

Specificities in the Guidance of Refugees from Ukraine

J. Masan (Jan Masan)^{1,2}, M. Hamarova (Mariana Hamarova)¹, M. Lichner (Milos Lichner)⁴, M. Smidova (Maria Smidova)⁴, K. Trebski (Krzystof Trebski)⁴

¹ St. John Paul II. Institute of Missiology and Tropical Health at St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia.

² University of Thessaly, Greece.

³ University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia.

⁴ Faculty of Theology, Trnava University in Trnava, Slovakia.

Original Article

E-mail address:

hamarova.mariana@gmail.com

Reprint address:

Mariana Hamarova

Missiology department, St. John Paul II. School of Missiology and Tropical Health SEU

Pod Brehmi 4/A

841 03 Bratislava

Slovakia

Source: *Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention*
Pages: 8 – 12

Volume: 13
Cited references: 7

Issue: 4

Reviewers:

Selvaraj Subramanian

SAAaRMM, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Catherine Mulama

Joshka, Kenya

Keywords:

Refugees. Ukraine. Migration. Physical Health. Mental Health. Adaptation. Systemic Support. Guidance. Cultural Differences.

Publisher:

International Society of Applied Preventive Medicine i-gap

CSWHI 2022; 13(4): 8 – 12; DOI: 10.22359/cswi_13_4_02 © Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention

Abstract:

Between March and June 2022 a study was conducted with social workers working with refugees from Ukraine as a result of the war. The research involved 30 respondents aged 30-55 from family centers operating in Slovakia and Poland. For this research, qualitative research methodology was used. Standardized interviews were used as a tool for data collection. The results of the research have generated three main themes with further specified sub-areas of concern: what experience the staff of the family centers have in receiving refugees; the needs associated with the situation of receiving refugees since the

outbreak of the war; how the staff perceive guidance when working with refugees from Ukraine. Staff at the family centers reported several types of problems in relation to migration from Ukraine. Based on their answers, it can be concluded that the range of problems exceeds both the possibilities and competences of a single worker or guide. For systematic support, a multidisciplinary approach with the involvement of experts from different fields, e.g. social workers, psychologists, lawyers &/or clergy, is needed. An individual and flexible approach should be kept in mind, given that refugees may have different backgrounds, experiences and needs. It is not easy to ascertain the actual capacities of the assistance centers. Further similar investigations focusing on the actual practical impact could help to improve the effective assistance provided to refugees from Ukraine while simultaneously increasing its quality.

Introduction

This paper presents a summary of the results of the research conducted between March and June 2022. When working with refugees, reflective and empathetic understanding is essential, as well as creating a supportive climate for the client/each refugee and her or his family with regard to their individual needs. The worker's expression of appreciation, respect and acceptance of the client and his or her family, showing confidence in the client's ability to solve and cope with problems, is also important in this process (3). At the same time, it is important to help clients to at least try to see difficulties and suffering as integral elements of human life, without destructive factors. Each person is seen as unique and unrepeatable in the light of this process (5).

Methods

Design

Qualitative research methodology was used for the purpose of the present research. A qualitative approach is appropriate, for example, because of the following characteristics: interest in meaning (how people perceive the meaning of their lives and the structure of the world); the researcher is the instrument for data collection and analysis; fieldwork; of an exploratory and descriptive nature due to the interest in the process; meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures; inductive in that the researcher builds abstracts, concepts, hypotheses and theories from the words of the respondents (7,1). The

qualitative approach also has the advantage of allowing a deeper and more diverse study of complex topics involving many levels of feelings and experience (6).

Data collection and sample selection

The sample for this research was chosen by the purposive sampling method. This method of selection allows a wide range of methods to be used to locate all possible or specific cases or hard-to-reach groups of respondents (4,1). 30 respondents aged 30-55 years participated in the study. The prerequisites for entry into the research were completed university studies in social work and a minimum of five years' experience in the field. Respondents were recruited from family centers operating in Slovakia and Poland.

The data collection process in this research began by contacting potential research participants in person, through center directors, or via email or online applications. Once contact was established, the purpose of the research was presented. Subsequently, ethical issues of the research were discussed and the contacted participants were asked to participate in the research. The following meeting focused on the purpose of data collection. The primary means of collecting qualitative data is through research interviews. In this research, standardized interviews were used in order to establish a detailed picture of the research participants' opinions, perceptions or narratives about a certain topic. Each interview lasted 70 minutes.

The authors of the article formed a research team. First, they contacted the research participants and, after the interviews were conducted, recorded their transcripts as well as research notes. A joint discussion of the research findings was held in a plenary session, with the authors paying particular attention to unusual aspects, biases and assumptions (such as cultural and religious differences). The research reflects participants' particular experience.

Ethical matters

Careful attention to ethical matters should be paid when planning research. Social work research in particular is often an intrusion into the lives of respondents and it involves the sharing of personal information. Research participants should therefore be protected. A safe environment should be provided for participants during the research so that they can disclose their experience without fear. Their participation in the research must be voluntary. Their willingness to cooperate in the research should therefore be respected, as should their potential refusal. Their anonymity should also be preserved so that they cannot be identified (1).

Prior to conducting the research, participants were given in writing the option to withdraw from the research at any time. After receiving participants' written and signed consent to their voluntary participation, they were also provided with a data protection statement in line with GDPR and, to ensure their legal protection as well as the legal protection of the research, specialist consents were also sought from them along with their consent to the processing of their personal data. All these consents were also provided and signed by the research participants.

With the consent of research participants, interviews were recorded by the authors, then carefully transcribed and the recordings were erased in the presence of the interviewees in order to preserve their anonymity.

The aim of the research was to describe what the staff of the family centers experienced when receiving refugees and to identify what needs have been generated by the situation since the outbreak of the military conflict.

The research question focused on the achievement of the research objective was as fol-

lows: what are the experiences of the interviewees in working with refugees from Ukraine?

Results

Analysis

All respondents were given the same range of topics on which to comment. The analysis compared and examined data from the interview transcripts based on an eight-step strategy (2). It then looked at the individual themes that the interviewees addressed in the interviews.

Topic No. 1: The experiences of the family center staff regarding receiving refugees

Family center staff coming into contact with refugees from Ukraine identified several levels of problems that refugees have to face:

Mental health – psychological well-being or discomfort is affected not only by the reason for immigration itself connected to fears for one's safety and existence, but also by the material and non-material losses associated with emigration (social background, work, self-fulfillment, property...). The emotions that refugees have to face, primarily related to the flight itself, such as trauma, fear, sadness, but also secondary emotions arising from their new status, such as shame, dependency and distrust, have a major impact on their mental health. All of these create vulnerability and require the support of both volunteers and professionals.

"During this period of waiting, refugees say that they are often just placed somewhere and become dependent on the help of others..."

"...in addition to the trauma caused by the war and also by arriving on our territory, refugees also suffer from having to depend on others to survive."

Physical health – psychological discomfort is also a risk factor for physical health. Migrants who arrive with health problems require special care in this area.

Problems arising from migration itself – asylum application, waiting for asylum, temporary placement in institutions or families.

Adaptation issues:

Problems related to everyday life – logistics (transportation), language barrier, cultural differences.

"Refugees from Ukraine, based on their own words, commonly experience barriers related to transport, language, loss of their social networks, financial difficulties and limited access to their material and non-material resources."

Problems related to self-realization/their place in society – finding work, a school or nursery school for children. Job placement is also a specific problem in terms of finding work in a field relevant to the applicant's education and skills. Some immigrants experience a change in social status, economic and subsistence problems which can have a negative impact on family dynamics and partnerships.

Potential problems – discrimination and prejudice of the majority, bullying. In all these areas, it should not be forgotten that it is not only adults but also children who require special access and care.

Workers are also confronted with migrants' mistrust of the support system which is the result of long-standing insecurity towards the authorities and persistent fears for their safety and the safety of their families. Some of them do not even trust the interpreter assigned to them.

"Based on my experience, in the area of mental health support for refugees, they do not believe that such professional support, counseling or guidance will help them to cope with their difficulties, traumas or problems they face, nor are they willing to participate in counseling or guidance."

Topic No. 2: Needs related to receiving refugees since the outbreak of the war

According to their statements, the staff working in the family centers perceive and realize that the focus of services for the most vulnerable refugees coming from Ukraine oriented towards the fastest possible self-sufficiency is not fully developed and that refugees, in addition to the traumas caused by the war and also by arriving in other countries with an underdeveloped support system, suffer from the fact that they have to depend on others for important issues not only for their basic survival, but also for their future lives.

Therefore, they list the areas they say need to be addressed and where support needs to be provided to refugees in order to make their integration as smooth as possible:

the work permit process;
healthcare provision;
psychological support (also for children);
legal support;
spiritual support.

Topic No. 3: Staff perception of guidance when working with refugees from Ukraine

Respondents receiving and coming into contact with refugees from Ukraine have the space to use guidance, for example through a Rogerian or logo-therapeutic approach in their work. Based on their previous experience, the respondents identified certain needs of refugees that are important for the guidance process.

"They have lost hope, they lived through a situation that has completely changed their attitude to life and their values. They are looking for a new hope in life. They need to experience empathy and unconditional acceptance from a social or other support worker, and the associated feeling of knowing that there is someone who cares about them. Then it is possible for support workers to begin to build trust with the refugees as well in order to help them focus on a new meaning of life so that they can become more confident. In the meantime, their sense of meaning is given to them by other people, friends who surround them and whom they love very much. According to the testimonies of many of them, they can only survive when they have something to live for again, when they have the motivation to live for something again."

"The guidance that refugees need should be oriented towards unconditional acceptance and a deep empathic understanding, a rediscovery of the meaning of life. One can see here a certain link between the Rogerian approach and the logo-therapeutic approach."

According to respondents in the family centers, refugees need effective and flexible guides who are helpful in a variety of areas. Their demonstration of respect and regard for refugees, and their ability to see past cultural differences, is a basic prerequisite.

"Guides working with refugees from Ukraine should, in my opinion, be more oriented towards bringing religious and cultural aspects into the guidance process with clients."

Potentially, it would also be worth considering recruiting guides from among refugees who

have previously worked in the helping professions.

Discussion

Workers from family centers in Slovakia and Poland have identified a number of problems associated with migration from Ukraine. According to them, it is still unknown what other types of problems, including long-term ones with serious consequences, will arise in the process.

The above-mentioned problems show that their scale is beyond the possibilities and competences of a single worker or a guide. Systemic support requires a multidisciplinary approach in which experts from several professions should be represented: social workers, psychologists, lawyers, clergy.

As these people have very different backgrounds, experiences and needs, the approach should be individual and flexible. The question is what the real capacities of the different help centers are.

Conclusion

Refugees from Ukraine have experienced a lot of trauma, grief and loss of self-determination as a result of the conflict. They go through different changes and types of crisis situations that often do not allow for one-off solutions without complications or tensions.

In order to improve the provision of effective assistance to refugees from Ukraine, as well as to increase its quality, it is important to conduct further similar research with real impacts on the ground.

For example, important research in this area should also be conducted with guides and others who provide a variety of support to refugees from Ukraine: what their actual needs are; what difficulties they encounter in their work.

If the situation or circumstances change in the refugee crisis in Ukraine, it is advisable to repeat qualitative or quantitative research, or a combination of both: a small sample of respondents for qualitative research and a larger sample of respondents for quantitative research, which can map the currently identified problems, as well as the more specified needs in guidance in more depth and potentially identify new, effective solutions.

References

1. CRESWELL J W (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California *SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.* 2013.
2. FIFE D (2020) The Eight Steps of Data Analysis: A Graphical Framework to Promote Sound Statistical Analysis. In *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, (June 5, 2020) <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620917333>.
3. FINKE J (2004) *Conversational psychotherapy - fundamentals and specific applications*. Stuttgart: Georg Thieme Verlag, 2004
4. PATTON M Q (2014) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods. Integrating Theory and Practice*. *SAGE Publications, Inc* 2014.
5. POPIELSKI K (2005) *The noetic dimension of personality. Psychological analysis of the sense of meaning in life*. Trnava. Faculty of Philosophy, University of Trnava, Trnava University, 2005.
6. ROULSTON A (2021) The impact of time and communication on professional. Decision making regarding patients with advanced lung cancer: Interpretative phenomenological analysis of focus groups with specialist palliative care professionals. In *Acta Missiologica*, 2021 15 (1) p 12; 7-25. ISSN: 1337-7515 (Print) ISSN: 2453-7160. (Online) <https://www.actamissiologica.com/>.
7. TASHAKKORI A, TEDDLIE C (2010) *SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*. *SAGE Publications, Inc* 2010.