

## REU & SSRG

### Inclusion and Exclusion 2005

**‘It’s your life’**: Exploring the sexual health needs of young unaccompanied refugees and asylum seekers in Hackney.

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# Introduction

6-month CHTPCT-funded project to:

- To explore unaccompanied refugees' and asylum-seekers' experiences and views of factors affecting risk, protection and sexual health.
- To explore professionals' views of factors affecting risk, protection and sexual health for this group
- To make recommendations on work-based learning and development, multi-disciplinary networks and identify gaps in knowledge.

# Definitions

[A refugee is someone who: ]

*"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."*

UNHCR, 1951

## Definitions (2)

### Asylum Seeker

Someone who is fleeing persecution in their homeland, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercised the legal right to apply for asylum.

### Refugee

Someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution back home.

Refugee Council, 2005

## Definitions (3)

‘An unaccompanied asylum seeking child is a person who is claiming asylum, is under eighteen years of age or who in the absence of any documentary evidence appears to be under that age, and who is without adult family members or guardians in this country.’

Home Office, Asylum Process Manual. 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (30/08/05)

Compare to Refugee Council definition – inc. those YP under 21 who have responsibility for younger siblings (under 18) and not being cared by a responsible adult.

# Background

- Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill 2005
- Asylum & Immigration Act 2004 (section 9); 2002 (section 55)
- Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 – dispersal
- Unaccompanied YP are cared for under section 17 or section 20 of The Children’s Act, 1989.
- 16/17 year olds – frequently cared under Section 17

# The Project

- One-to-one interviews with 10 professionals in health, social and youth sectors in range of policy development /frontline work
- Focus groups and one-to-one interviews with 17 young refugees and asylum seekers aged 16-23 (took place in Social Services, Connexions, FE College, Youth service, young person's house)

# Young people by place

<b>Place of Origin</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Burundi		1	1
Congo	4	3	7
Ethiopia		1	1
Guinea		1	1
Jamaica	1		1
Kosovo		1	1
Nigeria	1		1
Sierra Leone	1		1
Somalia	1		1
Vietnam		2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>

# Emerging Themes

Professionals and young people:

- **Social isolation**
- Who is genuine (and who is not?)
- Discussion of status
- Lack of access/knowledge of sexual health services
- Age disputes

# Social Isolation: Profs

I think it's different, for... the younger... I mean, how do you fit in with um, Western teenagers um, who are used to a very, completely different way of life to you, with modern clothes, ...seem to have a lot of money or assets at their disposal, etc – how do you fit in with that? It's something we were talking about at lunchtime today – um..., how do you cope with not having the um, latest trainers? How do you cope with um, probably wearing second hand clothing because actually that's what you're given vouchers to go and do – get second hand clothing.

# Social Isolation: Profs

So there's all those issues. Non-English speaking as well, and teenagers being teenagers, young people being young people, they're very cliquey aren't they? They're very um, they get, they form their groups

So do you think it's harder for younger people to...integrate or assimilate, if you like?

Yeah, it probably is, yes I do, I think it is.

[Nurse Clinician/Manager]

## Social Isolation: YP

SU: And do you have many people from your own country or your own community here? Have you found it easy?

Th: Aicha has not got people from her country and Ygrette has not got people from her country.

SU: Ok. Um... And do they have much contact from people outside the community...?

[Slight laugh]

Th: All their friends are just refugees.

[...]

Th: They think they are nothing.

SU: = Other people?

## Social Isolation: YP

Th: Other people think they're nothing, yeah?

SU: So, they don't, they don't speak to you?

Th: They don't... Is it, the language? Oh ok. That they understand a little bit of English as well so they could like communicate with them.

SU: Ok. It's not language?

Th: It's not language, yeah. That the people from here don't like to mix with them. The friends they have are people from other... like people from Cameroon, Congo, and Iraq

[YP1: Guinean female, 17

YP2: Congolese female, 18]

# Emerging Themes

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# Difference b/w ASs & Rs

Well I suppose there's you know, talk about 'oh they're not ref, they're not asylum seekers, they're economic refugees', and I think we probably do meet people... within our service like that, that might not be, ordinary, um, you know, might not be strictly-speaking, genuine asylum seekers and may have paid a passage to some dodgy people with a, a van or a container to bring them here to try and find a better life – I think that you know, we have met people like that within the service. Um... but [so would you say that's not a genuine asylum seeker in a way, or...]

## Difference b/w ASs & Rs

um, well I suppose asylum is you know, you, you, you're running for your life cos the government or the regime or the war is, or politically you're under threat. And they're, they're running from poverty. And that I suppose, that's the difference. [Um, ok.] Yeah and I don't think it's really my, um...I don't feel like... I would make a judgement on any of that, I think this terribly needy and very young and just [yeah] need a service, you know.

[Young Families Project Manager]

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## Disclosure of status: YP

YP1: ... it's like when you say, 'I'm an asylum seeker', every people will look... look at you just like, really... like you are weak person, you know. Just...

Th: Strangely

YP1: Yeah strangely.

YP1: mentions the word 'martian'

Th: [slight laugh] He said they... fix their eyes at you as if you are some... some...

SU: Martian, yeah

Th: =somebody who came from space or something. And um...

## Disclosure of status: YP

SU: Do you, do you not like telling other people then, because of that same reaction, that it's a negative reaction?

Th: Says it's very difficult. He says... it's quite, quite difficult because the other people who, who are not asylum seekers look at you like a stranger, and they look at you like you're not from the same social class as they were. And you know, you're kind of like isolated...

[YP1: Congolese male, 17]

# Emerging Themes

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# Emerging themes: YP

- Lack of knowledge of health systems (inc. sexual)
- Difficulties in accessing GP
- Mixed attitudes towards services
- Worry about uncertainty of their claims
- Explicit plan to delay sexual relationships for some
- enjoyment of school/college; High career aspirations
- Mixed experience of SRE (in countries of origin)
- Mixed sexual activity

# Services: Home Office

Th: =So they kept him waiting for long hours, yeah?  
He said there was a lady that um, the way they  
treated them was very stressful and there was a  
lady who, who spoke to him, who was like, she  
was talking to him, as looking at him 'you're like a  
little liar',... you know...

SU: They didn't believe you?

Th: They didn't believe her, him. They were just  
looking at him like a liar

[YP1: Congolese male, 17]

# Emerging themes: YP

- Lack of knowledge of health systems (inc. sexual)
- Difficulties in accessing GP
- Mixed attitudes towards services
- **Worry about uncertainty of their claims**
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- enjoyment of school/college; High career aspirations
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- Mixed sexual activity

## Uncertainty of status: YP

YP1: ...And then I sent my document again back, so I still wait. I still waiting for my document. I don't know... if I'm, I'm not have some answer or something, I'm gonna be *crazy!* I want some,... I don't want the document, but I want something to be sure, I'm gonna stay *here*. [bangs her fist on the desk] and I'm, I'm not gonna leave this country yeah?

SU: You just want... to be sure?

YP1: Yes.

SU: Yeah. [...] It's difficult when you don't know...

YP2: =yes

## Uncertainty of status: YP

YP1: =Yes, yes, because you waiting...

YP2: =You, you can't plan anything... You don't know where you stand

YP1: =You, you waiting day after day, you know? Oh, today, they come and they gonna say to me, 'Go to your country, go to your country', you know and it's not... it's not... good and easy. And stress everything...

YP2: =Yeah

YP1: =Everyday you, you, you remember this

YP2: =You think about that.

## Uncertainty of status: YP

YP2: Sometimes I don't want to go to school because, there's no, there's not point to go to school

SU: Why not?

YP2: Because you don't know, you don't know what, what tomorrow, er, brings for you, you don't know, you not gonna stay, they're gonna send you back. Yeah.

YP1: This is very scary.

YP2: Yeah

[YP1: Kosovan female, 17

YP2: Burundian female, 23]

# Emerging themes: YP

- Lack of knowledge of health systems (inc. sexual)
- Difficulties in accessing GP
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## Sexual experience: YP

SU: Boyfriend?

La: Yeah, boyfriends. Um, first, first time in here, nice. But...er went... um, yeah everybody yeah, with girlfriend, yeah, have baby yeah,... boyfriend no good, boyfriend yeah, go away.

SU: Here in England?

La: Yeah! England, yeah? Er...

SU: Everybody has... you're saying everybody... has babies?

La: Yeah, babies yeah?

SU: But no boyfriends?

# Sexual experience: YP

YP1 : Boyfriends...

SU: =the boyfriend's not there?

YP1 : Yeah! Boyfriends, no! Boyfriends say goodbye!

SU: Goodbye

YP1 : Ah, no..., good. No good. But now, yeah, babies, baby born, yeah he is... No... no go visits the, the baby.

SU: Your boyfriend doesn't even visit... the baby?

YP1 : No! He's no good!

SU: No good?

## Sexual experience: YP

YP1 : Yeah. I think er... parents and children are one hundred, so maybe, er, two, maybe ten, ten boyfriend yeah, no go away. Yeah.

[...]

YP1 : Um..., no, I try here yeah? [she starts writing the numbers 100% and then 10% on the info sheet]

SU: Yeah

YP1 : yeah, yeah

SU: One hundred percent [La: Yeah!] – all of them?

YP1 : Yeah, no, no, no. Ten.

SU: Oh ok...

# Sexual experience: YP

YP1 : Ten boyfriends not go away

SU: Ok, so ninety percent go away

YP1 : yeah, yeah yeah!

SU: but ten percent will stay. Ok, and what about... his, his dad? Is he still here, is he around?

YP1 : Yes, he's still here! But now, yeah, he's new girlfriend!

SU: he's got a new girlfriend?

YP1: Yeah, but now his new girlfriend, yeah, now new girlfriend... have baby!

## Sexual experience: YP

SU: She's had a baby as well?

YP1 : Yeah! He's had baby! He's er... not now... but now he er... baby er... three months, er... four months.

SU: Her baby is four months?

YP1 : Yeah! Four months!

SU: And he's seven months? [about her own baby]

YP1 : Yeah, he's seven months, oh no!

SU: So he didn't... he didn't stay at all?

YP1 : Now, he's er... he sleep new girlfriend, ah!

SU: So what happened, did he...

## Sexual experience: YP

YP1 : Um...

SU: did he go straight away? Did he stay for a little while?

YP1 : I don't know... some people.... I [inaudible] Yeah?  
Now um... er... he's have baby, and he's go back...  
he, he leave girlfriend, she had baby, he's goodbye!

SU: So he's, he's left her as well? Is he with her now, or is  
he gone, from her?

YP1: Yeah – he gone from her!

[YP1: Vietnamese female, 17]

# Sexual experience: Profs

Um, and we have those young girls who've repeatedly been pregnant since arriving in this country – so in a short space of a, maybe a year – you know, they might have been pregnant 3 times – so they're not discerning what is a close relationship. However, we can see why people resort to doing that... because you know, you're in London, you're away from what you know, you haven't got any family around, so that might be that bit of comfort you think hey, 'he's in love with me' and you know, that comfort is what they... need at the time.

[Nurse Clinician/Manager]

# Emerging Themes: Profs

- Strengthening local multi-agency working
- Inconsistent/incoherent policy
- YP need safe, secure environments
- Many YP - prev exp of sexual violence/ torture/ teenage pregnancy; risk of sexual exploitation; trafficking
- Mental health needs – counselling an issue
- General treatment of YP in UK not good

# General Position: Profs

Ok, um, and generally what do you think the position of young asylum seekers and refugees is, within the UK...

I think [slight laugh] I think they're terribly... vulnerable group. I think they're extremely unpopular in the public, in the media's eye, I think that's fuelled by the media. I don't think they get nearly as much as... the public believes they receive... perhaps they get more than they might if they were in another country, so maybe that's why they're keen to settle here and not in France, or whatever...

# General Position: Profs

Um, but I, I don't think they're getting wonderful housing and all of our jobs and all of our money... and a colour television thrown in, I really don't. Not when I see how they're living and what they've got – I think it's terrible.

Ok, and so you think, kind of, the media, perpetuates that?

Definitely, definitely.

[Young Families Project Manager]

# Conclusion

- Need to do more consultation – lack of sexual health research with this gp
- YP's info needs must be addressed
- Isolation – central theme – how can we influence their social networks? impact on sexual health?
- Certain gps have high SRE needs
- (How) do we build on active decisions by some YP to delay sexual relationships?
- UASC – conceived as children or asylum seekers first and foremost?

# Discussion 1: policy & practice

- Do you have any experience in working/doing research with this group?
- What might the implications be for policy and practice?
- How can services be adapted to better meet this group's needs?
- What are the barriers to service access for this group?
- What is the likely impact to be of changing policy?

## Discussion 2: Reflections

- Access to this group – relatively difficult for research & practice – are they ‘hard to reach’?
- Language difficulties – pros and cons of using interpreters vs trying to ‘interpret’ ourselves?
- Due to time and access constraint, involving these users in the research process can be difficult; how to overcome?
- Could our methods have been changed to yield more detailed accounts of YP’s sexual health/experience?

## Further Info

- About project:

[s.uppal@city.ac.uk](mailto:s.uppal@city.ac.uk)

- Other links/resources:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

# Lessons for Policy & Practice?

- Lack of control on Central govt policy, but local policy & decision-making - more co-ordinated
- ESOL departments – good point of access to YP
- Dev't of health packs for all YP, through central pt of access
- Training for all profs working with this gp
- Better links with agencies across borough
- Services need to be more aware of needs, though not nec population specific
- Outreach work to refugee/community organisations
- What is the role of frontliners in feeding back to policy?