

Issues in Safeguarding Refugee and Asylum- seeking Children and Young People: Research and Practice

In this paper, the author describes and analyses undertaking a pilot study in which refugee or asylum-seeking parents who have been drawn into social work safeguarding children procedures reflect upon their experiences. This study is located within the context of political, policy and social work safeguarding practice developments in the UK which are relevant to refugee and asylum-seeking families. Interviews were undertaken with five refugee and asylum-seeking parents and one carer, three support workers and one social worker, and three conference chairs. Although the sample is small, the findings from the pilot study reveal some significant commonalities between comments from all three groupings, as well as significant differences. These findings will be of interest to refugee and asylum-seeking peoples, support workers, social workers, managers and policymakers and all who are concerned for the wellbeing of refugee and asylum-seeking parents, children and young people. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

KEY WORDS: refugee and asylum-seeking families; safeguarding; social work

Migration is a major social issue (Castles and Miller, 2009), for both northern and southern countries (Abdelmoneum, 2010). While much UK research focuses on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (Crawley, 2010) or trafficked children (Bokhari, 2008), there is also interest in refugee and asylum-seeking families[†](parents, children and young people) (for example, Grillo, 2008). However, while research engages with current policies and practices in social work, education and health for

* Correspondence to: Pat Cox, School of Social Work, University of Central Lancashire, Preston PR1 2HE, UK. E-mail: pcox2@uclan.ac.uk

[†] A note on terminology: 'asylum-seeking peoples/asylum-seeking families' is used throughout, rather than 'asylum-seekers' which has become a derogatory description.

Pat Cox*

School of Social Work, University of
Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

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refugee and asylum-seeking peoples (Bilson and Cox, 2007; MIND, 2009; Newbigging *et al.*, 2010), knowledge about refugee and asylum-seeking families' experiences of services remains fragmented and evidence about whether adaptations may be necessary to develop services which are sensitive to their particular needs is limited.

This paper is an account of a pilot study funded by the British Association of the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN) which aims to establish baseline knowledge for more extensive research. The study inquires into how current practices and procedures in safeguarding children, including investigation, assessments and child protection conferences, are experienced by refugee and asylum-seeking families.

Literature Review

Each section of this literature review focuses on key studies and other writings pertinent to this pilot. It does not purport to be a full review of all literature in each subject considered here.

UK Safeguarding Policy and Practice

Within UK legislative and policy requirements to safeguard children and young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2006), the responsibilities of social workers investigating harm or abuse of children and young people in families are immense (Devaney, 2008). Pressures are increasing due to public and political concerns following a series of deaths in the UK of children already known to social services (Freel, 2010; Lord Laming, 2003). 'Good news' research (Pritchard and Sharples, 2008) on social work practice improvements occurs rarely. Regular policy reviews and practice guidance reforms result in increased workloads for all social work staff, with some staff struggling to retain their commitment and not transfer their stressful feelings to service users and carers (Jones *et al.*, 2004; Social Work Task Force, 2009). Katz and Hetherington (2006) demonstrate the value of interagency relationships characterised by trust, the need to spend time achieving them and the role of organisational cultures in supporting such relationship development.

Policy and practice emphases on improving safeguarding systems and information sharing between professionals do not centralise users' needs (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2009) and may overlook the significance of relationships between social workers and families at the micro-level (Behnia, 2008). These relationships are often characterised by imbalances of knowledge and power (Bundy-Fazioli *et al.*, 2009; Forrester *et al.*, 2008); nevertheless, service users and carers involved in safeguarding investigations and assessments are

clear about what they want from social workers: empathy, genuineness and being non-judgemental. Conversely, they do not appreciate workers who are poor listeners and insincere (Maiter *et al.*, 2006). Howe (2010) argues for the importance of relationship building, relationship maintenance and practising containment (Bion, 1962) with parents and carers to ensure children's safety. Trotter (2004, 2008) asserts that developing partnerships with parents and carers correlates with effective safeguarding practice. Jones (2001) reveals that workers believe their safeguarding practice would be improved by less bureaucracy and more relationship building. Issues of risk in safeguarding preoccupy policymakers (Broadhurst *et al.*, 2009), but the impossibility of completely removing risk in safeguarding practice receives little attention (Stevens and Cox, 2008).

Refugee and Asylum-seeking Peoples

Refugee and asylum-seeking peoples are frequently characterised as existential threats (Huysmans, 2005), rather than as people needing protection and support to integrate themselves into receiving nations (Independent Asylum Commission, 2008). Racism and cultural 'othering' underpin UK policies controlling inward migration (see, for example, Wodak and Van Dijk, 2000), leading to the demonisation of refugee and asylum-seeking peoples by politicians and the media (Cooley and Rutter, 2007). Exclusionary attitudes (Goodman, 2007) mean that their lives in the UK are influenced by a generally negative political and social climate (Mulvey, 2010). In this paper, 'culture' refers to shared practices which permeate social life and which produce meaning (Calhoun and Sennett, 2007).

Government dispersal policies undermine integration (Hynes, 2009; Ryan *et al.*, 2008); many refugee and asylum-seeking peoples are without support networks of extended family and friends (Brown and Horrocks, 2009). Tension and uncertainty in households may increase risks of violence between partners (Richman, 1998). While trauma and its effects tend to be viewed from northern countries' perspectives (Anderman, 2002; Zack-Williams, 2006), a combination of previous traumatic events (British Psychological Society, 2007), present poverty and isolation, and expectations and pressures within refugee and asylum-seeking families and upon families from receiving communities may lead to depression (K. Gardner, personal communication, 2002) and similar conditions in children (Fazel and Stein, 2003) and adults (Ingleby, 2005; MIND, 2009). In research with refugee and asylum-seeking parents' support groups, Lawrence (2010) notes that parents had been given no information or guidance in relation to family life in the UK, nor about expectations of themselves as parents. While refugee and asylum-seeking

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families share oppressive experiences in common, they are also heterogeneous; many refugee and asylum-seeking families overcome difficulties and both engage with and contribute to, community and social life (Sales, 2007).

There is some interest in receiving nations in the lives of refugee and asylum-seeking peoples; however, researchers encounter problems in initiating or undertaking studies with these peoples. Bakewell (2008) argues that much research into forced migration, including study design, methodologies and methods, is constrained by policy imperatives which render invisible particular groups of refugee and asylum-seeking peoples who do not fit current political interests. Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) note the move from refugees researching their own experiences, to difficulties for researchers gaining access to them to become the subjects of current studies. Polzer (2008) asserts that refugees who have integrated successfully become ‘invisible’ through various forms of (re)-categorisation. The common theme in these and similar studies is that refugee and asylum-seeking peoples are ‘seldom-heard’ in research, which has implications for how their experiences could inform social work safeguarding practice (Hernandez *et al.*, 2010).

Issues of Culture and ‘Race’ in Safeguarding

Childhood harm and abuse are recognised as a cross-national issue (Sossou and Yagtiba, 2009; Stanley and Appleton, 2008), as is the need to avoid cultural imperialism in developing protective systems for children and young people (Lidchi, 2003, 2007). Social work responses to Black and minority ethnic families where harm or abuse is suspected are examined regularly (see, for example, Barn, 2007; Channer and Parton, 1990; Križ and Skivenes, 2010b). However, recent reforms in UK children’s services are criticised by Chand (2008) for their lack of attention to issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity and, whilst his work addresses these issues in England, his arguments apply across the UK. Child-rearing practices rooted in cultures other than those indigenous to the UK are not fully understood by social workers, leading to safeguarding interventions and decisions which are not always in children’s best interests (Bernard and Gupta, 2008; Koramoa *et al.*, 2002; see also Fontes, 2005). Social workers’ lack of knowledge and competence in assessing the influences of religious beliefs and practices in families’ lives may also impact negatively on interventions and decisions (Gilligan, 2009; Horwath and Lees, 2010; Wong and Vinsky, 2009).

As noted above, political and social climates influence how refugee and asylum-seeking families are perceived and how agencies respond to their needs. Cohen *et al.* (2002) and Humphries

(2004) reveal tensions in social work practice between social work values and how some families' legal status becomes an issue in service delivery. They argue that social workers must develop ethical interventions which are tailored to refugee and asylum-seeking families' differing and specific needs, not those of immigration policymakers.

The need for more culturally aware social work practice is acknowledged (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010; Harrison, 2009), accompanied by a critique of social work's cultural hegemony (Askeland and Payne, 2006) and language use (Vojak, 2009). Influenced by migration issues, consideration of transnational or cross-border social work (Hugman *et al.*, 2010; Negi and Furman, 2010) is developing and alternative approaches are discussed (Guru, 2010).

Hearing the Voices of Refugee and Asylum-seeking Peoples: Contributions from Research

In the previous section, some issues of culture and 'race' in safeguarding practice are addressed. As noted, research into these issues improves practice with children and families; in particular, research into the deployment of interpreters can assist workers in developing cultural and racial awareness and sensitise them to families' experiences of safeguarding systems and procedures.

Research studies of interpreter involvement in cross-cultural research interviews addressing welfare and health issues range from those querying trustworthiness and validity and seeking to inject order and control (for example, Kapborg and Berterö, 2002; Wallin and Ahlström, 2006), to those acknowledging that language is dynamic, interpreters are not robots and that the interplay of human relationships and languages must be attended to throughout (Ingvarsdotter *et al.*, 2010). Ethical considerations and complexities of interpreter involvement from the perspectives of the three or more subjects present in interviews are discussed by Liamputtong (2008); whilst Valero-Garcés (2005) explores psychological impacts for interpreters working in public services. In research involving interpreters in interviewing refugees, Williams (2005) notes the presence of competing agendas and the importance of establishing trust in interviewing-interpreting processes, as do Tribe and Thompson (2009a, 2009b).

Two key papers addressing issues of working with interpreters in safeguarding investigations and assessments where families speak another first language are by Chand (2005) and Križ and Skivenes (2010b). Chand (2005) reviews existing studies and synthesises their findings; Križ and Skivenes (2010b) interview safeguarding social workers in England and Norway about experiences of interpreter involvement. Findings from both studies include: the need

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for clarity about roles, responsibilities and agendas and for trust (Williams, 2005). Findings also include the need for additional time in interviews to ensure equitable treatment and recommendations for specialist joint training of interpreters and social workers undertaking child protection.

Research Question

This research sought to explore the experiences of a small number of asylum-seeking and refugee families who had become involved in social work safeguarding procedures and the experiences of a small number of social workers and chairs of child protection conferences concerning their practice with asylum-seeking and refugee children. From this (pilot) study, baseline knowledge would be established for further research into issues arising. More specifically, this exploratory pilot study would demonstrate these refugee and asylum-seeking families’ understandings, views and experiences of safeguarding processes and their perceptions as service users of the strengths and weaknesses of the current service design and delivery. Funding was provided by BASPCAN, with whom it was agreed that between five and ten families would be interviewed. As a result of the specific focus of the research question, issues of nationality (Cox, 2007) and intersectionality issues of gender, class or sexuality (Mohanty, 2003) were not addressed; nor were differences between parents (Featherstone, 2004) or between parents and children (Morris, 2009).

From the research question it was hoped that ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway, 1991; Rose, 1997) of families’ experiences of involuntary services and those of workers involved with them would be revealed, perhaps also providing more nuanced understandings of the complex issues of culture, which might assist agencies in reviewing safeguarding practices and making appropriate adjustments where necessary.

Research Design, Methods and Ethical Considerations

The study is located within the interpretivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The author is the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of migrants (including refugees) to the UK; in her heritage a number of European nationalities and religious faiths combine. Family narratives of movement, and problems and pleasures encountered in making new lives in unfamiliar surroundings were everyday rather than unusual, and encouraged her interest in migratory experiences. Together

with her social work safeguarding experiences, this knowledge and interest led to the research question and influenced the research design and method.

The study is underpinned by a standpoint that refugee and asylum-seeking peoples should be the 'source', rather than the 'object', of understanding (Doná, 2007; Limbu, 2009). Semi-structured interviewing was the chosen method as, despite flaws, this method provides scope for interview subjects to respond on their own terms and for sensitivity to the person and context in interviews, while facilitating the emergence of comparable findings (Mason, 2002). Bhavnani's (1991) three-fold typology of power in research relationships underpinned planning and undertaking, as did Alcoff's (1991) thinking on speaking for others and Henry's (2003) reflections on identities in research. Moore's (1994) exploration of 'representativity' and Wolf (1996) on representation, informed the writing-up processes.

Interview schedules for parents, workers and conference chairs were developed from a previous research project concerning childhood sexual abuse survivors' and workers' views of a support service, focusing on experiences, feelings and opinions, with a minimum of questions (Eastmond, 2007) to facilitate parents' contributions. Ethical research practice with refugees (Bögner *et al.*, 2007; MacKenzie *et al.*, 2007) was considered when designing interview schedules, consent forms, letters to families, agencies and workers and FAQ (frequently asked questions) folding leaflets (one leaflet for workers and one for families): all were written in accessible English, with preparations for translation where necessary. Everyone interviewed is an 'interview subject' or 'research subject', rather than an 'interviewee' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008).

Research Governance

Interview schedules, consent forms, leaflets and letters were approved by the University's Faculty of Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee. In accordance with the university's policies (compliant with the Data Protection Act), the identities of the research subjects and the interpreter are excluded, as are personal details and interview narratives. In order to protect the identities further, there is no information about nationality, legal status or workplace and no direct quotations. As a result of difficulties in contacting refugee and asylum-seeking families and workers, interview schedules were piloted with a social work academic with a personal migration background who shares the author's commitment.

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'The author is descended from migrants'

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Research in Progress

Pressures on staff in statutory agencies responsible for safeguarding children, changes of management and the fact that this was not research which they themselves had sought resulted initially in nil responses or refusals. Community-based voluntary agencies experience insecure or insufficient funding and more referrals than can be responded to; workers supporting and advocating for refugee and asylum-seeking peoples needed convincing of any researcher's understanding of the families' situations and commitment to not making these worse.

Through the generosity of two particular individuals, it became possible to interview five parents and one person with caring responsibilities; no children were interviewed (parents' decisions). In two interviews with parents, the author co-worked with an interpreter, who also acted as a supporter for all but one of the parents and the carer (one parent was accompanied by a different supporter). As a result of difficulties in recruiting social workers, three workers in two community-based support agencies and one social worker were interviewed, as were two child protection conference chairs and one chair of children in need meetings.

Interview subject-interviewer relationships require some discussion. That the author is descended from migrants (including refugees), a woman and began life in different circumstances from those which she now occupies are factors which impact upon research encounters, but do not undercut the power and privilege of her race (white), her power as a researcher (Bhavnani, 1991; Wolf, 1996) and her responsibilities to minimise distance and difference. While Richards and Emslie (2000) note how research subjects make sense of researchers' status, Henry (2003) analyses the complexities of power and identities in research subject-researcher relationships, emphasising the agency of research subjects in whether and how they chose to respond. Parents and the carer were contacted through others and the author did not control how she was 'introduced' in her absence. While differences in 'race', culture and gender were factors in interviews with parents and the carer and with one of the workers, co-working with the interpreter and supporter undoubtedly helped to establish greater trust with parents in interviews (Williams, 2005). The interpreter is an experienced researcher and extremely knowledgeable about research processes and the style of qualitative research questions, and like the interview subjects, was sent a copy of the questions in advance. The author's social work experience was a positive factor in interviews with the social worker and conference chairs, though less so with the support workers. Further consideration of all these matters forms the basis of another paper.

Each interview subject, interpreter and supporter whether a refugee or asylum seeker, or a worker, or both, lives and/or works in an area of the UK with a history of refugee and asylum-seeking peoples arriving and settling there. With agreement, most interviews were taped and then transcribed by the author; where subjects preferred note taking this was done and notes also transcribed by the author. Interviews were subjected to ongoing thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) by the author, who is the sole researcher (see Findings and Discussion).

Findings

Parents and Carer

Parents and the carer had some choice of venue for interviews and (if needed and wanted) their own interpreter and supporter. Parents, the carer and the interpreter were paid for their participation. All were offered opportunities to withdraw at any stage.

All parents and the carer expressed (to varying degrees) some difficulties in understanding safeguarding processes and procedures, some of which were evidenced by difficulties in explaining involvement in these processes to the researcher. All accepted the legal requirements to investigate children's wellbeing and safety.

The influence and emotional impact of formal procedures such as child protection conferences and court hearings were acknowledged. However, apparently, equally important were supportive relationships with social workers or other professionals – or the lack of supportive relationships. Such supportive relationships – even in the context of ongoing procedures – are cited as making, or would make, a difference. Two interview subjects felt supported by their current social worker; one credited the social worker for assisting the family to integrate into their neighbourhood. Social workers' attitude towards their work, being positive or negative about the work and about the families with whom they work was mentioned by all in this group in their interviews.

There are issues that the parents and carer find incomprehensible. They want social workers to spend time with them, explaining procedures and listening to them. The short task-focused time-frame for assessment is difficult for them to understand. One parent received a letter written in a language that they understand but do not speak: the effect of this error had endured. One had a child removed; contact visits were arranged. The visits take place in a building that the parent says is unsuitable for a child and dirty; sometimes, the venue for visits, or the timing of them, is changed at short notice. For this parent, changing times or venues is about others' needs, not the child's or family's needs.

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Social workers' endeavours to understand the importance of culture, cultural practices and religious beliefs to families are valued when present, and criticised when absent. Despite the acknowledged awkwardness of the safeguarding context and workers' power, parents value workers who treat them, their cultural practices and beliefs with respect, whose demeanour is appropriate to the occasion, who accept refreshments if they are offered and who remember significant dates in the families' religious calendar. Although social workers must often explain the particular expectations of parental roles, generational expectations, child rearing and punishment which obtain in the UK, social workers who also try to understand and acknowledge different cultural family traditions, relationships and practices are appreciated; workers who do not try to understand these issues are criticised.

Support Workers and Social Worker

Workers also had some choice of venue and (if needed) their own interpreter. Themes from interviews with the support workers and social worker were merged, as there are significant commonalities. Support and advocacy agencies working with refugee and asylum-seeking families know if families become part of safeguarding procedures only if they are asked for an interpreter or supporter to accompany them to meetings with social workers, or to the conference. Parents and carers might not inform their support worker, being concerned that advice or advocacy may be withdrawn. Parents have told workers of social workers stating that children may be removed from their care, because the parents cannot support them due to a lack of Section 4 support (short-term financial support offered to asylum-seeking people whose application for leave to remain in the UK has been unsuccessful under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999). In these and similar examples, support workers perceive social workers to be under pressure not to offer longer-term ongoing relationships, but to deal with immediate (safeguarding or other) issues only.

'Current assessments are culturally inappropriate'

Current assessments are culturally inappropriate; they are based on normative western assumptions about families and family narratives. Some assessments for adults and children, for example, with a learning disability or speech impediment are not yet culturally appropriate. Age disputes sometimes feature in safeguarding investigations and decisions.

Poverty, isolation and similar stresses impact negatively on refugee and asylum-seeking families' mental and physical health. Parents also often suffer from poor health, which limits their capacity to cope with uncertainty about their future.

Older children who have been soldiers or involved in combat may have different perceptions of physical chastisement from parents or carers than those in receiving communities, or workers investigating allegations of abuse. Parents who have been separated from children involved in combat sometimes struggle to rebuild their relationships with them.

Workers interviewed understand the significance of cultural and religious practices for some families and endeavour to respond: removal of shoes, accepting hospitality and remembering significant days. These workers know that some families are unused to official schedules, they understand that appointment times and meeting spans may not have the same meanings and they allow for lateness and over-running. Sometimes at conferences, the interpreter who has been hired does not speak the family's language or their particular variation of it. 'Pockets' of culturally sensitive and appropriate practices with families are not replicated across all agencies that have contact with families, leading to bewilderment, confusion and sometimes depression.

Conference Chairs

Conference chairs are responsible for facilitating safeguarding decision making. Chairs stated that they endeavour to respond to asylum-seeking and refugee children at 'risk of harm' as 'children in need', given the sensitivity of their situation; resulting in low numbers of refugee and asylum-seeking children being the subject of safeguarding conferences in this area. They try to arrive at recommendations which mean that families can be supported within their own communities. Families are encouraged to bring a supporter and an interpreter with them, and some local community, support and advocacy groups are now familiar with conference procedures. Chairs asserted that working with interpreters means ensuring that everything gets translated in all directions, including *both* parents' responses in full, requiring time and persistence.

The reason for most conferences is physical abuse, over-chastisement or inappropriate behaviour. Poverty is a major factor issue for families 'without status' and because families can be moved around, this can impact on referrals and delay decisions. All chairs acknowledged that most refugee and asylum-seeking parents are frightened of conferences, concerned that they mean they will be deported, despite reassurances from chairs that they do not report to the Home Office. Unlike some indigenous families, most refugee and asylum-seeking parents do not challenge either the proceedings or individual speakers.

Chairs expressed major concerns about the building where conferences were held. Facilities were basic: there was no suitable

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waiting area for families, supporters and interpreters. Small conference rooms feel cramped and cramped. The chairs had informed the local authority repeatedly of these problems and the effects on their work with families.

During interviews, each chair reflected on their own input and impact in conference settings. It appears that they try to make formal, legalistic and potentially exclusionary procedures less so. Although each of them expressed it differently, their concern about the building and waiting facilities is that it projects negative messages to visitors (parents, supporters, interpreters) about not being welcomed, not being valued and being excluded. They demonstrated good understanding of what parents would be experiencing and showed how they try to maximise inclusion and reduce exclusion wherever possible.

Discussion

Significant issues arise from the interviews with each of these groups and also from the research processes. Comments by parents and the carer resonate with comments from other families who have compulsory involvement with social services concerning their children about their preferences (Maiter *et al.*, 2006) in terms of the ‘how’ of their relationships with social workers. Howe’s (2010) and Trotter’s (2004, 2008) thinking about relationship building and relationship maintenance with parents in safeguarding investigations and assessments are exemplified in these parent and carer interviews, which emphasise social workers having commitment to their work and interest in, and support for, parents and their children during safeguarding processes.

There are a few possible explanations for parents’ expressed difficulties in understanding safeguarding policies and procedures; they may have identified the author as part of the safeguarding structures, despite assurances about her independence, and been unwilling to provide information about their circumstances. There may be genuine problems in grasping the legal and practice complexities, fear of asking for more detail, insufficiently clear explanations from social workers, or a combination (Bundy-Fazioli *et al.*, 2009). Parents’ lack of knowledge about expectations, policies and procedures is noted by Lawrence (2010) and may reflect social isolation (Brown and Horrocks, 2009; Hynes, 2009). Acceptance of the process by parents (and fear of conferences, as mentioned by chairs and workers) may relate to their worries about status (Guru, 2010) and future decisions about remaining.

Respect for cultural and religious practices and genuine attempts by social workers to understand the meaning of these

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for families are important to parents and the carer. Their longings (and appreciation) in this regard concur with Howe's (2010) and Trotter's (2004, 2008) assertions about worker-family relationships, thinking about practice issues (Bernard and Gupta, 2008; Chand, 2008; Wong and Vinsky, 2009) and the necessity to improve cultural competence in social work more generally (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010). Such respect and understanding also reflect social work's core values (Humphries, 2004), rather than reinforcing exclusionary social practices (Goodman, 2007).

Workers' remarks echo some parents' comments (above). Their feedback corroborates information about increasing pressures and referrals in safeguarding social work (Social Work Task Force, 2009) and that social workers struggle to prevent these pressures affecting their work. Comments reiterate the value that some social workers place on relationship building with families (Howe, 2010), rather than adhering to externally imposed schedules in safeguarding assessments (Jones, 2001; Social Work Task Force, 2009).

As workers noted, poverty, isolation and uncertainty may result in poor health and depression (Ingleby, 2005; MIND, 2009). Workers' knowledge about how children's combat involvement may impact on their families' lives can improve social workers' understanding of what may or may not count as trauma for refugee and asylum-seeking families (Anderman, 2002; Zack-Williams, 2006). Feedback about culturally inappropriate assessments and practices reflects existing concerns (Chand, 2008; Wong and Vinsky, 2009) and awareness that other approaches are required (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010; Guru, 2010).

Chairs' remarks also resonate with some of the comments made by parents and workers about parents' experiences of the system and the need (and the will) to adapt safeguarding requirements to refugee and asylum-seeking families' specific needs. The possibilities for family-centred conference outcomes engendered by re-categorising 'children at risk of harm' as 'children in need' reflect Vojak's (2009) thinking on the power of language and how language is deployed in practice.

Comments by chairs and workers on involving interpreters in safeguarding investigations, assessments and conferences reinforce calls for greater attention in interpreting responsibilities and processes generally (Ingvarsdotter *et al.*, 2010), interviewing refugee and asylum-seeking peoples (Williams, 2005) and involving interpreters in safeguarding (Chand, 2005; Križ and Skivenes, 2010b). Comments by chairs and workers on the need for positive interagency relationships and (obliquely) comments on organisational cultures corroborate research by Katz and Hetherington (2006) on these issues.

Refugee and asylum-seeking families and families within safeguarding systems may both be considered as 'seldom heard'

'Poverty, isolation and uncertainty may result in poor health and depression'

'May both be considered as 'seldom heard' groups or 'marginalised communities' in research'

'To ensure that all potential users and carers can access services sensitive to their specific needs'

'Current safeguarding procedures do not necessarily lead to greater certainty'

'Responding to families' current needs, rather than defining them solely by their refugee or asylum-seeking status'

groups or 'marginalised communities' in research (Pitts and Smith, 2007). In research, Bakewell (2008) and Polzer (2008) reveal marginalisation of many refugee and asylum-seeking peoples, while Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) emphasise researchers' responsibilities to speak up on their behalf. In social work practice, 'seldom-heard' emphasises agencies' responsibilities to ensure that all potential users and carers can access services sensitive to their specific needs (Hernandez *et al.*, 2010; Robson *et al.*, 2008).

Conclusion

Parent, carer and worker feedback emphasises the value of relationships, skills of listening, and recognising that custom and practice in procedures may be familiar to workers but not necessarily to service users and carers, including refuge and asylum-seeking families.

Addressing these issues rests not only with social workers, managers and conference chairs (Jones, 2001; Katz and Hetherington, 2006). For this author, a social work educator and researcher, the findings indicate that some re-evaluation of how social workers are educated to work with refugee and asylum-seeking families is necessary. While acknowledging that current safeguarding procedures do not necessarily lead to greater certainty (Stevens and Cox, 2008), trust building and communication in relationships (Behnia, 2008; Howe, 2010; Trotter, 2008) and co-working with and valuing interpreters (Križ and Skivenes, 2010b; Valero-Garcés, 2005) should feature in social work courses to improve safeguarding services to parents and families. Social work practice and education's cultural hegemony (Askeland and Payne, 2006) in relation to safeguarding policies and practices should be acknowledged: thinking and educating for both cultural sensitivity and to reflect international movements (Ben-Ari and Strier, 2010; Hugman *et al.*, 2010; Negi and Furman, 2010).

There are significant similarities within, and between, some of the emergent themes and much consistency and congruence within the findings, especially between those of the parents, carer and workers. Most of the findings are corroborated by research studies and other literature (above), making this research broadly 'trustworthy' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). From these findings, there is a need for individually appropriate approaches to refugee and asylum-seeking families within safeguarding procedures, responding to families' current needs, rather than defining them solely by their refugee or asylum-seeking status (Humphries, 2004). From these findings also emerges a need for social work

safeguarding practices that are sensitive to, and which acknowledge, the influences of faiths and cultures. Numbers in this study are small and the findings may not be widely generalisable. As such, further research with a greater range of research subjects is required.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank BASPCAN for encouragement and funding for travel and interviews with parents in this project through a research grant (2007). The author also thanks everyone who contributed to this study, and everyone who facilitated the contributions of others.

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