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“...THEN I STOPPED THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE”

Views of Iraqi Asylum Seekers On Inclusion & Exclusion

ABSTRACT

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[Pages and attachments](#)

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The purpose of this thesis was to gain a better understanding of Iraqi asylum seekers' experiences of inclusion and exclusion in Helsinki. The aim was an increase in awareness of their opinions based on the personal accounts gathered from interviews.

Six asylum seekers were chosen for the interviews. All of them were interviewed in person in Helsinki. Other common factors were their age, they were all in their 20s or early 30s. One was female, the rest were male. At the time of the interviews, two of them were living in reception centres, the rest in private accommodation or with friends.

The main subjects of discussion involved the opinions and experiences of living as newcomers in Finland still waiting for the decision on the residence permit.

The issues that hindered or promoted the feeling of belonging were discussed.

The results suggested that the feeling of inclusion was not a simple issue and that there were numerous situations where a newcomer was left feeling excluded.

The impact of the long wait for the residence permit decision was evident from the interviews. All of those interviewed had been waiting around three years for the decision.

Some concrete steps were suggested in the conclusion to promote integration more effectively based on the interviews and my own research both professional and personal.

Keywords: Asylum, Integration, Trust, Inclusion, Exclusion, Resilience.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that we are in midst of a worldwide refugee crisis, 68,5 million people are being forced from their homes globally, 25,4 million of them are refugees and 3.1 million are asylum seekers. Such figures have never previously been reached. The working definition of a refugee is a person fleeing conflict or persecution and that of an asylum seeker, is a person who has applied for international protection and whose refugee status has not been decided yet (UNHCR, 18.)

According to UNHCR, around one million people seek asylum every year. The Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia, Kosovo, and Eritrea were the six top source countries together submitting 381 900 or 45 per cent of all asylum applications recorded among the 44 industrialized countries (UNHCR, 18.)

The majority of people fleeing from their country remain in the neighbouring countries and 85 % of displaced people remain in the developing countries (UNHCR, 18.) Only 3,5 % of refugees arrive in Europe (Finnish Refugee Council, n.d.)

Since 2000, Finland has received 1,500–6,000 asylum seekers each year, aside from 2015, in which a record number of asylum seekers, 32 476 arrived. This increase was due to the global refugee crisis, the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War (Ministry of the Interior, 18.)

The number of people who applied for asylum in Finland in 2016 was around 5600 and asylum applications dropped further in 2017 (YLE Uutiset, 17.) The number of recent asylum seekers reaching Finland could be described as a small trickle compared to many other countries, but it is still significant compared to what Finland has received in its recent history. The largest number of applicants for several consecutive years has been from Iraq (Finnish Immigration Service, 18.)

For this thesis the focus was on Iraqi asylum seekers who arrived in Finland the latter part of 2015 and who are now in Helsinki. The ones that were selected to be interviewed were ones

who were still asylum seekers in 2018, suggesting that their asylum processes had not been straightforward. Several potential interviewees were found through the Tutuksi project or the voluntary work with asylum seekers. A number of them were selected and they were asked what experiences they had had regarding being part of Finnish society, whether they had felt included or excluded.

The reason that Iraqis were chosen as my target group was that they are the largest group of asylum seekers that I am in contact with currently and because I speak fluent Iraqi Arabic, so was able to talk to them directly in their mother-tongue and have fruitful conversations. In my opinion, asylum seekers' voices are not heard sufficiently. I would argue that unless you have interacted closely with migrants to Finland who have the experiences of seeking asylum then you will lack a good understanding of how the Finnish immigration system works and what its downfalls are.

According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights all have been born free and equal with the same rights and freedoms. It forbids degrading treatment and servitude. According to it, all are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of the Declaration (United Nations, n.d.) It is evident that these rights are not fully recognised whilst a person is seeking asylum.

I am not representing any organisation and am basing my personal views on the numerous discussions I have had throughout the years with migrants, refugees and in particular more recently, asylum seekers.

'We should never apologise for demanding our human rights' (Bralo 2018)

2 BACKGROUND

One of the Tutuksi project's main aims is to improve the experience and feeling of inclusion as a newcomer in his/her local community by finding various places where newcomers can spend their free-time and find new hobbies or continue old ones. The project aims to improve the participation, network development and integration of recent arrivals to Finland (Tutuksi, 2017.) However, Tutuksi is a small organisation and can reach only a fraction of newcomers and the main focus is on free-time.

Tutuksi staff are regularly contacted by people wanting to participate in some activity where they are able to meet others, especially Finns, some have no other criteria for their wishes. A person needs to have feelings of belonging, connecting and being accepted by other people (Klemettilä, 2018). These will hopefully be promoted by participating in an activity that gives a feeling of wellbeing, one that people are keen to do and get enjoyment from. They can be hobbies and other activities that have a positive impact on the individual.

These feelings can be improved with different and meaningful activities and because of that, leisure time activity can be a method for adaptation. Implication and self-activation can play a major role in the adaptation of asylum seekers and immigrants because new environments and manners become more familiar through guided activities (Tuomi, Heikkilä, Rita, 2017.)

Working at Tutuksi and being in contact with people regarding their free-time has brought about many discussions about the general feeling of being new in the country. Initially, the Tutuksi project was aimed at asylum seekers only, but with the changing situation of asylum seekers in Finland, namely the reduced number of them and the extended waiting process for permits, the project is also intended for other recent immigrants to the country.

I feel strongly that the current asylum system is failing those it is intended to help. The asylum process is very long and difficult, the criteria for obtaining work or a school place are tight and numerous other services available to Finnish residents are out of reach of the asylum seeker. One argument raised has been that part of the reason for these obstacles are that it has

been made to appear this unattractive by the current political climate, authorities and people in power as a deterrent to asylum seekers.

It is up to the individual to decide for him/herself how they feel about this issue and whether they support what has been decided politically. The entire decision making process faced a new situation with the refugee influx of 2015. "Finland -- an open country that prides itself on respecting different ways of life, cultures and religions -- is being greatly tested by the wave of Middle Eastern asylum seekers" (Bunikowski, 2016.)

According to the Minister of Employment and the Economy, Jari Lindström, Finland has to introduce new methods in order to make integration more effective. One such method is the Social Impact Bonds (SIB) and its aim is to improve the integration process of a newcomer into the society. "Having a job definitely increases the immigrants' wellbeing and link to Finnish society" (Hämäläinen, 2015.)

From searching through a number of reception centre websites on regulations for asylum seekers, no mention of free-time could be found and there were no guidelines evident that the service providers had any obligation of ensuring that some free-time activities were provided. This is not to say that they do not exist, but rather indicates how many other matters are considered a bigger priority, understandably so. The long process of seeking asylum is seen as a waiting time in general and the services provided are indeed limited.

In light of all these issues, the experiences of asylum seekers became increasingly interesting. All of the people interviewed had been waiting around three years for the decision of whether they would get permission to stay in Finland. As the state of uncertainty is prolonged, it can be seen to have an impact on the person physically and psychologically. A suitable description for this stage is limbo-like where the person is not certain where he belongs (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017.) This stage of limbo is where the people interviewed were living in.

Asylum can only be sought in person in Finland or through the UNHCR quota refugee system (Refugee Law and Policy: Finland, 2016.) You may get asylum in Finland if you have a well-founded fear of being persecuted in your home country or your country of permanent residence because of your origin, religion, nationality, membership of a certain social group, political opinions. Another requirement is that you cannot rely on the protection of the authorities of

your home country or country of permanent residence because of the persecution you fear (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018.)

Having said that though, the political situation in Finland has changed in recent years and the process for receiving asylum has tightened. It cannot be guaranteed anymore that these criteria will be honoured.

The political atmosphere in Finland and in other Western countries has been negative with regards to migration in the past years. The second most powerful political party in Finland at this moment in time is the True Finns (Perussuomalaiset). It is known for its anti-EU, anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stance. Its leader, Timo Soini, is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Prior to last year's election, the True Finns website stated: "Finland is not to make everybody happy in the world. Finland should take care of the Finns first." The slogan explains much about the seemingly contradictory domestic and international immigration policies of the Finnish government (Bunikowski, 2016.)

The European Union signed an agreement with Turkey in Spring 2016 allowing asylum seekers to be returned to Turkey. The EU-Turkey agreement is very problematic from the human rights point of view. Since the signing of the agreement Turkey has broken the agreement by sending people back to countries classed as dangerous, like Afghanistan (Finnish Refugee Council, n.d.)

Another example of the tightened situation is that humanitarian protection used to be granted due to difficult regional conditions. In 2016 the Finnish government removed from legislation the residence permit based on humanitarian protection due to the fact that many other European countries were planning to remove all humanitarian protection from their legislation, which in turn makes getting subsidiary protection more difficult (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018.)

Subsidiary protection status is given if you are under the threat of death penalty, execution, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in your home country or country of permanent residence or you cannot return to your home country or country of permanent residence without facing serious personal danger because of an armed conflict that causes indiscriminate violence in that country. This status can be withdrawn if the circumstances that

led to its granting no longer exist or have changed to such a degree that you no longer need protection. (Finnish Immigration Services, Permits and Citizenship, 2018.)

In early 2015, before the current migration crisis, the average processing time for asylum applications was 157 days. The estimate in the summer 2018 is around 6 months for a first-time asylum seeker (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018.) In actual fact this period is often a great deal longer as can be seen with the people being interviewed.

In 2016, the number of new asylum seekers in Finland was significantly less than the previous year, around 5600 persons. Most of the asylum seekers in 2016, some 1 250 people, were Iraqi nationals (Yle Uutiset, 2017.) In the same year new assessments of the security situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia were completed and new guidelines concerning asylum requests were conducted by the Immigration Service (European Migration Network Study, 2017.)

In May 2016, on the basis of the assessments, the Finnish Immigration Service specified that it was possible to return asylum seekers to Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia without the ongoing armed conflicts as such presenting a danger to them only because they are staying in the country. A Joint Declaration on cooperation concerning return was signed with Afghanistan in October 2016. Discussions concerning returns to Somalia and Iraq were also carried out (EMN Study, 2017.) From October 2017 to September 2018 out of the 6594 applications 2842 applicants were granted asylum, 2110 were given negative decisions. There were 2802 Iraqi applicants and around half were granted asylum (Statistics Finland, 2018.)

The United Nations chapter on identifying social inclusion and exclusion talks about these concepts with regards to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. One of the goals, is about promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies. Its target is to 'ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.)

One may be forgiven for asking why the topics of exclusion and inclusion are so important. The argument for this is that the wellbeing of all members, also the marginalised and excluded members of society and the community affect the overall wellbeing of the rest. Even if the individuals or groups of people that were being excluded were not significant personally,

then it is still important to realise that everyone's wellbeing is strengthened by improving the position of those who are the weakest (Kainulainen, 2017, 69.)

“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'.

There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

— Arundhati Roy (Indian writer, activist)

3 THEORY AND MAIN CONCEPTS

3.1 Exclusion

Exclusion is defined as lack of participation. Participation can also be limited when people cannot exercise their voice or interact with each other, and when their rights and dignity are not accorded equal respect and protection. Social exclusion entails not only material deprivation but also lack of agency or control over important decisions as well as feelings of alienation and inferiority' (UN Stats, 2018.)

Many asylum seekers can relate to these experiences. They have left the old but have not yet been accepted into the new. Being 'outside' mainstream society in some way and not having full entitlements means these feelings of exclusion may be even more severe for asylum seekers who will likely have had experiences of exclusion previously. Asylum seekers are separated from mainstream benefits support, provisions of accommodation, employment and other entitlements that would promote 'inclusion' (Hynes, 2011, 20.)

The consequences of exclusion may be further withdrawal from the surrounding community. It can be said that many aspects of the quality of life are affected by the consequences of social exclusion. Exclusion may occur due to inaccessibility to services available to only some members of society and not others. Taking part in activities may also be hindered by inaccessibility, inability for another reason or unwillingness by the individual. These all impact on the quality of life.

In a seminar on poverty and social exclusion in Scotland and the United Kingdom, the diagram below was used (Bramley, 2014). It presents some of the big issues affected by social exclusion and affecting it.

Figure 1 Social Exclusion



The figure shows the impact social exclusion can have on a person on the whole. It affects a person's everyday life on multiple levels and can have a compounding effect. Exclusion affects health, participation and general provision and use of resources. It is connected with the general well-being of a person.

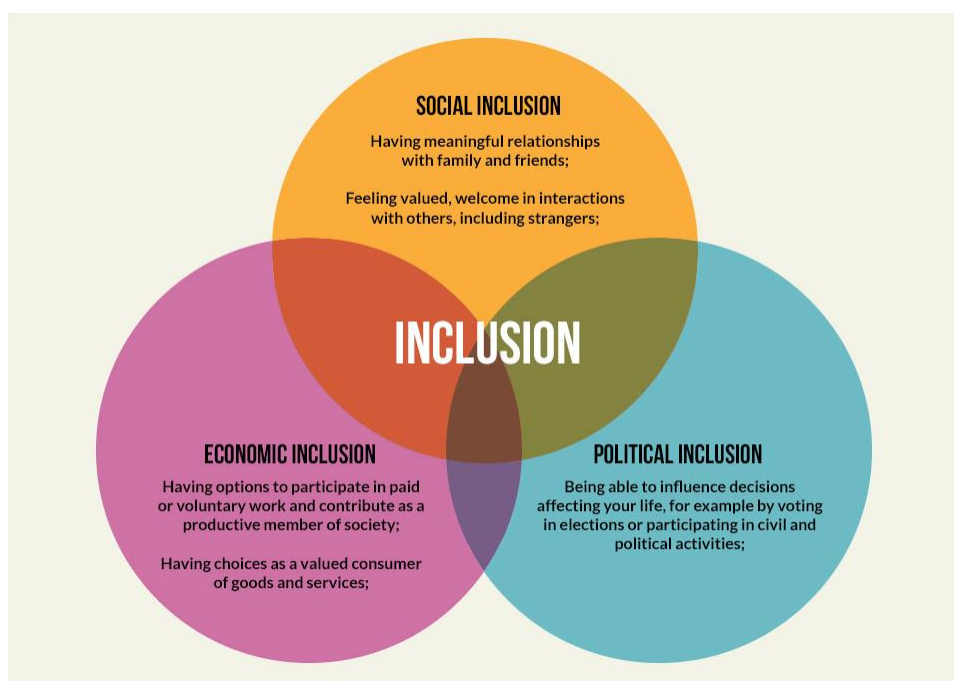
Social exclusion is affected by resources and their accessibility and availability, which impacts on the quality of life, all of which impact on participation. If you are excluded, then you may be less likely and willing to be active and more likely to withdraw. Negative experiences may mean that the motivation to participate diminishes. After experiencing being excluded, migrating and arriving in a new place, the journey to a country of asylum is necessarily often based on finding some form of 'belonging' (Hynes, 2001, 5.)

3.2 Inclusion

Inclusion is the experience of mattering and being part of some community, as well as being able to influence one's own life and having the feeling of having joint common issues. (Isola, 2017) Social inclusion and social integration are sometimes used referring to the same issue. Both lead to social cohesion. "By social cohesion I am referring to how a group work together as a unit" (Easterly, 2006; Hulse and Stone, 2007; OECD, 2011; UN, 2010.)

Exclusion and inclusion can be intertwined. Exclusion from one group or social category usually leads to inclusion in another group, so experiencing being included, for example, does not mean that you are therefore not excluded. It could mean that by being excluded from the mainstream you are then included in a more marginalised group. These experiences vary depending on the situation (Katisko, 2015.)

Figure 2 Social Inclusion



Svenska Youth League have designed the figure above to demonstrate inclusion and how many aspects of it are interlinked. Similar keywords, participation, influence and being valued arise that are connected with exclusion. Experiences of being included will increase the desire to participate and interact with others (Svenska Youth League, 2018.)

4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research published in Finland regarding asylum seekers and participation could be found in abundance. However, the majority of it seemed to have been carried out on underage asylum seekers. Many interviews carried out were also from the staff or volunteer's point of view. Other popular topics involved health issues and employment. It appeared that research specifically on Iraqi asylum seekers in Helsinki and their feelings of participation in Finnish society has not been carried out previously.

Repeatedly, previous research found that the feelings of inclusion and participation come from everyday experiences and positive interactions with other people. Ulla Björnberg studied social relationships and trust amongst asylum seeker families in Gothenburg for the University of Gothenburg. Asylum seekers there were asked about trust and social relationships as newcomers. Some were indifferent, suspicious or ambivalent about how to relate to the people in their area due their experiences as asylum seekers, but for some the experience was close to mistrust. Others were not able to be socially active with local people because they did not have a language in common. Some were fearful because of their situation, that their whereabouts or their personal information would be discovered. Some people felt that as their future was uncertain, they did not want to build contacts as their stay was possibly temporary. Some were so exhausted by their situation that they were withdrawn for this reason and had very little trust in general. Some of the stories "showed how avoiding the risk of running into problems generated a strategy to stay invisible" (Björnberg, 2011.) It is evident that there are numerous challenges to interactions and building of contacts between newcomers and local members of the community.

Maiju Viikinniemi from Tampere University of Applied Sciences wrote her thesis looking at participation, but focusing on unaccompanied underage asylum seekers living in Satakieli group home for underage asylum seekers. She found that the most valuable feature of participation was the sense of community. An important factor that influenced this was the feeling that the people involved could affect their own life (Viikinniemi, 2018.) So it was not just being

a member of the community, but actually being able to be an active member and have an influence and voice your opinions that was viewed as being important. This was made possible with interactions with the staff and meetings where all were invited. Most of the youth gave a lot of positive feedback about the group and family home's facilities, activities and time spent one-to-one with their own appointed staff member. (Tuomi et al., 2017.)

According to research carried out by Virva Nissinen for the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences on Paavali local parish in Helsinki, the sense of communality and inclusion were confirmed through working together and by increasing the new opportunities to cooperate. Significant was also the positive attitude of the workers of the parish. The parish was described as being inclusive and tolerant and people felt they were welcome and that the parish operated closely with the everyday life of the people (Nissinen, 2016.)

Nella Niemi made an information folder for Kontioniemi reception centre regarding free-time activities. On the subject of leisure time activities it was found that displaying different leisure time activities and possibilities to the asylum seekers furthered their integration and prevented social exclusion. Their attachment to the Finnish society was facilitated by various social contacts created during their leisure time activities. The asylum seekers also had a desire to activate themselves and seek out meaningful activities in their close environment. The well-being of an individual effects the wellness of the society as a whole (Niemi, 2010.)

Heidi Telkki did her research for Oulu University of Applied Sciences and focused on women, their wishes and their feelings of empowerment. An empowered person is described as someone, who has the right to self-determination, is an active member of society and feels in control of his/her everyday life. A prerequisite for empowerment is that resources for well-being are realised. These can be categorised into three: standard of living, common relations and a form of self-realisation in the country of origin as well as in Finland. Significant is also the approach of the staff working with the immigrants and that their behaviour supported life management and empowerment (Telkki, 2010.)

Participation was experienced in varying degrees. An example of this was a family group home where some of the young people there were interviewed and they stated that they "can have an impact and a say at matters that concern themselves, although for some of the youths it was unclear who actually sets the rules and plans what actions are taken". (Tuomi et al., 2017)

It can be concluded that in order for a feeling of participation to be achieved it was not solely about being active and getting involved, but it was as much about the people you were in interaction with and what the prerequisites were to getting your voice heard namely amongst the surrounding people in the community.

5 AIM OF THE THESIS

The experiences asylum seekers had of being newcomers in Finnish society, and whether they felt part of the new society they were living in was looked into. Had they found their place in the community and been able to participate in activities and interact with people around them. These are some of the issues that define participation. (Isola, 2017)

One of the major issues of being an asylum seeker in the Finnish system is the fact that you are given access to many of the public welfare services only after you have a residence permit. Before that you may find employment, a place to study, a home, but your entitlements are limited.

The legislation on integration (Kotoutumislaki) states that its purpose is to support and promote integration and opportunities for migrants to participate actively in Finnish society. Its purpose is also to promote equality and interaction amongst various groups of people in Finnish society. These legislations come into effect once a person has been granted permission to stay in the country (Finlex, 2010.)

The Finnish Integration policy looks good in principle, but in practice it falls short in many ways. There are problems with regards to the differences in interpreting and implementing it (Saukkonen, 2016, 16.) The National Institute for Health and Welfare is involved in the development of a new social and health care system in Finland. The reforms are to be updated in the near future (National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), 2018.)

The interview questions (Appendix 1) were planned so that topics brought up were related to the asylum seekers experiences in Finnish society in everyday situations. Suggestions were asked on how they would improve their situation with regards to integration, if they had the ability to do so. The purpose of this thesis was to find out the experiences of asylum seekers after arriving in Finland in order to gain a better understanding of their inclusion process.

The research question is:

How are the experiences of inclusion and exclusion apparent in asylum seekers' everyday life?

6 RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The community-based participatory research (CBPR) method was used in order to increase knowledge and understanding of the local asylum seeker's situation in particular and present it in order for people to know more about what experiences asylum seekers are having around us. If more people were aware of the struggles, then perhaps they would be inclined to do something about the situation. If more action was taken towards easing the waiting time for asylum seekers, then it could lead to improvements in some aspects of life for the asylum seekers and benefit the local community at the same time.

CBPR focuses on social, structural, and physical environmental inequities through active involvement of community members, organisational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process. Its aim is to increase knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon and integrate the knowledge gained with action that has the purpose of improving some aspect of the life of the community members (Israel, 2001.)

The main method of data collection was done by way of interviews based on a list of questions formulated (Appendix 1.) The interviews were semi-structured thematic interviews and the themes were built around the issues of inclusion and exclusion in everyday life situations.

Qualitative research asks for a relationship between the researcher and the research subjects (Dench, 2004, 31), so the six Iraqi asylum seekers were chosen as I knew them personally and had formed a trusting relationship with them. The interviewee's willingness to participate was asked and the interviews were conducted individually and anonymously. The thesis subject and interview purpose were explained initially. All of those asked to be interviewed accepted without hesitation.

For the interviews a list of loose questions was compiled in order to leave the interviewee with as much space to talk as freely as possible. All the questions were not asked in all of the interviews if the issues concerning the thesis were covered. The idea was to hear the personal accounts of the people interviewed.

The interviews began by explaining what subjects the degree was about and in more detail what the thesis at hand was on, what the purpose of the interview was and went through the consent form (Appendix 2.) The interviewee's permission to use a dictaphone to record the interview was asked. Permission was granted. This meant that full concentration was given to the interviewee and taking notes was not necessary. It was made clear that the recording was for my own use only and would be deleted once the transcriptions were completed. It was clarified that there would be no mention of details that may reveal the identity of the interviewee in any way. The contents of the six interviews were later transcribed and translated from Arabic to English before using the material for the study.

The interviewees were told that several other people of Iraqi origin would also be interviewed, ones who were living in Helsinki and were still awaiting the decision on their residence permit. They were told that this thesis was on asylum seekers and their feelings of belonging to Finnish society, that there were no right or wrong answers, only own experiences and opinions.

The interview began by asking about the background of arriving in Finland, what they were doing at the moment and how they were spending their free-time. They were asked about their views on Finnish society, especially about the differences compared to Iraqi society and their standing in this new society compared to the previous one in Iraq. They were asked whether they felt that they were part of Finnish society and whether they felt they were able to influence matters regarding their own life and the things going on around them. Each interview ended by asking about the interviewees' hopes for the future.

Information about the views and opinions of the asylum seekers was gathered during the interviews during their process of seeking international protection in Finland and then continued to do a data-based content analysis by reading through all the transcriptions and picking out the main themes, the similarities and exceptions in the interviewee's comments. The main themes were gathered as headings and the material from each of the interviews was divided

under the themes. Similarities and exceptions there were in the themes that were raised in the interviews.

After transcribing all the interviews 41 pages of transcription were looked at carefully and key words or points that the interviewees had raised were written down as comments. From them the main themes that had been raised the most frequently were selected and the ones that were in common amongst the interviews. Once the main themes had been gathered, the material was looked through and the parts that applied to each theme chosen and which ones were related to the topics of inclusion and exclusion highlighted.

Based on the results of the interviews some conclusions were drawn on the opinions of the asylum seekers. It was possible to say whether they were receiving the services that they required. The results were looked at broadly and what they presented using the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion.

7 RESULTS

7.1 Results

One of the main observations made whilst conducting the interviews was the specific conditions that asylum seekers are having to endure and the impact it is having on their everyday lives. Outwardly it may look like they have ‘normal’ lives going about their studies, work and hobbies, but underneath the uncertainty of the future is ever looming. Numerous asylum seekers have not been successful in gaining employment, a study place or an enjoyable activity to pass the time. Some are just trying to pass the time. Most asylum seekers I have met, even after a short acquaintance, talk about the stress caused by the past and present experiences. They talk about feelings of loss, disappointment, remorse, fear, hope and anger, amongst other things. They also talk about what these feelings do to them trying to cope with, for example, loss of sleep and appetite, depression and self-harm.

Some asylum seekers that I am in contact with are emotionally and psychologically so exhausted that it would not be ethical to ask them for an interview. One such person asked me to write:

“Do not despise others, they are human beings like you”.

I tried to remain as sensitive as possible to the interviewees needs and psychological state throughout, from agreeing on the interview day, to the interview, to the time after the interview was completed.

It was apparent that being an asylum seeker in Helsinki was far from easy. In general, the integration into the local community in Helsinki was not easy, finding a place to work or study was not easy and making friends was not easy. There were feelings of hope, but the long wait to hear whether a residence permit was to be granted or not takes its toll. The feeling of slowly

losing that feeling of hope was apparent. What promoted the feeling of becoming part of Finnish society was, most importantly receiving a residence permit.

Although language classes were available, for several people the encouragement and motivation they required to start focusing on learning the Finnish language and being a more active member of the community were tied up with the uncertainty of stay.

Other factors involved finding work. Those who were able to find work were motivated and very conscious of the importance of keeping the job, so much so that they were willing to tolerate poor treatment from the employer and work with very little job satisfaction.

The overall feeling from the interviewees was of struggle and disappointment, but not one of complete negativity. The struggle was mainly with regards to the negative decisions being made by the Immigration Office and the courts and the long wait during the asylum process. Disappointment was largely from the sometimes, unrealistic initial hopes and expectations not being realised. By unrealistic I mean that some were under false impressions about the speed and ease of receiving a permit for example. The negative experiences added to the feeling of being excluded and those outweighed the positive experiences.

The interview questions (Appendix 1) were firstly about the initial arrival to the country and places of stay, followed by questions of first impressions. To follow the questions led on to opinions of Finnish society versus Iraqi society and the current situation with regards to work/study and free-time. Status in Finnish society versus Iraqi society were discussed, as well as satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Experiences and feelings regarding the old and the new society and the position in Finnish society, pros and cons, benefits and losses were talked about. The overall feeling of belonging in Finnish society and being able to have an influence and a say in matters affecting oneself or society were discussed. All interviews ended with looking at the future and what thoughts were brought up from that. The themes that arose were:

- First impressions of Finland
- Disappointments
- Limitations
- Vulnerability
- Incentives

- The future

The interviews started by asking about the arrival to Finland and first impressions. All had hopes of settling and starting a new life in Finland. Some chose Finland specifically and others found that that was the country that they ended up in.

“When I was in Iraq I chose to come to Finland. I heard that refugees could be safe here. I heard the Finnish president had his own house opened for migrants, when I was still in Iraq, I also heard that Finnish people were very kind, loving and accepting to other cultures.”

7.2 First impressions of Finland

This theme arose in the beginning of the interviews whilst discussing the arrival to Finland and also when comparing Iraqi and Finnish society. First impressions were discussed in detail and in abundance and that is why it was chosen as the first theme.

Some of the first impressions of Finland and Finns were formed in the reception centres where the majority of asylum seekers live when they first settle in Finland. Life there was described as being difficult, partly because of the remote location, one person described it as being *“tossed in to the middle of the forest”*. Others talked about the difficulty of living in a big facility with its rigid system and set mealtimes for example. The treatment by the staff was also criticised. Staff were said to behave in an unfriendly or dismissive manner.

The impression that people got from interacting with Finns varied widely. The discussions on the differences in the people, comparing Iraqi and Finnish society, were also quite critical of the encounters with the local community, experiences that led to the feeling that newcomers were not welcomed into Finnish society and feelings of being excluded. There was some variety as some had negative experiences attempting to connect with Finns whilst others said that

they had many Finnish friends and even preferred to spend their time with Finns rather than Iraqis.

“I feel part of the Finnish society as I am living here. I have to talk and mix with them, it’s just the language barrier that is holding me back. I prefer to have Finnish friend or colleagues at work, there are Arabs there too and other nationalities, but I prefer the Finns because they give you respect when you are face to face. I feel they are good people and they respect others”.

The most positive experience of being in Finland compared to Iraq was from the only female interviewed. She talked about having had no influence on her own life and had not been able to make decisions for herself in Iraq. She described her feeling of her mind being frozen in Iraq and that it had now started working in Finland.

“I feel that my mind was frozen because of the society. But then here, no, it started working. Now I am thinking about my life, my future, responsibilities. But there no, it feels like my mind was frozen there especially for the woman. They freeze her mind and don’t let her think for herself. Even if the woman tries to work, do a job then even her husband tries to stop her. I mean there are so many stories, a lot of pain, a lot.”

She also talked about liking the feeling that people did not gossip here like they did in Iraq. She had a very positive opinion of the people and the lifestyle in Finland.

“The nice things are the Finnish society, that doesn’t look at what others have done. They concentrate on what they are doing themselves more. They don’t look at what the other did or said, I like this characteristic. I don’t know, the Arabic society likes to talk about this person and that person. We have this envy amongst people and that’s not nice”.

There were several less positive opinions and experiences with regards to interactions with Finns. There were experiences of being given unfriendly, hostile looks for example:

“if a person looks different from them then they do not want to get close”

“they don’t want to mix with us refugees, they make us feel like we are strangers, like we are the enemy, like there is a barrier”

“I feel that the majority of Finnish people are arrogant”

“he looked at me as if I wasn’t even a human being, as if I was air. Maybe when the air blew in his face, he would have felt it on his nose, but he wouldn’t have felt me at all”.

A lot was mentioned about the characteristics of Finns, especially compared to Iraqis. If generalisations were to be made, then it could be said that there were many differences with regards to socialising and striking up conversations with others. Finns were described as being shy and withdrawn and that was seen as a challenge to the generally more outgoing and outspoken Iraqis. Some of the interviewees brought up their feelings of loneliness and about missing what they had left behind, especially family and friends and described their feelings of being alone:

“It could be that my best friend at the moment is my phone. It’s my closest friend, even when I sleep, I put it by my head”.

“...you know in Iraq they are my people, you know I have to feel part of them because they are my people, my family, my relatives. Everyone in our area knows us and not just our area, but many areas that I have been to.

“Here nobody knows me”.

One person described in detail what a bus ride would be like in Iraq where you would become friends with the driver and other passengers sitting nearby and by the end of it would have exchanged Facebook contacts and such like. He compared it with his experiences on public transport in Finland.

“maybe half the people on the bus will have become my friends and the phone numbers and Facebook friends and so on and so on.... We spend the journey time together chatting and time would pass by past.....If I travelled to the furthest point in Finland, to the North you will get nothing but looks, nothing, you leave the car with no memories, you leave without any chats and the journey has been boring until you arrive at your destination. Big differences here.”

These experiences of feeling that you are not welcomed amongst the people makes it difficult to feel included and accepted. When you are accustomed to a certain set of norms of behaving in a culture, then it can be difficult to understand and adapt to a new culture with different norms and ways of behaving.

As well as people, culture and the differences in Finnish and Iraqi culture were talked about. In general, Finnish culture was viewed as open when it came to the individual and his/her freedom to behave a certain way, but at the same time not easily penetrable. Many felt that although they were in Finland and amongst the people, they were not part of the society and the people.

“The Iraqi society is very different and restrictive. I couldn’t do the things I was hoping for, for example to help the elderly. Also to be able to have friends from both genders, this was not acceptable back home. In Finland I can help people without being controlled or criticised by the society”.

The change in the position that people had in Iraq compared to their position now in Finland had variations also, but on the whole several mentioned having to start their life again from the beginning having lost everything they had had in Iraq. Some had had a good position in Iraq with regards to work and income and influence, others talked about living in fear and stress already in Iraq.

“I owned my own business, I had workers working for me, all this I left behind, I lost it”.

The starkest difference seemed to be with the role of the woman again, comparing her position in the society in Iraq to the Finnish one. She talked about her role in Iraq, as if she did not really have a role there, she just existed. She also talked about the restrictions on her behaviour there and how some members of the Arab community in Helsinki that she was in contact with now had commented on her behaviour here in a critical way and were trying to restrict and influence her behaviour by their comments.

“But when I mix with the Arab community, even those here give me looks. Also when I took off the hijab they always asked me about it. I

say "What has it got to do with you? It's my choice and I wanted to do that." They ask me "Why did you take off the hijab?" and I say it's my personal choice, but even here they are fighting me".

When I go to the Arab society they warn me and tell me not to mix with the Finnish people, but I say to them No. I am direct with the Arabs, sometimes I say They are better than us. I give it to them, they come to advise me, but I say No. I defend myself and say that this is wrong. If it's wrong then I don't stay silent, I did it before, but now No, my mind Is working and I know right from wrong. When they talk I say No, you are wrong. A lot of things changed in my life with regards to my way of speaking and thinking, many many things"

7.3 Disappointments

The main criticism was not about the Finnish people or culture, but with the asylum process itself.

"... the immigration office. They don't look at the humanity and the person. People come looking for safety and security, but they do not value the person's situation."

The long waiting time and expected numerous negative decisions affected all of the people interviewed. Waiting to know whether you would get a residence permit or not meant that people had to wait on many aspects of their life. Some of the wait was due to the system making them wait, such as certain services and opportunities only being accessible after getting a residence permit, other reasons for waiting were that they were not able to or did not want to make longer-term decisions because the future was uncertain.

"So you wait a year, two, three until you can continue your life. This is difficult for any human being that has emotions and feelings"

"I have like a lock on my mind to stop me from thinking, the only thing I am thinking about is getting a residence permit. After that, a lot of thoughts will open

up....All of this would happen after the permit. At the moment, even our breathing is not normal”.

7.4 Inequality

Circulating rumours amongst the newcomers in Finland and uncertainties about the Finnish society and the rights of an asylum seeker meant that some of those interviewed were left with the feeling of being unable to challenge a certain situation or a person if they came across unfair or unequal treatment because they did not have a permit. When asked about exploitation in Iraq, the comment was that there the Iraqis position is strong and you have people behind you who will defend you because you are ‘*amongst your own*’.

“everything is tied up to the papers, here our lives are tied up with the papers and I think that even the laws are not on our side if we are exploited”

“If a Finn and an Iraq file a complaint then there will be a difference”.

“So we asked about it that if people are carrying knives, where is the government. We were told that Finnish people get a reduced punishment because they have nationality and residence permit, so we got scared and have been the whole three years. Since then we have been scared and we are not able to stand up to a Finn”.

There was confusion about the legal status and whether asylum seekers had the same rights as Finnish citizens. There were experiences of exploitation in the workplace, like being asked to go into to work and do extra jobs for free or not being paid fairly or on time.

"I see at work a lot of people taking advantage of others and treating them like slaves just because they don't have papers....those employing us are using us and enslaving us and they know he doesn't have papers, he can be struck off and then it's difficult for him to find other work. For this reason our lives...we've even become slaves, those who have employed us have made us

their slaves. I don't like someone to take advantage of me, I don't like to be exploited although at the moment I am being really really exploited by my employer, you wouldn't believe it".

7.5 Incentives

Getting a permit here in Finland had been viewed to have been made enormously difficult from all aspects, studying, work and other activities. Despite the opportunities that were available being limited, all of the interviewees had managed to find work or a place to study Finnish language. These successes increased the feeling of being part of Finnish society, getting up in the morning and going out, having a pattern to the days and weeks, having the feeling of belonging:

"The residence permit...it will make me feel I can repay the favour to this country. After I get the residence permit I can learn the language, I can study and I will be able to prove myself in the society. I'll feel part of the society".

"So that I can know that I am part of the society, so that I can reply to the society, so that I can understand what they are thinking, so I can ask in their language, they will feel safe when I speak in their language. For these reasons, what I want more than to just be part of society is to learn the language. This is a really big issue, the language is difficult as you know, we haven't gone to school so we don't have anything that would strengthen our skills."

One big issue was the conditions that people were working under. One person in particular talked in great detail about his experience of being exploited by his employer and the situation being so that he could not do anything about it as he did not want to risk being struck off. Despite being promoted, he was being paid less than all the others with permits.

"Only by playing all the tricks can you get your salary.....maybe they even forget to pay you your salary."

"I sometimes ask different people for a job so they know as a refugee I haven't come here to sit around and rest, I would like to get a job and earn money".

“my life improved here a bit, I felt that I have a connection with the society. I got work, I was searching for work and I learned how to deal with my things”.

7.6 The Future

This feeling of having to wait indefinitely meant that plans for the future were difficult for many to think about. More than one person said that they had made no future plans and instead were living day by day or at least were hesitant to talk about them. After numerous experiences of disappointment and exclusion, it was difficult to look to the future.

“I don’t really have hopes. My future...I don’t really know to be honest”.

“Of course everyone has hopes, but the situation hasn’t allowed me to...even if I had hopes that I would be...would be..... they have all been wiped. Honestly, I don’t have”.

“Even if he came to a country with hopes and then saw that his abilities were not recognised, the skills that he put effort into getting in his home country.....they thought they will have a future here but then were disappointed and then stopped thinking about the future”.

It seems that the Finnish way of thinking about the future in terms of making long-term goals is very different in comparison with that of the Iraqi way of thinking. This was reported in several studies (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017.) This may be due to the in-between situation of not knowing whether the future will be built in Finland or elsewhere or may be culturally bound:

“I don’t really have hopes. My future...I don’t really know to be honest”.

Some suggestions were given when asked about the asylum system and what improvements could be made to it. They mainly concerned suggestions of ways to ease people’s access to work and other opportunities:

“I would simplify things and change a lot of the laws that would help the person run his life in a suitable way”.

“I would open up the opportunity to study for those refugees, I would let them study, finish university studies and then carry on. That will benefit this country, the country could benefit from their expertise. I would open up work possibilities, factories, anything. I wouldn't leave him without work, unemployed. If I left him with nothing to do then crimes would increase, many things. If I got him busy with other things, busy with other issues then firstly he will benefit my country and I would cut down on unemployment or on laziness, many things...crime and so on and so on...”

The overall impression I got from the interviews was one of disappointment and extreme fatigue and stress. Still there was the underlying determination and all were still active members of society, trying to better their situation. The interviewees are all living examples of resilience. The situation that they have been faced with has undoubtedly taken its toll on many and all they hope at the end of it is a time where they can build their lives without the fear of getting deported.

“But I am keen to be a part of society. I am patient, very patient, so much so that I got grey hairs because I have been patient...”

“I keep trying and trying and trying.....”

“Even if he came to a country with hopes and saw that his abilities were recognised, the skills that he put effort into getting in my home country, his home country that got devastated and destroyed and ruined and suppressed all of those things that happened there, so there is no future there, but then of course he will think that they will have a future here but then were disappointed and then stopped thinking about the future. His only hope is that he will get those papers and maybe after that maybe afterwards he will think about the future”.

“A young person needs to feel that he/she has a future. Without work, pride or a future, he/she is a bomb” (Mäntymaa, 2018.)

Good mental health promotes the integration process of learning new skills, culture and language. Promoting the health of the asylum seekers is important, since the immigration experience as such is stressful even for healthy immigrants, and good health helps the asylum seekers to cope with the difficulties faced in a new country” (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017, 29.) Migration

impacts in many ways, it creates important changes in the physical, mental and social health of the immigrants (Jahangiri, Tabatabaie, Keykaleh, 2017.)

Mental health is affected before, during and after migration by many variables and each experience has particular effects due to the way the traumatic and unusual experiences manifest themselves in the form of cumulative and compounding stressors and cause different psychological consequences (Jahangiri et al., 2017.) It can be said that a negative experience may cause a strong reaction due to the numerous previous negative experiences already encountered. The uncertainty of what the future will hold adds a continuous strain on the asylum seeker.

In addition, those given international protection run a tenfold risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, elevated rates of depression, chronic pain and other somatic complaints in comparison to natives (Kirmayer, 2011) so it can be said that all is not resolved the moment a person is given a permit and the services and care provided should reflect this need in the 'post-permit' period.

It can be said that prolonged uncertainty and forced idleness in the reception centres is likely to add to the distress and negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of asylum seekers (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017.) This is what is happening in Finland. Added to this asylum seekers are often housed remotely and find making friends with local people of the community challenging. The experiences of isolation and distance from the wider society and the feelings of segregation are present as most activities take place in immigrant groups, in isolation from the surrounding society (Ikonen, 2015.)

The reason that activities for asylum seekers are important is the consideration of what an individual can get from taking part in an activity where they can meet others. The time waiting to hear the decision on the residence permit is long and the majority of asylum seekers I have met search for ways to pass the time more easily. The impact and importance of participation should be considered, as should the lack of participation. The effects that inclusion and exclusion have can be seen from the results.

I have compiled the SWOT below based on the interviews I carried out. Its aim is to demonstrate the impact of participation, what its possible benefits and hinderances are. With the experiences of participation come the feelings of exclusion and inclusion.

SWOT of participation of asylum seekers in their community:

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Participation will mean that newcomers will have a stronger feeling of belonging to society, which will improve their well-being leading to improved state of mind. ✘ Healthier lifestyle. ✘ Integration will be speeded up and taking part in everyday activities will reduce prejudice on both sides. ✘ Relief from arduous waiting time. 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ As the asylum seekers time and place of stay is uncertain, activities may be interrupted and funding lost. ✘ Information reaching those that the activities are aimed at may be challenging due to language and reading skills as well as uncertainty about duration and place of stay.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ More opportunities to improve Finnish language skills, thus increasing study and work opportunities. ✘ Making new friends and expanding own network. ✘ Having the opportunity to participate means allowing asylum seekers to do meaningful activities in their free-time and gives them relief from the stress of waiting for the asylum decision. 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✘ Most vulnerable and marginalised asylum seekers may not be reached or suitable activities may not be found/offered. ✘ Attitudes of local people may be racist and prejudiced. ✘ Newcomers to the community and expenditures regarding them may not have been taken into account, so the community may feel resentment at having to share resources/provide for the newcomers.

8 ETHICAL ASPECTS

When discussing issues regarding asylum seekers, it can be said that with the recent influx of asylum seekers in Europe, the issue is relevant and current. Supporters of immigration argue that immigrants benefit the country but may need special programs to assist them in their adjustment, whereas opponents suggest that immigrants drain resources that could be spent on other national priorities (Birman, 2005.)

As well as the issues involved, the approach and methods used need to be considered from an ethical point of view. Qualitative research often results in face to face interactions, observations and participating in research participants' lives what imposes particular ethical challenges that are also hardly ever discussed. It has been proposed that qualitative research has more ethical challenges than quantitative research (Birman, 2005.)

8.1 Vulnerability

Having experienced all the traumas related to having to uproot oneself and seek refuge in a new place, the person seeking asylum is often left vulnerable and the uncertainty of the future can have strong adverse effects. This aspect needs to be kept in mind during the interviews. 'Vulnerable persons include persons who are, individually or as part of a group, stigmatised, excluded or have limited control over their lives, to maintain independence and to self-determine' (Aldridge, 2016.)

This is likely to be the feeling that asylum seekers have and so it is important for the interviewer to bare this in mind and clarify to the interviewee that the interview has been planned with this in mind, for example that taking part in the interview is voluntary and that the interviewees have a right to decline from responding, the data is collected anonymously and they will remain unidentifiable throughout. The ethical rule of voluntary participation or 'informed consent' requires the 'provision of information to participants about the purpose of the research, its procedures, potential risks, benefits and alternatives' (Christians, 2005, 144.)

The fact that people will be asked to participate for the benefit of the interview and were not given anything in return needs to be considered also. All of those interviewed were of the opinion that this subject was important and gave me words of encouragement and were hoping that ‘outsiders’ would get a better understanding of their situation. By ‘outsider’ I am referring to people who are not in close contact with asylum seekers and their issues. Many have told me that they feel they have few opportunities to express their feelings to ‘outsiders’.

When the subject of this thesis was decided upon it was clear that there were suitable interviewee candidates amongst the people I know. I found it more challenging than initially expected, when it came to deciding whom to ask and when, as it was vital that the relationship was not compromised in any way.

I was aware that, if somebody was asked their willingness to take part in my thesis interview, then they may accept without actually wanting to do it, accepting out of a feeling of obligation or not wanting to refuse for some other reason. It was also important not to ask anybody who was going through an exceptionally difficult time, so as not to burden them further in any way or put them in a position of having to discuss something that may trigger memories of past experiences or trauma.

8.2 Confidentiality & Trust

An important ethical consideration was how to deal with collected data that was not of direct use for the research project. The fact that a personal interview was conducted and questions asked meant that more than likely, some went on to talk about other matters besides the interview topics and thus required sensitivity on reading the situation on the part of the interviewer.

In interviews the task of balancing data collection with interviewees’ needs and their situation was important. In order for the interviewees to feel comfortable being interviewed they needed to be given the opportunity to talk freely. A feeling of trust needed to be apparent and the expression of confidential information had to be accommodated.

As the interviews were voluntary and were conducted in an informal open way, the probabilities of mistrust and other factors involving risks were minimal. Trust was also a factor that had to be considered in deciding who to interview. Having a trusting relationship was one of the criteria for picking interviewees and attaining the trust was essential.

8.3 Culture

Ethics are also culturally bound and so a good understanding of the interviewee's language and cultural background were necessary and this hopefully decreased the risk of acting in an inappropriate way. The writer Dina Birman talks about cultural insiders in the context of researchers. She writes that "inclusion of cultural insiders on research teams is necessary to ensure that researchers act ethically" (Birman, 2005.) By cultural insiders it is referring to people who understand the language and culture. Being from the same or similar culture will have its obvious benefits, but may also affect some of the interviewees negatively for those same reasons. It may raise the trust and confidentiality issues that others may feel are stronger others weaker due to the closeness of backgrounds.

9 CONCLUSION

This research has elements of ethnographic research due to the fact that prior knowledge and experience of issues regarding both Finnish and Iraqi ethnicity were already known and very familiar before the start of the interviews. Contact with the interviewees was also not solely for the purposes of the interview, nor for the length of the interviews only. Hopefully the interviewees will have gained one more experience of inclusion by participating in the interview, although it may not have been thought of as such consciously.

Trust is necessary when it comes to establishing social contacts. Having social contacts with others is essential for maintaining the feeling of wellbeing and good physical, mental and social health. The feeling of trust gives a sense of security. This is an important factor while waiting for the permission to stay. Having social contact with others gives a feeling of belonging and is about being made visible.

Having talked to the interviewees, looked into the themes and read up on material regarding the issues that arose it can be said that the situation for asylum seekers in Finland today is far from impressive. The experiences and feelings of exclusion far outweigh the feelings of inclusion and are taking place on many levels in various scenarios involving different services and service providers, bureaucracy and the person next door.

As for the people I interviewed, the degree of wanting to be and feeling like a member of the community varied. All the interviewees wanted to be more involved with the local community, some had succeeded in this better than others. All wanted to be increasingly active participants. The common feeling that was been raised in these discussions was that until you get a residence permit, you are at the mercy of others, that the people who have permission to live in Finland are strong and you as an asylum seeker are weak. There was an underlying feeling of being a 'second-class citizen'. The repeated feelings of exclusion will have strengthened this feeling.

In previous research carried out the importance of being heard and being able to influence matters affecting oneself were highlighted. The same elements were also highlighted in this

research. The previous suggestions of how they could be realised were the same as the inclusive elements that were addressed in the results above.

Inclusive elements came from positive experiences, from first impressions to people's reactions to the services provided. They all gave incentives to want to integrate further and to strive forward in life. Having incentives was seen to help keep up the morale during the waiting time. Exclusive elements involved the negative reactions and experiences, the disappointments and the feelings of being made to feel somehow inferior.

The aspects that encouraged more inclusive and less exclusive feelings were largely linked with the asylum process, but also with knowledge and people. As people were still in the asylum process, they were waiting to 'get out of it' so they could start a 'normal' life as part of the mainstream. Knowledge was lacking in many aspects and there was reliance on friends, volunteers and other contacts for support, information and advice. Added to that was the changing situation with regards to the legislation and regulations and the prolonged waiting time. A crisis management group was established in the Ministry of Interior to manage the situation generated by the sharp increase of asylum seekers in Finland and to decide on necessary measures (EMN, 2017.) As is evident, coping strategies were developed as the needs were rising as the situations were taking place.

The issues above have been addressed in the Finnish legislation (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2018) and immigration services (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018) and other service providers, but the fact that such a vast and unexpected number of people came to Finland, in 2015 particularly, highlighted the weaknesses in the asylum process. The Government Annual Report for 2015 states that the unprecedented increase in the number of asylum seekers shifted the focus of operations and their effectiveness to manage the large-scale influx of migrants and minimise its negative effects (EMN, 2017.)

In response to the research question, it can be said that the experiences of inclusion and exclusion affect everyday life greatly. Feeling excluded affects motivation to study and work and connect with people, it affects the person physically, psychologically and mentally. Experiencing inclusion in everyday situations on the other hand gives an incentive to strive forwards and have a more positive outlook on life in general as part of Finnish society.

9.1 Current situation of interviewees

At the time of writing, out of the six interviewees three had received residence permits, one person had become undocumented and two were still waiting for the decision. The two people still waiting were both working, one had applied for a work-based residence permit and the other one was hoping to do so if he was eligible to apply, which still remained unclear. All, but one, were either working or on a Finnish language course. It was evident that the psychological wellbeing was in correlation with the permit status.

This limbo-like state of being was stressful and frustrating. Frustration was increased by the numerous disappointments. Disappointments of not receiving a permit, of not being believed, of Finland not being what it was anticipated to be, of failed attempts at connecting with people.

As has been researched previously, the feeling of uncertainty about the future and the long wait for the decision that will determine the destiny of their lives is the one common thing that all the asylum seekers have in common and that has a great effect on their daily lives (Yijälä & Nyman, 2017.) Despite uncertainty, there is hope.

9.2 Suggestions with regard to asylum seekers

The issues mentioned above that hindered the feelings of belonging reflects what the majority of asylum seekers are experiencing at the current time. Asylum seekers have been left to wait with limited support and incentives in the form of opportunities. The routes to finding work and study opportunities have been made rigid and are full of obstacles and the attitude of the people they are in contact with is, too often, exclusive, dismissive or even hostile.

Many aspects effect integration, most of which we are unable to impact upon. This suggests that many aspects involving integration happen without our control (Saukkonen, 2018.) However, there are certain aspects that a person can impact on. One is the community that a person

is part of and how that community reacts to new arrivals. The community that he/she moves to has a big role to play in the integration experience. People living in the same community have a role to play in offering opportunities for a newcomer to participate and feel included.

Forming friendships with local people was seen as a positive aspect and promoted general wellbeing. Loneliness was a major issue. The initial stages of a newcomer settling in an area could be planned and implemented, so that the feeling of being welcomed was reinforced. This is an aspect that has been taking place in reception centres and other service providers to some extent, but not systematically.

Positive contacts with local people are important, but the most important criteria for a successful outcome is that those going through the asylum process are given the support that they need and that they are made aware of their rights and that the process is not open to the possibility of numerous oversights.

According to legislation “Asylum seekers are entitled to social services and urgent health care. “Urgent health care” is defined as “immediate evaluation or treatment that cannot be postponed without the illness being worsened or the injury exacerbated and that applies to an acute illness, personal injury, deterioration of long-term illness or disability,” and includes “dental, health care, substance-abuse care and psycho-social support” (Finlex, n.d.) This urgency is decided by the authorities and so is left open to interpretation. Some may get access to services, others may not. One interviewee described this problem of having to suffer with toothache and being told to use painkillers rather than getting a dentist’s appointment.

If knowledge was given at an early stage and then throughout the process about Finnish culture and asylum, for example then it would reduce misunderstandings, rumours and disappointments. Knowledge about rights and responsibilities would reduce the aspects of vulnerability and the risks of exploitation. Planning it from an inclusive point of view should be improved and should involve asylum seekers themselves.

In order for an individual to understand and navigate through the asylum process a support network is needed. Support should firstly be provided by professionals. Increasingly people are turning to non-professionals, volunteers and activists, who are able to navigate alongside the asylum seeker with varying degrees of success.

Alterations to immigration legislation are needed by which the asylum process would be clearer, simpler, shorter and, at the very least, in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration states that all have been born free and equal with the same rights and freedoms. All should be treated with equality, should have freedom and the right to protection. For example, forced deportations of people fearing persecution or worse have taken place and are therefore not in line with the Declaration.

Services should be planned and implemented from an inclusive and participatory point of view. Contacts with local people are important, but the most important criteria for a successful outcome is that those going through the asylum process are given the support that they need and that they are made aware of their rights and that the process is not open to the possibility of numerous oversights.

Gaining a residence permit based on employment, for example, could be made easier by removing the condition of having to have a valid passport in order to apply for it. Language skill requirements could also be eased in many positions where it is not essential. The majority of asylum seekers who arrived in Finland 2015-2016 are young, healthy, able-to-work men. Exclusion combined with passive support results in finding employment even more of a challenge (Katisko, 2018, 78.)

Newcomers should be allowed and encouraged to find their place in society, learn the language, understand the customs and build social networks. All this will be very difficult if the general atmosphere in society does not support integration of the whole society in new, more ethnically and culturally diverse circumstances (Saukkonen, 2016, 20.)

Finding services and activities, aside from essentials, such as accommodation, health and financial support, is not an easy task. Asylum seekers' personal needs, wishes, expectations and abilities should be better heard and recognised.

9.3 Suggestions with regards to further research

In my opinion, having looked at recent material available on asylum seekers in Finland, an insufficient amount of research has been carried out in this specific field.

Further assessment would be valuable regarding suggestions for improvements to the asylum system and how they could be made financially viable.

Several interesting angles arose from this research, one of which was the experience of the woman compared to the men's experiences. The topic of how gender related to the status of the person in Iraq and then in Finland would be a very interesting issue.

Another interesting topic would be looking into the thoughts and plans of the future and how they are culturally bound. From talking to the interviewees, I was under the impression that it was not only the uncertainty of the future that meant that the concept was unclear, but that long-term plans were not readily talked about. How this is culturally bound would make enlightening reading.

As the number of undocumented persons is on the rise and set to continue rising under the current political atmosphere and legislation, it would be valuable to study how living under the fear of deportation affects the person and how the service providers are responding to the growing need of this group of people.

The obstacles and challenges that asylum seekers will have faced, initially with the difficult experiences in their country of origin, as well as the tough journey, followed by their experiences in Finland will have left its mark.

Mental health is described as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (World Health Organisation, 2013.) This subject would be important to research further.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview Questions

- Background: arrival in Finland, places stayed in Finland, time in current location
- How are you spending your time?
- How has your role/position in society changed?
- Would you like to change that? How?
- What are you lacking?
- What have you gained?
- What are your opinions on Finnish society?
- How is it different from what you have grown up in?
- Who and how can society be affected?
- Do you have a feeling of belonging where you are?
- What affects that?
- What are your hopes for the future?

APPENDIX 2. Consent form

Consent for participation in research

Name of the study

Views of Iraqi Asylum Seekers on Inclusion & Exclusion
Master of Community Development, Human Rights and Conflict Resolu-
tion

International Master's Degree

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK)

Author of the study: Nadia El-Radhi-Wood

I have been told about the purpose and the research methods used for the above research.

I am aware that participation in the study is voluntary. I am also aware of the fact that participation in the study will not cost anything, my identity will remain secret and be known only to the researcher, all material will only be used for research purposes and the material will be disposed of once the study has been completed. I am able to suspend participation of the study at any time without having to justify my suspension without any consequences.

Place and date

Signature