee Single-Mothers, Social Networks and Social Capital

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1) What types of social networks do refugee single-mothers establish and maintain?

2) How are these networks employed to support them in their sole-parenting role?

What is the research?

A qualitative investigation into how refugee single-mothers utilise social networks to

- access emotional and practical support,
- strengthen personal and family resilience and
- gain social capital to establish new lives in the United Kingdom.

Particular attention will be given to

- the impact of displacement on mothering,
- navigating tensions arising from different cultural norms,
- intergenerational conflict and
- unfamiliar legal frameworks.

By combining Social Network Analysis with individual interviews, this research will explore the experiences of refugee single-mothers through a lens of positive resilience and agency, amplifying the refugees' own voices in the arena.



"Quietly" Willow Tree

Why refugee single-mothers?

An extensive report into refugee integration by **Nuffield Foundation in 2013**, found that

women,
Africans and
Muslims

had the **poorest integration outcomes** across the areas of Employment, Housing, Education and Health in UK.

Women are

- most likely to experience limiting physical and emotional health,
- least likely to seek help, and
- least likely to access language, training and employment.

Living in family units was shown to increase positive outcomes. With some cultural taboos remaining around divorce, separation and pre-marital sex, refugee single-mothers can find the support of co-ethnic or co-religious groups more nuanced.

Previous Social Network Analysis research with refugee populations by Deng and Marlowe (2013)² and Williams (2006)³ have found that women without male relatives can face distinct problems in integration.

The proposed research will further develop this analysis, in the specific single-mother context.

Research Context

Plymouth, UK has been a dispersal city for asylum-seekers for almost 2 decades, with a consistent population of 300 individual people seeking asylum, often remaining in the city after receiving positive Refugee Status Determination decisions.

The city has made a commitment to host 25 families under the Vulnerable Person and Vulnerable Children Resettlement Schemes. The prevalence of single-motherhood amongst female refugees in the city has recently been discussed in multi-agency round table meetings, with a recognition that gaps in data on this population exist, and need to be addressed.



Methodology

Combining semi-structured interviews with participatory social network visualisation tools, egocentric target sociograms will be created. This real-time production prompts memory and allows room for clarification, providing deeper insight into the depth and nature of ties within the network.

The sociograms will then be analysed to find common themes, whilst the interviews will provide detail and the possibility to identify gaps in support.

This tool has been found to be particularly well-suited for use with older or less well-educated participants⁴, as well as supporting communication across language barriers.



Anticipated outcomes

In line with Williams' typology³ of social networks of refugees, it is expected that refugee single-mothers will have multi-layered social networks spread across countries, continents and time-zones, facilitated by modern technology.

Variables such as reasons for flight (e.g. gender/sexuality? Religious conversion?) and circumstances leading to sole-parenting (widowhood, divorce, pre-marital sex, rape) are likely to impact the availability of support from home and/or co-ethnic community support in the UK.

Sources

¹Cheung, S.Y. and Phillimore, J. 2013, *Social Networks, Social Capital and Refugee Integration*

²Deng, S.A. & Marlowe, J.M., 2013. *Refugee Resettlement and Parenting in a Different Context*. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 11(4)

³Williams, L., 2006. *Social Networks of Refugees in the United Kingdom: Tradition, Tactics and New Community Spaces*. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 32(5)

⁴Ryan, L. Mulholland, J & Agoston, A., 2014 *Talking Ties: Reflecting on Network Visualisation and Qualitative Interviewing*. *Sociological Research Online*, 19 (2)