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Perceptions and Experiences of Social Integration among Adult Immigrants

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Abstract

A sense of social belonging is an important factor for integration. The different experiences that immigrants face towards social integration were of major interest to the authors. The authors conducted a qualitative study based on the experiences that immigrants went through as well as their perceptions of social integration. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four immigrants, ranging between 31- 42 years of age. The themes found during the analytic process were: Swedish language, social networks and information, identifying yourself and culture. The most important findings were that social workers and other persons in authorities were important for establishing contacts with native-born, as they introduced them to activities that led to interaction with native Swedish. Social activities, in particular, seemed to play an important role in establishing contact with native-born and creating a social network.

Key words; Immigrants, Refugee, Social Integration

Preamble

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1. INTRODUCTION

The international movement of people is an important characteristic of our modern global world. Increased migration over borders has become a major concern for all, especially for the international bodies such as United Nation, European Union, African Union, international organisations, and NGO`s.

Among the migrating people are the refugees, forced to migrate from their countries due to insecurity, economic, social, political or environmental factors. These factors usually interact to force people to move away from their home countries (Healy, 2008.p, 41).

According to UN, more than 43 million people from different countries were forcibly displaced since mid- 1990s, about 15 million are refugees and 27 million are people who are forced out due to conflicts in their homeland. By the end of 2014, 59.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. (UNCHR, 2015).

Some of the immigrants migrate to seek better opportunities in life, be it through education or employment. The destination nations, however, have not been ideal; many immigrants face political, economic and social challenges in the west - Sweden not being an expectation (Hans, 2015).

We choose the topic due to our interest of integration of immigrants at large. We narrowed it down to social integration being one of the challenges for immigrants when it comes to integration.

The relevance of this study to international social work is that a social worker's duty is to work in partnership with local people and communities, to increase possibilities for social inclusion of members of socially excluded groups and promote the integration of immigrants (IFSW, 2012).

In order for better integration and cooperation between the different multicultural societies present in Sweden, there is the need for social workers to find out how they can improve the social integration between the natives born and the immigrants. The experiences of immigrants noted might be useful in combating some hinders to social integration. It is through immigrant's perceptions that social workers can improve the relations between the immigrants and the natives.

Social integration can be seen as a dynamic and principled process where all members are free to participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. Social integration does not mean coerced assimilation or forced integration (UN, 2005).

1.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to explore immigrants' perceptions and experiences of social integration with native-born.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do adult refugee immigrants perceive social integration?

2. What are the experiences of social integration with native-born?

1.3 Essay disposition

In the first section of this study, an introduction of the field chosen is presented. The introduction is followed by the aim and research questions. Thereafter the definitions of some concepts used in the essay are explained. Previous research is introduced in chapter two to explain the scientific knowledge and concepts used in this essay then the theoretical framework follows in chapter three afterwards. In chapter three the social identity theory, social network theory and Durkheim concept on social solidarity are explained. The three theories will aid discussions of the results and analysis chapter and also to conclude the research. Chapter four describes the methodology and data collection; it explains the method's connection to the fulfilment of the aim of the study i.e. ethical consideration, essay eligibility among others. In chapter five: results are presented using information gained from the interviews, analysis of the results in relation to previous research, social identity theory, social network theory and Durkheim concept on social solidarity. Discussion follows after and then in the final chapter is where a conclusion of the study is presented.

1.4 Definition of Concepts

Immigrants

The term immigrant is derived from the word immigration. Immigration in turn comes from migration, which means the movement of people from one place to another, in this study the term will refer to international migration. International migration refers to the

movement of people from one country to another with the intention of residing in the country of destination. Thus, immigrants are people who have moved from their home nation and have migrated to new countries for instance Sweden, where they intend to live (UNECE, 2001).

The focus will be on the adult refugee immigrants.

Refugees

According to the Convention Refugee Definition Article 1A, paragraph 1, of the 1951 Convention, the term refugee applies;

"First, to any person considered a refugee under earlier international arrangements. Article 1A, paragraph 2, read now together with the 1967 Protocol and without the time limit, then offers a general definition of the refugee as including any person who is outside their country of origin and unable or unwilling to return there or to avail themselves of its protection, on account of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group, or political opinion. Stateless persons may also be refugees in this sense, where country of origin (citizenship) is understood as "country of former habitual residence". Those who possess more than one nationality will only be considered as refugees within the Convention if such other nationality or nationalities are ineffective (that is, do not provide protection). The refugee must be "outside" his or her country of origin, and the fact of having fled, of having crossed an international frontier, is an intrinsic part of the quality of refugee, understood in its ordinary sense. However, it is not necessary to have fled due to fear of persecution, or even actually to have been persecuted. The fear of persecution looks to the future, and can also emerge during an individual's absence from their home country, for example, as a result of intervening political change" (UN,2008).

What is social integration?

Social integration is about the social relations and interactions between minorities and the majority population. It refers to the inclusion of new members into the social structure of the receiving society. It can be seen as a dynamic and principled process where all members participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations. Social integration however; as mentioned before, does not mean coerced assimilation or forced integration (UN, 2005).

In this study, social integration is taken in a broader sense to refer to the quantity and quality of contact between immigrants and native-born, irrespective of the degree of cultural identity maintenance. The social interactions referred here include exploring immigrant's perceptions of contacts with the native-born.

What is SFI?

SFI stands for "Swedish för invandrare" Swedish for immigrants. It is a qualified language training/ tuition program that aims to provide adults immigrants (16 years and above) with another mother tongue language other than Swedish basic knowledge of the Swedish language. In training, you learn and develop a functional second language. The program is designed to fit even immigrants that cannot read and write. To attend you must be a resident of a Swedish municipality.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter present some previous studies done on social integration. The presented previous studies will help review the issues to be discussed later on, under the results and analysis chapter. The data will be provided in themes.

2.1 Language

A study on linguistic isolation, social capital and immigrant belonging in the United States conducted by Nawyn. S, Gjokaj. L, Agbenyiga and Grace. B (2012) illustrates how important language is in creating social capital for immigrants. The research in this study was carried out on Burundian and Burmese refugees resettling in the state of Michigan in the United States. Their concern was on employment prospects, but they realised that their inability to communicate in English was an obstacle for them to network, communicate or get vital information from the receiving community (Nawyn et al. 2012).

The research states that a household is linguistically isolated either if the language spoken in a home is not English or the adults in the home are not English proficient (Martin and Bruno, 2000 mentioned in Nawyn et al. 2012, p. 258). This implies that when the focus of linguistically isolated households in a particular region is high, it follows that the social capital given controlling skills will be low. Even though there is a common language spoken in the household, immigrants without prevalent language skills could be in one-way obscure in the community, which can cause an intergenerational condition in their families. Allen, 2007 cited in Nawyn et al. (2012) states that

"in communities without sufficient language support, refugees can experience significant social isolation" (Nawyn et al. 2012).

Elmeroth, (2003) in this study based upon 22 interviews, of immigrants from a Kurdish refugee camp concluded that the interviewees from the refugee camp have lived under very difficult conditions. It has been difficult to meet their basic needs due to isolation and lack of any contact with Swedes. The immigrants lack the contact with the native speakers thus lacking the skills that is necessary for them to acquire the language. The lack of integration into Swedish society leads to their marginalisation (Elmeroth,2003).

These studies show the disadvantages that arise for immigrants due to limited language skill of native or common language. Common language is important in acquiring basic

needs and interaction. For immigrants to be motivated to learn the language they are need for interaction with the natives/targeted language speakers. For one to be able to integrate with the overall society it is important to speak a common language. The authors insist on more contacts with the natives-born/targeted language speakers. In these studies, mention above, language is seen as a key factor for immigrants to be able to integrate.

2.2 Community

The community plays a big role in social integration. The overall relationship between the native-born and the immigrants determines how the society integrates.
A study conducted by Fuente and Herrero (2012) on social integration of Latin American immigrants in Spain showed that, informal community support is positively related to social integration whereas insecurity is negatively related. The statistical relationship between discrimination and social integration disappears once levels of informal community support are taken into account (Fuente & Herrero, 2012).
Another study examines, in a comparative way, the situation of refugees settled in Italy and the Netherlands. It analyses how refugees themselves perceive their social condition in the two contrasting 'models' of integration in Italy and the Netherlands and how they define integration success and develop strategies to achieve their goals. The narratives of refugees explored in this paper documents that integration, as it is perceived and desired by the refugees themselves, is built on functional aspects, as well as social participation in the wider community. These aspects of integration consist of sets of overlapping processes that take place differently in various spheres of the receiving society and have various outcomes. It is argued that policy should recognize this complexity and acknowledge refugees as social actors rather than turning them into policy objects in order to facilitate integration in each of these sub-sectors (Korac, 2003).
To highlight the aspect of integration to consist of sets of overlapping process, a study conducted in Germany showed the significance of children's friendships, their attendance at birthday parties, and contact among their parents to social integration. By attending birthday parties, children's friendships are publicly reinforced and membership in a social circle. During these events, communication and social exchange drive the process of social integration at the micro-level, and ethnic boundaries can be

shifted or blurred. Ethnic segregation in parents' networks has an impact on children's participation in these events and, thereby, on children's integration in social networks. However, the causal effect in the other way around – children's birthday party attendance on contact among their parents – is even stronger. Children attending events like birthday parties improve the contact and communication among the parents (Windzio, 2015).

Immigrant children's interacting with the others native-born children in the community enriches the social contact for their parents, which in turn leads to future interactions. A study conducted by Brigitte, Suter and Karin, Magnusson (2015) in regards to integration showed that the social network in a community plays a big role to integration. The researchers conducted a study between two groups, refugees from Burma and Somalia with expectations that refugees from Somalia would find it easier to integrate into the society than the Burma refugee's due fact that they were already settled immigrants from Somalia who would ease the whole process of integration for the newly arrived Somali immigrants. The studied findings did not show such a clear-cut result. Instead, they present a more nuanced and complex picture of the relationship in the community between earlier migration and established social networks, group belonging and the bonding ties between them, the situation in the refugee camps and the practices of mobility – which conditioned the processes of acquiring capital of various sorts and forging social ties in different settings. As such, this realisation legitimises the rather lengthy empirical sections on the time before, on mobility practices and on social networks, as they clearly constitute an important contribution in their own right (Suter, Brigitte & Magnusson, Karin, 2015).

2.3 Culture and self-identity

Previous research has shown that the immigrants' who approach social integration positively predicts their attitudes towards contact with native-born. The present research builds on this previous work by investigating the extent to which immigrants' independent vs. interdependent problem-solving style moderates the relation between approach–avoidance tactics on social integration. Interdependent problem-solvers rely on other people to achieve their goals. This interdependence was expected to reduce the influence of approach–avoidance tactics on integration amongst immigrants (Rubin, M., Watt, S. E & Ramelli, M, 2012).

The findings demonstrate the importance of smooth integration into new groups for psychological functioning of newcomers. In a world, that integration requires adaptation to new groups; individuals can contribute to their own psychological functioning by adopting certain strategies when they enter a new group: group-related approach strategies improve their well-being, while avoidance strategies decrease it. Moreover, in the intercultural domain, a strong attitude towards contact is helpful for self-concept adaptation and the psychological functioning of migrants. These findings have various practical implications for the selection of newcomers, and for training and coaching migrants (Rubin, M., Watt, S. E & Ramelli, M, 2012).

A study by Barzoo Eliassi (2014) on how social workers in Sweden frame social problems of immigrant clients shows us that Swedish social work often assumes a discourse of colour-blindness and universalism. The study indicates that Swedish social workers not only see cultural differences but also regard these differences as central when they frame, assess, and formulate their interventions. The discourse of culturalisation not only produces and reinforces the ideas of cultural hierarchy and Swedish superiority, but it also tends to obstruct non-European immigrants from equal participation in the Swedish society since they are not allowed to enjoy their full citizenship. Consequently, there is a need for social work in Sweden to rethink its culturalism framework and go beyond cultural reductionism and take into consideration other issues such as unemployment, housing conditions, poverty, social isolation, marginalization, and ethnic discrimination (Eliassi, 2014).

The social workers approach towards the integration of immigrants always matters. The prejudging of immigrant's culture affects the decisions made by social workers in order to deal with the cultural differences of immigrants; cultural competence was suggested by the social workers as a tool to work effectively with immigrant clients. Although the social workers demonstrated openness toward learning about the cultures of immigrants, they omitted to discuss cultural differences in the light of unequal power relations and history of dominance where non-European cultures are often stigmatized and seen as for lacking modernity, enlightenment, rationality, and democratic values.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the theoretical perspectives that have been used for analysing the interview results will be presented. The theoretical assumptions chosen are Social Identity Theory, Social Networking Theory and Durkheim's concept on social solidarity.

3.1 Social Networking Theory

Social network theory will help us explain immigrant's perceptions and experiences toward social integration with the native-born citizens.

A social network consists of individuals and organisations, often referred to as "nodes," which are tied together by different sorts of relationships, such as friendship, economic exchange, influence, and common interest like sports "ties".

A person can see him or herself as a node that has ties to friends, family, work colleges, community members, schoolmates, neighbours as well as to larger groups and organisations like religious, political, educational, and states institutions. A social network can be seen as a map of all of the relevant ties between the nodes being studied. The network can also be used to determine the social capital of individual actors.

The power of social network theory lies from its difference from traditional sociological studies that assume that it is the attributes of individual actors, whether they are friendly or unfriendly, wise or unwise, etc. - that matter (Charlie, 2016).

Social network theory produces an alternate view, where the attributes of individuals are less important than their relationships and ties with other actors within the network. This approach has turned out to be useful for explaining many real-world phenomena, but leaves less room for individual agency, the ability for individuals to influence their success; so much of it rests within the structure of their network.

Major part of social integration occurs in social networks. The social networks can be either formal or informal. The formal network is more to the professional network e.g. the social services, institutions and organisations in the society while the informal network consists of close friends, neighbours and family

The social networks are helpful for immigrants to provide emotional support, information, contacts and the opportunity to socialisation. The socialisation process includes the acceptance and respect to the values, culture, norms and rules of both parties (Charlie, 2016).

Social network theory will be used to show how the participant gained from engaging themselves in different social networks. Social network relies on the level of trust between people developed during interactions, breaking the norms, improving the trust and awareness of actors toward integration.

3.2 Social identity theory

This study is based on immigrants' perceptions and experiences towards social integration with the native-born citizens. Human have the tendency to classify themselves into different groups, mostly where they maintain a positive self-image. The sense of belonging to the majority group was a constant topic among the participant. Social identity theory will be used to explain these perceptions and experiences. Psychologist Henri Tajfel introduced social identity theory in 1978. The theory maintains that a person's social identity emerges from the natural process of social categorisation. People categorise, or classify, themselves and other people by many criteria, including occupation, religious affiliation, political orientation, ethnicity, economic class, and gender. An individual automatically identifies with some categories and rejects others. This creates a distinction between in-groups and out-groups, people identifies mostly with the in-groups and does not identify with out-groups (Rodriguez, 2015).

Social identity theory explains the process by which individuals identify themselves with particular groups. Social identity theory suggests that individuals recognise their own membership in groups by defining the social boundaries surrounding particular groups, and then self-categorising themselves as either belonging or not belonging to them (in-group's vs out groups). As individuals begin to identify with a particular group, they are able to answer the question of who they are in reference to their affiliation to a particular group. The need for defining oneself and creating meaning in one's life motivates the process of identification. Social identity theory maintains that all individuals are motivated to achieve and maintain a positive self-concept. A person's self-concept derives from two principal sources: personal identity and social identity.

Personal identity includes one's individual traits, achievements, and qualities. Social identity includes the group affiliations that are recognised as being part of the self, such as one's image of oneself e.g. a Muslim, a Christian, a blue-collar worker, or a conservative. Some individuals emphasise the personal aspects in their quest for a favourable self-image, while others emphasise their social identities. Social identity

theory attempts to explain when and how individuals transform their group affiliation to secure a favourable self-concept (Tajfel & Turner 1979).The theory will be used to investigate some of the immigrant's perceptions and experiences of social contacts with the native-born citizens.

3.3 Durkheim social solidarity concept

Durkheim believed that people who are of different cultures and backgrounds when engages with neighbours or distant traders, in different activities, one way or the other loosen the traditional bond they have had with their families, religion and the moral solidarity that protected social integration. Durkheim says, "Society exerted a powerful force on individuals" (Krier, 2015).

The unity of individuals in a society builds social integration with collective consciousness.

The ongoing activities with every individual of different backgrounds and cultures promote social integration. Interaction, actions and communication in different ways, in schools, in churches, the bus, group of people sharing the same religion, at work and so on, enhances an amicable way of integrating in the society. Individuals get to be aware of one another in the society.

According to Durkheim, people´s beliefs, norms and value is a common way they understand and behaves or put together collective consciousness that exists through social interaction. He stated that population of people in an area also creates more interaction in the society, also making the society more involved (Krier,2015).

Durkheim social solidarity concept will explain the participant's opinion on adopting the new culture at the same time dealing with own cultural practices.

According to Durkheim, the typical network applicable to social integration are of two kinds, which are; firstly, the multiplicity of ties; that is the network of multiple connections of actors seen between two or more roles, or of various collections on the same role. Take for example, friends, actors that cooperate on common tasks with help and advice. The second, Durkheim referred to as "interconnected clusters, or subgroups, with the same large network that focuses on ties among actors (Sandro, 2008 p.129 - 130)

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Method and data collection

The use of qualitative method in research is more suited when it comes to exploration of values, processes, experiences, language and meaning among individuals. This is why this method suited this study, as we aimed to explore perceptions and experiences of immigrants (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004.p, 61).

Qualitative interviews are usually unstructured/semi-structured and rely on open-ended questions. The interviews in this study have been conducted with an open-ended approach. This has provided us with the chance to ask follow-up questions when necessary and gave the interviewees room to present/answer the information more freely and in-depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state that face-to-face contact with the interviewee, and an audio-recording combination is an appropriate way to gather information. During the interview, recording of the information was done. As a backup two recording devices were used in case of malfunction or interruption.

Notetaking was also done simultaneously with the interviews. This was for referencing purposes and also as Rubin & Babbie (2011) states, notetaking signals a sign of interest to the interviewee when done appropriately.

The audio recordings were later on summarised in written form. The data collected were stored properly and only for the duration needed; after the study was conducted, the data were discarded for confidentiality purposes.

The interviews were conducted in a small community and permission to record was granted by the interviewees. An information letter was also given to the interviewees, in which confidentiality and anonymity principles were laid out. Before the interviews were conducted, the interviewees gave their consent to participate in the study.

Finally, the use of internet as a searching tool was prominent in the finding of previous research. The university of Gavle school data base search as discovery, sage online, and diva was of great help. Google scholar and google search was also used. Search words ranged from social integration to phrases such as perceptions of immigrants to social integration, social integration of immigrants. These search words were deduced to stick

to the topic and to reduce the search to be as close as possible to the topic of this research. Even with the phrases the results of search ranged between 1- 2997, which made it difficult to choose the most relevant studies. However, we tried to narrow it down by limiting the search results to 'social work studies' so as to stick as close as possible to our topic. We searched for mostly social integration of immigrant's topics like perceptions of immigrants, social integration of immigrants etc. as to keep it closer to our study topic.

4.2 Tools of analysis

To analyse the data material, we used the analytic approach of content analysis. Content analysis best suited the study due to the fact that we aim at the perceptions of immigrants. We heard to sit, listen and pick out the most outstanding perceptions. According to Patton (2002) in qualitative study, content analysis refers to reducing qualitative data and at the same time identifying patterns and meanings in data. The authors collected the data through recordings and note taking, then sat down and listened, transcribed the gathered data and broken it down into different categories and come out with striking themes such as language, culture, social network and information, self-identification and culture. (Patton, 2002)

4.3 Difficulties

One difficulty experienced was finding participants for the study. To find participants that were not closely related to us was a bit challenging. We decided not to conduct the study with close friends or relative due to risk of influencing the study.

4.4 Sampling

Non-probability sampling best suited this study because our aim was not to generalise the results. Bryman states that, "The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed" (Bryman, 2012, p,416).

D'Cruz and Jones (2004) insist that the importance within non-probability sampling is to be clear about the aim in sampling and to be consistent with the focus, purpose and

methodology of the research. Since there was a target group (immigrants), the use of purposive sampling was more convenient (D'Cruz & Jones.2004. p, 100).
With the focus to our studies we asked first asked our friends if they had someone who we didn't know well that might be willing to be interviewed. It is through our friends that we found four participants that matched our study criteria. We settled down to four participants who we judged to best suit the research. We avoided newly settled immigrants since we wanted immigrants that have lived in Sweden for at least more than four years.
We interviewed four participants.
Interviewee A is a 35 years old man, whose country of origin is Senegal and has been living in Sweden for 15 years. He has four children but currently lives with only two and his wife. Currently searching for job.
Interviewee B is a 41 years old man originally from Nigeria, married, has four children and has been living in Sweden for 13 years. He is working with a newspaper company.
Interviewee C is a 41-year-old woman from Eritrea, has three children and is currently living in Sweden since 2005. She is a single parent working in healthcare.
Interviewee D is a 36-year-old man from Rwanda living in Sweden for 16 years now and is working as a translator.

4.5 Ethical Consideration

While conducting research-involving people, ethical guidelines must to be adhered to. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) mention four core guidelines that researchers should put into consideration i.e. informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher. Briefing of the participants on the ethical consideration was conducted; they were notified about the research plan, the overall purpose of the study as well as any risks and benefits that may arise from the research. The opportunity to withdraw from participation on the interview was always open. *(Informed consent).* A letter of consent was provided, asking for the right to record the interview which stated clearly the right to withdraw from the research at any time and that participation was voluntary.
Confidentiality is another factor, which concerns making sure that the information that respondents are giving is presented anonymously in regards to their personal identity, and that the information is used for study purposes only, and disposed after the study is

conducted. We made this clear to our interviewee that we would not use their real names while presenting the data and by no means that they would be identified.

There is a potential risk for participants to be harmed, stress and worry when participating in a study, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). We discussed these risks with the interviewees before, in order to ensure that they were aware of what their participation meant. D' Cruz and Jones (2004) emphasise on the importance of ethical consideration, they maintain the importance of protecting the privacy and dignity of the research participant, obtaining informed consent, protection against any harm, anonymity/confidentiality, accurate reporting and evaluation of results and storing the research material securely and for the required period (D'Cruz & Jones.2004, p.103). We regarded these ethical considerations by informing the participants of key ethical principles before conducting the interviews and by trying to regard sensitive ethical issues during the interviews. The interviewees' real names will not be mentioned instead they will be referred to as Interviewee A, B, C and D.

4.6 Reliability

Reliability indicates the extent to which a measure reveals actual differences in the phenomenon measured, rather than differences inherent in the measuring instruments itself. Reliability refers to the actual phenomena and not to inconsistency of a measure (Marlow, 2001 p.181).

This simply means that if another research is conducted using the same method it will yield the same results as the ones obtained in this study. To ensure reliability, the authors adapt the use of the same interview questions to the four interviewees with modified of the sub questions to fit the flow of the interview. Before conducting the interview, we counterchecked the questions thoroughly; a test on volunteer subject and amongst the authors was conducted. In regards to the identification of themes, the test-retest procedure showed similar results thus resulting into our themes: Swedish language, culture, social networks and self-identity.

4.7 Validity

Validity is very important in any study, reliability reflects “consistency and trustworthiness” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2007.p.122). For the findings to be regarded as reliable, the findings have to be reproducible by other researchers using the same measures as mentioned above. Validity on the other hand is to check while examining the sources of invalidity; to validate is to question- whether an investigation is investigating what it seeks to investigate. To validate is to theorize i.e. to pursue the methodological issues of validation and generates theoretical questions about the phenomena investigated (Kvale & Brinkman 2009, p.256).

Throughout the study, the question whether the research tool is measuring what they are entitled to measure acted as a guide. A pilot test was conducted to ensure that the questioners are reflecting on our aim. We conducted the pilot study with three familiar immigrants’, the results showed that the questions were in accordance to the study and were in reference to perceptions and experiences of the immigrants. Their perceptions were more to the importance of language, room for interaction and willingness to integrate to the new culture. We were conscious though not take in their perceptions with us while conducting the interview with the participants.

4.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process whereby the researcher constantly reflects on his/her participation in the process of knowledge production. This includes researchers own positioning/expressions of values, assumptions and experiences on the choice of questions, data collection, analysis and conclusions. The criterion of reflexivity requires that the researcher put aside his/her interpretive practices and perceptions on research study. (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004).

It was upon us as authors to put in mind that our perceptions and experiences as being immigrant ourselves did not affect our research. We were careful through the study not to be bias, we used only the data collected to analysis our studies. We carefully selected the research questions to avoid directing the participant of this studies towards our own perceptions and experiences towards social integration.

4.9 Generalizability

The aim of this study is not to generalize but rather to get an insight and reach an understanding of perceptions and experiences of the respondents.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the results will be presented and analysed in reference to earlier research and the theoretical perspectives presented earlier in this study.
The most frequent perceptions and experiences mentioned have been summarised under the three themes: Swedish language, culture, social networks and self-identity.

5.1 Swedish Language

A common experience among the interviewees was the importance of the language. They felt like it was the key to interaction with native-born. According to their views, social workers need to be persistent when it comes to communication and language should be a high priority as an interaction tool.
One interviewee mentioned though that not knowing the native language was a barrier for interacting with others in the beginning, but after learning it, things flowed better. She concludes that it was after she learned the language that she could understand better. Learning the language made it easier for her to integrate to the society.
"In the beginning it was difficult for me in many ways. Even if I understand a little English, all the information came in Swedish. I used to miss appointment times in the migration office, bus- schedules, I missed a lot of things because of not being given the information in a language that I could understand, but I struggled with the language and slowly I came into the society.
When I started to study the language, it helped me to understand the culture and to access the services provided for me."

Interviewee C

The quotations above indicate, not surprisingly, that language is a key to integration for migrants. Furthermore, it also indicates that it is the key to progress in the new country, and to be able to live independently without depending on others for help. The participant's perceptions show that language has the ability to give the immigrants better knowledge and understanding how things work in the new country. Thus, it can be suggested that when one migrates or travels to another country, the use of language is a powerful tool in achieving or acquiring the necessary information needed and to

communicate. Languages hold the power to achieve not only social integration, but economic and educational integration as well. Without Swedish language skills, immigrants are readily excluded from many aspects of life, including employment, education, access to services and social interaction.

The interviewees felt that it is upon social workers to see to it that immigrants get the relevant information in a way that they understand and the introduction to the Swedish language should come at an earlier stage in the integration process. Parrish (2010) emphasises on social workers being particularly sensitive to the implications of language when communicating with people in need, they must explain important concepts in ways that are easy for the recipients to understand (Parish, 2012).

The interviewees stated that social service sees the importance of learning the Swedish language since they offer rewards to immigrants that complete the language faster. It was not until 2015, that the Swedish government stopped issuing allowances to the immigrants who learned the Swedish in a shorter period (The National Centre for Swedish as a Second Language, 2016).

The previous study on linguistic isolation, social capital and immigrant in the United States by Nawyn et al. (2012) supports the importance of immigrants in learning the spoken language. The study illustrates that the inability to communicate with the overall community members was a great hindrance to social integration; it hinders the ability of migrants from receiving important information thus, a hinder to social integration this in turn makes it impossible for the immigrants to make use of the social networks available in the society, a setback to integration. (Nawyn et al. 2012).

The social network theory states that it is through participating in social network that social integration is enhanced. A migrant's ability to move from one place to another, to find a job, housing, start a business, participate in the available social activities, access health care can all be directly impacted by or even dependent upon the migrant's social network. There is no way an immigrant can access all the social network in a new country without being able to speak the native language or least a common language. The participant of this study perceived learning the Swedish language to be of great significance to social integration.

To belong to a certain group is an important factor. The social identity theory talks of the out-group and in groups. In order to belong to the majority group i.e. the native-born citizens, the immigrants perceived the Swedish language to be of great use. Good communication in Swedish was seen as one of the requirement of identifying oneself

with the native-born. The language makes it easier to access others goods and services in the community.

Communication is a central issue in social integration. We use language to communicate with others. Trevithick (2005), states that we use language and our capacity to communicate to shape our lives and to relate to others. Language informs the way we think, we experience and the way we interact with each other. Language provides the basis of community but also the grounds for division. Systematic knowledge about language and practical awareness is fundamental to the process of building mature communities. (Trevithick,2005.p, 118.)

With this in mind social workers should make sure that, they are understood and that immigrants get the opportunity to study the Swedish language and opportunity to mingle with the native born and Swedish speaking population. Elmeroth, 2003 in his study shows us the risk of immigrants lacking the social network and contact with the natives. The Kurdish refugee lacked contact with the natives, being isolated in the camps made it even more difficult to interact with the natives thus lacking the tools to learn the language, which in turn makes it more difficult to be socially integrated.

5.2 Social network and information

Social networks have value. The benefits that come from the trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation associated with social networks are important to social integration. Sweden has not failed on the part of providing the social networks and on informing the immigrants. All the interviewees were in accordance that the social services play a good rule in making the social amenities available. One of the participants showed his satisfaction with the social services. He stated that

"My wife is going to school, my kids to school and for me I am looking for jobs. It is very easy to get "dagis" kindergarten place, as long as you do what the social service ask you to do, you get the help you want until you get your job. Social service helps a lot; they guide you always on the right path."

Interviewee A

The quotation above shows that the services provided by the social services enhances the opportunities for attending arenas in which social networks are created, and also

enhancing dissemination of information to the immigrants. Furthermore, it enhances integration and development for immigrants and their children when they meet other Swedish children and their parents in schools.
The social service also works hand in hand with the immigrants, they provide for information on the availability of social activities available in their respective municipality. There are ranges of activities, such as sports, dance, music, orientation, religious and traditional gathering, education, etc. The interviewees were in accordance that it is through the availability of social amenities that they get the opportunities to interact with the overall community members. One interviewee mentioned his appreciation to Sweden, he felt satisfied with the help he gets, and the social service provides information to him on most inquiries he has:

"My kid plays football now. I know about the football organisations because I used to play there. I learned about it from a social worker. My son also tried ice hockey too, the surrounding likes ice hockey that's why he said he would like to try it but even if he didn't like it, ice hockey is very popular here and we got to meet a lot of Swedish people."

Interviewee A

He continues to mention that it was through football activities that he made native-born friends. He also got a job through the football club. His child´s interacts with the other kids makes him believes it is through this that his boy speaks better Swedish than him. He also mentioned that in his hometown, hockey is very popular, the neighbour's kids play hockey and their parents also, relatives and friends are big fans of hockey. The neighbour's interest in hockey led him to register his child to a hockey club, which led to him meeting new people, making new friends and creating a social network. The other participant also gained a lot from participating in social networks.
Besides the social workers providing the information to immigrants on available social activities, others institutions like schools, hospitals, kindergarten etc. plays an important part in this as well. It is through these activities that social contacts and social circles are formed.

"In the school they teach my kids swimming, as a single parent I am occupied with work I can't take them to activities but when am free we go to swimming, the playing ground and so on. The kids mingle and play together with other Swedish kids both in school and also while in other activities. The information about activities comes from school, the company that owns the houses, newspapers, all around."

Interviewee C

The above quotations were in accordance to other interviewees, who stated that participation in social activities enhanced social integration. It was through activities like sports that the immigrants have to meet others, being able to integrate, gets contacts, and learn about the mainstream culture. Durkheim social solidarity concept believes that the participation of individuals from different backgrounds and cultures promotes social integration. Social networks provide a sense of belonging, in school, at work, at home or when participating in activities. The study on the integration of immigrant children and their parents in different dimensions of social networks strengthens the results that due to participation in social activities, ethnic boundaries are blurred and new social networks are developed.

Fuente and Herrero (2012) concluded in their research that the statistical relationship between discrimination and social integration disappeared once levels of informal community support were taken into account. A better understanding of the factors is that, either promote or inhibit the social integration progress of the immigrant population is important to orientate public policies and intervention programs that contribute to the adaptation of this population to the host society (Fuente & Herrero, 2012).

According to the experiences of the interviewees in this study, integration policies should be aimed towards increasing immigrants' opportunities to attend arenas in which interaction is natural, such as the social activities mentioned above. A simply ground like children of the immigrants attending birthday parties of the native-born has proven to be a means towards social integration as seen in the previous study conducted by Windzio (2015) in Germany. The immigrants interacted while dropping and picking up their kids and by doing so new social networks were created. The aspect of letting kids play and interact together improves the trust and creates more room for integration, breaking the norms

5.3 Identifying yourself and Culture

Concerning social integration, the stand that immigrants have in the society matters a lot. If one identifies strongly to his/her religion and beliefs, it could affect the perceptions of social integration in the residing country. The interviewees in this study tended to identify themselves to the cultures of origin, as well as recognizing the importance of adapting to the Swedish culture. This is exemplified in the quote below.

"Parts of my people from my country want to keep their own culture, they do not want to integrate but they get problem because if you live in another country you cannot only keep your culture.
It is better to integrate; it does not mean that one forgets his/her culture but one can mix them."

Interviewee D

According to Durkheim`s theory on social solidarity, the more the people of different cultures and backgrounds engages with neighbours and others in different activities, the more they tend to loosen the traditional bond of their own group culture. This was evident among the participants in this study, who believed that, for an improved social integration, the immigrants had to loosen the bond to one's culture and traditions.
According to social network theory, communication, interaction and action, develop an amicable way of integrating. The socialisation process includes the acceptance and respect to the values, culture, norms and rules of both parties.
The awareness of culture in social integration plays a vital role in the society. In some countries, immigrants are obliged to learn the host country language, know the history of the country and learn the national anthem, before they gain citizenship in the residing nation (Euractiv ,2012).
In Sweden, the tools are there for culture integration by choice, it is upon the immigrants to choose to adapt to the culture.
The interviewees seemed to merge more into society through attending social activities as this led them to interacting with native-born more often, which positively affected their balance of their own culture and the Swedish culture. Social integration is a

dynamic process, a process that includes actor's self-identification, acceptance and respect to the differences that might occur in contact with different cultural elements. Most participants still practiced their own culture, but respected others´ culture as well. They felt the freedom to practice their own culture and the same time felt welcomed to practise the Swedish culture.

The social identification to the different cultures and religions improved social relations. For instance, one interviewee mentioned how important for her culture to respect others, the children have to listen and respect their elders. She said through these, she has seen that the kids had no problem with interacting with other children. The same goes for herself, the culture she had has taught her to respect one another and that she had no difficulties with interacting with others despite their origin.

The participants expressed experiences of people gathering for special occasions like midsummer, Eid, Christmas etc. During these ceremonies, social relations were believed to be improved.

"When it comes to midsummer, they used to have a festival in the big park here, when I have time I usually attend. Being Muslim I cannot attend all ceremonies. However, the ones I attend people are very friendly. When I invite them to Muslims ceremonies, they always try to attend as well.

We try to integrate to the Swedish culture but I still have my culture, I still respect the Swedish culture, we have to mix both. We make new friends and learn the culture all together."

Interviewee D

The quotation above shows that the participant feel it is important to respect the Swedish culture, as well as to keep identifying themselves with the home country culture. This is a way to promote the integration of the immigrants into the society and enhances social networking.

Social networking theory deals with respect and acceptance to different cultures, values and opinions while social identity theory talks of one identifying him/herself with a particular group/culture. The participants of the study were in accordance that social identity played a role in social integration. According to Tajfel & Turner´s theory on social identity (1979), the sense of belonging to a certain group gives people a sense of

social identity and the participants in this study achieved this through balancing identification to two social groups; the ethnic group and the native-born group. When a person feels comfortable in a particular group he/she chooses to stick to it, rejects the negative parts and takes in the positive. This is seen by the participants being content with what the society has to offer and the reception by the native-born citizens. The receiving group on the other hand has to be willing to take in the new members. In this case, the Swedish authorities were perceived as welcoming; e.g. basic needs were catered for, the social services were easily accessible, the information on different activities were available, and the language school (sfi) provided tools for enhancing the Swedish language. As seen by the interviewees, most used these tools to learn the language, to participate in the different social activities; i.e. church, football associations, and went to school. As a result, their possibilities of interacting with native-born enhanced, and their chances of social integration increased. Durkheim´s theory of social solidarity emphasises the importance of shared beliefs in order for social solidarity to emerge. As social interaction between immigrants and native-born is vital for "shared beliefs" to come about, creating spaces for interaction is an important concept towards social integration.

The study by Korac (2003) conducted in Netherlands on multiculturalism also pinpoints on the importance of respecting other cultures (Korac, 2003). The authors showed that immigrants who approached the host nations positively to be better socially integrated achieved than those who came with a negative approach.

Eliassi (2014) warns social workers on the risk of judging immigrants as a collective individual (culture wise) it is important for social workers to serve all immigrant as a self-person and to learn to respect others culture. Swedish social workers at the social services have the tendency

6. DISCUSSION

In this study, learning the Swedish language, self-identification and social networks have proven to be vital for maintaining positive contacts with the native-born, and thereby enhancing social integration. The aim of this study was to explore immigrants' perceptions and experiences of social contact with native-born.

The most important findings of the study were the vital role-played by the social services, institutions like schools and organisations, as well as attending activities that increased opportunities for interacting with native-born. The results show that social ties have an important impact on immigrant's social integration in Sweden and that they viewed social interaction with native born to be of great importance.

The interviewees in this study attached great importance towards learning the Swedish language, as a key factor for creating a social network. Learning the language was a first priority after settling down because language served as a major tool in socialisations and creating stronger ties to native-born.

From the look of the results and analysis, the study shows that both formal and informal ties play a major role in social integration. The social service, institution like schools and non-profit organisations played an important part in enhancing possibilities for social interaction with native-born. However, an important part of social integration is the extent to which immigrants identify with the values, opinions and traditions of the native-born. When immigrants can identify him/her with the society culture, social contacts and integration with the native-born Swedes are increased, which emphasised in the social identity theory. Durkheim concept of social solidarity shows the importance of integrating different cultures together, in order for social solidarity to emerge. Thus, immigrants must loosen traditions/values that do not correspond with the values that are the foundation of the Swedish society. However, it is important that the society is perceived as inclusive and welcoming, in order for this to happen. By participation on the different cultural activities like Eid and midsummer provided more room for social integration. Risks of social exclusion are greater if the Swedish population is unwilling to open themselves to the immigrants. The findings of this study are of importance to social workers in working against social exclusions of immigrants. As social workers, we are bound to work according to social policies that put emphasis on facilitating social integration for immigrants. It is also of great importance for social

workers not to generalise all immigrants' culture wise.

The findings in this study emphasises that social workers must focus more on creating spaces for social contacts between immigrants and native-born. The participants assessed attending social activities as the easiest way to make new friends and interact with native-born. Activities like sports and attending school created room for new social contacts and room for interaction thus, immigrants get the chance to practice the Swedish language and learn how the Swedish society works. The natives Swedes get also immigrants culture and perspective through interaction. Thus, it is important that more arenas to be introduced for immigrants where this type of interaction is made possible.

As mentioned earlier because our aim was not to generalise our findings that's why qualitative study best suited the study. Despite the fact that the result showed consistency with previous research reviewed in this study and gave answers to the research questions it would be interesting to conduct a wider study to see if the perceptions and experiences of immigrants in the Swedish society correspond with the finding of the study.

7. CONCLUSION

Through this research, it was found that language, social networks and social identity community at large and culture were important tool towards how immigrants perceived social integration. The immigrants have to have the will to learn the language. The social workers should put more focus on ensuring that the means to learn the language are readily available. They shouldn't judge immigrants to them vs us. Immigrants should be able to interact with the natives. Openness trust and respect towards one another culture promotes social integration. Immigrants should be willing to give room for the Swedish culture where applicable and vice versus. When the community respects one another, they are better communication, acceptance and interaction thus creating room for better social contacts, network and solidarity. Cultural barriers, isolation, social barriers are easily destroyed through respect to every culture. Immigrants have to respects and to be willing to learn the natives' culture and the same goes to the natives, Swedish and the social workers team. Learn to respect and learn immigrant's cultures as well.

The more the social network between ethnic groups the better the intergroup relations, thereby decreasing prejudice and conflict and creating access to the social capital of natives, which in turn integration at large.

Successful social integration processes depend on immigrants own motivations and accessibility to the tools of social integration.

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8. APPENDIX 1 → Letter of consent

I have been the given the necessary information about the study i.e. that the study is on the experiences that I face towards social integration and I know that I at any time can stop the interview without any reason. The study is meant to better social integration of immigrants, I approve that students Eze and Kiarie, their supervisor and examiner, have access to the material that will emerge from this interview. I do also give my permission for this interview to be recorded. I have been informed that the information collected will be confidential;-I have been promised anonymity and have been informed that the data collected will be used only for the purposes of this study, and the recorded data will be later destroyed.

Date

_____

Signature interviewee: Printed name:

_____ _____

Signature responsible interviewer: Printed name:

_____ _____

Signature responsible interviewer: Printed name:

_____ _____

9. APPENDIX 2 → Interview Questions

1.2 Research Question

1. How do adult refugee immigrants perceive social integration?

2. What are the experiences towards social integration in general?

First a little background of the interviewee,

Age, country of origin,

How long have you been in Sweden?

Describe the area you are living in?

How is it to live in your respective municipality, what are your experiences?

How did you go about to get the social services, basic needs?

What social activates are you involved in (also children if they have)? If there is, what experiences do you perceive?

What is your occupation?

What are some of the experiences do you perceive at work place?

What is your take on finding a job here?

What do you perceive of being Swedish?

What is your take on cultural perspective?

Do you participate in some Swedish culture e.g. celebrating midsummer etc.?

Do you have anything to add for us in relation to our subject?