Rebuilding Family Life: An Exploration of Female Refugees' Experiences of Family Reunification and Integration in Ireland.

Susan Mackey

CARL Research Project

Name of student:	Susan Mackey
Name of civil society organization/community group:	Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre
Name and year of course:	Master of Social Work 2011-2013
Supervisor	Eleanor Bantry White
Date completed:	April 29th 2013

What is Community-Academic Research Links?

Community Academic Research Links (CARL) is a service provided by research institutes for the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in their region which can be grass roots groups, single issue temporary groups, but also well-structured organisations. Research for the CSOs is carried out free of financial cost as much as possible.

CARL seek to:

• provide civil society with knowledge and skills through research and education;

• provide their services on an affordable basis;

• promote and support public access to and influence on science and technology;

• create equitable and supportive partnerships with civil society organisations;

• enhance understanding among policymakers and education and research institutions of the research and education needs of civil society, and

• enhance the transferrable skills and knowledge of students, community representatives and researchers (www.livingknowledge.org).

What is a CSO?

We define CSOs as groups who are non-governmental, non-profit, not representing commercial interests, and/or pursuing a common purpose in the public interest. These groups include: trade unions, NGOs, professional associations, charities, grass-roots organisations, organisations that involve citizens in local and municipal life, churches and religious committees, and so on.

Why is this report on the web?

The research agreement between the CSO, student and CARL/University states that the results of the study must be made public. We are committed to the public and free dissemination of research results.

How do I reference this report?

Author (year) Project Title, [online], School of Applied Social Studies, Community-Academic Research Links/University College Cork, Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/en/scishop/completed/ [Accessed on: date].

How can I find out more about the Community-Academic Research Links and the Living Knowledge Network?

The UCC CARL website has further information on the background and operation of the Community-Academic Research Links at University College Cork, Ireland. http://carl.ucc.ie

CARL is part of an international network of Science Shops. You can read more about this vibrant community and its activities on this website: http://www.scienceshops.org

Disclaimer

Notwithstanding the contributions by the University and its staff, the University gives no warranty as to the accuracy of the project report or the suitability of any material contained in it for either general or specific purposes. It will be for the Client Group, or users, to ensure that any outcome from the project meets safety and other requirements. The Client Group agrees not to hold the University responsible in respect of any use of the project results.

Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is a matter of record that many student projects have been completed to a very high standard and to the satisfaction of the Client Group.

Abstract

This research explores female refugees' experiences of family reunification and integration in Ireland. The research was proposed by Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre in an effort to explore to understand the experiences of refugees in greater depth and to identify appropriate support for family members at this time. A literature review was conducted and research was carried out using an interpretivist perspective, qualitative methodology. This information was then analysed and a number of significant findings emerged. The accounts of women in this study suggest that the processes of migration, reunification and integration had impacted them significantly in terms of disruption and change in their lives and in their relationships with family members. While all reflected being happy to reunite with their family members in the beginning and identified many beneficial effects of reunification, over time relationship difficulties arose for most of the participants and while some overcame these challenges, relationship breakdown occurred in other cases. These experiences appeared to be impacted by structural and social challenges and by supports which acted as protective or inhibiting factors for family reunion and integration. The findings together with the literature review informed a number of recommendations made in relation to supporting and alleviating challenges that may arise for refugee families following reunification.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my tutor Eleanor Bantry White for her continued support and advice throughout the research process and for sharing her extensive research knowledge and experience with me. I would also like to thank Claire Cumiskey & Fiona Hurley, Legal Information Officers and Fiona Finn, CEO with Nasc for their invaluable support, advice and encouragement throughout this research. To Emer & Yvonne, thank you so much for giving your time to edit and whip me into shape!

To my father, Frank, my sister Claire, my nieces & nephew and to Mum and Ter for their never ending support and encouragement over the last two years. Special mention to my partner Michal without whose support I could not have completed this work.

To my MSW classmates, thank you for all your support during the last two years.

Most importantly, thank you to the women that participated in this research. By sharing your experiences you have enriched this research immeasurably and your openness, honesty and

strength has set an example for me. Beyond doubt, my learning experiences throughout these two years have deepened because of you.

Executive summary

Background to the Study

This research has come about through the CARL project within UCC. The CSO, Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre proposed this research in order to explore female refugees' experiences of family reunification and integration in Ireland in order to better understand their support needs at this time. The need to explore this issue arose as a result of their direct work with refugees.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the research was to explore the perspectives of female refugees regarding their experiences of family reunification and integration in Ireland. The primary objective was to understand their experience with a view to gaining a greater awareness of the needs of refugee families at this time. The following research questions were posed:

1. From the female's perspective, how have relationships between family members been affected by the processes of migration, reunification and integration?
2. Have female refugees experienced any challenges since their arrival to Ireland? If so, what did they think had caused these challenges?
3. What factors helped or hindered the processes of reunion and integration for the family?

Methodology

This research is a small-scale qualitative study. Undertaking qualitative research allowed the researcher to focus on the experiences of female refugees and to explore the impact of the experiences of migration, reunification and integration had on their lives. The use of a participatory approach to research with an Interpretive framework supported gaining a greater insight into how participants viewed their unique situations. The primary research involved carrying out five semi-structured interviews and this together with a comprehensive literature review served to explore their experiences in-depth.

Findings

The accounts of women in this study suggest that the processes of migration, reunification and integration had impacted them significantly in terms of disruption and change in their

lives and in their relationships with family members. While all reflected being happy to reunite with their family members in the beginning and identified many beneficial effects of reunification, over time relationship difficulties arose for most of the participants and while some overcame these challenges, relationship breakdown occurred in other cases. These experiences appeared to be impacted by structural and social challenges and by supports which acted as protective or inhibiting factors for family reunion and integration. The findings together with the literature review informed a number of recommendations made in relation to supporting and alleviating challenges that may arise for refugee families following reunification.

Recommendations

1. Access to Information: The availability of information to families prior to entering the state or at the point of entry emerged as an important requirement for women in this study.
2. Targeted Support: A number of women in this study also spoke of the desire to have a designated worker as a form of support and somebody that they can trust and link in with following reunification.
3. An integrated and well-planned response from key services including social services, education, health and immigration professionals
4. Updated Policy and Legislation. Key areas in this respect include:

- The adoption of the Directive 2004/38/EC on the Right to Family Reunification
- An independent appeals mechanism
- Independent residency status for family members of refugees

5. A Comprehensive Anti-Racism Strategy:
6. Further research into the experiences of refugee families on a larger scale and research into the impact of the lengths of separation on family reunification and integration outcomes.

Author's Conclusion

These findings reveal that while reunification is marked by a sense of relief, safety and happiness for family members, their situation post reunification can often prove to be more difficult than originally imagined. Most women in this study recounted significant challenges in adjusting to new dynamics in family relationships and in adapting to their new community following reunification. Thus, it appears that a serious need for support for these

families does not cease following reunification and it is essential that policy makers, state and community services respond appropriately to this.

Table of Contents.

Chapter One: Introduction	**Page Number:**
1.1 Title	1
1.2 Introduction	1
1.3 Research Rationale	1
1.4 Research Aims and Objectives	2
1.5 Research Questions	2
1.6 Defining the Terms	2
1.6.1 Family Reunification	2
1.6.2 Refugee	3
1.6.3 Integration	3
1.7 Chapter Outline	3
1.8 Conclusion	4
Chapter Two: Methodology.	
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Participatory Research	5
2.3 Research Paradigm	6
2.4 Literature Review	6
2.5 Sampling	6
2.6 Data Collection	7
2.7 Data analysis	7
2.8 Ethical Issues and Concerns	9
2.8.1 Attending to the Sensitive Nature of the Topic	9
2.8.2 Respect for privacy and confidentiality	9
2.8.3 Informed Consent	10
2.8.4 Cultural Competence	10
2.9 Research Limitations	10
2.9.1 Language	10
2.9.2 Prior involvement with the organisation	11
2.9.3 Other Family Member's Perspectives	12
2.10 Conclusion	12

Chapter Three: Literature Review.

3.1 Introduction 13
3.2 Refugees & Family Reunification: The Law and Policy in Ireland. 13
3.3 Impact of Delay – The Experience of Separation 15
3.4 Family Experiences - Post Reunification 16
3.4.1 The Spousal Relationship 17
3.4.2 The Parent-Child Relationship 17
3.5 Protective Factors Affecting Reunification & Integration 18
3.6 Inhibiting Factors Affecting Reunification and Integration 19
3.7 Support Systems for Family Reunification and Integration 20
3.8 Conclusion 21

Chapter Four: Research Findings & Discussion

4.1 Introduction 22
4.2 Key Findings 22
4.3 Experiences of Family Relationships Following Reunification 23
4.4 Relationship Stressors 25
4.4.1 Impact of Separation 25
4.4.2 Acculturation Stress 27
4.4.3 Trauma 28
4.5 Varied Relationship Experiences 29
4.6 Structural Challenges to Reunification & Integration 30
4.6.1 Immigration & Social Services 30
4.6.2 Education & Employment 31
4.6.3 Discrimination 31
4.7 Language & Social Networks 32
4.7.1 English Language 32
4.7.2 Lack of Social Networks & Extended Family 33
4.8 Protective Factors 34
4.8.1 Practical Supports 34
4.8.2 Community Engagement 35
4.9 Conclusion 35

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations.

5.1 Introduction 37

5.2 Key Findings and Final Discussion 37

5.3 Recommendations 38

5.4 Reflection 40

5.5 Concluding Remarks 41

5.6 Conclusion 41

Bibliography 43

Appendices

Appendix A Research Sample – Criteria Chosen 52

Appendix B Information Sheet 53

Appendix B Consent Form & Release of Interview Transcript form 56

Appendix D Interview Questions 57

Chapter One: Introduction and Background.

1.1 Title

"Rebuilding Family Life: An Exploration of Female Refugees' Experiences of Family Reunification and Integration in Ireland".

1.2 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline the research rationale for the study, the research questions, aims and objectives. Within this piece there will also be a general introduction into the situation of family reunification in Ireland. Finally, key terms within this study will be defined and explored.

1.3 Research Rationale

This study came about through the Community Academic Research Links (CARL) project within UCC. The CARL project affords opportunities to students to carry out research on behalf of Civil Society Organisations (CSO's). Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre, the CSO who proposed this research topic is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Cork City that provides a free information and support service to immigrants primarily in the Munster region. Nasc has built up a wealth of experience of identifying the needs of migrants through working with service users and key stakeholders in the region for over thirteen years. I have been professionally involved with this organisation for seven years and have built up a degree of knowledge of the subject area identified by the CSO.

Through their direct work, Nasc has witnessed a number of issues arising in refugee families after family reunification has occurred. This has included relationship difficulties, conflict and adjustment issues for family members. Nasc recognised that there is a gap in research in relation to the area of family reunification and outcomes for reunited members in Ireland. Thus, in an effort to explore this situation further, the CSO has proposed this research in order to understand the experiences of refugees in greater depth and to identify appropriate support for family members.

Social workers, along with other health and human services professionals, are involved in many ways in the provision of services for refugees, for example in the form of health services, supportive counselling, settlement support and social and educational programmes (Cox and Pawar, 2006). Thus research to understand the range of issues faced by

refugees is also vital to the profession in order to comprehend the lives of refugees, the experience and the needs of this group and most importantly to develop more appropriate and effective responses to their needs.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The aims of the research are

- To explore the perspectives of female refugees regarding their experiences of family reunification and integration in Ireland.
- To understand whether they have faced any challenges subsequent to reuniting with their family and the factors they believe had contributed to this
- To identify the supports in place that aid their integration in Ireland.

Thus the primary objective is to understand their experience with a view to gaining a greater awareness of the needs of refugee families at this time. This will be achieved by obtaining the perspectives of female refugees through the use of semi-structured interviews and by carrying out an in-depth literature review on previous data available in this area of research.

1.5 Research Questions

1. From the female refugees' perspective, how have relationships between family members been affected by the processes of migration, reunification and integration?
2. Have female refugees experienced any challenges since their arrival to Ireland? If so, what did they think had caused these challenges?
3. What factors helped or hindered the processes of reunion and integration for the family?

1.6 Defining the Terms

This section defines the key terms that are discussed throughout the research.

1.6.1 Family Reunification:

Under Irish law (The Refugee Act, 1996) a refugee is entitled to be joined by their spouse and unmarried dependent children (under 18 years) or in the case of a minor, by their parents during a process known as Family Reunification (Cosgrave, 2006). In this research project the definition of Family Reunification refers to the attempts of family members separated by forced migration to re-unite in a country other than their country of origin

(Cosgrave, 2006). Today this is one of the principal sources of migration flow in many countries.

1.6.2 Refugee:

The term refugee for the purpose of this study refers to a person who has made a claim for asylum under the Geneva Convention 1951 (UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). The Geneva convention defines a refugee as *"a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that society"* (Article 1A (2), Geneva Convention). A person that has attained status by this manner is often referred to as a 'Convention refugee' (The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI, n.d.).

In this research the term also refers to a person who has attained the status of 'Programme Refugee'. This is defined under Irish law (Section 24(1) of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) as *"a person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Government"* (Refugee Information Service (RIS), 2009, p.19). A Programme Refugee is usually afforded protection at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in response to a humanitarian crisis (AkiDWa, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, family members who have joined a refugee through the process of family reunification will also be encompassed within the term.

1.6.3 Integration:

In this study, integration encompasses the process of settlement which refers *"to concrete activities and processes of becoming established after arrival in a country of settlement"* (Valtonen, 2008, p.6). However, it also goes further to include the ability of refugees to fully participate *"in the social, economic, cultural and political life of a society"* (ibid), whilst continuing to maintain their own cultural identity. This involves the person attaining meaningful status, roles and relationships within the host society.

1.7 Chapter Outline

Chapter 2: Methodology. This chapter addresses the participatory approach to research and looks at Interpretivism as the conceptual framework within this study. It also examines the

use of qualitative research and discusses the methods of data collection and analysis. The limitations of the study are further examined and ethical concerns that arose during the study are also explored.

Chapter 3: Literature Review. This chapter begins with information relating to the law and policy that governs family reunification applications in Ireland. The literature also explores individuals' experiences of reunion and integration under a number of key themes as well as the factors that can serve to support or inhibit this process.

Chapter 4: Research Findings. This chapter presents and analyses the primary research findings. The main themes are focussed on which are the experiences of family relationships post reunification and the factors contributing to this, challenges encountered by participants and supports that helped or hindered the processes of family reunification and integration.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations. This chapter summarises and discusses the main findings within the study. Additionally, recommendations informed by the literature review and findings are made as a means to attend to the support needs of refugee families. A final reflection and closing remarks conclude this research.

1.8 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has outlined the rationale for this research project and explored the main aims and objectives and posed the research questions. Key terms have been outlined and a general introduction into the situation of family reunification in Ireland has been presented.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the participatory approach to research and the rationale for adopting a qualitative, interpretivist framework. Research methods, data collection and analysis methods are addressed. Finally, research limitations and the ethical considerations are considered.

2.2 Participatory research

This research is part of a CARL project within UCC, therefore by its very nature it is participatory. It requires collaboration between the university and community group to address the research questions raised by the CSO. This form of research is often adopted as a means of *"solving a pressing community problem or effecting social change"* (Strand, et al., 2003, p. 3) through a 'grass-roots' understanding of the issue. Its basis is influenced by the work of Freire who argues that learning should be a two way process involving critical reflection, shared knowledge and collaboration which aims to empower the oppressed and bring about structural changes in society (Selener, 1997). In the participatory approach, the interviewee is seen as the expert in their own experience, hence the importance of the researcher working collaboratively with them and the community organisation involved (Park, 2001). In this study, I worked together with participants and staff of the organisation in terms of the research design and implementation. For example, I consulted with them on the development of the information sheet and interview questions and incorporated their feedback on research content into its design. This enabled the knowledge and experience of participants and the CSO to shape the findings and produce a richness of data as a result. The CSO was also involved in the formulation of the research questions which altered during the course of the study. From the outset, one of the research questions addressed the specific issue of separation and how this had influenced family dynamics post reunification. However, through subsequent discussion of the findings with the CSO, we determined that while separation seemed to be a crucial factor in determining outcomes, other factors such as trauma also appeared to influence women's experiences post reunification. Thus we negotiated a broader question which better encompassed the perspectives of the women in this research.

One of the most important elements of this study will be the dissemination of findings following submission of the research. Thus, in keeping with the participatory nature of the study and the requirements of the CARL project, these findings will be presented to the agency and participants involved.

2.3 Research Paradigm

An interpretivist research framework was used to investigate the experiences of people from refugee backgrounds who have been involved in the family reunification process. Interpretivism has been defined by Fisher (2007) as an epistemological position which supports the need to understand difference between people in their role as social actors. This is a subjective approach to research which recognises that 'reality' cannot be objective but is created through people's interpretations of it. This in turn is influenced by their values, by other people's understandings and by the outcomes that develop as a result of both (Fisher, 2007).

This approach is highly compatible with the use of qualitative data which has been gathered as part of this research. Qualitative studies correlate well with small-scale studies such as this, where information derived can be rich in content and the analysis of it is open to new concepts that may emerge (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It has also allowed for increased flexibility in terms of the research design and sensitivity to the context of the study (ibid). Hansen (2006) states that qualitative research is particularly appropriate where exploratory studies are being undertaken and where the social contexts of people's lives are of critical significance, hence the support of this approach to the current research.

Research Methods

2.4 Literature Review

Carrying out a literature review allowed me to understand if and how the research questions posed in this study have been addressed. It also assists in identifying which research path to take that can best build upon that work that has already been done (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). A comprehensive literature review was also vital in order to make sense of the research findings.

2.5 Sampling

The sampling method employed in this study was purposive sampling. This occurs where participants are chosen based on particular features or characteristics which enable

detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes that the researcher wishes to study (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). As specific criteria were chosen in order to narrow the parameters of the study, this resulted in the chosen form of sampling[1]. Thus participants were not selected randomly but instead chosen on the basis of their availability and the CSO's judgment that they met the criteria of the study. The liaison person within the CSO works directly with service users that have gone through the process of reunification, thus was in a prime position to assist in identifying and acquiring the participation of individuals. With this assistance I worked in conjunction with the organisation to source appropriate participants for the study.

1. Please see appendix A for these criteria

2.6 Data collection

Data was gathered from five participants through the use of face-to-face semi structured interviews. This format follows a structure but also allows for some probing responses and exploration of respondents views in more detail. Furthermore, it offers scope for the clarification of points raised and provides people with an opportunity to discuss matters which concern them (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003). In terms of the location of interviews, participants were offered a private room within the CSO office. This was chosen as a neutral venue where participants may feel more comfortable to discuss issues that they would not wish to do so within their home environment The participants were also offered a second option of the supervising tutor's office within the University as an alternative in the event that the influence of the CSO may have affected what they discussed. However, all participants chose to use the CSO offices. Reasons given for this included that it was centrally located as well as being a familiar and comfortable venue for them.

2.7 Data analysis

Upon completion of interviews, taped records were transcribed. Further to this the transcripts were analysed in-depth through following a series of steps as recommended by authors. This included the data management stage where data was summarised, allocated to various themes and links were identified between these (Ritchie, Spencer & O' Connor, 2003). This was followed by the descriptive stage where meanings were attributed to the themes that arose. The final phase of explanatory work entailed applying patterns of association to the data and deriving possible accounts for their occurrence. Greater

refinement and richness of data was elicited through navigating back and forth between each phase (ibid).

Grief and Loss, Systems Social Work and Attachment theories informed the explanatory phase of the work by assisting with accounting for patterns that emerged in the study and relating these findings to the broader context. Grief and Loss was the primary theory employed as it helped to highlight the significance of the multiple losses experienced by participants prior to and post reunification. 'Ambiguous loss' was particularly relevant as it related to the consequences of separation which all participants had experienced. This has been defined as a type of unacknowledged loss which can arise from the experience of losing a loved one who is physically absent yet psychologically present (Boss, 1999). The resulting grief can be difficult for the person to recognise and understand, and therefore can make it more difficult for them to deal with. Meaning Reconstructionist Theory also aided recognition that a person's experience of loss is largely dependent on the meaning they assign to this (Neimeyer, 2001).

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) was used when looking at parent-child relationships in this study as it can support understanding of the influences of separation and disruption on bonding between family members. This argues that a lack of an early secure attachment relationship between children and their caregivers can have negative psychological and developmental implications for them later in life (RASNZ, 2012). Thus, a major event such as forced migration and the subsequent separation from a primary caregiver can impact the parent-child relationship. However, previous research has also supported understanding of the importance of the influence of culture, extended family and significance of community carers in many societies that refugees originate from and how these factors can also impact the relationship (ibid).

Lastly, Systems theory looks at interactions and relationships between systems in an individual's life and acknowledges that the circumstances of the person cannot be understood without reference to this (The International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2001). There are multiple influences in the lives of refugees (i.e. structural frameworks) and many existing relationships that could both be affected by and alter the actions they take. This theory assisted in understanding these interactions and helped to identify factors that influenced outcomes for participants (Coulshed and Orme, 1998).

2.8 Ethical Issues and Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the issues involved, this research was submitted for ethical approval to the Department of Applied Social Studies Research Committee at UCC. The following points were explored in great detail during this process and a number of revisions were made in accordance with the committee's recommendations. Approval was subsequently granted following this process.

2.8.1 Attending to the Sensitive Nature of the Topic

Participants in this research can be constructed as vulnerable people in Irish society and interviews carried out involved discussing difficult and sensitive issues. Therefore particular care was taken when addressing sensitive subjects in order to minimise the distress of participants. A 'pre-briefing' occurred on the days prior to the interview which involved discussion with the liaison person at Nasc, the participant and I. The purpose of this was to discuss the content of the interview with the participant and to highlight that emotions may be triggered during this process. They were also informed that they were under no obligation to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with. This was an effort to minimise the potential for surprise or distress during the interview and to provide them with sufficient opportunity to consider their participation.

The interview process drew on Alston and Bowles (2003) interviewing techniques in regards to sensitivity issues. This involved establishing a rapport as a key component of the interview process and employing the use of basic, impersonal interview questions at the beginning before moving to ones of a more sensitive nature. This was to facilitate the person to become more comfortable with the interview procedure and to feel more ready to discuss issues of concern. The use of empathy and maintaining attentiveness on my behalf was also critical to remain sensitive to the person's needs throughout the interview and to discern any underlying meanings to what was being said. A 'de-briefing' occurred following each interview involving informal discussion. The CSO also put measures in place to provide support to respondents in the event that they became distressed as a result of the interview.

2.8.2 Respect for privacy and confidentiality

Given the sensitive and private nature of family life, all individuals were assured of anonymity and confidentially. The identities of people interviewed were concealed and the person's country of origin was referred to only by region in the event that it was an identifying factor for the person. All information recorded was stored on a secure UCC

server. Once the project is handed into the University (April, 2013), the information provided through these interviews will be destroyed within six months, i.e. October 2013.

Details regarding the purpose and dissemination of research were given to participants and discussed prior to the interview (see Appendix B). The purpose of these interviews was also only discussed with staff of the CSO that were directly involved with the research.

2.8.3 Informed Consent

Participants were provided with straightforward oral and written information as to the purpose of the research, the content and format of the interview (see Appendix B). Translated information was also offered to speakers of English as a second language. From the outset, voluntary informed consent was obtained in writing from respondents (see Appendix C). Participants were also informed that if at any stage they wished to withdraw their consent or participation in the study, that this would be complied with and it would not affect how the CSO works with them in the future. Further advice was provided to them in terms of their right to complain to the university should any grievances arise and details on how to do this.

2.8.4 Cultural Competence:

Participants in this study came from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Thus the planning and implementation of this study adhered to the principle that respondents have the right to be treated with dignity and to have their culture, values and beliefs respected at all times (RASNZ, 2012). Although I have a number of years of experience of working with a diversity of nationalities and cultures, I focused on becoming more familiar with the particular cultural backgrounds of each participant in the study. This was to inform the design and implementation of the research and ensure respect of peoples' communities and cultures. It was also important to acknowledge how cultural background could influence what was discussed in interviews and how issues are constructed and mediated through cultural norms (Alston and Bowles, 2003).

2.9 Research Limitations

2.9.1 Language

It was originally envisioned that for participants whose first language was not English that interpreters would be made available and this was offered to all of those concerned. However, during discussion with these participants, they requested to carry out the interviews

without the presence of an interpreter. The reasons given were that they did not feel comfortable in light of the sensitive issues being discussed. Participants also related that their level of English language was proficient to carry out the interview without an interpreter. I am conscious that this may have influenced research findings in terms of what was being communicated, however this also sheds light on the private nature of the topic and the need to respect the participant's desire for confidentiality. Language affects expression and this was highlighted in by researchers in the Koulouriotis (2011) study that stated that it was only by communicating through the interviewee's native language that they could access the deeper level of their experience. As language proficiency can prevent them from sharing their whole experience, I made every effort to discern the intention of participants and to reflect this honestly in the analysis and findings (Rees and Pease, 2007). Thus reflexivity was key here to assess the nature of this issue and how it influenced the research.

2.9.2 Prior involvement with the organisation:

As I possessed existing knowledge of the topic through my work with the CSO and through views and perspectives obtained from both colleagues and service users, it was important for me to be aware of any potential bias that may arise during the study. Thus the need for awareness and reflexivity was crucial when researching this area. This involves the examination of 'one's self' (Padgett, 1998) and engaging in thorough analysis of my role in the research process. A research journal as well as regular consultations with the university tutor, colleagues and 'critical friends' were tools I used to engage in this process and to ensure self-awareness of my own assumptions, values and preconceptions (Grinnell and Unrau, 2005).

Positionality is also important to note in this context (Merriam et al., 2001). Because I am working for the agency where participants have benefitted from and may continue to avail of the service, there is a possibility that they may feel obliged to take part in research or perceive me as being in a position of authority. Again reflexivity is key in this respect and I found that engaging in discussion with participants in regards to informed consent and voluntary participation helped to maintain power relations on a more equal level.

It is important to additionally note the positive elements of my prior involvement with the agency. This includes having an in depth knowledge developed of other nationalities' cultures and ways of life. Additionally, through experience of teaching English as a foreign language at the centre, I have built up extensive communication skills and an ability to adapt

these to facilitate speakers of English as a second language. I found that this served to support communication and enhanced understanding during interviews.

2.9.3 Other Family Member's Perspectives

Because I have consciously opted to interview adults and not children as part of this research, this leaves the possibility that the child's perspective may not be accurately reflected in the study. However, due to the already ethically sensitive issue being studied, it was felt that interviewing a person under 18 would pose many additional dilemmas. Thus every attempt was made to reflect the experience as being the perception of the interviewee's relationship with their child rather than portraying it as the child's view. This also applies to the male account in this study. As it was decided to focus on experiences of women in this study, again the focus is on how the female perceives her relationship with a male family member.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the concept of participatory research together with the rationale for employing qualitative research and an Interpretivist framework. Issues relating to data sampling, collection through semi structured interviews and data analysis are discussed. In the final section of this chapter the limitations and ethical considerations of the research have also been explored.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3. 1 Introduction

The aim of this piece is to review the literature that exists in relation to the experiences of family reunification and integration of refugees and their family members. This includes information relating to the law and policy that governs family reunification applications in Ireland. The following also explores individuals' experiences of reunion and integration under a number of key themes as well as the factors that can serve to support or inhibit this process.

3. 2 Refugees & Family Reunification: The Law and Policy in Ireland.

The Irish government introduced urgent policy and legislation in response to the large increase in numbers of asylum applications to Ireland between 1994 and 2002 (Ruhs, 2009). The principal piece of legislation developed concerning refugees and asylum seekers was the Refugee Act 1996, as amended by several subsequent pieces of legislation. This Act established the Refugee Applications Commission (ORAC) as an independent body that considers asylum applications at first instance and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) which reviews appeals of negative asylum decisions (Ruhs, 2009). Additionally, The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) was established in 2005, with responsibility for the statutory and administrative functions of immigration management on behalf of the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform while the Reception and Integration (RIA) agency, set up in 2001, was given the portfolio of coordinating services for asylum seekers and Programme refugees (Quinn, 2009).

While Ireland has recently been recorded as having the lowest acceptance rate of claims for refugee status in Europe (Eurostat study in Smyth, 2011), the UNHCR currently estimates that 8,249 persons are refugees in Ireland (including family members) while another 5,439 are seeking asylum (UNHCR, 2012).

In terms of the right to family reunification for refugees, this is enshrined in domestic and European instruments. In the European context, The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), incorporated into Irish law through the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2000, *"recognises the rights of everyone to his or her private and family life"* (RIS, 2009, p.13). Article 41 of the Irish Constitution also *"recognises the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society… possessing all inalienable and*

imprescriptible rights" (Irish Constitution, 1937). The State therefore upholds the family as the necessary basis of social order and essential to the welfare of its society.

A refugee is entitled to apply for permission to be joined by members of their family under the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006 and Section 18 of The Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended). A family member is quite narrowly defined in the Act as a spouse and an unmarried minor child, or in the case of a minor refugee, by their parents (RIS, 2009). This has been the subject of much concern for applicants and representative groups. For example, Nasc highlights that current legislation does not include same sex relationships, civil or de-facto partnerships (Nasc, 2012). Research also outlines that many respondents themselves see persons beyond the nuclear definition as belonging to their family (UNHCR, 2012). In light of this, the UNHCR recommends that countries of asylum should apply liberal criteria when determining which family members can be admitted, for example, spouses by customary or traditional marriage or adopted children (ibid). In certain cases, other 'dependants' of the refugee are entitled to join but this is solely at the discretion of the Minister for Justice. However, authors state that these applications are *"rarely successful"* (RIS, 2009, p.18). At present applicants have no statutory right to appeal a negative decision. While in practice an administrative review can be requested, there is no independent facility available to lodge an appeal and a lack of clarity continues to exist on the decisions made (Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), 2013).

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), which assesses and compares integration policies in the European Union and worldwide, Ireland scores the worst of 31 countries in terms of non-EU family reunion. This is due to factors such as Ireland opting out of the EU directive on Family Reunification as well as their failure to implement the Immigration, Residence, and Protection Bill, initially drafted in 2007 (MIPEX, 2012; ICI, 2013).

A number of concerns have been highlighted in regards to the Family Reunification application process itself in Ireland. The issue that appears to cause the most distress for applicants is the administrative delays involved in processing applications and the amount of time they must spend waiting for a decision. At present an individual generally waits for a period of at least 18 months before a final decision is made which falls below the EU average of 6 months (The Integration Centre, 2012). A number of reports have also provided examples where refugees had to wait longer than this average time period with various complications delaying the process (RIS, 2009; Cosgrave, 2006; Sheridan, 2008).

Further to this, it is likely that a refugee has already been waiting for a number of years for their status to be determined, through the asylum system, before being eligible to apply for reunification (Cosgrave, 2006). Thus overall this can result in a person being separated from their family for long periods of time.

3.3 Impact of Delay – The Experience of Separation

A number of studies have recorded the impact of this delay on family members both in Ireland and abroad. For example, all participants in the Lentin (2010) study on the experiences of Somali people in Ireland (most of which were refugees) had left their families behind and reported that prolonged separation had caused them 'enormous distress', depression and loneliness. This is further supported by the McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford (2009) research where participants also described their feelings of anxiety about their missing family members as well as experiencing sleeplessness, poor concentration and feelings of guilt. A number of publications have also maintained that this experience of separation can exacerbate and prolong the after effects of trauma reactions and bereavement (Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, Moreau, 2001; The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 1998).

Understandably, these issues can result in impeding the integration in the host society and family members can tend to focus more on the process of reunifying rather than on integration (ICI, 2013). This can also negatively affect the person's educational and employment prospects and their financial situation as a result, which is compounded in cases where the person continues to send remittances to the country of origin in support of their family members. Highlighting this, many participants involved in the McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford, 2009 study reported having to vacate educational programmes in favour of casual labour due to the need to support their family members (McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford, 2009).

Parent-child separation is also a common consequence of immigration, with the Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie (2002) US research on the experiences of separation for young people from China, Haiti and Mexico revealing that of 385 early migrant adolescents interviewed, 85% had been separated from one or both parents for extended periods of time. A similar study conducted by Luster et al., 2008 on Sudanese males separated from their families at an early age, found that all of those interviewed had experienced 'ambiguous loss'.

However, authors do stress that people can display remarkable resilience in the face of this adversity (Atwell, Gifford, McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009; Lentin, 2010). Central to this

resilience is the meaning that they can make of their experience and how prepared they are for it. Additionally, the ability to maintain contact and how this manifests itself is instrumental in influencing how separation is experienced (Bonizzoni, 2009).

3.4 Family Experiences - Post Reunification

The Huddleston, Dag Tjaden & Callier (2012) study describes family unity as the starting point for integration. Nearly all participants interviewed as part of the study's European wide integration survey (2012) enjoyed an easier settlement subsequent to family reunion. For example, in Belgian, French, German, and Italian cities, over half of respondents saw how living with their family helped them to get more involved in their local community and many credited their increased employment opportunities to reuniting with their family (Huddleston, Dag Tjaden & Callier, 2012).

The presence of a supportive family can be of benefit to their general health and well-being with a study in the UK on Somali refugees finding that the family acted as *"the main buffer mechanism against depression and anxiety"* (McMichael and Manderson, 2004 in Lentin, 2010, p.46). Given this, the refugee family member's expectations of family reunification will be *"naturally high"* (Atwell, Gifford, McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009, p.677). However in reality, the situation can often prove to be more difficult than imagined. Thus, while family reunion certainly represents *"a turning point"* for refugees, research suggests that it can also serve to disrupt *"the fragile balance that has been established"* during separation(Rousseau et al, 2004, p.1096). Family dynamics, coping strategies and member roles within the family system are forced to alter and this impacts individual members in a variety of ways (Rousseau et al, 2004).

3.4.1 The Spousal Relationship

While the initial point of reunification is met with excitement and relief, disorientation and estrangement can also be common experiences for spouses that re-connect following long periods of separation (Rousseau et al., 2001). This experience can result in considerable stress, and in some cases, marital breakdown. A significant factor highlighted in a number of studies is the prevalence of domestic violence in relationships. For instance, the Rees & Pease (2007) study based in Victoria, Australia investigated the extensiveness of domestic violence in refugee families from countries including Iraq, Sudan and Bosnia and identified that factors such as the history of trauma, social and cultural differences, social isolation and economic status can make refugee families more vulnerable to this occurrence.

The changing identity and status of women was particularly significant and can occur because of varied employment opportunities and the influence of altered expectations, norms and roles of women within the host society (Rees and Pease, 2007).

The impact of losing the role of the traditional authority figure and 'breadwinner' on male participants was also explored in the Coakley and MacEinri (2007) study on the integration of African immigrants in Ireland. While domestic violence was not specifically referred to as a consequence, employment held huge significance for male respondents and the lack of it served to reduce their sense of self-worth and status, resulting in changing power structures within the family unit and a negative impact on family members (Coakley and MacEinri, 2007). Additionally, while the Fagan (2006) research looks at the situation of migrant women as a whole in Ireland, based on the accounts of domestic violence agencies, the circumstances described also relate to the experiences of refugee women. Significantly, respondents stated that physical abuse appeared to be more pronounced in cases concerning migrant women and that violence had escalated since the arrival of the family to Ireland (Fagan, 2006).

This and other research further suggested that for a female who was dependent on their partner's status to reside in the state, as is the case for members of refugees, this can lead to added complexities and uncertainty for a woman, making her more reluctant to leave an abusive relationship (Fagan, 2006; Cosgrave, 2006). While a literal interpretation of section 18(3) (a) of the Refugee Act 1996 does allow the family member to remain in the State as long as the refugee is entitled to reside, their status continues to be that of a dependent. Following recent guidelines issued by INIS, the situation has become clearer for victims. However, legislative provisions are still lacking in the area (ICI, 2013) and a lack of clarity remains for women who apply in terms of their rights and entitlements following separation (Women's Aid, 2012).

3.4.2 The Parent-Child Relationship

Available research suggests that family reunification is often an ambivalent process for children. There are many mixed emotions that children deal with, including the excitement of living with their parents again, coupled with the sadness of leaving loved ones behind. Coping with adaptation to a different way of life and culture can also pose further challenges for the child (ICI, 2013).

A number of studies have reported issues of detachment and withdrawal on the part of the reunited child (Glasgow & Ghouse-Shees, 1995). This can be caused by many factors

including the feelings of abandonment they may have felt during separation (Bowlby, 1969; Menjívar, 2009) as well as the loss of their carer in the country of origin upon reunification. This is compounded where periods of separation are lengthy and where children are younger (RASNZ, 2012). A study on the issue of family separation and Latin American women in Canada, highlighted that the child's willingness and ability to re-attach was questionable, "*since the reunification was, in effect, a second major rupture of their attachment"* (Bernhard, Landolt and Goldring, 2009, p.18).

Increased instances of conflict can also arise as a result of changing power balances in the family system and attempts by the parent to re-assert their authority (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2011). Changed roles, together with other factors such as parents being overprotective with their children and conflicting loyalties arising from expectations of family and the host society, can have a disorganizing impact on children. The Ní Laoire et al (2009) study on young migrants' experiences in Ireland highlights the impact of conflicting norms and roles on children. In this, respondents identified a sense of dual belonging to their home countries and to Ireland, which proved to be challenging in some cases. This sometimes led to increased tensions with their parents when young people began to deviate from behaviours and norms of their country of origin (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). Reports have also shown that refugee children can be more vulnerable to psychosocial difficulties and lower educational attainment (Yeh, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

However, it is important to note that the way in which the child and parent experience reunification is dependent upon a number of factors, including the existing attachment bonds between them as well as the influence of other caregivers (Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002). Where the caregiver has maintained a sense of family and helped to keep the memory of their parent alive during separation, this can help to alleviate the negative impacts of reunification (Menjívar, 2009).Thus, these elements and more can help to determine the severity of the impact upon the parent and child and whether the effects are felt over a prolonged period of time.

3.5 Protective Factors Affecting Reunification & Integration

While it is clear that family issues can arise, there are also several contributors leading to successful outcomes of reunification and integration for families. For example, employment was found to be a protective factor in a number of studies (McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford, 2009; Coakley and MacEinri, 2007). Furthermore, the Rees and Pease (2007) research also found a link between improved employment prospects for men and a reduction

in the incidences of domestic violence. Education was further seen to increase the ability of individuals to adapt to social change (Rees and Pease, 2007) and act as a means to enhance opportunities in the host country (Coakley and MacEinri, 2007).

Another factor found to be of benefit to families was when individuals maintained some connection to their traditional roots (Rousseau et al, 2004). For instance, partaking in indigenous practices has been shown to aid people to cope with the disruption of reunification and settlement and to establish meaning and identity as a result. Additionally, where family members allow for flexibility in roles to facilitate adaptation, this can serve to decrease the likelihood of resentment and anger building within the family (Rousseau et al, 2004).

Finally, migrant led and charitable organisations were found to provide essential information and resources to refugee families as well as facilitating a means to bridge networks within structures of the host society (Lentin, 2010).

3.6 Inhibiting Factors Affecting Reunification and Integration

Parallel to this, a number of issues have been identified which may pose barriers to integration and subsequently can serve to exacerbate family difficulties. For instance, recent research conducted by RASNZ (2012) on refugees' experiences in New Zealand and the Immigrant Council of Ireland's (ICI) study on the impacts of family reunification on integration in Ireland (2013) have identified that actors contributing to adjustment difficulties included discrimination, lack of access to accommodation, a lack of extended family and social support, health difficulties and a greater prevalence of poverty and unemployment.

Other Irish research also confirms that the lack of extended family and networks means that migrants are vulnerable to social isolation (Pillinger, 2007; Coakley and MacEinri, 2007) and this can impede integration and family reunification outcomes. For example, relatively few respondents in the Pillinger, 2007 study had formed friendships with Irish people and those in the ICI (2013) study had difficulties integrating into Irish life because of conflicting social and cultural patterns (ICI, 2013). In other research, the lack of extended family particularly impacted care provision for those with pre-school-aged children (Bonazzoni, 2009).

Another key factor highlighted by a number of studies is language acquisition. This is seen as the main means to access wider civil, social and cultural life of the new society and an essential way to avail of educational and employment opportunities (ICI, 2013).Thus the lack of attainment of the host language can severely curtail prospects for refugees. The provision of English language by the state has been the subject of some criticism by a number

of reports in this respect. For example, participants in the Lentin (2010) and Sheridan (2008) studies reported a lack of formal English language support for refugee children in schools, which led to significant delays in their educational development and integration.

It is also important to note the impact of trauma and additional losses on refugees, making them a distinct group in terms of migrant integration (Weine, Stevan, Knafl et al, 2005). According to research, factors such as witnessing violence, experiencing torture, abrupt separation and forcible displacement can produce consequences that can be long lasting (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Rates of depression, anxiety disorders and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are reported to be higher amongst refugees when compared to the general population in the host country (Bracken and Crumlish, 2010). These experiences can subsequently challenge their ability to integrate in their host society and maintain relationships with family members.

3.7 Support Systems for Family Reunification and Integration

Considering the immense impact that separation and reunification can have on the well-being of refugees, as well as on the adaptation of the family to their host environment, it is important that services are made available that assist the process as a whole (RASNZ, 2012). However, unfortunately at present there appears to be an absence of state support for refugee families in Ireland. For example, the RIS (2009), UNHCR, 2009 and Lentin, 2010 studies amongst others found little or no services available to families who reunite as well as a distinct lack of information on rights and entitlements for newly reunited members. This was reflected in the views of participant's in recent research who expressed feeling largely left to their own devices following reunification (ICI, 2013). Currently, the relationship between family reunification and integration appears to be largely neglected in integration policy, i.e. 'Migration Nation' (2008), and this is reflected in the absence of comprehensive post-family reunification supports (ibid).

The limited support that is available includes state care and support for separated children, provided via the Health Service Executive (HSE) as a mandatory provision in accordance with the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and the Child Care Act, 1991 (Lentin, 2010).Various provisions are also offered by the City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC) for separated children, aged out minors and young people that are newly reunited with their family members. This includes life skills training and language courses, as well as support with social protection entitlements, education, employment and accommodation (CDVEC, 2012).

A number of authors have recommended that state provision should include specific integration programmes that cater to the needs of refugee families, especially those who have been separated for long periods of time and have experienced mental or physical distress. The current lack of access to specialised psychological health care that assists people to deal with the consequences of trauma leaves them particularly vulnerable to prolonged effects (Bracken and Crumlish, 2010), thus the extended provision of dedicated services would help to support this need. Supports in line with other EU programmes such as the UK's Personal Integration Plan under the RIES project (UNHCR, 2009) or similar assistance to that provided to Programme refugees in Ireland by RIA have also been recommended as beneficial sources of support.

A number of authors see a wide range of roles for Social Work in this context. For example, by acting as a support worker in cases where a child or family is having difficulty adapting following reunification (Corbett, 2008; Red Cross, 2004). Additionally, by providing information and assisting refugees to access supports that can aid their transition and integration in Ireland have been suggested (Pillinger, 2007; UNHCR, 2009). Given that several authors state that refugees and ethnic minorities can be over represented in services such as child protection, (Rutter, 2003; Bernard & Gupta, 2008) and less likely to receive family and preventative support services (Ahmed, 2004), this appears to be an issue that will have continual relevance for Social Workers in the future.

3.8 Conclusion

Studies examined have revealed that family reunification is not *"a simple or straightforward process"* (RASNZ, 2012, p.7). While research does highlight that it can result in more successful integration for refugees, it also points to the fact that despite initial high expectations of reunion and integration, complexities can arise in the form of significant adjustment and adaptation difficulties for families (ibid). It has additionally shown how immigration policy and legislation can contribute to shaping family dynamics as well as their ability to integrate and relate to the wider society. This together with other structural and cultural factors can often result in *"redefinition, accommodation, and change"* for family members (Menjívar, 2009, p.313).

Chapter Four: Findings & Discussion.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the primary research findings. These are quite extensive and for the purpose of analysis I have focussed primarily on the major themes of experiences of family relationships post reunification, challenges encountered by participants and supports that helped or hindered the processes of family reunification and integration.

The following table shows the profile of each individual that participated in the research:

Table 1: Individual Participant Profiles*

Participant: Region of origin & status	**Reunified family member(s)**	**Length of Separation**	**Living arrangements prior to reunification**
Respondent 1 Western Asia. Refugee	Spouse: male	5.5 years	Lived with mother and daughter in Ireland
Respondent 2 Western Asia. Family member of Refugee	Spouse: male	3 years	Lived with family in country of origin
Respondent 3 East Africa Family member of Refugee	Spouse: male	2 years	Lived with family in country of origin
Respondent 4 East Africa Refugee	Children: 5 Age range 10-18 years	6 years	Lived alone in Direct Provision & private accommodation in Ireland
Respondent 5 East Africa Refugee	Children: 3 Age range: 14-17 years	3 years	Lived alone in Direct Provision & private accommodation in Ireland

***Please note: Some information has been generalised to maximise anonymity for respondents.**

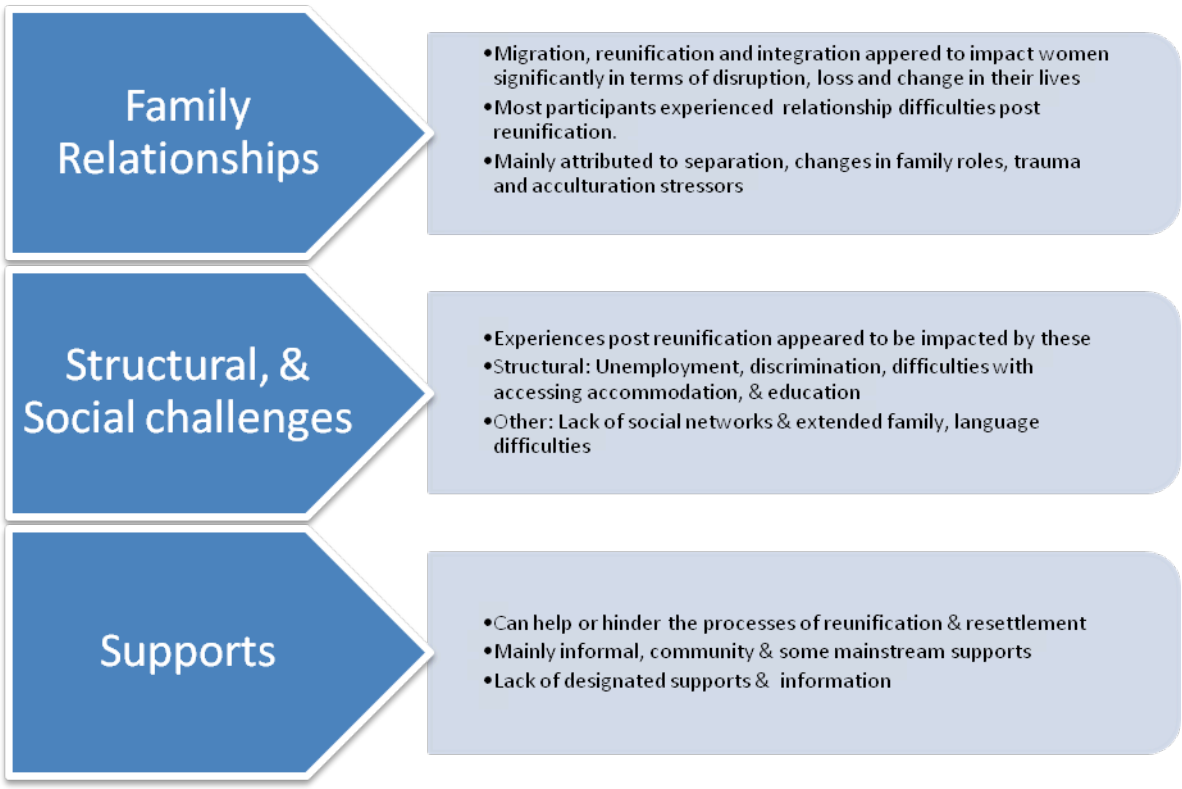
4.2 Key Findings

The accounts of women in this study suggest that the processes of migration, reunification and integration had impacted them significantly in terms of disruption and change in their lives and in their relationships with family members. However, some

differences emerged between individual responses to their experiences. Thus, while all recounted experiences of loss, disruption and separation from their loved ones, how they responded to this and what happened to the relationship as a result varied.

While all reflected being happy to reunite with their family members in the beginning and identified many beneficial effects of reunification, over time relationship difficulties arose for most of the participants and while some overcame these challenges, relationship breakdown occurred in other cases. These experiences appeared to be impacted by structural and social challenges and by supports which acted as protective or inhibiting factors for family reunion and integration.

Fig 1: Key findings



4.3 Experiences of Family Relationships Following Reunification:

Accounts of experiences immediately following reunification were frequently marked by a sense of relief and happiness to be together with their loved ones again and to finally be in a position of safety for themselves and their family members:

"…. I'm very grateful to have place, as a home again and to finally be safe with my family… I'm overwhelmed and I will be very grateful for the rest of my life for this." (Respondent 1)

"… I was over the moon, I was very happy; I was so excited that I finally had to bring them over"(Respondent 5).

"…. I'm happy you know – is – the big point is if you get your family and you live together"(Respondent 4)

This mirrors previous research carried out by the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2013) amongst others which convey the delight of individuals to be reunited with their family members and how in general their lives had improved significantly upon reunification.

However, most of the participants also relayed that challenges in relationships had occurred following reunification. These challenges most commonly related to an increase in tension and conflict between family members which included in some cases, family breakdown over time. While some managed to overcome these challenges through renegotiating family roles and finding *"a mutual platform to … stand on"* (Respondent 1), others experienced the further loss of family members. In one of these cases, a woman was left in a situation of homelessness following domestic violence and her husband's departure:

"…he just leave me, he part himself, I don't know where he go, he just go, without anything. I don't have one Cent…" (Respondent 3).

Another situation resulted in the child leaving the family home and subsequently ending up in a foster care arrangement. Women commonly related feelings of sadness, disbelief, guilt and disorientation as a result of these experiences.

"It was very, very difficult and I couldn't believe that was happening because I didn't see it coming, I didn't expect that….really I felt uhm I felt ashamed at one point, I felt very disappointed uhm I just went through a lot of thinking, I was thinking constantly"(Respondent 5)

"……why I'm here? For what; to cry and I don't know anyone, where I have to go now?"(Respondent 3)

Similar experiences have been reflected by participants in previous studies (Rousseau et. al., 2004; ICI, 2013), which highlights that additional losses can be experienced by refugees following reunification.

4.4 Relationship Stressors:

4.4.1 Impact of Separation

A number of women in this study related that the experience of separation from their loved ones had subsequently impacted their relationships. In terms of the initial separation from family members, participants commonly related experiencing difficulties in dealing with this:

"yes it's very heavy because – sometimes in (country of origin) I say I'm crying … and it's his fault and (he) is for three year "I know, I know, I know"…. I say every week, every day. Uh what happen? "I don't know baby, I don't know". It's for more, for more, for more, two months, one month, oh my god"(Respondent 2)

This period of separation was compounded by either having to remain in an unsafe home environment or having concerns about family members that were left behind in potentially life-threatening situations. As discussed in the literature review, this can be viewed as a form of ambiguous loss:

"Even you know sometimes I haven't any hope. Maybe they are died …travel is from the sea is the difficulty …they are not good, people they are died every time in the sea…" (Respondent 4)

"I wasn't able to keep in touch with my husband because I was afraid if they knew or felt that we're still in contact they might kill the child and hurt him and hurt me…. So we stayed apart for more than five years."(Respondent 1)

The departure of a family member from the home can be likened to bereavement as it is often marked by unresolved feelings of hurt, grief and a great sense of loss. Frater-

Mathieson (2004) also states that for those who have experienced additional losses through trauma and displacement, as with these cases, the experience of grieving can be more complex.

Subsequently, some participants linked this experience of separation to difficulties encountered in family relationships following reunification. For example, one respondent stated that the length of separation had affected their knowledge of the children and how she related to them:

"I just felt that - I couldn't fill the gap…because within the three years I've obviously forgotten - uhm what they looked like, or what they might be like, or how they behave or you know what they like" (Respondent 5).

This view is supported by other research findings which explain how "*particularly lengthy separations between parents and children can often create tension when they are finally together"* (Menjívar, 2009, p. 316). This was also commonly attributed to the lack of knowledge of each other and of their experiences during the time they had spent apart (ibid).

In terms of the parent child relationship, attachment bonds between caregivers and children can be disrupted as a consequence of these changes (Bowlby, 1969). During the period of separation, most of children referred to in this study remained with other carers in their family of origin. Thus, the subsequent relocation and reunification with their caregiver in the host country may have led to a loss of stability, and grief for their missing carer, leading to weakened attachments and challenges for the relationship.
In the following case, this may have been a contributing factor to family breakdown:

"… she (child) claims she didn't know me when she came over, you know she knew me when I was back in (country of origin) but when she came over here it was different"(Respondent 5).

A number of participants also noted that roles and dynamics between family members had altered following separation and subsequent reunification, and this posed challenges for them. Previous research supports this and notes that role changes which occur as a result of separation, force individuals within the family system to redefine positions and their perceptions of authority within it (Frater-Mathieson, 2004).

"... for a long time, I was the mother and the father and the sister and daughter and everything for a long time…so once when they come and say "I want share with you, I wanna help you" starting at first "Uh – I'm not sure you're gonna do it in the right way", you know?"(Respondent 1).

This can cause considerable stress for families as they work to renegotiate and reshape their roles and responsibilities within the family system.

4.4.2 Acculturation Stress

Adapting to a new environment and adjusting to changes in the family are interactive processes involving multiple overlapping systems. Thus, the ability to cope with the consequences of migration, reunification and integration involves not only the individual and family but also the wider social structures in society (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). In this respect, a number of participants in this study listed adjustment to new norms and cultures as another reason for increased familial tensions. This was discussed by the following participant in terms of her relationship with her spouse:

"In Africa we used to be/ if you are married you have to do <u>everything</u> for your husband.... So you can't go school, you can't go/do anything just have a baby and stay home and take care of the house .....When I came I see him just he think like before, like the way we think granddad thinks like - ... He want me to do <u>everything</u>" (Respondent 3)

Another respondent noted how the differences between parenting practices and the children's gradual adoption of new norms and cultures in the host society had led to difficulties for family members:

"Parents here are very different – the parenting role here in Ireland is very different to the one in (country of origin).....At the beginning it was l-/ it was like that like the way we did when we were back at home ... But as time went on, as they mixed up with other children that changed… Uhm so I felt they kind of moved away from that"(Respondent 5).

This factor cannot be seen in isolation of separation as it can serve to compound acculturation stress. Previous research has identified that different rates of acculturation can

occur amongst family members following separation, where one has had more time to adjust to new ways of life prior to the arrival of their family member (Frater-Mathieson, 2004).
A number of women stated that in order to overcome these obstacles and integrate into the new community, adjustments needed to be made to their own beliefs and cultures.

"....because once you move to a different country there's one thing to carry on with your culture or beliefs and practices and there's one thing to balance with the community that you're living in...so it's like having two people in one... Uhm you want to kind of preserve what you had before but some of it you have to let go" (Respondent 5).

In terms of children, one woman stated that while she taught them to engage with common Irish societal norms and practices, she also encouraged them to be aware of 'who they are'. In this example she refers to different religious practices:

"Yeah they do in school, with the Christianity; and I let my daughter join in you know, do some the carols, Christmas carols, and drawing, and having fun, I, I do let her join it, but in a certain way just remember you don't, you don't belong to that ideology, so you don't live in it you know?"(Respondent 1).

This is just a number of the ways that women demonstrated how they and their families adjusted to different norms and cultures. This may, as previous research states lead to a dual sense of belonging for family members, which can cause challenges in some cases (Ní Laoire et al., 2009).

4.4.3 Trauma

A number of participants also discussed the emotional consequences of traumatic experiences and admitted that these had impacted upon family relationships:

".....I'm/I'm angry most of the time, also I'm trying to hide it, be very calm, talk slowly and be friendly but still I have a <u>huge</u> anger problem and uh depression also…….It's affect me yes, it affects my family but uh I just don't know what to do ....." (Respondent 1).

Another respondent also echoed the same emotions and experiences:

"when somebody leaves their country in my state it would have been very traumatic…. you still have the anger inside you. And nobody has ever spoken to you about how you're feeling…" (Respondent 5).

As stated in the literature review, experiences of trauma can lead to higher rates of stress, anxiety and depression and where the grief remains unresolved in relation to trauma, this may have consequences for family relationships (Rousseau et al., 2004). Thus this may account for increased difficulties in between family members.

4.5 Varied Relationship Experiences

It should be noted that in a minority of cases, women did not express experiencing significant difficulties in their relationships following reunification. However, interestingly out of the participants interviewed, these women had been most recently reunited with their family members. Thus, it is possible that enough time may not have elapsed to allow for them to sufficiently reflect on their experiences or feel ready to speak in-depth about such private experiences. Additionally, as stated in the methodology section, for participants that spoke English as a second language, this may have affected expression and posed a barrier in terms of sharing their whole experience. In one case protective factors may have also played a role as the woman described how her mother, that had provided care for her children during their six years of separation had constantly spoke of her and maintained hope that they would be united again:

"mum in the time you know say even they/they don't know where I am … and then just she say I pray, I dream your mama you will get, we will find, we will meet, <u>every time</u> to tell my story, my name and how I come with them ……They didn't forget my name. They didn't..."(Respondent 4)

This she maintained had assisted their relationship upon reunification and the positive experiences they have had since reuniting.

Brown (1999) also stresses that it is important not to make assumptions about the experiences of refugees or label them all as being different or traumatised. Not all experiences considered difficult or traumatic by western standards may be viewed that way

by the refugees who endured them (Bracken, Giller & Summerfield, 1997). Additionally, the meaning that people make of their losses is important in determining how they will be experienced and dealt with (Neimeyer, 2001). In this respect, cultural factors can also influence how the loss is experienced. For instance, some countries have a long socio-political history of separation as a result of conflict and indigenous practices (Luster et al., 2008); hence this is likely to impact subsequent experiences.

Thus, while all participants in this study have discussed experiencing grief, loss and change, each person appeared to deal with this in a different way, which in turn influences outcomes for family relationships.

4.6 Structural Challenges to Reunification & Integration

Structural challenges named by participants in this study included unemployment, difficulties in accessing social protection, accommodation and education, immigration restrictions and discrimination.

4.6.1 Immigration & Social Services

While not all contact with these services was negative, a number of women in this study did express difficulties in accessing their rights and entitlements through immigration and social services. This ranged from administrative errors on the part of immigration services, i.e. a letter informing the family to register in Dublin instead of Cork, to requesting documentation that could not be produced during the registration process, i.e. a passport was requested from a participant who's country did not issue these to the ethnic minority group that she was from. Additionally, women recounted the provision of inaccurate information on behalf of social services leading to long delays in receiving payments and considerable hardship. One respondent relayed her upset after being wrongly informed by social services that following her separation she was not eligible to stay in Ireland.

"they say it's good to go back in your country… I have no right to stay this country anymore …. I cry here - they tell me to go back in my country" (Respondent 3).

This led to a high degree of stress for her as well as long delays in gaining financial support, during which time she depended on food vouchers provided by a voluntary organisation as her only source of income.

4.6.2 Education & Employment

Other significant factors raised as challenges to reunion and integration were the issues of employment and access to education. For example, one woman described the difficulties in accessing employment and how she felt that her nationality was a factor in this:

"....In general people they don't like foreigners ... Especially when it comes to job or study or opportunity. That's a fact…When some things have to do with money. That's a fact…" (Respondent 1).

Another respondent spoke of the challenges of securing a school placement for her child following their reunification:

"....When we went to enrol her they said ... that they didn't have space…... in the secondary school so they suggested that she goes back to primary school and at the time she's 14... And I say ...how can you enrol a 14 year old girl with 11 year old girls in one class and what do you think is going to happen to the child?" (Respondent 5).

These findings are reflected in previous literature, which also found that these factors posed challenges for successful settlement and reunification (RASNZ, 2012).

4.6.3 Discrimination

Discrimination was discussed by most of the participants and this cut across many areas of life including access to employment (as referred to in 4.6.2), social protection and access to adequate accommodation.

One woman described her experience when attempting to access private accommodation:

"say for instance you would pick up the Evening Echo and you would ring up to go and view a house…and well you get appointment anyway but once you got there ... they tell you the house is gone but there are other people standing out there who are still going to view the house. So that was very difficult as well to take in" (Respondent 5).

Another respondent felt that her religion played a role in this:

" ..... I don't know what/ when sometime I go to shopping and they like they look me – aw? and smile… I don't know. What happen … I don't know – I feel it, he do that I'm a Muslim I don't know" (Respondent 2).

This supports the findings of a number of previous studies which have also identified that discrimination can be a significant barrier to settlement (ICI, 2013).

4.7 Language & Social Networks

The lack of extended family, social networks and language difficulties were also highlighted as challenges for women in this study which hindered their ability to integrate in their host society. This reflects what has been discussed by authors previously (ICI, 2013; RASNZ, 2012).

4.7.1 English Language

While a minority of participants had acquired some English language prior to coming to Ireland, most related the challenges of their lack of language.

"….everywhere I was I find it difficult the first time when I separated, because I don't speak any language (English language) – I can't ask anybody"(Respondent 3).

Most of the women had taken language classes provided by voluntary and religious organisations, however some had not attended any classes and this appeared to limit their ability to integrate. It also seemed to increase their dependence on family members to provide them with support in accessing services. For instance, when referring to her husband, one woman related her dependency on him for this support:

" <u>Every day</u> he help me….I ask him what's the word for …what is the word for?...that is door, what is this? .....light…. I question, he reply me every day, every time"(Respondent 2).

In terms of language for children, while all mothers stated that they had learned English in their country of origin and were improving their proficiency, one child needed

additional language supports in school while other children struggled without educational supports. In this case, the respondent felt that this had compounded the child's isolation from peers.

4.7.2 Lack of Social Networks & Extended Family

The lack of social networks and extended family in Ireland was also named by most women as another challenge in this study. Some experienced difficulties in engaging with people outside the home and in reforming social networks:

".....But me, I came direct straight away and stay home, stay in to house with my husband. I didn't go out, I didn't meet, I don't know where they live…So that's the same things we go – I don't know – in which way I have to meet them - and I don't know"(Respondent 3).

In terms of their children, most women related that they had made friends in Ireland; however some described how they had experienced difficulties with bullying and exclusion from their peers, especially shortly after their arrival in the country. This correlates with research which states that experiences of bullying and social isolation can be common for migrant children, for instance in the Irish studies which ascertained the views of young people on this topic (Ni Laoire et al, 2009; Gilligan, 2010).

When referring to extended family, many participants described the importance of members outside of their immediate family and how the absence of these relatives had impacted their lives detrimentally. Immigration restrictions and conflict in the countries of origin were the main reasons given as to why they could not see their extended family members. One woman spoke of how the lack of family had impacted childcare and she related feeling a sense of isolation as a result:

".....without family is prison, like you can't go shop, like I'm upstairs I can't go shop … So I have to look somebody uh to/to push together my buggy downstairs … Sometimes I can't not have anything to eat because two/three days because I/ the buggy go downstairs…" (Respondent 3).

This lack of extended family support has been identified previously as a factor influencing successful integration for families (Pillinger, 2007; Coakley and MacEinri, 2007). Thus social isolation has been shown to inhibit this process for some.

4.8 Protective Factors

4.8.1 Practical Supports

The impact of factors such as separation, loss and coping with change is commonly mediated by support systems. Thus the level of accessibility to resources within the host community is pivotal in determining how well people will adjust and determine outcomes for family reunification (Ahearn, 2000). Systems theory can support understanding of how the necessary interventions (or lack of them) can influence the experiences of family reunification and integration.

In terms of access to information; friends, acquaintances and networks made in asylum centres were commonly cited as being the most beneficial to the women in this study. Thus information appeared to be primarily gained on an ad hoc basis. Other forms of support commonly referred to was that provided by NGOs which appeared to play a large role in filling the information/support gap and one that targets the needs of refugees and their family members. This view is supported by previous literature (Coakley & Healy, 2007) and has been recognised by the people interviewed as part of this research:

"... I think (NGO) is where I got the most support – uhm it was (NGO) actually uhm other than that no you wouldn't get the information"(Respondent 5).

"if I don't know (NGO) if they don't tell me ... I should be in the road still, because I didn't know where I have to go".(Respondent 3)

One candidate also spoke of designated supports she received upon entering the state. This differed from the rest of the women as she had to come to Ireland as a programme refugee. The supports her family received included being met by a settlement officer at the airport and being provided with information about Ireland and how the system here operates.

"I remember the first warm, kind welcome smile in Ireland… I will never ever forget that smile" (Respondent 1).

They were also offered help with sourcing accommodation and English language support as well as having intermittent contact with officers following their settlement via email and telephone.

In contrast, the rest of the interviewees discussed accessing mainstream supports for basic health and immigration needs; these were primarily in the form of contact with health and social services, schools and immigration services. A number of these services were regarded satisfactorily by participants, with one expressing that their children's school support was especially valued. Others singled out officers in community and social welfare services that had provided them with emergency payments in their time of need.

4.8.2 Community Engagement

In terms of other supports, community activities and education were commonly recounted as playing a significant role in enhancing many of the respondents' participation in the host society. One woman spoke of how education had reduced her sense of isolation:

".....So at that time they (training college) ring me the good time, because I have to do something, I was boring in that house and they ring me to come ... and I get English and Computers..." (Respondent 3)

Another spoke of how a community development programme had helped her mother to integrate:

"...integration, activities that helps a lot. I saw that with my mom had that experience. It was wonderful." (Respondent 1)

This correlates with literature which suggests that education, training and links to community organizations can serve as protective factors in enabling individuals to adjust and adapt to their host environment (Rees and Pease, 2007; Coakley and MacEinri, 2007; Lentin, 2010).

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the primary research findings. These suggest that participants had experienced disruption, loss and change in their lives, which were linked to the processes of migration, reunification and integration. While all reflected being happy to

reunite with their family members in the beginning and identified many beneficial effects of reunification, difficulties had emerged in their relationships with family members following reunification. These were commonly linked to their experiences of separation, trauma and adjustment to new norms and roles. However, each woman's situation was unique and individual responses to their experiences varied. Participants also illustrated that a number of challenges have been experienced since reunification and this included the lack of extended family and social networks, language difficulties and structural constraints. These findings further revealed that access to services can impact integration and the dynamics of family reunification, depending on the person's experiences of them.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises and discusses the main findings within the study. Additionally, recommendations are made as a means to attend to the support needs of refugee families. A final reflection and closing remarks conclude this research.

5.2 Key Findings and Final Discussion

Within this section I return to the initial research questions outlined in the introductory chapter and will discuss the findings with these in mind. The overall aim of this research was to gain a greater understanding of the experience of refugee women post reunification, with a view to gaining an increased awareness of their needs at this time. Through the use of an extensive literature review and primary research, it has been established that the processes of migration, family reunification and integration can have a profound impact on refugee families. The overarching themes that have emerged from these findings include that firstly participants expressed a great sense of relief and joy to be together with their loved ones again and to finally be in a position of safety for themselves and their family members. However, the findings also revealed that participants have been exposed to multiple losses as a result of their experiences. These include the separation from family members, loss of the home, culture and way of life and in some cases the loss of family members following reunification. Grief and loss theory has informed understanding of how these are experienced by individuals, the different meanings they make of this and how it can impact family relationships. This leads to another theme that emerged from findings which revealed that for the majority of respondents, challenges in family relationships arose following reunification and this led to family breakdown in some cases. These challenges were commonly attributed to separation, altered family roles and authority structures, the experiences of trauma and acculturation difficulties.

Access (or lack of) to supports since reuniting with family members have also emerged as protective or inhibiting factors in terms of outcomes for family reunion and integration. These factors appeared to lead to easier or more difficult family reunification processes depending on how they are experienced. Protective factors included access to information via informal networks and acquaintances; support from NGO's and mainstream services in some cases as well as access to education and community activities. Overall, however insufficient resources and information did appear to compound difficult situations

for families. The lack of information on legal status was especially concerning in cases of family separation given that some women reflected that it seriously impacted their wellbeing and their access to entitlements through state services. Structural constraints named by participants included unemployment, difficulties in accessing social protection and education in some cases, immigration restrictions and discrimination. The lack of extended family and social networks and language difficulties were also highlighted as challenges for women in this study which hindered their ability to integrate in their host society.

It is clear from the research findings that every woman experiences the processes of reunification and integration differently and each has a unique set of needs in relation to coping with the loss and change that is brought about by these events. However, a number of key recommendations have been highlighted by the participants themselves and by the researcher following an analysis and review of the literature and findings.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Access to Information: The availability of information to families prior to entering the state or at the point of entry emerged as an important requirement for women in this study. This includes information on their legal status in the country and what their rights are should family breakdown occur, information on their rights and entitlements, orientation to Ireland and how the system works, services that can support newly-arrived family members. This information also needs to be transmitted appropriately to frontline social service and immigration staff, for instance in the form of specific training measures, to enable them to deliver accurate information and to facilitate refugees to access their rights accordingly.
2. Targeted Support: A number of women in this study also spoke of the desire to have a designated worker as a form of support and somebody that they can trust and link in with following reunification. This reflects the UNHCR's recommendation that a targeted layer of support would be beneficial for refugee families to aid transition and adaptation prior to accessing mainstream services (UNHCR, 2009). Social Workers are well-placed to play a role in this form of support and to act as an intermediary in connecting those in difficult family situations with other professional helpers. While recognising that in a period of economic downturn this can pose a barrier to its implementation, when compared to the resources expended on foster care arrangements and crisis social services, this could have the potential to reduce not only the financial burden but the emotional cost for the family. As one woman stated

in the study *"…. Social Workers usually come when there's a fire but they don't come in before the fire….I think it is better to come in before the fire starts"*(Respondent 5).

3. An integrated and well-planned response: This would include a coordinated approach from key services including social services, education, health and immigration professionals to adequately attend to the needs of refugee families.
4. Updated Policy and Legislation: Another recommendation arising as a result of this work is that policy makers need to recognize the role played by policy and legislation in generating dispersed family arrangements which can subsequently shape their experiences following reunification. Because immigration restrictions and current administrative procedures can limit or delay opportunities for family unity, this results in situations of family separation for prolonged periods of time and can have negative repercussions for the family (ICI, 2013).

   Key areas that could bring about improvements in the lives of refugee families include:

- The adoption of the Directive 2004/38/EC on the Right to Family Reunification into legislation or alternatively, by adopting the principles within it through policy (ICI, 2013). This Directive aims to establish common rules of law relating to the right to family reunification, "*to protect the family unit and to facilitate the integration of nationals of non-member countries"* (Europa, 2011).
- An independent appeals mechanism, which would allow for the transparent consideration of family reunification applications.
- Independent residency status should be afforded to family members of refugees following a defined period of time. There should also be a guarantee of the continuation of residence to those whose family relationships break down due to situations of domestic violence, separation or death, which should be laid out in clear legal provisions.

5. A Comprehensive Anti-Racism Strategy: Following on from The National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) 2005 – 2008, a new strategy could provide direction in combating racism and discrimination in Ireland and promote a more inclusive society with increased tolerance toward different cultures and religions. This should include awareness-raising efforts and intercultural and anti-racism training for all State bodies.
6. Further research: suggested further studies could include research into the lengths of separation of family members and how this consequently impacts their experiences of

family reunification and integration. Future research conducted on refugee families experiences on a larger scale and over longer periods would also be beneficial (ICI, 2013).

5.4 Reflection

Throughout this piece of research, I continually evaluated my position, values and assumptions in regards to the research topic. I found that documenting my thoughts in my research journal and engaging in 'critical' discussion with colleagues and friends was hugely beneficial in order to do this. On reflection, at times, I was concerned around my bias and subjectivity in this research due to my work with the agency. I dealt with this by engaging in on-going reflection to determine how accurately I portrayed what the participants had discussed within my analysis. Additionally, I was mindful of my position within the agency and how this may have influenced respondents' interactions with me and their decisions to participate. However, overall I believe that my prior work involvement was an advantage in that it supported building a rapport and trust with participants and in engaging them in discussion about sensitive areas of family life. I also found that my long term working relationship with the staff team supported the research process and enriched findings through honest communication and gaining valuable feedback on a regular basis. As I had the experience of working collaboratively with the team on many projects prior to this, I believe that this supported the participatory nature of this study. The only challenge encountered was becoming accustomed to my new role as a researcher as opposed to my normal role within the organisation and the tasks that were associated with this. However, the CARL process involving the contract phase, clarifying the requirements of the research and on-going communication with staff assisted me to maintain my role as a researcher as distinct from my professional role within the organisation.

I have also reflected on some challenges experienced during the interviewing process with participants. Firstly, where those participants who spoke English as a second language chose not to opt for an interpreter due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the desire for confidentiality, this tended to challenge the extent of the interview I conducted and how in-depth I explored some areas. I also considered how this may have impacted the respondents in what they wished to convey and how they may have felt restricted in getting their points across. Secondly, because I was unable to interview children of the participants, I found that my understanding of attachment bonds was more limited, thus my discussion in regards to this area and links to attachment theory was more restricted than I had envisioned.

Additionally, in hindsight I believe it may have been more beneficial to allow for a longer period of time before interviewing those participants who had most recently been reunited with family members. As stated in the analysis section in Chapter 4, this may have influenced findings as it is possible that additional time may have supported some of the women to reflect further on their experiences and analyse their situations in greater depth.

Overall, I found that this research was a valuable and worthwhile process that has enriched my knowledge immensely through learning from those who have lived through experiences of forced migration, reunification and integration in Ireland. Despite the small scale nature of the research, I believe that the quality of findings gathered helped to answer the research questions posed in depth.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the findings of this research will be disseminated to the CSO and to the participants in this study. The issue of family reunification is one of great concern to the clients and staff at Nasc. Thus the research will help to inform Nasc's on-going campaign to improve the policy and legislation governing family reunification in Ireland as well as assist in raising awareness of the issues that emerge for reunited families and identify where support is most needed. As this is an emerging area of research in Ireland, many opportunities remain for future studies (as discussed in the recommendations section, Chapter 5). In the current economic climate, many community groups source the support of universities to conduct this type of social research. Following my overall positive experience of carrying out collaborative research and keen interest in the issue, it is one of my ambitions to engage in further studies in this area on a larger scale.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

These findings reveal that while reunification is marked by a sense of relief, safety and happiness for family members, their situation post reunification can often prove to be more difficult than originally imagined. Most women in this study recounted significant challenges in adjusting to new dynamics in family relationships and in adapting to their new society following reunification. Thus, it appears that the need to support for these families does not cease following reunification and it is vital that policy makers, state and community services respond appropriately to this on-going issue.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research and discusses the findings in the context of the research questions posed. A number of recommendations are outlined as a means to respond

to the needs highlighted by participants in this study. The final section contains my reflection on the research process and concludes with some final remarks.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S (2004) *Preventative services for Black and Minority Ethnic Children.* Birmingham, National Evaluation of the Children's Fund.

Arthur, S. & Nazroo, J. (2003) Designing Fieldwork Strategies and Materials in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers,* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

AkiDwA (2010) *Am Only Saying It Now - Experiences of Women Seeking Asylum in Ireland*. Dublin, AkiDwA.

Alston, A. & Bowles, W. (2003) *Research for Social Workers - An Introduction to methods 2nd Ed.* Routledge: London.

Atwell, R., S. Gifford and B. McDonald-Wilmsen (2009) Resettled Refugee Families and their Children's Futures: Coherence, Hope and Support. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* 40 (5).

Bernard, C. & Gupta, A. (2008) Black African Children and the Child Protection System. *British Journal of Social Work,* 38 (3): 476-492.

Bernhard, J., Landolt, P. and Goldring, L. (2009) Transnationalizing families: Canadian Immigration Policy and the Spatial Fragmentation of Care-Giving among Latin American Newcomers. *International Migration,* 47(2): 3-30.

Bonizzoni, P. (2009) Living Together Again: Families Surviving Italian Immigration Policies. *International Review of Sociology: Revue Internationale de Sociologie,* 19 (1): 83-101.

Boss, P. (1999) *Ambiguous loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

Bowlby, J. (1969). Disruption of Affectional Bonds and its Effects on Behaviour. *Canada's Mental Health Supplement,* 59(12).

Bracken, Dr. P. and Crumlish, Dr. N. (2010) *Submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children.* Dublin 2, Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Bracken, P., Giller, J., & Summerfield, D. (1997). Rethinking Mental Health Work with Survivors of Wartime Violence and Refugees, *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 10 (4): 431-442.

Brown, E. (1999) *Loss Change and Grief – An Educational Perspective* London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Cairde (2003) *Listen!: The Experiences of Minority Ethnic Women Living with HIV*, Dublin, Cairde. <Available at www.cairde.ie>. Accessed online: 8 Sept. 2012.

Cave, M., McSweeney, M. & Westfall, H. (2003) *Needs Assessment of the Health Promotion Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork City and County.* Cork, Southern Health Board.

City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) (2012) *Separated Children's Service*. City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). Available at <http://separatedchildrenservice.ie/>. Accessed online: 8 Sept. 2012.

Coakley, L., and Mac Einri,P. (2007). *The Integration Experiences of African Families in Ireland*. Dublin 2, Integrating Ireland.

Corbett, M. (2008) 'Hidden Children: the Story of State Care for Separated Children', *Working Notes,* 59. Available at: <http://www.workingnotes.ie/index.php/item/hidden-children-the-story-of-state-care-for-separated-children> Accessed online: 2 Sept. 2012.

Cosgrave, C. (2006) *Family Matters: Experiences of Family Reunification in Ireland*. Dublin, Immigrant Council of Ireland.

Coulshed, V. & Orme, J. (1998) *Social Work Practice (British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Practical Social Work 3rd Ed.).* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Cox, D. and Pawar, M. (2006) *International Social Work: Issues, Strategies and Programs,* London: Sage Publications.

Fisher, C. M. (2007) *Researching and Writing a Dissertation: A Guidebook for Business Students 2nd ed.* Essex: Pearson Education Ltd.

Glasgow, G. F., & Gouse-Sheese, J. (1995) Themes of Rejection and Abandonment in Group Work with Caribbean Adolescents. *Social Work With Groups,* 17(4): 3 - 27.

Grinnell, R. M., Jr., & Unrau, Y. A. (Eds.). (2005). *Social Work Research and Evaluation: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches / Edited by Richard M. Grinnell, Jr., Yvonne A.Unrau (7th ed.).* New York: Oxford University Press.

Europa (2011) *Family reunification - Council Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification.* Available at: <http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/l33118_en.htm> Accessed online: 2 Mar. 2013.

Frater-Mathieson, K. (2004) Refugee Trauma, Loss and Grief: Implications for Intervention. In Hamilton, R. J. & Moore, D (eds.) *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children: Theoretical Perspectives and Implementing Best Practice* (pp.12-31). New York: Routledge.

Huddleston, T., Dag Tjaden, J. (2012) *Immigrant Citizens Survey.* Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation and Migration Policy Group.

Immigrant Council of Ireland (2013) *Family Reunification: A Barrier or Facilitator of Integration? Ireland Country Report.* Dublin, Immigrant Council of Ireland.

International Committee of the Red Cross (2004) *Inter-agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children*. International Committee of the Red Cross. Available at <http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_1011.pdf> Accessed online: 5 Sept. 2012.

Irish Refugee Council (2011) *Direct Provision and Dispersal: Is there an alternative?* Internet Resource. Search: Available at:

<www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/.../The_Accommodation_of_asylum_seekers_in_Ireland_4.report.doc> Accessed online: 5 Sept. 2012.

United Nations (1951) *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 189, Article 1A(2)* United Nations.

Gilligan, R. et al. (2010). *In The Front Line of Integration: Young People Managing Migration to Ireland.* Dublin: University of Dublin, Trinity College

Hansen, E. C. (2006). *Successful Qualitative Health Research: A Practical Introduction*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin.

International Association of Schools of Social Work (2001) *About IASSW: International Definition of Social Work.* Internet. Available at <http://www.iassw-aiets.org> Accessed online 2nd January 2013.

Jaycox, L. H., Stein, B. D., Kataoka, S. H., Wong, M., Fink, A., & Escudero, P. (2002) Violence Exposure, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, and Depressive Symptoms among Recent Immigrant Children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 41:1104-1111

Kenny, C. (2009) *The Challenges Facing Refugees, Beneficiaries of Subsidiary Protection and Persons Granted Leave to Remain, as they seek Reunification with their Families in Ireland*. Dublin, Refugee Information Service (RIS).

Koulouriotis, J. (2011) Ethical Considerations in Conducting Research with Non-native Speakers of English, *TESL Canada Journal,* 28 (5): 1-15.

Luster, T., Qin, D. B., Bates, L., Johnson, D. J., & Rana, M. (2008). The Lost Boys of Sudan: Ambiguous Loss, Search for Family, and Reestablishing Relationships With Family Members. *Family Relations,* 57(4): 444-456.

McDonald-Wilmsen, B., and Gifford, S.M. (2009). *New Issues in Refugee Research - Refugee Resettlement, Family Separation and Australia's Humanitarian Programme*. Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Menjívar, C. (2009) Transnational Parenting and Immigration Law: Central Americans in the United States. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 38(2): 301-322.

Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.Y., Kee, Y, Ntseane, G. & Muhamad, M. (2001) Power and Positionality: Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status Within And Across Cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 20 (5): 405-416.

Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (2012). *Migrant Integration Policy Index - Ireland*. MIPEX, 2012. Available at <http://www.mipex.eu/ireland>. Accessed online: 10 Sept. 2012.

Mitrani, V. B., Santisteban, D. A., & Muir, J. A. (2004). Addressing Immigration-Related Separations in Hispanic Families with a Behavior-Problem Adolescent. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 74(3): 219-229.

Moreo, E., and Lentin, R. (2010). *From Catastrophe to Marginalisation: The Experiences of Somali Refugees in. Ireland*. Dublin, Trinity College Dublin.

Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre (2012) *Family Unity*. Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre. Available at <http://www.nascireland.org/campaigns-for-change/family-reunification/>. Accessed online: 5 Sept. 2012.

Neimeyer, R.A. (2001) *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Ní Laoire, C. et al. Bushin, N., Carpena-Méndez, F. & White, A. (2009). *Tell Me About Yourself: Migrant Children's Experiences of Moving to and Living in Ireland*, *Final Report of the Marie Curie Migrant Children Project*. Cork: University College Cork.

Pillinger, J. (2007) *The Feminisation of Migration: Experiences and Opportunities in Ireland*. Dublin, Immigrant Council of Ireland.

Quinn, E. (2009) *The Organisation of Asylum and Migration Policy in Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). European Migration Network, Available at <http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/20090324114217/BKMNEXT135.pdf>. Accessed online: 10 Sept. 2012.

Refugee Health and Wellbeing (RASNZ) Research Unit (2012) *Refugee Family Reunification, Mental Health and Resettlement Outcomes in Aotearoa New Zealand.* RASNZ Research Unit.

Rees, S. & Pease, B. (2007) "Domestic Violence in Refugee Families in Australia: Rethinking Settlement Policy and Practice." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies.* 2 (5): 1-19.

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. & Elam, G. (2003) Designing & Selecting Samples in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers,* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. & O' Connor, W. (2003) Analysis: Practices, Principles & Processes in Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J. (Eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers,* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Rousseau, C., Rufagarib, M., Bagilishyaa, D., & Measham, T. (2004). Remaking family life: Strategies for re-establishing continuity among Congolese refugees during the family reunification process. *Social Science and Medicine,* 59(5):1095-1108.

Rousseau, C., Mekki-Berrada, A., & Moreau, S. (2001). Trauma and Extended Separation from Family among Latin American and African Refugees in Montreal. *Psychiatry,* 64(1): 40-59.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (2010) *Research Methods for Social Work.* 7th ed., Belmont, CA: Brookes-Cole.

Ruhs, M. (2009) Ireland: From Rapid Immigration to Recession. *Migration Information Source*. Available at: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=740>. Accessed online: 5 Aug. 2012.

Rutter, J (2003) The *Experiences and Achievements of Congolese Children in Camden Schools.* London Borough of Camden, London

Sample, E. (2007) *State Practice and the Family Unity of African Refugees*. Forced Migration Review 28: 50-52.

Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., & Donahue, P. (2003).*Community Based Research and Higher Education: Principles And Practices.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Selener, D. (1997) *Participatory Action Research and Social Change*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Participatory Action Research Network.

Smyth, J. (2011). Irish Acceptance of Asylum Claims Lowest in EU. *The Irish Times*, 21 Jan. 2011. Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2011/0121/1224288008903.html> Accessed online: 10 Aug. 2012.

Sheridan, V. (2008) Diversity - The Old in the New: Tracing the Long-Term Process of Cross-Cultural Adaptation among Members of the Vietnamese Community in Ireland. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations.* 7 (6): 303-309.

Suårez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I. L. G., & Louie, J. (2002). Making Up For Lost Time: The Experience of Separation and Reunification among Immigrant Families. *Family Process,* 41(4): 625-643.

Suarez-Orozco, C. & Suarez-Orozco, M. (2001) *Children of Immigration.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The Irish Constitution Bunreacht Na hÉireann (1937) Article 41 *The Family.* Dublin, Dail Eireann.

The Integration Centre (2012) *Family Reunification Waiting Times*. Dublin, The Integration Centre. Available at <http://www.integrationcentre.ie/familycampaign/index.aspx>. Accessed online: 5 Sept. 2012.

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) (2005) *Refugees and Asylum Seekers.* Available at <http://www.nccri.ie/cdsu-refugees.html>. Accessed online: 10 Sept. 2012.

The United Nations (1951) *Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951.* The United Nations.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2009) Mapping Integration: UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Project on Refugee Integration in Ireland – 2008/2009. *Targeted or Mainstream Support to Refugee Integration? Legislation, Policy and Support in Ireland and selected European Countries.* The United Nations Refugee Agency.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2012) *Refugee Family Reunification -UNHCR's Response to the European Commission Green Paper on the Right to Family Reunification of Third Country Nationals Living in the European Union (Directive 2003/86/EC).* Bureau for Europe, The United Nations Refugee Agency.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2012) *Regional Operations Profile: Ireland*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e48e926.html>. Accessed online: 10 Sept. 2012.

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc. (1998) *Rebuilding Shattered Lives.* Victoria, The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Valtonen, K. (2008) *Social Work and Migration - Immigrant and Refugee Settlement and Integration.* Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.

Weine, Stevan; Knafl, Kathleen; Feetham, Suzanne; Kulauzovic, Yasmina; et al (2005) A Mixed Methods Study of Refugee Families Engaging in Multiple-Family Groups, *Family Relations.* 54 (4)

Women's Aid (2012) *Coalition Welcomes New INIS Guidelines for Immigrants Experiencing Domestic Violence.* Women's Aid.

Available at <http://www.womensaid.ie/newsevents/news/2012/08/02/coalition-welcomes-new-inis-guidelines-for-immigra/> Accessed online: 11 Sept. 2012.

Yeh, M., McCabe, K., Hough, R., Dupuis, D., & Hazen, A. (2003). Racial/Ethnic Differences in Parental Endorsement of Barriers to Mental Health Services for Youth. *Mental Health Services Research,* 5(2): 65-77.

Appendices

Appendix A: Research Sample – Criteria Chosen

Criteria were decided as follows:

Inclusion Criteria

- Interviews were carried out with people over 18 years of age
- Women with refugee status or…
- Female family members of those with refugee status:

The female perspective was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, due to the small sample size and time constraints of this study, limited scope was available to explore gender differences in regard to their experiences. Secondly many of the aforementioned issues of concern have been highlighted by women to Nasc staff through their clinic work. Thus, highlighting these issues through the views of women may mirror some of the experiences already related to the agency. Lastly, as a female researcher and through my interactions with female service users, reflexive work has allowed me to realise that I tend to have a greater affinity to the experiences of women in this context. Thus by adopting this criteria, it was hoped that it would derive enhanced understanding and analysis as a result.

- Participants resided within Cork city and were living close to the agency venue where the interviews will take place, in order to minimise any transport inconveniences.
- Participants where family reunification is not an active issue for them. Individuals were included whereby the agency deemed that they were in a position to discuss sensitive issues. This was done in order to pre-empt and minimise the likelihood of distress for participants as a result of the interviews.

Exclusion Criteria

- Children under 18 years of age; this is based on vulnerability and potential negative impacts for individuals. This vulnerability is connected to issues such as the unequal power relations that exist between adult researchers and children as well as issues of informed consent and the child's understanding of the implications of participating in the research project (Ali & Kelly, 2012).
- Male participants (for the reasons outlined in point 3 of inclusion criteria).
- Members with high intra familial conflict or where there are any on-going child protection concerns. This will be based on the knowledge of the CSO of each individual.

Appendix B: Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Master of Social Work Research
For Interview Participants

1. **Purpose of the Study:**
   I am carrying out a project as part of my requirements as a student for the Master of Social Work course at UCC. This will seek to get an understanding of female refugees' and their family members' experiences of family reunification and settlement in Ireland. At this stage you have been advised about the purpose of this study by Nasc but this is an explanation of the research in writing for you.
2. **Title of study:**
   Rebuilding Family Life: An Exploration of Female Refugees' Experiences of Family Reunification and Resettlement in Ireland.
3. **Aims of the Study:**

- To learn more about your experience of family reunification in Ireland.
- To understand if you have experienced any challenges during or after reuniting with your family in Ireland.
- To understand what has helped or not helped your integration/settlement in Ireland.
- To examine what supports helped you and your family members during and after reunification.
- To get your opinion of what supports you think would help to aid family reunification and settlement in Ireland.
- **What will the Study Involve?**
  The study will involve interviewing five to six people that use the service of Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre. The interview should last no more than thirty minutes.
- **Why have you Been Asked to Take Part?**
  You have been asked because you have used the services of Nasc in the past and you are over eighteen. You also have experience of family reunification in Ireland. This research aims to get your opinions and views about family reunification and settlement in Ireland and what the experience has been like for you.

- **Do you have to Take Part?**

  You do not have to take part in this study but if you do, you will be required to sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of the consent form and this sheet for your information. If at any stage you want to remove your consent, before the interview or after the interview has taken place, this will not be a problem. It will not affect how Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre works with you in the future. If you change your mind and take away your consent, the information received will be destroyed.
- **Will your Participation in the Study be Kept Confidential?**

  Yes. I will make sure that no clues to your identity appear in the study. Any information that you provide in the interview will not be identified in the research. If there is something written in the study that you have said, this will be disguised. While the interview will be confidential, any information which indicates that you or another person may be injured or harmed will need to be passed on to Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre. In addition, any information which indicates that a child may be at risk will be reported to officials in line with Nasc child protection procedures.
- **What will happen to the Information which you give?**

  The information that you give during the interview will be recorded on a Dictaphone to make sure that I have accurate information for the study. This information will be kept confidential and the interview tapes will be kept in a locked drawer at Nasc, which only I will have access to. Once the project is handed into the college (April, 2013), the information that you give through the interview will be destroyed within six months, i.e. October 2013 at the latest.

  No other client or staff member of Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre will have access to what you have said in the interview.
- **What will happen to the results?**

  When all the information is gathered the results will be presented in my study. This will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner. The thesis may also be read by future students on the course. The study will be published on the UCC Community Academic Research Links Website and may be published in a research journal. The findings will also be presented to the staff at Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre.
- **What Can I Expect During or After the Interview?**

  There should not be any negative results for you by taking part in this study.

However it is possible that talking about your experience may cause you some distress. It is not the intention of the research to cause you any distress. Therefore, the interview can stop at any stage if you want. At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you do feel distressed, a staff member from Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre will be there to provide extra support for you.

If you need any further information, you can contact: Susan Mackey at 021 4317411 or susan@nascireland.org or at Nasc Irish Immigrant Support Centre, 35 Mary Street, Cork on Fridays anytime between 9.00am-5.30pm. If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Appendix C: Consent Form & Consent for Release of Interview Transcript

Consent for Release of Interview Transcript

As stated in the information sheet your interview will be tape recorded. This will then be typed up ("transcribed") by me and stored securely. You will have the chance to review this transcriptand remove or amend content if you wish to do so. The only other person that *may* see this transcript is my University tutor who will supervise the research. If you agree to this please sign below:

Authorisation

- I understand that the researcher (Susan Mackey) will listen to my tape and type up the interview we had.
- I understand that this transcript *may* be seen by the University tutor supervising the research.
- I understand that I will have a chance to review the written transcript and remove or amend content if I wish to do so.

I _____ (name) authorise Susan Mackey, Researcher to type and store my interview transcript.

Signature: _____

Date: _____/_____/_____

Appendix D: Interview Guide*.

Warm up questions

1. In your opinion, what is family reunification?
2. When did you reunite with your family?
3. How long were you separated from them before you reunited?

Middle phase questions

4. What has it been like for you since you have reunited with your family?
   **Probes: The positive aspects/ the negative aspects? Are all of your family members living together in the same home at this time? What things do you think helped/did not help since reuniting with your family? i.e. people, groups, education, employment etc.
5. After you reunited with your family, is there anything you think would have helped you and your family members to manage better?
6. What do you think has helped you and your family members to integrate in Ireland?
   **Probes: What type of supports? Who provides support? i.e. from Social Services, Immigration Services, NGOs, church, minority ethnic groups?
7. What do you think has not helped you and your family members to integrate in Ireland?
   **Probes: time spent waiting to be reunited? Employment? Experiences of direct provision? Discrimination? Separated from extended family? Effects of trauma from country of origin?

End of interview

Time allocated for debriefing, feedback, and suggestions from the participant.

**Please note: these questions are subject to change depending on direction of interview*

*** Please note: These probes are suggested and again will be dependent on the direction that the interview takes*