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Unaccompanied refugee minors: navigating cultural transitions during resettlement in a Nordic country

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

Background

Worldwide, there are many asylum-seeking children and adolescent not accompanied by their caregivers, making them vulnerable. At arrival in their host country, the process of facing cross-cultural transition and subsequent adaption and adjustment, commonly referred to as acculturation, can entail both possibilities and challenges. To better facilitate the resettlement processes, we need more knowledge about how the youths themselves understand their acculturation process.

Objective

In this study we analyzed interviews with unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) with two research questions in mind: 1. *How do the youths describe the Norwegian society and culture?* and 2. *How do the youths navigate within this cultural and societal framework during their first five years in their host country?* Our aim was to better understand their acculturation processes, based on their own understandings when facing an unknown culture.

Method

Data comes from a longitudinal study of URMs arriving in Norway before the age of 16. Face to face interviews were conducted with 48 URMs approximately 2 and 5 years after their arrival. To explore the first research question, a thematic analysis was done including interviews from all 48 youths at both time points. The results from this analysis gave us an understanding of the societal and cultural framework, as seen from the youths themselves, they had to relate to during resettlement. Based on the results from the first analysis, a second analysis was done using Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis. This analysis aimed to explore the second research question; how they navigated in this cultural and societal framework.

Results & Conclusion

The first analysis resulted in four themes, Childrens rights, Political principles, Family relations & Development, and Norms, with several subordinate themes. Several of these themes are in line with research literature describing “the Nordic model”, such as a strong welfare state and physical punishment of children being illegal. The second analysis, regarding how the youths navigated within this societal and cultural framework, resulted in two themes: Working hard to re-establish their lives by finding keys into the society, and Balancing between different, and often conflicting, expectations. Knowledge regarding the cultural and societal framework these youths are facing and how they navigate within this during resettlement is important knowledge to identify possible cross-cultural challenges and promote positive developmental tracks.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion