

Asylum seeking children in
Europe. Their welfare, health
and wellbeing.

GRACE
Göteborg University
Nordic School of Public Health

Purposes of the programme:

- To improve practices of reception and waiting for outcomes for asylum seeking children
- Make children visible and give them a voice. Regard children as persons in their own right.
- Promote the implementation of the convention of the rights of children.

Background of the programme

- Children make up close to 50% of all refugees in the world.
- Many children have suffered when they arrive into the host country
- Many children suffer during the asylum seeking process and their health may deteriorate. The long term effects can be very problematic.
- Research on refugees have to a very large extent neglected to analyse the situation of children.
- The problems of parents are visible but those of children are easily forgotten

- Children can have their own reasons for being granted asylum.
- Practices vary between countries.
- Culture of misbelieve.
- Illegal immigrants, trafficked children and 'proper' refugees are mixed up
- Security policy versus human rights

The project

- Focus on the process of transition, i.e. from the time when they left their country of origin until they have left the host country or received permanent permit of stay
- Study of the ways in which children are treated at different levels.
- Analysis of Policy documents in European countries within the EU. Policy discourses
- Analysis of how policies are implemented in different authorities that are responsible for children's needs. Interviews with persons in charge and study of policy documents.
- Analysis of the welfare, health and well-being of children. Interviews with children about their personal experiences in relation to their local context.

Projects within the programme:

- - Asylum seeking children in EU-states – comparisons of international and national policies
- - The rights of children according to national law and local implementations of the laws
- - Studies of the welfare, health and well-being of children
- - Trafficking in children – comparative analyses of national policies
- - Study on hidden refugees and paperless families with children in Göteborg. A focus on urban every day life.

- The following aspects will be covered:
- The voice of children in the asylum seeking process
- Children's experiences in their everyday life
- Children's contacts with their country of origin
- Study of the self image and sense of coherence in children
- Investigation of physical health
- Register study of health data for refugee children in Sweden

Theoretical approaches

- The overarching theoretical perspective is based on normative political theory on post-national citizenship (Soysal, 1994; Hewitt, 2003). This discussion is partly anchored in the discussions on human rights, in particular (in our programme) the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. A basic problem to tackle in the analyses is the tension between on the one hand the needs of states to regulate immigration, on the other hand the demands of the CRC to look after the best interests of the child. In addition we want to analyse the relations between national legislation and international conventions – how they influence each other.

At the organisational level

- We intend to implement an organisational theory on cognitive balance (Machado, 1998). This approach highlights the different roles of actors in organisations, their cognitive understandings and their professional ethic. The focus is directed at those cognitive processes that create social order within the organisations both within an organisation and in relation to their external relations to other organisations. The degree of cognitive balance or imbalance between actors contribute to how judgements and decisions are made.

At the personal and interpersonal levels

- We will focus factors that foster health – ‘Sense of coherence’ (Antonovsky, 1991). This can be accomplished when the existence is manageable, makes sense and can be understood. A supportive environment contributes to “resilience” in the individual and this, in turn, contributes to an increased capacity in coping with difficulties. Furthermore we highlight empowerment, i.e. the capacity of the child to have an influence of her /his situation.

- The approach entails a cultural, structural and interpersonal perspective on the social worlds of children, in particular the roles of children in relationship to parents and other close persons. In the new context as asylum seekers norms must be extended and renegotiated and this might create a situation of insecurity which might be detrimental to the health of the children. We intend to use narrative interviews with children.

Funding of the research programme

An application for funding has recently been sent to the European refugee Fund in Sweden (EU).

- Comparative studies are highly relevant – we want to expand the study and invite national partners.
- Application for the comparative extended studies will be addressed to the European Refugee Fund in Brussels.

Who wants to join?

- Contact Ulla Björnberg
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- See also CERGU <http://www.cergu.gu.se/>
- Book: ***The Asylum Seeking Child in Europe***