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Overview

This portfolio thesis is comprised of three parts and includes a systematic literature review, an empirical paper and supporting appendices.

Part one: Systematic literature review

Part one is the systematic literature review which focuses on the needs and strengths of unaccompanied minors during establishment. Overall, six articles were reviewed and quality assessed. Narrative synthesis was utilised and four main themes and and 14 subthemes were identified. Conclusions and clinical implications for support provision are discussed.

Part two: Empirical paper

Part two is a qualitative empirical study which explored the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children through the lens of professionals in the community. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to interpret the data and develop themes. Conclusions and implications for practice are considered.

Part three: Supporting appendices

Part three consists of the appendices supporting both previous parts.

Total word count: 16,954 (excluding references and appendices)

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Part 1: Systematic Literature Review

A review exploring the needs and strengths of unaccompanied minors during establishment

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Abstract

Purpose

There are multiple influences on the establishment experiences of unaccompanied minors. This review aimed to complement existing literature by exploring the needs and strengths of unaccompanied minors. Understanding unaccompanied young people's lived experience is essential to improve accessibility and care provision in the community. The review synthesises young people's support and establishment experiences in six European countries following migration.

Method

A literature review search was carried out to identify appropriate studies. Six papers were included in the review and their methodological quality was assessed for before the narrative synthesis was conducted.

Results

The narrative synthesis identified four main themes: building social capital, cultivating connections, transforming identities, and hope as a way forward.

Conclusions

The review demonstrates the value of utilising community resources to support unaccompanied young people's establishment experiences. This has important implications for support provision and service development. Further research is needed to capture an updated depiction of unaccompanied minors' experiences and the influence of the systems around them.

Keywords: Unaccompanied minors, needs, strengths, community support, establishment experiences, Europe

Introduction

Moving to a new country comes with its own set of challenges and adapting to a different way of living is difficult for some people. Whilst the novelty of getting accustomed to new cultures, people, languages, climates, and customs can be exciting, it is no easy feat, especially for unaccompanied minors who must navigate unfamiliar territories alone. Unaccompanied children are young people who are outside of their country of origin and do not have parents or guardians to accompany them (Halvorsen, 2002). Unaccompanied young people have to adapt to multiple novel experiences independently whilst receiving the support provided by their host country. Aside from having the same needs as other children, unaccompanied minors have specific needs and capabilities which must be assessed to ensure they are supported appropriately (Kauhanen & Kaukko, 2020). The children have to cope with various difficulties following relocation, influencing their sense of safety, belongingness and psychological well-being (Chase, 2020). In addition to their post-migration experiences, unaccompanied young people's journeys before and during migration could also influence their establishment experiences. They must also reconstruct their meaning of home in the context of their migration, which is associated with their evolving identity and sense of belonging (Sirriyeh, 2016).

From a socio-ecological viewpoint, children's development is shaped by interacting with the systems around them, with each system influencing its impact on the young person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Systems such as family, school, power, gender roles and friends could influence a child's context and experiences. This framework captures the challenges young people encounter alongside their strengths and protective resources. Protective factors have buffering effects and demonstrate how unaccompanied children respond to hardships (Werner, 2000). Identifying and creating protective factors promoting resilience can facilitate young people's capabilities, therefore using community resources such as school environments provides space for growth. Strong connections with peers, good support networks and encouraging home environments contribute to positive outcomes (Alvord & Grados, 2005). Children depend on adults to offer emotional and practical support and create feelings of belongingness (Osman, Mohamed, Warner, & Sarkadi, 2020). Staff in care homes and day centres, teachers, social workers and mentors are some of the individuals supporting

young people. Trust building is significant for unaccompanied young people, therefore it is imperative that adults in their support network forge good relationships with them (Herz and Lalander, 2019). This takes patience, and studies have highlighted barriers in establishing trust as young people may perceive staff as people who are not emotionally invested in them (Wernesjö, 2014). Some countries introduced mentoring (Alarcón & Prieto-Flores, 2021) and befriending (Behnia, 2007) programmes aiming to bridge young people's support needs within the community. Mentoring programmes help equip children with skills to deal with everyday life and improve their ability to plan and adapt, contributing to progressive establishment experiences (Aytar & Brunnberg, 2016). They facilitate young people's social, cultural, and linguistic needs, promoting their sense of belonging and instilling hope (Gelis, 2015). These programmes provide space for children to establish trusting relationships with mentors, effectively enabling better personal support provision.

Unaccompanied young people also need a stable, caring, home environment to experience family-like relationships that offer emotional support and affection (Bjerneld & Puthoopparambil, 2022). In England, the Local Authority Children's Services provide placements for unaccompanied minors. Foster care or residential placements are provided for children younger than 16 years or for those deemed vulnerable, whilst adolescents aged 16 and 17 are usually placed in supported or independent accommodation (Wade, Sirriyeh, Kohli, & Simmonds, 2012). Literature suggests that the level of emotional and social support received by unaccompanied minors older than 16 is not the same as younger children, signifying that their needs are not being met adequately (Groak, Sclare & Raval, 2010). These unaccompanied young people often accelerate their transition to adulthood and independence, as their experiences are influenced by the administrative implications of turning 18 for child welfare agencies (Webb, Cox, Cumbers, Martikke, Gedzielewski, & Duale, 2017). Age is therefore a significant influence on the experiences and outcomes of unaccompanied young people, including how the public and policy makers understand and treat them (Pruitt, Berents, & Munro, 2018).

The contexts around migrating unaccompanied children are well documented, with literature focusing on social work issues (Christie, 2003), health (Hjern & Kling, 2019), and mental health (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick & Stein, 2012). Whilst reviews address health issues (Curtis,

Thompson & Fairbrother, 2020) and socioecological factors pertaining to mental health (Scharpf, Kaltenbach, Nickerson & Hecker, 2021) amongst refugee young people, literature reviews focusing specifically on unaccompanied young people are scarce. There seems to be a gap in the literature for a systematic literature review addressing the needs and strengths of unaccompanied young people during establishment in society. The current review aims to bridge this gap by exploring unaccompanied young people's experiences of establishment following relocation. This review adopts a holistic approach with the hopes of shedding light on the diverse needs and strengths of unaccompanied children, whilst moving away from medically-informed interventions. Studies in Europe were included in the review to evaluate how young people's support needs were met across European countries. The review mainly focuses on qualitative literature to best capture the voices of young people and in some instances, their mentors. The establishment experiences of unaccompanied minors in Europe were sought to address the following questions:

What are the needs and strengths of unaccompanied young people establishing themselves in their new communities?

How are unaccompanied young people supported to become established in the community?

Method

Search strategy

An initial systematic literature review was carried out between August 2021 and October 2021, and again between January 2022 and February 2022. The electronic databases Academic search premier, APA PsycArticles, APA PsychInfo, CINAHL Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC and Web of Science were searched through the EBSCO host platform. Multiple databases were employed to target a broad collection of research to enrich the article selection process.

Search terms

The search terms were identified through scoping searches of existing literature. They were refined by analysing compiled data from relevant articles to identify keywords congruent with the topic of interest. The final search terms were:

unaccompanied asylum seeking children OR unaccompanied minor* OR unaccompanied children OR unaccompanied refugees OR separated children
AND
need* OR strength* OR resilient OR resilience* OR resource*
AND
community OR community based services OR community support

The 'English' limiter was applied during the search to ensure that the papers were written in English. A limiter was applied to reveal publications released after 2010 to capture an up-to-date portrayal of migrating unaccompanied minors in Europe. The Boolean operators OR and AND were adopted to acquire a broader range of articles.

Study Selection

Studies were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) they included unaccompanied minors, (2) they were conducted within European countries, (3) interventions were based in the community.

Studies were excluded if they met the following criteria: (1) they concerned accompanied minors, (2) they were conducted in countries outside of Europe, (3) they concerned mental health interventions.

The articles were screened by title and duplicates were removed. The abstracts of the identified papers were reviewed and assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1

Inclusion Criteria and Rationale

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Population: Unaccompanied minors	The review aimed to evaluate the support and issues unaccompanied young children experience through establishment in European countries, therefore they were the population of interest.
Language: English	To be read and understood.
Date range: 2010 onwards	A 12-year date limit was set to capture an up-to-date portrayal of migrating unaccompanied minors in Europe.
Study design: Qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods	The review aimed to draw on unaccompanied young people's strengths whilst exploring their support needs to become established in the community. Therefore, including studies with varying methodologies increased richness of data.
Location: Countries in Europe	To review the support approaches for unaccompanied minors in other countries in Europe, therefore geographical context is applicable to the UK.
Context: Community level	The review focused on young people's support needs within the community.

Table 2

Exclusion Criteria and Rationale

Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Population: Accompanied children	The review focused on unaccompanied children and youth, therefore accompanied minors were excluded.
Age: Adults	The review spotlights individuals who entered the host country as unaccompanied minors.
Language: Non-English	The papers need to be written in English for analysis.
Location: Non-European countries	The review focuses on unaccompanied young people in Europe.
Context: Mental health interventions	The review concentrates on community support, therefore literature concerning mental health interventions were excluded.

See figure 1 for article selection summary.

Figure 1.

Article Selection Summary

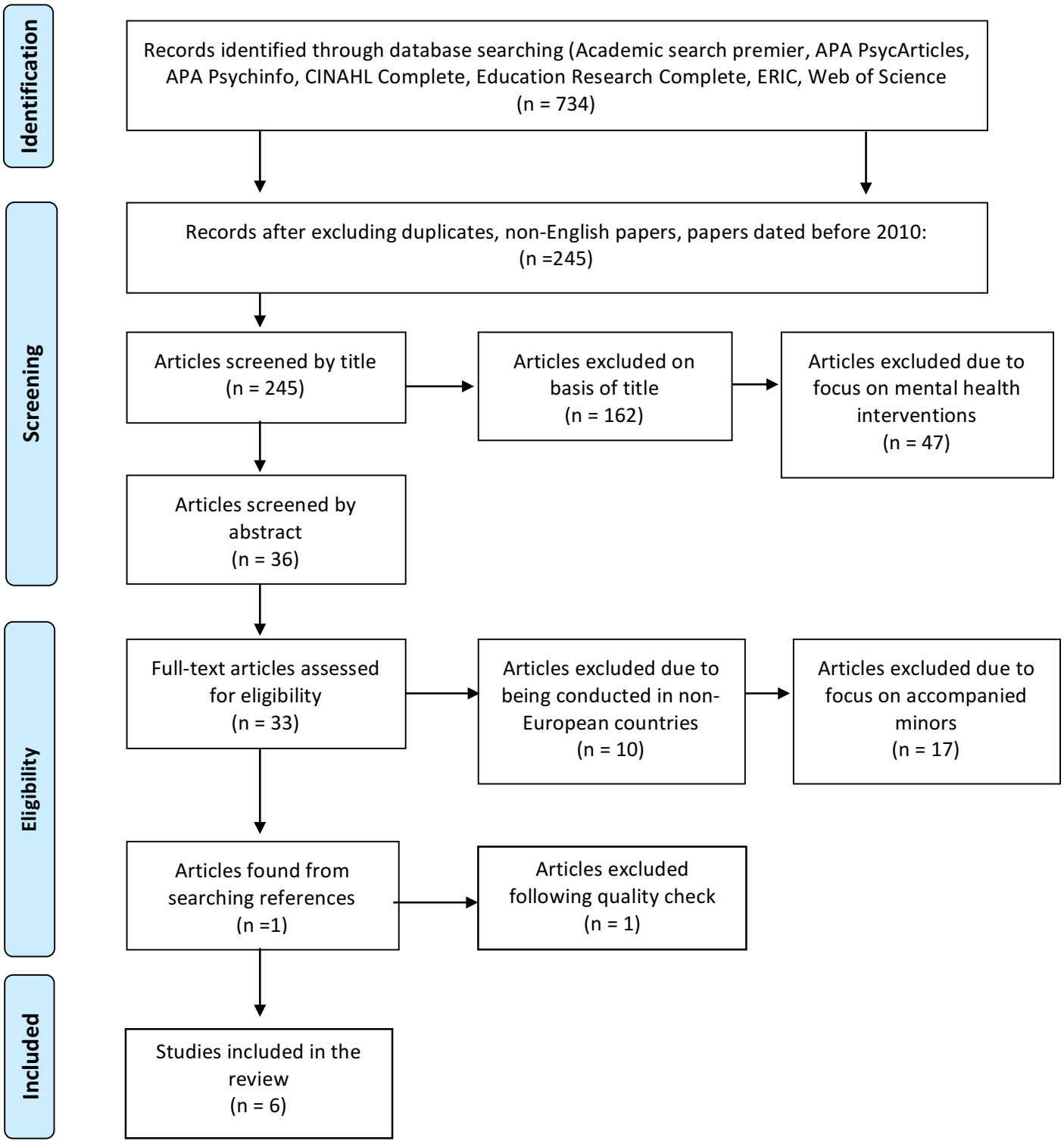

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram demonstrating the article selection process (Moher et al., 2009)

Data Extraction and Synthesis

The papers were individually examined and important information was extracted using a data extraction form (see Appendix). The form contained information about the articles' title and location of study, author(s), research aims, participant demographics, sample, research design, method of analysis and key findings pertinent to the review question.

Narrative synthesis was implemented to evaluate the extracted data and to capture unaccompanied young people's voices (Popay et al., 2006). This allows for integration of qualitative and quantitative research findings to provide an understanding of commonalities across the results. This method was selected as a way of weaving meaning and connecting similarities across the studies by exploring young people's experiences of establishing themselves into a new community.

The findings of the studies were extracted and presented (See table 3). Study characteristics such as method, location, number of participants, gender and age of participants and their country of origin were collated for comparison. This process allowed for categorisation of similarities and emerging themes across papers whilst acknowledging any discrepancies in the findings.

Quality Assessment

All selected articles were assessed by the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (2018) which caters for qualitative, quantitative and mixed method studies. Out of the initial seven selected papers, four studies met the MMAT baseline requirements whilst three studies did not state a clear research question. Nonetheless, the quality assessment was conducted to assess the methodological quality range across studies. A mixed-method study (Aytar and Brunnberg, 2016) received a quality rating of 25%, therefore it was decided that it would be excluded from the review. The methodological quality of included studies ranged from 45%-100%.

Four qualitative studies (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, Raithelhuber, 2021, Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010) achieved a score of 100% as they had succinct

research questions and clearly stated the aims of their study. Coherence was provided between the approach, findings and interpretations. The final qualitative study (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017) did not clearly present a research question despite explaining the aims of the study. Justifications for using the chosen method were provided and the links between the method, results and interpretations were consistent. The study however achieved a score of 45% as there was no research question to meet the quality assessment criteria.

The two mixed-methods design studies did not have a clear research question, although the study aims were clear. The study by Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores (2021) scored well within the qualitative and quantitative components, however there was no clear research question to link the data and results. There was coherence between the method, findings and interpretation of results and received a score of 65%. Although the study by Aytar & Brunnberg (2016) adopted a mixed-methods approach, the quantitative data were excluded as no general statistically based conclusion was reached, therefore qualitative data were solely used within the analysis. This study received the lowest score of 25% as it did not provide coherence between the research question and the quality assessment criteria. Due to the low rating, the study was subsequently omitted as the quality of the paper compromised the rigour of the review. A total of six papers were therefore included in the review following the quality check.

The primary researcher reviewed all the studies whilst a peer reviewer independently completed the checklist for two articles to identify inconsistencies in the quality assessment.

Researcher's position

The researcher conducting the review is a White woman from Malta. As a trainee clinical psychologist, the researcher has a strong interest in this topic due to witnessing varying and often negative discourses around migration whilst living in Malta and England. The researcher also navigated her privilege as a white, English speaking adult, whose planned migration to another country differed massively from the experiences of unaccompanied minors fleeing their home country and giving up everything for their safety. The researcher acknowledged her cultural background in relation to preconceived understandings and assumptions around

migration, to consider the impact of individuals' positioning within societal structures on their perspectives and biases. Journaling and supervision encouraged reflection on values, beliefs, and assumptions. A neutral position was strived for to reduce researcher bias, however neutrality is difficult to maintain.

Results

Study Characteristics

Six articles were included in this review (see table 3). The studies were published between 2010 and 2021 and conducted across six European Countries. Two studies were conducted in Scandinavian countries, namely Sweden (*n* = 1) and Norway (*n* = 1). One study was carried out in Austria (*n* = 1), in Central Europe. One study was conducted in Spain (*n* = 1), a Mediterranean country. Two articles covered the British Isles, with one study in Ireland (*n* = 1) and another in England (*n* = 1).

There was considerable variance in participants' countries of origin and geographical location across studies, with some studies reporting a majority of participants from Afghanistan (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018) followed by Somalia and Syria (Raithelhuber, 2021). The Irish study mainly recruited participants from countries in Eastern Africa and Western Africa, whilst young people in Brook & Ottemöller's (2020) study originated from countries in Eastern and Central Africa. One study recruited a majority of participants from Morocco, followed by Algeria, countries in Sub Saharan Africa, and Latin America (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021).

There was a gender imbalance across studies as the majority of participants were male in all but one of the papers (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010). Two studies (*n* = 2) (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017; Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018) included males and females in their sample. Two papers only relied on male participants (Raithelhuber, 2021; Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021), whilst one study only recruited females (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020). Sample sizes across studies ranged from six to 44 participants.

Although age ranges across studies vary, participants had arrived in their host countries as unaccompanied minors. Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd (2017) interviewed participants once they were aged between 18 and 28, however their ages at the time of their arrival were not recorded. Brook & Ottemöller (2020) interviewed young people aged between 15 and 20, after arriving in Norway aged 13 to 15 years old. Aside from six interviewees younger than 21, Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour (2018) recruited five participants older than 21 at the time of the interviews. Participants were aged between 17 and 23 in the mentoring group

and between 17 and 19 in the control group in the study conducted by Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores (2021). Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) interviewed young people aged between 14 and 19 years. Raithelhuber (2021) did not specify the age range of participants, however it was reported that none of the young people lived independently and some were enrolled in secondary school, suggesting a similar age range to the other studies.

Five papers used a qualitative methodology, whilst one adopted a mixed-methods approach. The analytic approaches used within the qualitative studies varied between grounded theory (n = 2), content analysis (n = 1), narrative analysis (n = 1) and thematic analysis (n = 1). The mixed method study employed a flexible coding approach for analysis (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021).

Table 3

Overview of Included Studies

	Author(s) & Year	Location	Participants' gender & age range	Country of origin	Method & approach	Main Findings	MMAT Score
1.	Brook & Ottemöller (2020)	Norway	6 (females) Aged 13-15 at time of arrival Aged 15-20 at time of interviews	Countries in Eastern and Central Africa	Qualitative Narrative interviews	• Actively looked for ways to help themselves adapt. • Demonstrated resilience through focusing on goals and dreams. • Felt the need to adopt similar behaviours to their Norwegian peers. • Struggled with the need to belong and the need to hold onto their cultural roots	100%
2.	Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour (2018)	Sweden	11 (8 males, 3 females) Younger than 21 years old (*n* = 6) Older than 21 years old (*n* = 5)	5 countries, majority from Afghanistan	Qualitative Grounded theory	• Social networks with professional carers were either perceived as a secure base or as a source of rejection. • Friendships were an important source of support and social capital. • The young people used their strong bonds with ethnic-like friends as a source of genuine support. • The young people found that 'Swedes' were hard to reach, however they were perceived them as facilitators of establishment in Swedish society.	100%

3.	Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010)	Ireland	32 (18 females, 14 males) 14-19 years old	Eastern Africa (*n* = 14) Western Africa (*n* = 13) Middle Africa (*n* = 2) Southern Africa (*n* = 1) Western Asia (*n* = 1) Eastern Europe (*n* = 1)	Qualitative Participant observation Grounded theory- open, axial and selective coding	• Adaptation, positivity, suppression, independence, continuity and distrust were used as coping strategies. • Religious faith was the common underlying element across all coping strategies and facilitated the young people in their use of their various strategies.	100%
4.	Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd (2017)	England	6 (5 males, 1 female) 18-28 years old at time of interview	Sub Saharan Africa	Qualitative Thematic analysis	• The significance of social support and social connectedness was emphasised. • Refugee populations from a range of backgrounds perceive social support as a contributor to wellbeing. • Lack of social support was associated with increased mental health difficulties.	45%
5.	Raithelhuber (2021)	Austria	18 (males) Group interview 1 (*n* = 10) Group interview 2 (*n* = 8)	Afghanistan Syria Somalia	Qualitative Long-term case study	• Viewed their mentors as fundamentally beneficial and supportive, and they were used to establish social contacts. • Learning German was important and mentors provided opportunities to learn the language and communicate.	100%

					Inductive content analysis	• Mentors provided access to resources and relevant services. These were perceived as coping tools for the young people's transitions to youth and young adulthood. • Their godparents (mentors) were viewed as a source of emotional and psychosocial support.	
6.	Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores (2021)	Spain	44 (males) Mentoring group (MG) aged 17-23 Control group (CG) aged 17-19 Time 1 MG (*n* = 32) CG (*n* = 26) Time 2 MG (*n* = 21) CG (*n* = 23)	Morocco Algeria Sub-Saharan countries Countries in Latin America	Mixed-method Flexible coding approach Repeated measures ANOVA Paired t tests	• Young people who had less caring relationships relied on support from their youth workers for formalities of their transition to adulthood, but most of them felt emotionally isolated. • Young people felt pressure when coping with housing and legal status once they turned 18 and left the minor protection system. • Through the mentoring programme, youths had broader social networks which improved their psychological well-being. It also provided them with emotional stability and motivation to achieve higher educational goals. • Quantitative analysis found large effect sizes for the mentoring group on resilience, educational aspirations and educational expectations and medium effect sizes for self-esteem and hope.	65%

Synthesis of findings

The key findings were extracted from each of the seven studies, which led to the emergence of the following main themes and subthemes (see Table 4).

Table 4

Main themes and subthemes

Main Themes	Subthemes
1. Building social capital	1.1 Language
	1.2 Mentors and professionals
	1.3 Education and employment
	1.4 Support and security
2. Cultivating connections	2.1 Care givers and family
	2.2 Friendships
	2.3 Trust and belief systems
	2.4 Overcoming loneliness
3. Transforming identities	3.1 Independence
	3.2 Adaptation and continuity
	3.3 Navigating prejudice
	3.4 Acculturation and establishment
4. Hope as a way forward	4.1 Personal growth
	4.2 Strengths and resilience

Theme 1: Building social capital

This theme emphasised the significance of accumulating social assets during establishment. Findings across studies indicated that learning the host country's language and having access to education and employment are central ways of adjusting. Interpersonal relationships with mentors and professionals were a huge resource for young people as they could build social capital whilst feeling safe and supported.

Subtheme 1.1: Language

Language was central to building social capital and facilitated adaptation. Young people described it as fundamental for establishment and was associated with accessibility and survival:

"Languages, language is important. If you do not speak the language, you cannot do anything here… the language is the key to life and to survival here." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 6).

Spending time with mentors and caregivers was an opportunity to practise the language:

"Because of German; it is also very good for us to speak German because we don't speak German anywhere else. We talk to them. Maybe our German will get better that way." (Raithelhuber, 2021, page 258).

Although learning the host country's language is essential, it is time-consuming and requires commitment and perseverance. Additionally, some languages are more difficult to learn than others. One participant highlighted the challenges of trying to meet the unrealistic standards others set out for them:

"They expect us to be as good as Swedes but it's impossible. I mean, it's really hard. It was really hard for me to learn Swedish." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 385).

One young person associated language proficiency with acceptance as locals were more open and willing to engage with them once they learnt their mother tongue, helping them fit in and achieve a sense of normality:

"You feel normal when you learn the language, and people behave differently towards you. Like, people are more open and kind to me when I speak Norwegian." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Subtheme 1.2: Mentors and professionals

Young people discussed the influence of having a mentor on their experience of post-migration adjustment. Mentors are resourceful and provide emotional and practical support to equip young people with the required tools to navigate their lives:

"You may have a problem and this person can help you fix the problem you have, and as I am not from here, the people from here know much more than I do about here, and they can tell me things that in the future can help me. [. . .] Actually, I didn't have an older person who I could talk about my things with in Spain, by now I have the mentor and I talk about my things with her." (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 13).

A participant discussed the value of mentors who demonstrated genuine interest in caring for them as it provided feelings of security and safety and helped strengthen their relationships:

"They took care of us. They were the ones who fixed things and prepared breakfast, lunch and what we ate. Yes, they help us as well, for example, they drive us to the gym or some other place… she took responsibility like a mother. Yes, she knocked on the door and when she did that, we got ready for school. If we didn't go to school, she would ask us why." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 382).

Creating a safe environment helped the children feel comfortable with reaching out for help:

"If I don't feel good- I'm feeling bad one day, or I'm angry- I ask him if he can meet to talk and he says yes. If I have something important, he asks me if I want to stay, no problem. He's a really nice guy [. . .] Because I always feel god when I am with him. He's a good person, he treats me well." (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 13).

Young people acknowledged mentors' willingness to help them achieve their goals, highlighting the positive impact they had on their lives as they supported them in the best way possible:

"What do they want? They want my best interests. They don't want anything, I don't think. They want me to be something, to be able to do something great. I say I want to work here as a car mechanic. They are helping me as best they can; they are helping me become that and they want to help me." (Raithelhuber, 2021, page 259).

Subtheme 1.3: Education and employment

Education was regarded as a pillar of success and a foundation for continuity, providing opportunities for career progression and further establishment in the community. Education was associated with increased power as it helped young people shift away from marginality:

"Especially on the issue of persevering more or less with their education. For me, education is the way out of marginality, to the extent that it is possible for each person… Anything that is education is the best that a person can do… And someone of this age. I am very sure about this: education, education, education." (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 18).

Some young people did not have access to education in their home countries therefore relocating provided the opportunity to attend school, essentially empowering them for the future. Access to education provided stability and enhanced their career prospects. Aside from improving income and accessibility, securing a job broadened young people's social networks and helped with feeling accepted which was fundamental for establishment:

"First you need a job. If you have a job, you have everything. Everyone can understand you. Yes. If you have a job and money, people will come to you. If you have nothing, people will leave you." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 386)

Despite their educational achievements, young people still experienced discrimination and were judged based on their legal status, threatening their sense of belonging:

"Like at college, after hearing everything what they've been saying about asylum-seekers, "they are here to get our jobs", blah, blah, blah, and then you're just like, "oh yes, and I'm one of them"…" (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 297).

One participant highlighted the importance of education above all else, recognising the positive influence of her educational achievements on her evolving identity as a Norwegian:

"I'm no one until I've been educated. When I am educated I have life under control, that is when I have succeeded and can call myself Norwegian" (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Subtheme 1.4: Support and security

Feeling safe and free from danger enhances young people's sense of belongingness. However, whilst some children are able to feel secure in their new homes, others might encounter barriers to this which has a consequential effect on establishment. Despite being supported with basic practical issues, one participant indicated that they were left to fend for themselves with more meaningful problems as they did not get appropriate help to deal with them:

"They help if you want to shop for food, but they will not help you if you have a real problem." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Although the support the young people received was not always sufficient enough to meet their needs, adults were viewed as people who guided their journeys and portrayed a hopeful depiction of life, essentially helping the minors mould a more positive interpretation of their own worlds:

"What has been helpful to me are the adults, because they show me, they show me that everything will be fine. I think this has helped me very much, that they show that life will be fine." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Theme 2: Cultivating connections

This theme explores the connections the young people established and developed over time. The relevance of their relationships with care givers, family, friends, and belief systems were considered, alongside issues of trust and loneliness. The subthemes capture young people's inner and outer worlds as they made sense of their experiences and attributed meaning to them.

Subtheme 2.1: Care givers and family

Young people's understanding of family was shaped by their experiences and exposure to such relationships, both before and after migrating. The studies highlighted variations of these relationships, with young people ascribing meaning to connections formed between themselves and others.

A participant presented a bleak portrayal of her former life which instigated her move. The young person highlighted the role a good family can play in providing emotional support:

"I did not have a good life in my home country, that's why I had to go. I did not have family. I need a family here. But when you get a bad family here too, it does not help at all… To have a future, you need a good family… You need someone who supports you and takes away the darkness you live in." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Establishing healthy familial connections with caregivers help young people feel secure, however, not all placements and living arrangements are suitable which can create a sense of unsafety at home. A young person felt unsupported as her caregiver was unreliable and unavailable:

"It was quite chaotic… She, who was responsible for us, left for work early and came back late. We rarely saw her. It was difficult to get in touch with her, and the communication was difficult." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Having family-like relationships helped a participant experience and understand what having a family would be like, despite the difficult feelings it brought about:

"They make me feel safe and welcome all the time and I get to understand like, if I had had a mum, what it would have felt like. Because I just see her, like, what she does for my friend and how she is with my friend and I just feel like maybe that would be what I would have, if I had my mum as well… and it's good for me to understand what it would feel like to have a family. So when I see them, I know it makes me sad but then I learn…" (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 297).

Subtheme 2.2: Friendships

Friendships were a main source of social support, allowing young people to connect through shared understandings of their experiences. The role of forging reciprocal relationships was emphasised, indicating that both parties need to put in effort to maintain a healthy friendship:

"Yes, someone who understands you and you understand him as well, because a friendship is about you two people helping each other, you know, nobody is selfish- so that's why we're friends." (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 297).

Despite having established good relationships with local friends, some young people still felt the need to act differently to fit in meaning they could not be their authentic selves around them:

"The Norwegian friends that I have are very nice… but you feel in a way that you have to adapt a little. There are things you cannot say, and you must behave in a certain way. You cannot entirely be yourself, even if you are very good friends." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Some participants highlighted the impact of cultural differences on their interactions with locals which created a sense of unpredictability and distance. Unaccompanied young people were not always met with the same willingness to engage which unearthed feelings of detachment and confusion:

"They are cold, you could say. If we have a theme day once a year, then we will meet them during that day and talk to them but then the following day, they don't know us. We try to say 'Hello, how are you doing?' but they don't want to. I don't know why." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 384).

Some young people found relationship building with multi-cultural friends to be more fruitful and sparked their curiosity and eagerness to get to know more about their roots and contexts, facilitating a sense of appreciation for both the disparities and overlap of their experiences:

"When I came to Norway, I could hardly do anything. But eventually, I got many friends from different cultures. I wanted to understand them, which religion they believed in, what traditions they had and so on. I was very curious and excited. Maybe they had experienced the same things as me? I wanted to know everything about them." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 7).

Subtheme 2.3: Trust and belief systems

Unaccompanied young peoples' perception of trust and belief systems were influenced by their experiences and the meaning they ascribed to them. Establishing trust is a lengthy process and requires patience from both ends of the relationship. Furthermore, cross-cultural norms influence trust building. A mentor spoke about the value of having open, honest conversations with young people about this process:

"We were talking about patience, about how difficult it is sometimes to get these things, to trust the people who are around helping him" (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 13).

It is therefore unrealistic to expect young people to immediately trust their caregivers:

"Some people expect you to just trust them straight away. Like they are your mum or dad or your blood- they expect you to trust them right away. It's not possible." (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 298).

Some young people turned to their faith and religious beliefs for friendship and support. One young person spoke about God being the only friend they could wholly rely on and trust:

The only, only, only friend I trusted all the time, that's God. [. . .] I don't have any more friends I trusted more than God, I don't think so. You know because, always God knows more than everybody. And God's gonna help you all the time. [. . .] God always gonna help." ((Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 232).

A young person felt that God shaped their experiences by taking on a protector role, demonstrating the hopeful nature of trust:

"Because I believe he's the one that sent the man to help me I believe he's the one that brought me to this, eh, country, you understand? I believe he's the one that's still protecting me up till now. I believe with him everything is possible." (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 230).

Subtheme 2.4: Overcoming loneliness

Coping with loneliness is difficult and is often encountered by young people following relocation. A young person experienced loneliness after moving out from the Care and Housing home (HCH) home:

"It felt pretty lonely when I moved out from the HCH home. They helped us but it felt rather lonely." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 385).

Preoccupation with commitments such as jobs, hobbies, and social interactions were resourceful approaches to navigating loneliness. One participant used the mentoring program as a means of socialising, helping him relax and overcome his difficulties:

"Because I like having relationships with a lot of people. Because a memory is a memory, but your memory and my memory, if we work together, there will be two ideas that are worked on. If it's only my idea, I can't do anything. [. . .] Well, since I came here with many projects, collaborating with them, I began to forget my stuff, I began to relax with my stuff…" (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 14).

Although having a job provides a routine and a distraction from everything else, it can also contribute to alienation and further loneliness:

"During the summer, I worked in a friend's shop for two and a half months. I didn't have time to think about other things. I worked all day long and came home late and did the same thing the next day." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 387).

Theme 3: Transforming identities

This theme explores the development of the young peoples' sense of self. It considers the young peoples' position in society and how they are perceived by themselves and those around them. Adaptation and continuity of culture was explored alongside independence, prejudices, and becoming established in the community.

Subtheme 3.1: Adaptation and continuity

Reshaping of unaccompanied young peoples' identity may occur as they experience new cultures and adapt to society, however they must find their own balance between retaining their culture and adapting to the new one. A young person's foster family provided space for him to practice his religious beliefs and maintain culture continuity, ensuring his individual needs were being met:

"I'm a Muslim, they allow me to pray in their house, they cook halal for me and their own food separately." (Raithelhuber, 2021, page 258).

One participant felt the need to adapt by slightly changing the person she presented to the world, suggesting that society might not have been as accepting if she were to be her full authentic self:

"You feel in a way that you have to adapt a little. You can't be yourself, not quite… You have to adapt to the society here." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Social norms vary across cultures, and young people need to abide to these unwritten rules to manage interactions with the locals. However, unaccompanied minors were spotlighted as highly adaptable individuals:

"Very difficult but for me, it wasn't hard. We unaccompanied minors adapt very fast. In Sweden, you have to do away with bodily contact when you greet someone but if you know how to talk to them, then it's easy to get to know them." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 384).

Subtheme 3.2: Independence

Whilst the concept of being independent at a young age can sound quite daunting, unaccompanied minors have no other choice but to adapt to this change. Transitions to adulthood are difficult for unaccompanied minors as turning 18 in many countries means that they have to cope without the level of support they would get as minors:

"Now since I am over 18, I have some difficulties. You have to get by on your own. You have to make a living by yourself. Nobody helps you. [. . .] It's not like being a minor. When you are older you have to do everything alone, nobody helps you. If you want to do something, manage papers or go to an office, you have to learn to speak, learn how to do it. The difference when you are younger is that in the care centre they do everything for you." (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 16).

One participant highlighted the abruptness in the shift from being cared for to being independent following migration, however they nonetheless indicated that embracing autonomy and resultant responsibilities is more advantageous than being reliant on others:

"You are no longer Mammy's boy or Daddy's boy, you know how you grow up, you take care of yourself, you have to learn to live without your parents, you know. Eh, taking your own responsibilities… I'm deal-with-your-own-problems guy. I deal with my own problems." (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 231).

Despite the difficulties young people face when establishing themselves, achieving autonomy is fulfilling. A young person developed her self-sufficiency through her relationship with herself and past experiences, eventually reaping the positive outcomes of her newfound independence:

"I've gotten used to doing everything myself. I've been doing this for so long, you see. Before, I wanted to have people around me all the time. Finally, I got used to managing by myself. Now I would rather be alone and manage by myself. I have control, and I know that I will handle situations, because I always have. I like it that way, you see." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Subtheme 3.3: Navigating prejudice

Discrimination and prejudiced attitudes create and maintain false narratives. People can quickly make assumptions based on the actions of a few, which results in overgeneralisations and stereotyping of all foreigners:

"All over the world, there are both good and bad people but if a foreigner does something wrong, then all Swedes think that all foreigners do the same thing. But it's not like that." (Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018, page 384).

Unaccompanied young people experienced prejudices based on their status as asylum seekers or refugees. A participant spoke about their apprehension when disclosing their legal status, acknowledging that people are quick to form biases based on their background which impacts their ability to effectively establish themselves:

"(. . .) I even feel scared when I go for a job interview and I take my refugee passport to present. And I'm just thinking; the manager will already put me in another group. And then they always see, oh, he has a background of coming from war; he is from a dangerous country. Why do you have to mention that? It's just your background. You want to establish yourself but I don't think it's possible. Even in 100 years, you will never escape it. Are you going to pretend for the rest of your life?" (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 298).

One young person admitted that people will always perceive refugees differently based on preconceived biases and misconceptions:

"(. . .) Society doesn't like that part of you, they think different about that part of you. It doesn't matter how much you explain yourself, it will always be there. Like the Somali runner

Mo Farah. You're different when you're a refugee." (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 297).

Subtheme 3.4: Acculturation and establishment

Cultural differences became apparent following relocation. One participant discussed the influence of his choice of clothing as a way of expressing himself whilst fitting in with the dominant culture:

"And the friend I used to be with, I was watching the way he's dressing… But the way he's dressing, I keep it in my way. [. . .] I'm putting my own style so… that's how. So… I'm in Europe now… I gotta be like a European guy, so, see people dressing good. I gotta dress good or something. (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 229).

Young people experienced patterns of acculturation where they integrated aspects of their culture with their new environment. A participant illustrated their ability to retain their Nigerian way of living despite being established in Ireland:

"But the way it is now, I'm in Ireland but if I want to live a Nigerian life, you could still get it." (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 229).

Although becoming established requires adapting to the host country's social norms and behaviours, a young person pointed out that one must not disregard their native identity and experiences that led them to where they are today:

"You have a responsibility. It is my responsibility to become Norwegian. You must teach yourself how to behave here. There are many things you have to learn and such… but what I realised is that it is important to also remember who you really are. You can quickly forget, and then you get sad and actually sick. You must think of God and people from home. Because they are like me and I must never forget that person." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Theme 4: Hope as a way forward

This theme highlights the significance of hope in motivating young people to move forward. The subthemes consider young people's personal growth, strengths, and resilience.

Subtheme 4.1: Personal growth

Young people experienced growth by improving their knowledge and skills to align with their goals. One participant expressed their appreciation for their caregiver who supported their personal growth and provided encouragement to achieve their ambitions, likening her to a mother:

"I trust her as well. Yes, I've known her since I was 15, as a young refugee in the country, so she's been like a mother. Oh, she, she's done a lot. When you are new in the country, and you can't find your way- she kind of- that's why I call her like a mother- because she kind of showed me the way. And she tried to make it happen, you know. If it wasn't for people like her, maybe I wouldn't go to University, or maybe I was just going to forget about my dreams and forget about my goals and- cause I've been through a lot- that's why I call her like a mother." (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 297).

A mentor praised a young person's quick progress with learning the local language which helped shed light on his capabilities and subsequent growth:

"I was angry for a few days because I didn't understand. There were some things that for me were difficult to understand and she said to me: "Let's see, you've been here for a year and you understand Spanish. If I went to Morocco and I stayed there for 2 or 3 years, I wouldn't learn it like you", then I relax and I think I'm speaking well." (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021, page 10).

Growth must also occur amongst professionals and care givers supporting unaccompanied young people. Bringing up events from the past can be re-traumatising, therefore working towards achievable and hopeful sources are better ways of supporting young people with their personal development:

"I think caregivers should not ask so deeply about how we have experienced events from the past. The person who has fled is grieving, he just arrived. Instead of asking about the past, teach us about how society works. Instead of asking about the journey here and experience in our home country, talk about something else. For example, our futures!" (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Subtheme 4.2: Strengths and resilience

Unaccompanied young people demonstrated resilience and used their willpower and strength to move forward and overcome their difficulties. Moving to a safe place after being exposed to multiple risks allowed young people to feel comfortable and experience hope:

"I've always been scared. First and foremost, I was afraid of what I was going to experience and whether I was going to be killed. I wondered what I was going to experience in life. The fear that I had disappeared… being in Norway makes me happy. I have hope for the future and many opportunities. It makes me happy." (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020, page 8).

Tolerating uncertainty and acknowledging that life will not always be so difficult was a source of hope for a participant:

"But I'm trying to keep my head up… You know, because I know things one day are gonna get better. You know I mean so… [. . .] I'm hopeful. It won't be this way every day. It won't." (Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010, page 230).

Young people demonstrated strengths by adopting a hopeful mind-set to fuel their urge to persist forward and overcome their difficulties. Keeping a positive and resilient attitude helped young people persevere, with the knowledge that hard work eventually pays off:

"Now we are finding it hard, but in the next five to ten years- there will be big changes. If we focus, if we work hard, it we are determined, trust me we will see big changes in our lives." (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, page 298).

Discussion

Overview of Findings

The present review aimed to investigate the needs and strengths of unaccompanied minors by exploring their support and establishment experiences across six European countries. Findings published between 2010-2021 were synthesised, revealing four main themes: building social capital, cultivating connections, transforming identities, and hope as a way forward (see Table 4).

Unaccompanied minors' experiences were directly and indirectly influenced by the systems around them. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Figure 2) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) was adopted to reveal the impact of young people's immediate system (microsystem), the interactions between their microsystems (mesosystem), the wider social settings which indirectly influence them (exosystem), and cultural values and beliefs (macrosystem) on establishment. This model acknowledges young people's social graces (Burnham, 1993) in relation to their position in society. It also spotlights the influence of power imbalances on inequalities and prejudices.

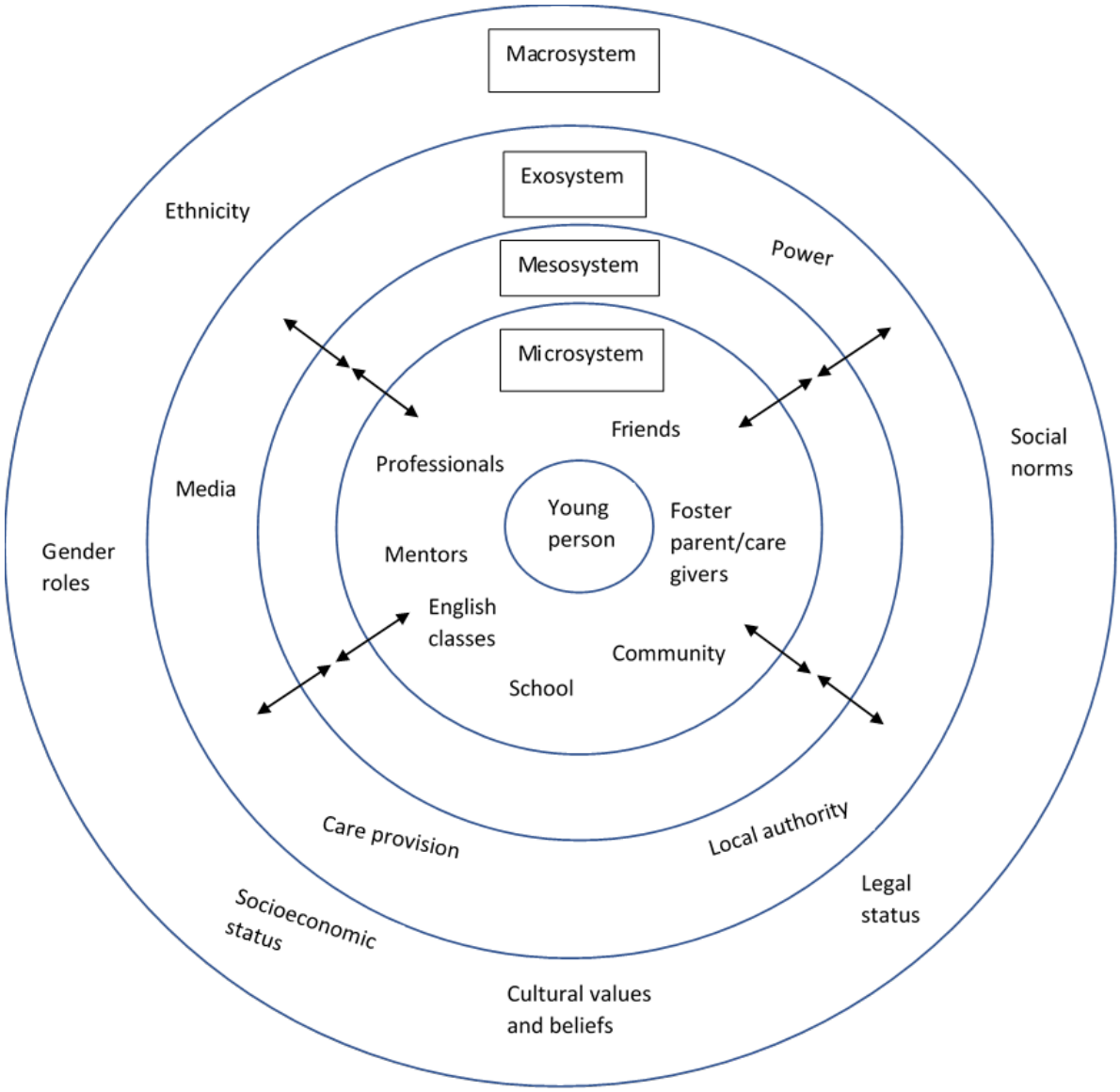

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1992) demonstrating young people's positioning in relation to their systems.

Feeling safe and free from danger was an essential foundation for establishment. Unaccompanied young people were reliant on their caregivers to provide stable, nurturing environments, as demonstrated by Bjerneld & Puthoopparambil (2022). Disparities between the treatment of younger minors and older minors were apparent throughout the studies, demonstrating the impact of appropriate support provision and placement type on their experiences. The lack of emotional and social support for older children was highlighted by Groak, Sclare & Raval (2010), which sheds light on practices that discriminate against children based on their age.

Young people's establishment experiences were shaped by the availability of resources and funding, and were largely determined by powers beyond their control. The narrative synthesis revealed the significance of building social capital to aid establishment. Two studies (Raithelhuber, 2021, Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021) demonstrated the value of mentoring programmes, as they provided access to resources and social capital alongside offering practical and emotional support. Gelis (2015) found that these programmes accommodated for young people's needs and instilled hope for the future. Mentors were perceived as secure-bases which facilitated young people's sense of belonging and allowed them to form trusting relationships, as suggested by Herz and Lalander (2019). The review also evidenced the significance of social connectedness in helping young people cope and access the community. Establishing connections with locals was perceived as challenging but nonetheless a useful source of social capital. This was particularly evident in Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour's (2018) study. Interactions with ethnic friends allowed young people to reconnect with their cultural roots and navigate their connections through common understandings. It also provided space for young people to attend to their evolving identities informed by their bicultural self. Strong support networks and connections were therefore perceived as contributors to positive outcomes, as outlined by Alvord & Grados, (2005).

The review revealed the importance of identifying unaccompanied minors' specific needs and supporting them, as suggested by Kauhanen & Kaukko (2020). Aside from the influence of external factors, unaccompanied minors utilised their strengths and resilience to overcome their difficulties. The included studies discussed young people's ability to persevere and experience hope despite their hardships. The review highlighted the value in listening to unaccompanied minors' lived experiences over biased societal stories which cause further marginalisation. These narratives can inform the support structures around the young people to contribute to more positive establishment experiences.

Limitations

The review was limited to six studies which could influence the generalisability of findings. Most studies included in the review hailed from countries in Northern Europe, whilst Western and Southern Europe were represented by one study each. The lack of representation from

Eastern Europe could influence applicability of findings to European contexts. As the review excluded non-European countries, unaccompanied young people's experiences of establishment outside Europe might differ.

The quality assessment revealed that two reviewed papers did not include a clear research question (Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd, 2017, Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021). This omission informed the lower scientific quality of the studies. Findings derived from quantitative data were limited to one mixed study (Alarcón, Bobowik & Prieto-Flores, 2021). There was therefore a heavy reliance on qualitative data to explore young people's establishment needs. Two studies had limited quotations in comparison to other studies, therefore they were not as representative of the results (Raithelhuber, 2021, Eriksson, Wimelius & Ghazinour, 2018). None of the qualitative studies included a reflective statement exploring the researchers' reflexive position, which limits insight into their perspectives and biases. The researcher was cautious about biases when interpreting the work of other researchers who made sense of participants' experiences through their own lens.

Implications for further research and practice

This review highlighted the multiple influences that shape unaccompanied young people's experiences of establishment. It sheds light on their needs and strengths which can inform care provision.

Males were overrepresented in the findings, demonstrating a need to include more research on unaccompanied young females. This will consider specific support needs for males and females to enhance service provision. Reviews exploring young people's transition experiences from care to adulthood might help bridge the gap for support needs. Additionally, further research on unaccompanied minors from various backgrounds would consider the influence of ethnicity and country of origin on establishment experiences.

The review demonstrates the value of using community resources to meet support needs. This could encourage individuals to make the best use of available resources to provide appropriate support. Unaccompanied young people require person-centred care tailored to their specific needs. Establishing good support systems around the young people will aid this

process and enhance their establishment experiences. Emphasis must be placed on trust building to ensure that the young people feel safe and comfortable with the individuals supporting them. Opportunities for social networking and support can be achieved by implementing mentoring programmes, and by encouraging community engagement. Furthermore, having access to educational prospects is essential for young people to build social capital and grow.

Updated research on unaccompanied minors is necessary as the constantly evolving political climate has a direct influence on their support and establishment experiences. Additionally, frameworks for supporting unaccompanied minors vary across countries which reveals the impact of geographical context. Therefore, research conducted in the UK is necessary to evaluate current processes and their effectiveness. This adopts a proactive approach which acknowledges the value of research in shaping support provision and enhancing unaccompanied young people's establishment experiences.

Conclusion

There are several influences that shape unaccompanied minors' establishment experiences. The results highlighted their support needs and strengths whilst considering the influence of the systems around them. The theme of power emerged as a facilitator in shaping unaccompanied young people's experiences and positioning in society. The meaning they ascribed to this was explored as they navigated their difficulties. This review emphasises the value of exploring young people's lived experiences to inform community support provision. Further research is recommended to capture an updated portrayal of the contexts around unaccompanied minors as they establish themselves.

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Part Two: Empirical Research Study

Exploring the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the perspective of professionals providing community services

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Abstract

Purpose

This research aimed to explore the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) through the lens of individuals supporting them. The study employed a systemic approach to consider the influence of community resources and support on their experiences.

Method

Eight professionals supporting UASC across the UK were recruited. Qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis was used for analysis.

Results

Three main themes emerged: “Navigating injustices”, “The right support”, and “Survivors”. Each theme contained three subthemes which are discussed.

Conclusions

The present study demonstrates how the systems around UASC interact to influence their experiences. The role of power was emphasised throughout the young people’s experiences, especially when considering their contexts and legal journeys. The study revealed the influence of accessing appropriate resources and support in shaping UASC’s experiences. Limitations of the study and implications for further research are considered.

Keywords: unaccompanied asylum seeking children, professionals, community support, accessibility

Introduction

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) are young people under the age of 18 seeking asylum without parents or carers in the country to care for them (United Nations Refugee Agency, 1994). UASC are not only separated from their family of origin, but also from their community and home country. They seek refuge for various reasons following political, religious, cultural or other forms of persecution. Unaccompanied minors are an especially vulnerable group, and compared with accompanied minors and non-immigrants, are more likely to have passed through multiple traumatic experiences such as the loss of family, abuse, and exploitation (Fazel, Reed & Stein, 2015). Upon arrival in the UK, they face the challenge of getting used to their new lives and labels, and transitions to adulthood are often accelerated as they experience difficulties and stigma, not only as asylum seeking young people, but also as young people in care (Sirriyeh, 2013).

In the UK, the local authority is responsible for assessing unaccompanied minors and providing accommodation and support. UASC are financially supported under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 until they turn 18, irrespective of their immigration status (Children Act 1989, Section 20). However, the funding they receive varies as it depends on their local authorities' policies. In 2021, there were 3,762 asylum applications by unaccompanied children in the UK, a rise from 2,773 in the previous year (Home Office Immigration Statistics, 2022). Some local authorities support an excessively large number of UASC. In response, the National UASC Transfer Scheme (NTS) was introduced in July 2016 to encourage local authorities across the UK to voluntarily accept UASC so children were more evenly distributed across the country (Association of Directors of Children's Services, 2016). However, this means that some children get transferred to areas which do not offer sufficient support. Relevant training is essential for care provision, specifically in areas of low ethnic diversity where opportunities to develop knowledge base and skills for the care of minors are limited. In fact, specialist support services are largely based in London, and they are not accessible to all unaccompanied children who need them (Bhabha & Finch, 2006).

Support

UASC need to be supported in the community, with sustainable and accessible interventions which could be aided by involving and training local non-mental health professionals (Jordans

et al., 2010). Community support figures could provide sensitive care and support, helping the child to form attachment bonds to foster a secure base and safe haven (Bowlby, 1973). Caregivers' facilitation of closeness, safety, and confidence helps children navigate difficult experiences and promotes their social and emotional development. Whilst not all young people may wish to access therapy or counselling, their needs must be assessed to ensure they receive sufficient support (Chase, Knight & Statham, 2008). The value of offering support within different settings is evident, as mental health services often experience difficulties in reaching unaccompanied children (Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, Middelthon, 2012).

Understanding experiences of stigma and fear surrounding mental illness and help-seeking amongst UASC is crucial in considering an appropriate framework for support. Psychological distress among UASC is often described as physical manifestations, and help seeking is more acceptable for symptoms of physical ill health (Fazel, Garcia, & Stein, 2016). Societal beliefs of mental health could influence UASC's attitudes, as people with mental health problems are viewed as stigmatised and socially excluded in certain cultures (Majumder, O'Reilly, Karim & Vostanis, 2015). Beliefs and suspicions about the relationships between healthcare providers and the government could also shape willingness to access support (Hodes & Vostanis, 2019). Distrust relating to mental health support can also be related to care settings, as clinics and hospitals were found to be associated with anxiety and fear (Fazel, Garcia, & Stein, 2016). These findings reveal the need to offer interventions in environments that foster familiarity and trust, such as community settings.

While improving accessibility to care is important in addressing the mental health needs of UASC, care providers must evaluate their experiences to deliver culturally and developmentally appropriate interventions across different environments (Grey & Young, 2008). Culturally specific assessments and interventions should be utilised to consider barriers such as language fluency (Ehntholt & Yule, 2006). Although culture needs to be addressed in service provision for UASC, support from specifically culturally matched professionals is unrealistic in mental health services (Majumder, Vostanis, Karim & O'Reilly, 2018). Additionally, placements are often reliant on the availability of resources which insinuates that finding culturally matched care givers is not always viable. Therefore, involving

agencies and external services will inform care pathways and address the need for different approaches when accessing care.

Michelson and Sclare (2009) conducted a comparative study with UASC and minors accompanied to the UK by one or more primary caregivers to address psychological needs, patterns of service use, and care provision in a specialist mental health service in London. Although unaccompanied minors were more likely to exhibit post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, they were less likely to receive trauma-focused interventions and cognitive therapy, and also received less practical assistance with basic social needs. Furthermore, UASC were more likely to skip appointments and had a higher rates of disengagement. Therefore, due to the complex social and psychological needs of unaccompanied children, a well-planned response is needed, not necessarily from healthcare providers such as CAMHS, but from community agencies. Mental health outreach and accessibility for UASC might improve through providing additional community support, especially in relation to hard-to-engage children.

Resilience

UASC are alone, so their status as children is more important than their asylum seeker label (Hopkins & Hill, 2010). Therefore, they need to be treated like other children of the same age. Honneth's (2012) Theory of Recognition considers the need for relationship building and recognition in relation to care and welfare. Individuals need recognition in human relationships through social interactions to form and maintain healthy identities which are shaped by maintaining self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem. UASC are often denied legal status, making them more reliant on social groups to offer compensatory respect (Honneth, 2012). Engaging in social activities promotes children's resilience as it helps them build up social support, avoiding isolation and loneliness (Kohli, 2006). Positive connections with peers, good support networks, supportive schools and encouraging home environments are important influences which contribute towards positive outcomes (Alvord & Grados, 2005). Holistically, engaging in new experiences promotes resilience as it shifts the focus to cultivating an environment that allows UASC to explore their identities, rather than focusing on their past.

Resilience is context-dependent as it is influenced by interactions between individuals and their social worlds, with some aspects of resilience varying by culture (Ungar, 2008). Additionally, resilience is a process which develops through experiencing adverse life situations (Newman & Blackburn, 2002). Resilience is often overshadowed by risk and vulnerability in literature, which limits identification of factors and processes that encourage positive outcomes (Kohli & Mater, 2003). The promotion of psychosocial well-being for unaccompanied children requires entering the minor's inner and outer worlds with therapeutic care which helps the process of self-recovery (Kohli & Mater, 2003). Furthermore, practical support, fostering a sense of belonging and support to take charge of their lives are essential support ingredients (Mitra & Hodes, 2019). Restoring a supportive environment ensures that the focus is not only on mental health, but addresses practical and societal difficulties (Birman et al., 2008). This might involve help with filling out applications, promoting language proficiency and advocating for more stable housing, for instance. Restoring a sense of normality is essential, which is possible through multi-faceted care provision involving family and the community. Despite the experiences of adversity and exposure to risk factors, most UASC survive and thrive through being resilient and determined to succeed in education, gain refugee status, and work towards achieving their aspirations such as improving social status and wealth (Kohli & Mater, 2003).

Much literature on UASC focuses on experiences from the viewpoint of the child's main carer, which suggests that their representation in the literature is passively illustrated (Rogers, Carr & Hickman, 2018). Therefore, aspects of the experiences of UASC can be missed. Some studies address the child's perspective, with a growing body of literature exploring the lives of UASC (Koser, 2016). However, there is still a need to further explore and represent the lived experiences of UASC from other perspectives (Kohli & Kaukko, 2017). Current research focuses on issues related to legal, medical, social and welfare-based requirements, with less consideration being given to the overall needs of UASC (Crawley, 2010). The care and support needs of UASC are vast and require a multi-faceted approach involving appropriate services to provide integrated care. This approach expands outreach to the community and beyond to promote children's resilience and qualities through their interactions with individuals supporting them. Therefore, exploring perspectives of care providers and professionals in the community moves towards a more systemic approach.

This study aims to explore the experiences of UASC through the lens of professionals and volunteers providing community services. The following research question was developed:

How are the experiences of UASC perceived by professionals in the community?

Method

Design

The study used a qualitative approach to gather rich subjective data (Alase, 2017). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to provide insight into their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to identify and analyse themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021).

Participants

The study recruited individuals in the community involved in the care and support of UASC. Eight participants were recruited based on the sample size recommendations made by Turpin et al., (1997) for clinical psychology doctoral programmes in the UK as it prioritises the depth, rather than the breath, of the study. All participants were over the age of 18 and were in paid employment, although the study criteria also allowed inclusion of volunteers supporting UASC. Participants represented the Yorkshire region, Devon, Scotland, and London.

Ethics

Ethical approval was authorised by the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Hull. The study's information sheet (Appendix D), consent form (Appendix E), risk assessment form, data management plan, and recruitment email (Appendix G) were approved during this process. Recruitment for the study commenced in May 2021 and ran until April 2022. The amendment sheet (Form C) was utilised to broaden the study's recruitment strategy and was approved in October 2021.

Prior to the interview, participants received the study's information sheet and consent form. Participants needed to provide informed consent to participate in the study. They were able to withdraw from the study at any point until data analysis commenced. Audio recordings were deleted following transcription. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymising participants' identifiable information.

Procedure and data collection

The researcher established a connection with a contact in a UK based organisation supporting UASC, who forwarded the study details including the information sheet and consent form to

colleagues via e-mail. Since the required sample size was not obtained this way, the recruitment strategy was broadened to include other organisations supporting UASC. Organisations were contacted via targeted e-mails requesting participants for the study. Snowball sampling was adopted to recruit participants. Potential contributors contacted the researcher to express their interest in participating, after which a mutually agreed date and time was arranged for the interview and a Microsoft Teams link was sent out. Virtual platforms were used due to COVID-19 restrictions on face to face contact, however this method allowed for increased participant outreach and accessibility.

Eight semi-structured interviews were carried out between August 2021 and April 2022. With participants' consent, the interview was audio recorded on an NHS encrypted laptop. The interview recordings were later transcribed verbatim, and participants' identifiable information was omitted to protect their anonymity. The audio recordings were deleted following the write up of the study's results. Participants were able to request feedback of the study once the final report was produced, and they were also able to contribute any suggestions if there was something about the study they felt needed improving.

Methodological analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was utilised to analyse the data. Reflexive TA identifies and analyses patterns across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to mould an understanding of the experiences of UASC. The study was exploratory and used a subjectivist and interpretivist approach to uncover the meaning behind participants' understandings of lived experiences (Krauss, 2005). Such an approach allowed participants to construct an impression of the world as they see it (Ratner, 2008). Reflexive TA was adopted for this study as it enabled the researcher to explore UASC's experiences from a data-driven perspective to allow for inductive theme generation, which was congruent with the explorative nature of the study. Reflexive TA is theoretically flexible which made it an ideal method for the researcher's critical realist stance (Braun & Clark, 2021).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was initially selected for analysis to consider the subjective perceptions of participants in exploring their understandings to develop a phenomenological account of their experiences (Smith, 2004). However, it was decided that

reflexive TA was the most appropriate method of analysis to provide rich and insightful understandings of complex phenomena through identifying patterns across participants' constructs of UASC's experiences (Smith & Firth, 2011). Consideration was given to the position of the researcher, as subjectivity could lead to bias towards objective facets of the individual's reality (Shrout et al., 2018). Reflexive TA allowed the researcher to reflect on her position to consider the influence of her own preconceptions and biases on her understanding of participants' experiences. This helped the researcher to come as close to the perspectives of participants as possible by being curious and persistent in understanding their interpretations of lived experiences (Tuffour, 2017). A reflective position ensured that focus was given to the process of participants' experiences, rather than the outcome. This helped identify participants' realities and viewpoints to create a collaborative reconstruction of them, giving the researcher an active role in understanding the meaning they ascribed to them.

The researcher used conversations within research supervision as well as a reflective journal to reflect on the research process and consider the potential influence of beliefs and biases on data interpretation. Data analysis involved a succinct and thorough evaluation of each transcript to adopt an ideographic approach. For further context, please refer to the researcher's reflective statement (Appendix A).

Participant demographics

Participants' demographic details were collected to position their voices in relation to UASC's experiences. Some demographic data were excluded from the table as it was not collected.

Table 1

Participant demographic information

Participant Number	Age/Age range	Gender	Ethnicity	Class
Participant 1	30	Female	White Polish/English	Working class
Participant 2	34	Male	White British	Middle class

Participant 3				
Participant 4	56-65	Male		
Participant 5	46-55	Male	White Scottish	Middle class
Participant 6	26-35	Male	White & Asian	Middle class
Participant 7	36	Male	White Dutch	Middle class
Participant 8				

Results

Participants engaged in a conversation guided by semi-structured questions about their perception of the experiences of UASC. Three themes, each with subthemes (*n* = 9), captured participants' accounts (see Table 2). Figure 1 depicts a visual representation of the relationship between the themes.

Table 2

Summary of developed themes and subthemes

Themes	**Subthemes**
1. Navigating injustices	1.1 Systemic challenges
	1.2 The legal journey
	1.3 The power of recognition
2. The right support	2.1 Having people who care
	2.2 Accessible resources
	2.3 Connecting with communities
3. Survivors	3.1 Search for safety
	3.2 Trauma and resilience
	3.3 Maintaining hope

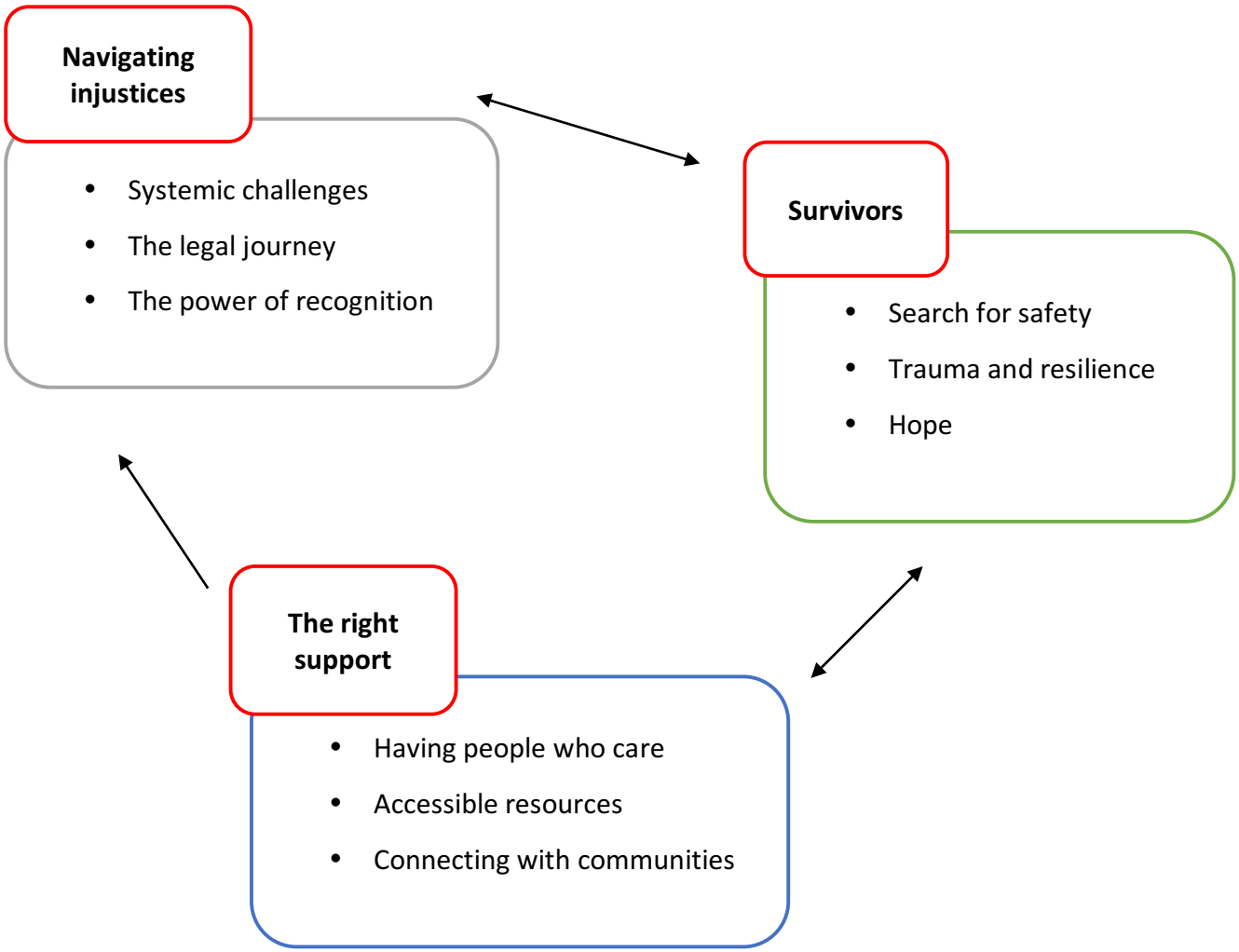

Figure 1: A visual representation of the themes and their relationship which demonstrates how the themes were developed.

Theme 1: Navigating injustices

This theme elaborates on the systemic difficulties that are faced by UASC as they navigate hostile environments and injustices. UASC's establishment experiences are largely influenced by their legal status which reveals their position of powerlessness in a situation that impacts so many aspects of their lives. UASC's experiences of injustices were classified into three subthemes: "Systemic challenges", "the legal journey", and "the power of recognition".

Subtheme 1.1: Systemic Challenges

The systemic challenges that shape UASC's experiences uncover a myriad of difficulties which go beyond the control of the young people and professionals supporting them. Such

difficulties uncover the flaws of the care system which overlook UASC's specific needs by treating them like any other looked after child in the UK. This approach disregards UASC's circumstances which vary significantly from the experiences of looked after children and require a different package of support:

"The model of care of looked after children is kind of applied to unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum, and I often think it's not tailored enough to their needs and to their specific experiences." (Participant 2)

Unaccompanied young people are often faced with injustices since they carry the migrant label and in many cases, because they are black in a white majority population. Racism and discrimination occurs implicitly and explicitly, revealing the impact of systemic issues on UASC's personal experiences:

"They experience injustices and they recognise that that is because they are often young black people or because they are migrants. So I think a lot of them are very wise about the way the world is, some of them are learning for the first time what it is to be a young black migrant child in a predominantly white environment." (Participant 3)

Issues of inequality and privilege were brought to light, revealing power imbalances amongst young people requiring the same interventions:

"Every single local authority treats them different when it comes to housing, finance, what they get, what they can't get, and I find that absolutely shocking. I still can't get my head round it." (Participant 4)

Another systemic challenge faced by all local authorities is the fact that there are not enough resources to keep up with the demand. This sheds light on the mismatch between the needs of young people and accessible support. The lack of appropriate placements has a consequential effect on young people's circumstances as they may end up in unsuitable temporary accommodation which can have a consequential effect on their experiences:

"We've had such a significant increase nationally of children coming into care and we haven't had a growth in; we certainly haven't had a national growth in foster carers or residential children's homes or supported living. So finding home for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the context of also trying to find home for you know, children in the UK, it's a difficult one. (Participant 8)

Subtheme 1.2: The legal journey

UASC have to tolerate a high level of uncertainty as they navigate their legal journey. UASC's experiences of the legal system are often unpleasant from the time of their arrival in the country, since they could be age assessed and inappropriately labelled as adults. This has a knock on effect on their identities as children and ability to access appropriate resources:

"A lot of children arrive in the UK without documentary evidence of their age and so they are age disputed by the border force, by the home office, by local authorities, age assessed as being adults, and so they are denied access to support that they are entitled to or have a right to" (Participant 3)

Since a number of professionals are often involved in UASC's care, they often require their own assessments which means that the young people need to re-live their experiences which could re-traumatise them. The whole process is invalidating as it disregards the young people's voices:

"How many times they have to justify themselves over and over and over again right before you even got to the very first main stage of their asylum process" (Participant 1)

Participants admitted that the current system is flawed, shedding light on the repetitive nature of UASC's legal experiences which impacts both the children and the individuals involved in their care:

"A lot of it is pretty much unnecessary systems and procedures so it is frustrating in that way." (Participant 2)

In addition to their lengthy assessments, UASC have to overcome a number of hurdles to convince the government that they should be granted safety. Their legal journeys are often an ongoing presence which has the ability to overshadow their childhood experiences:

"The hoops they have to jump through over successive years, it seems unnecessary." (Participant 5)

Subtheme 1.3: The power of recognition

UASC are young people first and foremost, therefore they have the same basic needs as any other child. Refuting their identity as young people invalidates their experiences and has repercussions on their ability to access appropriate resources and support:

"They're children, it doesn't matter where they come from, who they are, what their story is." (Participant 4)

UASC's rights to access care are dictated by their immigration status and age, making the legal process a tricky once especially in cases where a child looks older than their age. Failing to recognise their status as children denies young people their rights to be looked after like any other child and spotlights the inadequacies of the current systems:

"There are going to be so many children now who are given ages of adults who are now going to be slipping through the nets and I think that's going to be something we see later down the line." (Participant 1)

Denying young people their rights to access care puts them in risky situations as they are forced to navigate a novel world without age-appropriate support. The weight of the labels UASC carry are heavy and inform the way they are perceived by society:

"They are very vulnerable young people and therefore are in need of a lot in terms of support, in terms of access to services, access to their rights, at the same time they are viewed as being less deserving of that support for political reasons related to being migrants, to being non-citizens." (Participant 3)

There was also a recognition that UASC encounter many difficulties during their teenage years which in itself can be quite a challenging period of young adulthood. Participants acknowledged the confusing nature of UASC's experiences, which has a knock-on effect on young people's ability to effectively process their circumstances:

"They struggle with all these experiences and feelings because they're quite young of course and they're also just you know being teenagers." (Participant 7)

Viewing UASC as young people takes away the powerful influences of labels and allows society to see them for who they really are, children:

"Fundamentally they are young people, the same as everyone else" (Participant 6)

Theme 2: The right support

This theme explores UASC's support needs which form the foundation of effective establishment. Various facets of support were addressed within the theme to consider their impact on young people's experiences. Positive support enhanced the children's experiences, however the shortcomings of care provision were often influenced by factors beyond the control of UASC and the professionals supporting them, once again revealing the underlying theme of powerlessness. Young people's support experiences were categorised into three subthemes: "Having people who care", "accessible resources" and "connecting with communities".

Subtheme 2.1: Having people who care

Unaccompanied children need to feel safe and cared for, like any other child. Many people are involved in UASC's support networks, therefore the young people need to understand everyone's role and purpose, which can be quite disorientating considering the amount of people they encounter. However, children's experiences are enhanced when they are supported by individuals who are invested in helping them to adjust. The benefits of this arrangement are mutual as it provides a sense of fulfilment:

"Personally I find it incredibly rewarding to be a part of a cog in the wheel that can help them to integrate and help them to feel more at home, be a part of a wider support network, so that feels valuable." (Participant 5)

Participants highlighted the value of relationship building above all else. Establishing trusting relationships with professionals does not require specific capabilities, but rather it can be forged by anyone who is willing to invest their time and energy in the young people. UASC are often aware of the disparities between individuals who genuinely care for them and those who are only inclined to form connections for the sake of the job:

"We don't always have to be experts in everything. You know actually if you build trust in a relationship with a young person, that's more important I think sometimes than having all the answers to everything." (Participant 8)

Professionals supporting UASC are in a position of power relative to the young people, therefore they are able to amplify their voices by advocating for them. Having people who genuinely care for the young people has a positive influence on their interactions and demonstrates that they are not facing their experiences alone:

"I'm here to fight for you and to try my best on your behalf." (Participant 1)

It is imperative for UASC to feel safe and cared for at home, and their sense of security is largely achieved through establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with their carers:

"There are some where through a shortage of foster carers or good quality placements the real support and care that they need is not provided because that sense of care comes from where they live, where they spend most of their time, the support staff, foster carers. A positive fostering arrangement can never completely replace kind of their parents but the care that they receive helps mimic that." (Participant 2)

Aside from influencing their sense of security, having people who care and receiving the right support contributes to UASC's emotional well-being and ability to adapt to novel situations. The offer of shelter and love can only be fulfilled by those who really care:

"When young people get to experience good quality care where they are in environments where they have access to trusting adults, where they have access to love and they benefit hugely and they can improve their sense of you know self-worth" (Participant 3)

Subtheme 2.2: Accessible resources

UASC are supported using the same model of care as looked after children which demonstrates the insufficiency of the current system which may overlook their specific needs. Placements are dependent on the local authority and their ability to provide access to necessary resources within their geographical area. This reveals an equity problem across the UK as some young people experience greater inequalities than others:

"The experiences of unaccompanied children vary massively and I think it depends on where they're placed. The services and the opportunities vary significantly from region to region, local authority to local authority." (Participant 2)

The shortage of appropriate accommodation was brought to light by participants which demonstrated the impact of placement type on UASC's experiences. Young people often end up in inadequate housing arrangements which exacerbates other issues such as risk. There is a recognition of the inappropriateness of such arrangements, however they are often the only available alternative due to a lack of accessible resources:

"There's no accommodation so they're putting them in hotels, which isn't good. Vulnerable young people get put in hotels and it will be about 4, 5, 6weeks until they can probably get somewhere." (Participant 4)

When young people are placed in remote areas or communities where access to support is limited, they often experience isolation as their ability to be independent and thrive is restricted by powers beyond their control. Accessibility to services can positively impact

UASC's experiences as it provides more opportunities for social support and essentially improves their quality of life:

"There are huge waiting lists for services and a lot of services that exist will exist in cities and lots of the young people that at least I am supporting, are not based in cities and so young people are being spread around to places where the resources don't exist which isn't helpful." (Participant 6)

The shortcomings of the support system reveal issues of equity which directly impact young people's establishment experiences. There was an acknowledgment that accessibility issues prevent UASC from receiving the ideal support, signifying a need for change:

"I think we've got a bit of a way to go in how we support young people and how they access it." (Participant 8)

Subtheme 2.3: Connecting with communities

The connections formed through community engagement are often more authentic than the ones forged through more formal means. Having community support also means that the young people can shift their focus away from their legal journey and focus on interacting with things that matter:

"They welcome community support, that feels really good when young people really engage with the support offered by the third sector, by community organisations, and I think that young people really are thankful and seek out support which is like less about someone being employed to give them help." (Participant 3)

Being placed in inaccessible communities impacts many of the systems around UASC. Aside from having limited access to support and services, young people may have sparse social contact which could lead to feelings of isolation. Additionally, the absence of peers and a community to engage with leads to harder establishment experiences and could impact young people's sense of self as they lose touch with their cultural roots:

"You've got no resources, no ESOL courses, no gym, no other people to talk his language, no maybe halal shops. You're just going to exacerbate greatly how in everything else he's feeling." (Participant 4)

Learning English allows young people to express themselves and it is a precursor to connecting with others in the community. UASC are often reliant on their local authority to provide English language courses which reveals an issue in itself as support provision is not always best suited to meet the learning needs of unaccompanied young people, especially when resources are limited. UASC's ability to engage with the community and thrive is therefore heavily influenced by factors beyond their control:

"As soon as they can start to learn the language they can start engaging in the community which is very helpful so I can see a big difference between young people that already speak English, and young people that don't speak any English so they're often more isolated" (Participant 7)

However, limited English proficiency should not mean that UASC are automatically excluded from the community. By having access to alternative ways of expressing themselves, the young people could connect with their hobbies and other people through varying means, such as through art and music:

"I do think that there needs to be more coordinated kind of provision of activities, things that are fun, things that distract, things that help people with cultural development, things that help them develop, express themselves creatively as well." (Participant 2)

UASC are shaped by their environments, therefore their experiences are often enhanced when residing in an accessible community:

"In an ideal world young people will be placed into locations where there is a community they can engage with" (Participant 6)

Theme 3: Survivors

This theme encapsulates the influences of UASC's post-migration journeys which shaped their experiences and sense of belongingness. The title "survivors" is a testament to the young people's strength and fortitude in the face of adversity. The subthemes address UASC's search for safety in a novel environment, the interplay of trauma and resilience, and the role of hope on their ability to grow and thrive.

Subtheme 3.1: Search for safety

The search for safety underpinned UASC's perilous journeys and helped weave meaning into their experiences. The young people sacrificed everything in a bid to seek shelter from the dangers they were escaping. Establishing a sense of safety is fundamental to survive and thrive:

"You're going through an asylum process. You're asking the government to stay here because your country is not safe. […] They just want to stay here and be safe." (Participant 4)

Safety allows you to feel secure in your own environment, and although it can be sought, it is not always available. Some young people may not be fortunate enough to achieve a state of safety, especially when their housing and care arrangements are not suited to meet their needs:

"Having a roof over your head does not necessarily mean you feel safe" (Participant 6)

The systems around UASC are complex and often involve many professionals which may exacerbate feelings of unsafety due to a lack of stability and consistency. However, when UASC are supported by individuals who demonstrate genuine care and trustworthiness, they are able to establish connections which provide safety:

"If you can show that you are at least one person who will like not make false promises and you stick by your word and you're true and consistent, like I guess you can trust somebody and there is hope in that sense." (Participant 1)

Although the support around UASC is not always adequate to meet all their needs, they are often in better positions than they were before arriving to the UK and they have survived their journeys to get to a place of safety:

"I think we get some young people who are just really; just kind of relieved to be here and to be safe, and they- materially at least- they might have more than they've ever had before." (Participant 2)

Subtheme 3.2: Trauma and resilience

Participants reflected on the notion that resilience conceals trauma. Although UASC were perceived as resilient individuals, there was an acknowledgment that what we view as strength is a survival strategy which often disregards the myriad of difficulties they experience:

"There is resilience and kind of a mask that young people are coping well and they somehow overcome a lot of the traumatic experiences they've had, but actually that coping strategy is what got them so far when other needs are met […] people are resilient but also people are damaged by their experiences and that damage, that neglect is often overlooked." (Participant 2)

Often times, UASC do not have much choice aside from portraying resilient qualities and progressing through their hardships:

"It doesn't mean they can cope with everything. It's just that some of them put on a brave face, but they do it and that's what they struggle with because they have to, maybe they have to feel they need to put on a brave face." (Participant 4)

Always perceiving UASC as resilient can shift our understandings of their realities as it protects us from comprehending the true extent of their experiences:

"More often than not people describe UASC as very resilient and it's interesting isn't it because I've kind of questioned with them our perception of how resilient they are and what's really going on." (Participant 8)

Despite its relationship with trauma, resilience is valuable as it helps UASC adapt and overcome their difficulties to move forward in life:

''I think they're fantastically resilient but through the fact that they're still here, that they're still going… they're just here because they survived and they keep going because they have to." (Participant 5)

Subtheme 3.3: Maintaining hope

Maintaining hope was a crucial resource for both UASC and the individuals supporting them. Hope is a two-way street which illuminates the encouraging outcomes of UASC's experiences and facilitates progression:

"If you then see them participate in school and they learn some English and they make friends, and they start actually studying and then they receive their refugee status, that's beautiful to see and that definitely gives me hope and them as well." (Participant 7)

The ability to positively influence UASC's experiences is highlighted within the context of safe relationship building which was a source of hope in itself as it demonstrated care and continuity:

"Young people respond positively to stable relationships with trusting adults who have the ability to instil hope in them. […] if you have a trusting adult that you have a good relationship with and they are able to offer you hope, that can build resilience." (Participant 3)

Sustaining hopeful attitudes is the driving force which motivates staff to keep striving for a better future for UASC:

"If we didn't have hope, we wouldn't be doing what we're doing." (Participant 8)

Although UASC's experiences are often overshadowed by difficulties, they are in a safer place than they were at the start of their journeys. They survived against all odds and value the support that has been given to them as they seek safety, which is a source of hope for a better future in itself:

"I think a lot of young people are incredibly grateful for the support they're receiving, even if the support that they receive might objectively be inadequate from our position."
(Participant 2)

Discussion

Overview of Findings

This research aimed to explore the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the perspective of professionals supporting them in the community. Participants gave insight into their understandings of UASC's experiences which revealed more adverse elements than positive ones. However, UASC's strengths and qualities were also highlighted, demonstrating their resilience and determination to move forward. Protective factors played a big role in improving young people's experiences.

There were several factors that shaped young people's realities which emphasised the role of power imbalances. Young people were often powerless in decisions that concerned them which informed their identities. Participants discussed the long-lasting consequences of being wrongly age assessed as an adult, shedding light on the significance of recognition. Young people often rely on social connections for support, as they often experience stigma due to their legal labels. Honneth's (2012) Theory of Recognition highlighted the importance of recognition in social relationships to maintain healthy identities and improve self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-respect. Individuals in the community played an important role in the children's lives, especially when they were invested in their relationships. Integration on a community and societal level is essential to create meaningful relationships and receive emotional support. Professionals provided space for young people to form attachment bonds that facilitate a sense of safety (Bowlby, 1973). This was important as the level of social

support young people receive encourages them to reach out to services (Michelson & Sclare, 2009). Working systemically was considered to improve person-centred care provision and enhance UASC's experiences. However, participants also highlighted the drawbacks of involving multiple professionals to support unaccompanied minors as it could influence their ability to form trusting relationships. Community settings foster a better environment for young people to establish trust as opposed to other settings such as mental health services, essentially impacting outreach (Tingvold, Hauff, Allen, Middelthon, 2012). Participants stressed the need for relevant training to ensure that they could respond to UASC's needs appropriately.

Participants reflected on the value of offering appropriate placements for young people to foster family-like connections with their caregivers. However, allocation is reliant on the availability of resources meaning that some young people end up in unfavourable environments which has negative implications for their experiences. Improving accessibility through appropriate placements is imperative as young people's experiences fluctuate depending on their ability to access the community and required support. Living in communities with individuals of the same background was considered advantageous for UASC as it allows them to connect with their cultural roots, drawing attention to the influence of culturally appropriate placements. Alvord and Grados (2005) emphasised the significance of establishing positive connections with the systems around the child to lead to beneficial outcomes. Educational environments provide further opportunities to form connections whilst building social capital (Byun, Meece, Irvin & Hutchins, 2012). Participants spotlighted the difficulties experienced by UASC when they cannot access appropriate educational support. This limits their ability to learn the language and establish themselves, consequently influencing their self-esteem and restricting connections with locals.

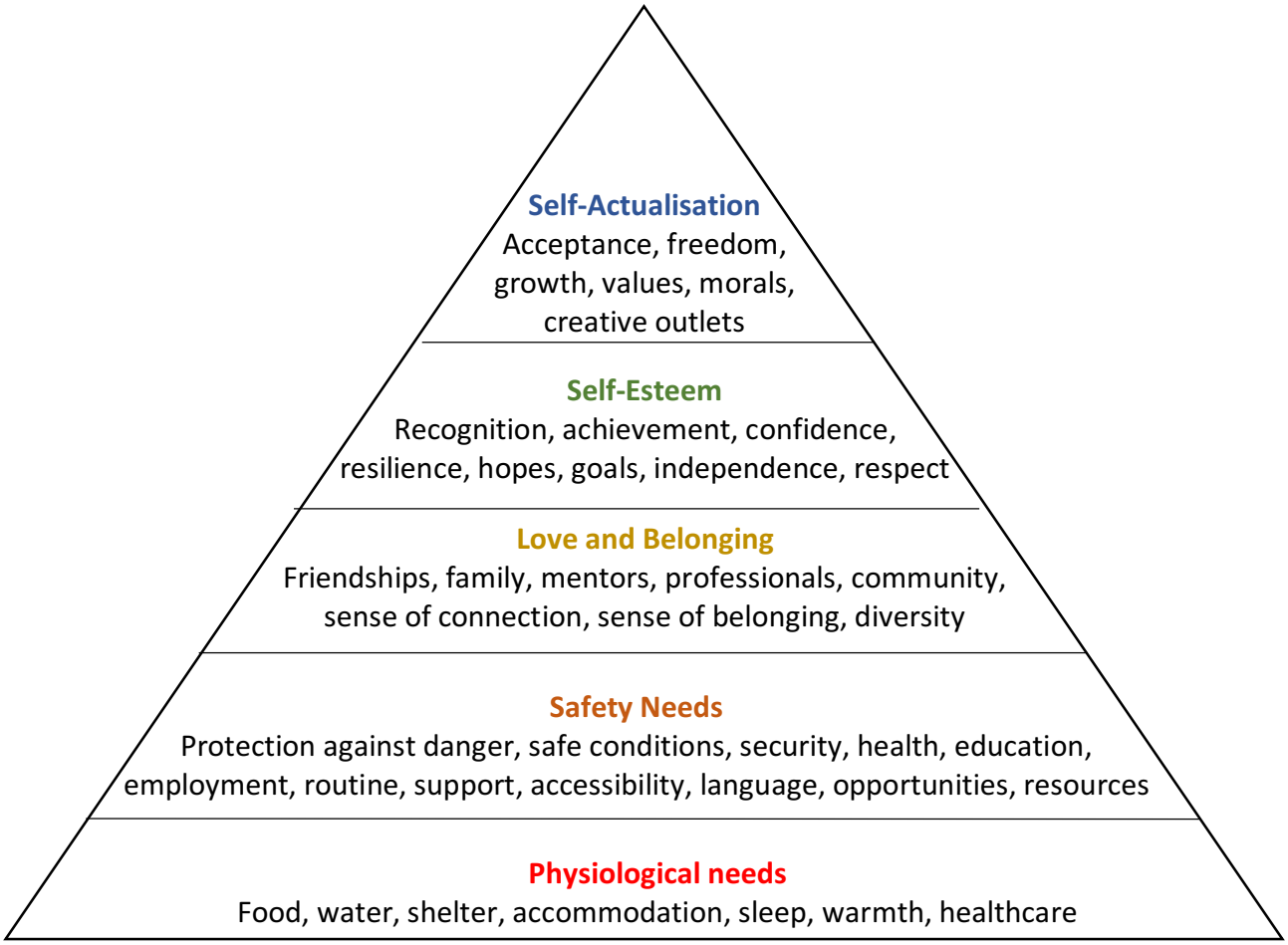

Figure 2. Adapted Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs depicting unaccompanied asylum seeking children's needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) was adapted to depict UASC's needs as perceived by professionals within their systems. Young people need their physiological needs met first and foremost, and without these they cannot progress to higher levels of the hierarchy. They were dependent on external factors to fulfil these needs, revealing the influence of power and accessibility to resources. Participants' accounts revealed the importance of young people's safety above all else, which sets the foundation for achieving their psychological and self-fulfilment needs. Although UASC still relied on external sources to provide support, a shift in power dynamics became evident while progressing up the hierarchy as they started to exhibit their qualities and resilience through growth. This framework demonstrates the implications of providing adequate support and access to

resources to ensure that young people could survive and thrive. Furthermore, it illustrates the pivotal role of individuals supporting UASC and equipping them with tools to progress.

Ensuring that UASC have access to appropriate activities within the community is imperative and directly contributes to their quality of life. Participants stressed that UASC are children above all else, therefore they should have opportunities to access activities that are fun and engaging. Social activities help the young people shape their social support networks which promotes their resilience, as highlighted by Kohli (2006). Community resources encourage resilience as they enhance children's abilities and help them adjust. Although UASC's experiences were often overshadowed by trauma and adversity, they exhibited resilience which supported them to move towards their goals. By focusing on goals to grow and develop, they established a sense of hope which was also shared by the individuals supporting them.

Limitations

The present study represents the voices of eight individuals supporting unaccompanied young people across the UK. Although there was limited diversity in relation to gender and class, there was diversity in terms of age and ethnicity. Participants also held an array of job roles which diversified the sample. However, their positions might have influenced their perceptions of unaccompanied minors' experiences and exacerbated power differences. Such disparities may have been further accentuated by the fact that the study captured professionals' voices, rather than the children's. Some participants were recruited from the same organisation which may have introduced some bias within the results.

Interviews were held online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this improved accessibility and outreach, a practical limitation arose as two participants experienced poor network quality which at times impacted the accuracy of captured data. To overcome this, the audio recordings were replayed and notes were taken to reflect on the conversation.

Implications for Clinical Practice and Further Research

Further research investigating the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK would be valuable, specifically research exploring UASC's own personal accounts. This would provide an updated insight into their experiences which considers the impact of

current support contexts across the UK. Additionally, it would empower young people to use their voices. These recommendations have implications for national guidelines and policies relating to the care of UASC, which provides space to improve support and service provision. Policies such as the National Transfer Scheme need to consider UASC's specific needs when appointing their placements, to ensure that they are not placed in remote areas with limited accessibility. UASC need to be aware of their rights as they are children in need as stated by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, therefore local authorities have a responsibility to care for them and provide appropriate support. Gaining insight into UASC's specific needs could improve service provision as well as their experiences.

Implementing preventative measures and ensuring support is accessible could reduce the need for mental health interventions. However, this support must be provided when required. Care provision should be enhanced by utilising interventions which consider young people's specific needs and places the young people at the centre of their care. We must safeguard children by working systemically to ensure that no child goes unnoticed, especially if they are not currently involved with services. Psychological interventions can be used in conjunction with community interventions to lead to more positive outcomes as the benefits of community support are highlighted. This research sheds light on the benefits of community support and addresses the need to implement preventative approaches which are tailored to the individual needs of UASC.

Essentially, this study could help future research in the area and encourage systems to evaluate and review their current approaches to implement change. This could help expand service provision within the community to employ more accessible support, which will improve the experiences of unaccompanied children.

Conclusion

The study findings reflect the multidimensional experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The significance of context is highlighted as their experiences are influenced by the interactions of the systems around them. The theme of power was prevalent within the findings which spotlights the role of power imbalances and inequalities in shaping the UASC's realities. The present study sheds light on the significance of accessibility and

appropriate support to enhance UASC's experiences. The implications for service provision and support within the community were considered.

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Part Three: Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A: Reflective Statement

Developing the research topic

I have a particular interest in difference and diversity, therefore researching this area was in line with my curiosity. My interest in this topic slowly developed over time as I had witnessed an influx of refugees and asylum seekers over the years whilst I was still living in Malta. Although I knew what was happening, I could not fully grasp an understanding of their experiences and what led them to migrate. Additionally, there were often negative discourses around asylum seekers which revealed issues of racism and marginalisation. I was curious as to what the experiences of asylum seekers were like in the UK, and if they differed to those in other countries. I felt like exploring this topic would be especially interesting because of the geographical location of the UK. Unlike Malta which is close to main European migratory routes, the UK is pretty cut off which means that asylum seekers have to endure long journeys at sea and land to get there. I therefore decided that I wanted to explore the experiences of asylum seeking children in the UK for my empirical study. The systematic literature review complemented this research by exploring unaccompanied minors' needs and experiences of support across European countries.

Data collection

I started recruiting participants for my study during summer 2021, therefore I had a hopeful timetable planned out for my research. However, recruitment stalled after December 2021 and I started to feel overwhelmed as I still needed another 3-5 participants. I was not able to recruit any further participants through the contact I had established therefore I had to change my recruitment strategy to expand outreach. This was a frustrating process and I started to feel quite upset as I tried reaching out to different sources but all my attempts were unsuccessful. I used the time in between interviews to carry out my SLR, however this was also a frustrating piece of work which took a while to establish due to having to carry out multiple literature searches. When I eventually selected my final articles, the SLR started to progress well and it did not feel as daunting as it previously did.

Right before April 2022, an organisation I had contacted forwarded my recruitment email to their employees which generated some responses. I was delighted to finally hear back from individuals who were interested in taking part in my study after four months of not being able to conduct interviews. I was so thankful that I was finally able to get back on track, and by 29th April 2022 I completed my final interview. Transcription was a lengthy process which sometimes felt quite challenging especially when I encountered participants with heavy accents. Although frustrating at times, the data collection process was the most enjoyable part of my research as I was able to hear participants' narratives and witness my study finally coming together.

Interviewing participants made me realise that I had already had some preconceptions about what I thought I would discover during our conversations, and actually carrying out the initial interviews gave me a different perspective on the whole process as information was relayed from a different point of view each time. This brought about different reflections and ideas which did not necessarily correlate with my own presumptions.

Analysis

I decided to print off my transcripts and use hand written notes to fully immerse myself in the data. Although I initially used IPA for my analysis, it did not feel like it was best suited for my study. Thematic analysis felt like the better alternative as it helped with understanding participants' perceptions of UASC's experiences. Repeating this process initially felt daunting, therefore I decided to take some time off first to ensure that I could re-analyse with no prior expectations of what themes I would expect to emerge from the data. I then re-printed the interviews and re-analysed them using TA. Going through this process the second time round made me realise that I had initially tried to capture everything that the participants were saying, which deviated from the goals of the study as it felt like more of a summary of what they had discussed. I was also more aware of the power imbalances involved, since I had not directly heard the young people's voices and interviewed professionals instead.

When hearing about the all the procedures and systems put in place, it made me feel exhausted and tired because it seemed to be exacerbating the negative experiences of UASC and the people who care from them, rather than trying to help improve an already difficult

situation. While coding I started to share the same frustrations participants were displaying. It felt like not only the voices of UASC go unheard, but also of those who support them. In a way, reaching out to take part in this research felt like a bit of a cry for help, a way of wanting people to acknowledge the systemic hardships UASC experience in the UK, and the trickle effect this has been having on the people who support them. I was moved by participants' commitment in supporting asylum seekers and refugees which made me reflect on my own role as a trainee clinical psychologist and the shared values that were becoming apparent.

I felt myself getting even more frustrated as I read through more transcripts, I started experiencing a myriad of emotions including anger and feelings of disbelief. It made me think that if people heard these stories, would they be more compassionate towards UASC and their experiences? Then again, when news articles about migrants drowning and dying while crossing the channel seems are posted on social media, some people seem to find it amusing and I can't help but notice a lot of people reacting to the posts with laughing emojis. Makes me wonder where the humanity and compassion gets lost- is it because the young people are foreign and they want to keep them out? Is it because they really find this amusing? Is it because they believe that we do not have enough resources to help people who arrive here? Do they just choose to turn a blind eye to what's really happening and convince themselves that this is normal? What will it take to make people see the reality?

I thought of children's innocence and how this quickly gets taken away from them as they pass through these horrible experiences. As I read through the transcripts and coded them, I started to dislike the word 'UASC' because it signifies their loss and is certainly a reminder that their parents are no longer with them, and that they're now in this big, hostile world, having to navigate through the outcomes of their journeys alone or with the few people who show them compassion and genuinely want to support them. It's a reminder that they are not just children, which is essentially what they are, but they are also unaccompanied, a reminder of their loss (loss of family, loss of support, loss of identity, loss of guidance) and a reminder that the world that they know is no longer the same. Their support system has crumbled down and they are now left alone to cope and manage the world that they gave up everything for.

Seeking asylum is another label that does not sit right with me. The word 'seeking' means finding, or wanting to obtain something. Now I get the legalities involved with this, but if you had to think about the language being used, seeking feels like they're asking for permission from a body that holds more power than them, more authority to make decisions about how their futures are going to end up which leaves the children powerless. I feel like the language we use to describe young people lacks compassion and draws out the power imbalances that are prevalent and maintains the narrative that it's ok to cause that divide and categorise people by their status rather than for who they are- humans.

Prior to starting my research, I was an 'outsider' to a lot of these difficulties and I observed more than anything from a point that felt very disconnected to what was actually going on. It felt far. My positioning has now changed though, and although I am not a part of the young people's experiences, I hold a closer observational and interpretative position, I feel immersed in their experiences even though it has been through my own understanding of the words of other people. Although I was not listening to someone's life story, I have been listening to the common themes and problems and difficulties that a lot of young people have been faced with which helped me build a narrative of what has been going on. I feel like that position is important because it allowed me to zoom in and out of their experiences to build an understanding of all their interacting systems.

Writing up

6th year was an especially tough one for me, I was not coping well with stress alongside having other difficulties which were exacerbating my experiences. I was constantly experiencing overwhelming feelings and I was getting very upset with the fact that everything was taking so long. Additionally, I could not meet the deadlines I had set for myself as recruitment difficulties pushed my timeline back. I found the write up process to be the most daunting and I could not progress as I needed to. Eventually the burnout caught up to me and I had to take some time off work and give myself permission to put my research aside and relax. This was really tough for me as I'm used to occupying myself and staying on top of everything so this initially made me feel like a failure. However, I realised that I needed time to press pause and slow down as I was not achieving anything by overworking myself and remaining stuck in the same old patterns. My supervisor was really supportive throughout this process and

provided encouragement which helped me accept my situation. Taking this time for myself really helped me recharge my batteries and realign with my values and goals which provided a new sense of hope for the last stretch of my journey. I was a lot more focused upon my return which helped me concentrate and be productive. This provided reassurance that actually, I am capable of writing up research, especially about an area that I'm passionate about.

I have learned that it's best to embrace the good and bad research days without letting my threat system get to me. I was aware that this research project was going to be a roller coaster of emotions however I had no idea how true this really was until I got to fully immerse myself in the research and experience it first-hand. Although there were times when I was ready to give up as I felt like this research was beyond my capabilities, I tried my best to convince myself that I would eventually manage to get through it. I'm glad I did this as I now have a lot more faith in myself than I did before starting this research. Despite the difficulties I experienced, I feel like the research process was a life lesson and I am confident that the knowledge I learnt is something that I will retain throughout my career.

Appendix B: MMAT criteria

Part I: Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), version 2018

Category of study designs	Methodological quality criteria	Responses			
		Yes	No	Can't tell	Comments
Screening questions (for all types)	S1. Are there clear research questions?				
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?				
	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.				
1. Qualitative	1.1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?				
	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?				
	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?				
	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?				
	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?				
2. Quantitative randomized controlled trials	2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed?				
	2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline?				
	2.3. Are there complete outcome data?				
	2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided?				
	2.5 Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?				
3. Quantitative non-randomized	3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population?				
	3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)?				
	3.3. Are there complete outcome data?				
	3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis?				
	3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?				
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?				
	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?				
	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?				
	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?				
	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?				
5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?				
	5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?				
	5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?				
	5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?				
	5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?				

Appendix C: Data extraction form example

Author(s)	O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, Todd
Title of study and year of publication	Voices rarely heard: Personal construct assessments of Sub-Saharan unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee youth in England (2017)
Location of study	England
Research aims	To determine ways in which positive post-migration development and integration could be achieved for UASC
Target population	Unaccompanied minors
Participants- gender	5 males, 1 female
Participants- age	18-28 years (did not record the exact ages at which they had left their home country)
Sample size	6
Research design/methodology	Qualitative study
Methodological quality (as assessed by checklist)	45%
Theoretical model specified	Personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955/1991)
Intervention used	Phase one- individual assessment involving the PCT method Phase two- all individuals participated in group sessions with a qualified therapist over four consecutive days Phase three- final individual PCT assessment
Outcome measures	N/A
Method of analysis	Thematic analysis based on personal construct assessments

Main findings	Themes of despair and distress experienced in England and the personal opposites to those constructs. Focus on trust and supportive individuals. Participants emphasised a desire to enjoy life, laugh and distract themselves from loneliness, sadness and longing for their families as part of their meaning-making. Themes of courage and support from others who have experienced similar difficulties.
Conclusions	UASC demonstrate remarkable strength and the aspiration to move forward and achieve individual goals. However, society does not always facilitate these goals and they are often met with risk factors and struggles. Unaccompanied young people should be provided with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities with peers and adults they could form trusting relationships with. Initiatives to prevent discrimination, stigmatisation and isolation, and that facilitate social relationships to develop should be promoted.

Appendix D: Research information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study: Exploring the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the perspective of professionals and volunteers providing community services

Hello I am Rebecca Magri. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project which forms part of my doctorate research. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything you would like to clarify or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims to explore the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) through the lens of professionals and volunteers providing community services. It will highlight the importance of using community resources to promote children's resilience and qualities through engagement with people who play an important role in their lives. This study hopes to improve pathways to mental health through an integrative and preventative manner. It essentially aims to improve care provision to promote more positive transitional experiences for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you have been involved in the care and support of UASC in the community. This information sheet is being shared with people who may fulfil the criteria to take part in the study as they may be interested in participating.

What will happen if I take part?

If you choose to take part in the study your details will be passed on to me, after which you will be contacted to arrange the interview at a time and date that suits you. The interview will take place on your preferred virtual platform via video call (for example, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype) or voice call. A link for the meeting will be sent out via e-mail. If virtual calls are impossible for you, we will organise a face-to-face meeting at a location convenient

for both of us. We will have to follow government guidance as well as local guidance to ensure a COVID-19 safe interview.

At the start of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask questions if there is anything you would like to clarify or require more information about. You will then have a conversation with me which will last around 45-60 minutes. The discussion will be audio recorded, which you will have to consent to prior to starting the interview. I will ask you to share your perspective on the experiences of UASC you have worked with. There are no right or wrong answers, I am only interested in how you make sense of the experiences of UASC.

Do I have to take part?

Participation is completely voluntary. You should only take part if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Once you have read the information sheet, please contact me if you have any questions that will help you make a decision about taking part. If you decide to take part, I will ask you to sign a consent form and you will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

Participating in the study will require around 60 minutes of your time, which may be inconvenient for you. The interviews are not intended to cause participants' distress, however, the interview may become difficult due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Should you experience any distress, the researcher will offer support and if needed, will help signpost you to where you can gain access to further support.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I cannot promise you that you will have any direct benefits from taking part in the study. However, it is hoped that having a conversation about the experiences of UASC from a community perspective will help expand service provision and encourage systems to evaluate their current approaches to implement change. This support will essentially improve the experiences of UASC. You may also find the conversation in itself enjoyable.

Data handling and confidentiality

Your data will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR).

All of the personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The researcher and research supervisor are the only people who will have access to identifiable information. Your personal information will be kept separate from research data in a secure location (locked cabinets in the research supervisor's office), and will only be used to contact you and destroyed once the study is complete. All other material will be anonymised.

The final report will include direct quotes from participants. These will be anonymised, so no participant will be identifiable from what they say. To protect your anonymity, you will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure that it will not be possible to identify you from the information you provide.

To protect the security of the audio recordings, an encrypted recording device will be used. After the research is completed, all of the audio recordings will be destroyed. Anonymised transcripts of the recordings will be stored securely in an on-line storage repository at the University of Hull for ten years.

Data Protection Statement

The data controller for this project will be the University of Hull. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. The legal basis for processing your personal data for research purposes under GDPR is a 'task in the public interest'. You can provide your consent for the use of your personal data in this study by completing the consent form that has been provided to you. Information about how the University of Hull processes your data can be found at https://www.hull.ac.uk/choose-hull/university-and-region/key-documents/data-protection.aspx.

You have the right to access information held about you. Your right of access can be exercised in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure, objection, and data portability. Questions, comments and requests about your personal data can be sent to the University of Hull Information Compliance Manager [dataprotection@hull.ac.uk]. If you wish to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office, please visit www.ico.org.uk.

What if I change my mind about taking part?

You are free to withdraw from the study until the point of data analysis, without having to give a reason. Withdrawing from the study will not affect you in any way. You are able to withdraw your data from the study up until data analysis has commenced, after which withdrawal of your data will no longer be possible as the data will have been anonymised

and/or committed to the final report. If you choose to withdraw from the study before analysis begins, your data will not be kept.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study will be summarised in a written thesis as part of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology. The thesis will be available on the University of Hull's online repository https://hydra.hull.ac.uk. The research may also be published in academic journals and/or presented at conferences.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Rebecca Magri
Clinical Psychology
Aire Building
The University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX
Tel: 07974629319
E-mail: R.Magri-2016@hull.ac.uk

What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study, you can contact the University of Hull using the research supervisor's details below for further advice and information:

Dr Annette Schlösser
Clinical Psychology
Aire Building
The University of Hull
Cottingham Road
Hull
HU6 7RX
Tel: +44 (0)1482 464094
E-mail: A.Schlosser@hull.ac.uk

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

Appendix E: Consent form

Version number and date: V1 06.04.21

CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Exploring the experiences of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the perspective of professionals and volunteers providing community services

Name of researcher: Rebecca Magri

Please **put your initials** in all the boxes to fully consent to taking part in the study.

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 06.04.21 V1 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time up until the point where my data has been transcribed without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐

3. I understand that the research interview will be audio recorded and that my anonymised verbatim quotes may be used in research reports and conference presentations. ☐

4. I understand that the information collected may be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers. ☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix F: Recruitment poster

Would you like to take part in my doctoral thesis study?

I am looking for professionals and volunteers who are involved in the care and support of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in the community.

I am interested in how you make sense of the experiences of UASC. It is hoped that the findings from this research will improve care provision to promote more positive transitional experiences for UASC in the UK.

What would I have to do?

If you would like to participate in my study, contact me by email to arrange a meeting. The meeting This will last for 45-60 minutes and we may talk via video or voice call on your preferred virtual platform. Our discussion will be audio recorded, which you will have to consent to.

If you are interested in participating or would like further information about the study, please contact Becky Magri on:

Email: R.Magri-2016@hull.ac.uk
Telephone: 07974629319

Appendix G: Recruitment email

To whom it may concern,

I am a 6th year trainee clinical psychologist. I am carrying out a research project which forms part of my doctorate research.

My study aims to explore the experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) through the lens of professionals and volunteers providing community services. It will highlight the importance of using community resources to promote children's resilience and qualities through engagement with people who play an important role in their lives. It essentially aims to improve care provision to promote more positive transitional experiences for unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study since you are involved in the care and support of UASC in the community. This will involve attending a 45-60-minute interview on your preferred virtual platform via video or voice call. If video or voice calls are impossible for you, we can organise a face-to-face meeting at a location convenient for both of us in line with government guidance. Our discussion will be audio recorded, which you will have to consent to. There are no right or wrong answers, I am only interested in how you make sense of the experiences of UASC.

If you are interested in participating or would like further information about the study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Email: R.Magri-2016@hull.ac.uk
Telephone: 07974629319

Your participation will be greatly appreciated and will contribute to the final report.

Thank you,
Becky Magri

Appendix H: Interview schedule

Interview questions

Version 1 06.04.2021

1. Introductory questions
    I. Where do you work?
    II. In what capacity are you working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children?
    III. Why are you interested in taking part in this research?

2. Their lived experiences and how they make sense of it
    I. What is it like to be working with unaccompanied children?
    II. How do you make sense of their experiences?
    III. How do you feel UASC make sense of their experiences?
    IV. What factors do you feel might have an influence on the experiences of UASC?
    V. How do you feel UASC manage the impact of their experiences?
    VI. In what way do you feel like the experiences of UASC shape their identities?
    VII. How do you make sense of your interactions with UASC?
    VIII. How do you feel about the support UASC receive? How do you feel UASC perceive the support they receive? How do you feel about support being accessible for UASC?
    IX. How do you see resilience in UASC? Do you think we need to help promote resilience amongst UASC? How can we do that?
    X. What do you feel helps cultivate hope in your work? And for UASC?
    XI. What is needed for UASC to be better supported and better integrated in the community?

Appendix I: Example of an annotated transcript using thematic analysis

Original Transcript	Code/comments	Final Theme
Interviewer: And how do you feel that unaccompanied children make sense of their own experiences?		
Interviewee: I think it; it's massively varied, I think some young people cannot make sense of their experiences um have a lot of anger and sadness, and or traumatised by what has happened. I think some have somehow managed to process it but like maybe with the passage of time and now they feel safer and protected that they can put it in some context and kind of move on from it in a way. Um I think um most of the young people I work with are traumatised in some way, I think a lot of them are very good at distraction, some of them have excellent quality support and kind of therapeutic support and general support and are working through that, learning how to deal with that, um others maybe have access to that support but for whatever reason it's not providing that maybe. And then I think generally there isn't enough support, therapeutic support for young people and there's patchwork services, refugee council obviously have a therapeutic service for unaccompanied children and um but then the mainstream mental health provision um for children, adolescents is grossly underfunded um	Cannot process their experiences especially if they do not feel safe. May dismiss the trauma. Wisdom and understanding comes with age and experiences. Avoidance is better than being re-traumatised. Lack of support, care provision is not good enough to meet young people's needs.	Trauma and resilience Search for safety Systemic challenges Accessible resources

it's difficult to get access until you're at a crisis point, very little; there's lots of well meaning; there's lots of good intentions but mentally it's a resource issues we've got skilled therapists and counsellors and psychologists kind of working with children at crisis point rather than doing more preventative work and more therapeutic work at an earlier stage to get to kind of yeah, yeah. Does that answer your question? I'm sorry I'm just rambling. **Interviewer**: No absolutely, no you're making a lot of sense actually. It's really important to take those preventative measures and be proactive rather than reactive because the problem will keep getting maintained in that way. And what factors do you think might have an influence on the experiences of unaccompanied children?	Lack of preventative measures. Prevention is better than cure. Staff and UASC are powerless.	Systemic challenges
Interviewee: I think, I think the experiences of unaccompanied children vary massively and I think it depends on where they're placed, the services and the opportunities vary significantly from region to region, local authority to local authority. Those that have access to kind of extracurricular activities it's where those kind of good quality kind of further education um seem to do well. But in lots of areas there just aren't the; um there isn't enough kind of for them to do, there aren't enough activities um catered to the needs of those maybe with	Some children end up being luckier than others. Placements vary and are dependent on higher powers, beyond UASC's control. Influence of geographical placements.	Accessible resources

English as a second language so accessing; I mean even for those that are; have English as a first language, there is often threat by kind of services or activity groups, community groups, services for young people um but for those with English as a second language, I think there's other barriers to them accessing (inaudible) service that already exists. So I think their experiences vary massively I think um the; in terms of education I think that in some areas it's very good and I think that this; the direction; the aims and the aspirations of local authorities looking after unaccompanied children um kind of begin and stop and helping them learn English and I think obviously a lot of the young people we work with have never had any education so setting them up to fail; kind of being able to reach university level is not going to happen but you; we lump in together those that maybe have had quite a lot of education already in with those who have never been to college, never been to school, and I think that's limiting for those that maybe could have progressed a bit quicker but also it doesn't really provide the support that those have never been in an educational setting need. Do you know what; I just think that the package of education is not sufficient for anyone, well for most people, yeah.	Importance of learning the language to improve accessibility, however it needs to be accessible in the first place. Children across different regions will have different experiences. Sole focus on learning English. Lack of care provision and appropriate opportunities. Setting them up to fail. Lack of opportunities to progress further. Need for more individualised support provision, accessibility needs to be addressed.	Accessible resources Connecting with communities Accessible resources