Coming of Age in Exile
- Health, Education and Employment Outcomes for Young Refugees in the Nordic Countries

Signe Smith Jervelund
Associate Professor, Centre Director
University of Copenhagen
Department of Public Health,
Section for Health Services Research
Danish Research Centre for Migration,
Ethnicity and Health (MESU)
Reception of immigrants

Foto: Polfoto
Background

• Increasing immigration to the Nordic countries - since the 1970s dominated by refugees

• 20-30% are children. Increasing proportion of unaccompanied minors

• Many live in neighbourhoods characterized by a high density of ethnic minorities and low socio-economic status
Why a Nordic Approach?

1. Major similarities
   • regarding majority populations
   • regarding the general welfare policies

2. Major differences
   • regarding immigration patterns
   • regarding specific immigrant and refugee policies

3. Comparable register data access

4. History of close research collaboration
Equity in Health

• ”Equity in health implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and, more pragmatically, that none should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential, if it can be avoided”

Aims

• To investigate **how socio-economic and health inequities develop** during the formative years in young refugees

• To investigate **how SES and health are interrelated** and associated with key areas of welfare policy like health services, education, employment and housing

• **To identify welfare policies** that may promote health and socio-economic equity in young refugees compared with the majority populations

• The project started July 1st 2015 and ends December 31st 2019

• Five partners (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden)

• Funded by NordForsk (30 mio Nkr).
MENTAL HEALTH
Depression

• Refugees had a higher prevalence of depression compared with native-born peers

**More depression**
- Traumatic pre-migration experiences
- Discrimination
- Daily hassles in host country

**Less depression**
- Social support
- Greater host language proficiency
- Higher educational attainment

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
Emotional and Behavioural Problems

- Females: More internalising symptoms
- Males: More externalising symptoms
- Longitudinal study: Social context in host country more important than pre-migration experiences

More problems
- Traumatic pre-migration experiences
- Discrimination (internalising)
- School relocations
- Stressful post-migration experiences

Less problems
- Attending school or being employed
- Ethnic majority friends
- Greater host language proficiency
- Parents with longer education

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
Psychiatric Disorders

• Same overall rate ratio (RR) as ethnic majority peers
• Refugees had higher RR for psychotic and nervous disorders but lower RR for affective disorders than native peers

Factors associated with psychiatric disorders

• Quota refugee
• Unaccompanied
• Lower household income
• Older age at residence permission

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
EDUCATION
Enrolment in Education

• **Accompanied** refugees were enrolled in education to a greater extent than the general population.

• **Accompanied** refugees were enrolled in education twice as often as unaccompanied refugees.

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
School Achievement

Vietnamese refugees in Finland:

- Refugees had a lower grade point average than native-born peers
- Discrimination and adherence to “traditional Vietnamese family values” associated with poorer achievement
- Better host language proficiency associated with better achievement

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
Educational Attainment

Unaccompanied refugees in Sweden:

• Few had undergone post-secondary education
• More females than males completed upper secondary school
• \( \leq 15 \) years of age at arrival – higher completion of upper secondary school compared with those aged 16-17 at arrival

Vietnamese refugees in Finland

• More than compulsory education:
  • Less discrimination in childhood
  • Greater host country language proficiency
  • Adherence to “Finnish values”
  • Ethnic self-identification as Vietnamese

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
EMPLOYMENT
Employment

• Refugees employed to a lesser extent than other immigrants, descendants and native-born

• **About 50%** of refugees were employed

• More men than women were employed

• **Unaccompanied** refugees employed to a greater extent than accompanied refugees

• More than primary education improved employment probability

• Often unskilled jobs

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
LINKS BETWEEN HEALTH, EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher educational attainment associated with less depression

Long-term improvements in mental health associated with studying or working

Education had a positive effect on employment probability

Some refugees outside labour force received health-related subsidies – too ill to work

→ Need for further longitudinal studies of causal and interrelated effects

→ Need for Nordic/international comparative research
NEET Status among Population Groups (DK)

Source: de Montgomery, CJ et. forthcoming
Development in NEET Status by Countries of Origin

Denmark

Figure 3.: Development in NEET status - by main countries of origin

Source: de Montgomery, CJ et. al Forthcoming
CONCLUSION

Discrimination, host language proficiency, support from social networks important factors for young refugees’ well-being and integration

- Conditions in host country
- Welfare policies can address these factors

Findings from Denmark:
Narrowing the gap
- Moving in the right direction?
Thank you very much for your attention!

Email: ssj@sund.ku.dk
Partners/Research Teams

1. Danish Research Centre for Migration, Ethnicity and Health, (MESU), Department of Public Health, **University of Copenhagen**, Denmark (*Signe Smith Jervelund*)

2. Centre for Health and Equity Studies, (CHESS), **Karolinska Institut and Stockholm University**, Sweden (*Anders Hjern*)

3. **Institute of Migration**, IFM, Turku, Finland (*Elli Heikkilä*)

4. **The Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies** (NKVTS), Oslo, Norway (*Lutine de Waal Pastoor*)

5. Faculty of Health and Social Studies, **University College of Southeast Norway**. (TUC/UCSN), Porsgrunn, Norway (*Ketil Eide*)

*In total 23 participating researchers, 5 partners/research teams and 4 countries*
NEET Status: Boys versus Girls (DK)

Source: de Montgomery, CJ et. forthcoming
NEET Status among Population Groups by Immigration Year

Source: de Montgomery, CJ et. forthcoming
NEET Status by Marital Status and by Motherhood

Source: de Montgomery, CJ et. forthcoming
Post-Traumatic Stress

- Higher prevalence among teenagers than children
- Higher prevalence among males than females

More PTS
- War experiences
- Psychological vulnerability prior to traumatic experiences

Less PTS
- Longer stay in host country
- Mother’s emotional well-being
- Having peers to play with

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming
Most common jobs

Study of unaccompanied refugees in Sweden

• Only a few had jobs that required higher education

• Mainly employed in service, care and sales jobs – especially women

• Men also employed in unskilled manual jobs

Source: Børsch, ASR et. forthcoming