The Challenges Faced when Seeking Asylum in the United Kingdom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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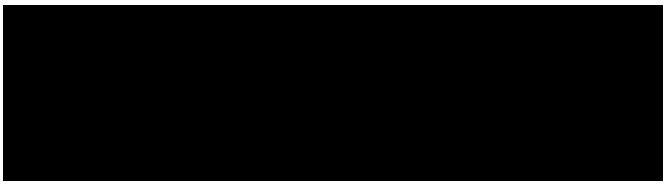
Thesis declaration form

I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature: 

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Overview

This thesis explores the challenges refugees face when seeking asylum in the United Kingdom (UK), specifically focusing on the experiences of interview with the Home Office.

Part One is a Conceptual Introduction. The aim is to provide an overview of both the UK Asylum process and related literature on the challenges faced by refugees when in the Home Office substantive interview. It reviews the research that has been conducted with refugees about their experiences of interviewing with the Home Office and highlights the sparsity thereof.

Part Two is a qualitative analysis using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the challenges faced by refugees when seeking asylum in the UK. This studies interview questions focussed on the experience of the Home Office interview and how this impacted what people were able to say. Eight people took part in the study. Analysis of the semi-structured interviews generated four superordinate themes. The themes identified were; *"Confronted by a Hostile System", "Beliefs about Professionals", "Experiences of Interviews", "The Impact of the Process on the Self".*

A discussion of the limitations of the study, it's implications, and suggestions for future research are included

Part Three provides a critical reflection on the ethical considerations when conducting research with refugees. Consent, recruitment, and language limitations are discussed as well as the strengths and limitations of qualitative research.

Impact Statement

The outcome of this thesis has implications for the asylum decision making process in the UK. It has generated insights into the psychological factors that can impede disclosure in the Home Office substantive interview and thus result in an evolving narrative. This has implications for how interviews are conducted by the Home Office and how decisions are made.

The outcomes of this research contribute to the literature which highlights the complexity of disclosure and how it can be modified by fear, shame, and trauma.

Whilst the current evidence indicates that inconsistencies are seen as grounds for rejecting a claim by the Home Office, the data gathered from this study paints a more complex picture of what might be indicated by an evolving story of why a person has a claim to asylum.

The research has highlighted numerous challenges that refugees face in recounting their experiences to the Home Office. It has demonstrated that changes to a person's account of their reasons for seeking asylum are not necessarily indicative that that person is not a legitimate refugee. This increased understanding is of value to decision makers in the Home Office and courts in the UK. The outcome from this research can contribute to ensuring that future decisions are informed and fair.

Results from the study also highlight practice changes that can be made in both the environment and style of the interview within the asylum process which so they are experienced as less overtly hostile. Participants articulated how dehumanised they felt by their treatment by the Home Office. Many of the post-migratory stressors identified by participants are readily manageable through Home Office procedures and policy. The research points to areas of process where changes could be made which in turn may positively modify health outcomes for refugees in the UK. This has implications both for the use of health resources by refugees and their integration into the UK.

The finding that the detrimental impacts on mental health were ongoing even after leave to remain was granted is contradictory to some of the other literature on the mental health outcomes for refugees. Researchers exploring the health outcomes for refugees may find investigating what effects this outcome a productive line of research. It may be that the open format of semi-structured interviews allowed for an uncovering of description that is lost in forced choice questions using western mental health terminology.

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Acknowledgements

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To my son, thank you for your perpetual effervescent joy, and in answer to your daily question; "Have you finished your work yet?", "Yes, I think I have".

Part 1: Conceptual Introduction

Abstract

This Conceptual Introduction presents the literature on the institutional practices and psychological processes that may impact an applicant's explanation of their reasons for seeking asylum, with a specific focus on the Home Office interview. It discusses the current literature focussing on; issues around ascertaining credibility, the psychological processes that may impact what a person is able to disclose, and current research about refugees experiences of the UK Home Office process when seeking asylum.

There is currently little in-depth research in the UK which addresses an applicant's experiences of the UK Home Office interview and the impact this has on the applicant. Further research is needed to understand these processes to promote informed and fair decision making in applications for asylum.

Introduction

The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 1951) states that a person who has fled their country on the basis of a well-founded fear of persecution for reason of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social group or political affiliation has the right to seek refuge in any country that is a signatory of the convention. In turn, the host country has a right to determine the validity of the applicant's claim through questioning and examination of supporting evidence before granting asylum. Therefore, it is important to understand how a refugee might explain their reasons for seeking asylum, what might affect that explanation, and how that explanation might be heard by the host country assessing the validity of the claim.

For people seeking asylum, the ability to disclose everything that has happened to them can be impacted by myriad factors and there are many reasons why their narrative may contain inconsistencies (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Herlihy, Jobson, & Turner, 2012). As the United Kingdom's (UK) Home Office guidance states: 'these may include: age; gender; variations in the capacity of human memory; physical and mental health; emotional trauma; lack of education; social status and culture; feelings of shame; painful memories particularly those of a sexual nature' (UKBA, 2015a, p.14). Additionally, the delivery of a narrative may differ according to cultural conventions (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Herlihy et al., 2012). Despite this evidence, the Home Office system makes the core assumption that the impetus to be granted asylum will override any impediments to disclosure, regardless of the applicant's experiences or circumstances. Furthermore, everything the person seeking asylum needs to disclose must be revealed within the substantive

interview (Baillot, Cowan, & Munro, 2012) irrespective of how challenging that disclosure may be.

This conceptual introduction will review the different factors which may affect the way in which a refugee in the UK narrates their experiences throughout the application process.

The first section of the paper briefly reviews the process of application. Whilst theoretically the process is apparently straightforward, the practical experience of many people seeking asylum is often far from this. If we are to make sense of the choices that applicants make in narrating their experience then it is vital to understand the steps that may be involved and the different people to whom a person seeking asylum may need to explain their experiences.

The next section focuses on the various people to whom a refugee may have to give an account of their experiences to. It discusses how decisions about how an asylum claim are made, with a particular focus on credibility, which is often central to whether a claim is rejected or accepted.

The paper then addresses the literature on specific factors that might influence a refugee's narrative such as the impact of trauma on memory, cultural differences in narration, the effect of shame as well as discussion of the literature on deception.

In the final section I review existing research relating to what affects the ways in which people seeking asylum in the UK explain their experiences when seeking asylum. Throughout the paper I have used the term 'refugee' or 'a person seeking asylum' because, as the Refugee Council states the term 'Asylum Seeker' is dehumanising (https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/) .

The Process of Application

"He pointed to the facts. Surely they spoke for themselves?... They shrugged. Not necessarily, they said."

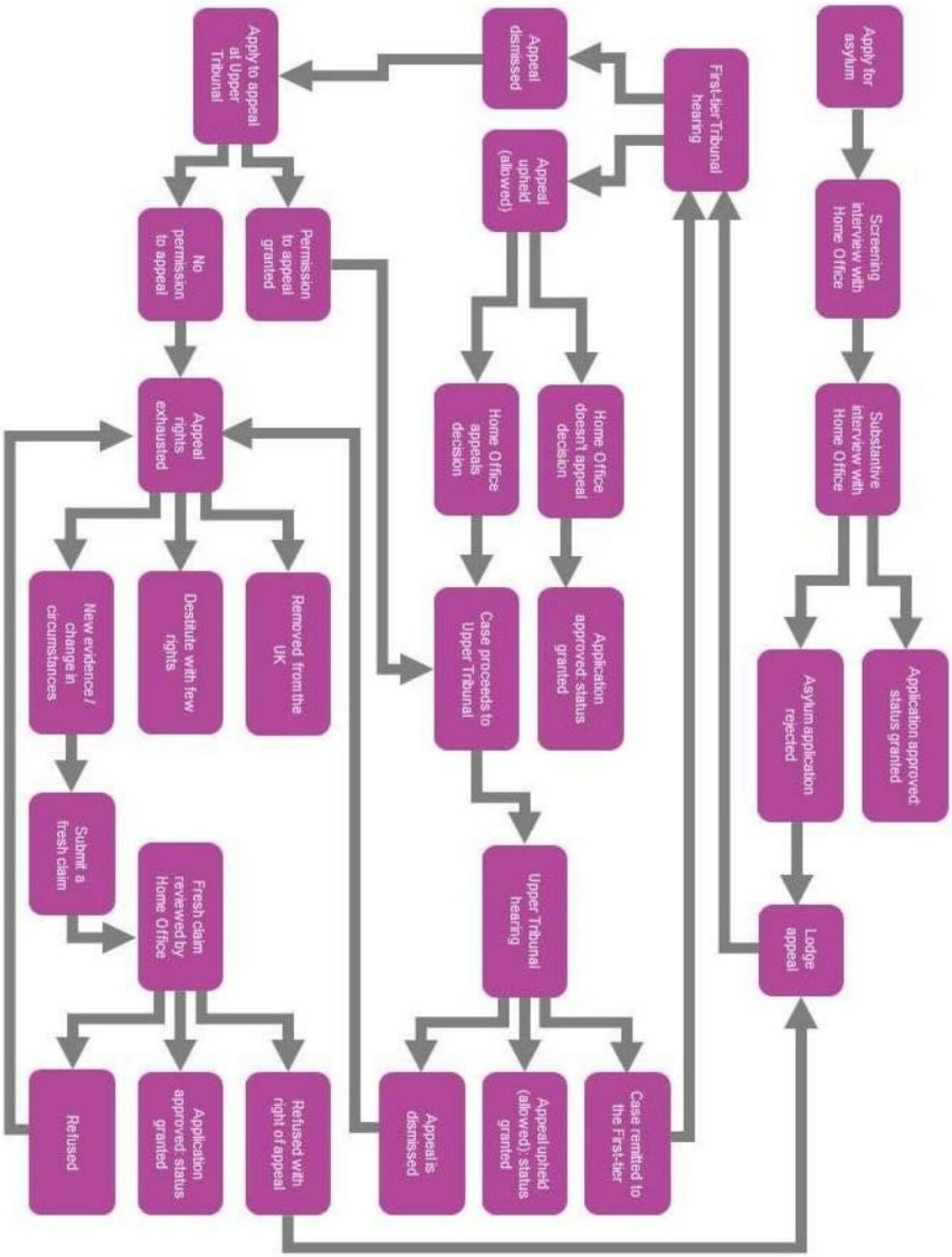
(Constantine, 2019, p.12 in Refugee Tales)

The process of seeking asylum in the UK is superficially a straightforward one. The applicant lodges a claim, provides an account of their experiences during two interviews (the screening interview and the substantive interview) with the Home Office, and a decision is made. In practice the subsequent process can be both very long and very complicated (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Taken from Clayton, Crowther, Kerr, Sharrock & Singer

(2017)



There are three main ways an asylum claim can be lodged: on arrival at a UK port of entry; in-country with a local Immigration Compliance and Enforcement team; or at an Asylum Intake Unit (AIT). Some claims are made by other routes, for example where the claimant is in prison or has a severe medical condition and it is agreed by the Home Office that a postal claim may be submitted; though such cases are unusual (Bolt, 2017).

Once the claim has been lodged a short 'screening' interview is conducted. The stated purpose of this is 'to establish the claimant's personal details, capture biometric information, briefly record the individual's reason(s) for claiming asylum, collect information on the claimant's method of entry to the UK, and identify any vulnerabilities to enable appropriate referrals for support to be made' (Bolt, 2017, p. 11). A claim is then managed by the Third Country Unit (TCU), the Detained Asylum Casework unit (DAC) or Asylum Casework Units (ACU). The casework unit is responsible for arranging a 'substantive' interview. This interview is the 'main opportunity for the claimant to provide evidence about why they need international protection' (UKBA, 2015b, p. 4). The interviews are conducted by the Decision Makers (DMs) (also known as caseworkers) who are also responsible for making the final decision (Bolt, 2017).

Whilst the guidance from the Home Office purports to acknowledge the difficulties people seeking asylum may face in disclosing their experiences, evidence indicates that, contrary to the policy instruction in 'Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status' (UKBA, 2015a), applications are often refused because of minor inconsistencies and lack of documentary evidence (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; UNHCR, 2013). The initial decision is communicated by letter, and most types of

refusal carry a right of appeal (see Figure 1). There are 6 possible decision outcomes: 'Grant asylum'; 'Refuse asylum and grant Humanitarian Protection (HP)'; 'Refuse asylum and HP but grant leave under the Article 8 Family/Private Life Rules'; Refuse Asylum and HP but grant Restricted Leave'; 'Refuse asylum, HP, and Article 8 but grant Discretionary Leave outside the Rules'; or 'Refuse asylum and all other forms of leave' (Bolt, 2017).

Thus, most of the decisions are made within 'the administrative apparatus of the Home Office with the judiciary involved only at the appeals stage' (Schuster, 2018, p. 3).

If a claim goes to appeal it will be heard by the First-tier Tribunal. This is an independent judicial body where the decisions are made by judges and the proceedings are broadly adversarial (Campbell, 2017; Thomas, 2006); data from 2019 showed that 41% of these appeals were granted (Refugee Council, 2020). During appeal the judge will listen to arguments from a Home Office presenting officer (HOPO) and the asylum seeker or their legal representative (Clayton et al., 2017). If this appeal is refused a further appeal can be made to the Upper Tribunal if it is accepted that the appeal can be made on a point of law. The Upper Tribunal may make a new decision if they believe there was an error on a point of law or return the case to the First-tier Tribunal to be heard again (Clayton et al., 2017).

Whilst it may be assumed that the mere presentation of the facts would be sufficient for a successful claim, research indicates that they must be presented in a way that meets the cultural expectations of narrative in the UK (Herlihy, 2016) which satisfy the assumptions made by decision makers about what 'credible' looks

and sounds like (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018). This is despite the evidence that those who have experienced trauma often struggle to narrate their experiences in this way (Herlihy et al., 2012; Herlihy, Gleeson & Turner 2010; Bohmer & Shuman 2007).

The Audience and its Expectations

'It is widely accepted that the full meaning of a narrative emerges only during its performance, out of the interaction with ... the audience and its expectations'

(Finnegan, 1992 p. 93).

Before discussing why there may be challenges for refugees when presenting their experiences, it is important to address the contexts in which a refugee must explain why they are seeking asylum. It has been proposed that the narration of an experience emerges through a collaboration between the narrator and their audience (Conley & O'Barr, 1990). Therefore, each person in the process affects the context and may have a role in shaping how a story is told, which in turn affects how it is heard and how it is understood.

For a refugee to gain leave to remain in the UK they will have to explain their reasons for seeking asylum a number of times, at minimum during the screening interview and the substantive interview. Usually they will have to explain their reasons not only at these interviews, but also to their lawyer, to the interpreters reforming their words so others can understand, to a professional writing a medico-legal report, to the Immigration Judge hearing their appeal and to the Home Office Presenting Officer (HOPO) cross-examining them. Thus, the narrative about what prompted the applicant to flee, the journey to get to the UK and what they fear if they are compelled to return home, is repeated both orally and in writing (Bohmer &

Shuman, 2018). As Eastmond (2007) explains, a person recounting experiences of war or in a refugee camp, as a way to relieve their suffering, would not be likely to recount the same experience in an asylum hearing in the same way. Whatever the topic, the context and the audience often change the presentation of a narrative.

Goals and Beliefs of the Audience

The first time refugees have to explain their reasons for seeking asylum is usually during the screening interview conducted by Immigration Officers based at UK borders. Officially these officers have only a 'bureaucratic role' in the process of accepting or denying an application for asylum (Jubany, 2011). Therefore, the decisions they make, from a legal standpoint, are only meant to be recommendations which may be ratified by a higher-ranking officer. However, it is often the case that the 'official' decision-maker will accept the Immigration Officers' recommendations, making these recommendations critical to the decision-making process (Jubany, 2011). Research with Immigration Officers indicates that they may have a bias towards disbelief and often discredit applicants based on stereotyping and 'intuition' (Jubany, 2011).

Home Office caseworkers (also referred to as Decision-Makers in the literature), who are officially responsible for a claim from beginning to end, may already be primed by the recommendations of the Immigration Officers to believe that the person speaking to them is lying. The content of the refugee's experience is then filtered through this lens. It may be that in this way a 'culture of disbelief' is initiated, and it has been argued that caseworkers operate within this framework, which is likely to affect decision making to the detriment of UK asylum seekers (Jubany, 2019; Bohmer & Shuman 2018; Souter, 2011).

The hypothesis that a 'culture of disbelief' influences subsequent decisions is supported by the data which show that in a Home Office commissioned independent review of decisions made, one third of cases were identified as requiring improvement and approximately 17% did not contain evidence that the claimant's credibility had been appropriately considered (Bolt, 2017). This 'culture of disbelief', it is also argued, underpins poor use or misuse of Country of Origin Information (COI) reports leading to ill-founded assumptions and unfounded decision making (Schuster, 2018). In decisions pertaining specifically to women it was found that 50% were overturned after being subjected to scrutiny at the tribunal stage, compared to an average of 28% for all asylum claims (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011) indicating that improvements may be needed in decision making for this population . This can be contrasted with the observation that Immigration Judges are frequently seen as neither too credulous nor too disbelieving, and are assumed to create an atmosphere which enables the claimant to speak (Clayton et al., 2017). It seems that, in some cases, the primary goal of upholding the letter of the law results in a different outcome to the goal of meeting a target imposed by a department. In fact, when interviewed, caseworkers reported feeling that the quality of their work and thus the quality of their decisions were diminished because there was insufficient time to adequately prepare. Additionally, many caseworkers stated that they often felt they were "clock-watching". This prevented them from allowing time and space for the claimant to open up about their experiences, which the caseworkers reported affected the quality of the interview (Bolt, 2017).

It may be that the construct of the system undermines case workers who are trying to make fair and informed decisions by constraining the resources available to them to do this. At the most extreme end of this target driven culture is the role of

the Home Office Presenting Officers (HOPO's) who work to an imposed target of preventing success on the part of the refugee in 70% of asylum appeals (Campbell, 2017). Whilst their training states that a HOPO may not knowingly mislead during appeal, they have *no obligation* to promote justice or the effective operation of the judicial system (Campbell, 2017). Thus, once again it appears that the design of the system is not one which prioritises an accurate assessment of asylum claims, but instead focuses on meeting a target, regardless of whether or not that target represents fair assessments of the applicants' case.

Interview Style

The style of the interview and the way questions are asked must also be considered when analysing what people do or do not disclose. Lawyers representing refugees will (usually) start from the presumption that their client has been persecuted and that they will tell the truth if given an opportunity (Good, 2011). This contrasts with caseworkers who, it is argued, position themselves to be suspicious of the refugee's narrative and are thus more likely to consider the refugee as not credible (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Mayblin 2019). Additionally, lawyers often start by letting the applicant present their experiences in the way that they wish to, and only after the whole story has been told do they try to reform it to fit the needs of the decision makers (McKinley, 1997). Whilst this practice is somewhat contentious (McKinley, 1997), research indicates that legal representation results in a higher likelihood of the case being successful (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Clayton et al., 2017).

In comparison, the interview style of the Home Office has been described as interrogative, with little opportunity for the applicant to further explain their meaning (Baillot et al., 2009). The question/answer format of the interview has been said to

be particularly challenging for vulnerable people making it difficult for them to present a coherent narrative (Baillot et al., 2009). Additionally, the questions which are asked during the substantive interview have been described as being confusing for clients, starting with a question that only refers to the reason for departure, without making it clear that the historical context may also be important (Good, 2011). Furthermore the process has been criticised for being conducted as if the purpose is to demonstrate that a claimant is false, despite research showing that most professional 'lie catchers' are not better than the average person at detecting lies (Granhag, Strömwall & Hartwig, 2005; Hartwig 2004).

As Kirmayer writes 'the world we live in is constructed not only of brute facts, but equally of imagination' (Kirmayer, 2003, p. 169). If the person listening to the narrative, whether a caseworker or a judge, cannot imagine the experiences being described, or holds a belief that most refugees are mendacious, these assumptions will likely affect their decision-making process. Researchers have argued that Home Office decisions made about the veracity of a refugees claim are often judged in a mechanistic way (Campbell, 2017), and that decisions are based on what the decision maker, or people they know, might do in a similar situation (Herlihy et al., 2010). This has implications for all types of decisions as claimants who are not refugees may be given leave to remain as their story 'fits' the expectation.

Credibility: It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

"In the end I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like."

(Achebe, 2003, p. 24)

Credibility is the basis on which many applications for asylum are granted or denied (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018). It has been estimated that between 48 and 90 percent of all asylum claims are rejected on the grounds that they lack credibility (Byrne, 2007). Yet, to read the literature published by the government (UKBA, 2015a & b) one would assume that an applicant's story needs only to be told, and if it meets criteria set out by the UK government, then this is enough. There is an assumption that if a claim is 'honest' then the refugee has only to describe the circumstances in which they came to seek asylum, and since their account is true, asylum will be granted. Yet the evidence from a variety of disciplines posits that this is often not the case. Instead, those 'seeking asylum face the double problem of, first, trying to narrate unspeakable events, and second, translating those personal stories in a way that conveys the information needed by the asylum officials' (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018, p. 34). This research, based on disciplines as wide ranging as psychology, law, sociolinguistics, anthropology and human geography indicates that '*how'* a story is narrated has a huge impact on how it is received and whether it is judged as credible.

It is argued that in the eyes of an asylum decision maker what constitutes a 'credible account' is narrative consistency and quality of performance (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018;Thomas, 2006). Yet the bases for these criteria are often personal judgments, perceptions and dispositions which are often inconsistent between decision makers, and can lack an articulated logic (Campbell, 2017).

Thus, the presumed veracity of an applicant may have more to do with the ability of the applicant (or the person who represents them) to sort through their

experiences and present an appropriate selection according to the interviewee's prior conceptions of what constitutes credibility (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Herlihy, 2010). This may account for why those who have legal representation have a far higher chance of their claim being accepted (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Clayton et al., 2017). Therefore, it is the decision makers' norms and values which underlie whether what the applicant discloses is reasonable and believable, and not necessarily the veracity of their story (Schuster, 2018). Despite this there is evidence that many of the indicators used to assess credibility are based on faulty assumptions (Bohmer & Shuman 2018; Campbell, 2017; Jubany 2011).

Western Normative Assumptions

Normative practices of the 'Western' institutions assessing asylum claims are often used to judge the credibility of a refugee's statement without due consideration that these assumptions are culturally bound. Research in the UK has shown that in judging the credibility of a claim, assumptions language formulation and narration style (Ramezankhah, 2017), acceptable or appropriate expression of emotion (Jubany, 2011; Baillot et al., 2009), and 'reasonable behaviour' when fleeing a situation (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Schuster, 2018) are often based on the norms and values of someone living in Britain rather than in the country from which the refugee is fleeing. Bohmer and Shuman (2018) describe these practices as 'failures of logic', whereby the decision to deny an application is based on the logical assumptions of the decision-maker which are situated in Western norms and the limits of their own experience.

It is proposed that when producing a narrative of events that the amount of contextual information provided, including how much and when description is used,

varies depending on cultural conventions (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018). There has been some research which indicates that people from individualistic cultures, of which the UK is one, 'provide lengthy, autonomous, specific, self-focused and emotionally elaborate memories' (Herlihy et al., 2012, p. 668), and that when people seeking asylum recount their experiences they are expected to do so in a way that is culturally familiar to the assessor, if they are to be considered credible (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Herlihy et al., 2012). Yet some have argued that people from collectivist cultures, as is the case for many people seeking asylum in the UK, may narrate autobiographical memories differently (Herlihy et al., 2012; Minami, 2002; Han, Leichtman & Wang,1998). This may mean that those supporting a person to claim asylum in the UK may have transformed their narrative to fit the cultural expectations of the host country. This can then at times mean it is not clear to what extent the narrative is the lawyer's and to what extent it is the client's (McKinley 1997). In this way, it seems that the system can disempower people from being able to put forward their motives for seeking asylum in their own terms (Good, 2011).

Applicants who claim asylum on the basis of their sexual orientation are also found to be adversely affected by rigid, normative assumptions on the part of the decision maker about homosexual identity (Berg & Millibank 2017; Choi 2010). Noll (2006) describes how the power dynamics inherent in the determination of refugee status mean that it is the decision maker's understanding of the world which dictates what 'rings true' and what does not. Thus, what is considered 'credible' behaviour in cases where one is claiming status based on sexual identity is often shaped by Western norms, with little awareness of the psychological issues that may affect how these identities are negotiated in an asylum interview (Berg & Millibank, 2017). There can be an assumption that if someone is seeking refugee

status because of sexual identity that they will be entirely comfortable with that identity and therefore be able to discuss all aspects openly and freely. Research with minority groups from cultures where identifying as gay is not culturally acceptable found that one in four who identified as gay had not spoken to anyone about their sexual orientation (Kimmel & Yi, 2004) and many experienced a tension between these two aspects of their identities (Bhugra, 1997). Therefore there are many factors which may negatively impact a discussion of their sexuality openly in an interview, which often do not appear to be taken into account by decision makers, such as the impact of a same-culture or opposite sex translator, or the difficulty in conceiving that an official in the UK may be anything other than hostile to people identifying as homosexual (Berg & Millibank, 2017). In cases where women were claiming asylum on the basis of sexual orientation, questioning was frequently found to be particularly intrusive and the likelihood of not being believed increased (Clayton et al., 2017)

Women also appear at a particular disadvantage when applying for asylum in Britain (Clayton et al, 2017) . As with many aspects of life, there is a growing body of evidence in the UK as well as internationally which demonstrates that women's experiences of persecution are different from men's and thus the model of interpretation which is applied to their accounts inappropriately discriminates against them (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011). The cultural background and experience of some women seeking asylum in the UK can influence how much they say (Singer, 2014). They are often inexperienced in self-advocating and/or come from a culture where women are expected to be deferential, which may account for brief, vague or apparently inconsistent responses (Singer, 2014). The UNHCR reported that narratives that were thought to be too brief or too vague were often considered to

lack credibility in the eyes of decision makers and concluded that the level of detail the applicant was required to provide was unrealistic (UNHCR, 2013). Furthermore, the penalty for non-disclosure or late disclosure of information has a significant impact despite the evidence that for many women the opportunity to disclose abuse and violence is undermined when interviews are conducted in the presence of children (Muggeridge & Maman, 2011).

Interpreters – Sometimes it's Not What You Say

The interpreters' role in the process of seeking asylum is often overlooked. Interpreters frequently have more impact on outcomes than may be commonly acknowledged. Some interpreters may change the language used, or not interpret in full because of their own discomfort due to the content of the material, particularly in cases of sexual violence (Clayton et al., 2017; Baillot, et al., 2009;). Doubt has been cast on the accuracy of some interpreters and it is argued that the roles they assume are shaped by the perceived expectations of the officials in charge of the decision-making process (Campbell, 2017).

Even when different interpreters produce different versions of an applicant's recorded narrative on different occasions and the discrepancies are pointed out as having been used as grounds for refusal, the fault is frequently attributed to the applicant and not to the poor standard of translation (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018). Additionally, despite multiple examples in the research literature where mistranslation has changed the whole meaning of a case and thus the perceived veracity of the claim, the written record is assumed to be the 'true' representation of the claimant's meaning irrespective of their claims to the contrary (Gibb & Good, 2014).

Psychological Factors which Affect Disclosure

Although there has been little research into the difficulties faced by people seeking asylum when explaining their experiences, there is a wealth of research into the different factors which might influence a refugee's narrative: the limits of memory, the impact of culture, the role of trauma and the various drivers behind deception. A brief overview of this research, which hypothesizes the reasons a person's story might be rejected despite its veracity, is summarised below. The last section looks at the research relating specifically to deception, as it is often assumed that this is why a refugee may struggle to talk about their experiences.

Memory

It has been stated that those responsible for making decisions about the credibility of an asylum claim have expectations which are incompatible with the limitations of human memory (Cameron, 2010). In a review of rejected claims, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) found that inconsistent recall of the date, duration or frequency when a particular event occurred was often cited as a reason for arguing that a claim was invalid (UNHCR, 2013) despite there being clear evidence from the psychological literature that contextual temporal information is particularly difficult to recall with accuracy (Cameron, 2010).

Cognitive psychology research has demonstrated that details reported for repeated events are perceived as less honest and less credible than reports of a single event, and that the mediating factors appear to be confidence, consistency and cooperation (Weinsheimer, Coburn, Chong, MacLean, & Connolly, 2017). This has real implications for refugees, who may well have experienced repeated traumatic experiences such as torture. This research also corroborates the conclusions from

other investigations that when decision makers are assessing credibility, there is an expectation of what a credible account would look and sound like (Herlihy & Turner, 2015; Herlihy, 2014; Singer, 2014; Cohen, 2001).

Trauma

Fazel, Wheeler and Danesh (2005) concluded that resettled refugees in western countries were ten times more likely to meet criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than age-matched members of the general population. There is clear evidence that anyone who has experienced high levels of trauma tends to avoid thinking about their trauma and to avoid reminders of the experience (Herlihy et al., 2012). It may therefore be unrealistic to expect a refugee to describe in detail everything that happened to them. Avoidance is particularly prevalent in those who have experienced sexual trauma (van Velsen, Gorst-Unsworth, & Turner, 1996). As Herlihy writes: 'people suffering from PTSD due to experiences of sexual violence will be more likely to be prioritizing *above all other considerations* the avoidance of thought, feelings and conversations about their experiences...' (Herlihy, 2014, p. 123). Therefore, the refugee who has been a victim of sexual violence is faced with the dilemma of describing everything that has happened and reliving the pain, or recounting their experiences in a way that is tolerable to them by omitting potentially vital information about why they are seeking asylum. Another important aspect which can affect a refugee's narrative is the role of shame. The capacity for shame is universal (Gilbert & Andrews, 1998), yet what is considered shaming is both culturally driven and idiosyncratic (Lee, Scragg, & Turner, 2001). When one feels ashamed, the urge to hide, conceal and escape is visceral and not driven by rationality (Lee, 2009). Thus, a refugee who is experiencing shame may not disclose their experiences even if it would be prudent to do so.

In a study by Bögner, Herlihy & Brewin (2007), looking at the impact of sexual violence on disclosure during Home Office interviews, almost half of those interviewed stated that they struggled to disclose personal details due to feeling ashamed to talk about their experiences. Even when people felt able to disclose instances of sexual violence, it was common for euphemisms to be used which were vulnerable to being lost in translation (Baillot et al., 2009). For those who did not disclose in the initial Home Office interview, later disclosure is frequently met with the accusation of falsehood (Baillot et al., 2009).

Refugees Experiences of the UK Asylum Process

"And yes, they want me to tell them my story. But I only tell small parts, here and there, because it makes me too sad"

(Patrick Gale, 2019, p. 82)

As has been stated, the processes of the Home Office interviews, cross-examination at the asylum hearing, and the use of interpreters is liable to impact on how a refugee explains their experience, and how that explanation is heard by those who make the decisions on the acceptability of the claim (Campbell, 2017).

Yet research commissioned by the Home Office appears to assume that nothing will impede full disclosure of the experiences that led to seeking asylum, as well as a complete understanding on the part of the applicant of the information that is required (Campbell, 2017). This assumption, that an applicant will know what they need to say and will be able to say it, is likely to be erroneous. As the previous sections have discussed there are many influences that affect the way in which someone chooses to narrate their story, and this observation may be even more

significant for refugees. A person's claim for asylum is purported to be accepted or rejected on the basis of what is said in the interview and thus a fuller understanding of this process is vital to ensure that decisions, whether to reject or accept, are based on the research evidence.

A significant body of research addressing what happens in the asylum interview and why this is a complex process comes from a sociolinguistic perspective. Sociolinguistic research has highlighted how the complexity of language, such as how discrepancies in naming practices (Spotti, 2018) impacts understanding in the process of seeking asylum. As Blommaert writes: 'attention to asylum seekers' storytelling conventions is scant but their central position in the asylum procedure suggests that this should be an important topic of research both analytically and politically' (Blommaert 2009, p. 437). An example from the literature pertaining to the UK discusses the case of a Rwandan refugee whose nationality was disputed by the Home Office due to his "abnormal" linguistic repertoire (Blommeart, 2009). This case highlights the discrepancy between the sociolinguistics of speech and repertoire versus the sociolinguistics of language (Blommeart, 2009). Whilst this approach is valuable for illuminating the impact from the subtleties of language and issues of linguistic and bureaucratic power which frequently result in erroneous assumptions on the part of the Home Office, the method rarely invites the refugee to reflect on this experience. Thus the refugee's sense making of the experience is missing.

There limited amount of existing qualitative research *with* refugees which has investigated their experiences of seeking asylum in the UK pertaining to the Home Office process but this has tended to focus more generally on perceptions of the Home Office (Jannesari, Molyneaux, & Lawrence, 2019; Liebling Burke Goodman,

2014) and less on how this interaction impacted what they were able to talk about when explaining their reasons for seeking asylum. The only study which this researcher is aware of that focuses more specifically on disclosure in UK Home Office Asylum interviews is that of Bögner et al., (2007) who utilised thematic analysis to explore experiences of disclosing sensitive personal information by refugees. The paper reported that half of those interviewed struggled to disclose personal details, with frequently cited reasons related to the emotional impact of disclosure, including feeling too traumatised, afraid and ashamed to talk about the past. Some stated that the officials interviewing them reminded them of police or officials from their home country and that this increased their anxiety and interfered with their ability to disclose. The sex of the interviewer was also stated as an important factor, particularly in cases where disclosure was about sexual experiences.

It would seem that further understanding of the experiences of the UK Home Office interview process which explores the thinking and experience of participants may be able to contribute more to an understanding of what impacts how much can be said. IPA seems a particularly appropriate methodology to mediate in understanding how this is experienced and is made sense of. This can lead to greater insight of why an applicant narrates their experiences in the way they do.

Why Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis?

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) stands on three basic pillars: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Phenomenology is concerned with the experience of the self. Hermeneutics is defined as the theory of interpretation,

whereby it is proposed that the analyst can offer a perspective on the text or dialogue that is additional to the authors. Idiography refers to the perspective where there is a focus on the experience of a person; in contrast to a nomothetic stance most commonly found in psychological research. A detailed description of each of these three pillars can be found in Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009).

Thus, IPA is a qualitative analytical procedure that is concerned with 'the detailed examination of human lived experience' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 32). Its premise is that 'our being-in-the-world is always perspectival, always temporal and always 'in-relation-to' something' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 18). The aims of IPA are not only to gain understanding of the meaning and sense-making of the participants, but also to document the sense-making of the researcher (Smith & Osbourn, 2008).

IPA's epistemological stance assumes that access to a participant's cognitive inner world is possible through the careful and explicitly interpretive methodology, but that this will always have an interpretive element to it (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). Therefore, IPA is most appropriate for questions which are concerned with participants' experiences or understandings of a phenomenon and the perceptions and views of this experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). Additionally, whilst IPA is concerned with the idiographic experience of participants its epistemological stance does not preclude analysis being linked back to the theoretical frameworks of mainstream psychology (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009). The participants view is explored in detail, recognizing it is them who bring meaning to their experience (Smith, 1996). Yet IPA acknowledges that access to this meaning is through the researcher's interpretive analysis of the accounts based on the researcher's own experiences and current literature on the topic under analysis.

This project aims to explore the multitude of complex challenges faced by people when explaining their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK. As has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the situations in which refugees tell their story often operate in such a way that they do not necessarily have complete control of the narrative. IPA's use of semi-structured interviews means that participants have 'an important stake in what is covered' (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, p. 4). This allows for what is important to the participants to come to the fore, without undue imposition of a tightly controlled agenda which could be experienced as a repetition of the Home Office interview experience. The idiographic stance is one in which the researcher is trying to understand in detail the experience of the person and their specific sense-making. This respects each participant as an individual and does not just treat them as a faceless indistinguishable mass (Rajaram, 2002). Their experience, how it was explained and how that was heard is at the centre of the process of applying for asylum, making IPA a methodology which is well suited to exploring this topic.

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Part 2: Empirical Paper

The Challenges Faced when Seeking Asylum in the United Kingdom: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Abstract

Aims: To claim asylum, individuals are required to provide an account of their experiences in the form of interviews with the Home Office. These accounts are often challenged by the Home Office because of apparent inconsistencies and a lack of credibility. Yet the ability to disclose everything that has happened to them can be impacted by a myriad of factors and there are many reasons why there may be inconsistencies in a person's explanation. This study explores applicant's experience of seeking asylum in the UK, how they experienced interviews with the Home Office, and how this impacted what they were able to say.

Method: Semi-Structured interviews were conducted with eight participants who had been through the UK asylum process. Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Results: Four Superordinate themes were identified; *"Confronted by a Hostile System", "Beliefs about Professionals", "Experiences of Interviews", The Impact of the Process on the Self"*

Conclusion: Participants identified experiences of a system that felt overtly and intentionally hostile to them. Psychological, practical, and institutional factors were identified as impacting what they were able to disclose in the interview. Participants identified deterioration to their mental health as a result of the experience of seeking asylum which for some was not alleviated even once leave to remain was granted.

Introduction

This project aims to explore the multitude of complex challenges faced by people who are seeking asylum in the United Kingdom (UK) when they narrate their experiences. Research shows that the narratives of those seeking asylum may be influenced by various psychological, cultural and systemic factors, which can impact on the process of seeking asylum in the UK (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018).

Under UK guidance (UKBA, 2015b) people seeking asylum in the UK are required to provide an account of their experiences during the substantive interview with the Home Office. To be granted leave to remain their personal history must be described in a way that it is considered credible that they suffer from a well-founded fear of persecution. For many this account will be provided many times over to various people involved in the asylum-seeker's claim.

The substantive interview is considered by the Home office as the 'main opportunity for the claimant to provide evidence about why they need international protection' (UKBA, 2015b, p. 4). The guidance from the Home Office (UKBA, 2015a) purports to acknowledge the difficulties those seeking asylum may face in disclosing their experiences, yet applications are often refused because of minor inconsistencies, changes to the initial narrative and a lack of documentary evidence (UNHCR, 2013; Bohmer & Shuman, 2018).

Thus for an application to be successful in the asylum process, a credible and coherent narrative must be presented that meets the cultural expectations of the UK, and satisfies the assumptions made by decision makers about what 'credible' looks and sounds like, and does not involve any late disclosures (Bohmer & Shuman,

2018). The subjectivity of credibility, and the deferral to others to provide 'trustworthy' voices such as medical or Country Experts, means that telling the story for many refugees is a futile exercise, without the corroboration by those the UK Home Office consider to be valid sources of information (Bohmer & Shuman, 2007; Fassin & d'Halluin, 2005).

Thus, before the challenges which may impact a refugee seeking asylum in the UK can be addressed, one must first address the context in which this narrative is extracted and heard. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the methodology used in this paper, purports that, "IPA studies should be very clearly situated in the cultural and historical context of their production" (Larkin, Eatough & Osborne, 2011, p. 322).

The following sections summarise the operation of the current system, referring to some of the issues at play. It will then discuss what is known to impact refugees' narration of their experiences and finally will look at some of the assumptions underpinning the decision made and how this may impact how what is said is heard.

The UK Asylum System

There are numerous obstacles a person seeking asylum will face following arrival in the UK, and many refugees must tolerate years of uncertainty waiting for an outcome to their application (Burridge & Gill, 2016). As of June 2019, 17 000 of the 32 000 (53%) seeking asylum in the UK had been waiting more than 6 months for their initial decision and a further 6700 were waiting for the result of their appeal (Walsh, 2019). A person waiting for a decision on their application is usually prevented from taking paid employment (Gov.UK, 2014) and thus must rely on welfare support

but at a level which is below the poverty line (Mayblin, 2020). The stated rationale for this policy is that many of those who seek asylum in the UK are motivated by poverty more than persecution (Zimmerman, 2011) despite evidence to the contrary (Robinson and Sergrott, 2002). Nevertheless, restrictive asylum policies continue to be pursued on the basis that there are too many people coming to the UK seeking asylum and that most of them are not genuine refugees (Mayblin, 2018). These policies have a significant negative impact on those seeking sanctuary in the UK, gatekeeping them from needed services. A meta-analysis (Hou et al, 2020) has demonstrated that post-migration everyday challenges are associated with poorer mental health, and existing in a state of poverty and insecurity is likely to have far reaching detrimental impacts on mental health.

Whether asylum is claimed at ports of entry or later in a refugee's journey, cynicism about the legitimacy of a refugee's claim is believed to be widespread in those who would process the claim (Jubany, 2017; Crawley, 2009). One civil servant describes the Home Office as a "closed and secretive organisation…..focused on driving down migration" (Mayblin, 2019, p. 65), whilst a former Home Office secretary comments that 'the culture "was very unsympathetic to the position of the people who were asylum seekers"' (Mayblin, 2019, p. 66). Although this may not be the position of all those working in the Home Office, there appears to be some cynicism and disbelief within parts of the Home Office system responsible for processing refugee's claims for asylum.

All these factors influence the experience of the claim process, and how an asylum seeker tries to navigate it. In the process of determining eligibility for asylum, experiences of persecution must be voiced, but the "institutional context and interactional practice affect the formation of the asylum narrative" (Puumala,

Ylikomi & Ristimäki, 2017). Despite this effect the system itself often discounts the decision maker's participation in the narrative produced (Woolley, 2017).

Thus, whilst policy exists which acknowledges the difficulties refugees face when seeking asylum, the culture of the Home Office and the resulting practices appear to leave the guidance ineffective in many cases. This is important because, as already stated, the system in which refugees must narrate their experiences impacts what is said and how it is heard.

Memory, Trauma, Shame and Disclosure

Despite efforts to improve the training of decision makers in recent years (Schuster, 2018), policy guidance seems to acknowledge the difficulties that refugees may face when describing their experiences (UKBA, 2015a), and problematic bias and assumptions still appear to underpin beliefs about what a true claimant will or will not do within the UK asylum system.

Inconsistent recall of the date when a particular event occurred, or about its duration or frequency, has often been cited as a reason for arguing that a claim is invalid (UNHCR, 2013) despite there being clear evidence from the psychological literature that contextual temporal information is particularly difficult to recall with accuracy (Cameron, 2010) and guidance from the British Psychological Society which states that "memories may be wrong with regard to precise details and yet accurate with regard to more general contextual information" (British Psychology Society Research Board Working Group, 2008, p. 12).

Additionally, the main assumption of the Home Office asylum process is that a coherent and consistent disclosure of all the relevant reasons for seeking asylum is possible for all applicants at the initial stages of interview, and this is emphasised in

the Home Office Guidance (UKBA, 2015b). The implied assumptions here are that there are no barriers to disclosure which are insurmountable, that what will be considered relevant is immediately obvious to the applicant and that deviations from this initial position is indicative that the claim is unfounded (UNHCR, 2013; Campbell, 2017) .

Yet evidence demonstrates why these expectations are based on false assumptions. Research on disclosure indicates that, even within a therapeutic environment, close to half of the subjects questioned do not disclose everything to their therapist (Farber, 2003) and that length of therapy and therapist allegiance are a key factor in disclosure for experiences that are hard for the person to discuss (Hall and Farber, 2001). The construction of the Home Office interview process is one where neither allegiance, nor the timeframe in which an applicant is expected to fully narrate their experiences, is properly considered. Interviewees may adopt what they perceive to be a passive or neutral stance which can be interpreted negatively, this negative interpretation increases anxiety and can decrease the ability to narrate in the coherent and detailed way that is expected (Herlihy and Turner, 2009). For some applicants, silence will have been the source of their survival (Kirmayer, 2015); to switch from this strategy in an unfamiliar, and in what may be perceived as an unfriendly environment, may require an applicant to override the fear response. This may mean that an applicant is being asked to disclose experiences which they are not ready to, and furthermore, may not be able to.

This is particularly salient for those who are experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is reported to be found at high levels in the refugee population (Fazel, Wheeler & Daneesh, 2005). For those with PTSD, avoidance of thinking about trauma and avoiding reminders of the experience is a common coping

strategy (Herlihy et al., 2012). This is particularly prevalent in those who have experienced sexual trauma (van Velsen, Gorst-Unsworth, &; Turner, 1996; Baillot, Cowen & Munro, 2009). Rape is used as a tool of war (Gotchall, 2003; Hagen & Yohani, 2010) for the very reason that it brings shame upon the person who is raped. And shame is known to make people want to conceal and hide (Lee, Scragg & Turner, 2001; Gilbert & Andrews 1998). Often those who have experienced interpersonal trauma struggle to trust that they will be treated fairly, which can impede talking openly and fully about what happened (Brand, Schielke, Brams & DiComo, 2017).

In the case of the Home Office interview, this can mean that what is said does not necessarily neatly map onto the mental events occurring, yet the non-verbal communication of interviewees can be ignored or misconstrued (Puumala et al., 2017). Often a full narration of traumatic events requires feelings of safety and connectedness to the person one is talking to (DeMarinis, 2014); in the initial meetings with the Home Office, this feeling may not exist and so all that may be relevant to the claim for asylum may not be initially discussed. Despite this, later disclosure is frequently met with an accusation of falsehood (Baillot, Cowan & Munro, 2009). The assumption that one can override this shame and the compunction it brings to hide the shameful act seems to disregard the above evidence on human behaviour.

Dissociation, which can occur following trauma and which is thought to impede the integration of the trauma memory (Brand et al., 2017; Ehlers & Clark, 2000), can also have an impact on what is disclosed and high stress situations are thought to increase the likelihood of this occurrence. It has been shown to have a significant effect on what can be recalled and what can be articulated (Herlihy &

Turner, 2007). A question may be asked which results in traumatic recall and the subsequent dissociation from the interviewee, which appears to the uninitiated interviewer as vague narrative or an evasion of the question completely.

The Impact of the "Single Story"

It has been argued that the process of seeking asylum, as it operates today in the UK, excludes those who do not 'conform to a particular narrative of persecution' (Woolley, 2017, p. 378). This is exemplified in a paper by Kea and Roberts-Holme which discusses Gambian female asylum seekers who had experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) who have applied for asylum in the UK (Kea & Roberts-Holmes, 2013). The constraints of what an asylum story can be, means that an initial claim for asylum due to fear of FGM to her daughters cannot be accepted. Instead, it must be the applicant's experience of FGM on which her claim for asylum is based. The reason she gives initially may be *her* reason, but this cannot be *the* reason given to the Home Office. What is stated must be reformatted to include the victim narration for which asylum might be granted. Thus, refugees must 'cede narrative agency over their stories to institutional procedures' (Woolley, 2017, p. 382). To do this the provided narrative must be altered which is then perceived as inconsistent by the Home Office. This reformulation of experience fits the narrative required by the asylum system but suppresses the nuance of the applicant's story. In the context of a system which expects a certain narrative, an assertive and resilient female, or someone who describes their case in what is perceived to be either overly emotional or an unemotional way may find their case appraised negatively as this does not fit the preconceptions of how an asylum seeker should communicate (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Chantler, 2012). Thus, through the machinations of the system with

which they interact, refugees can feel co-opted into a strategic presentation which fits the institutional needs of the Home Office.

Rationale

Although there is a body of research about the asylum process, and the factors which may impact on a claim, much of this comes from the perspective of those working with refugees. Research with refugees themselves concerning their experiences of the UK asylum process is sparser, and the challenges experienced when interviewed by the Home Office have received limited attention.

This paper explores refugees' experiences of the process of seeking asylum in the UK, with a specific focus on the substantive interview.

A fuller understanding of these experiences could be of value to asylum decision makers, and courts in both the UK and internationally. In turn this could contribute to ensuring that future decisions are both better informed and fairer.

Research aims:

- To understand refugees' experiences of the UK Asylum process
- To understand the challenges faced by refugees when explaining their experiences in the Home Office substantive interview.

Method

This section covers: the rationale for using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); recruitment; ethical considerations; data collection and the process of analysis.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

IPA, developed by Jonathan A. Smith, is concerned with lived experience and is characterised by its phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic approach (Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove 1995; Smith 1996; Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009, Smith & Shinebourne 2012). The approach is particularly focussed on the personal meaning and sense-making of experiences which are significant to a person (Smith & Shinebourne, 2010). Its ontological position rejects the stance that people either actively construct or passively represent reality, instead it posits that people are "existential world disclosers" rather than "epistemic world-constructors" who "through meaningful engagement in everyday activities reveals phenomena in particular ways for particular purposes" (Yancher 2015, p. 108).

IPA's epistemological stance assumes that access to a participant's cognitive world is possible through the analytic process, but that this will always have an interpretive element to it (Smith et al., 2009). The epistemology of IPA is particularly appropriate for this research study which sought to investigate refugees' experiences in seeking asylum in the UK and the challenges they faced when being interviewed by the Home Office. IPA is most appropriate for questions which explore how, in their interactions with their environment, people attribute meaning to that experience (Smith et al., 2009). It has also been argued that IPA has is particularly appropriate for research with refugees (Schweitzer, Steel & LIamputtong, 2008). Its commitment to idiography allows for "detailed, nuanced analysis of *particular* instances of lived experience" (Smith et al., 2009 p. 37) so that participants' unique social and political histories are acknowledged (Sigona, 2014) and refugees are not presented as a "mute and faceless physical mass" (Rajaram, 2002 p. 247).

Additionally, IPA's openness to human experience means that theoretical assumptions are set aside in the analysis and thus it has the capacity to privilege knowledge and experiences outside that of the researcher (Schweitzer et al., 2008).

Participants & Recruitment

Participants were recruited by referral through a London Charity working with refugees.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants could be included in the study if: they were able to conduct the interview in English; had been granted permission to stay; and had no serious concerns that talking about their experiences of the asylum process would lead to ongoing or undue distress.

Participants were excluded from the study if they were still going through the asylum process, would need an interpreter to conduct the interview, or were considered to be too vulnerable, or likely to be unduly affected by talking about their experiences.

The requirement to conduct the interviews without an interpreter was decided upon as IPA's epistemology assumes that access to a participants sense making of the world is possible through the detailed analysis of their words. Had interviews which used interpreters it would not have been clear whether the transcript being analysed was a direct reflection of the words which the participant had said in the interview.

The rationale for requiring participants to have leave to remain is so that there is homogeneity in the group with regards to their status in the UK. Additionally, for

those whose status remains uncertain, there may be a concern on the part of the participant that if they speak negatively about the Home Office this could have a detrimental impact on their application.

Although it was not an inclusion criteria, all participants in the study had had their initial application for asylum rejected and were only granted refugee status through the appeals process.

Recruitment Procedure

Recruitment used purposive sampling. Research using IPA chooses participants who are considered homogenous; this was defined here as meaning that they were all refugees in the UK who had successfully gone through the asylum process in the UK.

Ethical considerations (see below) meant that I had no contact or knowledge of participants before meeting them. Participants were recruited by staff at the charity. They would identify and contact suitable participants, describe the study and answer any initial questions. They provided the information sheet (Appendix 1) for those who expressed interest in participating. If participants were agreeable to being interviewed, an appointment time was then fixed and communicated to me.

The intended sample size was 10 participants; in the event only 8 participants took part. Twenty seven interviews were booked, of these only eleven were attended. Two of those could not be included in the study due to language issues and one because the participant opted to withdraw from the study at the point of interview.

Due to the detailed nature of IPA smaller sample sizes are considered appropriate, and a sample of between 4 and 10 is considered sufficient for a professional doctorate (Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 2); no additional approval was required for this study.

There was a possibility that participants might disclose information which altered (or appeared to alter) their narratives and which could pose a risk to their leave to remain if the information were to be subpoenaed by the Home Office. Although the risk was minimal, it is possible, and there is historical precedent in North America (Lowman & Palys, 2014). To mitigate this risk it was agreed that any identifying details of the participants such as full names, contacts details etc. would not be shared with me. This allowed participants to keep full anonymity whilst taking part in the interviews. Additionally, only oral consent (Appendix 3A and Appendix 3B) was used[1] as this meant that there was no paperwork connecting any names to the project. The acceptability of oral consent was discussed at a Service User meeting at the London Charity from which participants were to be recruited. All participants at the meeting stated that they thought it was an acceptable method for gaining consent, and most identified this as preferable to them.

[1] The acceptability of oral consent, where it is appropriate, is documented by the UCL research ethics committee (https://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/faq.php). Precedent for using oral consent in research where there was a comparable risk to participants can be found here: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/ethics-case-studies/case-study-ensuring-data-confidentiality/.

It was explained to participants that although everything they said would be kept confidential and anonymised in so far as possible, if there were any concerns about risk to themselves or others this information would have to be passed on to relevant parties. This would be done in the first instance by discussing with the on duty clinician whilst the participant was onsite at the charity where I recruited and conducted my interviews.

Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews; a format frequently used in IPA (Smith et al. 2009). Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility, which allows the aspects of the topic which are important to the participant to be explored without being overly controlled by a fixed schedule of questions (Smith, 1995). The schedule used is outlined in Appendix 4, but participants' responses on particular topics were developed and probed further where relevant.

To avoid further re-traumatization, participants were not asked questions about, or expected to disclose, their reasons for seeking asylum in the UK. However, if they wished to speak about this they were not prevented from doing so. The focus of the interviews was on their experiences in seeking asylum in the UK and any challenges they encountered arising from how they narrated their experiences during Home Office interviews. The questions asked were presented at a Service User meeting to discuss accessibility of language and acceptability of questions and suggested amendments from this meeting were followed up. Prior to starting the interviews, the researcher talked with the participant about the research, ascertained whether they would want to be called by a pseudonym, and answered any other questions that the participant had about the study. That they would be anonymous was re-iterated and that identifying information arising from this study would not be

collected so as to ensure that there were no details recorded that would disclose their identity.

One potential participant asked to withdraw at this stage because they were concerned about the negative impact on their mental health as a consequence of talking about the Home Office interview process. For all those who took part, oral consent was obtained, and this was audio recorded. Participants were asked to tick a box against the wording of each aspect of the consent process in addition to verbally agreeing to each aspect of the study. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 45 and 120 minutes with most being around 60 minutes long. Prior to recording of both the oral consent and of the interview, participants were told when the recording was started and when it was stopped. All interviews took place at the London Charity where participants had been recruited. This location was chosen so that participants would be in a familiar setting and so that it would be possible to follow up with a clinician if there were any concerns that needed addressing post interview.

Analysis

The process of analysis followed the guidelines set out in Smith et al., (2009). All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, with any identifying information obscured in the transcription. The following transcription notations were used:

Editorial elision of unnecessary material	[…]
Anonymised information	[Country Name]
Explanatory/Clarifying comments	(Home Office Interview)
Non-verbal utterances	(laughs)

Speech emphasized	*italicised*

Once transcribed, the transcription was read through whilst listening to the audio recording, for closer engagement with the transcript and to ensure that the words and any accompanying emotion had been conveyed appropriately. After this point the audio recording was deleted. As per IPA guidelines and each transcription was analysed separately so that the idiographic content could be attended to. At each stage of analysis, themes were cross-checked and agreed with supervisors (Professor Jonathan Smith and Dr Henry Clements).

Initial Noting

In keeping with IPA's idiographic commitment, each interview was initially analysed in depth individually (Smith et al., 2009). Recordings were listened to at least once before transcription and transcriptions were read multiple times. Transcripts were read line by line, any words or phrases which felt meaningful to the narrative or seemed to stand out were underlined. Thoughts about use of language, comments and questions about how the person was making sense of their experience and any concepts were attended to and noted in the right-hand margin (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Participant 8, Original Transcript Page 1, Lines 9-20

Errrmmmm……. Ahhhh when I come this country, like me, like, when I come this country I been to police station, to ask asylum. Then when I got there I was looking for like …hostel errrr I ask them like …"camp?" we call camp you know like refugee camp. I was thinking they got refugee camp, that's why I asked them then when I ask them "refugee camp", there is not any camp, they say to me	Didn't know the processes - based actions on prior experiences - looking for a camp - as this is what was known - has no language - but all the govt info seems to assume the person will know they expectations of the system on arrival
err I was in [UK City Place]. Then when I ask them, they say there is no camp…..they kick me out then I was looking for someone to help me. I don't even speak English at that that time, I was just walking on the road, and I saw police car, and I tried to stop, nobody listened to me, they just leave. Then I was walking along the road and I find someone and he helped me to get some food, he gave me some money, and then I ate food and I was walking all night, then morning I go back to police station then ask them. I come from [European Country] and I told them I have fingerprint, and I told them I have fingerprint, and I have UN paper, then I give to them, they search me, and then they keep me for 24hrs in a prison.	Kicked out - walking on the road- was interviewee perceived as mentally unwell- did people just not want to help? No one is listening- no one is helping – strong sense of rejection Outside walking all night- small helps from strangers- food money Able to provide documentation this seem to help a little in being heard Treated like a criminal Tortured in COI - unable to get documentation - in prison for a long time - looked for by ?

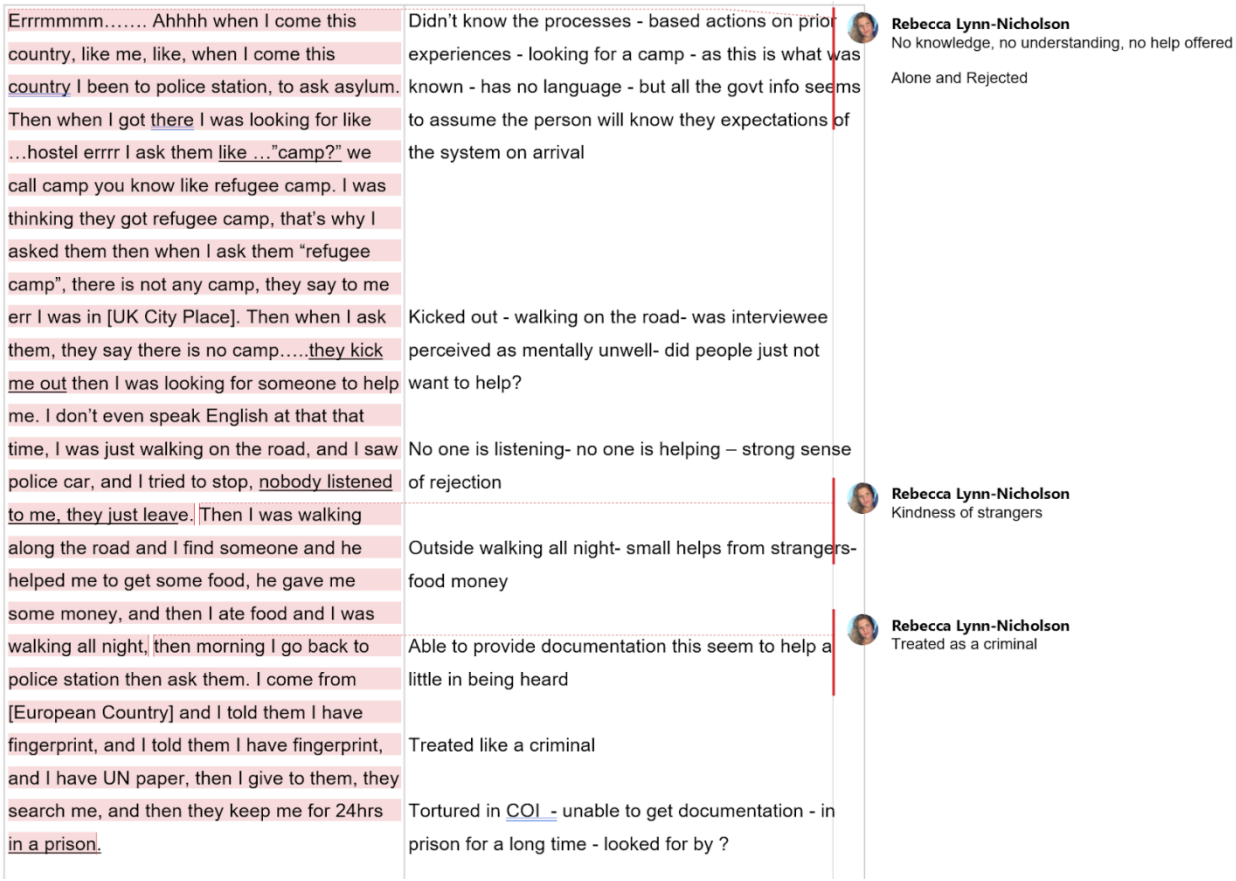
Developing Emergent Themes

Transcripts were re-read and emergent themes which drew on the transcript and initial analysis were noted in the comments box (see Figure 2). Engagement with the double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009) of the researcher making sense of the

participant's world, as the interviewee constructs their own understanding, captured both the participant's sense-making and also my own interpretation of it.

Figure 2

Participant 8, Original Transcript, Page 1, Lines 9-20



The emergent themes were extracted into an Excel table with the corresponding transcript so this could be cross referenced back to the data.

Developing Superordinate Themes

Once the themes had been extracted the next stage involved looking independently at each participant's emergent themes for connections across those emergent themes and clustering those that were identified as being related to one another. The suggestions of Smith et al., (2009) for ways of developing superordinate themes (e.g.

abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration and function) were used as guidance to condense and cluster the emergent themes. For example, Participant 8's transcript initially had 125 emergent themes which after analysis were condensed and clustered into three superordinate themes (see appendix 4 for Participant 8 as an example). This process was followed for all participants, thus maintaining the idiographic commitment of IPA.

Looking for Patterns Across Cases

The next stage involved looking for patterns across cases to create a Master Table of Themes. This was initially done by laying the tables out together and looking for connections across them, clustering these into themes representing shared higher-order qualities. These were then moved and clustered together in Word and reconfigured and relabelled where appropriate. The final themes are represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of the Master Table for all 8 participants

Superordinate Theme	Sub Themes
Confronted by a Hostile System	Invariable Rejection
	Assumed to Be A Liar
	In a War
	Feeling Betrayed
Beliefs about Professionals	Unprepared and Ignorant
	Human Rights are not Their First Priority
	Home Office Interviewers as Hostile Actors
	Invaluable Supporters
Experiences of Interviews	Challenges to Telling One's Story
	Creating the Right Environment
The Impact of the Process on the Self	Losses of Agency
	Negative Psychological Consequences During the Process
	Ongoing Psychological Consequences

The complete Master Table of themes for the group is found Appendix 5A.

Validity and Quality

As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), validity and quality was assessed using Yardley's (2007) four criteria; Sensitivity to Context, Commitment and Rigour, Transparency and Coherence, and Impact and Importance.

Sensitivity to Context

There are a number of ways a researcher can demonstrate sensitivity to context: through the context of theory; through a thorough awareness of previous literature; through analysis that is sensitive to the data and through an awareness of the impacts of the power dynamic between researcher and participant (Yardley, 2007).

These aspects are exemplified in the research cited and discussed in the Introduction; the manner in which data was collected and analysed, and a sustained attention to ethical issues through all stages of the study.

I paid particular attention to the power dynamic between me and the participants since I did not want their participation in the research to be experienced as a repetition of the experiences of the interview with the Home Office. I did this by discussing the interview schedule with the Service User group to check for acceptability of the questions I planned to ask, conducted the interviews in a familiar setting for the interviewees, maintained a warm and empathetic style and by making it clear at multiple points during the process that they could stop the interview if they wished to.

Sensitivity to the data was demonstrated through conducting and describing an in-depth analysis and supporting my arguments with extracts. Smith et al. (2009) state that this gives participants a voice in the project and allows the reader to check the interpretations being made. I would have liked to ask my participants views on my interpretations of the text as has been suggested by some researchers (Riessman, 1993) , but due to the safeguards put in place to ensure full anonymity there was no way of re-contacting them without a record being kept of people's identities.

Commitment and Rigour

Smith et al., (2009) suggest that in-depth engagement with the topic and through developing competence and skill in the method used may be demonstrated through attentiveness to participants during data collection and taking care over the analysis. I am new to IPA and have sought to develop my skills by attending specific IPA training and ongoing supervision. My supervisors have agreed with my final themes and agreed that they link back to the data. I worked to carry out the study in a careful and thorough way despite practical restraints such as a slow process to recruit sufficient participants, and the time available for analysis due to the constraints imposed by other requirements of the course.

Transparency and Coherence

I have shown transparency by detailing each stage of the analytic process and including examples of each stage of the analysis. As suggested by Smith el al., I have provided a clear description of "how participants were selected, how the interview schedule was constructed, the interview conducted and what steps were used in the analysis" (Smith et al., 2009 p. 182). I have worked to ensure there is a coherence of fit between the write up and the theoretical assumptions of IPA. Yardley (2007) also includes consideration of reflexivity within the principle of transparency, whereby the impact of the researcher on the research process is considered to be clear about their own beliefs and assumptions. With this in mind I present a brief reflexive statement below:

I am a white, middle class British woman who grew up in a diverse area of inner London. Whilst I have lived outside the UK at various points of my life; America, Eswatini (formally known in English as Swaziland) and China respectively, I am fortunate that I have never been forced to leave the UK and

become a refugee. I have, however, across my lifetime had and have friends whose parents are refugees or are refugees themselves. In the early 2000's I volunteered for some time at a weekend drop-in for age contested children in the UK, which gave me an insight into some of the challenges people face when engaging with the process of seeking asylum in the UK.

I have a long-standing interest in the impact of war on people, in part due to having a Grandfather who was a Prisoner of War and a father who lived in Hull during WWII, a city which was badly bombed. These experiences have shaped my interest in the effect of war and enforced displacement on people. This is reflected in my previous education of a BA in War Studies and an MSc in War and Psychiatry. I was particularly interested in the potential that this project may have to contribute towards improved understanding in the Asylum decision making process so that it can be conducted in a manner that is both informed and fair. These fore-conceptions (Heidegger, 1962) undoubtedly shaped my engagement with the data, but I worked throughout my analysis to engage with each participant's personal experiences, to understand their accounts as best as possible, and ensure that each participant's voice was honoured in my analysis.

Impact and Importance

This final principle articulated by Yardley (2007) reflects that however well or sensitively a piece of research is conducted, the most conclusive way to evaluate a piece of qualitative research is in whether or not it tells the reader something interesting and useful. In the discussion section I have included a section on the relevance of this study to the asylum decision making process in the UK and I hope that this thesis is an engaging and enlightening read.

Results

Introduction

Four superordinate themes were identified once analysis had been completed. These were as follows:

- **Confronted by a Hostile System**
- **Beliefs about Professionals**
- **Experiences of Interviews**
- **The Impact of the Process on the Self**

Each super-ordinate theme is explored in the following chapters. The following notation was used:

Editorial elision of unnecessary material	*[…]*
Anonymised information	*[Country Name] [*
Explanatory/Clarifying comments	*(The Home Office)*
Non-verbal utterances	*(pause)*
Speech emphasized	*underlined*

1. Confronted by a Hostile System

This theme captures the experiences of applying for asylum and encountering a system which was perceived as hostile and appeared to presume all applicants to be liars. Participants' experiences of those who were working in that system, was that their main aim was to find reasons to reject their application. The themes here are: "*Invariable Rejection", "Assumed to Be a Liar",* "*In a War*", *and "Feeling Betrayed".* Participants described over the course of their interviews experiences of encountering a system that seemed to them specifically set up to reject applicants.

Invariable Rejection

All but one participant spoke of a sense that all interactions with the Home Office were seen as ways to find reasons that they could reject the participants' applications. As Participant 9 states:

> *P: No, because Home Office, they just….do what they want……*
>
> *R: Can you tell me a bit more about that? What is it they want?*
>
> *P: ...Because they don't want people in this country…… they just think ah maybe you just want to be there. Who wants to be there? I cannot leave my family to be here from nowhere and I don't know the language, and I don't understand anything.*
>
> P9 143-145/6

There appear to be a few processes at work here. First is the general perception that the Home Office does not want people here, the implication being that interactions are then structured in a way which makes that outcome more possible. She is then trying to make sense of the belief structures that underpin this; that there is a desire

to be in the UK and so coming here is an active and preferred choice. Participant 9 then articulates how ridiculous she believes this presumption is, she has left her family, she did not know the language and did not understand what people were saying to her.

Participant 2 presents the experience of being unwanted in a different way:

> *Whatever, whatever you tell Home Office they turn you down, whatever, whatever, they turn you down, all they know is turning down.* P2 10/274-275

Here there is a sense that there is nothing that can be said that is good enough for leave to remain to be granted. The repetition conveys an image of a non-discriminating conveyor belt. That no matter what information is given, what experiences are relayed, and whatever is said, the answer will not change. The use of "all they know" could imply a belief that this is all the Home Office knows how to do, that they are taught in this way.

Assumed to be a Liar

Most participants referred to being named or treated as liars and that presumption being the basis for rejection. Participant 7 discusses not being believed about his Nationality or his basis for claiming:

> *...the judge and the Home Office officers they didn't ask anything about my Nationality, who I am. Through the interpreter, and the decision I see, they don't believe me who I am. Even though I have two brothers, one sister here, and my uncles and cousins, they got status for similar reason. That means like, these people, the officers at the Home Office who do the decision, they don't understand people. Like me I came to this country at [age] I get my working visa for then and then for some political reason I became asylum seeker but that took eight years of my life. Now I am nearly [age] and that doesn't make sense, the reason they give me, they say "I don't believe you", that is not a good reason (pause) to change people's life.* P7 2/37-44

In the first part of the text he describes Home Office disbelief about the credibility of his claim, despite having several family members who have been granted asylum for the same reasons he is claiming. For Participant 7 this is evidence that the decision makers do not understand the people they are assessing. He had initially run over the period of his work visa and this is carrying more weight in ascertaining the authenticity of his claim, and is being used as a grounds for rejection, than any of the other factors that indicate that the claim is valid. His mistake is seen as a lie, as a reason to not to be believed, but as Participant 7 articulates, this conflation of mistake with lie, for him, is not sufficient reason for the negative impact on his life that he has experienced.

Participant 3 recounts an initial Home Office refusal, because of the omission of information which she was too afraid to disclose, and was unaware of the relevance to her application:

> *So, yeah, so I couldn't say all. So but that was why the Home Office first of all refused me my paper, saying that "Why did I only mention the prostitution? Why didn't I mention the forced labour?"* P3 6/188-190

The inability to disclose all aspects of her experience in her initial application is treated the same as a lie and used as a reason for rejection. Participant 4 discusses the experience of the rejected application positioning her as a liar:

> *... you're not allowed to say that "no I didn't lie" or "no I'm not a liar" so it's paper sent to you and it's a long process to tell people "no, I'm not a liar" that's the most painful thing...*P4 18/564-566

This description speaks to the experiences described by the previous two participants, that in the rejection of the Home Office is the implication that you are lying about being a refugee, but here the emotional pain of this is articulated; the pain of having to live, often for years, with this accusation.

In a War

Over half the participants described parts of their experiences with the Home Office in the language of war and fighting.

In describing her experiences in the detention centre, Participant 2, states;

> *if you see them, if they come to deport people it will be as though they are going to war. You will see those giant guys, they will be giants! They will be very giant and tall, just to come and pack a woman.* P2 11/306-309

In this description it seems that only the guards are positioned as soldiers, and it is they who see themselves as going to war. This sense of how they are perceived as "giants" is contrasted with the job that Participant 2 sees that they have. Her use of the word "just" seems to imply that she believes these giant men are necessarily intimidating because of the job they have to do. Their role is to accompany the women on the coach to the airport prior to deportation, but their demeanour to her is reminiscent of something much more domineering, and her use of the word "pack" something that you might do with luggage - brings the sense of feeling dehumanised which permeated so many of the participants interviews. For Participant 2, in contrast to the others in this theme, she seems a passive participant, a prisoner in the fight as opposed to a participant. By contrast in the description of one of her interviews with the Home Office Immigration service, Participant 10 states:

> *It was a horrible experience, it was a battlefront….it was a battlefront. When... they wouldn't allow you to put across to anybody because they*

took the phone off you. P10 3/65-66

The use of the metaphor "battlefront" as opposed to "battle" creates a sense of action, this is where the struggle is happening, to exert her human rights, to communicate to others what is going on, to be understood by the person interviewing her. Participant 4 develops the imagery of the fight further:

First they (Home Office Caseworkers) don't, my understanding is I think they don't know, that is why they are doing this. Otherwise no one can do these kind of a things like you know erm… become unaware of your problems or your understanding and what you are saying, denying that you are telling the truth or something, so I, I, you know, first thing you feel is like so helpless, like, you know, there is no way you can do anything and then you leave everything and you feel like I'm going to fight, I'm going to do this, this, this then it makes you angry, upset, aggressive and then frustrated. You know I'm fighting so much and I'm doing all those things, but you know they don't understand. P4 3/55-71

Here the fight is presented differently, in the first two the participants present as helpless victims. Here Participant 4, in contrast to Participant 10 and Participant 2 feels able to fight. She makes sense of the caseworkers' actions by stating that they do not know the rights of refugees. For Participant 4, their lack of knowledge is the only way she can make sense of the actions and decisions she has encountered. Yet there is something in her statement which speaks to her trying to convince herself of

this in the use of the phrase “become unaware”. There is an implication that she thinks at some point the caseworkers may have been perfectly aware and capable of what she is trying to explain. There appear to be two different fights she is engaged in: the fight to leave the situation which has made her a refugee and then the fight with the Home Office to be recognised as one. This brings a sense of endlessness in the fighting, that she is working tirelessly for what she is saying to be heard and understood but keeps coming up against a system that is incapable of doing this.

Feeling Betrayed

Half the participants alluded to a sense of betrayal they felt from the rejection from a system that purported to exist to help them. Participant 7 reflects on the impact of having no recourse to resources after losing his appeal:

> *then when I am refused three times, they um stop my support, accommodation and financially. They don’t force you to go back, but they say you are not right to stay here. That point, I think, is breaking down for the people, they lose their trust, (pause) in this country, because when they do their application in this country, they trust them to get help.* P7 4/74-77

The experience can be seen as presented as a betrayal of trust; help is promised but what happens instead is enforced destitution. That what Participant 7 has experienced in his Asylum process feels the exact opposite of help.

Participant 8, speaking about his arrival to the UK comments:

> *(Big sigh) yeah when you think, when you come from there, you think maybe they will help me. You think "they gonna help me, I am sure they are going to help me" you say like this. When you come here you will see (slaps hand on table) <u>different, differently</u>. The way you was thinking is (long pause) and when you see, it is different. It's totally different.*
>
> P8 16/464-467

The big sigh at the beginning of the passage was suffused with a sense of disappointment and resignation in the interview room. The emphasis on "differently" through gesture and intonation seems to indicate that what is experienced in the UK is perhaps the exact opposite of the hoped for help. In the passage he does not even describe what he thought would meet him, perhaps because to compare this hoped for experience with the reality is too painful?

2. Beliefs about Professionals

Professionals play a significant role in the interviews of all participants. Professionals in this context are not solely those who work in the Home Office but anyone working in a professional capacity with the participants in relation to their asylum application. These agents include Solicitors, Barristers, Interpreters or Translators, and any professionals working with relevant charities. The beliefs about professionals are represented by the themes: 'Unprepared and Ignorant', 'Human Rights are not Their First Priority', 'Home Office Interviewers as Hostile Actors' and 'Invaluable Supporters'

Unprepared and Ignorant

This issue of knowledge and by extension what is "truth" was a key issue for some of the participants interviewed. Participant 7 states:

> *Home Office, the people who they put on the cases, what they know, is different to how we live.* P7 1/22-23

This short statement is one that is echoed by other participants in their interviews and speaks to the ownership of knowledge. Participant 7 is not saying that the caseworkers do not know anything. His point is that what they know is not what is actually happening, that the "knowledge" that the Home Office possesses and the lived experience of participant 7 are not the same. Participant 9 also alludes to the lack of knowledge on the part of the caseworkers:

> *Yeah, I feel the Home office didn't do their jobs, they didn't do it right. They were supposed to ask me questions about my asylum and what they ask I have answered for that. So there was no point for saying "oh your asylum has been refused". And the argument they gave was not (long pause) not making sense.[...] So they knew about (pause) so when I was coming, the Home Office are supposed to read and be prepared, do their research, I don't know what and before asking me question.* P9 7/185-194

In this instance, the supposition is that the research required to ask relevant questions in order to be able to understand what has actually occurred, has not been

undertaken. Here the discrepancy in understanding the case is attributed not to a difference in "knowledge" between the caseworker and the participant, but to a lack of research on the part of the interviewer. Participant 4's accusation of paucity of knowledge is wider still:

> *…they think Asylum is, you run away from your country, and running from war or you have to be a trafficking victim. It's not* asylum, *asylum is far bigger than that. There is political asylum, religious, discrim, there's so many …and they don't ..they don't understand this, they just seem to think, you left your country, came here because you want a better life. Excuse me! Some people are a billionaires in their own country, it's just that because you know, if you ask me, I would love my previous life, because I had the most beautiful life……. Why would I want this sort of shitty life?* P4 8/225-232

From participant 4's perspective this ignorance stems from a lack of understanding of the grounds on which an asylum claim can be made. She implies that they are ignorant of the system which their jobs exist to uphold. Within this ignorance, she purports there is an assumption on the part of the Home Office caseworker that a person is only here for a better life. That, to the Home Office, it is inconceivable that the life lived before was superior to the one that is lived in the UK.

Human Rights are not Their First Priority

In several of the interviews there was a sense that the Human Rights accorded to asylum seekers was not the first priority of those they came into contact with who

were working within the Home Office system. Participant 7 discusses his views on the Solicitors he worked with:

> *... (Solicitors), they don't want to do much for you. They work for the company, most of them don't want to work for your problems [...] Some people I know, they got money, they got private solicitors and they got their whole application less than a year, even with court stuff. When you go private, they go quickly because they get early their money.* P7 *14/325-329*

He is stating that, in his opinion, the first priority of the solicitors he encounters is the company they work for and the money they can earn. He cites an example of someone who is able to pay upfront, and who finds that the process is quicker and smoother, because of this. Participant 7 claims that his problems and his need for asylum are secondary to the solicitor's motivation to be paid, and so the process, in his eyes, is slowed down because of the way money is paid through legal aid.

Participant 3 describes her experiences after reporting her uncle who trafficked her into prostitution in the UK:

> *So when the police found that, that I was working in one agency. You know that I reported my case to them. So they now decided to check, so they now checking on me! I was not happy with them, I said "why?, I explained to you why I came to the country. I came to report him, the man, my uncle who, who assaulted me in your country. So now you are the one now, looking for me, like trying to know if I work or not…"* P3 9/274-278

Her experience is that by reporting the crime, instead of focusing on the actions of the criminal she has reported, she becomes the target for investigation. It seems in her eyes that the energies of the authorities are diverted towards finding out what rules she has broken which are then used as grounds to refuse her claim.

Home Office Interviewers as Hostile Actors

Half the participants identified the Home Officer interviewers as intentionally hostile actors in the interviews.

Participant 4 sees the process as intentionally dehumanising:

> *They are very logical questions, but they don't want to ask those they want to ask those stupid questions, which makes you feel bad, which makes you feel stupid, which makes you feel like a slave.* P4 14/435-436

In her eyes, the questions that are asked are used to impose the power differential between interviewer and interviewee, and there is a cruel quality to the experience she describes. Her use of the word slave is particularly significant, the questions she is asked leave her feeling without power or agency; not as a free person with rights, but as a slave whose freedom is owned by the Home Office interviewer.

Participant 6, makes sense of this hostility through what seems like a spitefulness on the part of the Home Office workers:

> *it's more or less like they are taking out their frustration, they are putting it on the job, because you know they have workload, they have their own home frustration that would have followed them to work. So they just take it out on us though "these people are trash". That is how I*

felt at that time to be honest, "they are trash, they don't even have rights, let's just treat them" that is how I felt, "let's just dump it on them, they don't even have a voice to speak, they won't speak" because they see us as, they will be mute, they won't say anything. So they feel they can do a lot and get away with it. P6 27/666-673

She posits that the frustrations of the interviewers' lives are taken out on the refugees who are seeking asylum in the UK. As with the quotation from Participant 4, the refugees' lack of power plays a part in the way participant 6 sees the Home Office workers choosing to behave.

Participant 9 sees this behaviour as "part of the job". She believes that Home Office workers act in this way in part because they are expected, to make the process difficult:

No (pause) but I think it is part of their job, they don't want to be easy, they don't want to just say "yeah", because they don't believe, no one go there (Home Office) and say "oh it's fine" P9 9/238-239

Participant 10 expands on this, summarising the contention being made:

Ah erm I would say sometimes they are not doing what they are meant to be doing and sometimes they are doing what they are meant to be doing, but I think that it's part of the rule of the country, I want to believe that. They themselves, they are in the system, but they also try to make it

tougher. I could liken it to their staff being given a rod, they can use the rod any way they want to use it, and they like I can use the rod to smack anybody, I can use the rod to destroy things, I can use it to scatter things. They are just making use of it, because they have that rod. Because when you look at it, they make mistakes, they want to arrest people, they arrest someone else, to me it's being overzealous about the whole thing. P10 13/349-356

In this quotation she seems to be placing the problems experienced both at the level of the system, but also within the individuals who operate in that system. The workers are acting in accordance with the "rule of the country" but then they are choosing their behaviour within that system. The rod is a metaphor for the power that this participant sees the Home Office as having. In her eyes they are using that power in destructive ways (to smack, destroy or scatter) because they can and not necessarily in a way that is driven by the needs of the job.

Invaluable Supporters

Many of the interviewees identified some of the professionals they worked with as invaluable supporters, without whom they would have struggled to get through and survive the experience. Participant 6 describes the work of her solicitor:

So, I got released obviously and got back home and everything, and started fighting again, fighting. I remember [solicitor's name] now stepping in very well. He now put in my... okay no we had already put in obviously the asylum application, but he just put in more and more and

more evidence, he was doing research he worked tirelessly, he tried, no lies he, because of that man, like obviously, I'm still here, you know, today. P6 8/197-201

The amount of work on the part of the solicitor is emphasised here. From the point of view expressed by participant 6, she would have had no hope of a successful application, without the professional support of solicitor researching and gathering evidence for her case.

For others the valued support is from charities working with them, participant 2 discusses the importance of the support she has received by a charity:

They always monitor me, ah I'm really happy, I'm really happy. This charity does not let me be insane, I would have been insane by now if not for them coming into my life. P2 20/557-558

Without the active support provided by the charity, Participant 2 believes that her mental health would have been severely compromised.

Participant 8 discusses value of supportive others in the context of maintaining hope:

If I didn't find this [charity] I will give up. I don't have any hope. Why I have something like, because these people, the way they talk you, the way they chat with you and they will give you hope, a lot of hope. Even if you cry, they will cry with you, that is why I like them. In this country

> *[charity] is my family like thing they are my real family in this country. They are really nice and kindness and helpful. Because of them I have a paper, I am allowed to live in this country. But many people, they do not have this help, they will give up.* P8 16/473-478

In this quotation the importance of empathy is highlighted in the statement “if you cry, they will cry with you”, perhaps highlighting something that is perceived to be missing in the interactions with Home Office workers.

3. Experiences of Interviews

This section discusses the participants' experiences of being questioned at interview about their reasons for seeking asylum. The first theme, "Challenges to Telling One's Story", explores the participants' descriptions of challenges they faced in narrating the experiences that led them to seek asylum. The second theme, "Creating the Right Environment", comprises the participants' perspectives on environments they believed were more conducive to them being able to speak openly and freely.

Challenges to Telling One's Story

Every participant spoke of the challenges they faced in explaining their experiences. For some this was the practical barrier of not understanding fully the grounds on which they could claim asylum. For others the barriers were psychological effects including fear, shame and trauma, which they fought to overcome or initially limited what they were able to say.

Participant 3 feared death if she disclosed all and so initially only described part of her experiences, and the omission of information was then used as grounds for refusal:

> *…the therapist wrote again to them after the refusal. A situation where somebody has been under control for many years, it takes a while for everything to come out, at the same time. [...] I didn't lie to you. I said the truth, I didn't say it before, because I was under oath, I was under oath, I was afraid*. P3 7/196-200

This extract shows the division between the perception of this omission by the Home Office and the participant. She states that what she had said was not a lie, that her ability to disclose the full story was distorted by her fear of what would happen; that she might die or be hurt, if she broke the oath she had made. Whilst fear silenced some of the narrative for participant 3, shame is also seen as presenting a challenge to narration. Participant 2 discusses her first substantive interview with the Home Office:

> *When I have my main (interview), I don't know where I am going to. So, I don't know, so I just did the interview. Even I don't know the situation I am in when I did the interview, because I've been facing many problems by then.*
>
> P2 14/376-378

This statement illuminates two issues which are pertinent to the experiences of those seeking asylum. First, her own lack of knowledge about the basis on which she could make her claim. At this point she has no external support; her comment that she does not know where she is going refers not to the physical building but to the significance of the interview. At this point Participant 2 does not really understand the process or the circumstances under which she can claim asylum, she simply says what she thinks is relevant. The second issue is the drive to obscure shameful experiences with generic language, the "problems" she has been facing are multiple interpersonal traumas, both in the country in which she was born, and once again when in England. Even now, not unreasonably, she is reluctant to describe in plain language what these problems are.

Participant 3 also discusses the role of shame, and the struggle to overcome the desire not to speak about experiences she perceives as shameful to her:

> *… I feel so bad about it when I was explaining to them, because it was so difficult, so difficult for me to open my mouth to tell them in that first interview. Everything I was saying, it makes me feel ashamed of myself.* P3 11/354-363

The effect portrayed here is as if she has been muted, and is struggling to open her mouth, and then when she does manage to, how awful she feels as she is speaking. So even participant 3, who overall has the most positive relationship with the UK asylum process in the cohort, still describes the interview as not being a penalty free exercise.

The difficulties experienced in narrating openly are expanded upon by Participant 6:

> *My emotions even spoke for me, because I couldn't even talk, broke down, from the moment I started (pause) the story, I just broke down, I couldn't even get the words out of my mouths, blblblbl. I, you know I was more or less like stammering because I couldn't get it out. I think I got it out more when I had counselling and therapy. It was difficult. That was another difficult time of my life.* P6 25/617-621

She describes initially characterizing her experiences as emotions, not words, unable

to articulate what she has gone through. The description of trying to express her experiences verbally as "getting it out", brings to mind something which is stuck inside her and hard to access. Through therapy she is able to transform her emotions into words, but as in other cases to describe everything in the first interview felt impossible. Time and support to be able articulate the experience are identified as needed by the participant.

For other participants the challenge to narration came from the actions of others, for example, participant 10 states:

> *Sometimes when we go for such interview, they tried, there are things you've said before, but they will try to put words into your mouth, in order for them to use against you. If you are not strong and you are not accurate enough you will end up saying what you are not even meant to be saying.* P10 2/45-48

She perceives the actions of the interviewer as intentionally trying to manipulate a mistake from her that, "they can use against you". This description presents a perception on the part of the participant of a very adversarial interview, which is trying to catch or perhaps even create a "lie". Her use of the word "strong" to describe the qualities she sees as needed to withstand these strategies links back to the earlier theme of "having to fight". What is described here is not a person experiencing a process which is aiming to elicit a true story, but one that is aiming to catch someone out in a perceived lie. Participant 4 also describes the impact of the interviewer action on what is said, but frames it in a slightly different way:

…the tone they use of their voice, it's like it changes in between the, you know, the interview. So if you are taking my interview and talking and she say go slow, but you are emotional and you don't wanna go slow and "you know [Name] I'm gonna stop the interview" so there's like "oh, eh, if" so it's like yeah (claps), she have this power, you know and it makes you think like (pause) and it stops you to tell the very important points, which, that's why you were telling that story.

P4 15/448-453

Once again there is a perception that the actions of the interviewer are affecting the narrative. In this instance the interviewer is described as being much more subtle: a different tone of voice, and a warning that the interview will be terminated if the participant's narrative does not conform to what the interviewer needs. The outcome, in the view of Participant 4, is that the part of the story that she appears to be struggling with, due to the emotional content, is silenced.

Participant 7 describes the impact of mistranslation:

In my interview as well, the, one or may be two of them, translators that work with my solicitors they don't have enough may be English to explain in my language, they cannot translate it. This is where, in some way, I agree with the Home Office why my case be refused, because what I said and what they translated, words are so similar, but it doesn't complete the meaning.

P7 11/257-260

Once again the actions of others are affecting the narration. The translators' reproductions of his story do not accurately convey what he is trying to say. The decision has been made on an incomplete rendition of the reasons for seeking asylum. Whilst participant 7's narrative is truncated by what is written by the translator, Participant 8 is constrained by what is asked:

> *P8: I was happy when they say you have interview, I was happy that day, because they want to hear my situation and they want to help me. That was the way I think at that time. I was happy.*
>
> *R: And did you feel like you were able to tell the story as you wanted?*
>
> *P8: Ahhhh I didn't find that that day, because errr they didn't ask me that much questions. They just ask me 85 questions. "What is your name? What is your family name? When did you born? Where did you come from? What is your City Name? They just ask, "one, two, three, four", they count like this. They didn't ask what I wanted.* P8 18/535-542

In the first part of the passage there is a sense of hope, that the sought-after help will be found, but instead he experiences a list of closed questions. In contrast to some of the other participants, he is ready to speak about his situation at the interview but is met with disappointment. Without the questions being asked, the story cannot be told.

There are a variety of challenges discussed here including fear, shame,

trauma and the actions of others, but in each case what is a common thread is that the participant, contrary to the assumptions of the Home Office system does not necessarily have full control of the narrative that is produced. That what is and can be said is impacted by a multitude of factors.

Creating the Right Environment

Most participants reflected that there were circumstances where they felt more able to speak and the challenges discussed above were less difficult to overcome. Participant 3 discusses the reassurances needed before she is able to tell the full story:

> *So they, a woman who was in charge of the therapist was telling me, "he only did it to make me afraid, not to put him in trouble, so don't worry about it." Then the reverend came as well, to you know and prayed for me and lecture me about the situation, "he only did it to make me be afraid. Not for me to go and tell people what he brought me for in the United Kingdom". So I said "okay" and from there I said that had put my mind at rest. [...] It was a difficult thing, but I had to. I had to say everything, the ones that I can remember, and the ones I cannot remember, I was able to say it.* P3 10/299-306

With this support, she is able to explain everything, though it is still not an easy task. What seems salient here is that the ability to disclose is strongly affected by a sense of safety. Once she feels safe, she is able to speak openly. Participant 9 describes the importance of having a sense of safety, but in a different way:

> *Yeah because it was different when I went to court, because when I went to court, I had female judge I had female solicitor… everyone was female and I was able to express myself, to be more comfortable.* P9 5/115-117

Here is it the gender of the audience that is important; despite requests to the contrary, her Home Office interview had been with a male interviewer, which had inhibited what she felt able to discuss. When the audience was changed to one which created a sense of comfort and (presumably) safety, this changed what could be said.

Participant 8 discusses the importance environment and highlights the importance of feeling listened to:

> *When you go to judge they will <u>hear properly</u> everything, like your story from the bottom. They will read everything, they will like talk to you, and when they talk to you, they know what is like your problem. If you really have a problem, or you don't …* P8 12/347-350

In this instance the right environment is not only what can be said but also what is heard. The emphasis on "hear properly" implies that this has not been the experience up until this moment. Participant 8 feels that, prior to this, in interviews with the Home Office, they have not been listening with attention. There is a valued interactional quality to the encounter with the Judge, which contrasts to the limited closed questions described by participant 8 in the previous section.

4. The Impact of the Process on the Self

This section discusses the impact of the asylum process on the self. For all participants the asylum process has profound and often lasting impacts and is captured in the themes; 'Losses of Agency', 'Negative Psychological Consequences During the Process', 'Ongoing Psychological Consequences'. For all three themes the impacts described were experienced as a direct result of the experience of seeking asylum in the UK. For some the psychological impact, for example flashbacks, were related to previous traumas, but were described in the interviews as being triggered by the aspects of the asylum process.

Losses of Agency

Over half the participants referred to losses of agency and the impact this has on their lives. For some the loss of agency is described in very practical terms of the freedoms that would normally be available being taken away. Participant 10 describes being told she is not allowed to work:

> *Along the line I was told I couldn't work, I couldn't do anything, I didn't ask for any money. [Charity] stepped in, I was asked if I was getting money from the government, they asked about section 95 and I said I don't know anything about section 95.* P10 3/63-65

For participant 10 there is an apparent lack of information provided about a person's rights, provided by the Home Office, and the need for others to step in to fill this gap. The participant presents herself in the terms of what she did not do: ask for money and what she did not know (about section 95). She conveys a sense of helplessness in relation to her treatment, whether this helplessness is indicative of

her actual relationship to the process, or how she felt she must present herself is unclear. Participant 8 also discusses the limitations placed on how he can spend the money that is made available to him.

> *Every week they give us maybe £30. I can't even cash out that money, every week I have to go shop and buy something. Then even like, which shop I use is Sainsbury, Tesco, is expensive shop. I can't even go to Lidl or Aldi something like that, I can't get from there nothing.* P8 5/150-152

For him there is more of a sense of frustration, this is the only source of money he can legally access but he is limited by how he can use it. There is a sense of feeling controlled here, the ability to live and make decisions as an adult is curtailed and the resulting frustration of being a person who cannot act freely. Participant 6 expands further, first by comparing her time in detention to prison, but then develops this simile:

> *I came out, to have even stepped out, because you know in [Detention Centre], when you move from here to that door there's another door, that a security officer has to come and open. You move again, there's another door, it's like <u>being in a prison</u>. So, when I came, when I stepped out of [detention centre] and they opened the door for me to leave, (takes a big breath) "oh fresh air, freedom". [...] You know I was like "wow", you people who have been in prison, and everything even though I've never been to prison, you know, and I will never go, in Jesus name, Amen. But I am like, I see what it is like to be in prison, not having*

your freedom, you know, it's also the same thing as not having your papers, as well too. It's you being in prison really… P6 8/188-195

The passage starts with the description of detention and the experience being directly comparable to prison. The comparison is emphasised demonstrating the experience of complete removal of freedoms. Participant 6 is keen to separate herself personally as someone who would not go to prison: it is important for her to be distinguished from a criminal. Yet her experience as a refugee in the UK while she waits on the outcome of her claim is experienced as if it were imprisonment.

Despite a shared sense of injustice articulated by many of the participants interviewed, there was a common belief that they were powerless at the hands of the Home Office system. Reflecting on the restrictions imposed, and the impact that this has had on him and his family, Participant 7 states:

...if I speak up, to make my voice heard, [...] the penalty will be to be prisoned and sent back to your country and still the same thing, to make you not see your family. P7 23/526-523

His belief is that if he complains in a way that draws attention from the Home Office, he will be punished. The implication being that even if he thinks the treatment he is receiving is unjust, he feels powerless to speak up against such treatment, lest this is used as a reason to deport him. Participant 8 makes a similar statement, but couches it much more clearly in terms of the power dynamic at play:

> *If they do something, anything you can't do, because they have power, they can do whatever they want. Home Office play like, whatever he wants*. P8 11/317-318

The use of the word play here is particularly striking, conjuring up imagery of a cat playing with a mouse. Not only does this passage explicitly discuss the power dynamic between the Home Office, in the minds of the refugees, it also highlights the participants' sense that these decision makers do not truly understand the seriousness of the predicament whose fate is in their hands.

Negative Psychological Consequences During the Process

The experience of negative emotional consequences was a common theme for all participants. Deterioration in mental health manifested in a variety of ways: flashbacks; a sense of madness; or a sadness borne of frustration. These negative impacts on emotional health are explicitly described as torture in some cases. Participant 9 states:

> *(laughs) I don't know much, but I think the Home Office, I think it's just like torture.* P9 9/225

Although it was not a requirement of the study to talk about the reasons for seeking asylum, most participants spoke explicitly about experiencing torture or other acts of interpersonal violence prior to coming to the UK and all participants alluded to it. This prior experience makes the description of the process as torture both poignant and relevant. Often when people describe something as 'torture' this is an abstract use of the word in a purely metaphorical way. In these cases, these are people *who*

have experienced torture and interpersonal violence and are comparing the UK asylum process to that.

This analogy perhaps sheds light on the disclosure that at that time death felt preferable to the suffering they experienced while negotiating the UK asylum process. Participant 6 reflects:

> *... So many people would have claimed their life just because of this, because the truth is, it did come to mind at that time, I was like "should I just kill myself?" and just you know make it easy I wouldn't have to suffer this long again, you know?* P6 15/377-383

The use of the word "again" perhaps refers to a double suffering; for the reasons that give her the right to asylum in the UK, and then again in the process of proving that right. Despite its emotional content, the statement was spoken in a rather neutral way. Later she talks about how after becoming a mother, at a later point in the process, there is an inviolable reason to live which continues to this day. Thus, her emotional state at the point of interview may be more distant and more different from her feelings at that time. This is in contrast to Participant 8 whose emotive account summarizes the negative psychological processes which culminated in wanting to give up and die:

> *Ugh, I never call myself guilty, because that's not my problem. I try my best and they didn't help me. If I call myself guilty, how? I can't, I haven't done nothing wrong, I just, just fight for my help, for my right. I didn't find anyone, anyone who could help me, then I become angry.*

Who I am? Where I come from? What I am looking for? You ask yourself questions: what am I going to be like? What is my future? What is my future? Then you will be, you will get stress and hate yourself, that like it will make you angry, push you to hurting on yourself especially now when you give up [...] when you walk on the road, you don't care if car is coming or it is not, may be when you walk on bridge, that water, are you going to go in that water (pause) .you don't care. You do whatever you want that time, because you give up, you don't care about anything.

P8 19/558-568

The extract speaks to the experiential trajectory described by many over the course of their interviews. First he starts by describing how he can never call himself guilty, referring to Home Office accusations that he has incorrectly claimed refugee status. This harks back to the earlier theme of "Presumed to be a Liar". Additionally, the use of the word guilty brings to mind assumptions of criminality and speaks to the wider narrative that places people who have sought asylum but not been granted it as criminals. This "crime" is juxtaposed with how he makes sense of his actions, which is to fight for his rights and the help that is promised to refugees who come to the UK. Instead these promises turn out to be false; no help is offered from the Home Office, as he states, *"I try my best and they didn't help me"*, leading to the sense of anger and hopelessness. The outward anger initially directed at the Home Office is now turned inward, and the participant's sense of self is lost and as this sense of self is lost so is the drive to live.

Ongoing Psychological Consequences

Nearly all participants referred to the ongoing psychological consequences of the asylum process, such as depression, mistrust and trauma related to the experience. As Participant 10 states:

> *The fear and the whole distress, I tell them at the therapy, I still have it, I still have it. […] I still get those feelings, it's hard to get out of it. Whenever I see their car, or I see them pass, I think "Oh my! The police again", or the enforcement department driving.* P10 4/100-107

Despite having leave to remain in the UK the fear and distress of that time persists, it seems as if subjection to the process has resulted in a further trauma which still remains and is difficult to escape. Participant 4 describes the ways the process has negatively impacted her core sense of self:

> *….. one thing there was is that, because of Home Office, the way treat you, the way they keep you waiting and stuff, it makes you feel worthless you know like "I'm just nobody, I'm just a piece of a shit" and this shit is waiting for Home Office to be, you know picked up, or thrown away…you know whatever, it's up to them. So this is one thing which ummm it's still in me, even though I am strong or whatever, but that, that self you know that helplessness was, there is a big part in my heart that feels like, "I was so helpless" you know, I couldn't do anything so that is one thing so even thought that was, so I used to question myself, you are*

> *so strong, you are this that, yet you were helpless like you know. It's still in me, that like at times I feel like I'm worthless. Yeah, this process makes you (pause) that at some point*. P4 19/569-577

The first part of the passage elucidates what the process did to her self-perception. Participant 4 is someone who viewed herself as someone strong with self-worth, but she feels reduced to "a piece of shit", something which is just waiting to be "thrown away". This use of language highlights not only the dehumanisation felt by the refugees interviewed but also the unrelenting message that they are unwanted and unwelcome. For participant 4 the salient part for her is the helplessness in the face of this treatment, which causes her to question her sense of identity. She describes the effect as if it were a virus ("*it's still in me*") and that she is still infected by her experience, leaving her psychologically weakened, perhaps indefinitely. As she goes on to state:

> *I feel like Home Office have given you a curse, you, you have to live with it (pause) may be for the rest of your life.* P4 20/612-613

For some of the participants there were some positive psychological outcomes attributed to their experience. Participant 6 spoke of feeling more determined to make the best life for herself, and participant 4 spoke earlier in her transcript about being stronger because of the process, although the previous statements discussed above indicate that this strength is perhaps only superficial. For Participant 2 however the experience overall is seen to have had good psychological outcomes.

> *Yes, yes, because talking to the Home Office, I am no longer afraid of them, in the first place. I not running away from them anymore, the police I cannot run away from them, so it makes me feel happy. Open up all that I have gone through, I have been able to voice out my situation, I have been able to tell my story, so I feel very happy. Yes it makes me feel very happy. So I am no longer that kind of shameless person any more, in the midst of the Home Office, in the midst of, except my friends I have not told them anything about myself, apart from my brother, who knows, so in the other process, I am happy. I feel I have people, who are there, when I am in support, when I am in distress, I can go to this organization, I have my brother, I have my friends. Though I didn't tell my friends about it.* P3 14/429-437

For participant 2, unlike participant 10, in speaking with the Home Office and gaining her leave to remain her fears have been eliminated and she is happy as a consequence. Not only this but she describes her experience as one where she is able to discuss her experiences fully "*Open up all that I have gone through, I have been able to voice out my situation, I have been able to tell my story, so I feel very happy."* Yet the process to get to this point was not linear, and her shame about her experiences as well as her fear of the repercussions if she disclosed everything meant initially that the "full" picture was not given. This compunction to hide her past shows up again when she switches in mid-sentence to describe how she has not told her friends. Thus whilst for participant 2 the process has been positive ultimately, a conflict remains and her instinct is to keep her early life hidden.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of refugees' experiences in seeking asylum in the UK. It sought to understand any challenges faced in relating their experiences to Home Office interviewers. The methodology adopted was an analysis of eight semi-structured interviews using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four superordinate themes were identified: Confronted by a Hostile System; Beliefs about Professionals; Experiences of Interviews; and The Impact of the Asylum Process on the Self. Each of these themes will be discussed in turn, with reference to the relevant literature.

Confronted by a Hostile System

The participants all described an experience in which they felt they were treated as liars, in a system that seemed from the outset geared to reject their application. Due to this, they felt they had to fight relentlessly to establish the validity of their claim. Much has been written about the 'Culture of Disbelief' that is said to operate within the Home Office from those working with refugees (Bohmer & Shuman, 2018; Jubany, 2017; Anderson, Hollaus & Williamson, 2014; Souter 2011). The interviewees' experiences seem to echo this position and endorsed the view that from the outset their experiences was that the Home Office workers they encountered were biased towards not believing and discrediting any applicant.

It is acknowledged that the decisions Home Office caseworkers have to make are extremely complex and that some applicants will intentionally use deception to gain refugee status. Yet research has consistently demonstrated that people are poor lie detectors; in empirical studies accuracy is usually below 60 percent, and these rates fall below levels of chance when the person is judging someone of a different

cultural background to them (Vrig, 2000). Although meta-analysis has shown that there are non-verbal behaviours which distinguish liars from truth tellers (DePaulo et al., 2003), these studies have been made with Western populations and may not be universal indicators. In fact, it has been demonstrated that professional 'lie catchers' struggle as much as the general population to detect untruths (Granhag, Strömwall & Hartwig, 2005; Hartwig 2004). This is particularly the case when someone holds 'stereotypical' beliefs about what deceptive behaviour looks and sounds like (Vrij & Mann, 2000). This can be especially pronounced when there is a difference in culture between the interviewer and interviewee as non-verbal behaviour is culturally mediated (Granhag, Strömwall & Hartwig, 2007).

In cognitive psychology there is a broad evidence base which demonstrates that, in situations of uncertainty, simplifying 'heuristics' are used to aid judgement (Kahneman 2011;De Martino et al., 2006) and these heuristics and biases are often linked to our existing values and beliefs (Parkhurst, 2017). Research into how people understand political information has shown that they (no matter what their political persuasion) engaged in both defensive avoidance behaviour (i.e. avoiding information which contradicted their position) and confirmation bias (i.e. searching for information which was seen to be congruent) (Yeo, Xenos, Brossard & Scheufele, 2015). This evidence appears to be supported by the qualitative research by Mayblin (2019) where civil servants reported that, even though there is little evidence that people who claim asylum are doing so because of an economic 'pull' factor, this information is not acknowledged within the Home Office as it does not fit the prevailing cultural narrative.

The likelihood of resorting to using bias and heuristics when making decisions increases the more uncertain and complex the situation becomes (Parkhurst, 2017). Although these are universal strategies that the human brain uses, there is evidence that training interventions can reduce the impact of them on decision making and that this can have a lasting effect (Morewedge et al., 2015). Therefore actively encouraging multiple perspectives can be beneficial in protecting against the use of 'quick' thinking in making complex decisions. Additionally, decisions made in work structures where diversity of perspectives is promoted, fosters better outcomes (Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi & Malone, 2010; Esser 1998). It seems that the system the participants encountered was one which appeared to be constructed so as to reinforce its own disbelief in the veracity of an applicant's claim. This left participants feeling as though they were treated as liars who had to fight relentlessly to prove otherwise.

Beliefs about Professionals

In some instances, professionals were viewed not to have sufficient knowledge to support or make decisions about an applicant's case. It was also alluded to that upholding refugee's human rights did not appear to be the first priority of some professionals they encountered. Views on solicitors were particularly mixed though some identified them as being an important factor in the success of their case. Burridge & Gill (2016) have written about the uneven access to advice and legal representation, due to the enforced dispersal of refugees. Attending to this uneven access, could make a significant move towards a fairer system. Support from those working in refugee charities was also identified, in particular the ongoing support and empathy that was provided. This is contrasted with the perceived hostility of the Home Office interviewers and although not a universal experience it was highlighted

by a number of participants. This supports previous research which has described the interview style of the Home Office as interrogative, with little opportunity for the applicant to further explain their meaning (Baillot et al., 2009). It is worth noting that the participant who did not find her interviewer overbearing, did not get a positive decision initially. Thus, it seems that the participants' negative perceptions of the Home Office interviewers, is not simply a reflection of the outcome of the decision.

Experiences of Interviews

As stated in the introduction, the underlying assumption of the Home Office asylum process is that a coherent and consistent disclosure of all the relevant reasons for seeking asylum is possible for all applicants in the substantive interview with a person who is a stranger to them. The advice on the UK Government website states "You must tell the caseworker everything you want them to consider or it can count against you" (https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/asylum-interview). Yet it seems from the data that the belief that this is always possible is questionable; and therefore the subsequent actions by Home Office caseworkers may be built on faulty assumptions.

For some participants a challenge in the interview was lack of knowledge about the basis on which asylum can be claimed. This echoes a paper by Kea & Roberts-Holmes, (2013) where the stated reasons for claiming refugee status change; from fear for their children, to fear for themselves, even though their personal experiences have not changed. In a culture which assumes asylum applicants are out to 'game the system' there is a certain logic, on the part of the Home Office, to holding a belief that applicants would have perfect knowledge of the asylum process and any subsequent change to the initial narrative is a sign of a false claim. Yet this

knowledge of what is and is not asylum-compliant appears far from universal. It also contextualizes why interviewees who are without legal representation are more likely to have their application rejected (Burridge & Gill, 2017; James & Killick, 2012).

The psychological barriers of shame and trauma, as impediments to initial disclosure, were also identified. This is in accord with previous research on the impact of shame (, Baillot et al., 2012; Bögner et al., 2010; Bögner et al., 2007) and trauma (Herlihy et al., 2012) on a person's ability to disclose and coherently narrate their experiences, particularly if they do not fully trust the interviewer (Brand et al., 2017); and the role of fear, particularly for those who have been trafficked (Van der Watt & Kruger, 2017).

Institutional and interactional practices also appeared to constrain and restrict the narratives applicants felt they could provide due to the use of closed questions, and what was interpreted by the participants as interrogatory style on the part of the interviewer. Poor language interpretation was also identified as a challenge; that what was said by the participant was not accurately represented in the official document; an issue that has been identified in previous literature (Danstrøm & Whyte, 2019; Jacquemet, 2009). Participant 7's proposal, that a check should be made on whether the interpreter has enough fluency in their native language *as well* as checking whether they are able to speak fluent English seems like a reasonable suggestion.

What was identified by participants as important for narrating their experiences was a listening, trusting environment that provided time and space for the story to unfold. Experiences of this were described in a variety of contexts but in particular in relation to solicitors and counselling/therapy. The style of

Immigration Judges was also contrasted with Home Office interviewers, with the former seen as interested in the truth and the latter interested in finding a way to reject an application. The overall sentiment from participants seemed to be that, whilst it was not impossible to talk about their experiences in a complete and coherent manner, to do this at the initial interview, particularly in contexts which did not feel open and safe, was an unrealistic and possibly unreasonable requirement for many of them. Therefore it seems that the expectations that all refugees will be able to, and know how to, disclose all relevant information relating to their claim, in the substantive interview, particularly if it is the first time they have spoken openly about these experiences, may be an unrealistic expectation. An automatic rejection of an asylum application, based on an evolving narrative, makes the incorrect assumption that the evolving narrative always implies that the person is not a refugee. It seems however, that environments where there was an interest in listening closely to the experiences of the applicant and which provided time for them to put their experiences into words allowed for the story to be told.

Impact of the Asylum Process on the Self

A key theme for the interviews was impact on the self, both during the process of seeking refugee status, and once it had been granted. The poor mental health found among refugees, in comparison to the general population, has been attributed to both pre-migratory (Fazeel, Wheeler & Daneesh, 2005) and post-migratory experiences (Steel et al.2009; Silove, Sinnerbrink, Field, Manicavasagar & Steel, 1997). Miller & Rasmussen, (2017) argue that uncertainty regarding refugee status, possible detention and a lack of basic resources engender continuous stressors which refugees have limited or no control over are in many cases the cause of deteriorating mental

health. Research has consistently shown adverse psychological and physical outcomes when there is a lack of control, particularly when this is prolonged, unpredictable, and linked to exposure to aversive stimuli (Sapolsky, 2004). This work illustrates how, whilst pre-migratory traumas may be a source of emotional distress, this cannot be assumed to be the primary source of distress among refugees. The negative effects on mental health, attributed by the participants to the impact of the process itself, seem to support this view.

A study in Germany (Schock, Rosner & Knaevelsrud, 2015) found that the perceived injustice experienced during an asylum interview was predictive of an increase in traumatic intrusions. A secondary analysis by James, Iyer & Webb (2019) of the Survey of New Refugees (SNR) (Daniel, Devine, Gillespie, Pendry & Zurawan 2010), concluded that emotional distress fully mediates post-migration stressors and longitudinal health of refugees. The associations between post-migration problems and mental health problems is broadly supported by the growing evidence suggesting that post-migration stressors are related to poorer mental health in refugees and asylum seekers (Carswell, Blackburn & Barker,2011; Laban, Gernaat, Komproe, Schreuders & De Jong, 2005; Steel et al., 1999). That the asylum process specifically increases the likelihood of psychological difficulties (Morgan, Melluish & Welham 2017; Hocking, Kennedy & Suresh, 2015; Silove et al., 1997) and is a significant sources of distress (Jannesari, Molyneaux & Lawrence, 2019; Sherwood & Liebling-Kalifani, 2012; Crawley, 2009). In a comprehensive review of international research Jannesari, Hatch, Prina & Oram (2020) reported that factors relating to the asylum interview process were key components in all general post-migration stress score measures.

Longitudinal studies on the psychological impacts of asylum processes have found that gaining refugee status lowered distress levels (Ryan, Kelly & Kelly, 2009) and led to substantial improvement in mental health functioning, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Silove et al., 2007). This is disputed by over half the participants interviewed in this study who indicated that they still suffered negative psychological effects as a consequence of the interview process despite gaining refugee status. A possible explanation for this is that the asylum-seeking process is experienced as a moral injury. Moral injury is defined as "a betrayal of what's right by a person in legitimate authority, or by one's self" (Shay, 2014, p. 182). Research with refugees in Australia who had experienced immigration procedures were more likely to perceive moral injury from their post-migratory experiences (Hoffman, Liddell, Bryant & Nickerson 2019) which was associated with increased rates of PTSD, anger, depression, and lower mental health quality of life among refugees (Hoffman, Liddell, Bryant & Nickerson 2018; Hoffman, 2015). There has been little research thus far into the long term impacts of a moral injury profile with refugees and none within the UK. The impact of post-migratory experiences directly related to the UK asylum procedure and their association with perceived moral injury could be a useful and interesting avenue of research.

Limitations

There are limitations to this research which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Since this is a qualitative study, it uses only a small sample with a specially selected group of participants, therefore any generalisations must be regarded with caution. Participants came from a single charity and although it was not an inclusion criterion of the study they were all people who had had their

application accepted only after appeal. Those who fall into this category represent 30% of applications with known outcomes (Walsh, 2019) and so are a minority group within those who have gone through the asylum process.

Although every effort was made to help participants feel safe to speak openly it is important to acknowledge not only the power dynamic between me and participants, but also the ongoing dynamic between participants and the Home Office, and the impact this may have had on the data. I was aware that the interviews I was conducting had the potential to feel like a repetition of the Home Office interview. This at times restricted how much we explored participants experiences, where doing so meant accessing memories that were distressing for them to recount. This was particularly apparent in my interview with Participant 9, who found talking about the experience with the Home Office clearly upsetting and asked to terminate the interview when I offered this option. It was also clear that many of the participants worried that their leave to remain would be taken away if it were known that they had spoken critically about the Home Office. One potential participant asked to withdraw when we discussed the project further, as he felt very afraid of the potential repercussions. He was willing to talk to me about his experiences if I had not audio-recorded them, but felt that it was too risky to talk about them if they were recorded because he believed that the Home Office would use any reason to revoke his leave to remain and he feared for his life if returned to his country of birth. Had time constraints allowed, it may have been beneficial to the project to meet participants more than once to give them time to develop more trust and feel more comfortable with me. Although I hope that everyone I interviewed felt they could speak freely and openly, it seems remiss to assume that fear would

not have impacted at least on some of the participants and potentially limited some of what they might have said.

Limitations of IPA

Through the choice of any method a researcher is limiting or obscuring the ways of understanding in some way, as well as making assumptions about what can be 'known'. This is due to the different assumptions which underlie the epistemologies of a method.

One of the key assumptions of IPA is that the interpretation of what a person says can be used as a gateway to cognition. Yet this assumes a certain level of choice in the words available to a person to describe that experience, as well as an ability on the part of the researcher to accurately interpret what is said.

Whilst all my participants were able to carry out interviews in English, several commented that they did not have the words to articulate exactly what they wanted to say and that they felt that speaking in English was a limitation. It may be that for those participants who felt they were not able to fully express what they wanted to in English this may not have been the case. It is also possible due to cultural differences in the use of language, my interpretation reflected my uses of those words and not that person's meaning. Had it been possible I would have liked to discuss my interpretations with the participants, but due to the processes that we had put in place to ensure their anonymity, and that there was no paper trail linking participants to the project as an added protection for them, this was not possible. A further discussion of the limitations and implications of English as the 'lingua franca' in research is presented in the Critical Appraisal.

Research Implications

This thesis has explored the experiences of the UK asylum process and explored any challenges faced in the Home Office interviews. Although a small sample it highlighted the difficulties faced when refugees explained their reasons for seeking asylum and the negative psychological impacts of the Home Office process as a whole. This has implications for further research as well as clinical implications for clinical psychologists.

As stated in the discussion, the ongoing negative psychological consequences that endured, even once leave to remain was granted, is contrary to some of the existing literature. It may be that this outcome was specific to my sample, and not a general outcome. Further research to investigate the experiences of those whose application was accepted without appeal may be a useful avenue of research. This could pinpoint whether the experiences related in this study are specific to those who have had to go through the appeals process. Understanding how widespread this impact is in the wider UK refugee population and what aspects of the process i.e. going through appeal, the number of years from application to acceptance impact this may provide greater understanding of the parts of the process which result in ongoing psychological difficulties.

Further exploration of whether and if so how the UK asylum process contributes to perceived moral injury also has a relevance for future work. Research with refugees has found that a moral injury profile has a significant impact on the mental health outcomes and is not addressed by standard trauma interventions (Nickerson et al., 2015). Thus it may be important for clinicians to consider the impact of the process of seeking asylum on the belief systems of the refugees they work with.

The results showed that full disclosure of experiences in a single interview is a complex matter, which may not always be possible. This has implications for how interviews are conducted and how decisions are made. A better understanding on the part of the Home Office caseworkers of the complexity of disclosure and how it can be modified by fear, shame, trauma and the environment and style of the interview could help as a guide towards practices which are perceived as less overtly hostile.

The research also highlighted how dehumanised participants felt by their treatment by the Home Office and the negative impacts this had on their mental health during and after leave to remain was granted. Although there is little control over what has happened to refugees before coming to the UK, many post-migratory stressors are readily manageable through Home Office procedures and policy. Changing these may positively modify health outcomes for refugees in the UK. I echo the summary comment in the Windrush Report that the Home Office needs to "change its culture to recognise that migration and wider Home Office policy is about people and, whatever its objective, should be rooted in humanity" (Williams, 2019, p. 136). It may be that some steps are needed to create a culture of curiosity rather than one of suspicion and disbelief.

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Part 3: Critical Appraisal

Ethical Considerations when Researching with Refugees

Introduction

This Critical appraisal discusses some of the challenges and ethical tensions in conducting research with refugees and people seeking asylum. It discusses methodological issues including: the process of obtaining consent and some of the tensions which arise in meeting the needs of participants and the requirements of institutions simultaneously; the challenges and considerations with recruitment; and the implications of language barriers in the context of IPA. It finishes with a discussion on how qualitative research is viewed and valued and the implications of this.

Methodological Issues

Gaining Informed and Ethical Consent

All academic research must proceed under the framework of informed consent. This is important because it is vital that no-one participates in a research project without explicitly agreeing to do so. In most cases a written consent form is used because it enjoys several advantages, it can be tracked and analysed, and if a complaint is made can form the basis for accountability (Hugman, Bartolomei & Pittaway, 2011). However, sometimes the frameworks in which this process operates begs the question: whose needs does the consent serve? It has been argued that for many vulnerable groups, which incudes refugees, a formal consent form satisfies the need to construct (if necessary) a legal defense for institutions but does not necessarily provide proper protection for participants (Dominelli & Holloway, 2008). This is because written consent relies on a complex approach to legal rights, situated in a 'Western' legal framework and an assumption of a person's capacity to exercise those rights (Hugman et al., 2011, Ssali, Poland & Seeley, 2016). It has been argued

that, in the context of field research with refugees, it is very difficult to obtain truly informed and voluntary consent, due to participants unfamiliarity with academic research and the power constructs in which it is conducted (Leaning, 2001).

This was an issue that seemed particularly salient to the project and ensuring that consent was obtained in a way that felt safe for the participants, but met the institutional needs of the university, was important. From early conversations about the project, and in particular when I first met with the Service User group at the charity from where participants were recruited, it was apparent that irrespective of leave status there appeared to be a fear that the Home Office held a power that could and would be used in an arbitrary way to negatively impact refugee lives.

Additional to this, as the project sought to understand the decisions made when interviewing with the Home Office, it was felt that there was a risk that what might be disclosed in interviews with me could jeopardise the refugee's leave to remain. Although I made every effort to ensure participants felt comfortable with me, and to make it clear that I had no links to the Home Office, I was still an unknown researcher. Thus there were numerous intersecting issues when considering how to obtain informed consent for this study including: power, trust and mistrust, and autonomy, in the process of aiming to obtain genuinely informed consent that served the requirements of the ethics committee, but was also ethically protective to the participants.

In the initial discussions about the project it seemed that oral consent would be appropriate for the study as it meant that names of participants and other identifying information was not stored. Research with refugees suggests that those who have been persecuted by authorities in the past report that signing documentation can raise anxiety (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln & Nur, 2007).

Additionally, due to the subject matter of the topic, we wanted to fully guarantee the anonymity of participants and written documentation would have resulted in paperwork with their names attached to the project. Although oral consent is considered an appropriate method of obtaining consent in certain circumstances, it is not the usual process used.

It was important that this proposed process was discussed to assess whether it was agreed that this was a meaningful and preferable way of recording consent by Service User group also. The issue was brought and discussed at one of the meetings to explore views on their experiences of research and the process of providing consent specifically. In agreement with what has been articulated in the literature, those who had taken part in previous research commented that when the research had been about topics they considered sensitive they had been reluctant to sign the associate paperwork, but not been given alternative options. These comments highlight the need for flexibility in the set up and design of consent processes. Although in my research oral consent was agreed to, this had to be recorded. One potential participant did not want to continue after discussing the research further with me as he had not realised the interview and consent had to be audio recorded. He declined due to fears that the Home Office would somehow find out that he had spoken about his feelings concerning the process. Many people in his home country had recently been murdered, and he felt that any kind of discussion about his treatment and the process, might pose a risk to his right to remain and thus to his life. He stated that he was willing to talk about his experiences but did not feel safe enough to have his voice audio recorded as this would be a form of proof he had participated in the research. Whilst it is important that he felt he had the power to

decline (see below for further discussion). The limits set by the practical requirements of the research meant that his voice and his story were not heard.

Recruitment

One concern I had with regard to recruitment was that participants may have felt obliged to take part in the study due to their previous relationship with the charity from which they were recruited. Thus, it was important to keep in mind that they felt they had the power to decline (Castor-Lewis, 1988; Druacker 1999). That participants were under no obligation to continue with participating in the research, was something that was discussed at the points of recruitment, interview, and post interview. Many people who were booked in for the interview did not turn up; of 27 interviews which were booked only 11[2] were attended, implying that even if they did not feel able to decline after initial contact, they did not feel obligated to attend.

In the design of the study, to ensure that participants were fully anonymous to me, it was agreed that I would not be directly involved in recruitment. Instead potential participants were identified by senior members of staff. This was to ensure that participants who took part in the research were those who were thought able to discuss their experiences with the Home Office without extensive negative psychological impact. Once identified participants were then contacted by those working at the charity who had had a preliminary discussion about the project.

Whilst this was set up with consideration of the participants in mind, it may have created a system where a person who may have wanted to participate in the research was prevented from doing so because of 'gatekeeping'. This kind of gatekeeping by professionals is a concern that has been identified in the literature (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1997). It is also likely that this process may have

[2] Two interviews were not used, due to language barriers and one because the participant declined to take part in the study.

unintentionally silenced some people simply because they were not invited to be interviewed. Krause (2017) discusses this issue in the context of fieldwork where leaders or heads of households are more often interviewed than others in the community. The issue he identifies is that using this way of sampling, only certain types of voices are heard.

An additional tension in the project is the question of homogeneity. Sigona (2014) discusses the problematic assumptions about the concept that there exists 'a refugee voice' and thus refugees can be considered a homogenous group. Malkki (1997) argues that representations of refugees which abstracts them from their specific political, historical & cultural milieus silences them. Certainly the people I interviewed had varied early histories and reasons for seeking asylum, they were born in different parts of the world and had spent differing amounts of time there before having to leave and come to the UK; their families appeared to represent a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds. Thus, while the sample was homogenous in that they were all refugees, had all gone through the UK asylum process and been given the right to remain in the UK beyond this there was undoubted heterogeneity.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis & Language Limitations

An exclusion criterion of the study was a need for an interpreter for the interview, thus all interviewees were required to be sufficiently fluent to conduct the interview in English. This requirement meant non-English speakers were excluded due to the research design. The rationale for this was that if interpreters were used it could not be guaranteed that the interpretations were the exact words of the participant, and thus compromised analysis of the text following IPA procedures.

In the academic literature there is dispute about whether the use of interpreters negatively impacts the validity of the research irrespective of method. Almalik, Kiger and Tucker (2010) discuss the points in the process where threats to validity occur through the use of interpreters; one is at the point of interpreting the English interviewer's question into the participant's native language, and another is in the interpretation of the answer back into English. Additionally, through the inclusion of an interpreter the components of the interview change as the interpreter has an active role in the data collected (Temple & Edwards, 2002). This is crucial when considering the use of IPA since the method is concerned with "giving voice" (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) but when interpreters are used, it becomes less clear whose voice it is. Tribe (1999) gives the example that there are no straightforward ways to ask a person if they feel depressed in Turkish. As one participant in this study noted when discussing his own experiences of having his reason for claiming asylum translated, a mistranslation of one word changed the whole meaning.

> *In my interview as well, the, one or may be two of them, translators that work with my solicitors they don't have enough may be English to explain in [language] they cannot translate it. This is where, in some way, I agree with the Home Office why my case be refused, because what I said and what they translated, words are so similar, but it doesn't complete the meaning…*
>
> P7 11/257-260

Whilst there are suggested strategies for checking the validity of interpreted interviews, such as getting a second interpreter to verify the accuracy of the tape

recording of the first interpreter's interpretation in the interview (Murray & Wynne, 2001), these would have been outside the financial limitations of the research.

Even if the interviews had been conducted with an interviewer who was able to speak the interviewee's preferred language, there would still have been a point where the interviews had to be translated into English. It is the language the thesis had to be written in, and English is the 'lingua-franca' of research and so any paper arising from the study would almost certainly be written in English also. Therefore interviews, irrespective of the language they are conducted in, at some point are usually transformed from "a life-as-told from a source" to a target language: to a "life-as-told-as-translated" and then to a "life-as-interpreted-from-translation." (Santos, Black & Sandelowski, 2015 p. 135). It would seem that there is a risk with qualitative research that when the research is not in the primary language of the interviewer, the interviewee or both there is a risk of loss of meaning due to the challenges presented by language transfer and interpretation/translation.

Participants in my study expressed frustration at times that they did not have the exact words to say what they wanted to express. I also noticed that participants who had learnt English after they had decided to seek refugee status in the UK seldom used metaphor in their interviews, perhaps indicating less access to the nuance of the language. However, it seems that even had the interviews been conducted in the first language, metaphor often does not translate accurately, and so nuance can still be missed (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010). This presents a conundrum for research, the primacy of English in academia means that research with those who are not fluent may not fully convey their meaning, but if the research is written and published in another language the potential reach for the outcomes is limited.

Addressing the Needs of Participants and Value of the Research

As discussed previously there can be risks for refugees who participate in academic research and these risks should be appropriately considered. One reason for considering refugees to be a particularly vulnerable group is that they have experienced trauma and discussing this can result in further trauma. This position has been contested and it has been argued that some participants welcome the opportunity to share their experiences with a researcher who is unlikely to judge or condemn them; that being able to give testimony about the past can be experienced as therapeutic, (Thompson, 1995). Therefore, it has been argued that the risk of potentially causing emotional distress should not preclude discussion of sensitive topics. However, it is important as a way to try to offset these risks, to properly address the needs and concerns of the population studied (Mackenzie, McDowell & Pittaway, 2007; Pittway et al., 2010).

Those I interviewed wanted the system to be improved, so that future applicants did not have to suffer as they had. As Participant 6 stated:

> *I just wish there's a way, that I could do something, or maybe I don't know form a group or I don't know, protest, or something, you know. I would happily do it to be honest, because to save other people from going through what I went through. Maybe what I went through is even.. because I always say this to myself" you think you are going through worse, when someone else shares their experience with you, you will be wow my situation is even better. Someone is even going through the darkest of all times with immigration".* P6, 18/467-473

A stated aim of this research is that it contributes to a fairer system where decisions are made on the evidence of human behaviour. But the use of small sample sizes, as is the case for most qualitative work, has been used as a means for discrediting any implications of such studies within the Home Office (Mayblin, 2019). Qualitative research is frequently seen as 'not representative' and therefore dismissible; by adhering to this narrow positivism, the preferred status quo in which the Home Office system operates can be upheld and continue. This attitude towards the validity of qualitative evidence is not limited to the Home Office. Psychological research in the UK still holds quantitative research based on the medical model of large samples statistically evaluated, as the 'gold standard' (cochrane.org). Yet as Denzin states "ways of knowing are always already partial, moral and political" (Denzin, 2009 p. 154). Thus, when considering what counts as research evidence, one must also question who has the power to control what counts as evidence (Larner, 2004). Academic research by virtue of the structures it operates in, often privileges the views of more powerful and dominant voices, irrespective of the method. Methods which are considered better quality evidence can remove agency and power from the participant, with forced choice questions that meet the needs of the researcher but leave no space to include the priorities of the participants. Thus, the use of qualitative methods with more open interview formats means that the interest of the participants is more likely to be promoted and that the research will highlight what is important to them. Yet because qualitative research is viewed as being less rigorous and less generalisable, there is a tendency for the findings to be more easily dismissed as specific to a limited group and not truly representative. So, whilst following a semi-structured interview format meant that the concerns of the

participants were voiced, the use of qualitative methods may mean, in a replaying of the observation in the participants interviews, that these concerns are not heard.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 15091/001

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Asylum Seekers' Narrative Dilemmas

Department: Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology

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Name of the Researcher: Rebecca Chaffelson
Name of the Principal Researcher: Henry Clements

If participants wish to contact Rebecca Chaffelson they can do so via [Charity] by speaking to [Name], the research co-ordinator. [Name] can be contacted either in person or by telephoning the [Charity] on [Telephone number] We have done this so that there is nothing with participants names on that link them to the project, to fully protect anonymity.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide to take part in this study it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. I can be contacted via [Name] if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Please take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Purpose of the study

Research shows that the narratives of those seeking asylum may be influenced by various psychological and cultural factors, which can lead to inconsistency and make it difficult to talk about what they have experienced. However, there is little research which addresses asylum seekers' experiences of telling their story or why they chose to present their experiences in the way that they did. This project seeks to gain a fuller understanding of how people choose to present their story.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part and you can also withdraw up to one month after completion of interview without giving a reason and without any negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw please speak to **[Name] at [Charity]** quoting the reference number at the top of the page. She will contact me (Rebecca Chaffelson) and I will withdraw your data from the project. We have designed withdrawal in this way so that there is nothing with your name linking you to the project to fully protect your anonymity.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in the project you will be interviewed by me (Rebecca Chaffelson) at [Charity]. Interviews are expected to last between 60-90minutes. In the interview you will be asked about your experiences of talking to the Home Office about why you were seeking asylum and about dilemmas you faced when explaining these experiences.

The discussion will be **audio recorded** and transcribed. Recordings *will be identified only by a code and they will not be used or made available for any purpose other than the research project.* Your anonymity will be protected as only the participant code will be used to identify the transcript. Your name will not be included anywhere in the transcript. I may quote you directly in the project write up. If this is done your anonymity will be preserved.

All recordings will be held on an encrypted password-protected USB stick and will be transcribed from this encrypted memory stick directly on to a separate encrypted

memory stick as soon as possible after the interview. The recording of each interview will be destroyed as soon as the

interview has been transcribed. In the unlikely event that you disclose identifying or potentially identifying information in the interview, this identifying or potentially identifying information will so far as possible be removed at the time of transcription. As a further precaution the encrypted memory sticks will be stored in a locked box when not in use and only I will have the key to this box. The transcriptions will be kept secure and will not be retained any longer than is necessary to fulfil the needs of the project. Transcriptions will be destroyed once all the data that will be used has been written up.

You will be reimbursed for your travel to and from [Charity] for the interview up to a maximum of £20.

Are there possible disadvantages and/or risks in taking part?

You may find aspects of this interview distressing as I'll be asking for your experiences of talking about your reasons for seeking asylum. You do not have to tell me about anything that happened to you, but I will be asking about what it was like to talk about these things. I will prepare you before any potentially distressing questions and remind you that you have control over the length and content of the interview. We will make an agreement beforehand about what you would like me to do if you become distressed.

We hope that you feel you can speak freely in the interview but acknowledge for some this may mean disclosing that you had to alter the narrative that you presented to the Home Office in some way, which potentially poses a risk to your leave to remain. To protect you from this risk we have put several safeguards in place to ensure that your identity is not known to the interviewer or the research team. Therefore, the chance of information you give to the interviewer being linked back to you has been minimised. This has been done through the following: use of oral consent, participants being given

a code and a point of contact at HBF, so the researcher has no email or phone contact information of participants, destroying of audio recordings once transcribed and anonymising all transcriptions.

Whilst the interviewer and research team will at no point know your identity the risk procedures of [Charity] for the protection of you and others will still be followed.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is a large body of research about people who seek asylum in the UK, but little which gives the asylum seekers themselves a chance to describe their experiences, and the narrative dilemmas they faced at the asylum interview. The purpose of the project is to gain your perspective on the process, so we can better understand the decisions people feel they must make. This in turn should contribute to a fuller understanding of people's experience at the asylum interview and should contribute to helping future decisions by the Home Office and courts to be better informed and fair.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint, please contact Henry Clements (the Principal Investigator for the study) at henry.clements@ucl.ac.uk. If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee at ethics@ucl.ac.uk. If something happens to you during or following your participation in the project that you think might be linked to taking part, please contact the Principal Investigator. If you need to contact either Henry Clements or the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee we recommend that you ask [Name] to forward your complaint on your behalf with your participant code so that nobody at UCL has an email from you with an email address which could be used to identify you and your identity remains anonymous.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All data will be identified only by a code, with all information kept on encrypted memory sticks which will be stored in a locked box when not in use to which only Rebecca Chaffelson will have the key. As oral instead of written consent is being obtained, there will be no written records with your name linking you to the research.

Limits to confidentiality

Although everything you say will be kept confidential and anonymised so far as possible, if I have concerns that you are a risk to yourself or others, then I might have to break confidentiality and let

relevant others know. I would inform you if I am going to do this, unless I believed it would increase the risk. In the event of risk to yourself or any other person then the risk procedures at [Charity] will be followed.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The write up of this project will be part of my thesis and published online. The project may be published in an academic journal. You will not be identifiable in any way from the write up of the project. If at any stage you wish to receive further information about this research project, or you have any questions or concerns please to not hesitate to contact [Name] who will arrange a time I can speak to you over the phone or in person at [Charity].

Local Data Protection Privacy Notice

This notice supplements UCL's general privacy notice which is available at: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/legal-services/privacy/general-privacy-notice

Personal data will not be sought in this research. As stated above, in the unlikely event that you disclose identifying or potentially identifying information which constitutes personal data in your interview, this identifying or potentially identifying information will so far as possible be removed at the time of transcription.

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). UCL has appointed a Data Protection Officer who has oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data. If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to discuss your rights in relation to personal data, please contact the UCL Data Protection Officer at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. UCL can also be contacted by telephoning +44 (0)20 7679 2000 or by writing to: University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT. We recommend that if you need to

contact the UCL Data Protection Officer then you ask [Name] at [Charity] to contact the Officer on your behalf with your participant code so that your identity remains anonymous.

Personal data, or personal information, means any information about an individual from which that person can be identified. It does not include data where an individual's identity has been removed

(anonymous data). In this study, the lawful basis for processing any personal data is consent and/or performance of a task in the public interest. However, personal data will not be sought in this study and if disclosed will be removed so far as possible at the time of transcription.

Special category personal data means any personal data that reveal racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health (the physical or mental), sex life or sexual orientation, genetic or biometric data. In this study, the lawful basis for processing any special category personal data is for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes. However, special category personal data will not be sought in this study and if disclosed will be removed so far as possible at the time of transcription.

As stated above, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to request that all your data are immediately destroyed. The retention periods for data have been set out above.

Complaints

If you wish to complain about our use of personal data, please send an email with the details of your complaint to the UCL Data Protection Officer so that they can look into the issue and respond to you. Their email address is data-protection@ucl.ac.uk. Again, we recommend that if you need to contact the UCL Data Protection Officer then you ask [Name] at [Charity] to contact the Officer on your behalf with your participant code so that nobody at UCL has an email from you with an email address which could be used to identify you and your identity remains anonymous.

You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) (the UK data protection regulator). For further information on your rights and how to complain to the ICO, please refer to the ICO website: https://ico.org.uk/

Ethical review of the study

The project has received ethical approval from the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC). Project ID 15091/001

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research study.

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval Letter

28th May 2019

Dr Henry Clements
Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology
UCL

Dear Dr Clements

Notification of Ethics Approval with Provisos
Project ID/Title: 15091/001: Asylum seekers narrative dilemmas: an interpretative phenomenological analysis study

I am pleased to confirm in my capacity as Joint Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) that your study has been ethically approved by the UCL REC until **1st June 2020.**

Ethical approval is subject to the following conditions:

Notification of Amendments to the Research
You must seek Chair's approval for proposed amendments (to include extensions to the duration of the project) to the research for which this approval has been given. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing an 'Amendment Approval Request Form'
http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/responsibilities.php

Adverse Event Reporting – Serious and Non-Serious
It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. The Ethics Committee

should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator (ethics@ucl.ac.uk) immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse incident is unexpected and serious, the Joint Chairs will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. For non-serious adverse events the Joint Chairs of the Ethics Committee should again be notified via the Ethics Committee Administrator within ten days of the incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol. The Joint Chairs will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

Final Report

At the end of the data collection element of your research we ask that you submit a very brief report (1-2 paragraphs will suffice) which includes in particular issues relating to the ethical implications of the research i.e. issues obtaining consent, participants withdrawing from the research, confidentiality, protection of participants from physical and mental harm etc.

Office of the Vice Provost Research, 2 Taviton Street
University College London
Tel: +44
(0)20
7679
8717
Email:
ethics@u
cl.ac.uk
http://ethics.grad.ucl.ac.uk/

In addition, please:

- ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in UCL's Code of Conduct for Research: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/file/579
- note that you are required to adhere to all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed as part of your application. This will be expected even after completion of the study.

With best wishes for the research.

Yours sincerely

Professor Michael Heinrich
Joint Chair, UCL Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Rebecca Chaffelson

Appendix 3A: Oral Consent Script

ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Hello again, I'm Rebecca Chaffelson from UCL. Thank you for considering taking part in this research. I am in the Research Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology and this research is part of my Clinical Psychology Doctorate training.

I am the researcher for this study, I can be contacted via [Name] here at the [Charity]. We have done this so there is no email chain linking you to the study to ensure your anonymity is protected.

To remind you, the Title of Study is 'Asylum Seekers Narrative Dilemmas: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Study'.

Dr Henry Clements is the Principal Researcher his email address is in the Participant Information Sheet here, *(show Participant Information Sheet).*

The Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer data-protection@ucl.ac.uk is detailed here *(show Participant Information Sheet).*

Just to remind you, if you want to contact either of us then we recommend asking [Name] to do it on your behalf, with your participant code, so that your identity remains anonymous.

If you need this information and you do not have access to the Participant Information Sheet, [Name] at [Charity] can also provide a copy of the information sheet to you.

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 15091/001

It's important that I explain the project to you before you agree to take part. To recap, the aims of my project are:

- To understand the challenges you faced when talking to the Home Office about why you were seeking asylum and to understand these experiences better.
- To investigate any dilemmas that affected what you said when talking to the Home Office
- To investigate the decisions you made in how you presented your experiences to the Home Office.

I am going to go over the details and ask you to consent to each element of the study. Before we continue, I want to remind you that you do not have to consent to the study. If you do consent to the study, you can withdraw your consent up to one month after completion of the interview. If you decide not to consent to one part of the study, you may be deemed ineligible for the study. Are you still happy to continue? *[Await confirmation].*

Do you confirm that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for this study? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you agree you have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of you and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to your satisfaction? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you consent to take part in an individual interview? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you agree to your interview data being used for the purposes explained to you? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that any personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure you cannot be identified? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that your data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that it will not be possible to identify you in any publications? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that your information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to you should you become distressed during the course of the research? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that although everything you say will be kept confidential and anonymised, if I have concerns that there is a risk to yourself or others, then I might have to break confidentiality and let relevant others know. I would inform you if I am going to do this, unless I believed it would increase the risk. In the event of risk to yourself or any other person then the risk procedures at [Charity] will be followed *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand the indirect benefits of participating? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that you will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that you will be compensated for the cost of travel to this study even if you choose to withdraw? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you understand that the information you have submitted will be published as a report? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you wish to receive a copy of this report? *(Await response*)

Do you consent to your interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible following transcription *(Await confirmation*)

Do you confirm you are aware of who you should contact if you wish to lodge a complaint? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you have any questions about anything?

Are you still willing to take part? *(Await confirmation*)

Do you give your permission for me to re-contact you via [Name] to clarify

information?

[*Await confirmation]* So if you're happy with all of that, and have no more questions, let's start.

Appendix 3B: Oral Consent Participant Tick Box

This is a written copy of the oral consent script I will read to you. For each section you agree to orally please can you tick the corresponding box. Many thanks.

	Tick Box
I am going to go over the details and ask you to consent to each element of the study. Before we continue, I want to remind you that you do not have to consent to the study. If you do consent to the study, you can withdraw your consent up to one month after completion of the interview. If you decide not to consent to one part of the study you may be deemed ineligible for the study. Are you still happy to continue?	
Do you confirm that you have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study?	
Do you agree you have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of you and have had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to your satisfaction?	
Do you consent to take part in an individual interview?	
Do you agree to your interview data being used for the purposes explained to you?	
Do you understand that according to data protection legislation, 'public task' will be the lawful basis for processing?	
Do you understand that any personal information will remain confidential and that all efforts will be made to ensure you cannot be identified?	
Do you understand that your data gathered in this study will be stored anonymously and securely?	
Do you understand that it will not be possible to identify you in any publications?	
Do you understand that your information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes?	

Do you understand the potential risks of participating and the support that will be available to you should you become distressed during the course of the research?	
Do you understand that although everything you say will be kept confidential and anonymised, if I have concerns that there is a risk to yourself or others, then I might have to break confidentiality and let relevant others know. I would inform you if I am going to do this, unless I believed it would increase the risk. In the event of risk to yourself or any other person then the risk procedures at [Charity] will be followed.	
Do you understand the indirect benefits of participating?	
Do you understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher(s) undertaking this study?	
Do you understand that you will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future?	
Do you understand that you will be compensated for the cost of travel to this study even if you choose to withdraw?	
Do you understand that the information you have submitted will be published as a report?	
Do you wish to receive a copy of this report?	Y/N
Do you consent to your interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed as soon as possible following transcription?	
Do you confirm you are aware of who you should contact if you wish to lodge a complaint?	
Have any questions you have about the study been satisfactorily answered?	Y/N
Are you still willing to take part?	Y/N

Do you give your permission for me to re-contact you via [Name] to clarify information?	

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule

1) **In your own words, can you describe the process for seeking asylum in the UK?**

2) **How do you feel about the process of seeking asylum in the UK?**
   Prompts: some people feel unable to explain how their experiences how they want want/ some see as a chance to tell their story

3) **Who was the person who you had your main interview with? Can you tell me what you believed their role was?**

4) **Did you have a solicitor? (Yes/no) Can you tell me what you believed their role was?**

5) **When thinking about the asylum process in the UK what words would you use to describe your experience?**

6) **What did you think was expected of you when you were describing your experiences in the interview with the Home Office?**
   Prompts: What led you to believe that?

7) **Did this affect what you said?**

   Prompts: Would you have presented your experiences differently/Did you feel you had to explain things in a certain way?/Did what you say change over time?

8) **Did you feel you were able to talk about things in the way you wanted to?**

   Prompts: What affected that? /Why was that?/ What would you have done differently?

Topic: *Decisions taken when presenting account to decision makers*

9) **During your interview with the Home Office/ experience gaining asylum were there any dilemmas you faced in deciding what to say?**

   Prompts: Were there any things that you felt you could not tell them? If so, why?
   Did you change the details of anything you experienced? If so, why?
   How did this make you feel?
   Were you encouraged by anybody to tell your story differently to how you remembered it?
   How were you encouraged to change your story? How did this make you feel?

10) **How do you see yourself as a person?**
    Prompts: What words would you use to describe yourself/why these?

11) **Has the experience of seeking asylum in the UK made a difference to how you see yourself?**
    Prompts: In what way? How do you describe yourself now?

Appendix 5: Participant 8 Table of Themes

Superordinate Theme *Sub-Theme*	***Transcript***	**Page/ Lines**
Experiences of Support and Rejection		
The importance of empathy for maintaining hope	If I didn't find this [charity] I will give up. I don't have any hope. Why I have something like, because these people, the way they talk you, the way they chat with you and they will give you hope, a lot of hope. Even if you cry they will cry with you, that is why I like them. In this country [charity] is my family like thing they are my real family in this country. They are really nice and kindness and helpful. Because of them I have a paper, I am allowed to live in this country. But….many people, they do not have this help, they will give up.	16/473-478
No knowledge and understanding of the UK Ignored and left to suffer alone	Errrmmmm……. Ahhhh when I come this country, like me, like, when I come this country I been to police station, to ask asylum. Then when I got there I was looking for like …hostel errrr I ask them like …"camp?" we call camp you know like refugee camp. I was thinking they got refugee camp, that's why I asked them then when I ask them "refugee camp", there is not any camp, they say to me [ ] there is no camp…..they kick me out then I was looking for someone to help me. I don't even speak English at that that time, I was just walking on the road, and I saw police car, and I tried to stop, nobody listened to me, they just leave.	1/9-15
Callous Home Office whose sole purpose is to reject	Home Office, when you go to Home office, it's…they are many worker and they don't care about people, I don't think. The way I think, they don't care about people, about anything. They even want to win the case and just throw you out.	11/338-340
Rejected, Hopeless and Suicidal	I didn't find anyone, anyone who could help me, then I become angry. Who I am? Where I come from? What I am looking for? You ask yourself questions; what am I going to be like? what is my future? What is my future?...then you will be... you will get stress and hate yourself……that like it will make you angry, push you to hurting on yourself……..especially now when you give up. People they start drinking, when you drink a lot you lose yourself. Then that time, what is going to come later, may be you kill yourself when you drink a lot, you go to somewhere and err…….even if ….when you walk on the road, you don't care if car is coming or it is not, may be when you walk on bridge, that water, are you going to go in that water…..you don't care. You do whatever you want that time, because you give up, you don't care about anything.	19/560-568
Feeling the betrayal of having to fighting with a system that was supposed to help you	(big sigh) yeah when you think….when you come from there, you think maybe they will help me. You think "they gonna help me, I am sure they are going to help me" you say like this. When you come here *you will see* (slaps hand on table) *different, differently*. The way you was thinking is….. and when you see, it is different. It's totally different. You have to fight a lot.	16/464-467
Left helpless and hopeless because ignored	I lose that time……. You know that time…..I lose all hope. I didn't have any hope I didn't even know which was my country. I ran away from my country, I came and asked for asylum here, asylum, and nobody listened to me. I lose hope, I don't know what's my future….and….. I was helpless that time….	8/226-229
The voices of others are needed to get help because refugees are ignored	Someone has to help you. […] If you ask by yourself they don't give you answer or anything.	218-220

Superordinate Theme *Sub-Theme*	**Transcript**	**Page/ Lines**
Lost in (mis)translation		
No Power against the callous injustice	If they do something, anything you can't do, because they have power, they can do whatever they want. Home Office play like, whatever he wants	11/317-318
Being kicked about like a football	Yeah they don't give you anything like when they say…. They just……play….like football you know when they like, you have to go when they say to you go there. If I say no, they will kick me out, I have to go, I can do nothing	7/207-209
Dehumanised through control of resources	Every week they give up may be £30. I can't even cash out that money, every week I have to go shop and buy something. Then even like, which shop I use is Sainsbury, Tesco, is expensive shop. I can't even go to Lidl or Aldi something like that, I can't get from there nothing.	5/150-152
Rejected due to (mis)translation	when they ask me question and errr the translator errrr……. the guy who translate for me, when I say something, he say different thing, I don't know how he did explain to them like err yeah, then they refused me, then they kicked me out from the house,	1/29-32
Refused because fresh claim (not basis that claim was made)	I don't know, because the first time when you do interview, if they don't believe you they give you refuse, now my one there is not any reason, because I just did fresh claim that is why they give me refuse.	10/308-310

Superordinate Theme *Sub-Theme*	**Transcript**	**Page/ Lines**
Challenges to Narration		
Refusal based on bias and assumptions of meanings of people's behaviour	…I find someone in my errrrr …..community……they way, he been court, the way they give him, he been refused, he was shy, he was scared, when he speak to them, he hold his hand like this (covers his face with his hand) and he don't look at them. Like his face is look down, that is why they give him straight refusal.	14/427-430
Fear can change your answers	yeah, when you get scared, even when you speak something, when they ask you questions, even if you know that answer you will answer different thing maybe, because you scared. When you scared you don't know what you are going to answer.	14/421-423
Privileging of UK Cultural norms to determine truth	Even the way they look, even the way they see it, if someone speak the truth, you don't have to be shy, you don't have to be scared, you have to look face to face, that is the way they believe. Even I can't look straight on the face because this is my culture.	13/399-401
Scripted questions prevented being able to tell story as wanted	.... they didn't ask me that much questions. They just ask me 85 questions, "what is your name? what is your family name? when did you born? where did you come from? what is your city name?" They just ask, "one, two, three, four" they count like this. They didn't ask what I wanted	18/539-542
Accused by Home Office, helped by Judge	Home Office solicitor …..they asking many questions, like different, different questions. When you get wrong….like…..they will call you a liar, then. Errr, the judge is helpful, they will, they will look all corners, all corners….to help you. They are helpful	12/356-358
Listening judge - hear the WHOLE story	When you go to judge…..they will *hear properly* everything, like your story from the bottom. They will read everything, they will…..like talk to you, and when they talk to you, they know what is….like your problem. If you really have a problem, or you don't ...	12/347-350

Appendix 6: The Master Table of Themes

1: Confronted by a Hostile System

1.1. Invariable Rejection

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Inevitability of being turned down	Whatever, whatever you tell Home Office they turn you down, whatever, whatever, they turn you down, all they know is turning down (10/274-275)
Participant 4	Intended disbelief from Home Office	...they have to say no to you...erm which is obvious, which is not a problem, they can say no, they want to not believe you (14/406)
Participant 6	Home Office tries to Justify the "No"	So, they just want that mistake to come from you, for them to justify that "No" that they are going to give you. To me the Home Office, they are always, from the moment you put in an application, to be honest, the answer is always "no" …. with them. They hardly ever give a yes. (24/588-590)
Participant 7	No understanding, just want to reject	To apply is easy, but to get through the progress, the Home Office I think, they are mostly without understanding. They try to push to send people back to their country. (1/4-6)
Participant 8	Ignored and left to suffer alone	I ask them (police) "refugee camp", there is not any camp, they say to me […] there is no camp…..they kick me out then I was looking for someone to help me. I don't even speak English at that time, I was just walking on the road, and I saw police car, and I tried to stop, nobody listened to me, they just leave. (1/9-15)
Participant 9	Unwanted and misunderstood	…..Because *they don't want people in this country*…… they just think ah maybe you just want to be there. Who wants to be there? I cannot leave my family to be here from nowhere and I don't know the language, and I don't understand anything (6/143-145)

Participant 10	Trying to get you to leave	They were looking for my shortcomings, or me saying things that would let them take me back home (7/183-184)

1.2 Assumed as a Liar

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 3	Omission assumed to be due to intentional deception	The voodoo, yeah. So, yeah, so I couldn't say all. So but that was why the Home Office first of all refused me my paper, saying that ….."why did I only mention the prostitution? why didn't I mention the forced labour?" (6/188-190)
Participant 4	Positioned as a liar with little recourse to action	... you're not allowed to say that "no I didn't lie" or "no I'm not a liar" so its paper sent to you and it's a long process to tell people "no, I'm not a liar" that's …the most painful thing. (18/564-566)
Participant 6	Assumptions that the claim is false prevents proper assessment of the person	... it's like people are not given the chance. And they don't do proper investigation to know, "could it be true? could this person be actually telling the truth?" you know, watch the person, if you're going to send the person for I don't know like erm for counselling, or therapy to see… if they are lying, or a lie detector or whatever, do it if you have to do it but don't just come back and say "this person is lying" because you feel the story is not consistent (24/594-599)
Participant 7	Not following the correct process is the same as a lie	They did in the court, but the judge and the Home Office officers they didn't ask anything about…. my nationality, who I am, through the interpreter, and the decision I see, they don't believe me who I […] "I don't believe you", that is not a good reason … to change people's life. (2/37-44)
Participant 8	Accused by home office	Home Office solicitor …..they asking many questions, like different, different questions. When you get wrong….like…..they will call you a liar, then. (12/356-357)
Participant 9	Reality questioned	If you say something, then they say, I don't even think that is true, and they say "I don't even think you live there or stayed there" (1/227-228)
Participant 10	Home office trying to manipulate mistakes when speaking	When they are asking these questions in twenty different ways... it didn't make sense. They were just trying to get me to say something different. To be able to say "you said this here, and you said something different, now you are contradicting". (8/216-118)

1.3 In a War

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Giants unnecessarily parading power over women	if you see them, if they come to deport people it will be as though they are going to war. You will see those giant guys, they will be giants! They will be very giant and tall, just to come and pack a woman. (11/307-309)
Participant 4	The endless fight for understanding	So, you become angry, you know, you become aggressive, you become angry because you know something is right that another is denying,[...] you …leave everything and you feel like I'm going to fight, I'm going to do this, this, this then it makes you angry, upset, aggressive and then frustrated. You know I'm fighting so much and I'm doing all those things, but you know they don't understand. (3/61-71)
Participant 6	We are going to war	I started praying more. So I sort of like, formed a group where we started praying at night, coz I was telling them, I said "listen, you are more or less here to fight a war" you know, you don't want to go back, and I said to them "I don't know about you, but I don't want to go back to [country] and I believe that with God all things are possible." (5/106-109)
Participant 6	Years of fight	.... and we adjourned it. I was upset in my heart, I won't lie, I was like "God this is years and years of fight again" you know… (13/329-330)
Participant 8	Others are needed	Because they are really, really hard…Home Office…you can't fight with Home Office…. alone. (7/215-216)
Participant 10	A battlefront	It was a horrible experience, it was a *battlefront*….it was a battlefront. When... they wouldn't allow you to put across to anybody because they took the phone off you. (3/65-66)

1.4 Feeling Betrayed

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Not helped by those who said they would	you know that your rights are denied and… you feel helpless because they are the people... who are supposed to support you or help you…. (3/63-64)
Participant 7	Left disillusioned and mistrustful	then when I am refused three times, err, errrr……..they um stop my…..er… support, accommodation and financially. They don't force you to go back, but they say you are not right to stay here. That point, I think, is breaking down for the people, they lose their trust, er…. in this country, because when they do their application in this country, they trust them to get help. (4/74-77)
Participant 8	Feeling the betrayal of having to fighting with a system that was supposed to help you	(big sigh) yeah when you think….when you come from there, you think maybe they will help me. You think "they gonna help me, I am sure they are going to help me" you say like this. When you come here *you will see* (slaps hand on table) *different, differently*. The way you was thinking is ….. and when you see, it is different. It's totally different. You have to fight a lot. (16/464-467)
Participant 10	Extremely deflating. Just as reaching sort after goal, told it is unattainable	(Big sigh) it's really hard to describe. It was like someone going to heaven, getting to the gateway of heaven, knocking and being sent back. That is how bad it was. (7/169-170)

2: Beliefs about Professionals

2.1 Unprepared & Ignorant

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Unprepared barrister	So when I went to the court, my barrister… he just (laughs), I don't think he studied my case or anything and he prepared himself for completely different stuff. (6/174-175)
Participant 4	Incorrect assumptions about who refugees can be	they think Asylum is, you run away from your country, and running from war or you have to be a trafficking victim. It's not asylum, asylum is far bigger than that, there is political asylum, religious, descrim, […] Why would I want this sort of shitty life? (8/225-232)
Participant 4	Baseless authority of ignorant experts	I don't so think in the Home Office….have some experts sitting with you and they can help, like if I'm lying, the expert tells me, you're not telling, telling the truth, I'll accept that because he's expert, he's from my country, but the person who doesn't even know what [reason for seeking Asylum] is, is telling me that I'm lying, that is really, really upsetting and I'm like, "dude, you know you're from [country A] and I'm from [country B] you don't even know what I am talking about" (9/246-255)
Participant 7	What is "known" by the home office is not the "truth"	Home Office the people who they put on the cases, what they know, is different to how we live. (1/22-23)
Participant 9	The news and reality are not the same	Yes so if they ask me questions that they know, and then they say "we don't think it was like that", then it's…. they say, they say but erm, erm, "the news say it's five people and you say it's hundred" (raising voice) *that is politics* so why you asking? *That* is the news saying. I'm telling you what I've seen, so…..so then….you know. If they say "the news say they killed five people" (raising voice) *I've* seen more than five people! So why do you want me to believe five? (6/155-159)
Participant 9	Incompetent and senseless decisions	Yeah, I feel the Home office didn't do their jobs, they didn't do it right. They were supposed to ask me questions about my asylum and what they ask I have answered for that. So there was no point for saying "oh your asylum has been refused". And the……argument they gave was not…….not making sense.[...] So they knew about……..so when I was coming, the Home Office are supposed to read and be prepared, *do their research*, I don't know what and before asking me question (7/185-194)

2.2 Human Rights are Not Prioritised

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 3	Frustration that home offices process takes precedence over any crime perpetrated against the applicant	So…. when the police found that, that I was working in one agency…you know that I reported my case to them. So they now decided to check, so they now checking on me! I was not happy with them, I said "why?", I explained to you why I came to the country. I came to report him, the man, my uncle who, who assaulted me in your country. So now you are the one now, looking for *me*, like trying to know if I work or not… (9/274-278)
Participant 4	Law firm benefits financially from cases rejection	It's not about the solicitor, it's the law firm they do like that. And with my research and with my barrister and you know, I ask and they said "it's true, we don't get money until we go to the court". So no matter how strong, how strong your case is ummm the solicitors will make sure it gets rejected. (6/161-164)
Participant 6	Intentional manipulation to create their desired outcome	...it was the deportation… paper. I was like, I pushed it away, I said "No! No! I'm not signing it, you want, you want to deport me! You are not going to deport me from this country, no! no! no!" and everything. And the lady just said[...] "anyways, fine, you don't sign it, we have your signature, we are just going to copy it and put it on the papers'". She said that, I'm not even joking [...] And I said, because I was crying, and I said "but that's illegal you cannot copy my…. signature" she said "We have got it anyways, we'll do that, seeing as you don't want to sign it". So, I think they have a cunning way of getting people to sign it. So may be an illiterate hearing that would say "ok let me just sign it, it's fine" and they sign it. They are cunning. (30-31/752-765)
Participant 7	Money is prioritised over justice	... (Solicitors), they don't want to do much for you. They work for the company, most of them don't want to work for your problems[...] Some people I know, they got money, they got private solicitors and they got their whole application less than a year, even with court stuff. When you go private, they go quickly because they get early their money. (14/325-329)
Participant 8	Refused because fresh claim (not basis that claim was made)	I don't know, because the first time when you do interview, if they don't believe you they give you refuse. Now my one there is not any reason, because I just did fresh claim that is why they give me refuse. (10/308-310)

2.3 Home Office Interviewers as Hostile Actors

2.3.1 Cruel Interrogators

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Intentionally dehumanised	They are very logical questions, but they don't want to ask those they want to ask those stupid questions, which makes you feel bad, which makes you feel stupid, which makes you feel like a slave. (14/435-436)
Participant 6	Sadistic replaying of torture	I can remember my interview, eh pfff, like, the questions I was asked. You know when I said, someone told you ok yes, I was raped, yeah, you are asking me "how were you raped, was he on the floor, was he on the bed, was he on top of you, was it…..?" so these questions are like torturing. (16-17/402-405)
Participant 9	Made to feel stupid	Because they made me feel stupid……when I'm not. I'm just telling what happened. (6/164)
Participant 10	Powerless, stigmatized and dehumanized	When I answered all those questions it felt like a tiger fighting a rat and you can imagine how big and powerful the tiger was to the rat. (1/14-15)

2.3.2 Malignant Operators

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Misery loves company	…and I think they can make you because they are already themselves having a miserable life, what can you expect from them, they are going to make you feel miserable, they are gonna make you feel bad about yourself…and they are gonna make you feel like a piece of shit because they themselves are unfortunately. (15/470-473)
Participant 6	No consequences for home office dehumanization	it's more or less like they are taking out their frustration, […] So they just take it out on us though "these people are trash". That is how I felt at that time to be honest, "they are trash, they don't even have rights, let's just treat them" that is how I felt, "let's just dump it on them, they don't even have a voice to speak, they won't speak" because they see us as, they will be mute, they won't say anything. So they feel they can do a lot and get away with it. (27/666-673)
Participant 10	The mistreatment experienced is intentional due to the constitution of the workers	The feeling I had right from the onset and is still the feeling I have now and then. I would say they are super wicked. (13/344-345)

2.3.3 Intentionally Domineering

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Intended domination	...in Home Office, they... make sure…. that you know "we are the boss" (5/130-131)
Participant 6	Overuse of power with disregard for the negative impact on the claimant	I just feel that sometimes some of the immigration officers they use their power, they overuse their power. I know they have a duty, you know, I know everybody wants to deliver, they want to, may be they are doing for promotion, they think may be if I do my job properly if I make sure maybe this individual is probably sent back , or if I grill this person very well, my …..boss or all may be the boss will appraise them for that, or a promotion or what not. I just feel you are dealing with people[...] That person could have been like, the nuts could have fallen off, you know, you don't know. So, your pushing, your pushing, your pushing, and you're not thinking of how it's affecting that individual. (17-18/420-429)
Participant 9	Hostile environment Intentionally Created	No……but I think it is part of their job, they don't want to be easy, they don't want to just say "yeah"…. because they don't believe, no one go there (Home Office) and say "oh it's fine". (9/238-239)
Participant 10	Problem is both at systemic and individual level. Individuals brutally parade their power over claimants	Ah erm I would say sometimes they are not doing what they are meant to be doing and sometimes they are doing what they are meant to be doing, but I think that it's part of the rule of the country, I want to believe that. They themselves, they are in the system, but they also try to make it tougher. I could liken it to…. their staff being given a rod, they can use the rod any way they want to use it, and they like I can use the rod to smack anybody, I can use the rod to destroy things, I can use it to scatter things. They are just making use of it, because they have that rod. Because when you look at it, they make mistakes, they want to arrest people, they arrest someone else, to me it's being overzealous about the whole thing. (13/349-356)

2.4 Invaluable Supporters

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	The support of others as saving self	They always monitor me, ah I'm really happy, I'm really happy. This Charity does not let me be insane, I would have been insane by now if not for them coming into my life (20/557-558)
Participant 3	The value of feeling cared for and safe	I have found family in United Kingdom who cares about me. So with that alone it makes me feel happy, and there is joy in my heart, when I know that I can walk to the police today and say, "oh look, I need help". I can even go to the Home Office and say "oh look at what I need" as a refugee or whatever so many helps. I can come to this place and say `I need help". Nobody will molest me, nobody will, will, will, will, will refuse me, they will surely help. Even if their office don't have the support they can direct me to where I can find support. Yeah (13/399-405)
Participant 6	Sharing knowledge making it possible to navigate the asylum process	…one of the immigration officers came to me and gave me a paper and said, no he asked me first he said "do you have a solicitor or a lawyer?[...] whatever you discuss with them stays confidential and everything" and I was like "are you sure?" "yes" and that day was like an immigration official officer helping me a little, I was like that is God, that is only God (5/111-119)
Participant 6	Without solicitor deportation likely	So, I got released obviously and got back home and everything, and started fighting again, fighting. I remember [Solicitor Name] now stepping in very well. He now put in my... okay no we had already put in obviously the asylum… application, but he just put in more and more and more evidence, he was doing research he worked tirelessly, he tried, no lies he, because of that man, like obviously, I'm still here, you know... today. (8/197-201)
Participant 8	The value of empathy & family	If I didn't find this [charity] I will give up. I don't have any hope. Why I have something like, because these people, the way they talk you, the way they chat with you and they will give you hope, a lot of hope. Even if you cry, they will cry with you, that is why I like them. In this country [charity] is my family like thing they are my real family in this country. They are really nice and kindness and helpful. Because of them I have a paper, I am allowed to live in this country. But…. many people, they do not have this help, they will give up. (16/473-478)
Participant 9	Helpful solicitor	The solicitor, what did it feel they were trying to do? Participant9: They were helpful (3/71-72)
Participant 10	Listened in detail	Yes she (The Solicitor) was very awesome. She was not like a tiger trying to devour me. She was very calm and listened in detail to everything I had to say. (10/267-268)

3. Experiences of Interviews

3.1 Challenges to Telling One's Story

3.1.1Lack of Knowledge about what is relevant

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	No knowledge - of basis on which asylum could be claimed	When I have my main [interview], I don't know where I am going to. So, I don't know, so I just did the interview. Even I don't know the situation I am in when I did the interview, because I've been facing many problems by then. (14/376-378)
Participant 3	No knowledge of law and so the risk of disclosure felt too great	The forced labour I never knew it was against the law in the United Kingdom. So that is why a lot of things I explained to Home Office about my asylum situation was not all that I could be able to say out because I was under oath, a strong oath. (6/185-187)
Participant 10	No knowledge of the process	I will start from when I was arrested, I was arrested on [date], I had been in the country long before but I didn't know how to go about legalising my stay. (1/3-4)

3.1.2 Psychological Barriers

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Feels shame about events that happened and therefore reluctant to report them	I don't know what to do, I don't know where to go, I don't know who to report to. All I know is (pause) when I escaped, I just want to keep everything in me […] I don't discuss it with anybody because I believe it's shame to me (16/448-451)
Participant 3	Feelings of shame makes speaking about experiences very painful	..., I feel so bad about it when I was explaining to them, because it was so difficult, so difficult for me to open my mouth to tell them in that first interview. Everything I was saying, it makes me feel ashamed of myself. (11/354-363)
Participant 3	Fear of others impedes immediate disclosure	the therapist wrote again to them after the refusal. A situation where somebody has been *under control* for many years, it takes a while for everything to come out, at the same time. [...] I didn't lie to you. I said the truth, I didn't say it before, because I was under oath, I was under oath, I was afraid. (7/196-200)
Participant 8	Fear can affect your answers	yeah, when you get scared, even when you speak something, when they ask you questions, even if you know that answer you will answer different thing maybe, because you scared. When you scared you don't know what you are going to answer. (14/421-423)
Participant 6	Not able to speak of the trauma, overtaken by emotion	My emotions even spoke for me, because I couldn't even talk, broke down […]. I think I got it out more when I had counselling and therapy here. It was difficult. That was another difficult time of my life. (25/617-621)
Participant 4	Awfulness of talking about trauma on Home	So they are asking something from you, what happened in the past, and your telling, and you're in that zone and they want you to be like "no, no break down, no just... go slow" "no what did you say?" and you feel like "oh my god, I just don't want to tell this part" (4/95-98)

	Office Interviewers' terms	
Participant 9	Being forced to talk before being ready	Because…. I think it, it was…..I needed a bit more time before the interview……I was not ready….. (6/139)

3.1.3 External Impact over the Narrative

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Coerced into silence	the tone they use of their voice, it's like it changes in between the, you know, … the interview. [...] so it's like yeah (claps), she have this power… you know and it makes you think like….. and it stops you to tell the very important points, which... that's is why you were telling that story. (15/448-453)
Participant 7	Meaning lost in (mis)translation	In my interview as well, the …one or may be two of them, translators that work with my solicitors they don't have enough may be English to explain in [language] they cannot translate it. This is where, in some way, I agree with the Home Office why my case be refused, because what I said and what they translated, words are so similar, but it doesn't complete the meaning. (11/257-260)
Participant 8	Rejected due to (mis)translation	when they ask me question and err the translator err …. the guy who translate for me, when I say something, he say different thing, I don't know how he did explain to them like err yeah, then they refused me, then they kicked me out from the house (1/29-32)
Participant 8	Closed questions prevented being able to tell story as wanted	.... they didn't ask me that much questions. They just ask me 85 questions, "what is your name? what is your family name? when did you born? where did you come from? what is your city name?" They just ask, "one, two, three, four" they count like this. They didn't ask what I wanted (18/539-542)
Participant 10	Without strength you will be confused into saying what they want	Sometimes when we go for such interview…. they tried…..there are things you've said before, but they will try to put words into your mouth, in order for them to use against you. If you are not strong and you are not accurate enough you will end up saying what you are not even meant to be saying. (2/45-48)

3.2 Creating the Right Environment

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Calmed by the interviewer	Yeah the lady was nice, because the way she see me that day (pause) I started crying and she now said come, she will leave me for some minutes, she give me tissue, she always calm me down, she always calm me down, the lady that did the interview for me (pause) she's a very responsible lady, so she's, she's very good. Though I know she's not the one to decide my case, but she just come for the interview, but the way she see me doing, she will calm me down, she will calm me down, she calm me down… she calmed me down, she's good. (9/237-242)
Participant 3	Needs to support overcome fear and talk about all that had happened	so they… a woman who was in charge of the therapist was telling me, "he only did it to make me afraid, not to put him in trouble, so don't worry about it."[…] It was a difficult thing, but I had to. I had to say everything, the ones that I can remember, and the ones I cannot remember, I was able to say it (10/299-306)
Participant 4	Judge accepts distressing narrative on interviewee terms	the judge is saying if you cry you won't like, and I say "I'm gonna cry anyways, you come today I'm gonna cry, you come tomorrow I'm gonna cry, this is going to make me cry what do you want me to do?" and he said "okay, if you're okay with that, we're okay" (12/368-371)
Participant 6	Interviewing without being unnecessarily intrusive	I know, but there's some of them that are nice as well. That you meet and you'll be shocked, you'll be like are you sure this is an immigration officer? Like, really? You know? They don't overpower you, they don't push, they don't, they are not intrusive, they are not like, you know, they want to know every detail and everything. Yeah, they know what's happened already, they just want to, you know……. they will know how to word it into the system or what not. (27/655-662)
Participant 8	Listening judge - hear the whole story	When you go to judge…..they will *hear properly* everything, like your story from the bottom. They will read everything, they will…..like talk to you, and when they talk to you, they know what is…. like your problem. If you really have a problem, or you don't … (12/347-350)
Participant 9	Reasonable requests responded to	Yeah because it was different when I went to court, because when I went to court, I had female judge I had female solicitor…. everyone was female and I was able to express myself, to be more comfortable (5/115-117)
Participant 10	Taking time to listen and understand	She took statement from me…...we spent so many weeks taking my statement. Right from the beginning up until the end. She was the one who told me [charity] doing some investigation. I didn't know what it was about but when they take work, they do their investigation. She asked me everything, right from the beginning, up until the end and I explain to her. (9/245-249)

4. The Impact of the Process on the Self

4.1 Losses of Agency

4.1.1 Curtailed Freedpms

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 6	Imprisoned; Literally & figuratively	…even though I've never been to prison, you know, and I will never go, in Jesus name, Amen. But I am like, I see what it is like to be in prison, not having your freedom, you know, it's also the same thing as not having your papers, as well too. It's you being in prison really… (188-195/8)
Participant 6	Until asylum is granted life cannot be lived	…when the lady came in she was like, you know "oh [Name] I'm not going to lie, asylum can take years and years and years […] just going to waste my, my…. life on earth.... (11/256-260)
Participant 7	Life on hold, not able to live freely	Yeah because your status, when you didn't get your status for this country, you cannot get bank account, and even if you did, you cannot get money, you cannot work [...] for some they let you to work, but for me, for eight years I could not work for myself. This affects my whole life too. (15/345-349)
Participant 8	Dehumanised through control of resources	Every week they give up may be £30. I can't even cash out that money, every week I have to go shop and buy something. Then even like, which shop I use is Sainsbury, Tesco, is expensive shop. I can't even go to Lidl or Aldi something like that, I can't get from there nothing. (5/150-152)
Participant 10	No work, no access to resources no knowledge of how to obtain them	Along the line I was told I couldn't work, I couldn't do anything, I didn't ask for any money. [Charity] stepped in, I was asked if I was getting money from the government, they asked about section 95 and I said I don't know anything about section 95. (3/63-65)

4.1.1 Silenced & Powerless

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	The truth is silenced	…in the Home Office, when they interview you… they don't want to know anything extra [...] they stop you…for speaking ... the truth…or telling the truth…. or something that can go against them. (7/202-205)
Participant 6	Feeling mute and powerless to speak up own rights	...me too I was mute, I was like (covers mouth) anything that happens I take it, you know [….] you feel you have no right to talk because you are an asylum seeker (22/530-534)
Participant 7	Speaking up against the dehumanisation of refugees will have penalties	...if I speak up, to make my voice heard, [...] the penalty will be to be prisoned and sent back to your country and still the same thing to make you not see your family. (23/526-523)
Participant 8	Powerless against the callous game	If they do something, anything you can't do, because they have power, they can do whatever they want. Home Office play like, whatever he wants (11/317-318)

4.2 Negative Emotional Consequences

4.2.1 Deteriorated Mental Health

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Process negatively affecting mental health more than previous traumas	Yeah, here, even when the issue of immigration, even let me tell you, even the problem I am having before I claim asylum, even the immigration problem is now more (long pause) over me than the problem I am having before. (10/260-262)
Participant 3	Consumed by fear, trauma and flashbacks	I started having…. serious nightmares. I started having serious nightmares, flashback, they all start coming now, [...] I was another person entirely. My face everything was changed..... (10/294-298)
Participant 4	Negative emotional spiral	So, you become angry, you know, you become aggressive, you become angry because you know something is right that another is denying. So it's very frustrating…err you become sad, you know that your rights are denied (3/61-63)
Participant 10	Made mad by the experience	When I was refused I appealed, all the while this was going on, I was almost running mad. (1/23-24)

4.2.2 Mental Torture

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 6	Experiencing fear and dissociation	So it was torture, I don't know what other word to use…. but I was angry, sad, I was depressed…..… eh err (sigh) I ……. felt, I felt…… ohhhhhh, I had, I even had palpitations and stuff during that time. (17/409-411)
Participant 7	Psychological torture	... when you stay here for the long, with the no reason, no one understanding, this becomes the psychological torture to your mind. You haven't got a life, you cannot do anything, you cannot improve yourself even for your family, for anyone else (3/49-52)
Participant 9	Home office interview feels like torture	(laughs) I don't know much, but I think the Home Office, I think it's just like torture (9/225)

4.2.3 Hopeless & Suicidal

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	Process eroding the secure sense of self	Because, I wasn't myself anymore, I don't know what I'm doing, (hits hands on lap) I don't know if I'm eating, (hits hands on lap) I don't know. So if you are, if you are just, if you are, if you are someone and you are like no one, you getting me? Because I believe I am (pause) *no one*. So instead of all this problem, it's better for them (pause) to come and carry my corpse. I even wished to die in their presence. (8/204-208)
Participant 6	The process drives people to suicide	... So many people would have claimed their life just because of this, because the truth is, it did come to mind at that time, I was like "should I just kill myself?" and just you know make it easy I wouldn't have to suffer this long again, you know? (15/377-383)
Participant 8	Rejected, hopeless and suicidal	I just, just fight for my help, for my right. I didn't find anyone, anyone who could help me, then I become angry. Who I am? [...] .when you walk on the road, you don't care if car is coming or it is not, may be when you walk on bridge, that water, are you going to go in that water…..you don't care. You do whatever you want that time, because you give up, you don't care about anything. (19/560-568)
Participant 9	Confused, numb & suicidal	……..I was confused, I don't even say, I don't know how to say how I was feeling, I was feeling nothing. Feeling like maybe throw myself, may be die, I was not caring about anything. (8/205-207)
Participant 10	Not wanting to care for self	Yeah. I did not want to do anything for myself. I did not want to worry about myself at that period. (5/124-125)

4.3 Ongoing Psychological Consequences

4.3.1 Ongoing Negative Impact on Mental Health

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 4	Left empty and angry	And they make you so mentally unwell, that when you get it, you just still empty, you know, you just still feel like, I don't know why, why did I fought for all this? Now I have my status, but…. there is some anger still there and there is some emptiness, it's still there. I cry, I get upset, I see my, my card and I get angry, and think "for this shit, I've gone through all this" you know and, ya this is, ya this is like that (21/663-667)
Participant 7	Trust forever broken because of torturous process	I've been tortured physically back in my country. But not being understand by someone or not being trusted, if feels like you broken your trust in anyone. You cannot trust them again... (4/83-84)
Participant 9	Ongoing trauma; avoiding the memory (of the interview)	Yeah I can't even, I don't want to go back, I don't want to remember about that (the Home Office Interview) (3/80)
Participant 10	Ongoing hypervigilance	The fear and the whole distress, I tell them at the therapy, I still have it, I still have it[…] I still get those feelings, it's hard to get out of it. Whenever I see their car, or I see them pass, I think "Oh my! The police again", or the enforcement department driving. (4/100-107)

4.3.2 Ongoing Damage to Sense of Self

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 2	A wished-for self that is (forever) lost	now (pause) since all that has happened, before I could force myself to dance [...] And before I always crack jokes, but now (pause) it's not as before… but I wish as before (22/624-626)
Participant 4	Sense of self-worth irrevocably tarnished	….. one thing there was is that, because of Home Office….the way treat you…they way they keep you waiting and stuff….it makes you feel worthless you know like "I'm just nobody, I'm just a piece of a shit" and this shit is waiting for Home Office to be … you know picked up, […] It's still in me, that like at times I feel like I'm worthless. Yeah, this process makes you…. that at some point (19/569-577)
Participant 7	The essence of you is changed	It's…..wrong, exactly, it's…. wrong. This is changing people's personalities in my opinion, because it's having a psychological effect, they are changed. (16/370-371)

4.3.3 Ongoing Positive Impacts

Participant	Theme	Extracts (pages/lines)
Participant 3	There is a freedom in talking openly, but the shame still silences in some contexts	Yes, yes, because talking to the Home Office, I am no longer afraid of them, in the first place[…], in the midst of, except my friends I have not told them anything about myself, apart from my brother, who knows, so in the other process, I am happy. I feel I have people, who are there, when I am in support, when I am in distress, I can go to this organization, I have my brother, I have my friends. Though I didn't tell my friends about it. (14/429-437)
Participant 4	Made stronger	I mean I am still a strong person, and I think because of this I am even stronger (18/563)
Participant 6	More determined	I look back on the whole experience, it's made me strong, taught me never to give up, to keep fighting. […] I 've been fighting for a long time. So that is how I see myself, literally, I would say determined, yeah, more determined than before. (34/838-845)