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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

**Roles of Social Workers working with unaccompanied minors: Experiences
of Social Workers in Gothenburg**

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Abstract

Title: *Roles of Social Workers working with unaccompanied minors: Experiences of Social workers in Gothenburg*

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Key words: Social workers, unaccompanied minors, roles

The aim of this study was to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors, using experiences of social workers in Gothenburg. It sought to understand how social workers perceive unaccompanied minors, what the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors and the challenges that social workers come across while working with unaccompanied minors. Six In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers working in different settings, two social service social workers, two social workers working in residential homes, one school social worker and one social worker that has worked both at social services and in a residential home. This study applies role theory and resilience theory. The study concludes that social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as individuals, with unique needs, past experiences and expectations. The roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors differ from one organisation to the other. Social workers working at social service are more of case managers, those working at residential homes are integration agents while school social workers are guides into the Swedish school system and offer counselling. Social workers advocate for unaccompanied minor differently. Social workers face various challenges while working with unaccompanied minors, they come through interaction with the unaccompanied minors, colleagues, other actors, and the system. Role theory explains that Roles of social workers are influenced by interaction of social workers with unaccompanied minors and expectations of the profession. Resilience theory explains that through education and professional development social workers endure the challenges they face in their work. Finally, social workers working in different settings need to work together more to improve service provision for unaccompanied minors.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The advancement in technology, transportation and culture has made mobility so much easier from one place to the other, all over the world people are on the move, as highly skilled workers, international students, refugees, and other diverse groups (Williams & Graham, 2014). Migration has always been part of the human race, majority of people live in places where their ancestors did not live in, with regard to asylum seeking of the people seeking asylum in developed countries, more than half of them are children (Wallin & Ahlström, 2005). People migrate for different unique reasons, the reasons range from seeking better jobs and better lives to fleeing hunger, war and human rights violations these statuses make people vulnerable in foreign countries, children included (Williams & Graham, 2014). Some children come with their parents while other are unaccompanied by anyone. Unaccompanied minors usually experience more harsh situations than those who came with their parents. In response to this, researchers have developed a keen interest towards this group to understand their lives and circumstances, but it is also important to understand the professionals working with these children such as social workers, the police, and teachers (Kohli, 2006).

1.2 Problem Statement

Majority of unaccompanied minors are part of a group of migrants who were forcefully displaced due to conflict, violence and other persecution and fled without a legal guardian (Sandermann & Zeller, 2017). As migration was a phenomenon that has been investigated for many years this did not come as a surprise to the experts, but it brought some kind of strain to European countries, Sweden included as they needed to bring in their resources to address the situation (ibid). In 2015 there was a peak in the number of migrants coming to Europe, Sweden received one of the highest numbers of unaccompanied minors in that year alone with more about 35 000 applications for asylum (Migrationsverket, 2018). The topic of unaccompanied minors has become a hot topic lately in social policy and social work across European countries (Sandermann & Zeller, 2017). During reception of unaccompanied minors social workers are some of the professionals they get in contact with first and social workers are present at almost all stages of the minor's case (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2017). The extent at which social workers are positioned within work with immigrants and refugees utilizing services, they too must be prepared and understand what work with this group means for them hence this study (Haidar, 2017).

Social workers have been mentioned several times as a group of professionals having much interaction with unaccompanied minors, providing support for them is an inter and intra-professional task (Wright, 2014). Different social workers interact while working with unaccompanied minors and at the same time interact with other professions. This calls for all the actors involved to understand the roles that each professional hold to ensure that the services provided to the unaccompanied minor are effective (Tham, 2018). It is important to study the role of social workers working with unaccompanied minors, to bring to light the issues that all social workers working around the minor come across and bring role clarity among them. Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft (2016) write that the clarification of roles is important in understanding what each actor does, when and how; and show how professionals can complement one another's roles. It is necessary to bring this factor to social workers working with unaccompanied minors, usually unaccompanied minors have been through traumatic

situations the clarity in roles among the professionals involved with them could reduce the overlapping of roles and also fill the gaps that could be created by doing roles of others reducing possible harm (Wallin& Ahlström, 2015; Kohli. 2006; Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft, 2016).

Several studies have been carried out on the topic of unaccompanied minors to understand the situation of these children, regarding their protection, how they can be integrated in their new environment and the challenges they have faced on the way (Wallin & Ahlström. 2005). However little attention has been channelled to the professionals that work with these children to ensure the above stated particularly social workers, therefore this research aims to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. This is a gap in the literature that this study intends to address especially when it comes to English literature in Sweden.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors using experiences of social workers in Gothenburg, Sweden. More specifically trying to understand what it is that social workers do in their work with unaccompanied minors in different settings, become aware of how they perceive unaccompanied minors and understanding the challenges they face in their work and how they deal with them.

1.3.1 Research Questions

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions;

- How do social workers perceive unaccompanied minors and their needs?
- What are the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors?
- What challenges do social workers come across in their work with unaccompanied minors?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

2.0 Introduction

This Chapter provides the literature review on the topic under study. It starts with a background, which tries to give an overview of issues surrounding the topic of unaccompanied minors and social work. Then it gives a review of literature focusing on perceptions of unaccompanied minors by social workers, the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors then lastly the challenges social workers come across in their work with unaccompanied minors.

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Definition of Terms

Unaccompanied minor

According to Sedmak, Sauer & Gornik (2018) an unaccompanied minor is an individual under the age of majority who for different reasons leave their home countries without their parents or legal guardian. Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö (2016) write that an unaccompanied minor is a migrating child under the age of 18 who has been separated from their parent or legal guardian, they write that these children need special protection and assistance. This thesis will use the term *unaccompanied minor* to refer to children under the age of 18 who have migrated to Sweden without a parent or legal guardian. This includes individuals in both the asylum-seeking process as well as those who have been granted permission to stay in Sweden.

Social Work/ Social worker

According to the international Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2014) as cited in Ornellas, Spolander & Engelbrecht (2016, p.224)

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

A social worker in this study refers to persons with a qualification in Social work (having bachelor's or Master's in Social work) working with unaccompanied minors in different settings.

2.1.2 Migration Flow in Europe

Globalisation manifests in many diverse ways. One of these is the increase mobility of people (Zhitin, Kransov & Shendrik, 2016). The attractiveness of a place to migrate to is usually the standard of living which is brought about by socioeconomic development. Zhitin et al. (2016) write that according to the United Nations (UN) population division Europe is the continent which hosts the majority of international migrants. Each tenth resident of Europe is said to be a migrant. The topic of migration has attracted much attention in the recent decade among policy makers, researchers, and even human rights activists. Sweden was counted among

countries which have the number of immigrants exceeding that of emigrants and like other countries with this occurrence it is one of the countries with highest GDP per capita.

There are various push and pull factors associated with each group that migrates to Europe and they are unique for everyone. Migration can be because of pursuing labour opportunities, education, business opportunities and some family reunification or protection (Angeloni & Spano, 2018). The increased asylum-seeking in Europe is a result of people fleeing from wars, poverty and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and some part of Africa. This has placed pressure on European Union member states to respond and offer assistance (ibid). The deteriorating security situation in Syria and Libya is said to have fuelled an increased number in asylum applications received in Europe, in 2015 and 2016 the highest numbers of asylum applications were recorded (OECD, 2015: Eurostat, 2017). Some scholars claim that usually migration flow is determined by the welfare policies of nations, that those with generous policies will attract the majority of migrants (Angeloni & Spano, 2018). The reputation of a country plays a key role in attracting migrants as well as their integration of migrants, human rights standards and openness (ibid). Hatton (2017) writes that trends show that asylum seekers target countries with less restrictive asylum policies.

Sweden is still regarded as one of the most liberal countries in Europe when it comes to migrants' integration policies, which are diverse and accommodates different cultures (Riniolo, 2016). In the recent years Sweden has been faced with an increased number of asylum seekers and refugees. In 2015 is one of the years recorded in history for Sweden when it comes to migration. More than 160, 000 people sought asylum, more than 35 000 of them were unaccompanied minors (Migrationsverket, 2018). This put a strain in the resources of the country hence asylum seekers and family reunification regulations become a bit strict (Riniolo, 2016).

2.1.3 Protection of Unaccompanied Minors; International, Regionally & Locally

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is an internationally recognized convention regarding human rights of children. There are two articles in it that are relevant for the protection of unaccompanied minors, article 20 and article 22. Article 20 states that any child deprived of his/her family environment or cannot be allowed to remain in that environment in their best interest shall be entitled to special protection and assistance by state (UNCRC, 1989). Article 22 specifically focusses on refugee children who are with or without their parents, and part 2 of this article affirms that unaccompanied minors have the right provided for by article 20 (Ibid). As these children are accorded protection there should be continuity in their lives, their religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background should be respected (UNCRC, 1989). King (2013) writes that the right to legal representation in immigration proceedings of children who enter countries without their parents differs greatly across the world though there should be some uniformity. In some countries unaccompanied minors are given free legal representation by the state while in some they are not, their cases are taken as pro bono while some go without legal representation, which compromises their protection (King, 2013).

Thevissen et al, (2012) write that the European Union (EU) Reception Condition Directive says that member states have to ensure that an unaccompanied minor has a legal guardian or someone responsible for the well-being of the child. The dignity and best interest of the child must be guaranteed with regards to children who apply for international protection (Abbing, 2011). According to Abbing (2011) the EU law on asylum considers children, especially unaccompanied minors, to be one of the most vulnerable groups in society and Member States have an immediate obligation to respond to their issues. The determination of whether someone

is or is not 18 years is one of the important issues for EU member states as this determines the kind of care they will offer the individual seeking protection. When they cannot provide documentation showing their age a medical test is carried out, though this has been criticised by many scholars (Abbing, 2011; Thevissen, et al, 2012).

Sweden has ratified the UNCRC and is an EU member state. “*Sweden has been one of the main receivers of immigrants into the European Union*” (Liden & Nyhlen, 2015:3). The country has long taken pride in having an efficient and generous asylum system, it provided high quality care for refugees and other people in need of protection (including unaccompanied minors) (Liden & Nyhlen, 2015; Fratzke, 2017). In 2015 Sweden received a high number of migrants, despite its advanced system, the numbers overwhelmed Sweden. This resulted in a strain in the country’s capacity to handle asylum cases and the migration board failed to give shelter to all applicants. Due to this strain some migrants ended up finding help from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and churches (Fratzke, 2017). This prompted legislative changes to reduce the load, one of them being passport checking at the border with Denmark. This was to try to reduce the number of people coming into the country. Nevertheless, unaccompanied minors who were accepted fall under special protection rules and are entitled to special care arrangement (Fratzke, 2017).

2.1.4 Reception of Unaccompanied Minors in Sweden

Gustafsson (2015) writes that the reception of unaccompanied minors is based on children’s rights set forth by international agreements like the UNCRC. Municipalities together with Migration board and National Board of Health and Welfare have a joint responsibility with unaccompanied minors. The Migration board is responsible for the asylum investigation, National Board of Health and Welfare supervises the municipalities, make recommendations, develop guidance and supervision for care (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö 2017). Unaccompanied minors get a temporary guardian during the asylum-seeking process and a permanent one after they get permission to stay. The municipality is responsible for placement, which comes in the form of a family or a group home, they ensure that school and social support needs are also met (Lidén & Nyhlén, 2015). Under municipalities it’s the social services that take care of the daily living situation and care of the children and regardless of the stage of their case all children have the right to start school (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö 2017). The Migration Board executes the Aliens Act and Reception of Asylum Seekers while the municipalities perform their duties according to the Social Services Act (Lundberg & Dahlquist, 2012).

2.1.5 Social work with Migrants

The Social work profession is one of the most dynamic professions, it is continuously changing to adapt to international, regional, and local influences (George, 2015). Social workers together with other groups of professionals respond to needs of migrants at different levels. They initiate support received by mostly the vulnerable groups among migrants. Social workers need to be informed and constantly be uptodate with the current laws to know which kind of assistance they can provide for various groups (George, 2015). Cultural competence is necessary in the provision of services for clients with diverse beliefs, values, ethnicity, culture, and language. George (2015) writes that the degree at which social workers can have a multicultural perspective affects their interaction with their service users especially in migration. Competences of social workers go hand in hand with their role, social work is found in different places working with diverse groups. Studies have been done on social workers but their role especially in migration is vaguely explained in literature hence this study (Temesgen, 2016). Most social workers, when countries are having an over flow of migrants find themselves with a lot of work in their hands especially when there are children and other vulnerable groups involved (Diaconu, Racovita-Szilagyi & Bryan, 2016).

2.2 Social Workers' Perception of Unaccompanied Minors

Children are regarded as one of the vulnerable groups of society because of their inexperience, fragility, and physical and psychological weakness (Sedmak, Sauer & Gornik, 2018). Unaccompanied minor migrants are seen as even more vulnerable as they move from one country to the other without any guardian. They go through hectic situations before, during and even after their journey to another country. "Unaccompanied minors are often deprived of what is typically perceived as a normal childhood" (Sedmak, et al, 2018). Characterised by lack of social support, medical care and limited engagement in play, recreational activities and participating in cultural life. These children are seen as not only vulnerable but also at risk. The CRC recognises children as a vulnerable group that needs additional protection, it places responsibility on the state and on the parents or guardian. Unaccompanied minors are perceived as the most vulnerable group among refugees and asylum seekers (Sedmak, et al, 2018). The conditions that forced migrants travel in are usually not desirable, hence it is even more complicated for unaccompanied minors as they do not only need parents for physical survival, but they need them also for psychological and social well-being (ibid).

Hopkins & Hill (2010) when exploring the needs of unaccompanied minors state that as a child arrives in a foreign country alone their needs need to be attended to quickly. They write that these children have, physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, as well as knowledge, understanding and self-actualization needs (Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Due to various experiences that people have, their needs can be met differently. Hopkins & Hill (2010) argue that though Maslow suggested that basic needs should be met first, they believe for unaccompanied minors it is crucial that some of the needs be addressed simultaneously to improve their overall well-being.

Social workers are one of the professionals that work with unaccompanied minors to ensure well-being. Social workers believe needs of unaccompanied minors should be age appropriate and when addressing them, basic needs and emotional support should take precedence (Christie, 2010; Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), 2016). Kohli (2006) writes that social workers working with unaccompanied minors may struggle to transfer their understanding and experience of work with local children to conceptualize the needs of unaccompanied minors. Kohli & Mitchell (2007) in their study asked social workers to tell their stories with regards to their work with unaccompanied minors, one social worker described one of the children as moving towards total independence, she said he was fashion conscious, clean and someone who is self-reliant. Even though this is one social worker describing her service user it shows that she has adopted the strengths perspective and uses it in her practice as she chooses to see the strengths over the weaknesses. Social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as children with capability to rebuild their lives with endurance amid challenges they have faced and are facing (Kohli & Mitchell, 2007).

Gustafsson (2015) in her article about the reception of unaccompanied minors in Sweden brings in the way professionals perceive unaccompanied minors. She writes that different professionals perceive unaccompanied minors differently depending on their background and experience. During her interviews, professionals that work closely with the minors emphasized that they were working with teenagers, that unaccompanied minors are like other children and face familiar challenges. This perspective being supported by that most of the professionals have worked with other groups of children and see similar occurrences. Some professionals say some unaccompanied minors have unique culture from the Swedish society, so they tend to not respect women especially the male unaccompanied minors that this instils some kind of fear. There are differences that when abolished there could be better integration (Gustafsson, 2015).

2.3 Role of Social Workers Working with Unaccompanied Minors

Issues of migration are internationally recognised and are relevant to social work especially involving vulnerable groups of people; the social work profession works at improving the quality of life of people, promoting social justice (including that of immigrants and refugees) (Roestenburg, 2013). In the United States of America social workers play the role of assisting their clients to navigate the laws and regulations for care, it is important for social workers to understand the diverse lives of their service users including immigrants (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2016). The social work profession in work with migrants calls for high level of cultural competence and understanding of the legal and political issues surrounding migration (Chang-Muy & Congress, 2016; Diaconu et al, 2016). The responsibility to maintain a child rights-based perspective when working with unaccompanied minors is necessary, along with upholding respect, integrity and culturally appropriate social work practice (Rotabi et al, 2017)). The social work education prepares social workers to function in diverse settings and uphold high level of competence and professionalism, but it can be complicated to tell what role which social worker plays, usually it depends on the organisation one works, and these roles are usually given by the employer (Asquith et al, 2005).

In the US social workers play a significant role in delivery of services to unaccompanied minors, these range from developing programmes for integration and interventions, they are a group of professionals that are uniquely qualified to work with children because of their commitment to vulnerable groups of society and understanding of social problems (Carlson et al, 2012). Westwood (2012) writes that though there has been limited information on how needs of unaccompanied minors are assessed, she writes that some scholars like Kohli (2006) have responded to this by writing about how social workers assess and support these children in the UK. There have been criticisms that social workers are more into immigration control than providing care (ibid). Nevertheless social workers in the UK have been said to be executing the role of preparing and planning for transition to adulthood of unaccompanied minors (Kalverboer et al, 2017). They design interventions to avoid social exclusion, generating supportive local networks of protection and care (Kohli, 2006). Legal counsel, health, mental health and social services are important to unaccompanied minors especially those still undergoing the asylum-seeking process, so social workers should consider such in their advocacy and practice (Berthold & Libal, 2016) Social workers that are well informed are more equipped to even influence policies and bring social change (ibid).

Tham (2018) in her study with social workers found out that majority of social workers in Sweden described their roles as giving advice and support and few of them said they offer treatment work. Social workers in the social service specified that they spend less time in contact with their clients but mostly do administrative work (ibid). Nordling (2017) writes that social workers working with unaccompanied minors take various roles depending on the organisation they work with, the ones she calls social assistants are closer to the welfare state bureaucracy and follow many procedures. Stretmo (2014) state that social assistants manage contacts with different people involved in the work with unaccompanied minors, at some instances some of the actors involved are other social workers working in different settings from those Nordling (2017) calls social assistants. These social assistants in Sweden decide on the housing the unaccompanied minor will be getting. Personnel at the accommodation work more closely with the minors and usually have a better relationship with them than the latter (Nordling, 2017). However, even though social workers in different settings have different roles the aim to improve well-being of the unaccompanied minor brings them together.

2.4 Challenges Social Workers Encounter While Working with Unaccompanied Minors

Social work as a profession has the mandate to improve well-being of all its service users, but in so doing there are challenges that social workers come across. Even social workers working with unaccompanied minors face challenges in executing their roles. One of the challenges that social workers are faced with while working with unaccompanied minors especially at the initial stage is language barrier. Majority of unaccompanied minors find it difficult to communicate in English or Swedish, social workers state that language barrier affects communication as they need to use interpreters and at times they are not even certain that the children are getting the information the right way (Westwood, 2012). Social workers' capability to play a greater part in supporting and advocating on behalf of the children especially those who need to talk to someone about their experiences is limited because of language barrier (ibid).

Social workers working with unaccompanied minors face some ethical dilemmas in their work, social workers need to work within government policies and at the same time uphold ethics in social work profession (Wright, 2014). At times social worker's capacity to assist minors is constrained by immigration policies and at times by the migration agency itself (Haidar, 2017). In the US social workers have been said to work under dual pressure of regressive policies and the National Association of Social Workers' call for a "balance between security and human rights" (ibid). This is not only unique to the US as Wright (2014) writes about a same occurrence in the UK. Deportation of some unaccompanied minors have been said to be one of the most challenging issues in social work, at times social workers do not agree with the decision made by the migration agency to return the children to their countries but social workers have minimal influence on this decision (Wright, 2014). Social workers may feel that their hard work with unaccompanied minors was undone when they are deported, and this is disheartening for them, bringing in feelings of helplessness and frustrations among the professionals (Kohli, 2011).

One of the challenges social workers working with unaccompanied minors while executing their roles is the issue of role conflict. They are said to take the role of being corporate parents and at the same time be the link between all the actors involved in the welfare of the unaccompanied minors, Kohli (2006) writes that at times there is tension between differentiating between role of being a parent and of managing the resources available. Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft (2016) write of another challenge with regards to roles that at times social workers' roles are not clearly stated and this creates conflict with other actors involved, they say it is important for social workers to know their roles and those of other actors involved in work with unaccompanied minors.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the theories utilised in this study to explain roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. The theories try to explain how social workers get to function in their roles the way they do and how they cope with their work besides all the challenges that they are faced with. The two theories used in this study are the role theory and resilience theory. They are explained in the context of social work practice.

3.1 Role Theory

Bruce J. Biddle has written extensively on role theory over the years. In his book *Role Theory; Expectations, Identities and Behaviours* he writes that role theory rose in different disciplines in the 1920s and early 1930s. Role theory has been used to explain patterns of human conduct or roles, with social positions, identities, and expectations; within various social structures to determine human responses (Biddle, 2013). Early proponents of the role concept had diverse assumptions they made, the likes of Ralph Linton, Talcott Parsons, G.H Mead and J.L Moreno. Due to the diversity offered by these proponents of role theory, it can be applied to many research topics in various disciplines. Role theory has been criticised over the years since authors were not aware that they were explaining different phenomena using the same theory as some explain role theory in relation with functionalism in sociology, some symbolic interaction perspective, or cognitive social psychology (Biddle, 1986).

Role theory is of the stand that “*human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation*” (Biddle, 1986:68). Though there are different versions of role theory the common assumption they all have is that; expectations are the major generators of roles and that these expectations are learned through experience of which the actor (person functioning in role) is aware of the expectations they hold (Biddle, 1986: Biddle, 2013). Role theory explains that for one to exhibit a certain role they are stimulated to do so because they learn what behaviour is expected of them and others are stimulated by their own expectations (Biddle, 2013). Role theory suggests that human beings are rational and thoughtful beings; whose behaviour is not only guided by their experiences but also controlled by them (ibid).

A role is a constructed position within a larger social system, with normative expectations which specify obligatory, prohibited, and acceptable conduct on an individual inhabiting the role also known as an actor (Kessler, 2013). The expectations govern interactions of actors with other members in the system, actors conform to certain expectations to attain rewards and some to avoid sanctions (Biddle 1986; Kessler, 2013). Actors may have different roles that overlap but the environment where one is determines which roles take precedence, at work the professional role usually become more important than other roles (Biddle, 2013). Role theory explains why different individuals behave similarly in a social context when they have the same role and why they the same individual may behave differently in different contexts (Keller, 2013).

Role theory is relevant in explaining functioning in organisations and professions. In different organisations actors perform various roles, according to Keller (2013) there are positional roles

and functional roles. Positional roles are the roles that are shown by job titles and descriptions and hierarchies shown by organisational charts (Keller, 2013). These position roles that Keller (2013) talks of show how different actors with the same role may act the same way due to the same expectations dictated by the job description. They enable continuity in the organisation, as the expectations are the same for the role hence change in personnel would not bring huge change to the role. The functional roles are said to be a result of social interactions that are not specifically specified by the organisations or profession but are still necessary for smooth operations, Keller (2013) states that these could be roles like being a supervisor. The roles that are brought about by interactions with other members in the system are said to be repeated actions that come by negotiations and learning standards of acceptable performance (Keller, 2013). Interactions with the other members involved births some roles that were initially not present when the actors started to function in their role (Biddle, 1986; Keller 2013).

Role theory as concepts of role strain and role conflict that how challenges may arise as one functions in a role. According to Keller (2013) role strain occurs when various sets of expectations associated with a role become overwhelming for the actor, maybe increase in workload. This could lead to challenges in balancing work and functioning in the role. Role conflict refers to when various roles that an actor function in are not reconcilable (Keller, 2013). Biddle (1986) writes that role conflict is characterised by expectations that are incompatible, which brings about conflicting pressures. Role conflict may occur as result of expectations that are not in line with what the actor believes is their role (Keller, 2013). Role conflict and role strain may bring about job dissatisfaction, stress, exhaustion, and tension when it comes to functioning in the work environment (Gordon et al, 2012; Keller, 2013).

3.1.1 Application of Role Theory

Role theory shows how role expectations and relationships influence actors to exhibit certain behaviours in their work environment (Keller, 2013). According Toi (2015) social work scholars have used role theory to explain people interactions with others in social environment but rarely used it to explain their own behaviour. As a theory it provides a way to study direct and indirect influences the social environment has on an individual. Role expectations of role theory are position specific norms that show the attitudes, behaviours and cognitions required for a person occupying a role (Toi, 2015).

Social workers are a group of professionals that have various expectations towards them from various members they interact with. Social work as a profession has certain expectations that it would like social workers to show in functioning as social workers, these come in the form of values that guide practice (Reamer, 2001). Social workers are trained to perform according to certain values and norms, these shape the professional expectations regarding role performance (Munson & Balgopal, 1978). Social workers are expected to treat their clients with dignity, respect, know that their clients have the right to self-determination and demonstrate warmth and acceptance (ibid). The expectations that the profession has on social workers greatly influences their attitudes towards their service users. Social work profession through these values also shape the perception social workers have of their service users, so it is safe to say that role theory through role expectation shows how the expectations of the profession may influence how social workers perceive unaccompanied minors and their needs (Munson & Balgopal, 1978; Toi 2015).

Boehm (2012) writes that clients or service users also have expectations towards social workers, and as they interact with the social worker they influence the kind of role the social worker will play. Munson & Balgopal (1978) use role theory to explain relationship between social workers and their clients, they write that role theory emphasis on expectations brought about by various units that determine role performance; their stand is that how the social worker relates with the

client determines how the social worker will function in their role. Some social workers have a relationship with their client that has some close emotional attachment while some have a relationship that is based on fulfilment of aims and goals (Munson & Balgopal, 1978). Herz & Lalander (2018) write about social workers spending less time with unaccompanied minors and focusing more on the bureaucratic roles, but it is important to note that there are other groups of social workers that have a different kind of relationship with unaccompanied minors, these are social workers working in homes and other settings that have more contact with the children. Kohli (2006) writes that these social workers are caring and have a good relationship with the children, in her study the unaccompanied minors affirmed that these social workers were therapeutic, helpful, and good companions.

Role theory can be used to explain the challenges that social workers working with unaccompanied minors come cross. When an agency requires an employee to perform a role that is inconsistent with their values or the values of their profession it creates role conflict (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Tham (2018) writes that work with children in Sweden is characterised by a combination of high job demands and low control, leading to work related stress and job dissatisfaction. Ensuring protection and welfare for unaccompanied minors is part of the aims of social work ethics and values (Wright, 2014). Returning of unaccompanied minors to their countries usually poses a conflict of interest among social workers. Social workers do not have much influence on the asylum process or the decision hence they feel less involved. Social workers working in forced repatriation are said to have poor mental health (Sundqvist, Ghazinour & Padyab, 2017). Social workers perceive their roles to be incompatible with forced repatriation system and they feel it defies social work ethics (ibid). There is a conflict in the role the agency expects social workers to perform and their obligation to the unaccompanied minor.

3.2 Resilience Theory

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation or misfortune or frustrations (Ledesma, 2014). Resilience has attracted a lot of attention from different fields of study and each discipline has its own way of interacting with resilience. According to Masten (2005) resilience is a phenomenon with characteristics of good outcomes even through serious threats to adaptation. To represent the social sciences Ledesma (2014) uses Henderson & Milstein (1996) definition of resilience which is the ability to recover from a negative life experience and be stronger while overcoming the situation. It characterises the ability to go back into shape after bending or being compressed by life, enduring, and recovering quickly (Taormina, 2015). Resilience theory has its foundations in the study of adversity and an interest on how different life experiences affect people's lives (Breda, 2018). From its inception in psychology it has been used to study vulnerability of children born in adverse social conditions and their ability to cope for the better (ibid). Resilience theory has also been linked to adaptation; adaptive capacity of people being used as a starting point for linking resilience with various concepts in academia and practice with people (Smyntyna, 2016).

Resiliency theory provides conceptual platform for studying and understanding why some people go through traumatic and hectic situations and still manage to stand even after the exposure to risk (Zimmerman, 2013). The theory focuses on positive elements in the environment and from within that operate to oppose risk factors. These are referred to as promotive factors, which are divided into assets and resources, assets are from within like self-esteem and self-efficacy; resources are external factors like support from other people (Zimmerman, 2013). One of the important examples referred to as a promotive factor is the programmes that gives people the opportunity to acquire skills and put them to action, like education that encompasses fieldwork practice (Zimmerman, 2013; Breda, 2018).

3.2.1 Models of Resilience

There are three resilience models, of which different scholars use different names for these. They are the compensatory model, the challenge model, and the protective factor of immunity versus vulnerability (O'Leary, 1998). The Compensatory model perceives resilience as a neutralising factor to risk exposure (Ledesma, 2014). Fleming & Ledogar (2008) write that the resilience factor operates in an opposite direction to risk factors. Resilience has a straight effect on the result which is independent of the effects of the risk factors (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). The protective factor model of resilience states that the interaction between the protection and risk factors reduces the probability for negative outcomes and neutralises the effect of exposure to risk (Ledesma, 2014). It indicates that protective factors moderate the association between risk and negative results (Zimmerman, 2013). The protective factors inspire positive results and healthy personality despite unfavourable conditions (Ledesma, 2014). Some of the protective factors identified are, intrapersonal reflective skills, restoring self-esteem, life skills, academic and job skills, and problem-solving skills (ibid). The challenge model is of the motion that the risk factor is not too strong, that it can enhance a person's adaptation (Ledesma, 2014). The exposure to moderate levels of risks will help a person overcome other exposures that might have been overwhelming if initial exposure was not there (Zimmerman, 2013). Exposure to moderate levels of risk is related to better response or outcome, moderate exposure makes one stronger (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008).

3.2.2 Resilience Theory in Social Work

According to Kinman & Grant (2017) several studies have been conducted to demonstrate the benefits of resilience for employees and organisations. Research on importance of resilience among health workers has also been emphasised over the years. Social workers have been identified as a group of professionals that are more vulnerable to work related stress and burn out. Social work has been recognised as an emotionally taxing and complex profession, which requires social workers to manage their emotions effectively for their wellbeing and that of others they interact with (Grant & Kinman, 2012). It is a profession that is said to be reward as it gets to bring hope and well-being to children and adults yet very emotionally demanding (Considine, Hollingdale & Neville, 2015). Nevertheless, majority of social workers have shown that their work is satisfying, and they enjoy it (Grant & Kinman, 2014). The ability of how people who work under stressful circumstances fail to be burnt out and even flourish in their work is important to social work; social workers have a role to play in building their resilience (Grant & Kinsman, 2014; Kinsman & Grant 2017).

Developing resilience in social work is linked to promoting professional practice which is essential when working with people who are in a sensitive emotional state (Considine et al, 2015). It is a key skill in coping with difficult emotionally taxing work (ibid). Resilience is necessary for managing challenges social workers face in executing their roles, it helps them adapt positively to demanding working conditions, manage emotional demands, initiate effective coping strategies, advance well-being and enhance professional growth (Grant & Kinman, 2014; Considine et al, 2015). Grant & Kinsman (2013) suggest that resilience does not only promote wellbeing of social workers but also works as a protective of buffering mechanism. Resilience enables social workers to make sound decisions in their practice, as their profession is characterised by changes in the environment that affects how they practice, these could be changes in policies or other legislation affecting their work, hence with resilience they are able to respond appropriately in such instances (ibid). There are competencies that have been found to be important for social workers to be resilient, these are reflective skills, emotional intelligence, empathy and social competencies (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

3.2.2.1 Reflective Skills

Reflective practice is characterised by social workers learning from present and past experiences, figuring out what might work, deriving new understanding of a situation (Mishna & Bogo, 2007). One deliberately reviews their action to determine factors that affected outcome, learning from their own experience (ibid). Reflection has been strongly associated with happiness and job satisfaction as a practitioner gets to learn from their past experience hence improve their own practice which can be very fulfilling (Grant & Kinsman, 2012). A study by Grant & Kinman (2012) on social workers trainees has yielded results that social workers who are able to reflect on their feelings, thoughts and behaviour and can use their reflective abilities to effectively communicate were found to be more resilient to work related stress. They emphasised the importance of training social workers to be reflective at an early stage of their career journey as mastering this skill comes in handy when there is increase in workloads.

3.2.2.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is having the ability to motivate yourself and persist when faced with frustrations (Grant & Kinman, 2012). Emotional intelligence enables people to be more flexible, have self-confidence and be cooperative. Emotionally intelligent people have been said to be advanced in problem solving and decision making. Social workers need emotional intelligence in their demanding work to be able to overcome the frustrations that come with the work (Grant & Kinman, 2012). It is essential for managing their emotions and those of their service users with effectiveness. Social work like it has been mentioned before is emotionally demanding therefore, it is important for social workers to be able to have emotion management skills for them to be resilient (ibid). Grant & Kinman (2014) state that emotional intelligence is an intra personal and inter personal element, it helps the social worker relate better with other people and at the same time help her relate better with his or her emotions, regulate their moods and construct emotional resources. They emphasise that though social workers can gain emotional intelligence through life experiences and training, training is better situated to ensure emotional intelligence in social workers.

3.2.2.3 Empathy

Empathy in social work refers to sensing the client's situation as if it was your own, without forgetting that it is not your own (Raines, 1990). It is a core element in the helping professions with positive effects on the wellbeing of the service users. Empathy has been guiding social work interventions for many years, the ability to adopt the service users' perspective helps social workers understand the situation of their service users this makes them resilient (Grant & Kinman, 2012). When social workers use empathy, it is important that they are careful not to get over involved as this could lead to burnout, but to have accurate empathy for better service delivery (ibid). The relationships that empathy brings help resilience. Understanding the feelings and experiences of other people can come in handy when one is faced with a difficult situation themselves and be resilient (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

3.2.2.4 Social Skills

According to Grant & Kinman (2012) social workers need to have sound communication skills, assertiveness, and self-confidence. Having good social skills has positive benefits for social workers, they help social workers manage stress successfully. Being able to work with service users with confidence and self-assurance helps the social worker to endure hostile behaviour targeted towards them and enhance resilience (Grant & Kinman, 2014). As a benefit of having social skills comes social support. People who have more supportive relationships usually experience less stress (ibid). Having a good network of social support can assist in being more

resourceful, have confidence and build resilience among helping professionals (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

3.2.3 Application of Resilience Theory to Study

Social workers working with children in any kind of crisis witness the trauma of their service users which could create trauma for them, more often than not social workers contain their emotions in order to continue being functional in their work (Briggart et al, 2017). Social workers at times remove children from their families and for unaccompanied minors at times social workers are faced with deporting of children back to their countries, this can be very stressful for the social workers and it poses dilemmas, but Briggart et al (2017) write that organisational psychology research has shown that good social support enhances resilience and well-being. Talks with colleagues has been named as one of the ways in which social workers in child care become resilience as they get to share their experiences with one another and release the tension in their emotions (ibid). Continuous access to professional development, personal strengths and professional autonomy were identified as factors that will ensure resilience among child protection social workers (Truter, Fouche & Theron, 2017). Social workers that are able to have access to developments that affect their profession stand a better chance to be resilient. If social workers get training with various groups that they work with that they were initially not exposed to will help social workers to be resilient and ready to help their service users. Working with unaccompanied minors at times comes as a new task for some social workers, extra training on the issues of unaccompanied minors places social workers at a better place to intervene accordingly and be resilient in their work (Kohli, 2006; Grant & Kinman, 2014).

This study intends to use resilience theory to identify what helps social workers to cope with their work and the challenges that they encounter while working with unaccompanied minors. As discussed above many scholars have identified how social workers in their studies have managed to be resilient in their stressful and demanding profession. The decision making and intervention designing of resilient social workers has been praised and this is said to be a fruit of appropriate training that social workers get that builds their empathy, emotional intelligence, reflective practice and social skills (Grant & Kinman, 2014; Truter et al, 2017).

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with giving detail information on the methods used in this study and the reasons for that. It starts by an explanation of why I did the study. The process of choosing participants and other instruments used in data collection are explored and then it shows how the data analysis process was done. It will conclude by discussion of ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

4.1 The Study

This masters' thesis is written as part of the fulfilment for the requirement of a two years Masters Programme in Social Work and Human Rights, at the University of Gothenburg, in Sweden. The research topic was inspired my interest on studying issues pertaining to children and the profession of social work; hence the topic *Roles of Social Workers working with unaccompanied minors: Experiences of Social workers in Gothenburg*. This topic gave me an opportunity to explore issues of unaccompanied minors with more focus on the roles of social workers.

The focus of this study is to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors and the challenges they come across in executing their roles. It also explores how they deal with various challenges they come across. The study location is Gothenburg, this location was chosen because I am studying in this city, so it is a familiar place where I have accommodation and can have better links to participants at different times. It is a cross sectional study; the data collection period was between 22nd of March and 6th of April 2018.

4.2 Methodological Framework

This study refers to the people that took part in it as “research participants”, this term best captures the research relationship and shows better that the people involved shape the design of the study and are more actively involved in the investigation of the topic (Given, 2015). This study appreciates social workers and is of the notion that social workers are the best candidates to be interviewed when one is interested in knowing their roles and challenges. The participants in this study were social workers working with unaccompanied minors in different settings in Gothenburg. The social workers' experiences and perspectives were considered important in understanding their roles with unaccompanied minors. They were asked to give their perception of unaccompanied minors and their needs, describe their roles, and share the challenges they come across while working with unaccompanied minors.

This study takes a qualitative approach, which is a way of studying social reality, it is important in exploring, describing, or explaining social phenomenon (Leavy, 2014). It is mostly about making a choice to uphold words (narratives) over numbers (Gair & Van Luyn, 2016). This work takes the epistemological position described as the interpretivist. According to Murkerji & Albon (2018) this approach acknowledges that there are several meanings people accredit to their actions and that it focuses on gaining detailed insight on an issue as opposes to making generalisations about the world. This study attempts to understand the issue of roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors, getting information directly from the social workers themselves. The researcher had chance to interact with the participants and get a full and in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Knowing the experiences of social workers

working with unaccompanied minors, offers a holistic perspective from the participants themselves not just focusing on what others think of them but really getting what they do from day to day (their roles) and expressing the difficulties they have as they function in their roles.

4.3 Research Method: In-depth semi-structured interview

An in-depth semi-structured interview is a method of data collection which involves the researcher asking a person who has expertise on a topic questions and following up on their responses with a mission to get as much information as possible (Morris, 2015). The interviewer directs the conversation to keep it on topic but at the same time allowing the interviewee to be free and express themselves as they want to. In-depth semi-structured interviews give the researcher access to the interviewees' experiences, perceptions, understanding and interpretations of the topic under study hence the suitability of this method for this study as aims at getting experiences of social workers working with unaccompanied minors, one of the objectives being to understand their perception of unaccompanied minors and their needs (Morris, 2015).

In-depth semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to probe more and gave the interviewee a chance to ask for elaboration when they did not understand the questions or when the language was not clear. This enabled the social workers to tell their story giving insight on their roles and their perception of unaccompanied minors and their needs. A semi-structured interview guide (appendix 1) was developed before the start of the data collection process. A semi-structured interview guide is a list of pre-determined questions that is used to lead the interviewer during interviews (O'Keeffe et al, 2015). It consisted of eighteen questions which were developed from the research questions. The interview guide was in English and the interviews were in English as well, as it was the only common language between the researcher and participants. Interviews lasted from between thirty minutes to forty-five minutes. All interviews done in this study were in-depth semi-structured interviews, one was a phone interview and the rest were face to face. The participants were given a chance to choose time, date and place of their choice for the interview. All interviews were conducted in quiet rooms, some at the social workers' work places and some at distinct places chosen by them. All these were allowed for the social workers to be comfortable. All interviews were recorded, for smooth undisturbed data collection.

4.5 Sampling Process

4.5.1 Sample size and dynamics

One of the most debated issues is of how many participants are enough for qualitative research. Dworkin (2012) writes that the number of participants varies between 5 to 50 depending on what the researcher wants to achieve, their resources, the scope of the study and the nature of the topic. The study focuses on understanding meanings and interpretations and linking these to the lived experiences of the participants (ibid). It had six participants. The researcher believed that in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted would yield significant and viable data that could be used in responding to the research questions of the study. Of the six social workers interviewed, two were working under the municipality as social secretaries of unaccompanied minors, two were social workers at residential homes, one was a school social worker and the other was working in a residential home but had also worked as a social secretary before. Of all the participants that participated in the study three has a bachelor's Degree in social work and three has a master's Degree in social work.

4.5.2 Sampling Technique

The sampling techniques that were used are both purposive sampling and snowballing. The reasons for using both was that one was not sufficient. The discussion below explains in detail why this was done.

4.5.2.1 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a sampling method that entails choosing a participant deliberately because of the qualities they possess, the researcher decides what needs to be known and finds people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). This study only sought to interview social workers, who are working with unaccompanied minors or have worked with unaccompanied minors. The researcher purposefully selected social workers in different settings, that is from the school, from residential homes and those who work as social secretaries under the municipality. The selected participants were believed to be well informed in the area of unaccompanied minors and above were the rightful candidates to talk about roles of social workers. The aim was to concentrate on participants with the above-mentioned characteristics for the sake of making this study relevant.

4.5.2.2 Snow Ball Sampling

Snow ball sampling is a sampling technique which is used when the characteristics of the sample are rare, though the characteristics for participants of this study were not rare the mere fact that the study was carried out in English made it difficult to identify participants as majority prefer to use Swedish (Dragan & Isaiac-Maniu, 2013). Etikan, Alkassim & Abubakar (2016) write that snowball sampling starts with purposive sampling of people of interest, this study did the same it started with determining who will be most suitable to interview and then went on to use snowballing to select them. Snowball sampling is used to identifying people with characteristics of interest. Though at times it is criticized of being biased it has been successfully used by many scholars to identify various groups of interest (Dragan & Isaiac-Maniu, 2013).

For this study it started with provision of contact details of a person who worked with unaccompanied minors by a colleague, though this individual was not a social worker themselves, they then provided contact details of managers of different municipality offices in Gothenburg that work with unaccompanied minors, the managers then shared their email addresses and helped the researcher to get in contact with social workers. This process was not the same for all participants but the commonality rests on that all participants the researcher got in contact with them through other people.

4.6 Data Analysis

4.6.1 Transcribing Interviews

Transcription of interviews refers to the process of converting recorded interviews into text (King & Horrocks, 2010). It can be done partially or word for word, the researcher transcribed the recording word for word for all the six interviews conducted. This made it easy to identify the similarities and differences in the information that participants provided even before starting the analysis. I listened to the recording several times to ensure what I had written was what the participant had said.

4.6.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of data analysis that identifies patterns or themes within collected data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). One of its advantages is that it is not attached to any theoretical stance, making more flexible (ibid). Thematic analysis identifies themes or

patterns in the data that the researcher finds interesting; these are then used to address research issue, it is not just mere summarizing of the data but interprets and makes sense of the data using the themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Braun & Clarke (2006) provide six steps of thematic analysis; familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, search for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing of the report. They state that these steps are not linear, and one may need to be going back to some to come up with a good analysis.

This study made use of thematic analysis as it identifies codes in the data that can be developed into themes that address the research questions. The research familiarised herself with the data by first listening to the audio recordings many times and after transcribing read through the transcripts, while reading she could spot some similarities and differences in the responses. Coming up with codes was done manually by highlighting interesting parts and repeating patterns. From the list of codes that were highlighted, subthemes and themes were generated through grouping of these codes. After reviewing the themes and sub themes some were fused and became statements. Some parts of codes could not be made into sub themes, so information was written under one main theme. Themes were generated considering with the aim that they capture important facts that are relevant to the research questions. It is important to note that in some instances it was not easy to get a theme from the data due to differences in responses and lack of pattern hence some themes were derived from the questions that were asked for better presentation of the findings. Six themes were derived from data during analysis. They are presented in the table below;

THEMES	SUB THEMES
Uniqueness of unaccompanied minors	
Social workers functioning in diverse roles	-Role Allocation - Role & the social work profession -Importance of social work role
Challenges while interacting with unaccompanied minors	-Language barrier -Cultural barrier -difficulty in understanding or accepting decisions
Challenges while interacting with colleagues and other actors	
Challenges while interacting with the system	
Coping and dealing with the challenges	

4.7 Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

Leung (2015) explains “*that validity in qualitative research means “appropriateness” of the tools, processes and data*”. It talks of whether the research questions are suitable for the desired outcome, the choice of methodology, the sampling and data analysis if they are appropriate. For the study to be considered valid the methods used must be appropriate for the research area, the research finds this study valid because of the appropriateness of methods used, for example purposive sampling was the most suitable because the study was focusing on social workers so having a randomized kind of sampling would have compromised the results as the study needed to get the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors directly from them, hence the sampling method being appropriate.

Reliability in qualitative research relies more on consistency, in qualitative research usually the results have certain variation because of the slight changes in methodology and due to the fact that qualitative research focuses on probing for deeper understanding rather than examining features different people have different views and different explanations may be acquired (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Reliability and validity in qualitative research implies that the study is sound and appropriate for generating understanding of meanings, interpretations and perspectives and this study does provide this (Nobe & Smith, 2015).

Generalizability in qualitative research does not mean that researchers should sacrifice comprehensive and rich understandings of people (Smith, 2018). It means that researchers should appreciate the need for their results to be suitable for application on the larger community. One of the challenges in qualitative research is lack of generalizability which at times makes policy makers to not believe that qualitative research produces useful results, which is which generalizability is important also in qualitative research (Leung, 2015; Smith, 2018). The results of this study cannot be fully generalized to all social workers working with unaccompanied minors but when it comes to a population of social workers who may have the similar characteristics of the social workers in this study, that is the similar work place, education, background and practicing in a country with similar laws then some degree of generalization can be applied.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been said to have an influence on the qualities that make a successful study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). It is important for a researcher to uphold a high level of ethics to protect the participants. The researcher was conscious of ethical issues from the beginning of this study. Before starting to be in contact with the participants a letter of informed consent (appendix 2) was constructed, after approval by the supervisor the researcher then started contacting participants. When approaching the people who could be participants, the researcher shared information on the study, the aim, the purpose, research questions and a clear explanation of what the study was intending to fulfil.

Those who were interested and willing to participate showed their consent through signing an informed consent letter. Explaining of what the study was all about was done to give the participants understanding of the study and for them to know what it meant for them to participate in the study. The participants were made aware that they can skip some questions or stop the interview at any point if they do not want to continue. The signed informed consent forms were kept safe were only the researcher can access. Some of the participants emphasised that they should be kept anonymous, the researcher ensured that the data shared in this study does not in any way create a link that can bring forth the identity of the participants. Data collected in this study will be used only for this study.

4.9 Limitations of The Study

Rimando et al (2015) in their study on the challenges researchers face mention that language may be one of the limitations especially when it comes to identifying participants. The researcher was faced with a limitation of language, some people were willing to be part of the study only if it was to be carried out in Swedish. During recruiting of participants there were instances where some phone calls could not continue because the researcher and the other person on the line were not understanding each other. In some phone calls the researcher received invalid email addresses due to the difference of Swedish and English vowels.

The second limitation was lack of resources, especially time. Recruiting participants was time consuming especially since there was no compensation offered to those participating. Social

workers working with unaccompanied minors generally have limited time hence it was at times difficult to fit into their schedule and at times the interviews had to be scheduled for a later date which meant the researcher had to wait long periods to start data collection process. The final limitation was that it was the first time the researcher was using thematic analysis this also consumed time as she had to study a lot of material to be competent in using the data analysis method.

Nevertheless, the limitations did not compromise the accomplishment of the tasked the researcher had. The people that ended up participating in this study were fluent in English and the data collection process ended up going well due to smooth communication. The researcher under limited time with the help of the supervisor managed to cover a lot of work and this study provides reliable results on the role of social workers working with unaccompanied as per the experiences of social workers in Gothenburg.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings and analysis of the study. The findings are presented with themes and sub-themes that emerged through thematic analysis. Early literature presented in the literature review is used in the analysis. The theories utilized in the study will follow in the discussion chapter, this was done so that the theories can be clearly presented alongside the analysis for better conclusion making.

5.1 Presentation of Participants

As stated in the methodology chapter this study was conducted by using semi structured interviews with six social workers, two from social services, two working in residential homes, one school social worker and one who has worked at social services and in a residential home. All these social workers were working or have worked with unaccompanied minors in the above mentioned settings. During the interview the participants were asked two questions that were checking their background, one was on their educational background and the other was on work experience. When asked the question “*What is your educational background?*” three has a bachelors in social work and the other three has a master’s in social work. Four of the participants has a background of human rights in their social work. The question on work experience “*For how long have you been working with unaccompanied minors?*” the answers varied some of the participants had more than five years experience and some had less than five years but all had more than two years experience. All were working solely with unaccompanied minors except the school social worker who worked with unaccompanied minors and other children in school.

5.2 Uniqueness of Unaccompanied Minors

The perceptions of social workers on unaccompanied minors was expressed on who social workers think is an unaccompanied minor, whether they are dependent or independent, their needs, previous conditions, and the expectations of unaccompanied minors with regards to the services they offer. In responding to these the theme that was derived was uniqueness and age of unaccompanied minors, it was identified with regards to how they constantly mentioned how unaccompanied minors are different individuals with unique characters.

The views expressed by participants revealed similarities on who they believe is an unaccompanied minor. One respondent said;

Anyone under the age of 18 who has left their country without their parents or legal guardian

Another one said;

According to me it is anyone under the age of 18 that comes to any country that is not their native country and doesn't have any legal guardian or parent that are above the age of 18 with them so even if they come with siblings they are still an unaccompanied minors

How respondents define unaccompanied minors is in line with the definition by Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö (2016) that an unaccompanied minor is a person under the age of 18 who came to a

country that is not their native county without their parents or legal guardian. The results bring in that even if the children come with siblings under the age of 18 they are still unaccompanied minors.

When responding to whether they are independent or not they expressed that unaccompanied minors are different, and they are individuals and a generalisation would not do justice to define their independence. One of the social workers said this;

I have met so many different kinds of unaccompanied minors, I wouldn't say there is a general one, because we have those who have been to Sweden half a year and learnt Swedish and learnt the system and learn everything that they need to know and then we have those who have been here for 3 years and don't know a single word I would say those are dependent but I think what was general for all of them is the emotional dependenceness on adults everywhere.

Another one said;

I mean it is a difficult question because for me they have gotten to Sweden on their own for me it shows that in a way they are independent,

The other;

"... From the legal perspective they depend on the state, they get support from the state but it is important to note that when it comes to individuals I cannot say who is dependent or who is independent."

The issues of how long the child has been in Sweden and their age were mentioned as some of the factors that influence if the child is independent or not. When a child has stayed longer here they understand the system better hence independence. The findings show that the ability of unaccompanied minors to reach Sweden without parents or a guardian shows that there is some kind of independence they have, but legally unaccompanied minors are dependent on the state for care. Above all the fact that they are individuals and that some can be independent and some dependent was emphasised by all social workers. Kohli (2006) wrote that one of the social workers had a lot of positive things to say about one of the unaccompanied minors under her care, that he works hard and keeps his surroundings clean. Social workers do not paint unaccompanied minors with the same brush but respect their uniqueness (ibid).

When asked about the needs of unaccompanied minors social workers interviewed expressed that children have different needs as they are individual persons, they said that it is through an investigation that the needs of the children will be identified. One of the participants said;

"Like I said before children are children it doesn't matter if they come as unaccompanied or born and raised in Sweden some children have some needs others have other needs so I think that you always need to do an investigation about every child to establish their needs but of course all of them need shelter and they need love"

And the other said;

"I would say just that on the one hand for someone to kind of be the guide on the Swedish Society, what it means to live here kind of the social norms and understanding of how it really works here because generally they are kind of an isolated group in society so I think they need help to be a part of the Society and also psychosocial support which now since 2015 has become a very big part of it because of the waiting period"

When discussing the needs of unaccompanied minors the same issue of uniqueness featured in the results that an investigation has to be done to establish the needs of each child social workers interact with. The needs of unaccompanied that seemed common in the results were the need for integration, shelter, psychosocial support and love. Sedmak et al. (2017) mentioned some of these needs as needs of unaccompanied minors, they were of the motion that unaccompanied minors additional to basic needs have need to feel like they are part of a community and need assistance with dealing with their experiences. Hopkins & Hill (2010) affirmed this that due to their experiences the basic needs of unaccompanied minors and other psychological needs need to be met at the same time to bring stability in their lives.

Participants were asked if they were aware of the conditions of the children before they became in contact with them. They gave these different responses;

One said;

I don't know because we seldom speak of their past because we try to focus on their future... Some of them make us aware of how they feel and talk about their issues...

Another response;

Yes we know their conditions before they became in contact with us and it is different from child to child. I think depending on which country the child came from it is really different, the way to Sweden is really different but I also think it depends on the gender because girls meet different difficulties from boys. A lot of girls have been exposed to sexual violence or early childhood marriages and boys are forced to be in the military and they fear for their lives if they are to go back because it is really a big crime there and some boys were beaten by their fathers.

The next one;

When I worked in the accommodation it wasn't necessary for me to get their background then it depended on what relationship you created with the youth but as social secretary then it was my job to find out what kind of background they were from to kind of assess what their needs were...

Social workers working at social services mentioned that they get to know of the conditions unaccompanied minors went through before they became in contact with them, the school social worker and those working in homes mentioned that it depends on whether the unaccompanied minor wants to share the information or not. The social service social workers mentioned that it is part of the investigation they do to establish the background of the children. The findings show that social workers depending on where they work and expectations of their work will become aware of the previous conditions of the unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are the ones who decide whether they want to share their experiences or not. The findings show that of those who were willing to share some of the unaccompanied minors have been through hectic situations before arriving in Sweden, girls have been exposed to early child marriages and sexual violence while for boys some were forced into the military (where they were exposed to harsh situations) and some were abused by their parents. The results show that this varies also with the country the minor came from. Unaccompanied minors to some extent are deprived of a childhood that other children experience, they are perceived as one of the most vulnerable groups among refugees as they may even encounter more harm if proper safety is not ensured (Sedmak et al., 2017).

When responding to a question on the kind of expectations the unaccompanied minors have social workers continued to talk of unaccompanied minors being individuals. Some of the participants said;

One social worker;

I think they don't really know and it changes from time to time. When I meet the children for the first time when they are new here most of them don't have a clue about what the social services can do for them. So they usually don't know much about what we do but when they start school and get to know other kids who are with their parents they get quite high expectations. They are satisfied with what they get but kids are kids they usually want money and new clothes. Except from that most of them are quite satisfied, when you work with children who are born and raised in Sweden usually you go into the family because there is something bad and the children don't usually like what you do but unaccompanied minors usually feel like we do something good because we give them some money and help and we usually ask them how they are, how they feel and most of them feel that we care. I think most of them are quite satisfied with the services expect the money of course.

The other;

The ones newly arrived that didn't know their rights and know what they could have they didn't have any expectations they were just looking for information from me.

Another one;

I think that a lot of the time they have been given information, a wrong information from mostly I will guess people smugglers, that they paid money to get here, smugglers and I think they have given the young people wrong information that they can get phones, expensive clothes, get all these things. So, when they first came to Sweden there was a lot of focus on material things probably because they have been told that...

Last one;

"They had expectations that they would be offered an apartment would be offered clothing, they would be offered you know everything. So I feel a bit of a disappointment when they get here they realize there isn't an apartment."

The results revealed that social workers perceive that unaccompanied minors have different expectations from their stay in Sweden. Some through interacting with smugglers had been given information that hiked their expectations; some did not have much expectations until getting explanation on how things work in Sweden. The expectations varied from one child to the other. The results present that unaccompanied minors do not only have expectations on the state but also from themselves, social workers revealed that some of the children want to go to school and build careers, this determination at times is influenced by the zeal and will to send remittances back home. Social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as having the ability to rebuild their lives and overcome the challenges they have faced and the ones they continue to experience (Kohli & Mitchell, 2007).

5.3 Social Workers Functioning in Diverse Roles

As social workers who were interviewed were working in different settings there were some differences and similarities noted in their response to the question of what their roles are. The

sub themes that emerged with social service social workers was that they link children with services and they are case managers. They gave these responses;

One said;

“...usually like 2 days ahead we need to find somewhere for the kids to stay and after that we start the investigation and we usually have maximum 4 months, we ask about their needs and we also ask about their background their family really to get like to know all about the needs and within these 4 months we should decide which home is best for this child and after the 4 months we do like the decision if it's should be a family or youth home and afterwards we do follow ups if they are living in a house with other kids we usually do it in 6 weeks. If something doesn't work we try and find a better alternative. If they need something more like a psychologist or some special need in school so we do following ups in all situations.”

The other;

In Swedish we have a saying that you are the spider in the web, it means that you are like the main person that organises everything so even though the young person has the legal guardian demand who also organises all those things but still most of that falls on to us. Then again it is the Social worker's role to find placement somewhere for a young person to live and to make sure that that's a good place and follow up and do all that.

The school social worker mentioned that her roles were;

...Usually I follow them when they miss school, I have to investigate the issues behind them and make some guide plan to bring them back in school, Work as a guide to the Swedish school system and I also have counseling sessions, with anyone who needs to talk, if they are willing sure...

The social workers working at residential homes and the one who has functioned in two roles mentioned that their roles is to be there for the children. The sub themes that emerged were; being a guide to integration into the society, offer general support and motivation and help them to be in contact with the different authorities. Some of their responses were

One social worker;

“My role is to provide them with the support that they need on daily basis and it includes getting into contact with the authorities, with the hospitals, with their school, as a linkage between them and the godman and also serve as a guide and help them with what they need on a daily basis including their recreational times. It is very different from what those at the city council do.”

The other;

At the accommodation my role was to be an integration a guide to integration basically we were supposed to teach them everything they needed to know to be able to manage to live on their own one day so it could be anything from how to cook food, how to pay your bills, how to get a job how to get a phone simcard it could be everything you need to know in a daily situation so it was kind of up to the youth as well to tell us what they wanted to learn and we could tell them.

The social workers interviewed expressed that they do advocacy work in their work with unaccompanied minors.

Social service social worker;

The advocacy I do is more of the empowerment kind of, the children may not feel that way but I think it's hard to get a youth to get satisfied with the work of adults but I don't think they feel that way but we feel that...

Social worker that functioned in two roles;

At the accommodation there I did a lot of advocacy work and to help them with their contact with their social service social worker and with their legal guardian because they didn't always agree on one thing so it was good to be kind of a middle hand to help them with that but it depended on the kind of relationship you had with the youth because if you had a good relationship with them they could let you in but if you didn't they wouldn't let you help them. In the social worker I always fought that they could get the help they needed at the accommodation because when I placed them in home I expected them to get some kind of assistance of which at times they didn't get, so I fought for them to get the right care and at times you could speak for them when talking to superiors at social services to make the care better for them.

One of the social workers at residential home;

"I wish we could engage in more advocacy, you know that is one role that social workers have so I wish we could have advocacy for better treatment of these children. We do try to advocate for them, there have been some demonstrations in the city and me and my colleagues were there to give support and solidarity. But we specifically who are employed were to come up directly to argue about something it's going to be a conflict of interest because my organization"

The results reveal that social workers working with unaccompanied minors have different roles influenced by their work place. Social workers at social service take the role of being case managers, those working in residential homes work as integration agents, the school social worker as a guide and offer counselling. Carlson et al. (2012) writes that social workers deliver services to unaccompanied minors including implementing integration programmes. They design interventions that counter social exclusion making supportive networks (Kohli, 2006). Results show all social workers interviewed do advocacy work but how they explain advocacy differs, for those in social services it meant empowering the unaccompanied minors, for those at residential homes meant helping them appeal decisions they were not pleased with and for school social worker it meant helping them appeal as well and go an extra mile by writing letters to lawyers to help the appeal cases. Chang-Muy & Congress (2016) write that social workers help their service users to understand the laws and regulations governing care so by assisting with appeals they help them navigate the laws. As Tham (2018) has revealed that social workers described their roles as giving advice and support the results of the study show that social workers see themselves as giving guidance, support and motivation to the unaccompanied minors especially those working at school and residential homes. Social workers roles are shaped by their work place and the level of interaction with the unaccompanied minor, the results show that social workers who interacted more with unaccompanied minors on a daily basis (school and residential home), felt that they also played a motherly, sisterly and friend role (Stremo, 2014; Nordling, 2017).

5.3.1 Role Allocation

Social workers interviewed mentioned that they get their roles from their employers. They said;

One Social worker at social services;

When you sign your appointment paper it is written what you would be doing and that's what you will be doing. Socialsteresen are like the part of the state in Sweden who works with social issues they have handbooks about how we should work. The things that my employer gives are also based on socialsteresen, the title I have comes with expectations and those are the same for the person with the same title anywhere in Sweden."

School social worker;

In every Swedish school there is a team called the student's health team so whatever a teacher has or worry about a student they bring it to the health team then we discuss it, there is a psychologist, the counsellor, the principal and there is me then there is a special teacher then we discuss the student and see who is best suited to take the case

One Social worker at residential home;

Employer is the one that gives roles but they are also guided by the social work profession in general because it comes from the national board of health and welfare about how a home is supposed to be run so we follow along those guidelines

Social worker that functioned in two roles;

At the accommodation it was new so we didn't have so many homes so the roles were actually stipulated, we spoke a lot to each other, we kind of talked to each other and built up a routine that we were going to follow so this changed when we started to get to know the children because it could be so individually how you work with different youths, they demanded different things and they had different personalities.

When asked if their roles are clearly specified some of the participants mentioned that their roles were clearly specified but mentioned that it is different from one organization to the other. One of the social workers at social services mentioned that the unaccompanied minors she works with have different needs and that this also molds the roles she will take with the children, she mentioned that though the National Board of Health has specified roles she has the liberty of doing what is best for the child, she specified that her and one of her colleagues have a youth group of unaccompanied minors from Eritrea they meet once a week though this is not part of her roles she feels they need to work more with these children. The social worker who has worked in two settings and one of those who work at a residential home mentioned that at the residential homes their roles were not clearly specified but as the employees at the home they at times divided the roles amongst themselves and it was a more flexible environment. The social worker that worked in two settings expressed that at social services her roles were clearly specified and she followed a routine that was created by previous employees, she mentioned it was more controlled but at the residential home she could think outside the box. One of the social service social workers felt her roles were clearly stated. These findings are in line with what Nordling (2017) writes, that social workers working with unaccompanied take various roles depending on the organisation they work with, the ones she calls social assistants are closer to the welfare state bureaucracy and follow many procedures and those at homes experience some kind of flexibility.

5.3.2 Roles and the Social Work Profession

The participants felt that their roles were guided by the social work profession. But when asked if their roles fit the professional standard of social work they said yes and no.

The school social worker;

Yes and No I would say am more like a mother, people ask me at times why I don't have children and I say I have 150 because I help them with so much, like everything. From finding where their school bag is to their phone, to their you know everything. No because of the motherly feel and Yes because I follow my professional conduct, like confidentiality and others.

One of the social workers working at social services mentioned;

Now I think I function as I would want to function as a social worker aah I mean like 2015 I didn't do that, we were not like social workers at all we did what we really needed what to do, but now we have a lot of time. I had little time to help accordingly.

The other social service social worker expresses that;

Maybe not, Well actually but it is also in relation to working with unaccompanied minors it's also the different laws around migration, asylum and permanent residency but our job changes depending on what the Swedish government decide, now for example, we have a new law saying that this is changed now we can't get asylum or you know, that's one of the big changes between our job and Social workers that just work with young Swedish people.

The social worker who has functioned in two roles mentioned that she felt more professional at social services but at the residential home she felt that her role was more flexible but less professional except when she interacted with other actors. She expressed these with these words;-

"I felt more professional at social services, I don't know if it's about that when you are working at social services you are using the laws and its very serious, it feels like you have a weight on your shoulder that you need to have a certain professional appearance within this job and in some way it felt really serious and I felt that I came into the professional role more clearly when I was at the social services than I did at the accommodation, at the accommodation I used more of my personal skills working with the youth, more about personal relationships I felt more like a big sister, a mom than I did a professional role"

Roles of social workers are closely linked to the profession's standards. The results reveal that social worker felt their roles were guided by the profession but not all the time. Social workers felt when they functioned like sisters and mothers it was not very professional. Too much work load and changing of laws was mentioned as a factor affecting professionalism.

5.3.3 Importance of Social Work Role

Participants expressed that the role of social workers in the work with unaccompanied minors is very important.

The school social worker;

Ooh I think it's big, I think in general social workers have like really a big heart, we have empathy and I think that's one of the main reasons people become social workers, I think a social workers' most important tool is empathy.

One of the social workers from social service mentioned;

I think it's really important because someone needs to place them someone needs to do investigations, exercise confidentiality and they build trust with the children and they open up.

The social worker that functioned in two roles expressed;

I think it has a big role, they decide where the children are going to live until they are 18 so it's very important to have social workers and they all work with each other because they are such big part of the youths lives, so I think the social workers in the office should meet with the youth more often than they do now and give them hope that things will turn out well and also skills...

One of the social workers working at a residential home said;

“our interest is to be there for the voiceless, for the marginalized in society, imagine leaving your country and finding yourself in a whole new environment where the culture is different, and everything is different from what you are normally used to, of course you automatically become a vulnerable person and that's where social workers come in because we are there for the marginalized, our role is very important, we start teaching them to do all things around them pay bills....”

The results show that the role of social workers working with unaccompanied minors is significant, what they do there are no other professionals capable of doing that. Social workers are the only professionals that do assessments, of risks and have the competences of handling the investigation process. Social workers give hope to unaccompanied minors and equip them with skills to handle and face up their challenges. The advocacy they do changes a lot as it at times brings change to the initial decisions that were made. Social workers help prepare unaccompanied minors for transition to adulthood by to name a few teaching them how to cook, pay bills and budget money, this is usually done by social workers at residential homes (Kalverboer et al., 2016).

The social workers interviewed had at least a bachelors in social work. When it comes to training in working with unaccompanied minors, they responded by saying;

School social worker;

No and I never got any. Am only using the skills I got when I got training as a social worker but not necessarily with this group of children. I don't cope at all it is really had; my group and I we don't get any counseling

One of the social workers at residential home had received extra training;

“Yes I had a lot of training, we went to a lot of lecturers about unaccompanied minors, in different settings and I know some of my colleagues even went for motivational interview training. We also could training in a method called “find you way” and that's an integrational method you could use to work with

unaccompanied minors. I got this when I was working at the accommodation. As a social worker we went to a lot of lecturers about different situations and different topics about unaccompanied minors, I was once a month I went for training to get the newest information what is happening now, sometimes we went to lecturers with migration board where they told us that now this is what is happening now, this is important,”

Social work education prepares social workers to work with different groups of people, the results reveal that the training social workers get helps them to work with people with diverse backgrounds (Asquith et al., 2005). The results show that social workers who did not get extra training on unaccompanied minors reveal that working with unaccompanied minors was more stressful as they felt it was necessary for them to get more training especially that working with unaccompanied minors comes with many laws that social workers need to understand. The social workers that got extra training revealed that it was important and increase their competence in working with unaccompanied minors, they revealed that since Sweden was trying to adjust laws after 2015 they really needed to be aware of all changes so that they do not get caught up in giving wrong information to their services users.

5.4 Challenges while Interacting with Unaccompanied Minor

5.4.1 Cultural Differences

One of the challenges the social workers mentioned was cultural differences between them and the children. One of the social workers working at a residential home mentioned that;

I think to be honest there is a cultural barrier, because maybe I don't know but from the countries these kids come from women don't have the same level or patriarchy is a lot stronger or different there, the children do not feel comfortable with women and don't open up

The social worker who has functioned in two roles;

The challenges when working at the accommodation was a lot about the relationships with the youth, some had strong relationships with others employees than other, mostly there was discomfort when the employee was of the opposite sex...

The findings reveal that some of the children were not comfortable with sharing their struggles with the female workers and at times when it's the female worker on duty they wait for the male ones before asking for assistance.

5.4.2 Language Barrier

Language difference was mentioned as a barrier to communication. The participants mentioned this;

Social worker at residential home;

...most of them do not speak the Swedish language when they first come so there can be miscommunication when they seek help even though there are translators at times it is not enough...

Another social worker at residential home;

...the fact that I don't speak their languages as well and don't know the histories and how it works and all so at times it was difficult to interact with them well...

Social worker at social service;

Language is not a problem if they are new we use a translator but 80 or 90 % of my children use Swedish but the ones that don't know Swedish we use translator and it's not a problem, it was a problem in 2015 when we also had new kids and we had lack of translators.

Other social worker at social service;

Well, that's not really, we always work with interpreters and sometimes interpreters are very good so I wouldn't see it as a big challenge...

The citations above show that language is a challenge but not for all social workers. The social workers that felt language was a problem are those at residential homes, maybe because they spend more time with those at social services that mentioned that it was not a problem. For social workers at social services language was a barrier during the first days.

5.4.3 Difficulty in Understanding or Accepting Decisions

One of the challenges expressed was that of children not accepting the decisions made by the social workers about certain things.

One of the social service social workers said;

...children are not always allowed to decide everything about themselves because they are children and a lot of children have really strong wills it can be a challenge because a child is not allowed to stay in a house I don't know because I need to be sure it's a safe environment and like I said children come to relatives and want to stay with them.

Social worker at residential home;

A lot of youth who had families in their home countries it was tough they felt really bad they wanted their families to come to Sweden and be with them so it was really hard for them to stay in a residential home, when they wanted me to help them with what they wanted and I couldn't help them, they got really angry and at times I felt threatened and that is not a good working environment and it's hard to solve at times, so it was a lot of struggles with relationships, at times we worked well but at times it got really bad and we need to think of your professional role and not your personal feelings and try to make this as good as possible

The findings show that unaccompanied minors at times responded in an unpleasant manner when they did not understand or accept the decisions that social workers made. In summary the results reveal that the challenges that social workers encounter while interacting unaccompanied minors are cultural difference, language barrier and the behaviour the unaccompanied minors display when they are not happy with a decision made. The results show there was a challenge with the boys to respect the female social workers and were not feeling comfortable with sharing their struggles with them. Language is a barrier when the minors are new in Sweden but once they get to learn the language it does not become a problem. Westwood (2012) wrote that when language is barrier social worker usually worry if the children are really getting the right information from the interpreters. Unaccompanied minors are said to be violent at times when they do not agree with decisions made by social workers, the results show that

social workers at times feel threatened when they have to work alone with the children especially the male unaccompanied minors.

5.5 Challenges while Interacting with Colleagues and Other Actors

The social workers interviewed mentioned that they encountered challenges when interacting with colleagues and other actors.

One of the social workers working at a residential home mentioned this;

And also with my colleagues as well I felt gender stereotypes because I remember we are a very mixed group, we are only two who are natives swedes and at times it's like we get categorized like ooh that 'Swedish girl', I remember last time I would say am not Swedish I have barely lived here but I feel that affects the work as well

One of the social workers at social services expressed that;

A lot of the time I felt that other people may not know their roles, for example, they don't necessarily always know what my role is, what their role is but also I think that can come down to the fact that there are so many new actors employed during 2015, you know, because of the influence of young people they just took people in, they had no training, they didn't know really what their role was so at that time sometimes it is difficult to know whose role, and who was meant to do what but I have always in my job been quite clear what I am supposed to do...

One of the participants mentioned that;

... because of the insecurity some workers are demoralized to work like things always change why do I need to put much of an effort like just that the employees and employers there was a clash and the employees would not work, they are really not motivated so it's difficult to work in that environment where others expect you to conform to their slow working and if you don't conform you end up doing a lot of work and start saying you colleagues are lazy and then some feel who does she think she is so it is very difficult and the fact that I am a young woman yeah I shouldn't be too loud too open.

Another participant said;

People used to say, oh, that's really nice it might be a nice job and some say how can you work with those people, they are lying about their age, they are not really under 18, they are terrorists, you know. So, I kind of see that as more challenging, having to be an ambassador for these young people and having to fight for them. This is caused by ignorance of course.

The citations show that as social workers interact with other actors and their colleagues they experience challenges, these include gender stereotypes when working with some men with migrant background and having to work with demoralized coworkers with insecurities about their work since the number of unaccompanied minors coming to Sweden has decreased. A feeling that some actors do not know their roles and at times want to do others roles was also mentioned, that due to influx of unaccompanied minors in 2015 some people without experience were hired to help the situation. When interacting with their peers some social

workers felt like there was an element of ignorance and stereotype towards unaccompanied minors.

5.6 Challenges while Interacting with the System

The social workers had many different concerns while interacting with the welfare system. One of the social workers mentioned rigid structure of social services, increased work load and lack of resources as a challenge and working with migration agency. They gave these responses;

One of the social workers at social services;

I think the main challenge right now is that the resources are a lot less which makes it difficult. You have to try and find solutions that you don't necessarily or you know that are not the best and that's difficult and challenging and also upsetting because you know that the person needs something else and you can't give it to them

Social worker that functioned in two roles;

At social services it's the structural and the system of Sweden and how they changed the rules and the time is also structural if we could have had more social workers working with this group then we would have had time to assess and evaluate that we work with. It was organizational causes with the social services and the system in Sweden.

One social worker working at a home;

...there is so much of bureaucracy in the system, sometimes I wish that the city council, which has a very big say in their upkeep would be more flexible, and it's a lot of webs surrounding one person...

The migration agency featured in all the participants' responses on challenges.

One of the social workers working at a residential home expressed that;

and one of the big problems is also coming from the migration board which is handling their cases on their right to live in Sweden, Sometimes they really don't take into consideration a lot of things when they make their decisions, those are some of the striking ones I can think of. I have worked with people who have been very sick who have suicidal thoughts, I think that this should be taken into consideration when the decision is made, because denying them a chance to stay in Sweden is adding to their already precarious situation. When you have a case before you, you have to take the whole case into consideration like give me your birth certificate or contacts of your parents before making a decision, I think they should take everything into consideration especially the health of a person, basically those are the challenges that make things hard

School social worker;

Mostly I would say migration decisions affected the children more, even the rest of the group because that they are always in class and we had cases when they were sent away, on a Friday they were there and Monday they weren't which also causes worry inside of the class, which is confusing for children that age to

try to understand I mean if it's confusing for adults its more confusing for teenagers and since we are trying to be confidential it's very hard for us to speak up openly, so we cannot tell the other kids what happened so there was some kind of gap between the adults and the kids.

One of the social workers at social services said;

I definitely think it is completely wrong of migration agency to accept them as a child and then 2years later say you are not a child anymore because when you come to Sweden to seek asylum you should have your decision from faster as a child, some children have had to wait for 2years so if they were 16 when they came they are 18 after 2years so I think it all wrong so they should take responsibility for that even if someone is over 18, I mean they are still seeking asylum, they still maybe came to Sweden when they are under 18, so they should be assessed like that, I feel. ...sometimes you have one who you can say for sure is not 18 and they say he is 18. Migration agency has some medical assessments that they do which have been heavily criticised so since they are correct or not and also a fact that migration agency at times didn't do an assessment and say I have an interview with him and he is over 18.

The social worker that has functioned in two roles said;

...within the social services it was seeing how the migration board was working because I didn't really understand as a lot of youth got rejections and they were sent home countries and I didn't agree I thought they should stay and I was the one who was sometimes explaining to the youth why they couldn't stay and are being sent home or why they got another age than they said they had when they came some of the youths were told by migration board that you are not 16 you are 18 so you need to move to an adult asylum accommodation so there was a lot of challenges with my own personal feelings about social work and what I was supposed to do

Social workers expressed a concern when it comes to interacting with the system, by system they mean the actors that make decisions and the legislation. The limited budget from municipality, changing of laws were mentioned as challenges. The results reveal that social workers were not impressed with the decision making of migration agency. The social workers felt the migration agency did not do enough on considering the cases of unaccompanied minors, social workers called for holistic assessment of cases, the results show some people would be having mental health challenges and then migration decisions add to that. The results show that social workers were not happy with having to be the ones delivering the news of declined asylum applications and tell the children that they will be deported, they felt they at times are forced to deliver decisions that they are not supporting. Social workers are faced with ethical dilemmas in their work, the results show that when it comes to advocacy they wish they could do more but loyalty to their employers and the implementation of legislation constrains them (Wright, 214). Haidar (2017) wrote that at times migration policies and migration agency at times limits the work social workers. Social workers are caught between upholding professional standard like putting the child first and doing the job their employer dictates, this is common among social service social workers (Westwood, 2012; Wright, 2014; Haidar, 2017). The results show that social workers do not have much influence on decisions made by migration agency and as Tham (2018) writes social work with unaccompanied minors presents high job demand with low control which may lead to work related stress, one of the social workers

interviewed ended up resigning because she felt the low control hindered her to deliver her professional goals.

5.7 Coping and Dealing with the Challenges

The social workers interviewed had different way of coping with the challenges that came with their roles but the most common among all was talking to colleagues.

One of the social workers working at social services mentioned;

As we do our work we are empowered also, and then once a month we have 3 hours with a supervisor and the supervisor we have is working with unaccompanied minors as well she is a psychologist with her we talk about our cases, challenges and she equips us and trains us on new things.

The other social service social worker;

I always, I worked here and in another office with unaccompanied minors and I had been really lucky that I always had really good colleagues and I think we often say that as well amongst each other that there is a certain type of person who chooses to work with unaccompanied minors,

The school social worker mentioned that;

My group and I we don't get any counseling but we end up counseling each other. It's not from above or employers or anything, it's from within.

The social worker who functioned in two roles;

The accommodation I had a lot of conversations with my boss and my colleagues so in some situations after I got threatened they managed to get extra shifts so that we didn't have to work alone for a while until the situation had settled. But to cope with it was more of trying to find solutions like talk with the colleagues like one of the youth is mad at me I don't know what to do so you talk a lot to each other and give one another support because this is not working for me right now, that is how I coped with it there. At social services it was almost the same thing you talked when you had something worrying you with your colleagues, if you had questions about the system you asked questions and got information to understand it and talk to other colleagues in other municipals and taking help from your boss in some cases when you didn't know what to do it's kind of the same, a lot of support from core workers.

To deal with the challenges involving behavior of the unaccompanied minors, talking to the children and explaining things to them was mentioned. One of the social workers working at social services said;

We talk a lot with the child and try make them understand and also feel safe and secure. And also my supervisor helps with the decisions that we make, she is here all the time, I discuss everything with her and she helps me make decisions so it helps with the loads. Sometimes it works quite often we feel satisfied with our work but sometimes it's not like that but these days we meet children often and we talk often.

Another social worker working at residential home;

They are a bit older they are more independent so when they give us troubles we can have a more like grown up conversation.

The other social worker working at a residential home said;

I approach them with motivation and some of my colleagues speak the local languages of those that we are working with, so we really have time to listen to them and pass it on to those who matter, and can intervene like city council social workers.

Fundraising was also a way to deal with the challenges.

Social worker at residential home mentioned that;

...then I together with my colleagues make use of the little that we have and raise more funds to meet the unmet needs and try to lobby charities to donate more...

The school social worker said;

When they have been declined for example we help raise money because then they don't get from migration board, we do it anonymously as private people not as professionals

The results show that social workers have different ways of coping and dealing with the challenges that they encounter. The main way the results reveal that social workers use to cope is talking to colleagues. They mention that after talks with colleagues and at times with psychologist they are able to stand the challenges of work. Social support is mentioned as one of the things that helps social worker to cope with their work even if it is challenging (Grant & Kinman, 2014).

The participants when making remarks on the whole issue of unaccompanied minors gave these remarks;

One social worker;

I would like to see a more human migration policy, I think Sweden wasn't prepared for the migration wave in 2015 and we opened our hearts and welcomed people, we kept people here for 3 years and now we are sending them back, for 3 years you have established a social life...

Another social worker;

Here in Sweden I would like in the social services I would like to see more personnel it would be good to have less cases per social worker that would be a good idea to get more time to really work and do good assessments and good evaluations, that you really have enough information to base your decisions on

Social workers pleaded for a more human migration policy in Sweden that offers the best services for people it has received, less waiting time for applications of children as after establishing attachments here some are moved back to their countries. Some mentioned they would prefer it if children were not sent back. The social workers called for more personnel when working with unaccompanied minors as at times they need more time with social workers but because of work load social workers spend less time with the child.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the study findings linking them to theories chosen for the study which are role theory and resilience theory. The aim of this study was to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. Social workers perception on unaccompanied minors, roles of social workers and the challenges they encounter in their roles will be discussed in line with theories. This chapter will present the implications of this study on social work practice and further research and then give a conclusion to the study.

6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 Role theory

Role theory is used to explain how role expectations and relationships influence actors behaviour in their work places (Keller, 2013). Role theory is considered suitable to explain the relationships between social workers and their service users and in this case unaccompanied minors and how these lead to role generation (ibid). Role theory provides a platform to analyse direct and indirect influences on behaviour. The findings of this study show that social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as individuals, that are unique and have diverse needs. The findings reveal that when asked questions that where kind of grouping unaccompanied minors social workers, reframed from referring to unaccompanied minors as the same person but emphasised that they were unique. The findings reveal that when asked about, expectations, needs and independence of unaccompanied minors social workers maintained that these were individuals and it is only through interacting with them and doing a thorough investigation.

The findings bring to light that social workers expressed that unaccompanied minors had personal expectations to become better people in life, Kohli & Mitchell (2007) affirmed these findings by writing that social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as having the ability to rebuild their lives and overcome the challenges they have faced and the ones they continue to experience. Role theory explains that social workers may have perceptions about their service users as influenced by the expectations that society has on them, social work as a well-being enhancing profession sees potential in their service users. Social workers maybe seeing unaccompanied minors as having capability to build their lives due to influence from their profession's values and norms (Reamer, 2001; Biddle, 2013; Toi, 2015). The perceptions they have that unaccompanied minors are individuals may also be influenced by the expectations social work profession poses towards them that they should see all their service users as individuals and with strengths through strengths perspective, the social work theories also seem to have an influence in this behavior we see social workers portraying (Toi, 2015).

The findings of this study present that roles of social workers vary from one organisation to the other. Social workers working with unaccompanied minors have several roles influenced by their working place. Social workers at social services have the role of being case managers, at residential homes are integration agents, and school social workers had the role of guide into the Swedish school and offer counselling. All social workers mentioned doing advocacy work though their explaining of advocacy varied. Social workers working in residential homes and school social worker revealed that they at times played role of being, sisters, mothers, or friends

with their service users. Role theory explains that the level interaction with service users at times shapes the roles professionals will take (Keller, 2013). Social workers that interacted with unaccompanied minors more often (residential homes and school), mentioned to be more involved with advocacy for the unaccompanied minor and at times engaged in fundraising activities to help meet the needs of their service users.

Role theory explains that in organisations there are positional roles that when there is change of personnel allow for continuity, these roles according to the findings were present among social service social workers as they are not very flexible, these come with job titles, the findings reveal that social service social workers across the country working with unaccompanied minors have similar roles which are dictated by the National Board of Health and Welfare. On the other hand social workers at residential homes as per the findings had more flexible roles that allowed for creativity these have features of what role theory names functional roles which are influenced by social interactions (Keller, 2013; Biddle, 2013). Social workers revealed that for them to function in some roles it depends on the requests of the unaccompanied minor (Keller, 2013). Residential home and school social workers interacted with unaccompanied minors more hence they would even help them appeal some decisions that were made like if the child got rejected when asking for a jacket, the social worker at the residential home is the one that sees the needs of the child first hand. The findings show that social workers usually would have built relationships with unaccompanied minors and when it comes to having to explain to the minors why they are not allowed to stay in Sweden and being moved back, as the social workers themselves are not in agreement with these decisions it creates frustrations for them. Role theory explains this as role conflict, which occurs when expectations are not in line with what the actor believes in or when two roles dictate two conflicting expectations (Biddle, 1986). The findings show that social workers do not have much influence on decisions made by migration agency and as Tham (2018) writes social work with unaccompanied minors presents high job demand with low control which may lead to work related stress, this could lead to social workers resigning or improve resilience (Ledesma, 2014).

6.1.2 Resilience Theory

Resilience theory provides a platform for studying and understanding why people go through draining challenges and yet manage to continue functioning (Zimmerman, 2013). This theory is used in this study to explain how social workers working with unaccompanied minors manage to continue functioning in their roles besides the stressful challenges they go through. To use resilience theory there has to be some risk exposure that has been experienced (Ledesma, 2014). The findings show that social workers working with unaccompanied minors face challenges when interacting with unaccompanied minors, their colleagues, their peers, other actors and the system. These challenges include ethical dilemmas that's can be straining and as Haidar (2017) puts them the limiting migration policies. The findings show that social workers do not have much influence on the decisions made by migration agency, social work with unaccompanied minors is demanding but with low control, this could result in work related stress (Tham, 2018).

The findings show that social workers have different ways of coping and dealing with the challenges that they encounter. The main way that social workers use to cope is talking to colleagues. They mention that after talks with colleagues and at times with psychologist they are able to stand the challenges of work. Social skills which includes having a good network of social support is mentioned as one of the things that helps social workers to be resilient even when their job is stressful (Grant & Kinman, 2014). Social support enhances resilience and well-being among social workers working with children (Briggart et al., 2017).

Supervision is essential for social workers to cope with challenges, as supervisors help social workers when they are faced with difficult decisions to make, supervisors have been said to be the ones that help the decision-making process of social workers. Through empathy social workers also put themselves in the shoes of the unaccompanied minors and know that they are their hope hence motivated to do their job diligently even with challenges. Social workers motivate themselves to ensure that they provide the best services (Raines 1990; Grant & Kinman, 2012)

The findings show that training that social workers get is important in them coping with the challenges, both the educational training and additional training that employers provide that is focusing on working with unaccompanied minors. According to models of resilience theory mainly the protective factor of immunity versus vulnerability, academic and job skills are some of the factors that enhance resilience when employees are faced with challenges (Ledesma, 2014). Social work training the academic one, equips social workers with skills to work with vulnerable groups in society and through empathy be able to understand their problems but being able to separate themselves from the problem hence resilience (Grant & Kinman, 2014). Resilience is said to be linked to promoting professional practice which is why most of social workers continue to carry on working (ibid). Continuous access to professional development is mentioned as a factor that ensures resilience among child protection social workers (Truter et al. 2017). Extra training that the results reveal counts as professional development that quips social workers and helps them be more resilient, the findings show that social workers that did not receive extra training revealed difficult in coping (Kohli, 2006; Grant & Kinman, 2014).

6.2 Implications of study

The main aim of this study was to explore roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. It considered social workers working with unaccompanied minors in different settings. This study contributes to social work literature on unaccompanied minors and also on work of professionals. It offers unique knowledge on how social workers interact with unaccompanied minors, it will give social workers working in different settings an opportunity to understand the roles of one another; which creates an atmosphere of cooperation for the well-being of the unaccompanied minor. Through this study social workers will understand why their colleagues make certain decisions as they become aware of their working conditions and challenges they face. For employers of social workers this study offers them a chance to understand the challenges of their employees and the means they can employ to help them resilience.

Further research is desirable to increase knowledge in this field of study. Future research could use more participants and include other social workers in places that were not mentioned here, like social workers working with foster families of unaccompanied minors. Bringing the migration agency on board will also do justice to studies in this filed, it would make a great difference to hear their side of the story and understand why they make the decisions they make.

6.3 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the roles of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. The study sort to understand how social workers perceive unaccompanied, their roles and the challenges they face in playing their role. The role and resilience theories were applied in the context of social work. Semi structured interviews were carried out on six social workers, who had experience of working with unaccompanied minors in different settings.

The study has revealed that social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as individuals though a common name is used to refer to them. Social workers see unaccompanied minors as people with different needs, as unique as they are some are independent, and some are

dependent though they rely on the state for care just as other children rely on their parents. Social work is a profession that believes all individuals have strengths and can turn their lives in the direction they desire. The study reveals that social workers through their interactions with unaccompanied minors have seen that the needs that reoccur among the unaccompanied minors are need for integration in society, psychosocial support, and love. Through role theory it is learnt that social workers perceive unaccompanied minors as they do because of expectations that society and the social work profession has for them, social workers are expected to bring hope and well-being among its service users (Kohli, 2006; Biddle, 2013).

Social workers working with unaccompanied minors have the role of being case managers, integration agents, offer counselling, guidance, and advocacy. Some social workers were engaged in fundraising. They assume their roles depending on their work place. They get their roles from their employer when they sign contracts. The role of social workers is influenced by the social work profession and the interaction with the unaccompanied minors. Social workers working at social services have less flexibility in their work than those working in residential homes. Social workers working at residential homes and school at times take the role of friend, mother, and sister; they feel this is not very professional, but it helps them assist the unaccompanied minor better. The role of social workers working with unaccompanied minors is important; what they do other is complemented by the competences of the profession especially doing assessment (investigations) of risks. The social work education prepares them for these roles they play.

The challenges social workers face are based on their interaction with different stakeholders. While interacting with unaccompanied minors, cultural difference, language barrier and difficulty of the unaccompanied minors to accept and understand decisions. With other actors' challenges include demoralised colleagues at residential homes and increased work load at social services. The changing laws and how migration agency handles cases are challenging, social workers felt migration agency does not assess cases as it should and call for a wholistic approach to cases. Social workers reported that being the bearers of bad news was never easy for them when they explain to unaccompanied minors why their applications were declined and why they are being deported. This was reported to be going against their professional values as this lead to hopelessness among social workers and the unaccompanied minors.

Social support in the form of talking to colleagues helps social workers cope with the challenges. Frequent talks with colleagues helps social workers to be resilient. Having a supervisor to run decisions by and discuss issues before decision making helped social workers to also be resilience as it promoted professional autonomy. Professional development through continuous training that the employers provided social workers became equipped with new development in working with unaccompanied minors, this enhanced resilience. Social work education equips social workers with skills that help them become resilient, these being reflective practice, emotional intelligence, and empathy.

This study gives the lesson of the importance of social work education and continuous training for social workers. It tries to explicitly show the roles social workers have and provides the reason social workers may function differently in different places, social work is a profession with the same values but where the social worker works has an influence on how they function. Social workers need to be involved more in the asylum application process especially of unaccompanied minors as they work directly with the children and understand their circumstances so would bring important input.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

RESEARCH TOPIC:

Role of Social Workers Working With Unaccompanied Minors; Experiences of Social Workers in Sweden (Gothenburg)

Research Questions

1. How do social workers perceive unaccompanied minors and their needs?
2. What are the roles of Social workers working with unaccompanied minors?
3. What challenges do social workers come across in their work with unaccompanied minors?

Interview Questions

Background

1. Which is your educational background?
2. For how long have you been working with unaccompanied minors?

Social Worker's perception of unaccompanied minors and their needs?

1. Who is an unaccompanied minor?
2. Do you think they are dependent or autonomous? How so?
3. What are their needs?
4. How were the conditions for these children before they became in contact with you?
5. Do unaccompanied minors have certain expectations with regards to services they get? Do you think they are satisfied?

Role of Social Workers working with unaccompanied minors

1. What are your roles as a social worker working with unaccompanied minors?
2. Where are these roles stipulated? Is it from your employer or social work profession?
3. Are these roles clearly specified?
4. Do the roles fit the professional standard or quality service social workers should provide?
5. How significant do you think the role of social workers is in working with unaccompanied minors?
6. Did you get training in working with this group? If yes from where? Was it enough?

Challenges Social workers encounter while working with unaccompanied minors

1. What challenges do you face in executing your roles?
2. What are the leading causes of these challenges? How critical are they?
3. How do you try cope with the challenges?
4. What measures have been taken to solve these challenges? Are they working?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding this subject?

Appendix 2

Introduction & Informed Consent Letter

My name is Keotshepile Zwebathu and I am conducting a research on Role of social workers working with unaccompanied minors. This research Project is part of my studies in the Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of social workers working with unaccompanied minors in Sweden. Sweden has been praised as one of the countries handling issues of migration with a certain level of effectiveness. In 2015 Sweden received a very high number of unaccompanied minors, this group of children have various needs, social workers are one of the groups of professionals at the heart of accommodating unaccompanied minors, so this study aims at understanding their roles. There is a gap on literature that focuses on professionals working with unaccompanied minors, so this study aims at filling that gap as well.

To ensure that my project meet the ethical requirements for a good research, I promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees/respondents in the Project will be given information about the purpose of the Project;
- Interviewees/respondents have the right to decide whether to participate or not in the research even after the interview has been concluded;
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

As a participant within this research study, you will be interviewed, the interview will range from 45 minutes to an hour. The interviewer will ask questions on your experiences working with unaccompanied minors, particularly your role and that of fellow social workers. The interview will be recorded as this will make it easier to me to document what is said during the interview and help in the continuing work with the Project. During analysis, some data may be changed so that no interviewee/respondent will be recognized. After finishing the Project, the data will be destroyed. The data I intend to collect will only be used in this Project. Participation in the Project is voluntary and therefore you have the right to decline answering any questions or terminate the interview without giving any explanation.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any question.

Keotshepile Zwebathu

Tina Olsson

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You have read and understood this consent form, and you voluntarily accept to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this form to keep.

Signature

Date

