**Outline**

This study examines social conditions and support for women seeking asylum in three varying case study politico-economies, namely Britain, Denmark and Sweden. It aims to investigate state and organisational responses in these three Northern European states to a) understand socially harmful policy and practice in asylum systems from a gendered perspective and b) develop strategies and recommendations so that such conditions can be mitigated, support improved upon and knowledge shared.

Drawing together an intersectional feminist perspective with a social harm framework, this project incorporates semi-structured interviews with practitioners, activists, border control agents and refugee advocates in each country, as well as oral histories with women seeking asylum.

**Methods in brief**

As the figure below indicates, this project included three key methods:

Between October 2016-June 2018, 74 in-depth interviews with psychologists, detention custody officers, activists, sexual violence counsellors, immigration lawyers and barristers were undertaken. In-depth oral histories were also undertaken with six women, facilitating longer term insight into women’s lives and trajectories of violence.

Participatory action has been central to accessing insight to everyday harms in the lives of people seeking asylum. This has included spending more than 500 hours speaking with people seeking asylum across the three countries, in particular women in asylum centres in Denmark and in communities in Merseyside, Britain and Malmö and Gothenburg, Sweden.

**Further information**

This research has been organised around a case study approach, focusing on three Northern European countries with varying – rapidly changing – approaches to immigration. As Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, case studies facilitate generalisability of social issues whilst allowing for the value of in-depth analysis in specific localised areas. This project adopted case study analyses in these countries for three reasons: firstly, to draw in a qualitative intersectional approach in looking to the micro impacts of meso and macro structures and political decisions; secondly, to allow for in-depth policy analysis and consideration of each socio-political context of the countries included – all with varying dominant socio-economic structures; thirdly, to gain insight into best practice so that it might be shared across the countries and broader regions.

The study incorporated 74 in-depth semi-structured interviews with psychologists, support workers, detention custody officers, lawyers, advocacy workers and other such social actors working with people seeking asylum in the three case study countries (Britain: *n*23; Denmark, *n*: 21; Sweden: *n*30). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling initially directed at relevant institutions and organisations working with people seeking asylum in state and NGO capacities, and snow-ball sampling within organisations once some contacts had been established. This has been supplemented with over 500 of ethnographic activist research with women seeking asylum during this period, as well as in-depth oral histories with six women seeking asylum. Interview responses were coded using NVivo 8 and analysed from an interpretive perspective (Mason, 2002), read literally first and then deconstructed in relation to wider literature and the socio-structural and political context from which they responded. It is important to note, however, that themes were also informed by the longer-term participation with practitioners, activists and women seeking asylum, through which I was enabled to focus on aspects of the process which can otherwise be invisibilised or determined as a ‘by-product’ of asylum systems.

The broader findings from the study in relation to the impacts of borders on of women seeking asylum have been published elsewhere (see further reading, below). A key objective of the study was to examine harmful practices which impact negatively impact on women, including survivors of violence, and explore what strategies and forms of support were in place to address or mitigate such harms. However, from early in the project it became clear that, although my focus in interviews with practitioners was on state and organisational responses to women seeking asylum, respondents were secondarily interested in discussing the impacts of this environment on themselves as their colleagues. Whilst the very nature of semi-structured interviews means that discussion can deviate from the primary objectives of study (Delamont, 2003; Denzin, 2008), this particular project adhered to key principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2003) in that the conversations drove nuanced findings which were unintended outcomes of discussion. Having researched with practitioners for more than a decade, personal experience or opinions are seldom far from the figurative table. However, during this project – directly undertaken in aftermath of Europe’s refugee reception crisis and as policy and legislation were becoming ever more restrictive (particularly in Denmark and Sweden) - the discourse amongst interviewees was systematically connected to the wider political context, which was then systematically drawn back to everyday personal and work-related circumstances.

Interviewee information:

Sweden

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Respondent Number | Role | Interview length |
| S1 | Director of trauma and rehabilitation centre | 44.46 |
| S2 | Unaccompanied minors support worker | 33.54 |
| S3 | Asylum lawyer | 55.21 |
| S4 | Detention staff | 40.35 |
| S5 | Asylum support worker (unaccompanied) | 39.16 |
| S6 | Lawyer for refused asylum seekers | 1.00.51 |
| S7 | Migrationswerket asylum assessment officer | 57.36 |
| S8 | Director of Red Cross – national refugee and asylum organisation | 53.11 |
| S9 | Asylum lawyer | 30.19 |
| S10 | Asylum legal advisor at torture support centre | 51.52 |
| S11 | LGBTQ support worker specialising in bisexual women | 32.10 |
| S12 | Social worker for traumatised refugees and asylum seekers | 45.24 |
| S13 | Co-ordinator of LGBTQ asylum support group | 1.10.04 |
| S14 | Lawyer – appeal stage | 43.32 |
| S15 | Asylum support, language, emergency response in 2015 | 39.57 |
| S16 | Campaigns groups, Informal support for male asylum seekers | 29.18 |
| S17 | Red Cross co-ordinator | 57.16 |
| S18 | Custody officer, voluntary returns | 49.33 |
| S19 | Custody Officer | 41.19 |
| S20 | Psychologist, trauma treatment | 1.05.23 |
| S21 | Red Cross volunteer | 32.28 |
| S22 | Detention activities co-ordinator | 40.51 |
| S23 | Head of unit, detention centre | 1.22.02 |
| S24 | Case officer, custody | 48.33 |
| S25 | Custody ‘personnel’ | 43.14 |
| S26 | Nurse - detention | 44.46 |
| S27 | Custody officer | 41.05 |
| S28 | Custody Officer | 36.2 |
| S29 | Custody Officer | 57.03 |
| S30 | Custody Officer | 46.38 |

Denmark:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Respondent Number | Role | Interview length |
| R1 | Rehabilitation director at torture support organisation | 44.58 |
| R2 | Governor of Ellebaek and Sjaelsmark | 1.11.17 |
| R3 | Social worker with refugee and asylum seeking families | 40.41 |
| R4 | Torture rehabilitation specialist | 23.25 |
| R5 | Works at Sandholm Reception centre | 1.00.32 |
| R6 | Director of international torture prevention/rehabilitation organisation | 1.05.19 |
| R7 | Support worker in deportation centre | 42.54 |
| R8 | Prison monitor | 27.20 |
| R9 | Clinical Psychologist specialising in torture/survivors of violence | 39.36 |
| R10 | LGBTQ asylum seeker support worker | 55.18 |
| R11 | Legal advisor, specialises in women | 52.51 |
| R12 | Family returns counsellor | 41.11 |
| R13 | Red Cross staff | 56.52 |
| R14 | Danner | 33.37 |
| R15 | Danner | 43.35 |
| R16 | Refugees Welcome Denmark | 39.44 |
| R17 | Trampoline House | 1.00.06 |
| R18 | Oasis | 35.09 |
| R19 | D Red Cross | 51.22 |
| R20 | Action Aid | 44.33 |
| R21 | Action Aid | 56.33 |

Britain

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Respondent Number | Role | Interview length |
| R1 | Sexual violence counsellor in asylum group | 43.16 |
| R2 | Chair of migrant rights group | 50.13 |
| R3 | Social worker, refugee | 42.38 |
| R4 | Co-ordinator of refugee advocacy group | 40.51 |
| R5 | BME Mental health community development worker | 1.08.32 |
| R6 | Co-ordinator of refugee women’s group in Scotland | 1.10.44 |
| R7 | Outreach service provider for men seeking asylum | 1.23.05 |
| R8 | Co-ordinator of national refugee women’s group | 57.33 |
| R9 | Former barrister, campaign activist for refugee child rights | 1.20.21 |
| R10 | Local community and business development officer | 41.01 |
| R11 | Refugee casework co-ordinator - NW | 52.42 |
| R12 | Refugee caseworker, NW and NE | 1:00:56 |
| R13 | Asylum outreach worker | 53.32 |
| R14 | Councillor | 48.32 |
| R15 | BAMER engagement officer | 36.03 |
| R16 | Asylum women’s support officer | 1.24.01 |
| R17 | Campaigns group co-ordinator | 1.00.03 |
| R18 | Co-ordinator of national asylum rights group | 50.06 |
| R19 | Barrister | 46.17 |
| R20 | Barrister | 44.18 |
| R21 | QC | 56.32 |
| R22 | QC | 44.08 |
| R23 | Barrister | 55.24 |

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