



Social Relationships and Trust in Asylum Seeking Families in Sweden

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Abstract

Research has suggested that social networks are important resources for children as well as for adults to resist health problems. For asylum seeking children social networking might be hard to accomplish due to constraints linked to social and legal contexts in the host country. Constraints can also be linked to the family situation and the circumstances they have to cope with in everyday life. The situation of parents, in particular mothers, is important for the coping of children. The over arching research objective is to identify factors that are important for well being of children seeking asylum and to study how they cope with their experiences as asylum seekers. The tension between excluding experiences and expectations regarding how the situation of the child and it's family should improve or deteriorate after the flight is for a child a constitutive reference for how coping strategies are developed. In the analysis I draw on theoretical concepts of resilience, social capital, trust and social recognition. This paper draws on results from an interdisciplinary research project Asylum-seeking children's welfare, health and well-being. Gothenburg Research on Asylum seeking Children in Europe (GRACE), Goteborg University and Nordic School of Public Health, Gothenburg. The study was financed by the European Refugee Fund. The empirical data are based on qualitative interviews with parents and children who have waited for decisions regarding permanent residence for several months and sometimes more than a year.

Keywords: *Trust, Resilience, Social Capital, Transnational Families, Friendship, Asylum Seeking Families, Asylum Seeking Children*

Introduction

1.1 This paper is dedicated to analysing the social integration of asylum-seekers and how they cope with adversity during their wait for a permit of stay. Coping is linked to the period of transition, which is understood as the full process of leaving the home country, reception and application for asylum, and appeal for new trials after negative outcomes. Some asylum seekers do not leave the country after negative decisions but hide for a period and make a new application later. In reality it could mean that they remain as asylum seekers in the host country for years.

1.2 The period of transition includes having left behind important resources such as kin, friends and social networks that form social and emotional capital for everyday life. In addition, they leave behind assets and other material things, cultural capital, skills and know-how needed to advance in the community. Transition means moving to a new set of conditions of low predictability and high uncertainty. The transitional process can be described as a social state or phase characterised by great ambiguity, in which one's position, identity and social belonging are no longer clearly defined. These feelings were evoked already in one's homeland, when the decision to emigrate was taken and preparations were started. The transitional process is marked by experiences of social exclusion in the homeland, involving physical and psychological violence as well as substantial reduction of civil and economic rights. The tension between experiences of exclusion and expectations of improvement in the situation after migration constitutes a framework for how strategies of dealing with one's life must be studied.

1.3 Studies of the transitional process show that local institutional contexts in the host country have a decisive importance for the individuals' well-being. This is related partly to what resources the individuals have at their disposal, with which they can guide and control their life situation – in short, to the individuals' scope for agency and voice. Regulations and their implementations in the asylum process influence the welfare conditions and the well-being of the family (Ascher 2005).

Researching asylum seeking families

2.1 Within an interdisciplinary project of the health, welfare and well-being of asylumseeking children and their families, qualitative interviews were carried out with seventeen families.^[1] Interviews with parents and children were conducted separately, each lasting two hours and carried out on two separate occasions. Using this approach, we amassed a total of approximately four hours of interview per individual and eight hours per family. For each family we had two interviewers; one for the parent and another for the child. The sample of families was based on asylum tenure, with a focus on asylum seekers who have waited several months or even years for decisions on a permit to stay. Thirteen mothers and four fathers - five single mothers, but no single fathers - eleven daughters, and six sons were interviewed. The children were aged between 9-18 years. Eight are in their upper teens (14-18), five in their lower teens (12-13) and three are 9 years old. The interviewed families are from different countries, Afghanistan, countries in the Middle East, Iraq, Iran and Uzbekistan. Most families have a middle class background in terms of education or have had their own business. Two of the children (9 and 14 years) and one mother had minimal schooling before their arrival in Sweden.

2.2 Interviews were open-ended, covering experiences before, during and after migration. Themes centred on accommodation histories, material situation and social relationships with families and friends in Sweden and in the home country, social trust and close relationships. We also asked interviewees about their experiences with Swedish authorities, in particular the Migration authority, as well as their contacts with lawyers, interpreters and health care workers.

2.3 With few exceptions we have used interpreters. We are aware that filtering information through interpretation by interpreters and ourselves make communication difficult and entail the risk of misinterpretation. In order to deal with this problem we always used authorised and experienced interpreters.

Resilience and social capital

3.1 The theoretical approach adopted in the study uses concepts of resilience, social capital, trust and social recognition. Resilience concerns the individual's and his/her family's capacity to resist adversities that they experience as harmful to their psychological well-being. It includes the availability of resources that increase their operational capacity in the environment. Among these resources, social relationships are the most important. A supportive environment contributes to greater resilience in the individual, which in turn contributes to improved capacity for coping or mastering of stresses. On the basis of an extensive literature review and comparative research, Michael Ungar argues that 'In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their ways to health sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways'(Ungar 2008 p.7). Navigation refers to the capacity to seek support as well as to how accessible it is. For instance, creation of self esteem requires access to social relationships and socially affirming experiences. Furthermore, the individual negotiates resources that are meaningful to them within their social contexts. Through social relationships that entail trust and social recognition, a sense that the environment is understandable and manageable is transmitted.

3.2 In line with arguments by Virginia Morrow (1999) and other researchers, the ways in which children feel embedded in social networks, neighbourhoods, schools and other formal organisations that are important in their everyday lives are linked to their health. In this context, the concept of social capital is fruitful for understanding the role of the social environment. Social capital is generally understood in terms of resources that can be of benefit to or useful for the individual (Field 2003). Coleman (1990) identifies social capital as the value that actors can derive from social structures in order to realize their interests. Coleman regards social capital as individual assets which are anchored in families and in local communities and entail norms of reciprocity and trust.

3.3 However a social network does not in itself create social capital. Social capital requires more than just a network of individual ties. The ties between individuals must be of a particular type – reciprocal, trusting and involving positive emotion (Morrow, 1999). Social capital in this perspective is a result of the quality of social relationships within a social group or community. If both components in combination are high, the social network involves social capital. From an individual perspective, small networks may also bring the potential for resilience - if they feature qualities of trust, reciprocity and positive emotion. Networks characterised by little trust, reciprocity and positive emotions within the relationships, do not generate social capital, regardless of size.

3.4 Based on her research on the health and well-being of young people, Morrow (2001) emphasises that social capital should be regarded as the social context for their every day life and the extent to which young persons experience a sense of belonging in their social environment. How do young people perceive their neighbours, class mates and other persons in their environment? How do they explain the ways in which they perceive these relationships? For Morrow, social capital is regarded 'as a tool or heuristic device for exploring social processes and practices in the experiences of the social environments of the young as a way to grasp their social resources or lack of them that are related to the acquisition of other forms of capital' (Morrow, 2001 p. 757). Her reasoning is inspired by Bourdieu and his thinking on social capital as individual resources. Actors must regard their networks as resources in order to have them available as social capital (Bourdieu 1985).

3.5 Social capital is not only rooted in informal social networks. Also important are the community and collective resources created through schools and local associations and the individual's access to these (exclusion or inclusion).

3.6 The notion of *trust* and of *social recognition* is of special interest in considering social capital. Trust is the 'socially learned and socially confirmed expectations that people have of each other, of the organizations and institutions in which they live, and of the natural and moral social orders, that determine the fundamental understandings of their lives. In social interaction, a sense of normality is constructed through some tacit understanding of rules that 'makes our world predictable, reliable and legible' (Miztal 2001p. 313, quoting Barber 1983). In order to feel comfortable and safe we need to reduce irregularity and to follow rules of interaction that are recognised by those who are involved in social interaction. Trust is an essential component of how individuals in interaction interpret the social interaction that they are part of (Miztal 1996). Thus, trust is regarded as an essential element in social interaction in order to create a sense of predictability and normality. To trust a person means to feel sure that those persons that one interacts with follow shared norms. In more formal contexts, trust implies that the rules that are applied are transparent and fair. This aspect is of special importance for asylum seeking adults and children. In my view, trust is an important element to focus on in the everyday life of the asylum-seeking children, due to their situation of ambiguity, as discussed earlier.

3.7 Luhmann (1988) explains trust as risk management with regard to choice of action. He explains risk in terms of the extent to which our behaviour impacts on future possibilities. 'Risks emerge only as a component of actions. They do not exist by themselves. If you refrain from action you run no risk. It is a purely internal calculation of external conditions.' (Luhmann 1988 p.100). Based on these explanations I regard trust as a necessary condition for building social relationships and social capital.

3.8 Trust is also embedded in *social recognition* of the persons who are involved in a social interaction. The concept of social recognition implies that the individual is being met with symbols, gestures or talk signifying positive value and an invitation to reciprocity. Social recognition is about being made visible – contrary to invisibility, which can take different meanings such as harmless inattention due to being regarded by the subject as socially meaningless; or lack of interest by the subject. Being made invisible can also imply that the subject ignores the individual with a deliberate intention to humiliate (Honneth & Margalit 2001). Being made invisible is not the opposite of being negatively recognised – it is a matter of scale rather than a dichotomy. 'The route from not being recognized to recognition could pass via negative regard as a form of being socially visible' (Heidegren 2009p. 43). In order to avoid the risk of being subjected to negative regard, the individual can choose to be socially invisible (Heidegren 2009).

3.9 Social recognition is closely connected to self-esteem and social identity. Social recognition is an act whereby the subject attributes a positive value to the other. This implies that the subject commits to acting in a moral way, showing regard for the other. By socially recognising the other the subject no longer ignores or neglects the other. Through this process social recognition is a part of building trust. Trust and social recognitions are elements of emotional capital to draw on in social interaction. Trust is basically having confidence in one's own ability to anticipate the actions of those with whom one interacts. It is matter of double confidence in others and in self (Barbalet 2008). In our studies of asylum-seeking families trust and social recognition are a result of their experiences of social interaction. They are also a condition for their desire to interact. This is why it is important that officers at the Migration board address this issue - not only because they should search for reasons to give asylum to the children but also in order to show the children that they are socially recognised as individuals in their own right. An asylum-seeker has to appear trustworthy in interaction with the Migration officers and also with public authorities on whom they are dependent for services and benefits. The asylum-seekers live in a situation where they have to prove their reasons for staying, but the criteria for a permit of residence are unclear to them. Both children and adults explain their need to have their reasons for being granted a permit of stay believed. Since migration officers have to scrutinise the reasons for granting a residence permit, the process can appear to involve elements of distrust. Not being regarded as trustworthy generates insecurity and a lack of predictability in social relationships; in everyday interaction with other people as well as in interaction with authorities.

Results

Uncertainty and material deprivation

4.1 The transition period was associated with many different kinds of adversity for the asylum seekers. It implied loss of resources, social capital and trust in the country of origin. Both parents and children said that arrival in Sweden brought a feeling of security and relief. However, experiences of traumatic experiences remain and have an impact on psychological and physical well-being, bringing symptoms such as depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and stomach and headaches. The sense of insecurity linked to previous events is reduced after a while but through the process of waiting for a permit of residence the feeling of security is eventually replaced by feelings of uncertainty and unpredictability about the future. In the literature this is described as dealing with 'the trauma of return' (Brekke 2004). This refers to the impending threat of being forced to return, which blocks the motivation to manage new circumstances in everyday life in the host country. It has also been described as liminality which implies being positioned outside of society without rights to work, limited rights to health care and without an official identification number (Brekke 2004).

4.2 Material deprivation was experienced by almost all families. In our sample the children have lived economically deprived circumstances for a long time, since they have been waiting for a long time. This means that the possibility of expanding their social activities is restricted, and they are unable to afford to spend free time with friends. They express a sense of otherness in many aspects of daily life. Overcrowded living and experiences of having moved house several times were common experiences that added to difficulties in making friends and socialize. .

4.3 Some children's experiences during the transition phase have included deprivation and exposure to people who have exploited their vulnerable situation on the road from their home country to Sweden. These

experiences combine to create distrust in other people. Their own experiences with the Swedish Migration Board as well as those of their parents have transferred to the children a sense of being mistrusted about their reasons for staying in the host country.

Building friendships

4.4 Each interviewee was asked to give an account of their relationships with close family, parents, siblings, cousins and to other relatives. We also asked about their social relationships with and perceptions of neighbours and friends, in order to find out to what extent social relationships can be regarded as social and emotional resources, based on the participants' judgement.

Kin as friends

4.5 A quite complex picture emerged, but a general pattern among the adults is that they had several kin, but they had regular contacts with only a few. Reasons for these limited contacts varied. A few, but rarely mentioned, practical reasons were stated as to why they did not talk over the phone or internet - including not having access to the internet, difficulties due to lack of electricity or access to mobile phones. Some did not dare to contact relatives back home due to political reasons. They were afraid that their kin would be harassed and forced to give information. Another reason was that the families were spread over the world and also within their own countries. More commonly, different kinds of conflicts were mentioned, featuring violence and sense of guilt within the family circle, leading to very limited or non-existent relationships. For instance, Leila (40) said that her husband belonged to a political faction in Lebanon which was very much disliked by his family. All contacts with his part of the family were broken. Leila's family lived in other countries. She only had sporadic contacts with her mother. Zara (13), her daughter, had occasional contacts with an uncle on the side of the mother. They had no other contacts except from within the little nuclear family in Sweden. Another example was Sabir (48) (a father), who had nine siblings in Iraq but he had only sporadic contact with them. His wife had siblings living in other cities in Sweden and contacts between them were infrequent and not very friendly. Aisha (42) recalled that she was economically exploited by a male distant relative of her husband's in Sweden, who charged her a high rent for a room plus other costs which left her with £130 a month to cover the costs of living for the family. She spent short stays with other relatives within the same lineage, all of which left her and her two children with strained nerves.

4.6 A recurrent theme in the majority of the children's stories was that their social networks were quite weak or thin. Some of them had contacts with cousins in Sweden, but most of them have only sparse contacts with relatives back home. For instance, Laila (15) recalled that her father lived in her country of origin and her parents had divorced many years ago. She called him now and then. In Sweden she lived with another aunt. She also has contact once a month with her grandmother living in Canada. Furthermore she had chat contact with two cousins (children of her aunt) who live in Canada as well.

4.7 In contrast to the general pattern, some families were strongly tied into a local network of close kin. In one family, Leena (40, mother) spoke about strong relationships and support within the family – most of them in the host country. Her family lived with an uncle who has also provided her and her husband with jobs. This family belonged to a migrant family where family reunifications have brought most of the kin network to the host country and some to other parts of the world. They had no contacts outside their own network, no contacts with Swedes and saw no reason to extend their relationship outside the kin network. The close network brought trust and a sense of confidence in the future.

4.8 The children in these families were fairly well connected in school and with friends. The daughter in the tightly connected family had very few contacts with friends of her own age, but she was socially integrated with the family network. The children in these families also had regular contacts with their close kin (grandparents, father etc.) back in the home country.

Neighbours and friends

4.9 A recurring theme was that the parents had sparse contacts with other persons in their immediate surroundings. They said that they would nod hello to a few neighbours but there was no real contact. Almost all of them attended courses in adult education to learn Swedish and about Swedish society. There, they had contacts, but not outside school.

4.10 The attitude towards establishing contacts was one of ambivalence. Jibril (48) said that he was reluctant to establish social contacts, in particular with people from Iraq, his home country. This was because he was afraid this would cause problems. He had no contacts with neighbours and no contacts with Swedes, mainly because of language problems. Aisha (42) said that networking is the task of a man, but her husband was not with them and she should not establish contacts on her own. She had acquired two female friends whom she trusted, but did not intend to find more. Marcia (43) had lived with her family as undocumented for over two years. Her husband had disappeared. She was very nervous about being discovered by the police and she did not dare to have any contacts except with some teachers at school. Her story was that all contact with her parents in the home country was quite sporadic because of lack of money, but also of shame for their current situation. She has had to move house several times and she felt exhausted and lonely.

4.11 Parents living in remote villages also had few contacts since they felt like outsiders in places where Swedes know each other well. It is hard for an asylum-seeker who might stay only temporarily to be included. Some parents mentioned that people they know who have received a permit of stay and who have jobs are very busy. They felt that they did not want to disturb or interrupt their busy lives. Altogether, the stories told show how avoiding the risk of running into problems generated a strategy to stay invisible

within the social environment.

4.12 Most children had hardly any acquaintances in the area where they lived and their attitudes towards the areas were described by them as suspicious or indifferent. They expressed ambivalence about how to relate to the people in their area due their experiences as asylum seekers, but for some the experience was close to mistrust. Kaden (15) is one example. Both his opinions and those of his parents were that the young guys in the area were using drugs. Kaden: 'I see them every day'... 'They are high on drugs... and also they carry knives'. He had to be home by eight in the evening and was not allowed by his parents to be out late at night. He spent most of his non-school hours with his parents. His parents told him to go out more, but since he didn't have any acquaintances where he lived he stayed at home, even if he would have liked to go out in the area.

4.13 Lonely children also had lonely mothers (and fathers). Both mothers and the fathers that we talked with tended to play a waiting game where they lived or were openly suspicious or afraid of people knowing their situation.

4.14 Social networking with their school class cannot be regarded as particularly strong, however. There seems to be a weak expansion of relationships to other class mates. According to the descriptions of their social situation in school there were small configurations of individuals that kept together and occasionally these groupings socialised in between them. It was a shared experience of the children that they start in a preparatory class in school where they learn Swedish and some other topics. These classes served as an introduction to the Swedish school, and there were only a few children in the classroom and the children who attended them were in similar situations. This more intimate context made it easier for children to make friends and we were told by them that this was the most important social context for them to make friends. Laila, for instance, had one close friend in school. She said that 'Had we met first in the normal class we might not have made close friends since we both felt marginalised. Here (in Sweden) you have to trust people more; to have someone to trust is very important'.

4.15 The pupils in preparatory class had similar experiences even if they were not from the same country. They all told about the important role of preparatory class in school for making friends, and they were able to become close and to continue to be friends when they moved on to the normal class.

4.16 The children also said that they primarily spent time with other immigrants in school, regardless of if they were from the same country. Kaden: 'My school is an immigrant school. There are Swedes but I have no contact with them. Sometimes it happens that Swedes come along when they gather in a larger group, but still they have no contact. 'I feel better with immigrants... The Swedish guys seem to be cold with each other'.

4.17 The implication of the stories by Kaden and Laila is that they had very little trust in others. They were anxious about making mistakes, about not talking in a proper way and about not wearing the proper clothes. Laila claimed that she did not need more acquaintances since, in her view, they could be potential enemies. 'In the beginning I wanted more friends, but now I am satisfied. I try not to make more enemies'. The reason why she did not have more friends, she explained, was that there were no arenas where she could make friends outside school. She was involved in a film project in school, but this involvement had not generated more friends. Laila avoided speaking her own language with other pupils that spoke a similar language as she did, because there were dialectical differences. 'They will laugh at you', she explained.

4.18 Laila said that she was careful not to be involved in conflicts with other children in school. 'If you stay calm and avoid aggravating things then you avoid conflicts.' This was her deliberate strategy. She said that she socialised with a few children that always stayed together in school. In general, everybody was nice, nobody was mean and nobody had higher status in her opinion, 'even if they think that they have higher status.' High status was to her symbolised by wearing fashionable clothes.

4.19 The examples show that lack of trust and worries about being the subject of negative recognition contributed to the children avoiding making closer friends in their local environment.

Help and support

4.20 In the theoretical discussion I pointed out that trust is an important dimension in a salutogenetic perspective, since trust is a necessary condition in establishing social contacts and for a sense of safety while waiting for permit of stay. Among the interviewees there were stories told about trust as well as about lacking trust.

4.21 Parents and children were asked by the interviewer if they had someone that they could turn to for material and even financial help or other kinds of support. The frequent replies were that they did not want to rely on anyone for financial support or help with other matters. In their answers they were very explicit about their reluctance to enter exchange relationships with anyone. One mother said that theoretically she could ask her sister, but her spontaneous answer to the question was 'It would never happen'. A father said: 'I am not that kind of person'. Aisha emphasised that she did not want to be dependent. We also talked with the children about exchange of gifts and support between class mates and friends in school. None of them said that they did this. Sonia (15) stated that she did not want to help anybody because helping would mean showing compassion. To help meant to her compassion and this was not a good feeling. 'There are many who want to show that they have compassion with you. It is better that they don't come.' She was not against gratefulness but she was against being pitied, which meant being deprived of being a person in her own right. Sonia mentioned that her parents were suspicious about people surrounding them in the areas where they live (they moved frequently) because they did not want people to know about their situation as asylum seekers.

4.22 Sonia's family were undocumented refugees and in great trouble. They had applied several times for a permit to stay, without a positive outcome. The family was dependant on helpers and they were in a situation of asymmetric dependency. They had accumulated debts to some people in their church and this was a very sensitive situation for them. Their situation was a pendulum between social exclusion and social inclusion. The social network surrounding the family was linked to a church, where some persons helped them. This semi formal social support had brought trust in Swedish society in general for Sonia. She said that in Sweden she sensed freedom and that she was given self confidence. 'Here you can find people who care about you' She told that in her home country nobody cares, 'especially if you are not wealthy'.

Emotional support

4.23 We also asked about whether the respondents could talk with anyone close. Most spouses stated that they could talk about the strains of insecurity and other problems. One woman, Zarya (40), shared her worries with her daughter: 'My relationship to Laila (the daughter) is rather like a relationship with a sister, not that of a mother daughter relationship'. Ferrah (40), who lived with two daughters and her parents, had experienced a long journey, lasting over seven years before arriving in Sweden. Her family was split and her husband had disappeared. She said: 'I don't know whom I can trust. The only person (that I trusted) was the wife of a friend of my father (back in Afghanistan). She had no children and I could trust her, she loved me. I don't want to disturb anyone. After having cried I calm down...I don't want anyone to know about my problems. I wanted to solve my problems on my own. I don't want to have anybody interfering.' She mentioned that she had a younger brother, and her relationship with him was friendly, but she could not talk with him. 'Our culture does not allow it...Int: 'Do you wish that you have a more open relationship to your parents and siblings?' F.: 'It depends if I could trust them hundred percent, of course, I would like to talk. But if I know that they will be angry I don't want them to know about my problems.'

4.24 This conversation reveals much of what was mentioned by other parents. Problems should be shielded and not talked about within the close family circle. As adults, they wanted to protect themselves from interference from parents and siblings. To them, it was a matter of integrity. Children should be protected from exposure to worries.

4.25 Some children had close contacts with their parents and said that they were able to talk with them about worries. This meant that they could obtain temporary relief from thoughts about feelings of exclusion arising from not being able to socialise on similar terms with classmates. Laila had great trust in her mother and her close friend. She could talk openly with both of them about matters that concerned her deeply. She talked with her mother about her agony about having to return to her country but also about missing her country. It helped to talk, but 'it is like taking a pill. It calms you down but after a while the worries return'. Sometimes she felt very frightened of losing her mother. Her mother stated that that this was probably because they were very alone in Sweden. They hardly had any family close by – they were spread over the world. Being in school had helped alleviate this fear.

4.26 The general picture is that the children did not talk about the problematic situation of the family. One reason mentioned was that talking aggravates the problem and makes it more difficult. Another reason was that parents (mothers) should be protected from their children's problems. For instance, Jemina (15), who belonged to one of the highly exposed families, did not feel that she could speak with anyone about her worries or problems, either with her mother or her close friend. She reported that she kept everything inside and that she did not want to talk about her worries and feelings. Int.: 'Is it because you think that she (the mother) has many worries too so you don't want to disturb her or is it because you prefer to keep it inside yourself?' Jemina: 'It is both, but I think that it is best for me not to talk'. She thought that her mother might want her to talk but she did not want to share, mostly because she thought that it is best for her not to talk. She lived with her mother, sister and grandparents. She also had a brother but did not speak with any one of them. She would, however, like to have someone to share her thoughts with. Int.: 'So how do you manage?' 'I write, at nights' (she had sleeping problems and stomach aches). Her wish was to learn music or acting, because she thought that she could act out her problems. 'I want to get it out of me', she explained.

4.27 The situation for Sonia was similar. She did not talk with anyone in her family about their situation. She tried to support her mother but she could not talk with her. She did not want to. She expressed trust in a school nurse and she knew that she could visit her, but she only did it once. Both girls (Jemima and Sonia) had very problematic experiences with their families. Talking about problems would make them appear even bigger because sharing does not always mean diminishing feelings of anxiety - it might also imply increasing them. But it appears that behind all this there is the basic problem of trust, or insecurity about the extent to which they can trust others. Sonia and the other children in the highly exposed families were sensitive to the difficult situation of their mothers who were lonely, very worried about their future and depressed. The children were aware of that the mothers were very dependent on them. This dependency made the children feel a strong loyalty. In order to be supportive to their mothers they reduced their own needs. But still, when asked, they expressed positive expectations for the future where the immediate future meant a permit to stay. However they tried to avoid thinking about their past and future. As a consequence, they made themselves invisible, so as to avoid negative regard. Their situation was also not socially recognised by authorities at the Migration Board, since none of the children had ever been questioned or addressed by the authorities.

4.28 The general situation mentioned is even more pronounced in families with lone mothers. For instance Irene (40) said that she had siblings back in Afghanistan but she had no contact at all with them. She had nobody to talk to and she stayed at home every day and waited until the children returned. 'I am very lonely at home'. If they are late I get very worried.' She lost her husband and two sons in Afghanistan and she had not had an opportunity to work through her losses, which contributed to her poor health. She had relatives back in Afghanistan – on her husband's side - and they helped her to leave. But she had nothing

to return to and without any education she is unable to support herself.

4.29 One reason why these mothers have avoided social contact in the host country was that they were afraid that the scope of their situation would be revealed. They were worried about asymmetric dependency relations and felt uneasy about the risk that the full range of their problems should be revealed to others. They regarded it as shameful and chose to be invisible rather than negatively socially recognised.

4.30 These women stated that the only way forward was to obtain a permit to stay or just to remain in the country without a permit of stay. To return to their home country would worsen their situation to a higher extent than to stay. Meanwhile, what brought strength and resilience, for these mothers was their children. They clung to their mother identity, the only source of a stable social identity during transition. The children represented everything for them and this made them very dependent on the children – a dependence that was also mixed with guilt, since they felt incapacitated in their role as mothers. The lack of money aggravated their feelings of guilt towards their children and they tried to compensate for the feelings of guilt by being there for their children, which appeared to create a strong interdependency between mothers and children. This came out in the interviews with their children. These children were also very lonely. They were aware of the family situation and they said that they had to support their mothers and simply survive one day at a time.

The role of formal and semi-formal institutions

4.31 The Migration Board and the contacts with solicitors and service staff were of great significance to the families, who were very dependent on them for accommodation or financial support. What came out in the stories about relationships with officers in the Migration Board was how families could sense non control and uncertainty in exchanges with them. This was linked to long waiting periods and a lack of transparency regarding rules and rights. Some parents mentioned that their children had been upset by questions that were posed to them about what the parents had said. They felt that they had to confirm the stories told by their parents. On the other hand the Migration board was perceived as helpful. Some interviewed parents mentioned that they had support, but this depended on the officer or solicitor that they had as contact person. Churches were also helpful in providing light food or clothing. There they felt that people had time for them and showed a helpful attitude. None of the interviewed turned to immigrant associations for socialising. The reason mentioned was that they felt insecure about the people in these associations.

Summary analysis

5.1 A strong thread in the stories told by parents and children is that they preferred to rely on self and the family. Among the families that we met, resilience seemed to be predominantly focussed within the family. The family bonding was a strong source of resilience for parents and children, in particular for families that had many adversities to cope with. Uncertainty about the future was accompanied by a wish to appear independent and self reliant in relation to the environment. The emotional capital that mothers drew on was commitments to the children which translated into being protective and sustaining a sense of safety and of belonging. Building emotional capital within the family was by mothers used as a way to create self esteem in children as a resource for their coping with past insecurity and uncertainty about the future. However mothers had to cope with their own anxiety, guilt and insecurity which might impede transmission of emotional capital in their children. Emotional support can enhance emotional capital and feelings of confidence. However the context of insecurity and anxiety that was prevailing during transition could be an obstacle in the transmission of emotional capital within the family (Reay 2004). One could assume that a resilience strategy would be to turn to people outside the family for support or relief, but there are several constraining external conditions for doing so. Migrating has had the consequence that contacts with close relatives in the country of origin have been interrupted compared to the situation before leaving. This is not an unusual situation and has been described in other studies (Eastmond & Åkesson, 2008). Some reasons for lack of contacts with kin are practical, but in general reasons can be interpreted as self-protective. The adult asylum-seekers expressed worries about old and fragile parents and about guilt connected to being unable to care for them. Feelings of guilt are mixed up with worries and resistance to talk about their own problems to cope with in everyday life. Worries about the future and of being criticized for having brought the family into a difficult situation add to the feelings of guilt. To avoid contact with relatives is an alternative to being exposed to questions about their current situation. In her thesis about refugee families Eva Nyberg (1993) describes a pattern that she calls 'a definitive leaving'. Her concept refers to a change in the emotional bonds to the family of origin in the home country. In the cases that she studied the women belonged to extended families in the home country with daily contacts and interdependencies. She describes a process moving from 'turning away' to 'definitive leaving'. The 'turning away' had started for them already in the country of origin where different personal circumstances brought disconnection from the extended family. After migration the families became nuclear families or lone mothers, having to cope on their own. The mothers had to develop a strong sense of cohesion between themselves and their children, as well as a personally resilient approach. Parallel to this they had to give up their responsibility for close kin at home in need of support. This meant the personal loss of an obligation that was closely linked to their perception of self-identity. In the next step an emotional bond to the family of origin was dissolved, as they moved into the stage of 'definitive leaving'.

5.2 Nyberg's analysis provides understanding of the attitudes and practices that were described by parents in the present study, who had similar experiences. The pattern of significantly reduced family contact that was found among several of the families in our study might only be temporary. But there are similarities between Nyberg's cases and ours, such as conflicts within the families and political tensions that were prevalent already before leaving the home country. Altogether there are moral and normative obstacles involved. When we met the families they were all very convinced that they must remain in Sweden. They were turning away from their extended families at home and on their way to adapting to an independent nuclear family life, although emotionally disturbed by feelings of guilt and worry. Those mothers who had left for personal reasons, to avoid abuse or grim poverty, seemed closer to the emotional stage of

'definitive leaving'.

5.3 The results display a complex pattern in the social situation of the asylum seeking families. Some of them have relatives in Sweden and socialise with them occasionally, some have non-supportive experiences with not so loosely linked relatives. A few have been incorporated in a network of close kin and see no reason why they should have contacts with others beyond the network, because it provides social and economic security, but limited options for integration in the wider society, a situation described as bonding social capital (Putnam 2002). What all parents have in common is that they express little interest and even lack of trust in the neighbourhoods and some parents transferred this feeling to their children. The approach of the children is similar to that of their parents. They give the impression of a lack of confidence in approaching other peers. Both the children and their parents refrain from exchange of material goods with others partly because it is a sensitive issue for them. They express a negative attitude towards borrowing material things including money even from close kin. It is described as being below one's dignity and against norms. With reference to the theory of Goffman this attitude can be interpreted as linked to lack of a sense of trust and to uncertainty about one's status, reflecting the ambiguous situation during transition.

5.4 Cutting off from the social environment can be understood by using the insights provided by the concepts of social capital, social recognition and trust. My understanding of social capital highlights the quality of social relationships where trust and reciprocity are important emotional elements, which enable people to give and take resources under the condition of equality in the degree of dependency. The period of transition implies uncertainties, ambivalence and asymmetric dependencies. To engage in reciprocal exchange of resources presupposes that within a certain time frame one can count on a balanced exchange. In this situation it is important to prove self-reliance and independence.

5.5 The results suggest that there is a basic lack of trust in the adults and in the children which prevents them from building social capital during the transition period. This approach is also a matter of self protection. To keep a low profile is a resilience strategy which means reducing the risk of being shamed - an intrinsic consequence of constraints during transition - in particular limited economic circumstances and housing. Accommodation with relatives is constraining and hardly allows socialising at home for children or parents. Tight living arrangements also bring social control and reduce the sense of autonomy and independence. Without money it is difficult to find activities that can bring more contacts. The symbols of clothing seem also to be quite important in the stories of the children. The relative poverty of these children puts pressure on them in their everyday life and brings a sense of exclusion.

5.6 The asylum seeking process demands that the asylum seeker feels disoriented and lacks knowledge about rules and norms. In order to establish social interaction one has to feel a confidence that norms and rules are transparent and just. In general this means that one adopts a wait- and- see strategy and this is what both parents and children did.

5.7 Parents and children are under the authority of the Migration board and of the solicitors that prepare their case regarding a permit to stay. The institution has a huge impact on the future of the family. From the stories told we understand that the contacts with the officers in charge of their cases are ambiguous, entailing insecurity and mistrust. Mistrust is an integrated part of the organisation since the asylum seekers have to present legitimate reasons for their applications of asylum, and for reasons of support and benefits. Thus their position is one of dependence where the trust of others and social recognition has an impact on their sense of confidence. Needs testing is often associated with a feeling of negative social recognition, in particular if rules are not transparent and applied in different ways by the staff.

5.8 Schools and other institutions such as churches, voluntary organisations, and health care institutions nevertheless have an important role in providing social recognition and trust for parents and for children. These institutions are perhaps also important sources of resilience in providing social recognition for children. Staff within the formal institutions can be counted as the social capital for the families. Going to school is socially very important for the children and for the adults. In different ways children express their trust in teachers and say that teachers are helpful and that they can ask them if they do not understand. Also parents expressed high levels of trust in schools and teachers. Language appears to be a more complex problem, since the children that we have talked with tend to socialise with other immigrants rather than Swedes and their close friends (if they have any) are not from their home country. Socialising is also a matter of appropriating the right communicative style, and of understanding how to appear to others in the social surrounding (Illouz 2007).

5.9 One conclusion is that social networking is not a 'natural' process, but an intricate process with many constraining elements. Another conclusion of the analysis of the social situation of asylum seekers is that the dynamics of the social interactions can contribute to vicious circles where a socially exposed position can lead to social exclusion. The high dependency and reliance on the family as a source of resilience also puts high pressure on the family members, since they want to protect each other from their worries but they also feel responsible for the well-being of the family members. Worries, psychologically straining memories and closure against the environment can create vicious circles. Parents and children feel responsible for the well being of each other. This ambiguous interdependency can be experienced as a burden for the children, since they suppress their own needs of emotional support from mothers or friends.. The results of the study suggest that there are close links between emotional capital and social capital but also that the links between them are complex. To give emotional support might bring relief to the giver and the receiver. Reciprocity of emotional support can however also bring mutual dependencies that might bring emotional costs.

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