

Article

Young, unaccompanied refugees' expectations of social workers and social worker roles

by

Linda Natalie Borho

PhD-student

Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger

Norway

E-mail: linda.n.borho@uis.no

Wenche Hovland

Associate Professor, PhD

Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger

Norway

E-mail: wenche.hovland@uis.no

Sarah Hean

Professor, PhD

Department for Social Studies, University of Stavanger

Norway

E-mail: sarah.c.hean@uis.no

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Abstract

Background: Young people who have travelled to another country, unaccompanied and with refugee status, are a both resilient and vulnerable group with specific needs. Supporting them is often challenging for social workers, and providing this support is mediated by the expectations that these young people have of social workers and social worker roles.

Aim: In this study, we explore how young unaccompanied refugees (YURs) perceive the roles of social workers in the national context of Norway, where concerns about the quality of social work for this group have been highlighted.

Method: Using the theoretical lens of role theory, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 Afghan boys between 16 and 23 years of age, living under the protection of the Child Welfare Services (CWS) in two municipalities in Norway. The interviews explored the boys' positive and negative experiences of the social worker. A thematic analysis was conducted, in which the coding framework was informed by the premise that actual experience informs our expectations of other individuals' behaviour and roles.

Findings: YURs' expectations are more than instrumental, and more than a task they expect the social worker to perform. They also expect the task to be performed in a person-centred, therapeutic alliance (e.g. with humour and trust), and that the social worker exhibits particular personal characteristics or competences, besides being culturally competent and sensitive.

Conclusion: We find that YURs' descriptions of the social worker's roles of being a caregiver and practical helper are similar to what other young people in contact with the CWS expect. However, YURs expect an additional role, which is specific to this field of social work, namely that of an integration helper. However, the expectations that each individual young person has of social workers are individual, in flux and contextual, and not consistent over time. Therefore, we recommend prioritizing learning more about the young person's individual expectations of the social worker roles, as well as a useful weighting of these roles for each individual young refugee.

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Introduction

Despite their strength and resilience, young unaccompanied refugees (YURs) are acknowledged as an extremely vulnerable group (Broch, 2012; Lidén, Eide, Hidle, Nilsen, & Wærdahl, 2013). They require bespoke care due to their unique circumstances, including traumatic life stories, and a lack of family support, in addition to their migrant and minority status (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Kohli, 2006; Kohli, 2007; Lidén et al., 2013; Lidén, 2017). The intersectionality of these factors makes social work challenging for this group (Eide, 2012; Kohli, 2007). With increasing numbers of these children worldwide (UNICEF, 2023), there is a need to develop Child Welfare Services and social worker practice, roles and responsibilities, in order to be able to better support the YUR group. This study explores the nature of these social worker roles and responsibilities in a Norwegian context.

Roles are a set of expectations regarding behaviour and duties associated with a particular position within an organization (Turner, 2002), and role theory (Biddle, 1979; Biddle, 1986; Goffman, 1956; Linton, 1947) suggests that people adopt roles and play them out in their interactions with others, thus shaping their behaviour and identity, based on their understanding of the expectations associated with their roles. In the case of YURs, their expectations of the social worker may help shape the social worker's behaviour and identity, based on how the social worker understands what these young people expect of them. Therefore, developing knowledge of the expectations that YURs hold of their social worker is important in understanding how YURs and social workers behave and interact with one another, especially since they may each adapt to accommodate the expectations of others (Biddle, 1979; Biddle, 1986; Goffman, 1956; Linton, 1947). A lack of alignment may cause negative outcomes for the YURs.

Expectations are defined as the formalized and informal '*norms, preferences, and beliefs*' of the way individual(s) should act (Biddle, 1986). As such, in this paper, we define expectations as something aspirational, while acknowledging that in some situations expectations of another individual may be negative. However, in seeking to define a professional's role in a specific context, we put a focus on what should be performed ideally, rather than how it is not currently being achieved. In an

organization, these expectations vary according to the stakeholders involved (Healy, 2014; Ylvisaker & Rugkåsa, 2021), and are potentially linked to the specific culture in an individual institution (Schein, 1986), or even a national setting (Papell, 2015).

Expectations may be presented formally, in top-down institutional and state legislation on the tasks and responsibilities social workers are expected to undertake for unaccompanied minor refugees (i.e. formal job descriptions for social workers, written activity plans and reports regarding YURs), which are enforced by social work leaders. But these expectations may also be expressed informally and horizontally (between social worker colleagues) or bottom-up (i.e. driven by the care receiver). Informal expectations are often inconspicuous, yet are present and crucial in the work environment (Schein, 1986), and can produce gaps between actual practice and formal job descriptions, hence causing real practice to deviate from prescriptive norms and rules (Turner, 2002).

Informal expectations are difficult to uncover, but in seeking to define informal expectations, positive and negative experiences of reality are examined; descriptions of our positive experiences suggest how we feel others should act, whereas our negative experiences describe how we feel they should not act. For example, receiving help from respectful and kind social workers was a positive experience for young refugees. Their aspirational expectation is that all social workers treat them with respect and kindness. Being shouted at was a negative experience for young refugees, and their aspirational expectation is that social workers do not shout at them, but instead treat them with respect and kindness.

What is known about young people's expectations of social workers in general?

Young people's expectations of social workers can vary, depending on their individual circumstances and experiences. Minors receiving support in mental health institutions, or from the Children's Welfare Services (Lange, 1999; Larsen, Isberg, & Freng, 1990; Larsen, 2001; Paulsen, Aune, Melting, Stormyr, & Berg, 2017; Thrana, 2016) have been shown to generally expect social workers to act as a 'responsible and predictable grown-up' (Larsen et al., 1990) with supportive attitudes (Larsen,

2001; Lange, 1999) and a good sense of humour (Lange, 1999). They wanted social workers to take an honest interest in, and to personally engage with their practice (Larsen, 2001). Many young people expected their needs to be met by receiving the right sort of help at the right point in time (Paulsen et al., 2017), with care and love (Thrana, 2016), and within and through robust relationships (Paulsen et al., 2017). They did not want to be ignored, misunderstood, or mistrusted by their social workers (Larsen, 2001). They accepted social workers' strictness when reinforcing rules, as long as they were perceived as being reasonable and predictable (Lange, 1991). Moreover, young people expected social workers to empower them and enable them to impact their own lives (Paulsen et al., 2017).

YURs, however, have a unique set of needs, when compared with other young people in contact with social workers. They differ from other young people due to their integration process into a 'new' culture and society. They have also life histories associated with prior experiences of social distress, war, flight and travelling to Europe on their own. From the limited literature on YURs' expectations, these expectations appear somewhat similar to those of any other children in contact with the Children's Welfare Services: Herz and Lalander (2017) in Sweden find that YURs appreciated social workers who enabled them *'to define their own needs, agency, and identities'*. Furthermore, in Norway, Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017) showed that YURs first and foremost expected their social workers to help them and *'to be nice to them'*. They also expected the social workers to seek to understand their perspective on things and life (Skårdalsmo & Harnischfeger, 2017). Furthermore, it was important for these minors that the rules their social workers established and reinforced also made sense for them (Skårdalsmo & Harnischfeger, 2017).

Our study builds on the work of Skårdalsmo and Harnischfeger (2017) by further exploring the field of YURs' expectations of social workers in the Norwegian setting, but by applying the analytical lens of role theory to this field. This framework puts particular focus on young people's expectations of professional roles specifically in the interactions between YURs and social workers. It gives insight into how social workers find a balance in performing their professional role when adapting this to meet social work leaders' expectations on the one hand and YURs' expectations on

the other. By understanding the gap between social work leaders and policy expectations of the professional role and the YUR 's expectations of the role, through the role theory lens, we gain a better understanding of what social workers actually do, as they seek to adapt their role to accommodate potentially contradictory expectations. In this paper, we focus on the young people's expectations of the social worker's role. This forms one part of a broader PhD project that seeks to understand social workers' working reality by exploring, comparing and contrasting the expectations of the social worker roles from the perspective of social work leaders, young refugees and the social workers themselves.

Norwegian context

In 2015, 5,480 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in Norway (3,537 of them from Afghanistan). In the year 2020, the number dropped to 89 unaccompanied minors, most of them from Afghanistan and Syria, and rose again in the year of 2022 to 694 minor asylum-seekers (UDI, 2023). In Norway, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are first placed in asylum centres or institutions, depending on their age on arrival (Bufdir, 2021a). If given the right to asylum by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI), they acquire refugee status, and are moved to other institutions, care centres or foster families for a longer period (Bufdir, 2021b). Our study focuses on Muslim Afghan boys with refugee status, in contrast to other studies (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Johansen & Studsrød, 2019; Skårdalsmo & Harnischfeger, 2017), in which a mix of minor unaccompanied refugees and/or asylum-seekers are informants, of mixed nationalities and religions.

Methods

Project design

This was an explorative, qualitative study (Bryman, 2008) with a generic approach (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003). It was designed to explore the variation in the expectations that individual young, unaccompanied refugees hold in relation to their social workers' interactions with them. The fieldwork for the entire research project was conducted by the first author, and took place in 2019 in two neighbouring municipalities in Norway that were selected for their size, as this enabled us to recruit enough informants.

Sampling

A purposeful sample was selected based on four main criteria: their refugee status, current residence in a Norwegian child welfare institution or supported private residence, being 16 years of age or older and having travelled alone to Norway without parental/family support.

Due to the difficulty in accessing participants directly, and the need for trusted intermediaries, sampling was managed through snowball techniques (Bryman, 2008), with initial participants recommending others to participate in the study. For similar reasons, access to this hard-to-reach and vulnerable group was supported by two gatekeepers within the field. One gatekeeper was a female, well-experienced and trusted social work leader in one of the local institutions for young, unaccompanied refugees. The other gatekeeper was a 23-year-old male Afghan refugee who himself had come to Norway as an unaccompanied, minor asylum-seeker, and had lived in an institution for unaccompanied refugees. Information folders designed to appeal to young people were handed out via these gatekeepers, to seek to reach young, unaccompanied refugees living in these two municipalities. Interested participants contacted the interviewer directly.

Our final sample consisted of 11 Afghan boys (of Pashto and Dari origin), aged 16-23. Eight of them (16-18 years of age) were living in institutions with social workers who were present day and night. Three of them (19-23 years of age) had already moved from institutions to private apartments, with frequent visits by social workers. All the informants had the status of unaccompanied refugee, and had a residence permit. We deliberately use the term young, unaccompanied refugees (YURs) to describe our sample because some of the young people we interviewed were no longer minors, as they were aged 16-23. Furthermore, there is an important difference between being an asylum-seeker and a refugee, which influences children's perspectives regarding the future, their concerns and the way they are living. The young Afghans in this study had first become acquainted with the concept of a professional social worker upon their arrival at the asylum-seeker centre in Norway. As a profession, social work is not yet established in Afghanistan (Papell, 2015), so that the young people's expectations of what professional social work

should be was constructed in a Norwegian context. In the interviews, YURs refer to the residential care worker they interact with on a daily basis, although the majority of these individuals will be trained social workers.

In-depth interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Bryman, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014) were conducted by the first author. In line with Biddle's (1986) claim that '*expectations are learned through experiences, and that persons are aware of the expectations they hold*', the first author collected information about the young people's experience of social workers they met, in order to gain information about their expectations. The young people were interviewed about positive and negative experiences with social workers, and what formed those perceptions. The young people often compared and evaluated different social workers and their experiences with them, explaining why they liked or disliked what certain social workers did, or did not do, and what they expected of them. They were asked to describe a typical day with the social workers in their unit, such as which work tasks they believed the social workers undertook or should have supported them with in everyday life. They often described their own emotional or material needs, whether those needs were met, and if so, how.

When the young refugees were asked directly about their expectations in the interviews, they found it difficult to respond to a direct line of questioning. This was too abstract a concept for them. In order to gain this information, we therefore had to take a more indirect approach. We also had to consider the way in which young people expressed themselves, in the here and now, and how their expectations developed (i.e. from their experience of social worker practice). What children say is happening, and what they expect is happening, are potentially different things or in fact, as role theory suggests, that their expectations are coloured by their actual experiences (Biddle, 1986).

The interviews were conducted at a place of the informants' choosing, most often their own home (the institution), although some chose public spaces. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, as the young people spoke Norwegian well enough at

this stage of their journey in Norway. This is in contrast to other studies which used translators for some of their interviews (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Skårdalmo & Harnischfeger, 2017). However, the direct contact with the interviewer, even if the interview was not in their mother tongue, was important to create a trusting atmosphere and relationship between the first author and the interviewees within a short space of time. Holding the interviews in Norwegian without translators may have led to simplified language and a possible loss of detail. Nevertheless, holding the conversation without a third-party present was beneficial for establishing trust between the interviewer and interviewees, and contributed to the trustworthiness of the data collected.

Interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. With the young people's consent, the interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device and supplemented with field notes. The interviews, which were transcribed and anonymized by the first author, produced 142 pages of voluminous data. All interviewees cited in this article were unaccompanied male Afghan refugees, aged 16 to 23 years. Their names were changed, and for reasons of anonymity their specific age was not provided in the quotations.

Ethical considerations and challenges in the interviews

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the research project and the design of the fieldwork (Ref nr: 570373). This research project was conducted in accordance with the core ethical principles of scientific research (Blaikie & Priest, 2019), such as voluntary participation, informed consent, freedom to withdraw, a right to privacy, protection from harm and risk, and the avoidance of deceptive and covert research.

Due to the vulnerable position and situation of our young participants (Berg & Tronstad, 2015; Broch, 2012; Kohli, 2006; Kohli, 2007; Lidén et al., 2013; Lidén, 2017), and in line with the NSD's requirements, no questions about the young people's mental health, their journey to Europe, or issues related to immigration status, were asked in the face-to-face interviews. To create a safe interview situation, the participants were informed in written and oral form about their rights regarding the

interview and the information collected. The first author and the social workers were easily available to the young people both before and after the interviews, in case of doubts or concerns.

The interviewer previously worked as a frontline social worker, and thus had experience from interviewing foreign young people. Those experiences enhanced her ability to understand the context and create trusting relationships with the young interviewees. Nevertheless, some participants may have associated our interview with the interviews they had in challenging prior encounters with representatives of the Children's Welfare Services and immigration services.

Analysis

This qualitative thematic analysis followed a recursive, non-linear practice, yet the main steps were as follows: in the familiarization process (Braun & Clark, 2006), the first and second authors individually read and re-read the verbatim transcripts. The very first categorization of the statements was data-driven, meaning that the authors grouped transcribed quotations according to the type of information they provided (e.g. narratives of negative/positive experiences with social workers). Each author independently organized the transcribed quotations into different categories/groups, and labelled them with a code (node) in NVivo 12 Pro. We used this computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), in line with Bryman's (2008), Dey's (1993) and Gibbs' (2002) recommendations, to handle the great amount of qualitative data. In face-to-face sessions, we subsequently compared, discussed and reflected on our categorization of the data, the choice of categories and codes, and our first interpretations. We started to see first patterns and correlations in this initial coding of the quotations (Braun & Clark, 2006).

To further extract the meanings of the grouped and labelled quotations, we applied an analysis table inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004), consisting of four columns. The first two columns served to extract the essential meanings from the original quotations (e.g. 'He is always kind, even if it is getting late.') into the condensed meanings of the quotations (e.g. the social worker shows kindness, the social worker is generous with his time). In the third column, the condensed meaning

was further reduced and formulated as a subtheme (e.g. kindness, generosity). These and other subthemes were interpreted as a form of informal expectations of the social worker held by the YURs, describing ways of being or specific tasks. Constructing mind-maps of these subthemes informed us of possible patterns and relationships among them (Braun & Clark, 2006). From the young people's perspective, expectations of how social workers *should* behave, and how they *should* work, could be related to- and inform about the key roles social workers *should* perform in their encounters with them (fourth column).

Table 1: Short extracts and examples taken from our Thematic Analysis Table

| 1. Meaning units: Original quotations from the unaccompanied children | 2. Condensed meaning units: Condensed meaning of what the young people said | 3. Subthemes: Expectations young people have of social workers | 4. Main themes: Expected roles of social workers |
|--|--|---|---|
| <i>He is always kind, even if it is getting late. He talks like a friend to me.</i> | SW shows kindness SW is generous with his time SW is friendly | Kindness Engagement Friendliness | Caregiver |
| <i>I believe the SWs are here to control us</i> | SWs are controlling | Control Regulation of rules | Caregiver |
| <i>They prepare food for us, they clean the house, they drive us if they have time. They say we have to learn how to take the bus. Not everyone can take the bus. They drive us sometimes when they have nothing else to do.</i> | SWs prepare food SWs clean the house SWs drive the boys SWs encourage the boys to learn how to take the bus | Helping in the household Driving services Supporting autonomy | Practical helper |
| <i>When the SWs come to us, I can speak Norwegian to them, and I will improve my Norwegian. They talk about society and culture, which is good for us.</i> | SWs teach the language SWs teach about society and culture | Teaching the language Teaching about society and culture | Integration helper |

Inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004).

Results

The analysis of the interviews showed how young, unaccompanied refugees described their experiences of interacting with their residential care workers. Through a role theory lens, these experiences with the social workers, whether positive or negative, are translated into three key roles: the caregiver, the integration helper and the practical helper. In describing their positive and negative experiences, they presented a picture of the role they see a social worker as having: a role that is defined by certain *desirable personal characteristics*, a role that has certain *tasks* and a role in which these tasks should *be performed* in a certain way.

The caregiver role

Desirable characteristics of the care worker

In describing this role, young people state how care workers should demonstrate a variety of characteristics, including a good sense of humour, being authentic, genuinely engaged and sincerely interested in the YURs' life and well-being. As someone who 'gives the little extra', and who engages a bit more than the formal job description would ask for:

You can see they are really interested in their job; they ask us, and they want to help. And they don't do it just because the leader told them to. (Arman)

Here in our apartment, we think like a family. Once a month, we have dinner together with all staff, and they bring along their own family and kids, we are a big family (...). (Amir)

Desired tasks the care worker should perform

The two main tasks described were related to first showing care, but also to establishing boundaries and control: most young Afghan refugees expected the caregivers to provide and openly show them care. However, they also expected a level of control from the care workers, as a sense of boundary-setting through house rules and mutual agreements. These young people understood control as a natural aspect of the caregivers' tasks, and control was therefore expected and accepted by them, even though they would not always agree with all the house rules set by social workers. Some refugees experienced control and boundaries as a helpful orientation point in this otherwise challenging period of their lives.

It's really good with rules here. Things are allowed or not. If not, you don't even have to think about it. (Mehmet)

From the adolescents' point of view, as a caregiver, it was possible to be kind and strict at the same time. Moreover, they found it much easier to accept control and boundary setting from kind, polite and respectful caregivers, than from caregivers who (ab)used their position and power to practice control and enforce rules. Hence, they appreciated a caregiver's ability to strike the right balance between caring and controlling.

How the tasks should be performed by the caregiver

They described how these tasks should be performed. The young people described how they perceived the mutual trust between themselves, and the caregivers they interacted with in everyday life at the institution, as vital:

If you (caregivers) want us (young people) to trust you, you need to trust us as well.
(Arman)

They expressed how empowering it felt to be trusted by the caregivers. However, they also experienced how fragile the mutual trust between a caregiver and young refugee can be, as illustrated by Arman:

(...) there was a young refugee in a city in the North of Norway, he killed three boys. The social workers talked about that incident with us, here at our place. I just said, 'the same will happen here soon as well'. I thought the social workers understood that I was just joking (...). But they did take it very seriously. Next day (...) the leader and the social workers immediately [wanted] to talk about what I had said (...). I was surprised that they took it so seriously. It was my fault and I apologized. But I thought they knew me, for so long now. I thought they trusted me. (Arman)

Receiving trust from the caregivers was an outspoken expectation of the young informants. Interestingly, many young refugees described how humour and (rather harsh) jokes between them and the caregivers was a sort of proof of their established trust in each other and the robustness of their relationship. However, they valued caregivers who practised social work in a kind, polite and respectful way:

He is always kind, even if it is getting late. He talks like a friend to me. (Idris)

If you respect someone, they respect you too. You need to talk; you need to see the other person in a good way. Everyone needs to help everyone. (Amid)

Being kind, polite and respectful to each other was considered very important by the young people for the communication and collaboration between them and the caregivers.

While mutual trust, respectfulness, politeness, kindness and a good sense of humour were important for the YURs in all encounters with social workers, these aspects were emphasized most strongly in the young people's narratives with regard to caregiving activities and situations, and they were therefore categorized as the primary characteristics of the caregiver's role.

The integration helper role

Desired tasks the integration helper should perform

Most of the young refugees expressed how challenging it was to gain access to the local community, and feel at home in the new society and culture in which they were now living. The young refugees expected their social workers to acknowledge their role as an integration helper, to facilitate their social inclusion.

Firstly, they felt social workers should help the YURs integrate by helping them to build and maintain friendships: For the young people, the term 'integration' meant local, social inclusion through the establishment of friendships and social networks. They believed that friendships with other young people, but particularly with young Norwegians, were an important door-opener into local society. Social inclusion was equated by the YURs with being enabled and empowered to create new friendships and maintain old ones. They explained that having friends and social networks was of extreme importance for them, as they had left their families and friends behind and had come to Norway alone. Hence, making new friendships was vital, and one way of spending social time together with new friends was to invite them over, perhaps to stay for dinner, watch TV and sleep over once in a while. Their former social networks, mostly with other young refugees they met on their journey at the asylum centre, or in other institutions, were also important for them and needed to be maintained. They explained that these former networks and friendships could provide substantial practical-, and especially mental support, for them, both now and later on. Nevertheless, many young refugees experienced that some social workers would ignore this part of their role, and would not support social interaction as much as expected. Esmat described a typical conflict many of the interviewees were concerned about:

(...) when my friends visit us, they cannot sleep over, or they cannot eat here when they are hungry. I think that is wrong. In the other place I lived, the social workers

would even order pizza for everyone, also for my friends. (...) It is our home, the social workers should show us that it is our home, we live here, we eat here, and we sleep here. (Esmat)

Secondly, they felt social workers should help the YURs integrate by helping them to learn the language and cultural differences: The young refugees also expected social workers to help them learn the 'new' language, and to develop an understanding of the local culture and society. Occasionally, as integration helpers, they were expected to act as cultural mediators between Norwegian and Afghan culture, according to some of the young people's narratives. They also appreciated when the social worker showed an interest in Afghan culture and languages. This made the YURs feel liked, and was experienced by the YURs as a form of respect and acknowledgement.

The practical helper role

Desired tasks the practical helper should perform

Most of the young refugees we spoke to believed that daily practical help was the primary task of social workers. Firstly, they felt the social worker should help and advise in preparing domestic chores and schoolwork. The young people expected them to help to prepare food, clean the house and help them with homework.

So, they help us with cleaning the house and help us with the homework (...) and when we need, they help us cook dinner. They teach us, and they help us. (Amir)

Secondly, social workers should help with planning external activities. Some young people also expected help with other practical tasks, such as making doctors' appointments and planning leisure and holiday activities.

And thirdly, social workers should help with arranging or providing transport. However, the most popular form of practical help in the institution for young, unaccompanied refugees was offering to drive them to different places. Even though public transport was available, and most of the young people were capable of using the bus/train, they asked to be driven to school, to visit friends or to appointments. Apart from the practical benefit, the young people said they often appreciated the 'driving-conversation situation' as an opportunity to have the social workers' undivided time and attention outside the living unit.

How the tasks should be performed by the practical helper

When social workers supported them over and above the necessary, the young refugees particularly appreciated their input.

She (the social worker) is very nice ... when I have a bad day, I need help. (...) I was waiting for my turn at the washing machine, but I was sick and lying in my bed, and she put my clothes into the washing machine for me instead, this was so nice. (...) It was a little thing to do, but it meant so much for me. (...) She showed that she really cared for me. (Azal)

The overlapping of roles

Although our analysis has presented three key roles (the caregiver, integration helper and practical helper), these roles are not completely separate from each other. In the practice of social work with YURs, the tasks outlined by the boys demonstrated some overlap. For example, the caregiver overlaps with the practical helper's role in a 'driving-conversation-situation'. Here, social workers primarily take on the role of a practical helper when driving them to a place, but social workers may simultaneously also use this task as a means of performing the caregiver role: in a conversation with the young person in the car, the social worker offers attention and care at that specific moment. Depending on the subject of the conversation (e.g. themes related to culture, local habits, the society, the language), the social worker could potentially also step into the role of integration helper.

Differences in individual, situational expectations

Furthermore, not all of the participants expected the same of their social worker; while some seemed to need support from all three roles (integration helper, caregiver and practical helper), others only required one or two of these, and reached out to teachers and friends to fulfil the other roles. For instance, some seemed to expect the social worker to only be an integration helper to support them in learning the Norwegian language, or only a practical helper in their daily lives, at this moment.

Discussion and implications for the practice of social work

Young Afghan boys with unaccompanied refugee status have both positive and negative experiences with social workers. Through a role theory lens, these experiences are interpreted as the role, and informal expectations the YURs have of the social worker who works with them. There are three main social worker roles that

these boys describe (caregiver, integration helper and practical helper), and in doing so they present the personal characteristics desired of the social worker, the tasks YURs believe they should be expected to perform, and the way the YURs felt these should be conducted or delivered.

First, the caregiver role is as expected for any child in contact with the CWS (see Lange, 1999; Larsen et al., 1990; Larsen, 2001; Paulsen et al., 2017; Thrana, 2016). Yet, beyond seeing care as support, they speak of expecting a balance of care and control tasks that the social workers should perform. The YURs describe these not as contradictory forces, but instead that care can for them be considered a form of control. Establishing boundaries for the young people to work within may make these YURs feel more secure, a state especially necessary for them considering their traumatic histories and absence of parental influence. These institutional frameworks and rules, and social workers' boundary setting, aim to help the young people to behave in a way that is acceptable and beneficial in the society and culture in which they are now living (Foucault, 1991).

As with any child in the CWS (see Lange, 1999; Larsen et al., 1990; Larsen, 2001; Paulsen et al., 2017; Thrana, 2016), YURs expect their social workers to perform these tasks with humour, mutual respect and politeness. What these boys may be calling for here, in common with all children in contact with the CWS, is a need for a person-centred and therapeutic type of alliance with their carer (Rogers, 1959). This is an alliance in which the carer and YUR engage in a more horizontal interpersonal relationship based on mutual respect and trust, and is characterized by active listening and empathy on both sides (Rogers, 1959): a caregiver who encourages the young person to define their own needs and difficulties (Herz & Lalander, 2017; Rogers, 1959), and helps to find solutions on the young persons' situational premises (Skårdalsmo & Harnischfeger, 2017; Paulsen et al., 2017).

Similarly, the practical helper role was another outspoken expectation of the children, but again not a role unique for social work with this YUR group (see Lange, 1999; Larsen et al., 1990; Larsen, 2001; Paulsen et al., 2017). Practical help was required in terms of help and advice in preparing domestic chores and schoolwork, help in planning external activities and, lastly, help with arranging or providing transport. This

role should be performed from the boys' perspective, again with empathy and personal engagement.

But social workers working with YURs are expected by the young people to perform a further role. While the role of carer and practical supporter is a feature of social workers working with any child in contact with the CWS, the role of *integration helper* appears to be unique, and particularly important for the YUR subgroup of young people in contact with the CWS. These young, unaccompanied refugees now have the possibility of a longer residence in Norway, as their residence permits have been granted. Having a more permanent future in Norway to look forward to, they may be looking for social workers to help them integrate into what is likely to be their new home. These young people are clear that the social worker's role is to help the YUR integrate, by helping them to learn the language and understand the culture. Again, however, in line with the desire for therapeutic alliances (Rogers, 1959), while wanting to learn Norwegian culture and language as facilitated by the social worker, they also appreciated when social workers knew at least some basics about Afghan culture and language in return, and could act as a cultural mediator. This highlights the need for social workers working with this group to be both culturally sensitive and culturally competent. The former suggests a respect for cultural differences (Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020), and the latter an understanding of the Afghan language and history specifically, but also an awareness of intersecting factors for the young refugees (Rugkåsa & Ylvisaker, 2019). This is likely to be challenging for these workers in the complex and dynamic world of immigration, and will require a high degree of reflexivity from them (Volckmar-Eeg & Enoksen, 2020).

The Afghan YURs also equate integration with building new friendships, especially with Norwegians, and maintaining existing friendships with fellow YURs. In other words, social workers are expected by the YURs to build both bonding and bridging social capital for this group. The YURs' expectations are well founded, as in the long term, integration will promote the young people's resilience and well-being (Johansen & Studsrød, 2019). It will help them gain independence later in life (Oppedal, Seglem, & Jensen, 2009), and to overcome negative feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Herz & Lalander, 2017).

Limitations and future research

The number of interviewees was small, and all of the informants were male and of the same national origin. The context of our findings is the Norwegian social system and the local Norwegian approach to social work with unaccompanied refugees. Resources and person-power supporting YURs will vary in other countries.

It is also likely that YURs' individual expectations may vary with respect to time (i.e. the amount of time living at the Norwegian institution, the strength of their relationship with social workers and the young person's age and maturity), context (i.e. everyday routines) and situation (i.e. when they are alone or with peers). These variations now need to be explored in greater depth.

We should also consider how the YURs' expectations of the social worker role as carer, integration helper and practical helper may potentially shape the social worker's behaviour and identity, based on how the social worker understands what these young people expect of them, how social workers may potentially accommodate the expectations of the YURs, and how a lack of alignment may cause negative outcomes for the YURs. There were suggestions that YURs felt that social workers did not comply with their expectations: e.g., did not facilitate social activities or provide the transport that some YURs felt was important for integration and practical support. The degree to which social workers comply with the YURs' expectations, and the reasons they may resist, remains to be explored. In other words, the impact of the YURs' expectations on how social workers perceive their role, and their possible actions, is part of the ongoing work under the wider project of which this paper is part.

Social workers are also subject to more than the YURs' expectations. They will also be influenced by the expectations of their social work leaders and policymakers. They are asked to find the right balance for the individual adolescent within the specific situation and context, and to take account of the other young people living in the same unit. At the same time, the social workers need to consider the organizational and institutional framework within which they work (March, 1994; Schein, 1986; Turner, 2002). Multiple expectations from different stakeholders (Healy, 2014) (e.g.

care receivers, the institution, the organization, colleagues and social work leaders) can produce cross-pressure situations and dilemma for social workers (Ylvisaker & Rugkåsa, 2021) attempting to respond to the young refugees' expectations. How they strike a balance between these formal expectations of policymakers and social work leaders, and those of the YURs they serve, is also the theme of the ongoing research project of which this paper is a part.

Conclusion

On exploring the expectations of social workers held by young, unaccompanied refugees living in Norway, we find that the YURs describe the roles of the social worker in much the same way as other young people in contact with the CWS (a caregiver and a practical helper). However, YURs expect an additional role, namely that of integration helper.

Furthermore, YURs' expectations are more than instrumental, i.e., more than a task they expect the social worker to perform. They also expect the task to be performed in a person-centred, therapeutic alliance (e.g. with humour and trust), and that the social worker exhibits particular personal characteristics or competences, such as being culturally competent and sensitive.

If social workers are to take YURs' expectations of their roles as carer, practical helper and integration helper into account, when they consider their professional actions, they could reflect on and build competences by:

- 1) providing a balance between support/care and control functions that simultaneously allows sufficient freedom and facilitates integration, but that also sets appropriate boundaries with which to keep the YURs safe. In the absence of a parental figure, the social worker may be particularly important here;
- 2) supporting bridge-building and bonding social capital in YURs;
- 3) delivering care through a person-centred approach, and in the form of a therapeutic alliance; and
- 4) being culturally competent and sensitive.

However, the expectations that each individual young person has of social workers are individual, in flux and contextual, and not consistent over time. We therefore recommend prioritizing learning more about the young person's individual expectations of social worker roles, and a useful weighting of these roles for each individual. Social workers can establish a dialogue with each of the YURs by using the three key roles as a mapping and conversation tool. This sort of dialogue is helpful for YURs and social workers in understanding each other's situations: what expectations can and should be met, and how this can be done at both the individual and group level. The YURs can also acquire a better understanding of what expectations social workers cannot, or should not meet, for some reason.

Further research is required to understand how YURs' expectations impact on the social workers' view of their own roles and their professional actions in practice.

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