Unaccompanied Refugee youth and Social Interactions

Perceptions and experiences of social interaction with native-born

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2016

Bachelor Thesis 15 hp
Social Work
Social work, Specialisation in International Social Work

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Abstract

The aim of this study has been to explore how unaccompanied refugee youth create and consider their social interaction in their new country of residence, the study also explore how the participants perceived social interaction in relation to other areas of life and which mechanism they considered to be important for a positive social interactions. The empirical material was collected through four semi-structured interviews with unaccompanied refugee youths in Sweden.

The analysis is based on Social Capital theory by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu explain the term social capital to understand how individuals can ensure benefits or be inhabited through participation in certain social interactions.

The key results of this study show that the participants view their social interaction to be an important aspect of integration into the Swedish society, mainly because it provides them with the opportunity to learn the Swedish language faster. For this reason, the participants preferred to socialize with natives rather than with their own ethnic group.

Key result of this study is that the refugee youth perceived social interaction with native-born to be of greater importance, than with co-ethnic. Co-ethnic group means to belong to same ethnic groups as itself. The reasons for this were that they had fled their home countries due to persecution as a result of sexual orientation, and of social unacceptence of their lifestyles.

Another reason was they perceived interaction with native-born to better enhance possibilities of integration to host society.

Keywords: Unaccompanied refugee youth, Social Networks and Social Capital
Acknowledgement

I want to dedicate this to all of the participants for sharing their thoughts and feelings with me. I also want to show my gratitude to my family and friends who have been helping and supporting me, without their support I would not have been able to finish this study.

At the same time I would like to show my gratefulness to my lovely and supportive supervisor that have been a great support and pushed me despite the downfalls I have had during the time while writing this study. Your commitment has been motivational and an inspiration to me.

Thank you
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Chapter 1 Introduction

While working at an HVB-home for unaccompanied refugee youth, I noticed that many of the children sought close relationships and expressed the importance of close relationships because they was motivated to start a new life and integration was important for them. For this reason, the interest about their new life in Sweden made me curious to explore how unaccompanied refugee youth perceive and experience social interaction with native-born. The HVB home (Hem för vård eller boende) is a home for care or accommodation, this place is engaged in treatment and focusing on nursing, supporting and educating the children, youths, adults and families in need of support in social services responsibilities. It is important for social workers to be aware of the perceptions and experiences of unaccompanied refugee youth in relation to social interaction, as this promotes social integration. Social workers need to have more knowledge about these youth who are in a vulnerable situation and therefore need guidance and right treatment in order to have a better life in Sweden and be able to integrate in the Swedish society.

Klefbeck & Ogden (2003) believes that a social interaction is important because it provides practical help and gives the important information that is required to successfully become a part of society, and also gives emotional support to the individual.

Every year a large number of children with no accompanied parent or legal guardian seek asylum in Sweden. According to the Swedish migration board in 2015 about 35369 unaccompanied refugee youth have sought asylum, and in the beginning of 2106 about 1093 children sought asylum (Migrationsverket, 2016).

An unaccompanied child is a person who is under the age of eighteen, or by law considered to be, applicable to a child separated from both parents and “not being cared for by an adult who by law or custom has responsibility to do so” (UNHCR, 1997).

In this study, four unaccompanied youths; two males and two females have been interviewed. The participants were between 16-17 years old when they arrived to Sweden and are currently between the ages of 18 to 20 years. These youths have lived in Sweden for more than 2 years and are all students. The participants of this study have residence permits and live by themselves in a small town in Sweden. The reason I chose
this age group was due to the fact that these youth have been in Sweden a while and have had the opportunity to build up their life and become independent.

Chapter 2 The Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore perceptions and experiences among unaccompanied refugee youth of social interaction with native-born.

The research questions were as follows:
1) How do unaccompanied refugee youth perceive and experiences social interaction with native-born and co-ethnics?
2) What mechanisms are considered to be importance in creating a positive social interaction from the respondents’ perspectives?

Essay Disposition

The first chapter of this study is the introduction followed by chapter 2 which present the Aim and research question of the study. Chapter 3 presents the four previous researches that are related to the aim and research questions of this study. Chapter 4 contains the social capital theory by Pierre Bourdieu, Following by chapter 5, which contains a description of the methodology used for this study; the research design, sampling methodology, analysis tools, trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Chapter 6 is the results and analysis and chapter 7 present the discussion followed by the conclusion and suggestions for future study of this study.
Chapter 3 Previous Research

In order to find relevant studies, I searched through various types of databases, e.g. Academic Search Elite and SocIndex, using keywords such as: Unaccompanied refugee children; social networks, social capital and social capital prejudices.

Four previous studies were found, and these are connected to social networks and unaccompanied refugee children/youths.

The study *unaccompanied but not alone*, (Hessle, 2009) shows that social networks have an important impact for the establishment and socialization of unaccompanied children in Sweden.

This study is a ten-year follow-up study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and their living conditions and experiences as adults in Sweden. At the starting point of the study, 100 unaccompanied refugee children seeking asylum were interviewed, but after 10 years a register study was made by the Migration Board’s archives, and only 68 young adults were found to have remained in Sweden after receiving permanent residence permits. Only 20 of these were chosen for interviewing due to strategic sampling. The conclusion of Hessle’s (2009) study revealed that the some of the children that came to Sweden alone did not feel alone because some had found networks that were connected to their families, and the remaining children who did not have any connection with their families in their respective home countries created new social networks in Sweden. According to Hessle (2009), the majority of the children came from a safe household and the relationships with their families were good, which had affected their positive development of creating networks in Sweden. This study highlights the importance of having a social network in Sweden for unaccompanied refugee youths.

Hessle’s study (2009) shows how unaccompanied youths search for safety in their social networks in Sweden, which have an impact on their establishment in life, at work and education. The interesting result shows in Hessle (2009) that positive development of creating social networks in Sweden has an impact on establishment for unaccompanied refugee children’s lives in terms of work and education. For this reason the study of Hessle is connected to the aim of this study because the aim is to explore the perception and experience of social interaction among the same group of youth that Hessle bring up and also explore which mechanisms are used in order to have a positive social interaction with other people in the new country of residence.
Kohli (2011) describe in his study, *working to ensure safety, belonging and success for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children*, the main focus according to him is to consider what safety, belonging and success mean to children and young people who seek asylum alone within the UK and richer nations. Children who seek resettlement for political reasons feel safe in the new country of asylum after their arrival. He explores the “home seeking” of the unaccompanied children, meaning that he investigates their sense of belonging somewhere and process of creating a home, which feels safe and secure (Ibid).

He argues that this is more important for unaccompanied refugee youths than shelters or political sanctuaries. The feeling of having a “home” gives the feeling of relocating reliable relationships and exchange relationships. This can bring back feelings of comfort, safety and stability in their lives. To reach the feeling of “home”, unaccompanied refugee youths must go through a long journey to accomplish resettling in the new country (Kohli, 2011).

The unaccompanied refugee children that had been forced to leave their home countries face a shock in the form of new challenges that include a new foreign language, new laws and traditions and until they can establish an ordinary way of life, these unaccompanied refugee children who seek asylum become part of formal and informal networks of care and support where they learn to participate in the society as much as their immigration status allows (Ibid).

Kohli (2011) also suggests that the search for safety is important after arrival; they stand at the borders of legal, practical and psychological safety. This means that these children are least able to feel in charge of their path and thereby may remain on guard, muted and careful. Kohli argues that these children can hardly anything about the new society and the chance are high to be questioned in manner that are deductive and their stories are tested to fit the legal definitions to seek asylum.

This experience of safety is measured through a few acts that need careful planning from both the unaccompanied children and others as judges and protectors (Ibid). This study puts emphasis on the importance of feeling safe and included in a society, and how this affects a successful new start in the new country and, most importantly, the feeling of being at “home”. This in turn increases the opportunity of creating a social interaction around you.

The study of Kohli is connected with the aim and research questions of my study, as it is discusses in his study, refugee children’s safety is as a key to take further steps
toward creating social networks, allowing the opportunity to give a positive start in their new life. Therefore the intention of this study is to explore how social interactions become an important part of their new life and finds safety within their new social interaction and the important mechanisms that are used to create safety.

Another important study is Wells (2011) *The strength of weak ties: The social networks of young separated asylum seekers and refugees in London*, this article is about social networks of young unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees in London. It is a qualitative study of eight young refugees during 12 months of photo elicitation interviews to understand their social networks.

The study shows the potential in social networks to enhance the emotional and material support for refugees and discusses the extent to which social capital flows through these networks. According to the data the physical spaces were found to be important for the migrants and sources of ties were schools, churches, groups, language classes and the theatre (Wells, 2011).

The analysis of social network is important in migration research in order to capture how new migrants take advantage of social ties and test how things work in the new country.

The central argument of the study is that weak ties and specifically formal ties in this context, meaning school, friends, church, etc. are effective in connecting young refugees to a range of material and cultural resources such as legal advice, housing, education, entertainment and emotional support. The research confirms that the strength of weak ties for connecting people to new networks have the potential to change their social position and cultural location and integrate them into the new society (Ibid).

Wells (2011) highlights the importance of social networks and how the ties these youth/migrants create influence aspects on their future in Sweden.

Another relevant study to this thesis is conducted by Lars-Eric Petersen, Ulrike Dünnbier, Olaf Morgenroth (2012), the studies title is: *Ethnic identity and ethnicity-related stress in accompanied and unaccompanied adolescent Immigrants: Does the family work as social capital for adolescent immigrants?*

Two main goals of this study were to understand the development of ethnic identity and ethnicity-related stress between adolescent immigrants accompanied and unaccompanied immigrants in Germany compared with German adolescents.
The comparison between the three groups founded two main results, which was related to the dimensions of private feelings about one’s ethnic identity and the beliefs about publics regard for ones ethnic group. The two groups accompanied and unaccompanied immigrants were reported consider to be more discriminated from their own ethnic groups in their everyday life, in form of rejections, exclusions, denial of equal treatment and disvaluing actions. The unaccompanied immigrants were faced with more of these experiences than accompanied adolescent. 

The unaccompanied youth showed negative beliefs toward the public regard of their own ethnic group compared to the two other groups in this study. This according to Lars-Eric Petersen (2012) it depends on the fact that these youth live in collective accommodations together with other youths with the same or other ethnic background. 

Unaccompanied adolescent immigrants seem to face a pressure from their own ethnic group who are not their families but still gives conformity pressure a bigger importance than accompanied adolescent immigrants (Lars-Eric Petersen, 2012). Wells (2011) and Lars-Eric Petersen et al. (2012) study is relevant for this study because the intention is to explore how the unaccompanied youth perceive and experiences are of creating bonds/ties with native-born and co-ethnic groups and positive negative aspect of that, which both Wells (2011) and Lars-Eric Petersen et al. (2012) describes in their respective studies.
Chapter 4 Theory

Social Capital

Three individuals that have conceptualized and developed the theoretical term social capital are Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. I chose not include Robert Putnam, James Coleman conception of social capital because they bring up other conception of social capital that is not relevant for this research.

Putnam describes social capital as being a key concept for understanding mechanisms behind a functioning society. He state that knowledge of social capital proved useful in matters relating to regional development and growth, and the concept has great relevance for urban planning, economy and public health. Putnam describes social capital, as the most important norm that binds individuals in a network together is that of reciprocity. It is a trust between members, as individuals support others and expect other to support them in return. Putnam argues that social capital is the cornerstone of a functioning democracy, as it gets people to cooperate and work for the common good (Eriksson, 2003).

James Coleman’s conception of social capital is a part of a wider exploration of the nature of social structures. He argues that social capital is defined by its function.

“It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1994: 302).

The concept of social capital has become very popular during the past years and is used in several different areas. Pierre Bourdieu is considered to be the one who made a first coherent analysis of social capital, and his theories adds important power to aspects of the area (Eriksson, 2003). According to Bourdieu (1986) social capital is;

“The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the world ”(Bourdieu 1986 s. 248-249).
Bourdieu claims that the individual’s social capital can emerge from institutionalized networks such as the family, work-place and school. According to his definition a network is held together by the exchange of material or cultural goods that takes place between the members of social groups. The individual capacity of social capital depends on how large network of relationships that person effectively can mobilize and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural and symbolic), that each participant in this network available. 

According to Donald Broady (1998) social capital in Bourdieu’s sense refers to advantages accruing to individuals through connections between family, members, friends, relatives and colleagues. Each individual in a group/network takes different positions and make contacts and accumulate cultural, economic and symbolic capital. This becomes a sort of assets that all group members can take advantage of, depending on how close the group members are. One example Bourdieu brings up is, in order to ensure career and other social benefits it requires support from family, friends and others. In this way social capital is necessary for increasing other types of capital, such as economic, cultural and educational capital (Broady, 1998). It is also a product of the hierarchical and class relations in society, which governs possibilities of relationships between individuals and the distribution of resources among social groups. The choice of Bourdieu’s conception of social capital theory is because the focus is on the individual that emerge from institutionalized networks such as the family, work-place and school. This theory is relevant for this study because the social interaction among unaccompanied refugee youth such as friends, school and other important interaction are important to be able to ensure career or other social benefits as Bourdieu presents it.
Chapter 5 Methodology

In this section I will present the research design, sampling procedure, analytic strategy, ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the study.

Research design

Focusing on participant’s perceptions and experiences, I have chosen qualitative interviewing as my way of method. The qualitative approach is better suited for this research, which aims at reaching a deeper understanding of individual’s life experiences and perceptions. A quantitative research was not considered because the criteria of quantitative research aims at collecting and analysing data and using statistics to test a hypothesis established at the beginning of the study (Richard. m Grinnell, 2001). Brinkmann (2009) declares that qualitative interviewing is a suitable method for understanding the world from the individual’s point of view, by exploring meanings, experiences and perceptions (Brinkmann, 2009).

Considering that the aim of this study is to explore how unaccompanied refugee youth perceive and experience their social interaction with native born, I found qualitative interviewing to be a suitable method. This study investigates the importance of creating social interaction from the participant’s point of view. Which puts the participants in the focus of the study. Using preliminary themes and open-ended questions the interview form of my study is best described as the “semi-structured “ form. I have interviewed four unaccompanied refugee youths between 18 and 20 years old, two female and two male participants. All the participants arrived to Sweden without a guardian, but at the time of the interviews they were at least 18 years old. The setting of the study was a small town in Sweden and the interviews took place at the HVB- home, that the participants were affiliated to, which was a choice the participants made. All the interviews were recorded and notes were taken, and each interview lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews were performed in English and Swedish because it was easier to understand each other and because the mother tongue of the participants was Dari, one of the dialects in Afghanistan and Luganda one of the languages in Uganda. After the interviews were conducted, all of the interviews were transcribed and translated to English.
It has not been an ambition of mine to generalizing the outcome of the results, but rather to explore how the youth perceive and experience interaction and socialization with native-born. For this reason, the results of this study cannot be generalized to unaccompanied refugee youth in general, but is rather to be viewed as a way of highlighting an aspect of social interaction for this group of individuals.

**Sampling methodology**

An informal letter explaining the aim and conditions of the study was sent out to the participants before the interviews were conducted. The selection criteria were that the participants had resided in Sweden for at least two years, were 18 years old or above, and had their residence permits. This due to the fact that these youth lived in Sweden a while and had the opportunity to integrate in the Swedish society.

The staff members of the HVB-home posted the information letter on their private Facebook group, allowing the youths to contact me personally if interested in participating. Four individuals expressed their interest in participating in this study. I gave them the opportunity to contact me if they had questions concerning the interview questions or questions about the study.

**Analysis tool**

The analytic approach used in this thesis is “thematic analysis”. According to Boyatzis (1998) “thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information, thus the researcher develops “codes” words or phrases that serve as labels for sections of data” (Boyatzis, 1998).

I began searching for codes, by considering all segments of the text, which answered my research questions. The codes that were founded sorted first into four themes and then sorted into two main themes by analysing their relationship to each other.

The two main themes are: (1) the Swedish language and the role of HVB-home, and (2) Social networks through school and negative perceptions of co-ethnics.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research has four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, 1985).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) argues that these four criteria are more applicable in qualitative research than the ones of validity and reliability, which were constructed for
quantitative studies. In light of this, I have used Lincoln and Gubas’ concept of trustworthiness and its four criteria that is suitable for my study because trustworthiness covers all the different and important aspects that need to be taken into consideration. Starting with the first criteria and in order to obtain credibility, I have made sure I was studying what I aimed to study, by ensuring that the questions in the interview guide corresponded with my research questions, which I did by consulting my supervisor. I have aimed at reaching an authentic understanding of the participants’ experiences and perceptions by informing them of the aim of the study and explaining my definition of different concepts used during the interviews. I also gave the participants the opportunity to read the final results of the study before handing it in, in order to make sure their answers were understood in the way they intended them to be.

Regarding the transferability of qualitative studies, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested that replication is not possible in the same manner as in quantitative studies, as qualitative research involves individual perspectives. However, giving a broad description of how the study was carried out increases the transparency of the study, and gives other researchers the possibility to conclude whether the result of the study can be applied in other contexts (Guba, 1985). To meet this criterion, I have aimed at describing the participants’ history and background in ways that were relevant for the study aim. I have also described the social and geographical settings that they were in.

Another criterion that is described by Lincoln & Guba (1985) is dependability, which means that the researcher should consult colleagues or similar during the formulation of the research questions, how to analyse the data and how to interpret of interview transcripts. Besides consulting my supervisor during the research process, I have also been given feedback and comments from teachers and other university students during the initial phase of writing the thesis. It is important to consider reflexivity in this qualitative study because of my background as refugee and personal experiences. Reflexivity in qualitative research is that the researcher thoughts and values will be presented in the study (Malterud, 2001). Therefore the last criterion of trustworthiness is important to consider in this case. The criterion of objectivity requires that the researcher put aside his/her own personal perceptions on the subject of study. This regards the issue of individual prejudices and preconceptions personal of the researcher. In order to prevent my own personal perceptions to affect the study, I reflected upon my personal opinions and attitudes towards the topic of the study, critically reviewed them
and then actively tried to put these aside when conducting the study. This increased the possibilities of me, remaining objective throughout the research process.

**Ethical consideration**

In research which involves human beings ethical consideration needs to be taken into account throughout the entire research process (Brinkmann, 2009). The real names of the study participants was coded for the transcripts as, A,B,C,D. This is for ethical considerations to protect their identities.

I also have followed the requirements of the ethical review board in this study by taking into account the four main ethical principles: information and voluntariness (presented together as “the informed consent”), confidentiality obligations and the utilization of data Vetenskapsrådet (2002). The informed consent means that the researcher must inform the respondents of their role in the project and under what condition they participate. The participants must be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw their participation any time. The respondents in this study have been informed about the right to determine their involvement and the right to decide on how long and under what conditions they should participate Vetenskapsrådet (2002).

The confidentiality principle has been regarded in two main ways; the first is that I have ensured their anonymity by removing information which can reveal their identity when presenting the results, and secondly I have kept the data material in a secure place. Finally, I have regarded the principle of utilization of data by destroying all data after the study was conducted, in order to ensure that the data are not used for any other purposes than what the respondents were informed of.
Chapter 6 Result & Analysis

The first theme; Swedish language and the HVB-home revealed as the important role that HVB-staff played in increasing opportunities for learning the Swedish language. The respondents believe that social networks were an important tool mainly in respect to learning the Swedish language and thus being able to communicate with others. This in turn, was believed to increase opportunities for educational attainment and labour market entrance.

The second theme, social networks at school and prejudices among co-ethnics revealed that the respondents had negative perceptions in regards to interacting with co-ethnics. The participants believed that socializing with co-ethnics slowed down their development and language learning process, but also that, this affected their lives in a negative way. The common background characteristic for this was that the respondents had a sexual orientation or a lifestyle that did not correspond with the expectations of co-ethnics.

Theme 1: Swedish language and the role of HVB-home

The participants had difficulties from during the initial phase of their time in Sweden, as many aspects of their lives were still unsettled, and they did not know if they would be granted residence permits. The HVB-home played an important role in increasing their motivation to socialize with others, as did the school start.

Furthermore, the HVB-home’s encouraged them to get involved with sport activities, and this increased opportunities to socialize with native-born youth.

“The HVB-home and its staff members helped us to socialize and learn the Swedish language. For example we had to speak Swedish to the staff and the other children”.

Social interactions with native-born Swedish people were considered important in order to learn the Swedish language. A respondent emphasised the role of the HVB-home in creating opportunities for this:
“I wanted to have native Swedish friends because I wanted to learn the Swedish language. For me it was important to learn Swedish now that I live here”. I would say that the HVB-home had a very important role in creating a social network and learning the Swedish language”.

Participant A

Participant B expressed how important his football team had been for him in learning Swedish language, but also how creating a social network with native-born had helped him in being closer to this dream of becoming a football player, as he was now coaching children playing football:

“One of my biggest dreams was to become a football player. I started to play in a team in this city, and now I coach children. It has been a very important to socialize with the children and others in the team. This has helped to develop my Swedish language as well”

Participant B

Participants C mentioned the important role of the HVB-home in increasing opportunities to socialize with native-born. She states that first period in Sweden was difficult for her. She thought about her family and relatives, and therefore it was difficult for her to socialize with other and find the motivation to learn Swedish.

“When I got my residence permits, I got hope and the first thing I wanted to learn was the Swedish language. The HVB-home was an important tool because we were surrounded with people that spoke Swedish and we were motivated to speak.”

Participant C

Participant D was more open towards socializing with other people much earlier than the other participants when she came to Sweden. She means it is important for her to feel comfortable in Sweden and find the feeling of “home”. Therefore for her the Swedish language was important to learn as soon as possible so she could communicate with the HVB-staff and make friends. According to her, friends are important in order to feel good and develop as a person, her social network become her new family.

“It is important to have a social network, new friends becomes like family. Like the HVB-home, they were so important for me. They gave me the courage to learn the
Swedish language and socialize very fast with other people. Therefore this has helped me very much to fit in with other people and I feel good, that has been and still is important for me.

Participant D

The collected information from the participants shows that the Swedish language is important but that it was difficult from the beginning. But at the same time they all agreed in order to learn the Swedish language it is important to create social network and also easier to communicate and understand others around them.

The participants emphasised the role of the HVB-home, and perceived it as an important factor for them to learn Swedish language and thus being able to socialize with native-born.

This phenomenon can be analysed from Bourdieu’s social capital theory. The theory makes it possible to understand the statements of the participants. The importance of learning the Swedish language and the motivation from the HVB-staff is connected with what Bourdieu bring up. He means in order to ensure career and other social benefits it requires support from families, friends and others. As it is stated above, these youth gain support and motivation from the staff members of the HVB-home and other friends at school to learn the Swedish language, and this is necessary to increase their chances to gain other types of capital such as economic, cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Theme 2: Social interaction at School and prejudices among co-ethnic group

The participants all started in school class in which they could learn Swedish with other co-ethnics. The participants had negative perceptions and experiences in regards to this. The main reason for this was that the participants did not feel they could evolve in regards to learning the Swedish language when the majority of the class members were co-ethnics. With which they spoke their mother tongue.

Another important reason behind the negative perceptions that they had in regards to interacting with co-ethnics was that negative attitudes towards their sexual orientation or chose life-style, which were the reasons that they had fled from their home countries, were once again evident.

As for the participants, the key concept for understanding and functioning in the new society is to be surrounded by people that understand and accept them, rather than being
judged by co-ethnics and stop them from developing. Instead as the social capital theory contains support from their friends and the HVB-home increases the chances to develop and function. The participants stated that people from the same ethnic group prevented them from developing their Swedish language, which was very important for the participants. Except creating social capital among friends, participation in a football team has an important impact on one of the participant for his social interaction. The Participants explained that social interaction at school was important for them to develop the Swedish language and the solution was to socialize with people in school. Therefore an argument for this was that having friends from the same country could not help them to develop, which is exemplified in the following statement by participant A:

“I started school in a class with only immigrants, there was no native Swedish people there. I could not learn Swedish as well as I could, because I was surrounded with people from my country and other countries. We only spoke our mother language. “In the school I go to today, I only have Swedish pupils/friends, and I hang out with them and do my homework and I hang out with them outside of school”.

Participant A

Participant B explained that he depended on his football team as an important place for social interaction, in which the players were either native-born Swedes or from another country. There, he could not use this mother language and was therefore forced to use the Swedish language which gave him the opportunity to learn the Swedish language much faster.

“My interest for football has been very useful because I can socialize with others and talk Swedish more than what I can do at school where the majority is from the same country.

Participant B

“The language is important, I think I need to be social in order to learn, with new friends at school and the teachers, each and everyone will teach you something”. My interest for football has been very useful because I can socialize with other and talk Swedish more than what I can do at school where the majority is from the same country.

Participant B
Participant C described her struggle with co-ethnic people in regards to being a female refugee, as co-ethnics tended to question her life-style and life choices:

“I hear how they (co-ethnics) talk about me behind my back, and say bad things; they say why did she come by herself to Sweden? Where I am from it is bad for a girl to leave her family, they think I am bad, they don’t know the reason why I came to Sweden. When I tell them that I have contact with my family, they cannot believe me. I get very angry I feel like the culture I fled from is still following me. I don’t want that, I want to be with other people than people from my country”

Participant C

Participant D, like participant C described how she felt being judged by co-ethnic people at school, due to her sexual orientation. She stated that if she would have still been in her homeland, her life would be in danger because of her sexual orientation. Therefore she was not towards bonding with people from the same country:

“I am bisexual I cannot be bisexual in my home country. I can get a life sentence in prison or get killed. I actually don’t want to be friends with people from my country, because those I have met have been judgmental”

Participant D
Chapter 7 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore perceptions and experiences among unaccompanied refugee youth in regards to social interaction with native-born. The results show that social network is an important factor in order to learn the Swedish language. The result showed the staff members of the HVB-home had a crucial role in motivating the participants to create their own social network and was an important help for them in learning the Swedish language. These youth believed learning the Swedish language increased their opportunities for educational attainment and labour market entrance. Although the respondents were motivated to create social network the results revealed that they were facing prejudices from their co-ethnics groups about their sexual orientation and their choice of life-style. Therefore they had negative perceptions in regards to interacting with co-ethnics and they believed they could slow down their development and language learning process. Even the social capital theory discuss how important support from social interaction such as friends, families and others benefits the individual and ensure a better future for them. In the case of these participants the staff of the HVB-home have become the family and the support they need, but also and friends they feel confidence with, at school and outside of school have been an important factor to develop and gain other capital such as cultural and educational capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Hessle (2009) states in her study that unaccompanied refugees did not show feelings of loneliness when they came to Sweden, and that they found networks that made them feel good about themselves. The results of this study are a contrast to Hessle’s findings, because the respondents felt lonely and unsecure when they arrived to Sweden. However, she also states that unaccompanied refugee youth search for safety in their social networks, which has an impact on their establishment in life in areas such as education and work.

This is in line with the results of this study, as the participants showed how important it is to feel safe in their new social network, instead of experiencing prejudices as they did among co-ethnics. The importance of feeling safe and receiving emotional and material support has been highlighted in earlier studies as well, for example by Wells (2011) and Kohli (2011).
Also the findings of Lars-Eric Petersen et al. (2012) study supports the findings of this study, as they found that unaccompanied immigrants were reported to be more discriminated from their own ethnic groups. They also found that unaccompanied immigrants felt a conformity pressure from their ethnic groups, which I found in this study as well.

In a broader context the study shows many factors that are of importance for social work. Social workers need to be aware of the risks these youth face in the new country. Although they live in Sweden and lives in freedom, some can still feel imprisoned within their own culture or and among co-ethnics, which affects them negatively. It is an issue that can be risky for the youth’s lives and affect them psychologically, which might lead to isolation form the new society.
Conclusion

In this study the perception and experiences of social interactions with native-born from unaccompanied refugee youths perspective have been investigated.

A qualitative study has been used in order to answer the aim and the research questions of this study. Four unaccompanied refugee youths, two male and two female between 18-20 years old participated in this study.

The result are divided into two main themes, the first theme is the Swedish language and the role of the HVB-home and the second is social interaction at school and prejudices among co-ethnic group.

The result reveals that social interaction have an important impact on unaccompanied refugee youths. These youths was vulnerable when they first came to Sweden, but eventually when they moved to the HVB-home they started to socialize more and with help of the staff members at the HVB-home they become motivated to learn the Swedish language.

The result showed how important the Swedish language was for these youth in order to understand people around them, therefore creating social interaction became important, and the mechanism that was important for these youth was the staff members of the HVB-home and its role to build up their confidence.

The collected data of this study showed that these youths find it important whom to create social bond/ties with. The participants described creating social interaction with people from its own ethnic group was not effective. This is due to the prejudices they face among their co-ethnic groups that concern cultural values or sexuality. The co-ethnic group according to these participants can be factors to slow their chances of learn Swedish faster.
Suggestions for future research

For a future research it could be an interesting topic to do a study about the experience and perception of racism among unaccompanied refugee youth in Sweden. Today racism has become a common issue where people with a foreign background are victims of everyday racism and there is a high chance that these youth become victims of this kind of discrimination. This topic I think is interesting because it is an issue that affects us all and brings consequences that affect our society.
Reference list


Do you want to participate in a study on experiences of integration into the Swedish society?

Hello,

I am a social worker student and doing my last year at the program. This semester I will write my thesis and have decided to do a qualitative study about unaccompanied refugee children. To start with the participants must fulfill some criteria before they can participate in this study. It is important that the person is over 18 years old and has come to Sweden as unaccompanied refugee child. Furthermore the participants must have lived in Sweden for more than three years and have residence permits in Sweden. It is also important that the person have a job or is student.

The interview is expected to take about an hour and the focus will be on the experience of social network in Sweden. At the beginning of the interviews I will start by asking some simple questions about your background, education. Furthermore, I will ask questions around the theme social network. During the interview the interviewees are free to express their opinions and thoughts about the subject and end the interview whenever they want.

My intention is to record the interviews so that I can print and transcribe the information I collect. The participants are confidential, i.e. all information is encoded and processed so that no individual can be identified. The sound file will be deleted when the study is finished, and the aim is not to pressure you, instead I want to have a conversation and discussion. Feel free to contact me for further information or other questions about the study. Thanks!

Best regards

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Interview questions

Can you share some information about yourself and a little about your life here in Sweden i.e. free time, friends school?

Describe your thoughts about the importance of social network, and describe how would you describe your experience of social network?
   What would be the most important aspect to achieve a successful network according to you?
Describe what you think was hard for you to create a social network?

Have you ever experience any problem/ challenges within the process of create network due to the differences in cultural norms between the Swedish society and your native society?

Describe what you think has been life changing for you since you moved to Sweden?
Do you have anything else you wan to add that you think is important?