Exploring the nexus between statutory and voluntary agencies: Partnership working to support refugees

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Abstract

The paper explores refugee caseworkers' experience of working in partnership with statutory services. It provides insight into factors which contribute and hinder partnership working between the two services, with the primary aim of informing policy and practice in social work settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with refugee caseworkers in a single voluntary organisation. The study followed an inductive approach and the data collected was analysed using thematic analysis method.

Six themes were identified in the study: Barriers to service accessibility, professional competence, inclusive practice, integrated approach, establishing effective working relationships and roles and responsibilities. Refugee caseworkers suggest that further improvements are required to facilitate effective partnership working between statutory and voluntary organisations. The Study recommends that open communication, networking, sharing information, professionals' education and understanding of each other's roles and mutual respect are essential to form effective working relationships.

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Introduction

Partnership working has received considerable attention and has been the focus of political agendas in recent years (Atkinson *et al.,* 2007). The importance of agencies working more effectively in partnership has been highlighted in academic literature. (Rees *et al.*, 2012; Sutcliffe, 2008 and Addicott, 2013). This notion of agencies working together is not a new phenomenon and has been recommended in the Barclay report published in 1982. The report reviewed the role and tasks of social workers in local authority social services departments and related voluntary agencies in England and Wales and is in favour of social workers working collaboratively with voluntary organisations to support service users as citizens. (Barclay, 1982).

However, there is limited research on partnership working between statutory and voluntary agencies in providing support to refugees. (Atkinson *et al,* 2007). This may be because there are few statutory services for this group, voluntary organisations play a key role in supporting refugees in Britain. (Wren, 2004). To fill this literature gap, this research examines the working relationship between the two sectors by interviewing student social workers and experienced refugee caseworkers in a voluntary agency, to get their perspectives and recommendations in facilitating effective partnership working. It is therefore anticipated that the findings from the study will enhance social workers' knowledge on the best ways to develop good working relationships with other professionals and achieve better outcomes for refugees.

Literature review

This section of the research tackles issues about terminology, outlines the historical context for partnership working, and examines the factors that contribute and hinder partnership working. Finally, it discusses refugees' experience in host country, and social workers role in supporting them to integrate.

Partnership working

The term partnership has no single agreed definition. (Thurston, 2014, Sutcliffe, 2008, and Snape and Taylor, 2014). The researcher encountered overlapping concepts including interdisciplinary and multi-agency working, collaboration, service integration, and networking. These terms are often used interchangeably (Ahmad *et al,* 2004 and Thurston, 2014). For the purpose of this research, partnership working is defined as an agreement between agencies and individuals working together to provide robust service to refugees.

Voluntary organisation

The researcher faced challenges in clearly defining the term 'voluntary sector' (Hedley, 2005). The increase involvement of professional paid staff in these sectors has raised concerns about the suitability of using the term 'voluntary'. Despite these concerns the UK frequently use the term 'voluntary'. Thus, the researcher will adopt that terminology. For an agency to be defined as a voluntary organisation, there must at least be a greater degree of voluntarism. For this study, voluntary organisation is defined as "an independent and self-governing organisation that are non- profit - distribution and includes a degree of voluntarism" (Ronald *et al*, 2012: 52).

Statutory organisation

Statutory services are provided by the National Health Service and social care, education and early years services mainly through local authorities. Social workers in statutory sectors are generally assigned to one department, exclusively dealing with either children or adults, or specialising in assisting homeless or disabled people.

The Difference between refugees and Asylum Seekers

The terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' are often used interchangeably but have different meanings. (Lindsay *et al*, 2010 and Patel and Kelley, 2006). In the UK an 'asylum seeker' is a person who has made an application for asylum and is waiting for a decision on their application. A successful decision on their asylum application changes their status from an 'asylum seeker' to a 'refugee'. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who has fled their country of origin and is unable to return 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'. Persecution usually means execution, torture, imprisonment without trial, mistreatment and / or denial of rights. (Lindsay *et al*, 2010)

This research specifically focuses on partnership working between statutory and voluntary agencies working with refugees, it is therefore critical to make clear distinctions between the two groups because they have different entitlements and rights in the UK. (Mayblin, 2014). The Immigration and Asylum Act 1996 enforced different entitlements for the two groups. (Wren, 2007). For example, social and welfare support for asylum seekers has been removed from mainstream framework (Wren, 2007). The Home Office has responsibility for those seeking asylum under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1996. The provision of housing and welfare support for asylum seekers is now co-ordinated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Under the provisions of Section 97 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the UK has implemented a process of providing accommodation on a 'no choice' basis, to ease the pressure of housing and other services from the South East of England, asylum seekers are dispersed to other areas of the UK (Wren, 2007 and Stewart and Shaffer, 2015). Wren (2007) states that separating the social rights of asylum seekers from those of the UK citizens and non-citizens is to deter 'economic' migration. Thus, it could be argued statutory services for people seeking asylum are largely concerned with controlling their movements. (Brandell, 2011 and Reynolds and Muggeridge, 2008). Although the implementation of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 has resulted in the expansion of the work of voluntary groups in the provision of services to refugees in dispersal areas (Zetter & Pear, 2000), local

councils still have a duty to provide other statutory support services such as health and education.

Historical context

Partnerships between service providers can be traced back to the 1830s (Dickinson *et al*, 2012) where Voluntary institutions provided education for the working classes, funded and regulated by the state. Despite the state taking control of most educational institutions in the 1870s, voluntary organisations continued to play a significant role. Their functions became increasing noticeable in the early 20th century. During that period the Liberal Democrats believed that voluntary action was an integral part of a good society and should be promoted by the state not only in spirit but also in financial terms. Local Government became increasing reliant on voluntary organisations to carry out significant functions to meet the needs of the public in the areas of housing, health and education throughout the first world war and this continued into the second war world. The second world war reinforced the importance of voluntary sector organisations in tackling social deprivations. (Smith *et al*, 1995). Report of the 'Nuffield Social Reconstruction Survey on voluntary organisations', published at the end of the second world war, provides useful portrait of the voluntary sector at the end of this development. It became increasing accepted that it was more cost effective for the state to share its duties with voluntary organisations. The report 'Social Insurance and Allied services' written by William Beveridge (1942) recognised that voluntary organisations have an important function within the community. William posits that the state and voluntary organisations should work in 'partnership' to assist individuals in need.

The post-1945 Labour government was claimed to be less influenced by Beveridge. It has been argued that the creation of the welfare state in 1948 caused uncertainty for established voluntary organisations (Thane, 2012). Starkey (2000) argued that, voluntary organisations retained their independence and had support of the Labour government. Prominent figures in the Labour government (Post-1945) spoke positively about the functions of voluntary organisations. Herbert Morison, for example, in a speech to the London Council of voluntary service in 1948 praised the voluntary sector "as the pioneers who point the way and the critics who keep us to

the mark'. (Morrison 1949 cited in Smith *et al,* 1995: 41). Morrison emphasised the importance of identifying where the statutory sector and voluntary sector can cooperate efficiently (Smith *et al,* 1995).

Positively the expansion in state provision lead to a complementary expansion of the voluntary sector and resulted in greater collaboration between statutory and voluntary agencies. (Crowson *et al*, 2012: 1939). Successive legislations such as the National Insurance Act 1946 and the Children Act 1949 broaden the role of many organisations like the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).

Through-out the 1950s to the mid-1960s, the voluntary sector continued its role of innovation and working with the statutory sector to address large-scale poverty rediscovered by the researchers at the London School of Economics (LSE). The report produced by LSE found that elderly and child poverty increased in the 1960s. (Glennerster *et al*, 2004) and (Thane and Davidson, 2016). In the same period professionalism accelerated in the social care sector especially in social work which raised questions about the difference between professional and voluntary activity. (Smith *et al, 1995).* Aves committee (1969 – 1976) was set up to review the role of volunteers in social services. The committee spoke about the importance of training volunteers, and not using them as substitutes for paid staff but rather to improve a service. (Smith *et al,* 1995).

New types of voluntary movements emerged in the late 1960s such as the women and Gay Liberation movements and campaigns against race discrimination. (Thane, 2012). In the mid-1970s' the consequence of the global economic crisis led to the reduction of welfare provision by the state. This reduction in welfare provision became more prominent under the Conservative governments of the 1980s. (Whitehead, 2011). Under the Conservative government the goal was to stigmatise benefit claimants and legitimise the introduction of stricter conditionality regimes and benefit cuts. [Etherington, 2014 :14]. Reduction in welfare services has led to greater reliance on the voluntary sector to provide mainstream services, especially within the refugee community. With greater funding from the state, voluntary sector agencies are better equipped to respond to the needs of refugees. (Carey-Wood *et al*, 1995)

In the words of Hunter and Perkins "voluntary organisations have traditionally been creative and progressive, delivering demonstrations projects for newly identified needs". (2014:5). According to Knight (1993) voluntary organisations have a long history of intervening when the state is unable to support those in need. This is more prevalent among groups with distinct needs. Refugees were previously excluded from mainstream social work. However, some progress has been made in the refugee sector, the sector is becoming a more "distinctive and visible" area of work in the UK. (Robinson, 2014). Social work involvement with refugees was geared towards supporting young people in need of safeguarding and women and children in financial difficulties. (Sextone and Dowling, 2010). However, there has been a growing development in social work with older and unaccompanied refugee minors, dealing with people who have experienced torture and other traumatic events (Parker, 2018).

Partnership working became more prominent in the early 1990s (Hunter and Perkins, 2014) and was reinforced under the Labour government between 1997 to 2010. The Labour administration published several policies including the white paper 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say'; 'Putting People First' and 'High Quality Care for All' (Department of Health, 2006, HM Government, 2007 & Department of Health, 2008). These policies were designed to promote partnership working between local authorities, local NHS providers, other statutory agencies, voluntary sector and private sector providers. The main driving force for this integrated care system was to provide a person-centred support that would enable early and cost-effective interventions and to drive greater integration among health care providers.

The coalition government kept this idea of integrated support high on their agenda. Immediately after gaining power in 2010 they published the policy paper 'Equality and Excellence: Liberating the NHS' which sets out the government's long term vision for the future of the NHS. (Department of Health, 2010).

Factors that contribute and hinder Partnership working

The literature is full of factors that compel and restrain the impetus to cooperate (Gazley, 2014, Cited in Bingham and O' Leary, 2009: 392). Effective partnership working could produce great benefits for all parties (DH, 2012). Gazley (2014: Cited in Bingham and O' Leary, 2009: 44) proclaim that the potential gains of partnership working include economy efficiencies, more effective responses to shared problems, increase access to funding and other resources. Hunter and Perkins (2014:25) assert that partnership working has the potential to make the delivery of services more coherent and therefore efficient and effective. Moreover, in terms of additional resources and the pooling of ideas and knowledge, it could be argued that partnership working brings value for each participant (Hunter and Perkins, 2014).

Glasby *et al* (2011) states that these claims must be taken "with a degree of sceptism." The authors further assert that most of the literature on partnership working focuses on the "perceived virtues" without referencing any evidence to justify the claims. Additionally, most of the literature is geared towards the process of partnership working and not on the outcomes. (Glasby *et al*, 2011). Thus, effectively partnership working might be more intricate than the literature suggests. (Glasby *et al*, 2011). Several authors found that the drawbacks of partnership working include the potential loss of autonomy, greater financial instability and duplication of work. (Grønbjerg,1993, Huxham ,1996 & Shaw 2003 Cited in Bingham and O'Leary, 2009: 44). Personal, institutional and environmental factors affect the nature and quality of each relationship and will determine the outcomes. (Gazley, 2014 Cited in Bingham & O' Leary, 2009). For example, Wren (2007) highlights that, the role of statutory and voluntary organisations has become blurred. Governments are increasingly relying on voluntary organisations to provide welfare services to individuals in need, especially those with peculiar needs (Billis, 2009). A report produced by the Independence Panel raised concerns that the blurring of boundaries between the two sectors can negatively impact public confidence in the voluntary sector (Independence Panel, 2014). The growing competitive pressure on resource allocation and contract arrangements can constrain charities' freedom of action. This can lead to a shift in their core mission and purpose. (Independence Panel, 2014).

To deliver partnership working successfully, all participants must develop good working relations that build trust and shared responsibility, while respecting each other's difference. (Department of health, 2012). According to Douglas (2009), a partnership in which the participants have no idea why they are working together and have no motivation to continue are more likely to be unsuccessful. In summary, partnership working brings a range of benefits but it does have its problems. (Baggot, 2013). It is important to acknowledge that success is a contested concept, and what works for one partnership may not work for another. (Hunter and Perkins, 2014: 25).

Institutional Bias

Refugees are one of the most marginalised and vulnerable members of society (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016 and Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). They face difficulty and discrimination when accessing support, some of which is systemic. (Dominelli, 2009), (Equality and Diversity Forum, 2011), (Kuey, 2017) & (Homeless Link, 2017). When accessing mainstream services refugees are treated in the same way as other welfare claimants. Mainstream welfare providers fail to adapt their processes to accommodate refugees, making these systems discriminatory (Phillimore & Goodson, 2010). These systems further perpetuate poverty and disadvantage, (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002), making the transition into mainstream society difficulty. Patel and Kelley (2006) point out that agencies' lack of knowledge about the needs of local refugees is a barrier to support services. Refugees are at times treated as part of the "larger generic black and minority ethnic category", therefore their needs are often misunderstood and overlooked. (Patel and Kelley, 2006)

Davey and Jenny (2009) argue that the disapproving tone of public discourse about refugees contributes to the challenges faced by refugees. This negative public attitude also exists among some service providers. (Davey &Jenny, 2009). Negative attitudes toward refugees in the UK were more prevalent following the decision to leave the European Union. Refugees are viewed as a "drain on public services" (Lewis, 2013:325 cited in Mooney & Scott: 2015). Tribe (2002) states that refugees are often resented by host nations which make them feel less inclined to put

resources into refugee services. Right wing policies and misrepresentation of refugees in the media as 'bogus asylum seekers' further paint them in a negative light and fuel resentment among the native population. (King & Grant, 2016, and Mooney and Scott, 2016).

Partnership working and supporting refugees.

The needs of refugees are unlikely to be met by a single organisation. The complexity of individual circumstances and needs requires a robust and well-developed partnership between a range of agencies (SCIE,2015). Patel and Kelley (2006) assert that a holistic view of individual needs must consider practical, legal and social issues. The Home Office further assert that local authorities and local agencies need to have a joined-up strategy in place for the arrival of refugees (Home Office 2002). Refugees face hardship before, during and after their arrival in the United Kingdom. (Newbigging *et al.,* 2010). The Journey to safety can bring numerous challenges, they may have been subjected to discrimination, ostracization, imprisonment, violence, rape, torture, and death of family members. Possible consequences of these experiences include psychological trauma, poor hygiene, malnutrition, inadequate medical care, disrupted education for children, and loss or interrupted careers for adults. Refugees are therefore likely to require a wide range of health, housing, and social services. Research conducted by Basedow & Doyle (2012) found that refugees face practical problems immediately after they are granted refugee status. The report found that having no access to benefits was a significant problem for 50% of the service users, and many sought assistances from a voluntary organisation. McCarthy and Haith-Cooper (2013) discuss that much of the support given to refugees within the United Kingdom is provided by non-statutory or voluntary organisations, who are either contracted by the government or operate independently. They provide a vital safety net for refugees in terms of mediating between their position of social exclusion and mainstream services (MIND, 2009; Flanagan and Hancock, 2010 and Waugh, 2010). Delivering effective and anti-discriminatory support to refugees requires a comprehensive understanding of their experiences, both in their countries of origin and in the host country (Potocky Tripodi, 2002). When supporting refugees, practitioners must be willing to challenge

discriminatory practices. It is expected that the profession would lead the way in empowering practice with refugees. (Ferguson and Woodward, 2009). Social workers have a duty to challenge inequality, advance diversity and inclusion but may also be caught up in exclusionary processes. (Huegler, 2016). Social workers are also expected to report to immigration services if they consider an individual to be 'bogus', which contradicts social work values. (Hayes and Humphries, 2004).

Relationship based social work

The "importance of relationships is increasingly recognised in social work". (Ingram and Smith, 2018). Social work is about working with people and a range of professionals to find solutions and achieve desired outcomes. (O'Leary *et al*, 2013, Smith and Ingram, 2018, Ruth and Hingley-Jones, 2016 and (Amrose-Miller and Ashcroft, 2016). This is acknowledged in all social work theories. For example, ecological theory examines all aspects of the individual, including their relationships within communities and the wider society. (Christensen, 2010). Echoed in the code of ethics for social workers is the requirement for practitioners to work in partnership with the state and a variety of other agencies to provide adequate support to refugees, ensuring that their fundamental human rights are upheld, and their holistic needs are met (BASW, 2012). Hugman (2012) posits that for social workers to effectively respond to the complex needs of refugees, they need to gain a holistic impression of the individuals' internal and external worlds. He further states that social workers should utilise their intrapersonal and interpersonal skills to assist refugees to negotiate their way around the complex welfare system. Thus, for social workers to assist refugees effectively, adopting "an approach that is flexible, solution-focused and innovative" is critical and achievable through partnership working. (SCIE,2015).

Project Aims

The study aims to explore the perspectives of student social workers and experienced refugee caseworkers on partnership working between statutory and voluntary organisations in supporting refugees. It is hoped that the research will provide insight into factors which contribute and hinder partnership working between the two sectors and the approaches to facilitate better working relationships. The findings from the study could be used to inform policy and practice in other social work settings. As the primary research remains exploratory, no formal hypothesis has been made.

Objectives of the research:

- To explore refugee caseworkers' (at START) concept of partnership working
- To find out the factors which contribute and hinder partnership working from START's perception
- Recommendations to facilitate better partnership working.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research project has been granted by the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences Student Research Ethics Subcommittee. Approval was also obtained from the Chair of Students and Refugees Together (START). Research participants were provided with information sheets which outlined the purpose of the study, the extent and duration of the participation required, contacts details of the researcher, and research supervisor. The participant information sheet also detailed how confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.

Research Approach

This research aims to identify the factors which contribute and hinder partnership working between statutory and voluntary agencies from the perspectives of student social workers and refugee caseworkers. The findings from the study could be used to inform practice in social work settings. The research follows an interpretative phenomenological approach, a qualitative approach developed by Smith (1996). Phenomenology 'focuses on people's subjective experiences and interpretations'. (Krysik and Finn, 2013). Thus, making it a suitable method for exploring, interpreting and understanding refugee caseworkers' experiences. Moreover, qualitative approaches can provide rich, in-depth and authentic data that are generally inaccessible through quantitative approaches. (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Stone et al, 2018 & Denicolo et al, 2016). However, results from quantitative approaches are more generalizable and applicable to other populations. (Leung,2015). Since, this research is concerned with capturing individual experiences and perceptions, the researcher is not looking for representativeness. This project therefore adopts a constructivist epistemological position. The methodology is concerned with 'interpretation, multiplicity, context, depth, and local knowledge' (Ramey & Grubb, 2009: 80), and takes on a relativist stance that there is no objective reality to be discovered and replicated by others (Denicolo *et al.,* 2016, Cline *et al.,* 2015).

Research Method

Research context: Students and Refugees Together (START)

Key aspect of this research involved interviewing student social workers and experienced refugee case workers, at Students and Refugees Together to get their perspective on partnership working with statutory agencies and their recommendations to form effective working relationships. START is a voluntary organisation established in 2001 to support all refugees living in Plymouth. START creates innovative opportunities for students on placements.

START offers a range of services including one to one case work, community activities, and supported employment club. The initial assessment paperwork used at START draws upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which suggests for practitioners to understand the service user and their situation, they must appreciate that they are situated 'within layers of systems from immediate family up to wider society' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

START's clients have generally just been granted refugee status at the stage START becomes involved with them. Once granted asylum, refugees are given 28 days to move out of their Home Office provided accommodation and their financial assistance is stopped (Ceesay,2018). START's mission is to work in "partnership with families, individuals and organisations to facilitate the transition of refugees from people in need to self-reliant contributors to their local communities". To achieve this outcome START works with refugees to secure accommodation through homelessness routes with local authorities, private landlords, and then assist with setting up benefits or applying for destitution grants, as well as signposting them to other services (Ceesay, 2018). "START's harmonious relationships with the refugee communities, university, local authority, voluntary and commercial sector" ensure that the needs of refugees are fully meet. (START, 2017) A partnership service that has succeeded is the Refugee Housing Support Service (RHSS). The service offered holistic and person-centred support. The success of that partnership resulted in a new service (The Refugee Integration Service) being commissioned by Plymouth City Council.

Sampling method

The researcher employed a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling. To be included in the research study, participants were required to be employed as a refugee caseworker or student social worker on placement at START. The researcher had a pre-existing knowledge of the target population. All the participants had an experience working with a range of statutory agencies in supporting refugees. Thus, they "possess a high degree of insight, knowledge, and experience relevant to the topic" (Sim & Wright, 2000: 120), making this aspect of the sample purposive. The convenience nature of the sample relates to the fact that participants were easily accessible and were willing to participate in the study. The researcher was completing her social work placement within the research site during the data collection period. (Sim & Wright, 2000) & (Thyer, 2010). Convenience sampling is a frequently used method in social work research due to its cost-effectiveness and time-efficiency (Rubin, 2014).

A disadvantage of using convenience sampling is the lack of generalisability, defined as the extent to which data from a research study can be generalised to broader populations and settings (Costello, 2011) & (Bornstein *et al*, 2013). However, as previously discussed it is not a stated goal of this research to produce results that are generalisable. This research seeks to discover and learn from the experiences of refugee caseworkers and student social workers on placement, with a key objective of transferring findings to other social work settings.

Sample

All participants were recruited from START. Three student social workers and three refugee caseworkers participated in the semi-structured interviews. The research participants possessed experience of working with a range of statutory and mainstream agencies, ranging from 4 months to 2 years. The student social workers had a role of a caseworker. Hence, going forward they will be referred to as refugee caseworkers. It is embedded in the literature that a sample size of six permits initial themes to be discovered within the data. (Ritchie *et al*, 2014 and Padgett, 2008).

Interviews

To elicit detail accounts of refugee caseworkers' experiences, it was decided that face to face semi-structured interview would be the most appropriate method because it enables researchers to have sufficient structure while providing flexibility to explore participants responses in depth. (Sheppard, 2004; Carey, 2012; Bailey, 2007; Edwards & Holland, 2013; Humphries, 2008 and Ferguson *et al*, 2012). A characteristic missing in both unstructured and structured interviews. With unstructured interviews, questions are adapted across interviews which limit 'comparability of responses' and make data analysis difficult (Klenke, 2008 and McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Structured interviews on the other hand are inflexible, the interviewer cannot deviate from the script which restricts in-depth responses deemed fundamental for this research.

Data collection

Following semi-structured interview protocol, participants were asked a series of predetermined questions known as the interview guide (Marlow, 2011). Grinnell & Unrau (2018: 449) assert that the guide act as a kind of 'aide-me' moiré" to prompt the interviewer with regards to what themes to cover. Participants were also asked follow-up probing questions to encourage critical thinking and obtain detailed accounts of their experiences. The interviews were recorded using an encrypted Dictaphone. Recording of the interviews allowed the researcher to focus on the interview content and the verbal prompts (Winstanley, 2005). Thus, it enabled the researcher to generate "verbatim transcript" of the interview (Jamshed, 2014). However, using a recording device can put participants at unease, and may affect

their responses. To minimise this impact, the purpose of recording the interview and how the data was going to be kept was reiterated at the start of each interview.

Grinnell & Unrau (2008) and Ferguson *et al* (2012) state that good interviewing skills are needed to obtain sufficient information in semi-structured interviews. As a second-year masters social work student, the researcher employed learnt interviewing skills. (Marlow, 2011) & (Whittaker, 2012). Additionally, the investigator had been on placement within the research site for six months prior to conducting the interviews and had formed relationships with some of the participants. This may have provided participants an extra layer of comfort to speak openly about their views.

Data analysis: Method

Thematic analysing method was used to analyse the collected data. (Braun &Clarke, 2006, Gibbs, 2007). This was considered the most suitable method for 'examining, identifying, developing and reporting categories and themes within the data in depth'. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process because the steps are easy to follow but rigorous enough to generate meaningful findings. Nowell *et al* (2017) assert that it provides a well-structured approach to processing the data and producing coherent reports. The researcher considered using grounded theory to analyse the data as it includes a higher level of analysis than thematic analysis. However, due to time constraints and the small-scale of this study, it was deemed unsuitable to use grounded theory – a method that seeks to develop a theory that is grounded in the data. Timonen et al (2018) discuss that a full grounded theory is only achievable in a large-scale research project. Moreover, the objective of this study is to explore the perspectives of refugee case-workers (on partnership working between the statutory and voluntary sector in supporting refugees.), with the anticipation that the findings from the study could be used to inform practice in other supportive services. Thus, it is not concerned with developing a 'full fat' theory.

Moreover, thematic methods provide a 'flexible tool' to collect rich and detailed data, a feature which is absent in grounded theory. For researchers to enjoy the benefits of the flexibility thematic analysis offers without compromising the consistency of the

data, they must make clear the epistemological stances underpinning the study. (Braun & Clarke, 2006 & Nowell et al, 2017).

The use of a software program to organise and assemble the data was considered in this study. Software programs can facilitate the process of coding large amounts of qualitative data rapidly (Mclafferty & Farley (2006). However, a sound understanding of how these processes work is required, and this can be time consuming for novices (Mclafferty & Farley (2006). Additionally, the reflectivity that the researcher typically brings to the data analysis would be lost. Thus, the researcher views the time spent manually coding the data valuable as it allows greater understanding of the data and ensures that accurate accounts of participants' responses are obtained. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Based on those reasons, the researcher opted to analyse the data manually.

Researcher bias.

Researcher bias is described as a process where the researcher conducting the study consciously or unconsciously influences the results based on their own expected outcomes. Several authors argued that researcher bias is inevitable in qualitative research studies because the selection and interpretations of data involves the subjectivity of the researcher. (Smith & Noble 2014; Maxwell, 2014 & Galdas, 2017). Thus, eliminating the researcher's beliefs, values, and expectations has been described as an unattainable task. (Maxwell, 2005: 108). Although qualitative researchers must make attempts to minimise their own biases, Maxwell (2005) asserts that validity of results can be achieved through transparency and reflexivity about the processes by which the data have been collected, analysed and presented. Moreover, the researcher must critically examine and make clear how their own preconceptions may influence the research findings and how they intend to manage these. (Maxwell, 2005; Fortune *et al*, 2013, Smith and Noble, 2005).   As previously mentioned, the researcher completed a six months placement as a student refugee caseworker at site of study. To reduce the limitation of the potential biases during formulation, data collection, and sample recruitment, the researcher acknowledged prior knowledge of the field and how this may influence each of those processes. The researcher also took steps to ensure that the interview questions

were not leading to ensure that the research findings reflected the refugee caseworker's perceptions.

Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach to thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, presented here in chronological order: familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. To fully comprehend and make sense of the data, the researcher went through each phase several times, moving back and forward between the phases.

In phase one, the interview recordings were transcribed orthographically into written text, achieved by listening to the interview recordings several times. Transcription is recognised as an interpretative act that extends beyond translating 'spoken sounds' on paper (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Once the data had been transcribed, the researcher read and re-read the textual data, and initial ideas were recorded. Through the process of transcribing and reading, the researcher became familiar with the entire dataset.

During the second phase, the researcher read the entire dataset systematically and segments of texts deemed relevant to the research question were highlighted and assigned codes manually. The process of coding the data enabled the researcher to interact with the data intimately. As well as selecting codes which mirrored the participants language, the researcher also interpreted their accounts in search of a deeper meaning. The researcher was opened to all interpretations; an equal attention was given to all accounts, including those that deviated from the 'dominant story'. (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

During phase three, the coded data extracts were examined, and similar codes were categorised into potential themes and subthemes. "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Utilising mind maps, the researcher explored variety of ways of combining the codes into themes. The researcher further referred to the raw data to ensure that the themes depict an accurate view of the data.

In phase 4, prospective themes were reviewed and compared against coded extracts and the entire dataset to make sure that the themes reflected the participants' voice, and that interpretations are firmly grounded in the qualitative data.

The researcher referred to Delahunt & Maguire's (2017) set of questions to critically evaluate each theme.

Do the themes make sense?

Does the data support the themes?

Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?

If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?

Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?

Are there other themes within the data?

The researcher observed that some of the themes overlapped, and subsequently were merged to develop coherent and distinctive themes. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, systemic barriers, accessing services and resources were fused together and assigned the title 'Barriers to service accessibility'. Additionally, themes and subthemes that did not have enough data to support them were discarded. Through this rigorous process, the sixteen themes identified in phase three were condensed to five themes. The themes were then displayed in a thematic diagram to provide a visual summary. Nowell *et al* (2011) maintains that the time spent developing the themes is likely to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

During phase five, themes were defined and renamed. The researcher re-read the entire data set thoroughly and checked the themes were representative of the data and had relevance to the research question. (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes were then assigned concise and captivating names. For example, 'promoting inclusive practice' was changed to 'inclusive practice'. To provide detailed interpretations of the participants' accounts and identify the story behind the themes, the researcher critically analysed each theme. (Vaismoradi et al, 2016).

<u>Presentation and analysis of findings</u>

This study aimed to explore working relationship between statutory and voluntary practitioners working with refugees. The study further aimed to identify factors which facilitate and hinder partnership working. Comprehensive understanding of these challenges and facilitators could play a critical role in shaping policy and providing more accessible services.

The data analysis generated six themes, which are presented below.

Barriers to service accessibility:

Refugee caseworkers discussed a range of barriers refugees encounter in accessing statutory services. These include inflexibility of statutory services, limited use of interpreting services within mainstream services, and lack of staff awareness and knowledge.

The lack of adaption of mainstream services to meet the unique needs of refugees, such as being flexible with documentations provided by refugees to accessing housing, mainstream benefit systems and accessing other statutory services were cited as a major barrier. The participants felt that mainstream services are not equipped to meet the needs of refugees, and this creates a lot of frustration among the caseworkers.

"I think there could be a way to make it easier, it is general[...] I don't think they are well prepared for refugees and if you have to tick boxes […] there is never no room for writing down I am a refugee this is my story". (Julie).

"In my experience the systems and the processes within statutory service are design for mainstream host communities, so if you not 100% Plymothian or a UK citizen who born and breed and lived here, sometimes the processes are inflexible and because they are operated by human beings, who sometimes stick to the paper work, what the process is , what the system is and who lack an understanding of this peculiar circumstances for the refugee, it makes it a frustrating experience as a practitioner supporting refugees to access those services." (Anna).

One of the caseworkers provided an explicit example of the obstacles refugees faced in accessing mainstream services.

"The fact that they insist on having previous address years and years of previous addresses when obviously they haven't got years and years of previous addresses. The ID they would ask for is a barrier, and national insurance not being issued by the

home office in time is a massive barrier, because that stops them accessing a lot of services." (Jade).

English language proficiency was cited by all the refugee caseworkers interviewed as a significant obstacle in supporting refugees to accessing services provided by statutory agencies. The caseworkers expressed that this barrier is further exacerbated by the limited used of interpreting and translation services within statutory agencies.

"language is another barrier, and many of these places do not have interpreters the way that we do you know […] and it's about understanding that [...] working with them will take double the time or more". (Anna)

"I always try and explain lovely person but the English is very limited, so I never, I try not to say the oh the English is bad, because they can understand, so I try to or maybe you slow down a bit or maybe you can explain it to me and I try to paraphrase it but lots of people they say they understand, and they will slow down for about two minutes and then they are back with their normal English speaking speed ." "I can say especially with the Council it's a lot of trying to make sure […] and explain it again because they don't have interpreters and I think it would be so helpful if they would have an interpreter really". (Julie).

There is also an acknowledgement that limited use of interpreters disempowers service users as they are unable to engage and are forced to dependent on their caseworkers. One of the caseworkers communicated the discomfort of being left with no choice but to step in, challenging her values of anti-oppressive practice.

"I think […] they have to make sure the service users understand but they don't understand [...]some of them do and it's all fine but some of them don't so with them it's quite hard. I mean they know am here […] and maybe am stepping in all the time[…] maybe I shouldn't but I don't want to […] so I could say oh no it's your service, you have to get in touch with him but then I know he does not understand and it's his problem at the end and I don't want bad things happen to him and that's why I am stepping in, but I really shouldn't probably yeah so, interpreter would be very helpful". Julie

Professional competence

All refugee caseworkers interviewed cited that that lack of awareness and understanding of the unique needs of refugees among mainstream healthcare professionals is a significant barrier in supporting refugees to access resources. Majority of the refugee caseworkers further felt that because of this lack of understanding and awareness some practitioners are less empathetic and

sympathetic towards refugees, and therefore less willing to adjust their systems to meets their needs.

"I think there is a lack of knowledge about why refugees have different needs [ummm] than say a per […] British national [ummm] why they have ended up in that situation. There is definitely lack of sympathy and empathy with some employees. Yeah and I think some of them, the impression I got of maybe one or two was it was their choice to come here. Yeah definite lack of understanding". (*Jade*)

"*I think for example with the universal credit it shows that they have no idea because it is so mainstream, and the questions are so general for like every British citizen, that they are not very prepared for refugees."* (*Julie*)

Some of the participants emphasized that some of the practitioners are robotic in their approach because of the barriers that are present, instead of reluctance to aid refugees. The adequacy of support provided appears to be staff independent and level of knowledge and experience they acquire in relations to refugees.

"I think it is that flexibility which is lacking, not necessarily because people intentionally want to exclude refugees but because one they don't have the awareness, two there prioritise are so driven by time constraints, financial constraints, human resource constraints that they don't even begin to, or they can't afford to begin to be creative or to begin to think outside of the box." (*Anna*)

"I wouldn't say no one has a clue umm because some of the people, the individual people they try to give good work commitment they try to slow down when they are talking, try to get an interpreter, they to try help. So, I wouldn't say no one is aware of it but the general system is quite hard." (*Julie*).

Inclusive practice

Majority of refugee caseworkers interviewed felt that mainstream systems are discriminatory, and excluding to refugees, because of the barriers they present. The case workers imparted the strategies they implement in addressing these barriers to delivering improved outcomes for refugees.

The refugee caseworkers viewed creativity as a necessary skill to have in order to navigate the complex mainstream system. Being innovative and thinking of ways to facilitate inclusive practice is seen as critical when working with refugees. Additionally, being outcome driven while working within the systems was considered equally important.

"I think we became very creative … we have learnt to become very creative, and that […..] we just look for the [the] nearest possible address that we can invent that would

fit into that that column [......] because we have our focus on the outcome and the aim of that questions, not necessary on the accuracy but the address." (Anna)

Several of the refugee caseworkers noted that creating networking opportunities was fundamental to making contacts and building relationships with practitioners working within statutory agencies, in order to break down the barriers that make it difficult for them to support refugees to access statutory services.

"I mean if you work at START networking or cooperating is everything because [we] [......] I think without all these other agencies we can't do that much so our role is kind of getting people more independent and supporting them in their daily live and that involves everything, so you have to do networking all the time, if it's at the doctors, if its jobcentre, schools, different companies, [....] so network kind of cooperation is so important, and we have to do it otherwise we can't help." (Julie)

START workers also mentioned that to facilitate inclusive practice, they have created a system where they invite practitioners from a range of agencies to their weekly team workings. They further discussed that these team meetings enable them to share information and knowledge, grasp an understanding of each other's roles and establish effective ways of working together to meet the needs of refugees.

"I think continuing opportunities for collaboration [Arr] we have [monthly […] weekly team meetings, and sometimes we would invite maybe somebody from housing, somebody from Devon Home choice to do a 20 minutes presentation on what they do and what they expect from us and to have an understanding, and from the way we ask question for them to have an understanding of the kind of client group we work with. We do the same with the jobcentre and I think is continuing collaboration in that regard, [arrr] networking you know [......] so that [ummm] the only time we meet it's not when we need something from them, but we look for opportunities where we are in the same kind of audience with them, and we can talk about things."
Anna.

The importance of providing adequate training to practitioners working with refugees was echoed by 90 % of all those interviewed. They felt that statutory workers required training to become more culturally competent practitioners and to gain an understanding of the needs and experiences of refugees, in order to practice from a person centred and non-oppressive manner. The individuals interviewed discussed intensely the refugee awareness training coordinated by START.

They specifically mentioned that, the refugee awareness training provided is making a positive difference. The participants noted that, they have observed changes in the

attitudes of practitioners working within statutory agencies / mainstream services, refugee caseworkers felt that practitioners have a greater understanding of their needs, and as a consequence they are more conscious, and workers are more receptive to adapting their approach to meet the needs of refugees.

"I think the refugee awareness training is the most important and can understand and help for the people to understand what a refugee is". (Sarah)

"One of the [ummm] people who work at START does refuge awareness training ummm and I have spoken to people at the job centre after they had that training and people at CASS PLUS […] the court service, and they[…] they have said that they did not have a clue, they didn't understand the difficulties they face, they didn't understand ummm the way the system was set up to make them fail, and that it made them… they had a lot more empathy and a lot more understanding and they would change the way that refugees were dealt with by their services." Jade

"I think some do very well and some could perhaps do with some further training and I think what has helped as well to improve the working relationship has been one of our colleagues running refugee awareness training certainly you notice some of the people really picking up on those issues and being a lot more patients , lot more understanding, putting less demands for service users in say in the claiming commitments and that's at the job centre yeah… certainly I would go as far as say I can see an improvement. And I think with the Council as well I mean there are certain people ahh would perhaps display the qualities, patients, really listen, the need for interpreters." (*Mary*)

It was cited by one of the caseworkers that championing the rights of refugees at local and national levels resulted in good outcomes being achieved; making the process of accessing services easier.

Luckily in the recent past, the […] home office after a lot of lobbying from people like our self and the south west migration forum lobbied a lot […] now when a refugee arrives and is given the ID called the BR […] Biometric Residence Permit the national insurance printed on it, and we were so glad when that happened because it easiest a lot of issues which surround around arrr…. the national insurance number for example. (Anna)

The same case worker vocalized that students bring a lot of energy to the work environment and their passion shines through when advocating for refugees. She felt that the hard work of students had resulted in significant outcomes being achieved.

"But having worked here for two and half plus going to three years, I think we are having more positive responses from statutory services […] and I think much of it is the result of the work by our staff and students you know, when they go out there the

image [...] they present arrr their brokerage services, the way they brokerage services for refugees. The way they challenge in a very sensitive way some of the things they see and hear you know, and I think all that is helping". (Anna)

Integrated approach

All six refugee caseworkers interviewed mentioned that to meet the complex needs of refugees and deliver a holistic service, collaborating with other agencies is critical. They acknowledge that this approach enables them to address the whole person, including their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, while taking social and personal factors into consideration.

"The need for employment, the need to go to college to learn English and alone we cannot solve any of those [arrr] for housing for example we have to work in partnership with universal credit to get housing benefits, with PATH to identify houses, with private landlords to view houses, with the city council to negotiate ummm rents and [… and] housing benefit payments. So it's a range no single person can do it for the service user, so we need to have good working relationships and good understanding with all of these agencies and working together where we can achieve that outcome for the service user." (Anna)

"So people will come here with many different needs, many different skills, lot of their own knowledge that they bring with them, but it doesn't always apply to how the systems works here [...]so that's why we need these partnership links so that people can basically be set on their way to develop a future if you like". (Mary)

"very important otherwise it will be really really duplicated, it will be difficult for you to know where to find where to go and where to find the information or where to get support from." (Natalie)

Establishing Effective working relationships

There is a general consensus among refugee caseworkers that fostering strong relationships with partner agencies is necessary to adequately support refugees to access statutory and mainstream services. Majority of the caseworkers interviewed cited that maintaining an open communication, and building rapport is key to establishing effective working relationship and making best use of the resources and expertise that are available.

*it's just good communication […] like good communication as well with them and good relationship yeah, I think it's help. And you can them call them and just say my name is **** from START and I have this this oh really, we can do it, it's easy for them also to [to] […] just help you to solve the problems. (Sarah)*

"she helped to coordinate between myself, herself, domiciliary care ummm whenever I needed information for say a PIP application she would send me copies of his OT assessments, [arrr...] healthcare assessment. Any letters I needed writing, she would write any letters. [Ummm] We were having difficulty with housing, she went to spoke to her manager to see if anything could be done from her end, because Plymouth city council were being really unhelpful ummm there is nothing she could do but went to see if she could". (Jade)

Several of the caseworkers interviewed discussed that they had experienced positive and negative encounters, when supporting refugees to access statutory services and mainstream services. They felt that the service provider is staff dependent. They reported that some staff are flexible with their approach, while others are more rigid.

"[ummm...] some have been really good, [ummm] I've worked with live-well [...] [. ummm] one of the social workers there went out of her way, she was really really helpful and did everything she could with other agencies to get the best results for my service user [….] Ummm and I had varied outcomes with Plymouth City Council, some are really helpful, others would literally do what their tick box job is and won't help you any further. Ummm Job centre is the same, some are really helpful, others not interested." (Jade)

I had good and bad experience […] so for example yesterday I have been there, and they knew me, they knew my name … the lady knew my name, she knew I was from START, she was chatting with me, it was so quick, everything worked out well, she sawed me everything on the computer ummm what she was doing for my service user, they were so supportive. (Julie)

I could really see she trying to get the best out of it [….] but sometimes they are just so annoying, sometimes they are so tuck [...] and [and if] if you ask them oh! the service user maybe can't speak English or you want to try and support them, they

stick with their rules. They don't do anything. So both I think it always depend what kind of person you work with and [….] So yes, good and bad I think. (Julie)

Majority of the refugee case workers said they had observed improvements across agencies; they felt that positive changes were being implemented, and services provided are more tailored to meet the needs of refugees.

I think we should get [umm] or have the opportunity to be able to approach someone directly and I think that is starting to improve as well by creating a [ummm] a new post for somebody who is a technically lead for refugees and asylum seekers within the community connections … department. (Mary)

So […] some of the agency [...] it depends with the people it depends with the agencies are […] I think most of them are better I would say. Especially if they know what refugee is …helping but if they don't know they don't have any ideas but to start […] some of them willing to learn about refugee, of most of them still time to understand. (Sarah).

One of the caseworkers interviewed cited that, although improvements are being made, she felt that there is still a lot of changes that need to be implemented. The caseworker felt that changes to welfare policies, legislations and the need for practitioners to constantly update their knowledge disrupts the progression being achieved.

"I think it's improving but there […] there is also a lot lacking, and [……] also we have to be kind of ummm constantly adapting due to the fact that the well fare reforms for example there is introduction of universal credit as I am sure you are aware. so, with these we are constantly needing to be updating maybe our knowledge that's umm the communications channels need to stay open because if suddenly someone at the job centre doesn't talk to us it's a problem". (Mary)

Roles and Responsibilities

Two of the refugee caseworkers noted that the needs of refugees often unmet resulting in their service having to intervene, despite being overstretched. They disclosed that statutory services sometimes rely on them to provide interpreters or find alternatives ways to relay information to the service users. They reported that this hinders practice and interferes with the service users' progression because it limits their involvement.

"the need for interpreters although that is sometimes an issue as well [….] at the job centre […] so then falls back on START which is a small charity and yes so, we then have to rely on our volunteers a lot." (Mary)

"at the job centre ummm last time they used language line and it was so helpful yeah [……] so I was just sitting there supporting ummm with question she was not able to

answer but that that works, and it give the service user independence as well, otherwise it's always me, they can't do anything without me then. And the only think I do is just rephrased it, I am not an interpreter [...] I can't translate it so." (Julie)

Discussions around power dynamics between the two sectors surfaced; some of the refugee caseworkers said that sometimes they are not listened to and in some instances have to seek assistance from the service users' social workers to gain access to resources.

"Yes! With [….] in that particular instance with Plymouth city council, they listened to her because she was a social worker with an ID badge, whereas I was just someone who was at START." (Jade)

A mixed response was given with regards to the extent refugee caseworkers felt they can challenge the local authority that sponsors their service. For example, one of the caseworkers communicated that there are some restrictions to challenging organisations that commissioned their service due to the fear that the agency may face repercussion.

"if we were to [……] say we see that we are not really getting any response, not getting anywhere closer to resolving the issue in a positive way for the service user [ummm] and we feel we [laugh] [… umm …] how to put this? Basically, at the right side of law, we feel perhaps that certain law has been, or piece of legislation has been wrongly applied but we are not legally trained. However, there is that feeling, and you then might by taking it somewhere else like a civil legal advice team for example that could support this family with that issues you then going against someone who has funded you ... yes, so that can sometimes be problematic". (Mary)

While another worker shared that some of the staff within those agencies are unaware START is part commissioned by Plymouth city Council and therefore are unable to abuse this power.

"I think that at the operational level that hardly features, maybe at the strategic level you know … and even even within the Council am not sure that the average Joe Blokes dealing with housing or benefit even realises that we are you know, so I doubt that that's a big issue." (Anna)

<u>Discussion</u>

This section of the study will examine the research findings, present recommendations to form effective working relationships between statutory agencies and voluntary sector practitioners. The limitations of the study will also be explored.

This study suggests that delivering a robust service to refugees cannot be achieved by a single organisation or practitioner. As stated in the literature review, providing an adequate service provision to refugees includes effective partnerships between statutory and voluntary organisations. (Patel & Kelly, 2006 and Home Office, 2002, SCIE, 2015). Several authors state that for refugees to be successfully integrated into mainstream society, creating an effective refugee support network is critical. (Clarke et al, 2006; Douglas, 2009, The Audit Commission, 2000). Additionally, the importance of partnership working is acknowledged in several policies and legislative framework. For example, the 'Care and Support white paper', The policy Health UK and The Care Act 2014 all promote joint working. This notion of partnership working is further echoed in the code of ethics for social workers. Social workers work with refugees in various roles, including direct casework, community work, management and policy, in order to respond to the complex and unique needs of refugees, and ensure comprehensive and holistic assessment of their situation, they must work in partnership with the state and a range of other agencies (BASW, 2014).

The study identified a range of barriers refugees encounter in accessing mainstream services, such as the inflexibility of mainstream services, limited use of interpreting services within mainstream systems, and lack of staff awareness. These findings are congruent with the literature. Mainstream systems typically fail to adapt their processes to accommodate the distinct needs and experiences of refugees. (Dominelli, 2009; Kuey, 2017; Potocky-Tripodi, 2002, and Patel and Kelly, 2006). Thus, to assist refugees to access mainstream systems, a range of agencies need to work together. The refugee caseworkers in the study reported that, providing refugee awareness training to partner agencies has resulted in some practitioners becoming more receptive in adapting their approach to meet the needs of refugees. According to the participants in the study, the trainings provided lead to practitioners having a

greater understanding of the experiences and the peculiar needs of refugees, and as a result changes were observed. This consolidates the notion that for practitioners to adopt a person-centred and ethnically sensitive practice, they must receive adequate training. These findings could be used to inform practice in other social work settings, especially in the Southwest of England where racism is more prevalent. There has been a clear emphasis on promoting and assessing anti- oppressive and anti-racist approaches to practice. It is considered imperative that social workers acquire an in-depth understanding of the experiences of refugees in the country of origin and in the host country. Moreover, having an awareness of the impact structural barriers have on their lives is critical to practicing in an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory manner. (Potocky – Tripodi, 2002)

As discussed in the literature review, partnership working brings a range of benefits for all parties involved (DH, 2012). The study identified that partnership working facilitates the process for refugees to access a range of services and resources, enables sharing of information and knowledge, and promotes inclusive practice. However, it also has its drawbacks. For example, one of the participants in the study mentioned that working in partnership with a local authority restricted her ability at times to challenge their practices. Independence allows voluntary organisations to work creatively, and challenge partner agencies when ill-practices are observed. Relying on funding from the public sector could undermine this function. (Clifford *et al*, 2010). However, based on the overall research findings, the agency (START) continue to uphold its core values. For example, they continue to campaign for the rights of refugees at local and national levels.

The study further revealed that, when practitioners lack understanding and respect for each other's role, it can present challenges in the development of effective working relationships, and this can have a knock-on effect on service users. One of the participants in the study described an occasion where it was a struggle for her voice to be heard, she felt that being 'viewed as just a support worker' by some practitioners was the key reason. She expressed that this left her feeling disempowered and frustrated, and as a result sought assistance from a social worker because of the 'power' associated with their role. Smith (2014) argues that social work is an authority -based professions. It is therefore pivotal that social workers recognise the power invested in their role and use it appropriately to advocate on

behalf of vulnerable individuals and deliver good outcomes. Advocating on behalf of refugees may include challenging local authorities, bureaucratic and discriminatory practices.

Further frustrations were raised by few of the participants in the study concerning partner agencies lack of consistent interpretative support for refugees. They reported that interpreters were not always provided for meetings and appointments, and as a result had to use their own resources, which created additional cost for their small service. One of the participants explained how on some occasions, she had to speak and translate for service users in meetings and appointments where adequate notice was not given for an interpreter to be arranged. The participant explained that although she recognises that this form of practice is not inclusive and goes against her own values and that of the agency's in promoting service user independence, she felt that in those situations that was the only option available. When statutory / mainstream services fail to use an interpreter for a service that they are providing it can create significant difficulties for service users and support staff from partner agencies as illustrated in this study. According to the literature, public sector services are increasingly relying on voluntary organisations to fills gaps in statutory service provisions.

Limitations:

Research participants in the study were recruited from a single study site utilising convenience and purposive sampling method, which limits generalisability of findings outside the original research setting. This limitation did not compromise the research objectives. As previously discussed, it is not a stated aim of this research to generalize the findings, but rather to explore the experiences of refugee caseworkers, working in partnership with practitioners in statutory agencies. (Polit & Beck, 2013). The knowledge gathered in this research could be used to inform policy and practice in a range of social care settings. For example, it can help social workers to develop and modify their practices when working with refugees.

It also important to note that, the researcher completed a six months placement at START and held the position of a student refugee caseworker. There are problems associated with being an insider, such as unconscious bias. The researcher's prior knowledge may have influenced the collection, processing, interpretation and presentation of data. The researcher minimised potential biases by maintaining "an informed reflexive consciousness." (Alzbouebi, 2006: 1 cited in Open, 2016). However, having background experience enabled the researcher to identify subtle themes that a less informed researcher may fail to discover. (Unluer, 2012). Additionally, being a member of the target population meant that the researcher had built rapport with the research participants, a crucial component in any research interview. (Saidin & Yaacob, 2016).

Finally, the study used a small sample and focused on the perspectives of refugee caseworkers in a single voluntary organisation. The refugee caseworkers in the study had an extensive experience working with a range of practitioners, including social workers, doctors, nurses, teachers and mental health teams. Therefore, the participants were in a good position to provide comprehensive knowledge of factors which facilitate and hinder partnership working. Thus, the findings of this study could serve to inform practice. The views of qualified social workers and other practitioners within mainstream / statutory settings which provide services to refugees were not included in this study. Further research could incorporate the perspectives of

practitioners listed above to provide a more balanced view of strategies on how professionals can work collaboratively to support refugees.

Recommendations

The findings from the study suggest that achieving effective partnerships require open communication, networking, understanding of each other's roles and mutual respect. These themes are further explored below:

This research found that an important factor in delivering an effective service includes maintaining open communication between all providers (Bellinger & Ford, 2016). Open and honest communication help develop trusting relationships. This study also suggests that local authorities should provide a named point of contact for refugee support, to enable direct referrals and help reduce wasted telephone calls and duplication of work.

The study further recommends that voluntary sectors should share their knowledge with local authorities and other public sector partners. This can be achieved by providing training on issues affecting refugee and their families. Networking events further facilitate this process of knowledge sharing, which is importantly in a field where legislations and policies are constantly changing. It also keeps practitioners informed of the services available to the refugee community. To avoid duplication and ensure each partner fulfils their responsibilities, the study advises that organisations working together should hold regular sessions and have discussions about duties and responsibilities to create shared understanding of good practice and developing cooperation while being cost-effective. (Downe *et al, 2010).* This would make a substantial contribution to improving knowledge and understanding of each other's work.

Creativity in practice was also deemed fundamental, the study suggests that when working with refugees, practitioners need to think of innovative ways to navigate the complex and inflexible systems that are in place. Additionally, being outcome driven while working within those systems is considered critical.

Conclusion

Since the mid 1800's partnership working between statutory and voluntary organisations has been recognised as a critical component to delivering cost effective services to individuals in need of support in England. This approach of practice remains important when supporting refugees. Providing holistic support to refugees requires comprehensive understanding of their needs, lived experiences, strengths and stressors. As acknowledged in this study, practitioners can only achieve this outcome through joint working. The importance of forming effective relationships has always been at the core of social work. In the past social work involvement with refugees mainly included supporting young people in need of safeguarding and women and children in financial difficulties. However, in response to the growing population of refugees in the UK, work with unaccompanied minors, older refugees, individuals who have experienced torture and other traumatic events have increased.

The study found that, lack of appropriate interpretative support services, rigid processes, gap in professional knowledge and legal framework presents significant barriers to refugees accessing mainstream services. Refugee caseworkers felt that mainstream services are not accommodating to the distinctive needs and experiences of refugees making it a difficult and frustrating experience for all those involved. Both this study and the literature cite that practitioners' response to the needs of refugee is influenced by the values and policies of their organisations which in is shaped by structural systems. However, the study found that partnership working with statutory services can result in great outcomes. For example, it facilitates information sharing, access to resources and tackling the barriers mentioned above.

This study found providing refugee awareness training to professionals in mainstream settings results in a more harmonious relationship with partner agencies, because as professionals gain greater insight of the needs of refugees they become more comfortable with adapting their practice. This highlights that for social workers to provide effect interventions, they must be appropriately educated to work against oppressive systems, challenge their own practices and that of others. However,

social workers are caught between two interfaces, advocating for the rights of refugees while assisting the Home Office to identify 'bogus' refugees.

Refugee caseworkers in the study report that they have noticed a significant improvement in the attitudes of statutory staff towards refugees which had a positive impact on their working relationship. They, however, maintain that further improvements are required to strengthen this relationship. The study recommends that to establish effective working relationships, agencies must maintain an open communication, provide training workshops, organise frequent meetings and networking events to encourage information sharing.

In summary, partnership working between statutory and voluntary organisations is necessary to provide great outcomes for refugees. Their functions could easily become blurred so it is important that voluntary organisations maintain their independence to advocate, challenge ill-practices, and lobby on behalf of vulnerable groups without fear of repercussions.

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