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**“Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow”: Experiences of  
unaccompanied refugee girls in Cape Town**

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WRRROS001

A minor-dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of Master of Social Sciences in Clinical Social Work in the  
Department of Social Development  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Cape Town.

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**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES**

**DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER IN THE  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

I, Ajwang' R. Warria of 1 Devon View, Devonshirehill Rd., Rondebosch, 7700; do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce for the purposes of research either the whole or any of the contents of my dissertation entitled "Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow": Experiences of unaccompanied refugee girls in Cape Town" in any manner whatsoever.

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22/05/2008

DATE

## ABSTRACT

“Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow”: Experiences of unaccompanied refugee girls in Cape Town”

Warria, R., A.

### **MSocSc (Clinical Social Work) mini-thesis, Department of Social Development, U.C.T**

The arrival of unaccompanied minors poses unique challenges to the host country, raising serious questions about the rights and psychosocial health of that child. This mini thesis explores the experiences of young unaccompanied girls who arrived in South Africa and who are classified today as teenage refugee girls. The author investigated the challenges faced and adjustment mechanisms applied by the girls during pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration phases. This study highlights significance of stability and safety for functional adolescent development and what happens when stability and safety are absent.

Eight refugee girls from Ale’s House, Ons Plek Projects and Cape Town Refugee Centre were interviewed using the narrative approach. The data was tape-recorded and where necessary, illustrations were used. To come up with themes and sub-themes, the data collected was managed according to Tesch’s 8-steps. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model and Erikson’s psychosocial framework were applied in theme analysis.

This study found that fundamental adolescent issues of separation, identity, intimacy and sexuality interact significantly with problems of being a refugee such as xenophobia, lack of cultural-based therapeutic services or education thus interrupting growth and development. The participant’s experiences reflected elements of “Post Traumatic Refugee Shock” that were replicated in survivor’s guilt and emotional pain. Emphasis ought to be on proper diagnosis of psychosocial challenges and on cultural appropriate narrative therapy interventions. In addition, key stakeholders need to champion for the rights of the refugee child to ensure that their circumstances are taken seriously and addressed within the existing policy frameworks.

February, 2008

## DECLARATION

I, Ajwang' R., Warri, declare that "Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow": Experiences of unaccompanied refugee girls in Cape Town" is my own work; that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Ajwang' R., Warri

Signature:.

Signed by candidate

Date:.....

22/05/2008

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I am forever indebted to my family, wherever they are, for the considerable sacrifices they have consistently made so that I could further my studies. This research paper is dedicated to my mother, Leah Warriia, a survivor in her own way, and a special person who has always encouraged me to pursue what I am passionate about.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century hailed as the “Century of the Child” did not live up to this, because of the increasing abuse inflicted upon children. The abuse has led to continuous suffering and pain to numerous refugee children worldwide with 2006 being recorded as their worst year (Clarke, 2007). Clarke (2007) further suggests that there are almost 10 million refugees worldwide who have been uprooted from their countries and forced to flee.

The changing nature of conflicts is more noticeable in increased political repression and massive human rights violations (UNHCR, 2000). In addition, children in Sub-Saharan Africa who become vulnerable as a result of ongoing conflicts, persecution and human rights abuses opt to seek refuge in South Africa (Warchild, 2007). In UNICEF’s (1995) report on “The State of the World’s Children” it was reported that during the 1980’s more than 1 million children lost their parents or were separated from them during war. In 2006’s State of the World’s Children, children were reported to be “invisible”. The root causes of invisibility and exclusion stem from exposure to violence, traumas and adversities amid incidents such as loss of family, friends, possessions (Boothby, 1998), armed conflict, weak governance and HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2006).

In relation to above, UNICEF (1995) approximates that, over the years, more than 10 million children have developed psychological disorders due to war-related conflicts, persecution and discrimination as refugees (Junior, Reidesser, Walter, Adam & Steudtner, 1996). As a result of violations of their rights to protection within such an environment, refugee children were explicitly recognized within international law as having a crucial need in relation to special protection. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the end of the war or being a refugee in another country does not in itself stability or that psycho-emotional wounds will automatically disappear following resettlement (Orley, 1998). Special protection ought to be accorded to them as their growth and development has been hampered. Traumatic ordeals left them vulnerable and they have faced additional challenges not experienced by other children within their age group (Fangen, 2006). Stone & Wintersten (2003) argue that having the refugee status need not negate a child’s right or the host states’ responsibility to provide for it; they also have the right to recover following war and persecution (1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees)

### **Refugees in South Africa**

In 1994, with South Africa's transition to democracy, there was an increase in the number of refugee "survivors" arriving on the South African borders; since it was deemed to be a relatively safe destination (Stone & Winterstein, 2003) due to its policy on refugees (Ntlakana, 2006). According to the UNHCR 2006 global trends report released in June 2007, the number is on the rise. Glacherty, Suitcase storytellers and Welvering (2006) stated that the number of refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa then was almost 150,000. This could be higher as "...one tenth (53, 400) of new asylum claims globally were lodged in South Africa..." (Tolsi, 2008). A report in the Financial Mail (2007) states that "...no one seems able to provide accurate numbers of foreigners in South Africa and their impact..." The Refugee Backlog Project (2006) reported that the largest number of asylum seekers in South Africa is from DRC, though there are significant groups from Somalia, Pakistan and a growing number from Zimbabwe. Clarke (2007) suggests that the crises in Middle East, Sudan, the Horn of Africa, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo have contributed to the rise of refugees. The Financial Mail (2007) reported that current political and economic instability in Zimbabwe is the reason behind the large influx of adult and (unaccompanied) children refugees in South Africa.

The refugees who arrive in South Africa are not accommodated in designated camps unlike the case in most African countries. The South Africa Refugee Act 130 of 1998 allows refugees, including children, to settle nationwide with attempts to accommodate them in already existing institutional frameworks. The rights-based approach was adopted to promote local integration through free movement countrywide and access to public services; but this has not been realized in practice (UNHCR 1996 Report; Van Garderen & Batshabelo in Stone & Winterstein, 2003; Clacherty et. al, 2006) as will be outlined in this research.

Twun-Danso (2005:7) argues that numerous African youth are marginalized by "...political and social structures, and neglected and overlooked by both scholarly and political-oriented writings..." This research hopes to show significance of undertaking studies focusing on refugee girls who have faced situations of extreme deprivations and persecution. The research hopes to shed light on the factors that lead young refugee girls to come to South Africa, the obstacles they face in adjusting to a new country, the coping mechanisms adopted, and the perceptions of key roles players. In addressing this social issue, the study hopes to provide

recommendations in identifying helpful interventions in therapy and policy making, as relates to unaccompanied refugee children.

## **1.1 BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH**

The refugee phenomenon is a worldwide concern that came under limelight after World War II due to the large magnitudes of people who had been displaced. External displacement of people due to armed conflict is rife with millions of people being forced to leave their countries and seek refuge in other countries (Tolsi, 2008; Legoko, 2006). This has led several countries to either become producers or receivers of refugees (Leopold & Harrell-Bond, 1998; Blavo, 1999; UNHCR, 2001), with South Africa having 27, 683 recognized refugees and 115,224 asylum seeker applicants (Redden, 2005). A contradictory report by Penda (2006) gave an estimate of Cape Town's refugee population at 35,000 refugees. The refugee crisis has been augmented by the fact that most refugees in the world today are disabled, infirm, women and children (especially unaccompanied [girl]) who form the *vulnerable* refugee population (UNHCR, 1995; Marsella et al., 1998). These populations are said to lack "...mental and physical resources and strengths required for survival under the harsh circumstances associated with forced relocation..." and migration (Marsella et al., 1998:3)

### **Psychosocial issues of refugees**

During the pre-migration and departure period, refugee children interviewed reported being coaxed, coerced and absorbed (Kocijan-Hercigonja, 1999; Blavo, 1999; Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Korbin, 1991) into liberation struggles, civil and regional wars, political campaigns and revolutions (Namhila, 1997; McIntyre, 2005; Legoko, 2006; Leao, 2005; Parsons, 2005) in their home countries. In addition, they had to deal with gross human rights violations (Steinberg, 2005; Watchlist, 2004) as they yearned for protection (Boothby, 1998; Landau, 2006; Williams, 1991; Ogata, 2000), the need for assistance to rebuild their lives (Peltzer, 1996; Fangen, 2006; ICRC, 2003) and reclaim identities (Martin, 1998; Bala, 1996; Clacherty et. al, 2006; ICRC, 2003). The children, as "invisible stakeholders" i.e. being a major part of the population (McIntyre, 2005) have experienced poverty, oppression and hopelessness, insecurity and violence, as factors that have pushed and pulled them towards being marginalized, as potential war recruits and or as potential refugees. This study reviewed how children often end up bearing the brunt of worsening conditions in most African countries, as unaccompanied refugee minors.

The problems endured by unaccompanied refugee children are enormous ranging from hardships borne when seeking refuge and later in the bitter experiences they encounter while trying to forge a new life in refuge (Fangen, 2006). According to Oxford Handbook of Psychiatry (2007), sudden uprootment from one's comforts at home and the inability to legally and safely settle and adjust to life in a new environment can later cause psychological disturbances. The occurrence of being an unaccompanied refugee minor produces stressors which the child needs to cope with; such as having to "...alter existing world views in order to make sense out of their new realities..." (Boothby, 1998: 255). Other refugee stressors linked to mental health issues include guilt, withdrawal, anxiety, anger and aggression, depression, grief, fear, paranoia and suspicion, despair, hopelessness, somatisation, substance abuse and hostility (Marsella et. al., 1998). In addition to psychological disorders, other levels of functioning affected may relate to education, family, adjustment, acculturation and assimilation.

Developing and safeguarding the psycho-socio-emotional health and wellbeing of refugees thus continues to pose immense challenges. Marsella et. al. (1998:6) reiterate that "...psychological and emotional scars associated with the refugee experience remain a constant and abiding source of terror, humiliation and indignity..." Furthermore, as a refugee, the individual undergoes traumatic experiences associated with the consequences of forced migration from their country of origin. The level of vulnerability might be influenced by a child's developmental stage, level of understanding, role of family, social support systems and the view of conflict at hand. Developmental theorists (Ainsworth, 1978; Kohlberg, 1985; Erikson, 1968) support Boothby's (1998: 255) argument that "...the longer a child lives in the midst of danger and adversity, the more likely it is that their personalities, behaviours, attachment patterns and moral *and cultural* sensibilities will become altered in the process..." These issues make refugee individuals and their families' vulnerable and needing special protection in regards to their well-being.

### **Policy on refugees**

#### **(i) International legal instruments**

Due to interest in European refugee situation and issues of protection, in 1951, the United Nations adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. In the late 1950's Africa also had problems with refugees that needed resolutions and solutions. In response, the UN approved the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1967, as exclusion to the 1951

Convention. Countries around the world affirmed their commitment to protecting refugees by acceding to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Leopold & Harrell-Bond, 1998). The 1951 Convention was later viewed as the cornerstone document of refugee protection, worldwide, including in South Africa. Based on this, in 1967, African states came together under the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to form Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (Blavo, 1999). To date, all states which are signatories to the International and Regional Refugees Conventions have adopted national refugee policies based on the Conventions to act as guidelines in the management of refugees within their countries. In 1989, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was introduced with an emphasis on refugee children's protection and family tracing and reunification. Subsequently, the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was passed, and ratified by South Africa in 2000. Though it was based on the African context, it continued to support the best interest of the child. In addition, it emphasized a collective approach, yet recognized the rights and responsibilities of the child.

(ii) South African legal frameworks

The South African instruments that deal with refugees include the Constitution, Immigration Act 13 of 2002, Refugees Act 130 of 1998, the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 as amended and the Children's Act 38 of 2005. Refugees were not formally acknowledged during apartheid-era in South Africa, until 1990 when the government started abolishing the discriminatory laws on influx control and immigration. The Aliens Control Act 96 of 1991 "...consolidated 5 existing pieces of legislation into a single comprehensive law governing the terms and conditions of entry of non-citizens into the country..." (Stone & Winterstein, 2003). However, this was not effective in post-apartheid South Africa since the policy was still deeply rooted in the imperatives and ideologies of the apartheid era. This changed in 1998 when South Africa ratified the 1951 UN Convention to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugees Problems in Africa.

South Africa passed the Refugee Act 130 of 1998, developed in line with international conventions and the South African Constitution. Sec.32 of the Refugee Act states that an unaccompanied minor who claims asylum must appear before the Children's Court, and if found to be in need of care according to the Child Care Act then they should be assisted to apply for asylum. The Immigration Act 13 of 2002 later replaced the Aliens Control Act, though it was "silent" on the treatment of refugee children. The Regulations Act, implemented

in 2000 was a significant milestone in refugee protection, treatment and management. In this study, the policy frameworks were looked at in reference to unaccompanied refugee children; as a vital legal instruments established by the government to assist refugees in South Africa.

It should be stressed that children, especially those unaccompanied, should not be looked at as “little adults”; their needs, interests and coping patterns and mechanisms applied are different from those of adults. In regards to the psycho-socio-emotional traumas that the child might have experienced, it is essential to know when and what interventions have the most impact depending on the stage of refugee movement/ migration as different stages require different intervention strategies (Martin, 1998). When social workers intervene, the child needs to feel a sense of security, acceptance and emotional support. Furthermore, to increase resiliency and minimise the (secondary) trauma experiences, they need guidance as they grow and mature emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually.

## **1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Twum-Danso (2005:8) argued that “...Africa is a continent of the young...” This is indicative of the available statistics on the percentage of children under 18; such as 56% in Uganda, 54% in Congo and Somalia, 52% in Angola, 51% Zimbabwe and 43% in South Africa. According to a UNHCR (1995) report, more than half the worlds’ refugees are children under the age of 18. Refugee children show a complex set of issues for anyone who would like to understand and assist them within their situation. They present with concerns related to pre-migration, transmigration and post-migration. The process of adjustment to a new environment with new cultures is problematic and discouraging for the child; leaving her feeling as if she is lacking in mastery, independence, belonging and generosity (Bendtro et. al., 1990).

On the other hand, refugees who make it to Cape Town are thought to be the most resilient and courageous due to distance traversed. Therefore this study would be vital in exploring the coping patterns that these children follow in dealing with the changes experienced whilst adjusting to a new life in South Africa. This shift in changes can be viewed as an opportunity for empowerment as they go about learning from their experiences. This can be through increase in their resiliency or by boosting “...their capacities to making meaningful decisions concerning research participation and to defend their interests in research settings...” (Thompson, 1992).

Adults move more clearly through stages when dealing with impact of conflict in comparison to children (Kubler-Ross, 1983; Worden, 1992). They might not grieve constantly, but instead it is usually periodic and seems to come and go. In addition, when the circle of courage is broken, the lives of children are no longer in harmony or balance. They may show their conflict, despair and healing in obvious ways, or they may disguise their real feelings with acts of pseudo-courage. Bendtro et. al., (1990:456) stress that "...one can't mend the circle of courage without understanding where it's broken..." Thus the study yielded indications on when social workers might/ should intervene and how to go about it.

In line with the above, Punamaki & Suleiman (1990 in Boothby, 1998) stress that one-dimensional stress models that focus on individual determinants of children's coping do not give sufficient conceptual framework for understanding, research and action. According to them, instead, what is significant is knowledge around the nature of the conflict, how children understand it and how they perceive their roles in it; as these have an impact on the children's psychological development and mental health outcomes. The above authors are thus in favour of a two-dimensional model that "...considers the context of crisis itself and children's coping in relation to that context, rather than solely in abstract individualistic terms..." (Punamaki & Suleiman, 1990 in Boothby, 1998:255). This study looked at the youth's experiences, challenges faced and coping strategies adopted to enhance social workers awareness and intervention approaches.

The descriptive accounts narrated by this "at-risk" group may be valuable in that these revelations may shed some light on establishment of therapeutic and support strategies for refugee girls. A social worker's own personal and professional understanding of ways in which a refugee's crisis can act as a force of development, leading to greater personal fulfilment in the long run is vital. De Monchy (1991) and Bendtro et. al. (1990:457) stress that "...turbulence in their lives can work to social worker's advantage...a young person experiencing stress will intensify attachment behaviour...when adults manages these crises with sensitivity, the relationship bonds will become more secure..." Thus, when the social worker is skilful and knowledgeable in this area, it will enable her to intervene objectively, without feeling hopeless or overwhelmed.

### **1.3 MOTIVATION TO DO THE STUDY**

The researcher's personal and professional circumstances have influenced this research focus in relation to the circumstances that have significantly impacted on her. From a professional standpoint, in the past year, most of the work that the researcher has engaged in involved working with (unaccompanied) refugee girls, whilst also liaising with the various governmental and non-governmental organizations that deal with refugees. An observation corroborated by findings in literature state that provisions for the child ought to address their physical, legal and psycho-social needs and survival strategies as a way to increase resilience in the future (Rutter & Hersov, 1985; Jablensky, Marsella, Ekblad, Jansson, Levi & Bornemann, 1998). In addition, further observation indicated that most children, who have been disappointed by adults before, grow up believing that adults cannot be trusted; thus the hurdle would be the re-education process with a dependable adult (i.e. social worker).

The researcher holds a personal opinion that the family is a crucial element in safeguarding societal moral elements and their continuation. A study by Bendtro et. al's (1990) showed the significant influence that parents have on the development of children and how when that is taken away (such as with unaccompanied minors) the repercussions are tremendous. Thus in studying refugee girls, elements of family tracing, reunification and reconstruction are considered.

On both personal and professional levels, the researcher was frustrated and alarmed at how the South African government seems challenged in meeting the needs of the steadily growing population of unaccompanied refugee children. Thus, the motivation to do this study was also fuelled by the researcher's zeal to understand and give recommendations within the social work field on interventions that might help the child survivor cope with traumas, abuse, adversities and human rights violations faced previously.

## **2. PROBLEM FORMULATION**

### **2.1 RESEARCH TOPIC**

"Pot of gold at the end of the rainbow": Experiences of unaccompanied refugee girls in Cape Town.

## 2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the circumstances which led to departure of refugee girls from home?
- What are the perceived factors which lead to refugee girls arriving in Cape Town, South Africa unaccompanied?
- What are the perceived experiences of refugee girls in Cape Town as they cope in the new environment?
- What specific mechanisms do these girls adopt to cope with their changed circumstances?
- What roles do key role players undertake in helping teenage refugee girls?

## 2.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To investigate circumstances which lead to refugee girls leaving home.
- To investigate the perceived factors that lead to refugee girls coming to Cape Town, South Africa unaccompanied.
- To explore the perceived experiences of refugee girls in Cape Town as they cope in the new environment.
- To explore the mechanisms adopted by these girls in order to cope with their changed circumstances.
- To examine the functions and the recommendations put forward by the key role players.

## 3. KEY CONCEPTS OF STUDY

### 3.1 Refugee

The UN defines refugees as “...any person genuinely at risk of serious human rights violations in his/ her country or origin, who both needs and deserves protection...because of heightened risk to human rights on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group...”

The South African Refugee Act, 130 of 1998 definition of a refugee a person who “...is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, or, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to

*return to it; or owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing or disrupting public order in either a part or the whole his or her country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his or her place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge elsewhere; or is a dependent of a person contemplated in above..."*

In this study, a refugee is an individual who escaped from her country and has subsequently been recognized by the South African Refugee Act No. 130 of 1998 as a refugee because of affiliations with a particular political, religious, ethnic/ tribal group thus at threat of persecution.

### **3.2 Minor**

These include "...persons who are below the legal age of majority and are therefore not legally independent...it includes adolescents. The South African Children's Act 38 of 2005, effective from 1 July 2007, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) state that a "child" is a person who is below the age of eighteen, unless the applicable law sets a lower age..." (Guide to international refugee law, 2001:130). The CRC and the amended Children's Act both indicate that there is no difference between the concepts "child" and "minor". The participants in this study were minors i.e. be between 15-17 years old.

### **3.3 Unaccompanied minors**

These are "...persons below the legal age of majority who are not in the company of parents, guardians or primary caregivers..." (Guide to international refugee law, 2001:134). Another definition stipulates that they are children "...who are separated from both parents and are not cared for by an adult, who by law or custom is responsible to do so..." (Stone & Winterstein, 2003:16) The 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child recognizes such children who have been separated from family and relatives as being vulnerable. Current debate holds the above terminology to include children who have come into the country with "smugglers", caregivers/ guardians or parents, but who later abandoned them. These different aspects to the above concept indicate the complexity of the issue, thus, in this study, an unaccompanied minor will encompass a child who either came into South Africa alone or who was abandoned in the country or enroute.

### **3.4 Child-at-risk/ Youth-at-risk**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child state that for children to grow up well balanced, they need a family environment that is joyous, loving and understanding, and a society that is peaceful, dignified, has tolerance, practices equality and spirit of solidarity. According to the South African Bill of Rights and for purposes of this research, a child-at-risk will be viewed as a child who is endangered or has been exposed to vulnerabilities, exploitation, adversities, human rights violations and lacking guidance from a responsible adult. The above terms are used interchangeably in this study.

### **3.5 Coping**

It is the practice of controlling external and or internal demands that strain or surpass the resources of an individual. This includes feelings that might be overwhelming to a person, thus needing a “container” (Bion, 1977). In this study, coping was looked at from an ecological perspective, which highlights the significance of the interplay between environmental, physical, psychological, social and behavioural factors and where the refugee can tap into for assistance to manage difficult feelings.

### **3.6 Experiences**

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, this can be described as “...something personally encountered, undergone or lived through...” In this research, it meant the conscious events that impacted on the refugee from pre-departure to resettlement.

### **3.7 Key role players**

A key role player is a main person or group of people or organization championing for the rights of certain populations. The key role players under the refugee service providers identified for purposes of this study included a refugee attorney, a social worker working in a refugee organization, an immigration officer working at Home Affairs (Refugee Affairs) and a director of a refugee organization.

## **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Children who are refugees are particularly vulnerable. This is because other than experiencing displacement, trauma and adapting to new environments they are also trying to navigate crises

in various stages of development (Cole & Cole, 2003). Refugee children have to tackle these developmental issues, as relating to traumatic separations from countries of origin and experiences of loss which subsequently may contribute to complex psychological, emotional, socio-cultural resettlement processes (Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Twum-Danso, 2005).

The struggle to preserve a sense of stability places these young people potentially at risk of developing learning difficulties, behavioural problems and psychological distress (Bala, 1996). The review will outline key theoretical debates as identified in select literature on refugee children, as might relate to young adolescents coping and adjustment experiences in relation to the migratory process. Refugees are characteristically seen as victims, with common discourses focussing on adversity and their misery; which presents a distorted picture. Though refugees go through these hardships, it ought to be acknowledged that they have mustered enormous strength to survive, thrive and prosper (Camino, 1994).

The literature review will provide a brief conceptual framework which will attempt to capture the girl's experiences extensively on divergent contributing factors and experiences the unaccompanied minors encounter (DeVos, 2003). With a broader framework, the information can be used to form general principles and guidelines which would steer social workers towards cultural-sensitive psychosocial interventions, when dealing with unaccompanied minors (Peltzer, 1996).

The ecological framework will be discussed for significant contributions based on the principle of importance of persons-in-contexts. This approach is crucial because of its ability to capture and illustrate influence of the environment on the refugee adolescents. The past and present contextual migratory discussions incorporate developmental, crisis, behavioural, feminist and cognitive theories. The broad areas of refugee experiences to be discussed include displacement, resilience, culture, loss, grief and trauma and resettlement (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). Despite traumatic experiences, refugees often display strengths and creativity around survival strategies. This enables them construct and negotiate new roles and behaviour in the achievement of obligatory and desired ends. According to Camino (1994: xv), through this, "...they reveal multilayered, richly contextualized meanings of their lives and traditions as they act to reaffirm self and community..."

The events that lead to children leaving home and arriving unaccompanied mainly include war (civil and international), ethnic cleansing, post-election violence, death of parents and social exclusion (Eyber, 2006; Hannan, 2006). Past studies have focused on children and adults without addressing the needs of the adolescent refugee (Ullman, 1999; Steinberg, 2005; Sichone, 2006; Ngodwana & Treves, 2006; Tolsi, 2008). These studies were however instrumental in understanding teenage refugee experiences and coping mechanisms adopted. Experiences of adult and refugee children's participation and adaptation were fundamental to the process of enabling them become an integral part of their community of resettlement. This empowered them and the host population was less hostile (Landau, 2007). These were in line with the ecological framework themes of interdependence and mutual interaction within the environment of resettlement.

## **5. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This is a descriptive, exploratory study. This design was chosen because it enabled the researcher to gain deep insights into the unaccompanied (refugee) minors studies, an area that is relatively new and has not been explored in South Africa (De Vos, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 2005). The qualitative approach was applied and the descriptive nature of the research gave deeper meaning and provided rich details in line with the primary goal of understanding and describing the experiences and coping patterns of the refugee girls (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). The qualitative strategy used was criterion sampling; the qualitative method of data collection was narrative approach and data was analyzed thematically. The design was chosen because it allowed flexibility in modification of research plan, adjusting methodology and study time frame to suit the subject of study (Babbie & Mouton, 2004).

## **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **6.1 Research instrument**

Qualitative interviewing design was applied in the study of refugee girls because it is "...flexible, iterative and continuous..." in nature (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). The main instrument used to facilitate the process was interviews. The interview guide approach used allowed the respondents to express their opinions in their own words. It listed an outline on what needed to be covered and gave the researcher an allowance to adjust the sequence or rephrase questions when necessary. At the end, the different interviews covered similar material and helped maintain focus on the predetermined topics while allowing freedom to navigate

the unanticipated responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Narrative approach was used. Interviews were also held with key role players for triangulation purposes (De Vos, 2005). The secondary data collection method used was analysis of policy documentations (De Vos, 2005).

## **6.2 Sampling**

Spradley (1979 in Babbie & Mouton, 2004: 288) suggests that the basic criteria for selecting respondents should be South African recognized refugee status and availability. The research sample comprised of teenage refugee girls from Scalabrini Projects, Ons Plek Projects and referrals from Cape Town Refugee Centre. Scalabrini Centre, with 2 homes (Lawrence House and Ale's House) catered for abandoned refugee children, aged 4-18 years. Ons Plek Projects was originally started as a shelter for female street children, but the focus expanded to include care of abandoned or trafficked foreign minors. Cape Town Refugee Centre was established with an aim of addressing problems facing the growing number of refugees in Western Cape (app 450/day). These 3 projects were identified because of the significant work they do with refugees. In addition, they were willing participants in the study, with the hope that they could use the suggested recommendations to improve their intervention strategies.

Purposive sampling was used based on the researcher's and guardian's knowledge of the population, its elements and congruency on information they could give that would benefit the study (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). In other words, the selection of the informants was based on a specific criterion though equally purposive i.e. be refugees, between ages 15 and 17 (at time of study) and who arrived "unaccompanied minor". There were 8 participants in the study; from Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Rwanda. These countries have in the recent past been in turmoil. According to an August 2007 press release by Home Affairs Department, between 01/01/2007-30/06/2007, a total of 1917 people applied for asylum in South Africa. From that, more than half, i.e. 938 were from Democratic Republic of Congo, 443 were from Somalia, 433 were from Ethiopia and the rest from other countries not mentioned. This is not a recent statistic release thus it might not reflect the data at the time period when these girls arrived in South Africa.

## **7. DATA ANALYSIS**

In this research, data was collected in a narrative form. The semi-structured interviews used brought out qualitative responses that were subsequently qualitatively analyzed. The

researcher chose to analyze the data qualitatively due to the flexibility of the methodology. Therefore, the focus during analysis of the qualitative data collected was to identify key themes i.e. theme analysis (Dudley, 2005). The key process in the analysis of was coding, i.e. classifying or categorizing single entities of data in a system that can allow for them to be retrieved afterwards. Coding and relating concepts was fundamental to the analysis process as the researcher continually asked questions and made comparisons (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). Finally, the data was analysed in conjunction with literature reviewed and existing national and international policies on refugee children.

## **8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **8.1 Informed consent**

During this research, sufficient information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures followed during the investigation, the possible advantages and disadvantages which respondents may be exposed and the credibility of the researcher's study and researcher were made available to potential subjects and their legal representatives (De Vos, 2003; Tutty et. al, 1996; Rubin, 2005; Greig & Taylor, 1999). Emphasis was placed on voluntary participation of the individuals and organizations (De Vos, 2003; Tutty et al. 1996). In addition, the researcher attempted to ensure that the participants and or their guardians were legally and psychologically fit to give consent (Thompson, 1992:52). Furthermore, they were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point. A letter requesting consent and assent and outlining the nature of the study were given to the girl's guardians (Stanley & Sieber, 1992; Tymchuk, 1992; Grisso, 1992; Greig & Taylor, 1999). To the researcher's best of knowledge, the girl's parents could not be contacted for consent purposes thus parental permission was waived (Stanley & Sieber, 1992).

### **8.2 Violation of privacy/ anonymity/ confidentiality**

For purposes of this study, the above were viewed synonymously. The researcher was aware of the responsibility towards protection of the privacy and identity of respondents (especially as minors) and acted with necessary sensitivity where it seemed pertinent (De Vos, 2003; Tutty et al, 1996 & Rubin et al, 2005). Developmental research and theory indicate that protection of privacy is of paramount significance to young adolescents more specifically because they are at a stage where they are developing the differentiated sense of self (Melton,

1992). The researcher reassured the study participants that anonymity meant that no one including the researcher might be able to identify any of them afterwards.

### **8.3 Restoration of participants**

Dunkerley et. al. (2006) reports that there are added ethical sensitivities in doing in depth interviews with children and that especially unaccompanied children tend to be particularly more vulnerable because of previous experiences of trauma, hostility and poor support in their new surroundings coupled with feelings of isolation. Knowing that some children might have undergone traumatic experiences, debriefing sessions were used as a way of minimizing harm (Tutty et. al, 1996; Thompson, 1992). In addition the researcher attempted to apply the “least-intrusive-means principle” throughout this research process (Melton, 1992). Through debriefing, issues created by the research experience were rectified. This was achieved by discussing their feelings around the research experience immediately after the session. The researcher tried to correct any misperceptions that may have arisen in their minds (Rubin et al, 2005). In situations where the researcher felt that subsequent therapy might be appropriate, a referral was made to the organization’s social worker/ counsellor, with the minors consent.

### **8.4 Action and competence of researcher**

Research studies with children are reported to be “difficult, demanding and a challenge” due to the special characteristics of the research study sample which introduce greater vulnerabilities or enhance resilience (Thompson, 1992:52). The researcher had adequate skills required to undertake this study and was aware that she would be dealing with a sensitive topic and vulnerable young adolescents. Clacherty et. al. (2006) reports that unaccompanied refugee children are exceptionally wary and that most reluctantly trust adults. This was based on loss of reliable adult caregivers, experiences of deep grief and or disappointments by service providers or by media professionals who exploited them. The researcher previously worked with refugee children and in the process acquired general cross-cultural competence and trust building skills which she was able to transfer to this project (Struwe, 1998; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Melton, 1992).

The researcher understands her responsibility towards colleagues in the research fraternity with regard to appropriately reporting findings of the study (De Vos, 2003; Tutty et al., 1996 & Rubin et al, 2005). Recommendations will also be given and made available to all concerned parties. The researcher evaluated the possible risks and benefits of the investigation

thoroughly as related to the refugee's developmental stage (Thompson, 1992). Ethically correct actions, attitudes and perceptions in relation to the study were considered under all circumstances, at all times. The researcher was also aware of responsibility in honouring pledges made to the voluntary participants and the organizations. Progress on the research paper was reported regularly to concerned parties.

### **8.5 Deception of participants**

The researcher avoided distorting facts in order to make the participants believe what was not true (De Vos, 2003). No information was withheld or inaccurate information offered in order to ensure their participation, when they would have refused otherwise (Tutty et al., 1996). The interview setting chosen was easily accessible and culturally sensitive to the needs of the participants. The environment was convenient, familiar and safe in relation to the participant's needs, resources and concerns (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). During the course of the research, if an incident occurred whereby the researcher was not previously aware of, the issue arising would have been discussed with the respondent immediately (Tutty et al., 1996).

## **9. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

### **9.1 Use of narrative approach**

The outlook of experiences might change form as new experiences are gained and through interaction with different people. In addition, individuals often create or hear a narrative in relation to their own life experiences and background. Thus, the researcher was cautious because otherwise, the belief in the potential attainment of an objective reality would be rejected. In addition, it is understood that the literature on narrative research seemed to be rather vague about concrete inquiry procedures; in comparison with other qualitative research approaches such as case studies and biographies. To ensure quality of the study, the researcher strove to listen to the participant so as to capture their voice (De Vos, 2005). In addition, beginning to write early, reporting fully, recording of interviews accurately and the researcher constantly being aware of her subjectivity were vital steps during research. Triangulation was used study to corroborate evidence from key role players.

### **9.2 Language**

Language was an important selection criterion because English is a recognized official language in certain African countries. The researcher speaks Kiswahili as a second language.

An interpreter fluent in Lingala, French and Portuguese was available to assist during the interviews. All participants were interviewed in English which standardized the study's responses (De Vos, 2005). The disadvantage was that some were less fluent than others, thus some interviews took longer than the set 45 minutes.

### **9.3 Use of tape recorder**

The tape recorder proved to be a powerful tool in data collection in this research though it was not able to capture the elements of meta-communication that were taking place in the sessions. The researcher in turn had to watch and listen attentively and at times record what was going on. Another limitation was the transcribing process which proved to be time-consuming, tedious and monotonous, at times.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

There have been concerted efforts by the United Nations and other organizations, in many African countries to try assist the refugee populations. This has been through giving aid and expertise where necessary, especially in the curative realm. Intervention approaches in the past have relied on what has been researched on with younger children or and adults whilst the adolescent age group has been largely ignored. This chapter gave an overall overview into the study that was carried out with unaccompanied refugee girls from Scalabrini Centre, Cape Town Refugee Centre and Ons Plek Projects in Cape Town. The key issues that were briefly looked at were best interest determination, harmonization of law and policies and psycho-social aspects related to being a refugee girl. As it has been briefly outlined, it is clear that there is a gap in relation to unaccompanied refugee teenage girls in South Africa that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This study aimed to lessen the gap, by seeking to understand the youth's experiences, challenges and coping strategies during pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration. In the next chapter the methodology will be looked at in greater detail, as relates to the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter starts by looking at the research design and the rationale behind the choice of a qualitative approach for this study. Next, there is a discussion on the research methodology with emphasis on the use of interviews (from a narrative perspective), purposive sampling, data collection and analysis. Finally, there is a brief section on reflexivity.

#### **2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This was a descriptive, exploratory study because it enabled the researcher to gain deep insights into unaccompanied minors (De Vos, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 2005). The qualitative approach was applied and the descriptive nature of the research gave a deeper meaning and provided rich details in line with the research aim of understanding experiences of the refugee girls (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). As Rubin & Babbie (2005: 125) reiterate, this study attempted to convey "...what it's like to walk in the shoes of the people being described-providing rich details about their environments, interactions, meanings and everyday lives..." The units of analysis in this study are the individual refugee girls' narratives (Babbie & Mouton, 2004; Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

The qualitative strategy used was criterion sampling; the qualitative method of data collection was semi-structured interviewing in the construction of the girl's narratives and the data was analyzed according to grounded theory approach (De Vos, 2005). The design chosen allowed for flexibility which increased validity of findings and allowed the researcher more control and freedom during the research process (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). Grounded theory was applied because information was inductively derived from the study. This means that the data collected, data analyzed and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other as pertinent information was allowed to emerge rather than the researcher beginning with a theory (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). The main process within grounded theory analysis used was coding. This will be discussed further under data analysis.

In this research, narratives were used as medium of data collection, whilst attempting to construct the partial-history of the teenage refugee girl's life. Post-modernists hold the

assumption that the use of life history narrations as a method of data collection, allows the research participant's voice to be heard i.e. "...the subjective reality of the individual..." (Babbie & Mouton, 2004: 284). According to feminist research, this process of narrating experiences was empowering. The individual case studies selected involved in-depth analysis over a selected period of life time with the sole criterion being the opportunity to learn about the girl's experiences (Stake in De Vos, 1993: 275). These narratives as told to the researcher were compiled and would be used to assist the girls construct new fulfilling lives (Schafer, White & Epston, 1990 in Riessman, 1993). Attempts to successfully produce a picture of the participant's life required the researcher to be knowledgeable in the relevant literature, have a high level of linguistic agility and skill (Dudley, 2005; Babbie & Mouton, 2002).

## **2.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.3.1 Research instrument**

Qualitative research was applied in this study because it assists in the focused investigations of refugee girls' migration as a social issue. Interviewing was used because of researcher's interest in the participant's stories and with more narratives; she got closer towards gaining more clarity and having a conclusive study (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Policy documents were analysed and previous research findings were reviewed. This was vital because it provided a foundation for the study and in the analysis of the data collected.

Two appealing characteristics of interviewing are its non-standardization and its efficient use of relationships as fostered by the researcher, as a basis for obtaining data. With these characteristics, interviewing was appropriately used with grounded theory (De Vos, 2005). That is, because of its non-standardized nature, it was possible to collect precise data by reformulating the problem, categories and interview structure as the research progressed. Refining of the interview schedule meant that researcher had a greater control over the research process thus a decreased likelihood of asking misleading questions and increased opportunity to immediately assess the validity of the information collected (De Vos, 2003). The questions in the interview guide were open-ended and the respondents were allowed to express personal view points. Eventually, the different interviews covered similar material and helped maintain focus on the predetermined topics while allowing freedom to navigate the unanticipated responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

Contact with participating organizations was made via email and telephone. The nature of the research was explained and consent was gained. The refugee girls interviewed were approached by the organizations' gatekeeper, i.e. the social worker, who informed them about the study and requested for their voluntary participation. The interview questions were first discussed with the social worker, and it was agreed that they would not discuss them with the participants prior to interview; as it would have influenced their opinion and the quality of data collected. It was agreed that the social workers would further counsel the girls should the debriefing session be inadequate. The girls were interviewed over a 2-week period, subject to their availability due to academic demands. The researcher interviewed all participants in English, with the exception of one, where Kiswahili and English were used interchangeably.

Notes were taken in moderation because it assisted in pacing the interview. In addition, the sessions were audio-recorded so that the researcher could concentrate on the proceedings of the interview. This meant that she had a fuller record in the form of verbatim recording; meta-communication indicated that she was listening and was to probe into important cues (De Vos, 2003; Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Subsequently, it enabled the researcher refer back to certain issues arising at a later stage or when reviewing information based on the policy documents. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher and later analyzed accordingly. The participants were duly informed of all the processes involved in data collection, storage and destroying of the recorded material.

Furthermore, another data collection instrument used was international and South African policy documents relating to issues of immigration and children. On the international front, these included The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems. To further contextualize the study to South Africa, the policy documents used for this study were The Aliens Control Act 96 of 1991, Immigration Act 130 of 2002, The Children's Act 38 of 2005, The Refugee Act 130 of 1998 and The Child Care Act of 1983 as amended. Additional data was also drawn from interviews conducted with key role players in the field.

### **2.3.2 In-depth individual interviews using narrative approach**

A narrative is a story that details sequence of events which are significant for the narrator or her audience. Use of narratives to gather data was appealing because it became a means of understanding the identity, culture, lifestyle and historical world of the refugees. Within

socio-cultural framework, the researcher used the narratives to understand how the girls' actions were related to the social context in which they occurred and how and where they happened during development and migration. Social constructivism stipulates that people learn and develop through participation in social activities therefore the society and the person mutually and continuously influence each other. This enables an individual to learn and develop during these mutual processes taking place. Therefore, it is important to recognize that when the girls were telling their stories, neither the stories nor the girls were isolated or and independent of their context, as stipulated in the ecological framework.

The girl's experiences had meanings attached to them which supported the notion that story telling begins in childhood and continues through all stages of an individual's life. This is empowering to the girls (Delgado, 2006) because they guide and control the story telling. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives.

### **2.3.3 Sampling**

In this research study, probability sampling was applied in line with Spradley's (1979 in Babbie & Mouton, 2004) basic criteria for selecting respondents. That is, the girls undergoing enculturation, having a basis of current involvement in issues concerning migratory experiences and availability. Of great importance was that the participants had to be adolescents' at the time of the study. The research sample comprised of teenage refugee girls from Cape Town Refugee Centre referrals, Ons Plek Projects and Ale's House in Cape Town. The background on their suitability was then determined according to the criteria of the theoretical sampling procedure.

The sample was selected on the basis of the researcher and guardian's knowledge of the population based on research aims (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). This was necessary because the study was interested in the various experiences of unaccompanied refugee girls; which would enable the researcher's construct their amalgamated depictions (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). The participants had to have been classified as "unaccompanied" or "separated". Thompson's (1992) article argues that the age of consent should be between 11-13 years because their research findings indicated little difference in thinking patterns between 11-13 year olds and adults. Macklin (1992) on the other hand argued that a "mature minor", above the age of 16; can give consent if they can prove or have demonstrated that they can manage own affairs.

Therefore, the age group was chosen because of the level of reasoning capacity i.e. formal-operational thought as congruent with their age (Cole & Cole, 2003; Macklin, 1992; Greig & Taylor, 1999). For the participant to take part in the study, an assent form had to be co-signed because they had not attained the age of majority (South African Children's Bill, 2005). The language on the assent form was friendly and formulated with the cognitive level of the participants in mind. The participant's capacity to assent was evaluated on individual basis. The 8 participants were from Congo, Rwanda, Angola; countries which in the recent past have produced many refugees and asylum seekers entering South Africa.

The key role players interviewed for purposes of this study were from refugee organizations based in Cape Town, namely: Scalabrini Centre, U.C.T Law Clinic, Cape Town Refugee Centre and Ale's House.

#### **2.3.4 Data analysis**

During data analysis, human experiences are organized into meaningful episodes. The "raw material" is derived from inter-mental life experiences and intra-mental images that are not mostly accessible through direct observation. On the other hand, the personal stories that surface in texts within the creation of narratives could be available for direct observation and analysis. In this research, data was collected in a narrative/ word form and audio-recorded. The responses were subsequently qualitatively analyzed; with the key aim of identifying the main themes i.e. theme analysis (Dudley, 2005).

The key process in the analysis of qualitative research data was coding, i.e. classifying or categorizing single entities of data in a system. Coding procedures were of great significance within data analysis. This is because the researcher ascertained certain experiences among the collected data, which pointed towards the theoretical understanding of refugees (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 in Babbie & Mouton, 2002; Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Coding and relating concepts was thus essential to the analysis process as the researcher was continually making comparisons (Babbie & Mouton, 2002).

In line with the above, Tesch's method of theme analysis was applied (De Vos, 2003). This involved categorizing the data into the identified key themes that seemed evident in the transcribed material. An outline of theme analysis stages included; determining the unit of analysis, narrative preparation, thoroughly reading and understanding entire narrative, theme

identification, assigning a code to each theme, recording impressions separately, grouping the comments together by theme (clearly articulating a label for each theme), identifying the variations in each theme, reviewing data to search for additional themes or categories (Dudley, 2005; De Vos, 2003). The researcher subsequently presented the identified themes with direct quotations from the transcribed data (see Chapter 4). The findings of this study will be discussed in relation to findings from reviewed literature and policy documents.

Qualitative data analysis was important in identification and clarification of differences and or similarities evident in the experiences of the refugee participants. Furthermore, use of qualitative data analysis techniques together with the ecological framework allowed the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the participants.

## **2.4 REFLEXIVITY**

Human rights is a passion that has developed in me over the years as a result of interaction with refugees, asylum seekers and (il)legal immigrants in and from different countries. Therefore, I felt compelled to do a study on refugee children. Due to the fact that that I am not a South African citizen, there was a possibility that issues related to over-identification might occur, which would not have been beneficial to the research process. This did not happen and I was able to maintain a relatively competent level of objectivity throughout the study. In addition, as a foreigner, it was evident that most participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences; were open and could identify with me. Previous work experience with refugees equipped me with the skills which proved beneficial to this research study.

This was a challenging study to carry out in terms of the in-depth interviews as numerous sensitive and equally traumatic issues, needing therapy, arose from the interview with the girls. Despite this, I had to be the “sensitive researcher” as opposed to my normal role as the “compassionate social worker”. I also felt that I did not have enough time and opportunity to build trusting relationship with the participants, yet I expected them to open up and share their stories with me. I initially thought that this could be overcome by meeting the girls informally before the actual interviewing, with the residential social worker giving consent, but I did not go ahead because it might have impacted the data collection content and process.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the qualitative approach was viewed to be most suited to and in keeping with the aim of the study; to produce contextualized information on unaccompanied refugee girl's experiences. Interviews were found to be theoretically sound and practical tools that enabled the voices of these young girls to find expression and be heard, from a feminist perspective. The qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews both can be deemed as research tools that can assist in the exploration of sensitive topics. In the next chapter, literature on refugee studies and children will be reviewed. The information gathered can then be used constructively to contribute towards understanding of refugee children's experiences and the intervention processes.

University of Cape Town

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter engages with key theoretical debates on the factors that influenced coping and adjusting mechanisms in unaccompanied refugee children. The main thrust of this chapter is a review of current literature on challenges and other notable experiences relating to unaccompanied teenage refugee girls as they cope and adjust to their changed circumstances. Ecological framework was applied in this study because it looks at individuals within their current environments. It was ideal because it is based on evidence that no single factor can explain consequences. The framework tends to treat the interaction between the factors at the different levels with equal significance. It was chosen over other system frameworks because of its usefulness in the identification and ability to cluster intervention strategies based on the ecological level in which they act.

Although studies on adolescents have examined their psychosexual and psychosocial stages with reference to European paradigms, there is limited emphasis in these debates on the African refugee adolescents. A focus on unaccompanied refugee girls can significantly contribute to early adolescent, refugee and trauma studies. The literature reviewed in this chapter identified that psychosocial well being of refugees is of significant importance but that there has been little analytical attention paid to young unaccompanied refugee girls in South Africa. This issue was demonstrated by looking at factors that make refugee girls vulnerable when leaving their homes for South Africa. The next section presents findings from literature dealing with researched refugee experiences and coping strategies applied within new environments. Gaps in research on refugee youth will be pinpointed. This research provided detailed consideration on intervention efforts, with a focus on challenges faced by refugee youths as they coped within their new environment.

#### **3.2 PRE-MIGRATION AND TRANSIT EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN**

The state of children in Africa is grave (McIntyre, 2005). This is because the events that precipitate children to leave their countries of origin are political, social, cultural, financial, health, academic (Reuters, 2007) or economic instabilities. Blavo (1999:18) refers to the

children as being "...a product of the socio-economic and political conditions which are characteristic of the modern world..." The social and economic transformation processes and the breakdown of the African indigenous social system and the consequences thereof, has resulted in the society slowly bearing the brunt of those changes (Bala, 1996). The deterioration has subsequently led to discontent and social unrest among citizens. It can be noted that within the past ten years, there has been turmoil in Africa; most resources have been channelled to conflict, whilst development continues to regress and numerous inhabitants become refugees, that is, victims of circumstances. It should be emphasized that "...as long as weak political and economic structures exist and the continent remains dominated by young people, they will continue to become involved in conflicts..." (Twum-Danso, 2005:23). These structures that contribute to children becoming refugees will be discussed next.

### **Political instability**

The state of political affairs in numerous African states has in the recent past implicated children in their conflicts (Leao, 2005). Twum-Danso (2005) argues from a political theoretical perspective that the estrangement of the African youth from the political and social order has had a significant influence on the political stability of the continent. There have been civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cote d'Ivoire and Congo. For example, the Sierra Leonean conflict was dubbed a "youth crisis" because it was mainly dominated by the youth. Similarly, child soldiers partook in Mozambique's 17-year old civil war between FRELIMO and RENAMO (Leao, 2005). The current civil war in Uganda, post-election violence in Kenya and religious conflicts in Sudan continue to produce vulnerable refugee children.

Angola's 27-year civil war progressively became a battle of age, privilege and power to rule as youths were subsequently suppressed and manipulated into war (Parsons, 2005) leading to traumatic repercussions. Congo has been politically unstable as a result of the continued rivalry between a number of groups based both within and out of the country. Numerous attempts to broker peace such as Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of 1999 have not been successful. This political stability has led to an exodus of refugees which has greatly affected the children. The International Rescue Committee (2007) reports that more than 3.3 million people (non-combatants) have lost their lives due to the war in Congo since 1998 (from malnutrition and disease) and children have been left destitute. Recent UN reports estimates

that more than 2.7 million Congolese have been displaced from their homes and more than 300,000 are refugees in neighbouring countries (Refugees International, 2007). In Rwanda, the 1994 genocide left more than 800,000 Rwandans dead and many children orphaned. The violence against Tutsis was perpetrated by the Hutus; with an ethnic tension that dates back to the colonial time period (BBC News, 2004). From an ecological perspective, these incidences in a child's trusted environment leaves them traumatized, disintegrated, at a sense of loss and grief and endangered when negotiating the war zones during the unplanned flights.

### **Psycho-social trauma**

In Sierra Leonean, Angolan and Mozambique wars, the children were dissociated from their families and indoctrinated to view the specific movements as "family". The children were separated from their families and depending on their age, they could either work for the rebels in the frontline or would transport food and weapons to frontline, "servicing" high ranking officials and working on farms (Parsons, 2005). The constant state of civil wars have subsequently led to ongoing violations of the African child's security and human rights as "...victims of killings, rape and sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labour, forced recruitment into fighting forces and displacement and other violations from other warring factions..." (Watchlist, 2004:2). The ecological framework could help explain the result i.e. flight and unaccompanied arrival, as the consequences of abuse, and a relationship risk factor of parent's deaths and a community in conflict.

### **Physical safety**

Apartheid-era South Africa produced a lot of refugees and exiles in other African countries; the trend seems to have reversed, with an increasing number of immigrants entering South Africa (Landau, 2006, Ntlakana, 2006) due to Africa's unstable politics. A study by Dunkerley et al., (2006) on children seeking asylum in Wales, reported that safety was the main reason given as to why they fled their home countries. In other incidences, during and after the wars, the socio-economic infrastructure deteriorated; health facilities were lacking, sanitation was appalling, and high rate of unemployment was evident. Apart from safety and bleak socio-economic conditions, many children had also lost their parents (through death or separation). These traumatic experiences necessitate grieving in children and adolescents alike and if not completed, the basic grieving process might get complicated leading to pathological grief (Eth & Pynoos, 1985, in Peltzer, 1996:252).

### **Gender-based violence**

Gender-based violence has been identified as a factor that makes children end up as unaccompanied minors. The Watchlist (2004) report states that during 1989-1997 civil war in Liberia, more than 40% of women were raped. Butengwa's (1999) paper highlighted the impact of conflict on women's rights in relation to high levels of sexual exploitation, molestation and abuse. Research on gender specific persecution show that it has been used as a method of torture and to ensure silence of the survivors in societies where these acts could lead to social exclusion or would be viewed as being shameful, curse or a taboo (Valji, 2000). A combination of social and cultural understanding of sexual violence, depict women as undergoing triple persecution. That is, once during the sexual act and secondly the isolation and silence thereafter may prevent her from seeking assistance. International asylum practices in addition, have been accused of failing women in their lack of or limited understanding of gender based violence as an element of state persecution. Though these forms of violence are widespread, they are still significantly viewed as personal crimes rather than as state-sanctioned crimes. Therefore, girls are vulnerable and they continue to face the greatest risk of sexual violence (individual or gang), during attacks, migration and during resettlement.

In conclusion, Peltzer (1996) highlighted that children and adolescents are particularly liable to suffer emotionally and developmentally due to loss of parents. Consequences of this are the adolescent developing annihilation and abandonment anxieties, feelings of huge rage and anger, regression, disintegrated self, inability to make sense of the world, difficulty managing change and stressful events and constantly feeling overwhelmed (Melzak, 1995, in Peltzer, 1996:251). For the unaccompanied child, the most likely symptoms that one might notice are those associated with depression, behaviour problems and somatisation. Children suffering from loss are at constant risk even though symptoms may not manifest overtly for years. For this reason, this study hopes to shed some light on the coping mechanisms they have adopted as refugees in dealing with elements of "added bereavement". The research question on the mechanisms the girls have adopted to cope with their changed circumstances will address this.

### **3.3 ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

The ecological approach strives to understand the relationship between the person and his or her significant interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1975). The social ecology of a person can be conceptualized as consisting of interdependent and nested parts or "systems". These

are micro-system (such as family, care-givers), meso-system (i.e. 2 micro-systems in interaction), exo-system (which includes external environments which indirectly impact on growth e.g. neighbourhood) and the macro-system (i.e. the larger socio-cultural context). The main principle underpinning this system theory is that each system contains roles, norms and rules that strongly influence and shape a person's development. Each of the many systems exerts influence on the youth, that is, multi-systems of influence.

The ecological framework supports the notion that apart from the individual's perspective to be considered, other factors have a role to play, as behaviour is determined by the individual, her/his environment and their interaction (Fraser, 1998). The factors that influence experiences and coping processes are dynamic, mutually reciprocal and bi-directional. It is dynamic because it is not linked with any methodology, but based on thorough assessment and its representation of the "what is" and not the "how to" of a case study. Mutually reciprocal and bi-directional factors mean that no single factor can offer a single comprehensive explanation of the refugees and their experiences and coping patterns.

#### **Ecological framework versus other frameworks**

Social work practice previously was a linear, causal approach with emphasis on specific systems methodologies that proved to be ineffective. Linear (medical/ psychiatric) approach lacks a unifying, conceptual construction and framework for examining the complexity of the case focusing on the interaction and reciprocity of individual and environment (Austrian, 1995). Broad knowledge about the aetiology of a current issue could inform efforts to promote or enhance adaptive function in refugee youth, thus studying both their atypical and normative development gives a complete understanding of their current functioning and adaptation (Kirby & Fraser, 1998).

The psychosocial approach is similar to the ecological framework, in that it retains the "person-in-situation" perspective. The approach which has its roots in the psychodynamic approach is a combination of theories such as learning, crisis, existential and cognitive. It is based on the 4 key principles of who the individual is and what they want, their strengths and limitations and how the therapist can help (Turner, 2002). This approach would be ideal for intervention because it incorporates assessment, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation of an individual. The bio-psychosocial perspective "improved" the psychosocial approach by arguing that the construction of the individual's physical condition and health was vital. The

latter was not a key interest of this study thus it was not pursued further. This framework will be used in the study intermittently.

Fraser (1998) argues that the ecological model has an all-encompassing characteristic and is well-matched with risk and resilience perspectives; because it focuses on the person and their context. This is unlike those used by other mental health professionals which do not assess the individual holistically. This enables the social worker gain deeper understanding of the factors that contributed to the refugee youth coming to South Africa and the modifications that need to be made to boost coping, mastery and resilience. This research was guided by the context of interrelatedness of people and environments within a “supra-system” (Northern, 1995). Local social workers are confronted daily with the effects of the changes in countries bordering South Africa. Their work has intensified due to the cross-country migrations and the pressure to practice within an ecosystem perspective (Becker, 2005). Thus social services rendered should strive to address the individual, family, neighbourhood and broader related conditions that create social problems. The framework offers knowledge on the risks faced by refugee children, which can be used to predict future outcomes. These predictions can not be made with certainty but a combination of several high risk factors might lead to the conclusion that a refugee child may be at “high risk” for a certain outcome, such as maladaptive experiences. Conversely, the absence of risk factors has vice versa effect (Fraser, 1998).

#### **Ecological model and refugee experiences**

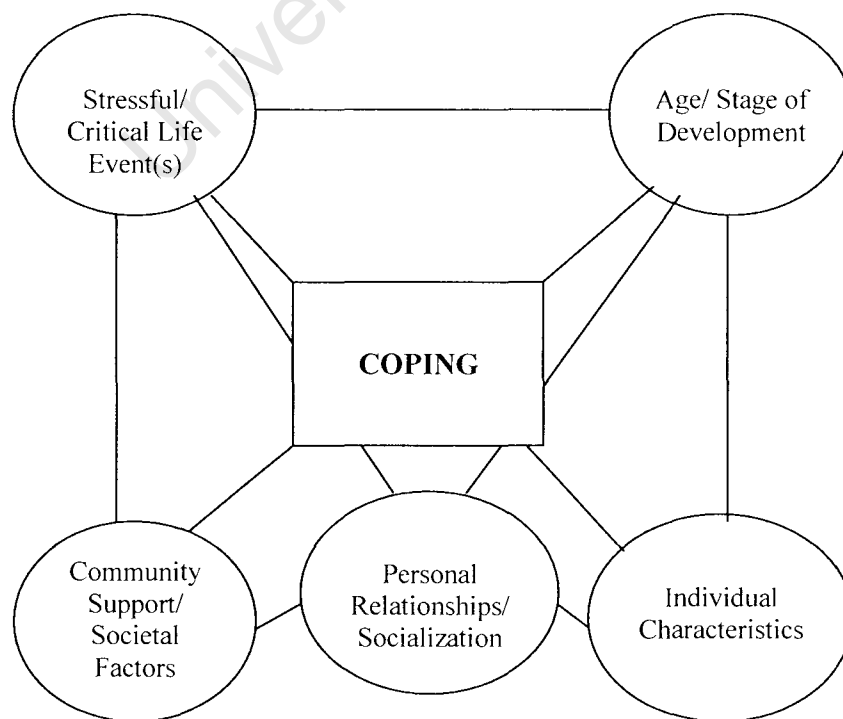
A “good enough” environment (Winnicott, 1965) for child and youth development is one which gives provision for learning opportunities, incentives and disincentives for behaviours, exposure to social relationships through adult mentors and is a source of social and economic support for families. Therefore, “...when the environment is impoverished, children suffer...” (Kirby & Fraser, 1998:20). The extra-familial elements such as availability of external resources and extended social supports lead to positive outcomes. Experiences of repeated rejection and hostility through xenophobia tends to hinder self-worth and might contribute to high levels of anger, isolation and frustration in the refugee girls thus making them shy away from socializing. Sociological theories on strain and structural opportunity offer explanations on how limited or ‘blocked’ opportunities in environmental settings might put refugee youth at greater risks (Farrington et. al, 1993, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998). In healthy environments, children generally have high expectations for social, educational and economic success.

### Ecological framework and coping

Coping with feeling or problem is the way in which “...individuals go about mastering or assuaging the stress which results when events challenge their routine predictions about the world...” Parry (1990: 45). These responses vary among persons and across situations (Jessor, 1993 in Fraser, 1998). Individuals may have divergent views as relates to their understanding and assessment of experiences; subsequently affecting the responses chosen to deal with situation (Parry, 1990; Pearse, 1991; Ex, 1966). Coping with refugee experiences will be looked at from an ecological perspective.

The “protective matrix” are important factors identified in determining coping capacity of any child in a state of stress which gives indications how they prevail over great adversity (McCallin, 1996 & Laor et al. 1997, in Ahearn et al., 1999; Bala, 1996; Fraser, 1998). The model (diagram 1) was initially developed as a guiding programme support for refugee and other war-affected children. It provided suitable structure to review evidence supporting the influence and interaction of factors below in the children’s experiences. These factors, based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, if “good enough” (Winnicott, 1965) can act as optimistic forces which can add to positive adaptive experiences in the presence of risks.

Diagram 1: Influences in a child’s coping capacity



Individual characteristics, personal history, social settings and biological factors influence how individuals behave and cope while in refuge. The stage of development is crucial because it represents a potential source of variation in the refugee girls' resilience and or vulnerability. Kirby & Fraser (1998:15) reiterate that "...vulnerability or resistance to stressful experiences appears to shift as function of developmental or maturational changes..." The shifting modes of coping could be a result of the interaction of the refugee and the environmental conditions that change as they enter school, develop friendship/ social networks and explore sexuality. Grizenko & Fisher (1992, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998: 15) argue that developmentally, individual factors appear more crucial during infancy and childhood whereas interpersonal factors are more significant during adolescence. Werner & Smith (1992, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998) study concluded that adolescent girls in comparison often have relatively more difficulties in school and are at greater risk for mental disorders. The gender marker and by virtue of being refugees, the girls are placed at an even greater risk. Positive social orientation, responsiveness to change, cognitive abilities and affection and caring were thought of as protective factors that could assist in acquiring healthy coping habits. On the other hand, self-efficacy is thought to promote adaptation, coping and sense of achievement.

Previous socialization and personal relationships such as with family, friends and peers may influence the risks of becoming a survivor or victim. That is, a rapid and brutal loss of family might increase a sense of isolation, mistrust in adults, financial strain and a decline in social status which makes the child vulnerable to maladaptive coping mechanisms (Fraser, 1998). It is appropriate to distinguish adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms across cultures as there are variations. Universal family variables such as cohesion, warmth and harmony and a positive relationship with at least one parent/ parental figure serve as a protective function. Positive interpersonal relationships and social support mitigates the effects of stressful life events for children and the youth in the same way it does for adults (Morisset, 1993, in Kirby and Fraser, 1998). These supportive relationships serve as buffers against life stressors.

Societal factors such as economic and social policies that maintain inequalities between the refugees and local population influence legalization, integration and resettlement. Opportunities in social structural reforms might act as protective mechanisms when a refugee is exploring ways of coping with experiences. South Africa has made headway in this area in relation to creation of policies that are inclusive and friendly to the plight of refugees, but the

issue lies in proper implementation leading to a dissatisfied refugee population (Penda, 2006), as acknowledged by government officials ( UNHCR, 2006).

### **Ecological framework and resiliency**

Bronfenbrenner (1979, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998) looked at resilience as a formation, with the end product being a consequence of interactions among risk and protective factors and a "...relative balance of factors across multiple system levels..." (O'Keefe, 1994, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998:19). This could be the *reclaiming environment* according to Bendtro et al.'s (1990) study of the youth which would be helpful in refuge situations. This *reclaiming environment* "...creates changes that meet the needs of both the young person and the society..." (Bendtro et. al, 1990:2). Resiliency influences coping behaviours that refugee children take on when confronted with stressors; depending on their age and ability to draw on various resources (Athey & Ahearn, 1991). In addition, Garmezy (1987, in Athey & Ahearn, 1991) identified three broad categories of variables that act as protective factors which encourage and reinforce the child's coping efforts. These are personality dispositions, supportive milieu and external supports. Junior et al. (1996) further reiterates that in response to coping, the child attempts to secure the two essential needs- human dignity and a sense of closeness with others. The emotional sanctuary provided by these two boost resiliency in the child. This happens when the child is given recognition as being worthy, has an acceptable standard of living and has gained self-esteem. Psychosocial support plays a vital part in the child's trauma recovery process and is crucial in their continued growth (Turner, 2002).

### **3.4 A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE**

Children and adolescents act and react accordingly and continuously, in response to their environments; that is, they are active agents within these settings. This provides space for growth and a context where experiences lead to growth in resiliency. Rutter (1985) emphasized significance on timing and developmental maturity in coping with crises e.g. events that occur at non-normative times may spill over and interrupt progress along corresponding path.

Middle childhood (6-11 years) is a significant stage of development when children move between the home and the outside world as a point of reference (Cole & Cole, 2003). The child can grasp meaning of trauma inspite their thought process being underdeveloped (Eagle

& Michelson, 1997). In addition, they are incapable of utilizing abstract or hypothetical constructs. On the other hand, adolescence (13-19 years) is a normative stage of development yet it is also perceived to be a sensitive period (Cole & Cole, 2003). According to Erikson (1968), this is a time when the teenager is expected to develop a sense of sexual and occupational identity. In most communities, upon successful completion, the individual ought to be 'in possession of' an integrated self. Adolescence is generally thought of as a period of heightened instability as reflected in the conflicts with parents, risky behaviour and fluctuating moods. The biological and social changes that are seen in adolescents are usually accompanied by fundamental changes within psychological processes. This stage is considered to be more flexible than any other life stages because it provides opportunity for creativity (Cole & Cole, 2003), dependency on the environment and an increased level of peer interaction. Separation from parents and subsequent resettlement compels the young adolescent refugee to adapt to a new environment which replaces her old childhood environment, made up of essentially familiar people and surroundings. Such survival demands in refuge can overshadow developmental needs.

A major source of conflict is when young adolescents are caught up between two worlds; of dependence and responsibility. Parents continually teach and demand from their children that independence ought to be matched with responsibility. Gradual assumption of adult work and responsibilities is considered by teenagers as gaining adult status though this takes on a different meaning in times of war and separation and in terms of trauma and coping (Cole & Cole, 2003). Parents continue to play a major role in an adolescent's life, in as much as they are capable of formal logic and abstract thinking (Greig & Taylor, 1999). Hence it is tragic when a child loses parents or is separated from them at this stage; as development might be hampered (Wenk-Ansohn, 1996) and their sense of self, identity and belonging shattered as they try and find themselves anew.

Communal sense of belonging is a highly significant factor in the formation of one's identity within African communal communities, and it can be conveyed by the relationships that exist. This is an aspect that is mainly lost should the child find herself as a refugee. They lose a strong sense of self and of belonging to a community and might be less receptive of guidance (Bendtro, 1990). Adolescents who have opportunities for education, growth and development are likely to achieve their dreams and aspirations in comparison to those without; who end up rejecting pro-social values out of frustration and anger (Camino, 1994). Studies by Kocijan-

Hercigonja (1999) identified 3 phases of war related traumatization. The first phase is experienced at pre-migration or departure where the girl is confronted by situations she does not understand or those which she might not have previously been exposed to. This phase is normally characterized by acute post-traumatic disturbances which are closely associated with feelings of abandonment, anxiety/ separation anxiety, behavioural and adjustment problems, internalized symptoms, learning difficulties and somatisation (Kocijan-Hercigonja, 1999; Peltzer, 1996). The next phase will look at how the refugees attempted to navigate their new environment.

### **3.5 EXPLANATIONS OF EXPERIENCES OF COPING IN NEW ENVIRONMENT**

#### **Accounts of unaccompanied youth's experiences**

Relationships with family, friends and community exist in intimate spaces of an individual's life and are referred to as 'bonds of reality'. Till the point of separation, psychological theories claim that a child usually has an ingrained attachment through shared bonds with the mother especially. This relationship is said to begin symbolically within the mother's womb and continues after child's birth (Thill, 1999). It determines the child's continued development, thus significant during adolescents' formation of identity, sexuality and establishing independence. A crisis such as separation from parents/ family is a turning point that might have subsequent deep implications for the adolescent's adaptation process and ability to face future crises. Thus, forced separation from parents before maturity is associated with serious emotional problems and is a predictor of psychopathology (Hauff & Vaglum, 1993 in Ahearn et. al., 1999; Hendricks et. al, 1993). According to Kocijan-Hercigonja (1999), knowing that there is someone who can be trusted plays a significant role in a person's psychological make up during and after separation, lessens the trauma.

Other key aspects in understanding the impact of change on children are culture and social relations; whereby a "...community as a collection of interests is mediated by culture...culture becomes the glue that provides a community with meaning, cohesion and integration..." (Athey & Ahearn, 1991:14). In most African societies, it was the duty of all adults to serve as guides and teachers for the young people, thus these structures enabled patterns of socialization and culture to be passed on from generation to generation. Child

rearing was not "...just the province of biological parents but children was nurtured within a larger circle of significant others..." (Bendro et. al, 1990: 37). Sense of belonging was achieved from early beginnings, as the child experienced a network of caring adults. Refugee flight thus disrupts family life consequently leading to failure in socialization and discontinuity of cultural values and behaviour patterns. The African refugee child losses more than just the nuclear family; it translates to loss of the extended family and community where feelings of unity, culture and traditions and mutual support are derived from. On the other hand, though travelling "unaccompanied" the child is looked after by members of the community (s)he is in.

In African communal upbringing, the sense of belonging was also derived when children interacted with nature. From childhood to adulthood, animals, streams, people and plants were interdependent; and children were taught to view misfortunes as consequences of imbalances with environment. Therefore, maintaining harmonious ecological relationships were an important aspect of one's life as a way of ensuring balance in one's life. Being a refugee might be interpreted as a curse, bad luck, being out of tune with environment. Eisenbruck's (1988, in Athey & Ahearn, 1991:14) research on cultural bereavement emphasized the implications of loss of culture and concluded that it "...leads to serious identity problems and delayed development..." especially in children. This was identified in adolescent refugees, who had resettled overseas (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2008), but no research has been conducted into refugees resettled in Africa.

Impact of war on children place them particularly at high risk because of their degree of dependence on their environment and family (Albertyn, Bickler, Van As, Millar & Rode, 2003). When there is instability in a country, bonds are torn; vital family structures and child's development are shattered. This means that the child can no longer be accorded the care and security required from parents. The unaccompanied child usually experiences shifting situations which (s)he does not understand and there are no reliable adults to provide explanations. The child is not mature enough to cope with separation-trauma in the same way an adult would; and loses a great deal whereby appropriate replacements cannot be found (Kocijan-Hercigonja, 1999; Thill, 1999).

In refuge, the unaccompanied child desperately searches for a sense of belonging and ends up finding "artificial belongings" because that need cannot be fulfilled (Women's Commission

for Refugee Women and Children, 2004). Their growth is mainly towards survival and forced independence without nurturance. According to Maier (1990 in Bendro et. al, 1990) and Bala (1996) the child's capacity to separate and cope alone or in another community, depends on degree of security of their attachments (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 2005), forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination within the context (Bricker-Jenkins, 2002). Implications of refugee children having limited number of safe relationships can be profound and traumatizing. Adolescent refugees face additional developmental problems of integration in regard to peer groups which might be absent (Peltzer, 1996)

In the second phase of trauma, the child is in new and unfamiliar surrounding that may differ significantly from the original one. The circumstances make it difficult for the child especially if they are unaccompanied. Kocijan-Hercigonja (1999) emphasizes that during this stage, the new surroundings, unfamiliar living conditions and identity-related issues pose a new trauma to be added to the primary trauma. In addition, children in this stage have been observed to develop behavioural disorders such as aggression, depression and communication-related disorders. According to Peltzer (1996:265) "...adaptive strategies used by adolescents to cope with major losses are structured around a specific acculturation process, with the goal of lessening potential tension and striking a balance between the demands of external reality and the need to establish continuity with an internalized past..." This study will address this and how it might relate to an unaccompanied refugee girl within the South African context.

### **3.6 THEORIZING COPING STRATEGIES**

The traumatic experiences faced by the child on how they ended up unaccompanied, directly and indirectly, are bound to alter the child's physical, social, psychological and intellectual state (Ullman, 1999; Kocijan-Hercigonja, 1999; Williams, 1991). Crisis theory looks at the impact of disruptions on established patterns of personal and social identity (Moos & Schaefer, 1986) i.e. people need to develop social, psychological and physiological equilibrium. This might also apply to children and or adolescents, though the study did not explicitly indicate this. It has been noted that when people encounter events that upsets their characteristic patterns of thought, feelings and actions, they apply habitual problem solving strategies until the balance is restored. The balance may be a healthy adaptation that promotes personal growth or a maladaptive response that might lead to psychological disorders (Moos & Schaefer, 1986).

Refugee experiences occur at a time when children are particularly vulnerable but also adjustable and flexible in comparison to adults i.e. acculturation (Westermeyer, 1991). From the time the journey begins to the time it ends with resettlement, Bendtro et. al. (1990) states that the child's needs for competency, satisfaction, drive for further achievement and opportunities for success are seen as secondary thus they are prone to express frustration through acting out and isolating themselves. To deal with the above, emotion-focused and or problem-focused coping responses identified can be applied to alter or manage the source of stress.

The theory of ethnopsychotherapy postulates that there are independent and communal coping styles (Peltzer, 1996). The urban-independent style is trauma-focused and mainly looks at intrapsychic conflicts, developmental disorder of personality and learned behaviours with a deep search for meaning and an aim to problem solve whilst relying on personal aspects. The African-communal style shows less focus on trauma because the individuals conceptualize conflict situatively (and within environment), suffering is seen as external, there is projection, and acting out. The functional aspects of coping include believing in fate, focusing on new dreams and priorities and regaining a sense of self through hard work, exercising self-control and discipline. Dysfunctional aspects included somatisation, denial and silence, avoidance, helplessness. Universal characteristics of coping include using activity as a form of distraction from reality, self responsibility, learned helplessness, social support and spiritual coping.

De Monchy (1991) stressed that when parents provide inadequate or no protection, children find themselves obligated to take on adult responsibilities, fend for themselves and make adult decisions. Research indicates that some unaccompanied children and youth look for work to support themselves; thus ending up in exploitative child labour (Crisp, 2002). This limits their academic chances and denies them opportunities to participate in other developmentally appropriate activities which might lead to psychological poverty. Research indicates that lower formal education in refugees is a predictor for acculturation distress (Berry et al. 1986, in Peltzer, 1996:263). The additional stresses such as economic exploitation may lead to an increase of use and abuse of substances (Westermeyer, 1991).

Loss is a central element and characteristic in any refugee child (Athey and Ahearn, 1991). The unaccompanied child, losses something at each phase of migration and final resettlement as "...spectators of disease, torture and death of which they become a part of sooner or

later...they are victimized by adults, yet their voices are not heard; only their cries can be heard with little sympathy..." (Blavo, 1999:33). In Bala's (1996) study, he found that social networks and relationships are lost when refugees need it the most, especially during trauma phases hence the need for social worker's role as "container" (Gibson, Swart & Sandenbergh, 2003). On the other hand, studies (Werner, 1989 in Athey and Ahearn; Dunkerley et al., 2006 and Moos and Shaefer, 1986) done have demonstrated that a very significant trait of children who cope well with adverse situations is the ability to find support within their community due to the establishment of protective bonds within this network. Spirituality offers consolation, endurance of pain, strength to cope with the traumatic experiences and gives new meaning to ordeals (Peltzer, 1996). Limited research, if any, has looked at how young refugee girls in South Africa adjust and cope with these challenges.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, research indicates that unaccompanied children are a growing concern especially due to multiple hardships they face, making them the most vulnerable of refugee groupings. The period of adolescence as it interacts with issues of separation and independence versus reliance is an important consideration in understanding this vulnerability. Localized research is clearly crucial in understanding the impact of psycho-social health of these young girls. Such kind of research helps to clarify nuances of experiences as relates to specific age contexts, in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, in regard to coping and adjusting mechanisms applied.

Successful coping and adjustment is more likely to occur when there is equilibrium between stressful factors and protective factors (Bala, 1996). The nature of instability and poverty levels in a number of countries in the Sub-Saharan region has dire consequences on the psycho-social health of girls especially. Intervention efforts need to emphasize healing and recovery whilst taking cognizance of particular issues, such as the cultural backgrounds these girls come from, family tracing and re-integration into community of origin. Ogata (2000) stresses that amidst so much terror, violence and despair refugees ought to be supported and given hope for a better future.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the results from the interviews. The first section briefly outlines the data collection methods, framework of analysis applied and a profile of the respondents. The subsequent section is an outline of key themes which emerged from the data collected. A variety of quotations will be used to give prominence to the girls' voices.

#### **4.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Data was collected using narrative approach. Active listening was pertinent during discussions. Significant points were written down in verbatim and later supplemented by adding dialogue accessories such as speed, tone and gestures (Newman, 2000). Instruments for data collection included "feeling faces" sheets and an outline of a map of Africa. These were used to break the monotony of talking and to help the girls tell their story in a sensitive manner. All interviews with the girls were conducted face-to-face by the researcher and the proceedings were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data was also collected from the key role players based on their willingness and availability. The interview schedule was important because it encouraged the participants to speak about their experiences.

#### **4.3 FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

Data analysis was carried out deductively. The evidence found was able to support, refute or modify certain aspects already reviewed in the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Within grounded theory, data was viewed from many angles, thus allowing emergence of themes. Tesch's (De Vos, 1998) analysis was used to categorize data into manageable units. The development of the themes was deeply linked with the participant's own accounts of life narratives shared. Within the narrative analysis, the researcher made comparisons across similar samples. This was because narratives are lengthy and contain comments, flashbacks, flash-forwards, orientation and evaluation, thus a systematic method of reduction was necessary. The psycho-social and ecological frameworks were contextualized in the discussion of themes emerging from the girls' challenges, experiences and coping mechanisms adopted. In discussing the themes, the terms "girl", "participant", "youth", "teenager" and "adolescent" will be used interchangeably to mean the "teenage refugee girl."

#### 4.4 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The participants/profile is presented below:

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

PROFILE	ADELINE	THANDEKA	LEAH	ALICE	AMINA	MICHELLE	LINA	SOFI
AGE	17	15	17	16	15	17	16	17
RELIGION	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Muslim	Christian	Muslim	Christian
LANGUAGE	Kinyarwanda French English	Lingala, French Xhosa English	Kinyarwanda English Afrikaans	Kinyarwanda French English	Kinyanja Kiswahili English	Portuguese Lingala English Xhosa Afrikaans	Portuguese Lingala English Xhosa Afrikaans	Portuguese Lingala English Afrikaans
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	Rwanda	Congo	Rwanda	Rwanda	Congo	Angola	Angola	Angola
LEGAL STATUS	Refugee	Refugee	Refugee	Application yet to be processed	Refugee	Asylum-seeker	Refugee	Refugee
YEAR OF ARRIVAL IN SA & AGE	2006 16yrs	2004 13yrs	2003 13yrs	2006/7 15yrs	1999 7/8yrs	1999 9yrs	1999 8yrs	1999 9yrs
POINT OF ENTRY	Durban	Uppington	Pretoria	Durban	Durban	No recollection	No recollection	Jo'burg
EDUCATION	High Sch	Primary Sch	High Sch	English Language Sch	High Sch	High Sch	High Sch	High Sch
CARE GIVER	Rwandese foster parents	Children's Home	Rwandese relative	Rwandese foster parents	Children's Home	Children's Home	Children's Home	Children's Home

## **4.5 FEEDBACK FROM:**

### **4.51 Refugee study participants**

Eight respondents out of a possible ten were interviewed. The remaining two had not been informed of the interviewing sessions on time thus they did not arrive. The names used are partially real whilst others are pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes and to protect the identity of the participants. All the participants came from Southern African Development Countries (SADC); which have been politically unstable in the recent past. Out of the 8 interviewed, 2 were from Congo, 3 from Angola and 3 from Rwanda. The participants arrived in South Africa at different ages; with the eldest being 18 and the youngest being 7/8 years. Their ages at the time of research ranged from 15-17 years; with a mean age of 16. In terms of spiritual inclination, 6 were Christians and 2 were Muslims. It was not clear if they were practising their religions. All participants spoke English, though some were more eloquent than others. An interpreter was not used at any one point, because the researcher found the participants to be competent enough to express themselves in English.

The modes of transport to travel to South Africa included walking, buses, trucks and trains. The points of entry into South Africa varied though all participants were currently residing in Cape Town. It is clear that they did not come to Cape Town directly, but that they resided in other cities prior, hence the phrase “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow”.

Approximately 90% of the participants were continuing with their education; having been integrated into the South African mainstream schooling, an indication of a positive and integrative governmental policy approach and implementation. School was viewed with ambivalence. It was taken to be both positive and negative, eliciting both good and sad memories. Teachers were at times viewed as confidants depending on their level of concern and if they felt they could trust the teacher enough.

All participants are multi-lingual, and fluent in 3-5 different languages, including some South African dialects. The longer the participant had stayed in the country, the more they were likely to be conversant in the local dialects. None of them spoke English as a first language, though they all strove to learn English for survival and adjustment purposes. This study did not probe how the refugee girls had managed to retain their home languages. It can be assumed that these girls were fluent in their home languages prior to coming to South Africa and that through strong bonds and associations with fellow refugees, they managed to retain the languages.

The reasons for leaving their own countries varied, but it was mainly fuelled by the political turmoil. All participants reported that they felt more at peace in South Africa than in their own countries. They said that they would not like to go back to settle in their countries of origin, but were willing to go and visit. None of the participants had visited home since leaving.

All participants were on a refugee permit, with the exception of one (due to the civil servants strike that was going on at the time of data collection). Key role players reported that Home Affairs-Refugee Office was always willing to assist with the unaccompanied minors (if approached by a social worker or a refugee attorney).

All participants reported experiencing xenophobia since arriving in South Africa, and especially when people found out that they were foreigners or that they could not speak local dialects. On the other hand, a unique finding was when some participants reported that they were favourably looked at and treated slightly better when they could speak the local dialects.

The participants either lived with foster parents from their country of origin or in a children's home. The ones living in a children's home seem generally well provided for in comparison to those living with foster parents. One of the participants lived with an extended relative, who she had managed to trace with the help of Red Cross.

In terms of coping and adjustment, the ones who had been in South Africa longer seemed to cope better. It was interesting to note that irrespective of the amount of time spent in South Africa, most were grappling with the pre and trans-migration issues. The mechanisms for coping varied but most looked into religion for solace, did extra curricular activities and or talked to a counsellor or peers. Most participants said that they found it easier to confide in fellow refugee peers.

#### **4.5.2 Key role players**

The key role players interviewed included a social worker from Cape Town Refugee Centre, a refugee candidate attorney from the UCT Legal Aid Clinic, an outgoing director at Scalabrini Centre, an immigration officer from Home Affairs-Refugee Affairs office in Cape Town and a candidate attorney from Lawyers for Human Rights. 4 of the interviews were conducted face to face using an interview schedule and one was through email.

The interviews with the key role players identified the factors that make children vulnerable as opportunities to promote cohesion, a lack of continuity in life plans, lack of psychosocial interventions and practitioners who are cultural-sensitive, refugees not knowing their rights and the law, and insufficient social support networks. These were factors that encouraged internal movement once in South Africa. The term “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow” indicated the reallocation to Cape Town due to perceived opportunities.

According to an interview with the Home Affairs official, the significance in the more than 2 year stay in South Africa was motivated by the fact that for most refugees, the point of entry was not Cape Town, thus a delay in getting legal documentation. He further explained that their office was willing to assist any child as long as that child was accompanied by a social worker and had been found by the Children’s Court to be a child in need of care. All role players called for development of standardized procedures (legal and social service) to be followed when working with unaccompanied children. They all felt that at present there is a tendency of “unaccompanied minors” to be looked at in the broader context under the South African Children’s Act 38 of 2005 and the Child Care Act 73 of 1983; and yet they have additional special needs that have been brought about by their current situation.

The basic elements missing within the national refugee policies in relation to unaccompanied children are liberalization of granting refugee status with fluid eligibility procedures, respect for the UN Convention Rights of Refugees and strengthening or providing assistance in tracing of the refugee family/ relatives, promotion of refugee children’s emotional and psychological needs. The social worker felt that at times, the bureaucratic process of granting asylum is lengthy and in many cases it aggravates mental health problems of refugees. Thus, any support that refugee children get usually goes a long way in their recovery process.

The social worker noted that discontentment becomes obvious when the new refugee arrivals become a threat to the locals in terms of accessibility and availability of local facilities and services. Generally, numerous African countries, including South Africa (UNHCR, 2006) lack education and health facilities for their own nationals thus with the influx of refugees such services are even more strained. The immigration official noted that the differences in ethnicity, cultural and religious backgrounds might influence host country’s reception of refugees.

The challenges in dealing with refugee children are limitations in government-initiated social services assistance, in relation to provision of basic needs which are crucial to their survival,

especially upon arrival and lack of procedures when dealing with unaccompanied minors. In addition they have to cope with haphazard relocations and travelling and might be unsettled due to the prospect that they might never be able to go back home again. The sentiments by the social worker and the director supported Dunkerley et al (2006) report that for children over the age of 16, social integration especially in schools was more difficult due to use of different language of instruction, different education system and tough competition from local nationals.

#### **4.6 KEY THEMES ARISING OUT OF THE INTERVIEWS**

The key themes arising were adapted to the ecological approach based the girl's experiences which were perceived to be "engines of development" and on the nature of influential relationships between different settings. The themes emphasized development as occurring through complex processes of interaction and over extended periods of time. Although the ecological model seeks positive experiences in proximal processes, it also acknowledges the significance of protective and preventative processes such as school and community activities which keep the youth from further harm. Relationships between caregiver and the refugee girl though absent, were acknowledged as being influential and ensuring connections that are developmental in nature. The girls' emotional wounds and survivor's guilt were found to be a hindrance to successful transitions between settings, that is, from pre-migration to post-migration.

##### **4.6.1 Stressful life events experienced by the refugee girls**

The stressful life events that the girls went through which impacted on their experiences will be discussed in this section. These include displacement, travelling, secondary trauma and unresolved emotional wounds.

##### **Displacement**

The shifts occurring in the lives of the refugee girls had profound effects in their lives. The reasons that resulted in the 5 of the girl's internal displacement included imminent outbreak of armed conflict and incidental fear of death and harm (Butengwa et. al., 1995). The start of these life threatening ordeals, losses and grief started prior to arriving in South Africa. The reasons for leaving home country varied, including amongst others, war extending to areas that were previously thought to be safe (Twum-Danso, 2005), loss of family, increased fear of harm, intimidation or and persecution by government officials and rebel groups (Leao, 2005). The girls

found themselves in rapid changing environments with little stability and thus might not have had an opportunity to mourn. Alice explained how she was going to be the next target if she had not escaped, after the death of her parents

*“...I lived with our neighbour, the neighbour of my parents before they die...a person can't see me they found only that person she was a mummy they pick the mommy...and say we live together and they ...do some thing wrong to that mummy and that mummy died (frantic, almost in tears)...”*

Displacement was an uncertain-filled experience for Leah as evident in an extract from her story below

*“...my parents died in the war after we left home and I was taken to a place for children who had lost their parents in the war...”*

Adeline run away from her school to escape being singled out by the policemen for breaking the law on incitement charges as indicated below

*“...because I am going to school, the group, the group of the children of the school we we make the school flag...you know the flag and that flag is not work, then we put on the stick then the flag go up and the...it's very hard because the policemen come and say what...what...what...what is the pupils do? This, this...this things and then the group...the policemen fetch that group me also I'm in the group and I saw the policemen...I go through to the toilet and I go...also I have a ? this skirt from school, I have it there at home I was wearing only that skirt and I run and I run and I run and I run to Tanzania...”*

For Amina, it is evident that there was deterioration within the country, thus the need to leave

*“...there too many problems in the country (Congo) like the war (sighs...in deep thought for while) they were damaging houses all those things...sickness, no medication so that's why they said it's the best thing to leave...”*

### **Travelling**

The girls' narratives of departure were perturbing. They were intertwined with the tedious journey of getting to South Africa. All participants reported that it was a struggle to get to Cape

Town. There were multiple modes of transportation used (Tolsi, 2008), as depicted by strained finances. Often the cheaper options of hiking lifts and walking were chosen, though they were not necessarily the safest. The versatility of walking was seen in war zones, as used to escape from rebels, border police and immigration officials or if money was lacking. Amina narrated how travelling can be wearisome

*“...We walked and walked then we also took a boat...then we took a train and bus...from Congo we went to Zambia, then stayed in Malawi, then to Mozambique then by truck to South Africa*

The migration process was harrowing as the girls harboured feelings of uncertainty with regards to their next destination, how they would get there, duration of time to be spent there and if there was a chance of survival. Critical life events lay in them having witnessed death and further losses experienced during the journey. Disintegration was evident for these refugee girls during flight and transit stage. The characteristics evident from the above extracts indicate open intimidation and violence, flight undertaken spontaneously, losses, the element of illegality when criss-crossing borders, long distances covered, limited finances and multiple modes of transportation used (Boothby, 1998; Ekblad et. al. 1998; Frater-Matherson, 2004; Eyber, 2006). The concept of initial bereavement becomes intertwined with the multiple losses experienced and emotional and developmental wounds develop, giving rise to secondary trauma which will be discussed next.

### **Secondary trauma**

The experiences that the girls shared since leaving home were attached to constant reminders of being a foreigner, compounded with feelings of uncertainty, fear, and hostile welcome, giving rise to retraumatization (Frater-Matherson, 2004). All participants had encountered problems since arriving in South Africa; though this varied. The researcher should have made this question more specific so as to get a uniform response on feelings associated with acculturation and resettlement. On the other hand, it gave them a free will to respond as they saw fit and in regards to what they saw or felt was an issue, thus upholding social work principles of self-determination and treating each person as unique.

The feeling associated with resettlement indicated the kind of arrival they received. This was not done in a manner that would enable them resettle comfortably and ease them into the new

environment. The effects of this are being felt now when they still seem to be struggling years later. When probed about knowledge of Cape Town, Sofi said:

*“...it’s somewhere...I don’t know this place properly...”*

Adelaide shared similar difficulties about resettlement

*“it’s been very difficult...not easy...not easy...since we came”*

### **Unresolved emotional wounds**

The narratives focusing on experiences during resettlement period brought issues of unresolved trauma(s) for some participants. For most it was difficult to cope with reminders about their losses especially in relation to what they left behind. There was a sense of bitterness and anger as a result of parents’ absence. Parent-child relationship is an element that is of great importance during girls’ development (Cole & Cole, 2003). Sofi sounded as she was still in mourning for that relationship which was not there any more or that she could not get due to her circumstances

*“...sometimes I feel shame...I feel shame...if I go to school and see some of the children they are bringing with their mother and fathers and we just we go alone...”*

Sofi’s pain was echoed by Leah in relation to the relationship losses experienced prior

*“...sometimes I just sit and think about all those things that happened before we came to South Africa...sad things...bad things...”*

### **4.6.2 Impact of migration on refugee stage of development**

For the adolescents in this study, their development is seen to take place against a backdrop of changing social, political and cultural circumstances (ICRC, 2003; Naicker & Nair, 2000). The experiences of the girls were looked at in relation to the psychosocial tasks expected of them at this stage. The psychosocial developmental tasks discussed included establishing identity, intimacy and autonomy, becoming comfortable with sexuality and achievement. Adolescent as a turning point became problematic for the refugee girls as there were cumulative/ simultaneous events occurring and they ended up having to multi-task.

### **Realignment of roles**

In the life of a refugee child or an adolescent girl, the realignment of roles might take on another aspect as travelling from country of origin was not dependent on the presence of parents. If parents were absent, the role shifted to another adult family member or close family friend and if that was absent too, then the girl had to take care of herself. This could happen prior to leaving home country, during transit or upon arrival in South Africa; thus a feeling of uncertainty within one's previously supportive environment. The children seem to have limited options as to whom they would travel with. Alice found herself taking on an autonomous role without any parental guidance

*"...I was alone...my mummy and daddy were dead...I had to do something"*

As indicated by Amina's narrative as a teenager escaping war and having lost established social networks and parental financial stability

*"...I don't come with my mummy...we come by anything...truck...only truck...use my legs sometimes...there is no money...sometimes it is dangerous..."*

### **Establishing identity**

Establishing an identity among young adolescents is a highly recognized psycho-social element. In answering the question "Who am I" the young adolescent is unconsciously able to integrate opinions of those influential around him such as grand-parents, caring adults and parents. When in refuge, this is a developmental task that the refugee misses out on which could affect formation of secure identities. Findings from this study support the notions (Mohammed, 2008) that growing up outside country of birth might impact the development of sense of values, beliefs, and relationship expectations. As emphasized by Shelmerdine (2005), Lina's story shows the importance of extended family within culture and the role played during development in establishing identity

*"...I miss my cousins...my grandmother telling stories for example how she grew up with my mother...the food...the games"*

Amina's narrative indicates a lack of occupational goal as expected of her developmental age

*"I miss playing with my sisters as the last born and helping my mother clean the house, cook all those stuff..."*

### **Establishing intimacy**

The participants in this study were able to establish intimacy, to a certain level though they struggled. 6 of the participants said they liked to socialize with their friends during free time. Peer relationships established and the activities that they engaged in were age appropriate (Cole & Cole, 2003). During such socialization they got to learn from each other as well as give each other peer support and guidance (Erikson, 1969). This went on to prove that the refugees are “ordinary people living with extra ordinary pressures” (Naicker & Nair, 2000). The peer relations were important as the refugees started re-learning trust by discovering intimacy, starting, maintaining and terminating relationships and practicing social skills (Huebner, 2000). For refugees these relationships took on a new meaning as they re-learned the above within specifications of a foreign country and from a different cultural perspective. These relationships were evident in Leah’s story

*“...I like hanging out with my friends...at home or at the mall...”*

This trend was also evident in Alice’s narratives

*“...I talk to my friends...the one friend that I trust, nobody else...”*

Teen years are a prime time for the development of sexuality. Sofi thought of herself as being physically mature and the thought processes shared indicated this

*“...we talk about boys...sometimes other things...some of my mother’s sister’s ask if we want to get sick...I started in 12 years...and then that time I never knew how to use this thing to protect...I was using it upside down, then I was talking to my friends then my friends teach me...”*

### **Sexual identity**

A healthy sexual identity is determined by a child’s exposure to sexuality and the nature of sex education given. A unique finding were two of the participants who shared that enroute South Africa, there were “*bad things that the men on the truck did to me*” whilst pointing to their private parts. They seemed quite upset for the next few minutes of the interview, thus this was not probed further. Though not explored within this research, one could say that there are elements of transactional sex and or acts of gender-based sexual violence during a refugee girl’s transit process, which might subsequently taint their sexual development.

The minimal exploration within this study marginally supported Butengwa's et. al. (1995: 13) study which reported "...that contrary to the principles of human rights and humanitarian law, women are increasingly subjected to systematic and debilitating abuse during situations of conflict..." Furthermore, matters of sex, sexuality and relationships are difficult to address in African homes because culture dictates that sex is sacred and that it should only be discussed within specific spheres (Ojanji, 2008). This further complicates the healing processes for the refugee girls who have faced gender-based sexual violence.

### **Sense of achievement**

Adolescents are thought to have achieved cognitive development. This is a time when they start to notice the relationship between their current abilities and future vocational aspirations. For the refugee girls, this was also identified as a functional coping mechanism adopted in spite all that had happened. An interesting finding was that they were able to figure out achievement preferences, new dreams and priorities. They also desired to regain self through hard work. Tied in with above positive outlooks, none of the participants had something sad or negative to say about the future. In retrospect, the Hopelessness Scale (Appendix J) should have been administered to verify this finding. Michelle was able to foster value attitude based on experiences and she said

*"...I wish that one day I will be a doctor and also because I want to help people..."*

Thandeka's sense of achievement based on refugee experiences was

*"... to see my mother again...I'd like to be patient with my school work and not be like any person out there not finishing school leaving school in the middle and doing what in the streets...I'd like to be a normal person, a person who works for herself, do things for herself and a person who is capable of everything that I need in life..."*

### **4.6.3 Significant individual characteristics of refugees**

The core characteristics of the refugee girls that came up during this study were resilience, emotional pain and survivor's guilt. This will be discussed next.

### **Survivor's guilt**

Survival from a tragic situation might be seen as a joyous occasion for some, but for the survivors themselves it is difficult to rejoice. This is because they may feel that they survived by

coincidence or luck and question why somebody else did not. During the discussions, if there was a question they had difficulty answering they would break down and ask the “*why me*” question or simply say that talking about a particular aspect makes them (feel) sick. These were indications of added bereavement. Conditions associated with survivor’s guilt, as a normal reaction to a traumatic event, depict that nothing could be done given the circumstances. “Guilt is the penance one pays for the gift of survival” (Hass, 1995). This sense of unjustified or imagined guilt was found to occur in almost all refugee girls’ narratives due to the situations they had experienced i.e. either currently being in a bad/ worse off situation or if during the ordeals they were not able to save someone they loved and cared for or there was a physical force preventing someone dear to them from being seriously injured or killed (Hass, 1995). Human nature almost dictates that it may be hard to feel appreciative for being alive while at the same time feel intense grief for those who did not survive. Amina felt hopeless at having experienced the good fortune at the expense of others during the war but powerless and sad at the way events turned out upon resettlement

*“...they made me feel bad and sometimes I used to think why did I come here to this country, I wanted to go back...”*

Leah’s guilt element was shown indirectly by playing down her survival because she thought that by attempting to save her own life, her parents were intentionally killed

*“...my mother and father they die I don’t know why I did not die with them...”*

According to Michelle, her guilt could be equated to a want to effect self-punishment and somewhat thought that she was responsible for her not being with her mother. A sense of self and competence seems to have been taken away from her as indicative of her attitudes towards friendships and views on daily life

*“...sometime I see people with family like them with their mom...I feel like God why couldn’t I also be like that person...”*

The participants with low self-esteem believed that they were victims of fate, and had guilt feelings associated with surviving and subsequently had poor resolution towards crises. On the other hand, some seemed a step ahead of others having realised the impact of positive resolution. In this sense, they were able to prevent further problems by adopting problem-focused coping

mechanisms i.e. in-depth analysis of guilt thus allowing for the emotional wounding and pain to be recognized and released. This is what Amina said, though it lost its core essence upon translation

*“...I work hard and stop thinking about my problems because I want to do well in school...I want to become a doctor...”*

Thereafter, there is a realization that past events were caused by external factors and not the survivor (Herman, 1997). With the help of a social worker, the ultimate ability of the teenage refugee girl to see herself as a victim too enables her to mourn and achieve a new determined life. This was seen as in the case with Sofi who said

*“...one day when I'm big...a known person...I'm gonna go look for him...”* Sofi said

### **Emotional pain**

The triggers for emotional hurt are painful life experiences such as those experienced by the refugee girls. Anger seems like an everyday feeling as a way of shielding themselves from the underlying emotional hurt. Refugee girls' ordeals were found to have an intense effect on their sense of wellbeing in the world and for most, it led to unleashing of distressing questions about the significance and fairness in existence and survival (as depicted in “survivors” guilt). The girls' emotional pain seemed chronic in terms of its somatic manifestation as they continue to re-live and dwell on past agonizing life experiences that took place. Adeline seems baffled with the physical pain she continues to get, yet it can be linked to the distressing life experiences associated with the physical pain.

*“...when I think of home sometimes I feel pain in my body...I don't know where it comes from...”*

The use of body related metaphors when describing pain and aches is synonymous with the African concept of the body being holistic. Somatisation seems to be a common factor as was reported by more than half the participants and it may contribute to medically unexplained (physical) symptoms that most refugee population have (Peltzer, 1996). The participants focused less on the ordeals and more on the situative aspects of the conflict at hand, emotional pain manifesting somatically and the conceptualization of the conflict within the environment (Pelzer, 1996). According to European concept of psychological illness, these symptoms could fit into

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For Amina, emotional losses seem not have been resolved “like an unhealed wound” thus continues to be a cause of tremendous pain that manifest somatically

*“...I see that sometime I used to get sick too much...I lie in bed, but it’s like I’m sick but it’s because I’m thinking too much...and I want to be next to my mom and that kind of stuff...that’s why I’m getting all the time sick...”*

The symbolism behind these descriptions may require the social worker intervening to have a sense of socio-cultural perceptiveness and “linguistic code” to be able to intercede effectively. Next, the concept of resilience will be looked at.

### **Resilience**

Resilience as a personal characteristic that can be attributed to many refugee children was looked at in terms of mourning and awareness. This is because how one handles losses has much to do with resilience and awareness. An aspect of resilience can be seen in Michelle’s ability to redefine loss in such a manner that allowed openness and continued learning

*“...I think like...I haven’t seen my mother for 12 years, so I’m always thinking God why are you always doing this to me...because I’m the last born and I haven’t had what other people have when they were small...being next to their mother and everything but I just wish if you guys can help that one day I go back and see my family for a short time...”*

Mourning within resilient adolescents was viewed in terms of being optimistic, remembering and being respectful to what happened; giving way to external and internal healing and not wanting to seek revenge. A unique finding was that a few were able to develop an awareness around the happenings in their countries, the impact of leaving home and subsequent sense of detachment and the value attached to patriotism. Thandeka said:

*“...I don’t think like I have a feeling of wanting to go and stay in my home country but I accept it’s my country. I’d like to go visit there one day...”*

It was interesting to note that though some participants were facing hardships in South Africa, they still did not wish to go back home indefinitely. On the other hand, all were happy to go back, upon completion of their studies, for a brief visit then return to South Africa.

*"...I miss my cousins and granny...but I want to go and visit after I finish school then come back to South Africa..."*

Adeline echoed Sofi's sentiments (above) about going to visit briefly

*"I miss my country...I want to go back and see our house, our garden, my friends, but not to stay..."*

In the context of the Kleinian object relations, the above could be seen as mourning the loss of a loved object i.e. country of origin even if it failed to provide a safe growing up environment, which is a characteristic of disparity upon separation. The researcher did not dwell on the reason(s) as to why they would not want to go back home indefinitely. This would have been an important aspect for social workers and policy makers working towards repatriations and reintegration processes of refugee youth.

Coping strategies that were employed by most of the participants seemed to be based on behaviour models, though in line with values of the culture of origin, thus allowing strengthening of identity (whilst retaining links with the past) and maintaining resilience as seen in these emotion focused ways of coping (contained ventilating)(Peltzer, 1996). Certain amounts of pain and heart ache could be tolerated but it was evident with the refugee girls' in the study that it could get overwhelming for them at times. This may lead to crying as reported by most of them, such as by Amina below

*"...sometimes I pray and sometimes I cry...sometimes when I cry my friends always see me...sometime I see people with family like them with their mom...I feel like God why couldn't I also be like that person...because some of my friends their mothers come here to visit and sometimes I say God why can't I also be like the others..."*

As with Sofi's withdrawing, it was seen to promote healing, but also one could tell that she grew up in a home that was unstructured and with high levels of conflict (Shelmerdien, 2005)

*"...sometimes if they talk about me, I just ignore them...I go outside and start to play with some other children...I have small temper...at times I cry or walk away...I can't take a lot of things..."* Sofi

The concept of resilience is core within the theme of relationships. This is so because it is these relationships that boost resilience within the refugee girl.

#### **4.6.4 The impact of relationships on refugee teenagers**

##### **Breakdown of family**

Family functioning plays a major role in healthy childhood development. Positive family effects were found to counterbalance the effects of independent risk factors faced by the refugee girls' during migration. As previously discussed under stressful life events, most of the children had lost their families during the war. For Sofi, the element of constant travelling, and living with different family members seemed like an accepted norm, though it symbolized instability and lack of concrete attachments within family.

*“...I never stay with my mother...I was travelling...today I'm with my granny, tomorrow I travel to my aunties or uncle...when my mummy came for me, my granny said, you don't live with your daughter, so why she come with you?”*

Sofi was later abandoned in South Africa and hence an “unaccompanied child”. Abandonment in South Africa might elicit different issues from that of a child whose parents died and she had to travel by herself. It will be important to note that the point of similarity for these girls is their current refugee status and their classification at the time of the research as being unaccompanied. Further research should perhaps look at loss of social relationships after arrival in a foreign country and the impact it has on children. 2 of the participants came at the request of relatives. The relationships turned sour on their arrival, upon which they were then abandoned and left to fend for themselves.

##### **Reconstituted families**

A number of the refugee girls interviewed had been newly fostered in South Africa hence reconstituted families. When interviewed, Ms Abrahams reported that the way to empower refugees was by giving them information, referring them to support networks and trying to place children within families. This, she added seemed to have increased resilience in the individual through re-creation of a flexible family support system and community support network as encouraged within the ecological model. This as shown below increased resilience and also helped them cope with further setbacks experienced in South Africa. Adelaide said this about her adopted family:

*“...they are poor...but there is love...they love us and those other children with no parents...”*

Amina held similar sentiments as Adelaide:

*“...the people care and that makes us feel loved...”* said Amina

The above were situations where a supportive milieu supported and reinforced the refugees coping efforts, as maintained by Fraser (1998). Love, care and compassionate relationships that the girls had lost were re-ignited in these foster care relations and subsequently become protective factors, in spite strained finances or basic necessities (Winnicott, 1965; Bendro et. al., 1990). The girl's had undergone numerous ordeals that a home environment, irrespective of its shortcomings, was better than what they had during their travels. To those who had lost everything, the reconstituted family was a respite as it provided protection and it was a safe haven for continued growth and development (Kirby & Fraser, 1998).

### **Spiritual relationships**

Religious coping tends to be universal, but it can be said to be more pertinent and prevalent in rural societies, as it acts as a protective factor. Most of the participants seem to have found solace in religion after their social networks and other relationships were lost (Peltzer, 1996). Religious “support” acted and continues to be a protective bond for most of them. Spirituality gave them that sense of a “holding relationship” (Winnicott, 1965), which enabled them endure pain and be strong enough to face traumatic experiences (Roehlkepartain, 2006). Michelle's spirituality gave her courage to go on in spite all she had faced

*“...it was a difficult life...maybe God wanted for me to be alone...like they thrown you away...but for me I know that God will do a miracle for me...I don't worry about them, they don't worry about me...I will carry on with my life, finish my school and God will do all the things He want to do...”*

For Sofi, she looked into spirituality for solace in the pain she faced when she was abandoned

*“...sometimes I am happy to stay at (Children's Home)...because when I go to school I see some children who stay in the streets...I thank God that's why I'm staying in this house...”*

### **Relationship with therapist**

The rapid changing settings that refugees end up in, and with limited stability and resources, enable social workers play a vital role in assisting them to not only resettle, but also help them deal with past traumas in a caring and compassionate manner. The refugee girls got support and confided in the social worker, followed by teachers and peers. It was interesting to note that all participants who interacted with the social worker on a therapeutic basis waited for the social worker/ counsellor to approach them first. This contradicts the European notion of waiting for the client to approach the therapist when a problem arises. Amina describes what needs to be in place before she seeks intervention

*“...I’m not the kind of person who goes to someone and speak but sometimes I do tell them if they are wrong...I talk to M (social worker) some of the volunteers...are easy to talk about feelings because of how they were asking me in a polite way, they were kind, they were showing that they care...difficult to share sometimes because they ask silly questions...”*

Sofi reported that if one does not inquire, she does not bother telling them either

*“...sometimes if they ask me (about Angola and my problems) if they don’t ask me I don’t tell them...”*

### **4.6.5 The significance of societal factors on refugee experiences**

#### **Xenophobia**

Anderson (2007) describes xenophobia as a violent practice, towards black African foreigners, which results in physical, psychological and emotional harm. The media was accused of propelling the “unknown” element in foreigners which further fuelled xenophobic reactions. All the participants strongly felt that the media portrayed foreigners and foreign countries in a negative light. Immigrants were portrayed as dangerous and having acquired their possessions fraudulently or living luxuriously at the expense of the South African community, which was not the case most of the time. Michelle who watches television said

*“...mostly bad way even when you are watching news mostly show them doing bad things...like during the holidays they were like showing how Congo had cholera, showing how people in such places where they are suffering...3<sup>rd</sup> Degree were showing how*

*Zimbabweans run away from home...never seen them showing refugees in a good way... ”*

Thandeka was also able to identify with the rest of the participants and said that

*“...some of the programmes or maybe the news they used to show people from other countries like suffering or maybe they used to show them committing crime, fighting, fighting but like in wars things like that...not nicely...”*

The social worker interviewed reported that media has a huge role to play in relation to how or what they chose to screen, which might be interpreted differently and might further increase intolerance towards non-South African persons and secondary traumatic experiences. To avoid recollection and reminders of those tragic memories, most participants would switch channels or walk out of the room. The social worker added that at school, the differences could be identified with other students hence the start of ostracization or bullying.

Most of the girls did not like being questioned as they felt it was intrusive and that it served as a reminder of a life story they would love to forget or not talk about, but they did not know how to tell the person without being thought of as rude. Amina noted that some people asked sensitive questions though in a respectful manner

*“...they can act in a polite way but not always as they wanna know more about you, they ask you about your family, who do you live with, what are your hobbies and all those things...”*

Adeline found that when asked intrusive questions, at times she would get angry because she found the questions to be very sensitive

*“...they just want to know about you...why you are not living with your parents, why you don't have proper school uniform, things like those...”*

According to all the girls interviewed, intrusive questioning always seems to give rise to name calling. Similarly to stories narrated to Bloch & Heese (2007), all participants reported being referred to as a *makwerekwere*. This is a derogatory term used to refer to persons from other parts of Africa once people found out their identity. Could this be a sense of discontentment as

the participants were viewed as threats to the locals in terms of accessibility of scarce services or just having different backgrounds? What was clear was that this form of intolerance prolonged the resettlement process for the participants in this study, and their sense of identity disintegrated further.

*“...When they say you speak funny...they start calling you names and all that...sometimes makwerekwere that is what they say...yeah, sometimes they call us makwerekwere...sometimes they call us (pause) I don't know those other names they call us...I forgot that name...it means it looks like is foreigner...something like that...”*

Amina narrated her xenophobic experiences

*“...we are Africans...if they can call us makwerekwere as if we're from America, which is not part of Africa...some of them they don't think...the first time I arrived here they used to call me kaffir, but I didn't know what that meant but then I used to ignore them...even the Xhosas were calling us makwerekwere...”*

Ms. Abrahams, a candidate attorney interviewed from the LRC was able to collate the above series of human rights abuses in her work with refugees

*“There's stigma attached to being refugees and being treated like a third rate citizen...they often come saying that they are abused and victimized by the local people in the communities that they live in...”*

The social worker interviewed also highlighted some experiences she had faced when intervening with a refugee girl in the past

*“...some children at school...they hear this child speaking English with a pronounced accent you know with a foreign accent, so that child will be targeted now...we as adults call it xenophobia...”*

### **School**

Despite the fact that the refugee girls are entitled to the same education rights as a South African child, much depends on the girl's ability to access such an opportunity (Hannan, 2003). The inadequacy of local learning institutions absorbing the refugees initially was based on factors

such as learning difficulties as relates to language, subject and curriculum content. All the participants did not speak English or any of the South Africa dialects upon arrival, thus they could not be integrated immediately into mainstream education. They all had to attend a language school first as indicated by Alice below

*“...I speak French, so I have to learn a bit of English first before I go to school...”*

Education was one of the crucial avenues through which the refugee girls were able to feel purposeful and have sense of stability (Winterstein & Stone, 2006). None of the participants was in any form of (exploitative) employment. All participants with the exception of one, who was in the process of learning English, were attending mainstream school. The highly rated activity that all the refugee girls in the study spent doing during their free time was reading school-related matters. This, they explained, would help them catch up with the rest of the class syllabus. The dilemma was choosing between doing well in school or socializing with friends-both important aspects during resettlement and becoming a well-balanced person.

The refugee girls had been put in grades congruent with their developmental age, but most of them were hardly coping with the grade-appropriate work load i.e. they had missed some years of school but were expected to perform as well as the regular attending children. This calls for the education policy to be reviewed to help them adjust gradually, as this was perceived to be another source of stress. Despite these challenges, the school was found to be a safe haven for almost all the participants and a place where their identity was boosted as they eased their way to being fully integrated in the community (Stone & Winterstein, 2003). Leah said

*“...I love school...it feels nice being there...”*

### **Leisure time**

None of the participants had attended any community-organized events in their area. They did not know such activities existed, which impacts on their integration and subsequent resettlement in the community. Many preferred to study (as a way of upgrading marks) or to take part in extra-curriculum activities at school because it was compulsory, as a way of gaining acceptance and making new friends, and doing something positive with self. During free time, Lina said

*“...I write songs...I make cards...dance especially because I like hip hop and all...I do volleyball and netball...watch tv...something nice with myself”*

### Home Affairs

Identity documents are of great significance to a refugee. Without a refugee identification document, the refugee does not have access to basic needs such as health care system, social services and education facilities (Anderson, 2007). Upon arrival in South Africa, a refugee is expected to report to the nearest Department of Home Affairs office to apply for a Sec. 22 permit (Refugee Act, 1998). Only one of the girls interviewed had not acquired legal status in the country due to the labour strike. Approximately 80% of them had refugee status and 1 had an asylum seekers permit. Both permits were temporary and renewals were subject to political situation in home country. Gender based violence recognized as a crime against human rights (Butengwa et. al. 1995) can be a basis of Sec 22 permit applications.

All the girls interviewed claimed they did not have any identity documents upon arrival in South Africa, but that they had acquired them subsequently. This contradicts Ms Abrahams (2007) view points and reports by the media (UNHCR, 2006) that asylum seekers have to acquire refugee status through torturous, lengthily and often traumatising asylum procedure (Anderson, 2007). This was not the case with the participants in this study, since they were assisted by social workers. This supports (Kagan, 2006) study that with legal aid, refugees are more likely to get their Refugee Status Determination faster. The social worker interviewed expressed that it would be helpful if there was a compiled legal document on procedures in dealing with an unaccompanied child. Mr. Van der Burgh, the Home Affairs official interviewed reported that their office was willing to assist the child as long as she had appeared before a court commissioner and was found to be in need of care; as stipulated in the Refugee Act 130 of 1998.

*“...a child is a child according to the South Africa Law, so so long as the Children’s Court finds the child to be at risk or in need of care, we will assist that child with the necessary paper work that needs to be done...”*

In the application of the definition in the Refugee Act, the study found that not all the participants arrived in the country unaccompanied. This holds true to the debate that the terminology “unaccompanied” should include children who came into the country with a caregiver like Sofi or with “smugglers” like Thandeka, but were later abandoned.

*“I was with the person that I came here with, my father’s friend...I don’t know where that person is, but the person was willing to go to George...he left me on the streets and told*

*me that he was gonna come back that he's just gone to sell clothes...till today he's never come back again..."*

In the past, it has been difficult to categorize abandoned refugee children due to the nature of their entry into South Africa. This places them at risk because without legal status in South Africa, they cannot access essential services such as social services, educational and health which then impedes on their growth and development. This is a key issue that was brought up in the discussions with the role players and there is an urgent need to address it within the children and refugee policies.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

These refugee girls' departure from country of origin and subsequent arrival in South Africa unaccompanied was found to entail a lot of emotional anguish. There were internal obstacles (personal trauma, survivor's guilt, preoccupation) and external obstacles (language problems, xenophobia) which were likely to interfere with their growth and development. They had to learn to cope with whatever they encountered in the best manner possible. The key themes addressed within the ecological model emphasizes youth development being determined/ influenced by the settings where she spends time in and that the proximal processes become their major engine of and for growth. Certain categories within the themes overlapped each other from time to time in relation to refugee girl's experiences.

A post-modern approach was evident in the narratives of the girls, in the augmentation of their voices. The results indicate that the girls would struggle to grow and develop in isolation upon resettlement. Elements such as family, community of residence and school are essential for continued growth. These aspects are fundamental to any individual's development though they are ever changing. Social workers could work with the attached meanings i.e. post-modern emphasis in shaping of meaning and fluidity. In spite all the adversities faced, the participants were found to have some level of resilience and were still hopeful for the future.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the themes that emerged in relation to circumstances and perceived experiences associated with refugee girls. The functions and recommendations proposed by the key role players were also incorporated into the discussions. The discussions were situated in social, political, cultural and institutional discourses. These were amalgamated for comprehensive interpretation of the girls' migration experiences. This chapter builds up on the themes and sub-themes outlined in the previous chapter. It further elaborates on these by reflecting on the policy documents and literature reviewed in Chapter 3; and makes links with the lived life experiences of the research participants.

#### **5.2 BRONFENBRENNER'S STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS AND REFUGEE GIRLS' EXPERIENCES**

The researcher investigated the circumstances that lead to refugee girls leaving home and arriving in Cape Town unaccompanied. Using the ecological developmental framework, she examined the extent to which life events experienced were stressful and the impact this had on the teenage refugee girls. Loss, trauma and grief formed the underlying framework in understanding the influence of migration experiences on the study participants.

##### **Pre-migration losses experienced**

The initial disturbance in the refugee girls' stage development happened during pre-migration period and it necessitated the flight and subsequent arrival in Cape Town unaccompanied. The internal displacement experienced by the participants placed them at risk due to loss of family (Hannan, 2003) and stage of development. They also feared persecution (Tolsi, 2008) and the gender-based violence that they had witnessed. In terms of crisis theory, safety precautions were lacking within homes, in the community and in the country (Refugee International, 2007). A crisis was looming. These factors made them susceptible and they left their country. South Africa was chosen because it was perceived to be safe, had better re-settlement opportunities and "was very far" from what was going on (Legoko, 2006).

##### **Exploitation**

The current refugee girls who were separated from their family from onset relied on the kindness of the people they travelled with or those whom they met enroute (Tolsi, 2008). Some were well

looked after hence enhancing the African proverb “a child belongs to the community”. On the other hand, some experienced “added bereavement” when these people betrayed their trust and exploited them. This also happened to 2 study participants who travelled with “smugglers” (Hannan; 2008). The experiences of these refugee girls was grim as they left home at a crucial time of their lives, hoping for better conditions only to end up further traumatized. Furthermore they had to summon whatever psychological resources left within for survival purposes and for coping with ordeals.

### **Unaccompanied children and war programs**

Another stressful event experienced by 5 of the 8 study participants was indoctrination into the war programmes involving children. They avoided this by escaping (Parsons, 2005). This could be attributed to middle childhood elementary reasoning or adolescent advanced reasoning skills and refugee survival tactics. For some, while in hiding, they had witnessed what was going on and decided to leave lest the same happened to them. Fear drove them to abandon their homes, family, friends and possessions and leave as they were; thus arriving unaccompanied. Migration studies (Forced migration, 2008) indicate that when there are issues of insecurity during conflict, parents try to safeguard the children by sending them away (alone or with strangers). Crisis theory stipulates that families are normally split for safety reasons and to increase chances of survival. The 3 participants, who bid their family farewell, did not know when they would see each other again. This is because they were also planning to escape to unconfirmed areas of safety if war escalated. The participation of children and adolescents in war has grave implications for their psychosocial well-being which was developing and needed nurturing (Blavo, 1999).

### **Trauma experienced and resettlement**

Due to traumatic incidents undergone, the key role players identified that some refugee girls try to create meaning and make sense around these experiences. For a successfully meaning-making process, the refugee girls had to have the ability to self-soothe. In object relations, this is the ability to internalize mother’s love enough to develop security (that someone is always there inside) and self-confidence when alone or feeling hurtful (Ashbach & Schermer, 1994). However, for the refugee adolescent to make sense of experiences, it was inevitable that traumatic ordeals will be replayed; hence emergence of unresolved traumas. Their lack of self-soothing capability was reflected by their narratives around acting out in school (Mitchell &

Aron, 1999), having learning difficulties, somatisation and intrusive dreams. These were examples of negative coping mechanisms investigated in relation to research objectives set.

### **5.3 SITUATING REFUGEE GIRL'S DEVELOPMENT IN A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Uprootment adversely transforms a child's life and affects their development. One of the research questions raised was on perceived experiences of the refugee teenage girl as they coped in the new environment. The developmental challenges to be discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner's (1975) ecological model and Erikson's (1969) psychosocial model are sexual development and establishing identity.

#### **Sexual development**

Sexual development may be influenced by internal and external factors such as family, self-esteem, school attendance and cultural belief systems. Sexual development is considered to be a source of considerable anxiety. In the case of the refugee girls, this is heightened by lack of parental guidance in sex education (Louw & Edwards, 1997) and their human rights being violated in conflict situations (Butengwa et. al. 1995). The influential parental attitudes in the youth's sexual development are lost when she ends up in refuge, unaccompanied. In addition to attitudes, parents are role-models for children in the way they relate to each other, make decisions and treat each other. For the vulnerable refugee girls, these situations which offer powerful models that would influence them are missing. During trans- migration and post migration periods, lack of parental monitoring and supervision meant that the girl's sexual development was their own responsibility. Though sexual exploitation was not explicitly explored in the study, at least 2 participants mentioned its occurrence during trans-migration. These forced sexual transactions were characterized by power inequalities and the girl's desperate attempts to survive (UNHCR, 2002; IOM, 2006). This maladaptive coping mechanism affects normal sexual development in girls.

#### **Establishing identity**

The development of a coherent, integrated sense of self is linked to finding one's place in the society and attaining a sense of self (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000). 4 of the study participants were found to be battling with resolution of this stage crisis. The migration process the girls underwent was a drastic social change that interfered with the normal process of identity formation. They had issues describing themselves and where they come from, but were clear on

where they are headed. An identity provides a framework linking personal goals and choices to the life course as a whole (Crockett & Silbereisen, 2000). Thus, the clarity in “where they are headed” might be a façade adapted to give them hope and strength to cope with emotional wounds.

The stressful experiences mentioned earlier also affect the development of a healthy identity. This is because in addition to loss of family and friends, the girls also lost cultural references. In the discussions, 6 girls indicated that they would miss experiences related to growing up. Peltzer (1996) reiterated that grieving for the abandoned culture is threatening to the individual’s identity which is of great importance at this age. Instead of focusing on aspects of adolescent transition, the refugee girls are forced to mourn for the loss of loved objects and lost childhood.

The adolescent categories of achievement, re-alignment of roles and establishing intimacy will be looked at within other themes. The study demonstrated that a child’s development takes place within the immediate social contexts of everyday life and that the daily interactions between the child and her social environment shape their growth and development over time.

#### **5.4 SIGNIFICANT REFUGEE CHARACTERISTICS WHICH SHAPE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND NARRATIVES**

This is a continuation of the research question that relates to perceived experiences of refugee girls as they cope in changed circumstances. The personality of the refugee girls had a considerable role to play in their experiences and their narratives (Assefaw, 2001). In addition, knowledge of refugee’s individual characteristics might assist service providers plan on intervention.

##### **Re-alignment of role and sense of immaturity**

Traumatic loss and change is a marked characteristic of all refugees (Frater-Matherson, 2004). The losses and changes during middle childhood into the teenage years are usually guided and monitored cautiously with parents or adult caregivers. Whilst in refuge, this is not present and therefore the girls had to take on the role. Lack of parental holding and containing environment (Winnicott, 1965) gave rise to distressing experiences which had series of negative mental health implications on them such as increased levels of anxiety, increased levels of sadness, survivor guilt, a sense of powerlessness, helplessness and worthlessness. According to cognitive-

behavioural theory, immaturity was evident when they struggled to communicate feelings, thoughts, needs and ideas adequately. This in turn impacts them as they can not communicate painful feelings to others.

### **Emotional instability**

The discussion with the refugee girls indicated that they continued experiencing emotional pain and suffering feelings of guilt that related to past memories. 5 of the girls interviewed reported constant images of the past intruding into daily life, re-experienced abandonment anxieties and also harboured morbid thoughts on a daily basis (Herman, 1998). These symptoms could fit into a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but psychological diagnosis should consider cultural formulation (Semple et. al., 2007). A common risk factor observed in conjunction with the teenager's emotional instability was their rapid changing environment which did not allow formation of trusting relationships (Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Cole & Cole, 2003).

The principal causes of emotional instability in the girls were identified as intense differences in culture and social norms, language and communication difficulties, "survivor guilt", inability to return home or to progress academically and lack of economic/ financial security. The somatic symptoms that the refugee girls exhibited are indications of personal or social difficulties expressed metaphorically and through the concept of the body (Kirmayer, 1996 in Peltzer, 1996: 255). They ought to be addressed appropriately; otherwise the girls were at risk of developing dysfunctional behaviour patterns, psychiatric morbidity, and ineptitude in relation to relationships (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Semple et. al., 2007).

### **Pessimism**

This imagined guilt resonated with the 6 participant's feelings and thoughts around hopelessness and worthlessness in circumstances which were beyond their control. This could also be seen as a cry for help i.e. there was so much going on that they might have felt fragmented on their own and without parental support. 6 of the participants wished that they could have died too and regretted being alive resulting in guilt feelings. They were unable to look at themselves and rejoice being alive. Instead, they were emotionally stuck as they continued to mourn for past events that they had no control over. In Kaplan's (2000) study, refugees were found to be pessimistic about the future. In this study they were pessimistic about current situation i.e. "the now" and not about their future.

### **Resilience**

According to 7 study participants, adapting to Cape Town was acknowledged as a stressful factor involving changes in academic, social, environmental and cultural fronts (Moos & Schaefer, 1986). For the girls, this process was amalgamated with experiences of loss, distress and grief, culture shock, xenophobia and learning difficulties which influenced development of survivor's guilt. They had to cope with the haphazard relocations and travelling and the fact that they might never go home again or see their family. With limited resources available and accessible to them, they started creating a sense of purpose, self-worth, identity and security. They were able to cope relatively well with adverse situations, characterized by exposure to multiple risk factors with limited support (Kirby & Fraser, 1998).

### **Intimacy**

According to Grizenko & Fisher (1992, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998) individual factors are less significant in adolescence in comparison to the interpersonal characteristics which they hold highly. This explains why sub-themes of silencing, denial and or minimizing painful events were commonly used by the refugee girls as coping strategies. The teenage refugee girls were elusive with personal information. It was common to find them exercising excessive privacy or preferring to talk to peers, as reported by 7 study participants. This refutes Peltzer (1996) study that refugee youth face additional developmental problems of integration because peer groups are absent during resettlement. The study participants acknowledged their unwillingness to share certain aspects of their life-stories. Apart from withholding information as a characteristic of teenagers, another factor was cultural-based difficulties whereby it is a taboo to talk about family issues with strangers and without the whole family's consent.

## **5.5 REFUGEE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE IMPACT ON THEIR EXPERIENCES**

The manner in which the refugee girls had previously adjusted and adapted to grief, loss and other life challenges was seen to have significant repercussions on the current situation. Common pre-migration experiences for these participants included briefly living in an unstable society, leading to primary loss of relationships and possessions. They also experienced secondary losses such as loss of sense of safety, familiarity, identity, well-being and confidence in self. This theme ties with the theme that addressed stressful life events. It strives to answer the

research question on mechanisms adopted to cope with changed circumstances. Relationships with peers will not be explored here, since it was discussed in the previous theme.

### **Fragmented family**

The coping skills adopted by 3 refugee girls gave an indication of the types of families they came from. According to the ecological model, a crucial element within family trauma that mostly necessitated participants' arriving unaccompanied is associated with fragmentation of critical dimensions of the family micro-system and the family life cycle. The pre-trauma risk factors that certain participants had which made them more vulnerable to experiencing trauma symptoms included family dysfunction, parental inadequacy, unstable living arrangements, family conflicts and prior experiences of death in family. The 3 girls described their inability to bond with parents and the anxious attachments which mostly led to fights (Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1978). This shows how the refugee girls were expected to function as an unresolved part of (parents') self. The child unconsciously ended up parenting the parent instead of being nurtured into growth of self.

Post-trauma risk factors included loss of belief in self, adults and the Higher Being, and inadequate support within their micro-systems. According to object relations theory, refugee adolescents who suffer trauma in core self and identity (and do not get therapy) are likely to end up trying to resolve these issues during adulthood, through repetition of the struggle in intimate relationships or with own children (Siegel, 1992; Scharff, 1992). Though the nature of family's response within the ecological model is vital, it was not examined in the study with other participants because they arrived unaccompanied. Thus the categories that followed look at significance in relations formed post migration.

### **Relationship within oneself**

A uniting element of grief was that it arose as a consequence of cultural uprooting resulting in loss of identity, cultural values and traditions and the meaningful social structures. 5 participants interviewed had made a personal commitment to work through grief stages. They were retrieving, consolidating and changing the meaning of their relationships to the person(s) and possessions lost (Staudacher, 1987 in Frater-Matherson, 2004). For 6 of the participants, the losses were sudden and unanticipated; which manifested at the different stages of grief. 5 of them had undergone the initial stage of avoiding. They were currently tackling the assimilation and or accommodation phase(s). It is worth noting that each participant's grief narrative was

similar to fellow study participants, but at the same time it was unique to that individual. Grief was found to transverse the themes dealing with stage of development, personal characteristics and societal factors. Characteristics identified by Kaplan's (2000) study that were displayed by these adolescents at the time of study included slight identity confusion, feelings of guilt, shame and isolation. Other characteristics that were not displayed and thus contradicted Kaplan's (2000) study included pessimism about future, disturbances in self-image, self-destruct behaviours to distract from pain and premature adoption of adult roles.

### **Therapeutic relationship**

This research demonstrated that illness is defined according to the system external to the refugee client. In most African collectivist societies when problems arose, they were tackled within the family. External assistance is only requested from extended family, which made these girl's emotionally isolated as they were either separated or without biological family. Thus, it was comprehensible when some of the girls reported that they did not see the need to seek help from a social worker/ counsellor on the issues that they had due to absent family support network. From a cultural perspective, they would be doing wrong to the family and themselves if they discussed their personal issues with anyone. The European viewpoint is conflictual as the refugee girl is seen as being in denial and lacking ability to express herself. This study refutes Erikson's (1969) psychosocial explanation that the girls did not resolve the "trust versus mistrust" crisis hence their lack of trust in the social worker/ counsellor.

In Africa, the family is crucial to an individual, because themes of loyalty, security, responsibilities and plans are looked at collectively. A normal child's psycho-social growth would have been influenced by the family's unique characteristics, which lacks whilst in refuge. A cultural-sensitive social worker can facilitate foster care placement of refugee children with a family from home country; as was the case with some participants. This relationship promotes permanency, enhances well-being and cultural values are retained.

\*Relationship with the Higher Being will be looked at under "coping strategies adopted"

## **5.6 CAPE TOWN INFLUENCES ON THE REFUGEES GIRLS' EXPERIENCES**

One of the key research questions the researcher explored was the perceived experiences of refugee girls in Cape Town. Using the ecological framework, the researcher examined the extent

to which macro-systems impacted on refugee girls. The girl's experiences as relates to resettlement, xenophobia, access to education and resocialization were also addressed in relation to resettlement in Cape Town.

### **Institutional neglect and injustice**

The Cape Town Refugee Office has been in the forefront due to its lack of aptitude in processing Sec. 22 Permits. According to the Legal Resources Centre (2008), the policy and practice of the Cape Town Refugee Office was declared unconstitutional. Conditions like these end up affecting minors from the macro-system level. The immigration officer revealed that difficulties with unaccompanied children's Section 22 Permits only arose if the child had not been found to be in need of care by the Children's Court. According to Sec. 14(4) of the Child Care Act 78/83, all study participants were found to be in need of care. The research question on functions of key role players was addressed within this sub-theme. Assistance was granted by refugee attorney at the UCT Law Clinic and social workers, for refugee children to successfully apply for Section 22 Permits. Prior to that, the refugee child's social and academic growth was affected by the compulsory, strenuous and time-consuming visits to Home Affairs to determine their status and to extend permits.

The permit granted the study participants certain privileges but they were faced with other issues (Namhila, 1997) such as the permit being a constant reminder that another change is inevitable during the process of resettlement. The study supported Namhila (1997) autobiographical details that refugee girls continue to be oppressed, distressed, doubtful, guilty and powerless through news from their country and language barriers. Acquiring the permit meant relinquished faith in the government of their country; thus might lead to loss of national identity. It was within the roles of the immigration officer, refugee attorney and the social worker to inform the girls' that they are not allowed to travel back home on such a permit. This emotionally destabilized the girls as it dashed their hopes of ever being re-united with their families.

### **Cape Town's diverse culture**

Cape Town has the largest population of refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa; within the Muizenberg, Maitland, Woodstock, Langa and Samora Machel areas (Anderson, 2007; Ngodwana & Treves, 2006). The refugee influence and culture can thus be felt in ways of dressing, language and braids which is nominal in other parts of South Africa. In the ecological model, culture within the participant's society played a big role in shaping and determining how teenagers understand and cope with loss and changes in life. The girls met and interacted with

fellow refugees at school. With this contact, the teenagers found that ‘glue’ that assisted in finding meanings, cohesions and integration (Ahearn & Athey, 1991). Similar to adolescents growing up in stable situations, they were equally confronted with fundamental issues like separation, personal value system and identity and sexuality. These issues interacted crucially with various problems related to being a refugee, such as loss, grief, psychic trauma and lack of cultural continuity (Tobin & Friedman, 1984, in Peltzer, 1996: 253). In addition to dealing with internal upheaval, the unaccompanied refugee girl had to adapt to living in Cape Town. This meant that the girl’s development was interrupted therefore she needed assistance re-integrating identity aspects already acquired.

Cape Town was described as “pot of gold at the end of the rainbow” by the social worker interviewed for the study. This is because it was the choice of many refugees who found it culturally diverse, “...marginally friendlier and more efficient...” (Smook, 2008; 6). Cape Town was revered by the girls as a place where they could start re-building their lives. The key role players stressed the importance of understanding and building refugee’s participation to enable them become an integral part of their communities of resettlement. In addition, the community’s capacity was limited and should be increased to promote involvement, integration of diversity and nurture interdependence (Goodkind & Foster-Fishman, 2002).

### **Xenophobia**

The girls experienced xenophobia which left them disappointed, bitter and stressed out when they were shunned, stigmatised, and asked humiliating questions (Blavo, 1999). This study supports Bricker-Jenkins (2002) study on ability to cope with adversities upon resettlement. To overcome this, the coping mechanism adopted was learning Xhosa and Afrikaans languages and the culture of the host city at the expense of their own. Developmental theory on middle childhood explained the notions that such young children (at time of departure) could grasp elements related to trauma though not fully comprehend it until a later stage. This is the reason behind them “feeling haunted” by their refugee status years later, in addition to constant reminders within obtrusive probing. Another challenging experience in Cape Town was when strangers gave them unwarranted attention and probed intrusively upon discovery of their refugee status. The girls reported being unhappy, feeling humiliated and ambivalent about having to narrate their life story over and over again (to strangers especially). A unique finding was the girls reporting that they enjoyed the conversation if it was purely about their country of origin, culture and ways of living.

### **Limited access to education**

The refugee girls experienced lack of educational facilities and limitations around institutions absorbing them immediately. This was because of schools language(s) of instruction, different education system and tough competition from South Africans; aspects they had not prepared for prior to coming to South Africa. Sociological theories on strain and structural opportunity argue that limited or 'blocked' opportunities in school might put refugee youth at greater risks (Farrington et. al, 1993, in Kirby & Fraser, 1998). The participants in this study were exposed to "good enough" environments that enabled them develop high expectations for social, educational and economic success. Unfavourable environments give rise to frustration and anger; which in turn might cause alienation, school failure and drug abuse during resettlement. The participants interviewed saw education as being an indicator of socio-economic status in South Africa, financial well being back in their home countries and as a means of integration into the community (Ready, 1991; Stone & Winterstein, 2003). In line with Dunkerley et al. (2006), Eyber (2006) and Stone & Winterstein (2003) reports, the key role players acknowledged that schools were a "key normalizing" factor for the participants since it promoted psycho-social wellbeing. Findings indicated that it increased the girl's chances of meeting and interacting with age-mates and led to a creation of a sense of security, purpose and meaning. Peers evidently became the people they could rely on, spend time with and confide in. A unique finding was that the refugee girl's first choice of friends would be fellow refugees, and from their country of origin. They felt they could trust them more and that they had bonded through the similar experiences undergone. This would be a good way in which social workers could introduce mentorship programs for refugees.

### **Resocialization of the refugee girls**

Learning institutions played critical roles in re-socialization of refugee children. The findings indicate that one of the main challenges was for the girl to adapt and develop socialization skills within that environmental context; as a source of continuation from learning and socialization which was disrupted. Schools were found to be potential key players in assisting refugee teenagers feel less invisible by initiating safe settings where they could feel supported and understood and forget past ordeals.

In this study, integration into learning institutions was found to be at odds with the participants' background. The differences were felt in schools' language of instruction, curriculum, discipline and school culture which can be looked into as part of honouring the pledges made to refugees

by the South African government. As discussed previously, assessment of refugee teenagers is as crucial as that of refugee children and adults. Within a school system especially, it ensures proper planning in meeting their special needs, and especially as they prepare for adulthood.

## **5.7 COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY REFUGEE TEENAGERS**

One of the key research questions set to explore the coping mechanisms adopted by the refugees as a way of dealing with changes in their lives. Some coping strategies applied to previous themes, thus they will not be discussed again. According to Erikson (Moos & Schaefer, 1986; Cole & Cole, 2003) should earlier stages not have been negotiated well, the child will not be able to cope adequately with later adversities faced. Previous life stages were not looked at in this study, thus the coping responses will be looked at independently of Erikson's first two stages of psycho-social development. The coping behaviours these participants adopted when confronted with stressors varied according to issue at hand and their ability to draw on various available resources (Athey & Ahearn, 1991). This study supported the notion that children who coped well were those who had the ability to find support within their community (Werner, 1989 in Athey and Ahearn; Dunkerley et al., 2006; Moos & Shaefer, 1986).

### **Legal status as a coping strategy**

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the procedure refugees undergo in order to be distinguished from other migrants (Kagan, 2006). By acquiring legal status in South Africa, the girls had a peace of mind to enable them concentrate on social, academic and emotional issues affecting them. Without a Section 22 permit, the immigration officer interviewed reported that the girl's would risk being arrested, transported to Lindela Detention Centre and subsequently deported (Smook, 2008). The valid permit plays a huge role in a refugee girls' survival in South Africa as it legalizes their stay in the country and facilitates easy movement and access to facilities and government services, countrywide.

### **Psychosocial support and coping**

Psychosocial impact of forced migration on unaccompanied minors is emotionally and socially strenuous; affecting feelings, relations and opportunities for social development and security. The social worker interviewed was able to share that psychosocial support was important due to the crucial role it plays in a child's trauma recovery process. A psychosocial support system that applies a rights-based approach is fundamental for a refugee girl's growth and continued development. Emotional wounding and healing does not occur within a short time frame but

requires long term commitment and working with the girls holistically. The refugees' best coping resources were often located in their existing social relationships such as with peers. From an ecological perspective, refugee girls are only bound to be protected if there are structures and systems which fulfil their rights within their community of resettlement. Psychosocial support is significant for the refugee's development because it addresses ongoing chronic situations and not single experiences in isolation. It also supports the 1999 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which emphasizes collective intervention approaches.

### **Sublimation as a coping mechanism**

Sublimation is a defence mechanism coined by Anna Freud (in Cole & Cole, 2003) that allows unacceptable impulses to be acted out by converting them to more acceptable form. The schools extra-curriculum programs and activities give the teenagers a sense of belonging and routine, which had been previously disrupted. This supports the social constructivism theory that people learn and develop when they participate in social activities. From an ecological perspective, the society and the person mutually and continuously influence each other. The activities that the participants engaged in included: song writing, poetry, listening to music, dancing and drawing. These activities were crucial because they ended up stimulating their thought processes and feelings (Worden, 1992). Sublimation was seen as a sign of maturity and a healthy redirection of the girl's emotions which permitted their growth within socially acceptable morals.

### **Coping with spiritual support**

The well-known bid that religious connection can serve as a protective and curative factor with regard to experienced stressors won this research study's support too. Spiritual-based coping is universal, but it was much more relevant in African societies. From the strain theory and psychosocial analysis most of the participants described how their spirituality had helped them cope and adapt as an unaccompanied minor. Spirituality provided a source of coping, through prayers and trust in God. For the latter, it can be said that it allowed the participants to place control of their lives in the hands of God. Similar to refugees interviewed by Bloch and Heese (2007), all study participants testified that if it were not for God's love and care, they would not have survived. The stronger sense of coherence helped them to further persevere under conditions of hardships within new environments. Although most of the participants went through very difficult times, trusting in God is still very convincing to them. Spiritual-based counselling can be offered by social workers to the refugees who have this inclination; with the focus being God's role in the

ordeal and their current relationship with God to assist with questions that they might still be grappling with (Roehlkepartain, 2006).

From an ethnopsychological perspective, none of the participants had something negative to say about the future i.e. in terms of their dreams and hopes. Most of the refugee girl's hopeful thoughts and wishes for the future were linked to interest in pursuing a helping profession. These substantiated the fact that because of their experiences, the refugee teenagers understand what it feels like to lack basic needs and thus feel compelled to give ample support, assistance and nurturing to others. It was observed that the teenage participants possessed qualities of resilience that enabled them cope and find meaning when certain losses are experienced.

## **5.8 CONCLUSION**

The findings from this study support the notion that the circumstances which led to refugee girls' leaving home are complicated and multifactorial. In this research, it was reported that the major reasons why the participants left their countries for South Africa was due to stressful events. The journey from country of origin into South Africa placed the girls at risk for added bereavement and distress, loss and severe deprivation. It has also shown their resiliency and tremendous strength to endure hardships as they tap into some of their limited ecosystems (Bryant, 1999).

The second finding maintains that there are certain perceived factors which lead to girls arriving in South Africa unaccompanied. The ones highlighted in this study are loss of parents in war, fear of the death and possible harm. In addition there were incidents of possible persecution linked to loss of family. Another reason was abandonment by the person who smuggled them into the country or rejection by biological or reconstituted family.

The next main finding supports the notion that the refugee girls underwent diverse experiences as they coped in Cape Town. It was evident that transitions during middle childhood and teenage years can cause stress if there is limited support and if the potential stressors are not spaced out. Emotional pain and survivor's guilt were evident in the girl's narratives of adjustment. School was found to be an influential factor in their lives. Xenophobia was also experienced. A unique finding was more rapidly issuance of refugee permit if one had access to legal aid.

The study supports the argument that experiences of the refugee girls and the coping mechanisms adopted differed somewhat from those experienced by a girl growing up in a supportive, secure and financially stable environment. Another finding on the coping mechanisms adopted to manage their changed circumstances highlights relevance of spirituality in their lives, re-creation of relationships with the social worker and peers and engaging in leisure activities. The element of resilience was seen during migration and resettlement when they engaged in therapy when approached, learnt English and the local dialects and tapped into supportive networks at school.

The final finding supports the notion that key role players play a huge function in assisting refugee girls. They do this by giving information, doing referrals and linking them with the relevant organizations, distributing food parcels where necessary, assisting with legal aid and permit applications and providing guidance and counselling.

The chapter that follows discusses the implications for future research and social work practice.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides recommendations and conclusions that draw on clinical and policy based perspectives. Thereafter, the significance of the present study is discussed. Finally the implications of the findings for future research and clinical practice are highlighted.

#### **6.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

##### **6.2.1 Clinical perspective**

The results from this study support the ecological perspective that the girls' growth and development cannot happen in isolation, but in relation to re-created supportive networks whilst resettling. Adaptation not only involves the participant but also the wider social structures. It is an interactive process involving overlapping systems as elicited by their narratives. This paper is a contribution to the emerging refugee literature focusing on why refugee youth need to grow up in an environment that is protective and why elements of the environmental setting should contribute to their protection, development and increasing resiliency. Failure to protect this vulnerable group of children would undermine national policies established and further contravene the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child, which South Africa is a signatory to.

Narrative data analysis indicated that all the participants in this study had experienced emotional wounding and were harbouring survivor's guilt feelings. These were as a result of pre-, trans- and post migration circumstances, where they experienced loss, trauma, ongoing changes and developmental interruptions. The study highlighted the "negative" relationship between emotional pain and survivor's guilt and the stressful migratory life experiences. The acquisition of personal insights to emotional pain and guilt was gained through traumatic experiences, narration of their partial life story and by interpretation of physiological signals i.e. somatisation. These experiences were found to have attached meanings thus post-modernism emphasis in assistance when shaping meaning and fluidity. In addition, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder should be investigated in refugee children using a cultural formulation since there were clear cultural issues impacting its presentation.

Displacement and subsequent resettlement pose unique cultural stresses that manifest in refugees as cultural bereavement (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Cultural backgrounds held these refugees' narrations and meanings which subsequently became the base for interpretations of physical ailments and a framework for rebuilding and reorganizing lives. Social workers ought to be attuned to those aspects which unaccompanied refugee children give meaning to and their definition of realities and experiences. Therapeutic interventions should focus on the framework of the refugee's subjective experience of monumental losses and cultural vulnerabilities.

Adolescence as a life stage was found not to be inherently stressful, but that the non-normative life events can cause developmental conflicts. A sense of personal control was found to be critical in dealing with events faced whilst in refuge and navigating this life stage. In identifying risks and stressors within refugee experiences and in trying to understand the way they cope, the ecological approach lent a hand at emphasizing the youth's adaptation rather than viewing it as a problem stage. The experiences become more complex due to the interaction of loss, trauma and developmental life stage.

The participants' experiences contribute to clinical social workers' knowledge and understanding of grief in children and adolescents, generally. This relates to effects of a traumatic event and the impact it has on refugee youths, which has been taken for granted in the past. Adolescent refugees were thought to be either mature enough to recognize and deal with what is going on and or that the impact was not as great as in adults or children. Refugee adolescents can be resilient and were found to be slightly mature and thus able to handle certain aspects of traumatic events better than younger children, but this does not mean that they do not need any assistance to recover from the cumulative trauma.

### **6.2.2 Policy perspective**

South Africa sanctioned the 1951 UN Convention to the Status of Refugees thus government ought to put precautions in minimising the rapid intolerance of non-South African nationals by locals. Xenophobia also affects foreign African children, contrary to the general thought that it only happens to adult refugees (Livesey, 2006). Xenophobic-related aggression and violence directed towards refugee children is a serious threat to their emotional safety with increasing occurrence of secondary trauma and subsequently impeding growth and reintegration processes.

Re-insertion of refugees into mainstream education system had both negative and positive aspects to it. This not only increased literacy levels and enhanced self-esteem within the refugee teenagers but it was also a stressful factor given the social/ home circumstances of the refugee minors. Schools played a vital role in making referrals, as a means of integration into the South African society, as a stabilizing force in the lives of these children, a means of protection against exploitation and as a legal obligation within the South African Education policy. The participant displayed a unique ability to not only retain their home languages, but they also swiftly learnt English and the local dialects. This was interpreted to be a form of survival and coping strategies adopted which played a huge part in the participant's integration and resettlement process. Findings indicated that if given a chance to further studies, refugee children and youth are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviours.

### **6.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Firstly, this study is significant because rich meaningful data was gathered from refugee girl's narratives. Secondly, the refugee's experiences were analyzed using an adaptation of Bronfenbrenners' (1975) 2-dimensional ecological model which looked at the refugee girl holistically. Thirdly, the findings will contribute to debates on early adolescence, refugee and trauma studies, and towards improving the psychosocial aspects of unaccompanied minors. Fourthly, the study gave indications how the South African Education policy plays a crucial role in the adjustment and mental health of refugee children. Finally, the study was also able to depict the refugee youths as survivors, having undergone multiple losses, ordeals and changes

### **6.4 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR:**

#### **6.4.1 Future research on refugees**

This being among the first study of its kind to be done in Cape Town, on unaccompanied minors, its relevance is on the perceived losses experienced, stage of development, extent of social disruption and coping styles developed to adjust with the changes. The refugee youth suffered distress from emotional wounding and survivor's guilt resulting from migration experiences. By disseminating the findings of this study, it is hoped that a broader understanding of the field will be made available to social workers, policy makers and other key role players within the refugee field. I further anticipate that this will hopefully encourage further research with refugee girls within the qualitative feminist paradigm.

Refugee migration and resettlement continues to be a crucial part of South Africa's international policy with increasing number of unaccompanied children seeking refuge (UNHCR, 2006). Further research could probably study if communities, like individuals, struggle in the wake of massive migration and resettlement of refugee children.

#### **6.4.2 Social work practice**

In spite of the limitations faced, there are significant implications for applied work with refugee youth. Firstly, there seems to be an increase in the number of children ending up unaccompanied in South Africa; thus a thorough action plan needs to be put into place. The study being qualitative in nature, gives prime interest to the girl's narrations on their subjective experiences therefore providing a plausible arena for their *marginalized* voices to be heard. By looking into these narratives analytically, this study provides depth and meaning to the experiences undergone in addition to the findings being grounded on the girl's actual experiences. There is need for well co-ordinated, multi-faceted policies and programmes that address the preventative, curative and reintegration elements as pertains to refugee youth. Social work therapeutic interventions must work at cultural and psychosocial levels to re-establish more secure ground especially where there is emotional wounding and survivor's guilt. In therapy, life stories should be recorded during grief work as a way of reclaiming identities (Dennis, 2005; Clacherty et. al., 2006). Peer counselling or mentorship can be adopted as valuable means of providing survivor-friendly assistance towards social integration.

The Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Regulations Act was accepted as cornerstone documents by South Africa in addressing protection of refugees within its borders. Governmental and non-governmental organizations working with refugee children should note that satisfactory reorganization of one's life in refuge is not a guaranteed outcome. Thus, extra social and professional support should be made available and accessible to the refugee to assist them construct a healthy balance, whilst simultaneously developing a symbolic connection with all previous losses and creating other forms of connections in the new environment. The policies lobbied for should focus on addressing refugee children as a unique entity and in need of special protection due to the risks they have been exposed to.

Training on policies, awareness of the impact of human rights violations and psychosocial needs of the refugee survivors and the appropriate procedures and practices for respecting and protecting the rights of the children and youth ought to be organized and integrated into studies

and in-house training for social workers and other key stakeholders in the refugee arena. The legal state of affairs of the unaccompanied minor needs to be addressed comprehensively and frameworks established to fully assist them. Currently there is a lack of clear-cut procedures as to who needs to take responsibility of what and when, pertaining to the unaccompanied refugee minor. The procedures formulated should also include measures to be taken should the unaccompanied minors' asylum-seeker's application be rejected.

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter looked at recommendations and conclusions of the study. Refugee minors' limited capacity to protect and lobby for themselves always means that considerations of age, capacity and trauma experienced can only suggest stronger rights for protection, never weaker. We all need to take an active role in moulding the children of today because when they continue to suffer; we fail to honour our obligations towards these children and to meet their developmental aspirations. An ideal world fit for children is one which all children are protected.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW WITH REFUGEE TEENAGE GIRLS

#### Questions for discussion

1. Tell me how you came to South Africa.
2. How did you end up arriving here alone?
3. What are some of the reasons that made you leave home?
4. What made you choose to come to South Africa and not go to another country?
5. Are there any differences between your country and South Africa?  
How do people refer to you when they find out that you are from another country?
6. Can you share with me some of the experiences that you have gone through from the time you left home until now?
7. Have encountered any problems since arriving in South Africa?  
If yes, can you please give examples? Who helped you cope? How?
8. Have you attended school or any form of training since arriving in South Africa?  
What were your experiences like?
9. How do you spend your free time?
10. Do you take part in extra-curriculum activities or in any community organized events?
11. Do you watch tv or listen to radio or read newspapers? If yes, how you think the media portrays refugees or people from other countries?
12. What experiences have you had once people found out that you are a refugee?
13. Do you miss your home country? (Explore). Would you like to go back home?
14. Do you find that there are many changes and adjustments in your life? How have you been able to deal with them?
15. How do you normally cope with changes in your life generally?
16. Have you been able to share your feelings with others, in terms of what you have gone through? What made it easy/ difficult?
17. What plans or dreams do you have for your future?

#### Reflection:

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW WITH REFUGEE ATTORNEY

#### Questions for discussion

1. Can you briefly describe your job for me?  
How long have you been working in this area?
2. What are some aspects of your job that you enjoy?
3. Can you share with me some challenges you have faced whilst working with teenage refugee children.
4. From your experience, what are some of the challenges that these children' adolescents face?
5. In what ways have you been able to assist them cope and adjust in Cape Town?
6. What legal frameworks ought to be put in place to ensure better services in the future, for this population group?

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Ajwang' Warria.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW WITH SOCIAL WORKER IN REFUGEE ORGANIZATION

#### Questions for discussion

1. Can you briefly describe your job for me?  
How long have you been working in this area?
2. What are some aspects of your job that you enjoy?
3. Can you share with me some challenges you have faced whilst working with teenage refugee children.
4. From your experience, what are some of the challenges that these children' adolescents face?
5. In what ways have you been able to assist them cope and adjust in Cape Town?
6. What legal frameworks ought to be put in place to ensure better services in the future, for this population group?

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Ajwang' Warria.

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR OF REFUGEE ORGANIZATION & REFUGEE OFFICER

#### Questions for discussion

1. Can you briefly describe what your organization does?  
How long have you been in operation?  
What age groups do you work with?
2. What challenges have been reported to be affecting refugee adolescents, between ages 15-17?
3. How has your organization been instrumental in assisting unaccompanied teenage refugee girls cope and adjust in Cape Town?
4. What difficulties have you experienced, as an organization, working with unaccompanied refugee children?
5. What recommendations would you give to ensure better services in the future, for this population group?

Thank you for participating in this research study.

Ajwang' Warria.

**APPENDIX E****PARTICIPANTS PROFILE SHEET**

Names:.....Nickname:.....

Date of Birth:.....Age.....

Month &amp; Year of arrival in South Africa.....Cape Town.....

Home Language(s):.....

Nationality:.....

Legal Status:.....

Thank –you!

**Ajwang' Warri.**

University of Cape Town

## APPENDIX F

### RESEARCH CONSENT LETTER

#### **RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CTCR/ ONS PLEK/ ALE'S HOUSE**

This letter is a follow up to our telephonic conversation, requesting consent in the Masters research study that I'm currently undertaking. All ethical procedures with regard to doing research with children will be adhered to at all times.

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of unaccompanied teenage refugee girls in Cape Town, and how they are coping with these changed circumstances. The duration of the study may vary though data collection is bound to take 2-3 days (the proposed month being May/ June 2007). The researcher would like to interview 10 participants, ranging from the age of 15-17 years, who arrived in Cape Town unaccompanied, within the past 2-3 years. The participants will be interviewed individually, with the interview duration being approximately 45-60 minutes. The research questions to be posed in the sessions have been attached. As the minors have been registered with your organization, I would like to request assistance in requesting them to participate in this research study.

The information collected will be used to determine the coping and adjustment mechanisms adopted by the girls. This would in turn provide the social workers and those working with refugee children with the knowledge around when and how to intervene and which interventions would be appropriate with this age group. We are hoping that participating in this study may benefit the child, as they will be allowed to share their experiences, which could subsequently assist them develop further.

In addition, recommendations from key role players will go a long way in lobbying for this vulnerable population. Would it be possible to interview a social worker from your organization? The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. The questions for discussion have also been attached. The completed research will be made accessible to the various governmental and non-governmental organizations working with refugee children with recommendations to assist this population group. It is important to stress that the research report and publication(s) will strive to conceal the identity of the participants and keep them confidential at all times.

Participation in the research study is voluntary for the children and key role players involved, and the individual may withdraw from the study at any one time. Debriefing sessions will be available after the interviews; should a situation arise whereby the participant needs further counselling/ intervention, this will be arranged. Should you have further questions, the researcher may be contacted on 072 930 0640 (cell) or emailed at [ajwarria@yahoo.com](mailto:ajwarria@yahoo.com) or [awarria@hotmail.com](mailto:awarria@hotmail.com). The research will be supervised by a senior lecturer from the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours Faithfully,

Ajwang' Warria

## APPENDIX G

### RESEARCH ASSENT FORM

From a social work perspective, I would like to learn more about the experiences of unaccompanied teenage refugee girls. In order for this to happen, I am asking you and other children with similar experiences to take part in this study. The results of the study will help social workers better understand and help children like you in the future.

I will come to Ale's House and ask you several questions related to your experiences. The information collected from you will be kept safely and will only be accessible to me. Once I complete the study, the audio tapes where the interviews were recorded will be destroyed. When I write up the study, I will not use your name.

Before you decide to take part in this study and or once the interview has come to an end, I will answer any questions that you may have. If you have any issues arising from the interview, you can also talk to your social worker/ counsellor. You do not have to take part in this study; it is ok to say no. If you decide to take part in this study, you can still change you mind at any time, and stop being a part of it.

You will be given a copy of this to keep for yourself.

If you decide to be in this study, please sign your name below.

.....	.....	.....
Names/ Signature of participant	Age	Date

.....	.....	.....
Names of person obtaining assent	Signature	Date

## APPENDIX II

## (i) FEELING FACES



Aggressive



Anxious



Bored



Cautious



Cold



Concentrating



Confident



Curious



Determined



Ecstatic



Enraged



Exhausted



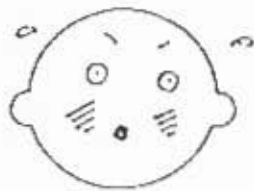
Frightened



Frustrated



Happy



Hot



Hungover



Indifferent



Interested



Lonely



Meditative



Mischievous



Negative



Optimistic



Relieved



Sad



Sheepish



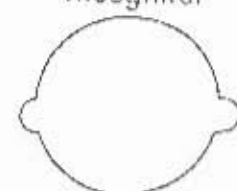
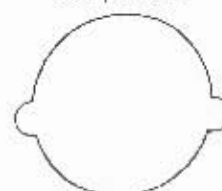
Surprised



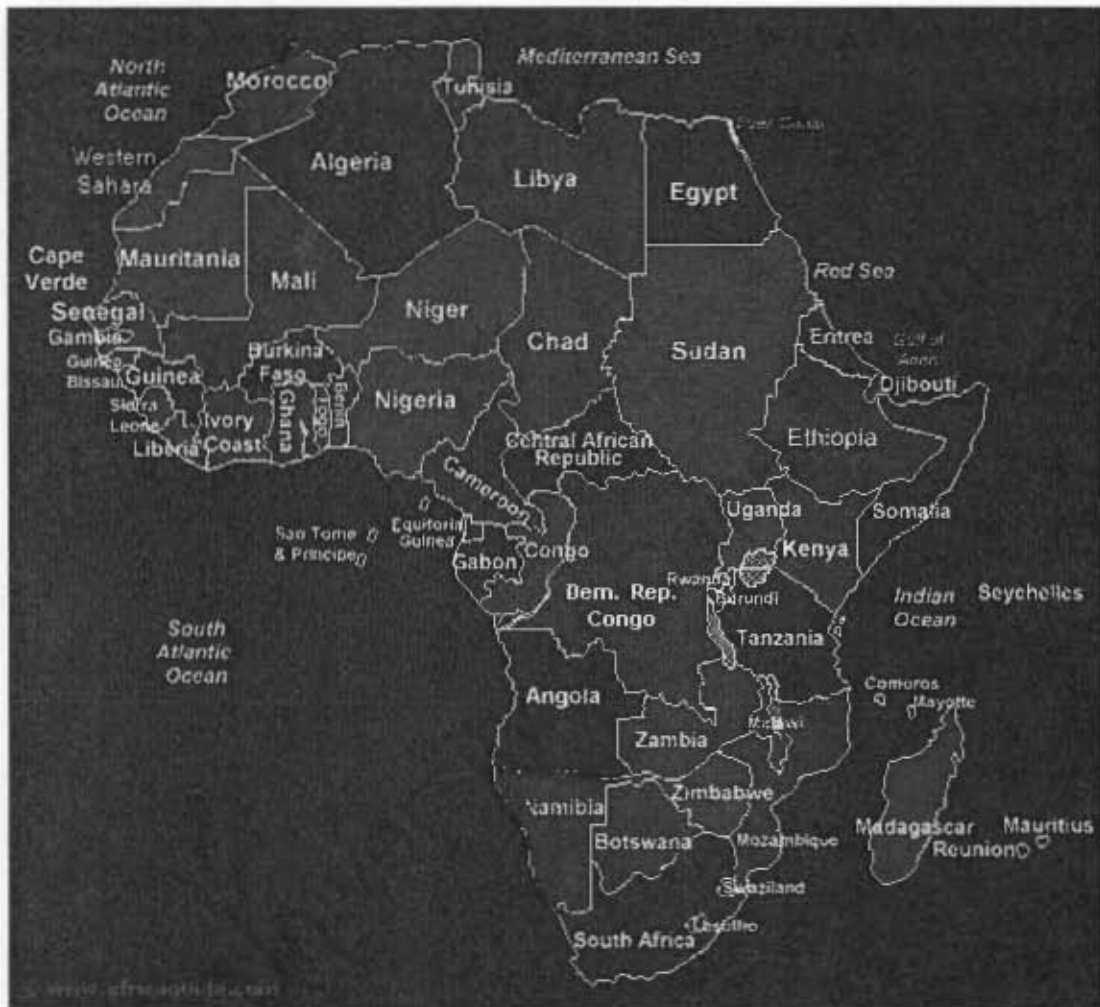
Suspicious



Thoughtful



## (ii) MAP OF AFRICA



## APPENDIX I

## EMAILED INTERVIEW (ROLE PLAYER-REFUGEE ATTORNEY)

**Date:** Mon, 19 Nov 2007 17:12:58 +0200

**From:** "Justin De Jager" <justin.dejager@uct.ac.za>

**To:** "Ajwang Warmā" <ajwarmā@yahoo.com>

**Subject:** Re: Masters Thesis

Hi,  
Here are my responses to your questions as requested:-

**Can you briefly describe your job for me? How long have you been working in this area? -**  
I am a candidate attorney working at the UCT Law Clinic in the Refugee Rights Project department. I have been working in the Refugee Law field, first as a volunteer and now in a professional capacity, since 2005.

**What are some aspects of your job that you enjoy? -** I find my work extremely rewarding. In particular, my work in assisting detained Refugees and Asylum Seekers leaves me with a sense of fighting for the individual's rights.

**Can you share with me some challenges you have faced whilst working with teenage refugee children -** Children are a particularly vulnerable segment of the population and this is even more true when it comes to Refugees. Finding social support for these children is often challenging as there are very little operating procedures in place at present.

**From your experience, what are some of the challenges that these children's adolescents face? -** Refer to the booklet that I handed you.

**In what ways have you been able to assist them cope and adjust in Cape Town? -** We operate as the legal implementing partners of the UNHCR. We therefore work closely with the Cape Town Refugee Center who are the social implementing partners. We assist refugee and asylum seeker children to navigate the Refugee Process and the broader legal framework as it pertains to children. In regards to social integration we will refer the child to our social implementing partner to assist.

**What legal frameworks ought to be put in place to ensure better services in the future, for this population group?** - We have attempted to formulate standard operating procedures for dealing with unaccompanied minors. We have recently conducted a series of workshops to educate social workers about the treatment of refugee and asylum seeker children who arrive in South Africa without any guardian or other support. Ideally, a regulation to the Refugees Act should be passed which deals with these aspects in a structured way, while taking cognisance of the common law and statutory law which pertains to children.

Good luck with your thesis.

Regards,

Justin de Jager  
Candidate Attorney  
UCT Law Clinic  
Refugee Rights Project  
Tel: 021 650 3775  
Fax: 021 650 5665

University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX J****Hopelessness Scale for Children** (Source: Kadzin, 1983)

1. **True/ False:** I want to grow up because I think things will be better.
2. **True/ False:** I might as well give up because I can't make things better for myself.
3. **True/ False:** When things are going badly, I know they won't be as bad all the time.
4. **True/ False:** I can imagine what my life will be like when I'm grown up.
5. **True/ False:** I have enough time to finish the things I really want to do.
6. **True/ False:** Some day I will be really good at doing the things I really care about.

## APPENDIX K

### TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW (REFUGEE TEENAGE GIRL)

A: Hallo Thandeka!

T: Hallo Ajwang'

A How are you?

T: I'm fine thank you and you?

A: I'm fine. I would like to say thank you once more for agreeing to be a part of this study. I am currently doing a research on children who are refugees in South Africa and who came into the country alone or were abandoned in Cape Town by the people or person that they came with. I'm interested in learning more about your experiences as a young refugee woman in Cape Town, so that as social workers we can know how best to help girls like you in the future. What I'll do with the information I collect today is that I'll put it together for this project. The information will be recorded here (pointing towards the tape recorder) so that I can be able to go through it later and not miss out on anything you have said. I'll last be taking down notes. Later, I'll write up the whole discussion that we have had today and once I've completed this study, I will destroy the tape. No one will have access to at any one time apart from me. Confidentiality will be ensured meaning that the tapes and written material will be kept away from other people. At the end, the report will be available to social work organizations that work with refugees. You can choose to use your real name or a nick name or a fake name. Are you fine using your name?

T: You can use Thandeka.

A: Ok. The interview will last about 45 minutes and I will ask you several questions about your experiences. You are free to stop me and ask me to repeat or clarify the question if you don't understand. If during the interview you feel that you do not feel comfortable continuing with it, just let me know and we'll end the interview there, Nothing bad will happen to you. After we've finished, you are free to ask me any questions about this research. Also if you feel like you need to talk to a social worker further let me know and I will organize for it. Do you have any questions so far?

T: No.

A: If you don't have any questions and you have agreed with all I have told you so far I'd like for you to sign this form for me, indicating that you have agreed to take part in this research.

T: Ok. (signs assent form)

A: Next can you please help me fill this in (participants profile sheet)

Thank you. I'll begin our discussion there. Can you please tell me how you came to South Africa?

T: Like what? Like what kind of transport did I use?

A: Yes.

T: I came first in Namibia I came in a taxi, those "iveko" taxis and then in Windhoek I took a truck (interruption)

A: So you took a taxi until Windhoek then a truck?

T: Yes, I took a taxi until Windhoek then a truck to Uppington

A: Were you alone or with somebody?

T: I was with the person that I came with, my father's friend.

A: And where is that person now?

T: I don't know where that person is, but that person was willing to go to George

A: Ok...you got to Uppington, South Africa...but how did you end up at Ons Plek in Cape Town?

T: It's because that person left me in the streets and he told me that he was gonna come back that he's just gone to sell some clothes and then he said that I must go and stay by his friends for just a moment and he's coming back but till that day he's never come back again. So I stay there for 5 6 months then that guy said that he'd better take me to the children's centre because even he can support me for food and clothes and everything he can't support me for school and stuff and by the way school is what I came for in South Africa and so that's why I end up being here at Ons Plek because he took me there.

A: So you came to South Africa because you wanted to go to school?

T: Yes

A: Ok...and why South Africa? Why did not you go to any other country? Why not Namibia or Angola?

T: Because...the reason why I come to South Africa was because it was a country where my father came first to check up so he thought this was the right country, the right place for me to go to school

A: If you can remember, can you think of the things that are different between your country and South Africa.?

T: The things...is that here in South Africa it's the same dangerous it's here and it's also dangerous there but it's the quality of the schools, the life and stuff they are abit different because there some of the school they can't afford the things that schools

here in South Africa can afford. Here in South Africa schools is in higher level, they have everything almost. They give you good education even there you can get good education but not the same as in South Africa. So that's my father thought I should come here in South Africa.

A: Any other differences between the 2 countries apart from schools and education?

T: Like how?

A: Language perhaps?

T: Yeah, language are different, but there is also some of the people few people learnt English from here and they also speak it, but there is a difference.

A: and when when people find out that you're from Congo, that you're not South African, what do they call you?

T: It was long time long time that they call me "kwerekwere" when they find out that I can speak Xhosa or English properly then they called us that...these are foreigners from that country and they call us names but now everybody that I tell I'm from that side they don't believe...call me that anymore.

A: So if you speak English and Xhosa they don't call you that?

T: but some of them find out that I am not South African because even though I speak their languages it's not strong ??? it still sounds like not South African, then they ask me why is your language like this...you feel like you're somebody from elsewhere, maybe you're another culture not South African

A: Apart from calling you "makwerekwere" do they also treat you differently?

T: Actually, some of them, not all of them, like they treat me very differently if it's playing with them I can play with them and some of them they ask me to teach them the things that I was doing that side or how we play that side, things like that...but actually they don't treat me very differently say not going to play with this child. To me they never done that, but yes to some of my friends.

A: Can you share with me some other things that you have gone through from the time you left home till now? The good and or bad things that have happened in your life.

T: I have good things and bad things that have happened in my life. The good thing was that my father and step mother were supporting me nicely.

A: There?

T: yes, in Angola before I came here also my mother was supporting me finely because my father was not there, my father was always traveling in every province,

like everywhere and then I was staying with my mother and my sister but though my mother was ??? and giving us everything. The bad thing that happened to me was that when my father and mother break...broke up and then my mother was left there in Congo...and then for a long time I didn't know where is my mother and then we don't have a contact...after I heard somebody say that my mother came to look for us but it was left that home.

A: Sorry...and how was it traveling from Congo to Namibia to Angola then finally to South Africa?

T: It was not so nicely because...because some of the places that we don't know...not used to those stuff that they are doing or maybe we go to places we don't have know like their conditions of living then we need to go back to places to people things like that, so it was not so nice (shaking her head)

A: And it wasn't easy...

T: It wasn't easy because going to different places al the time

A: And also because you didn't know for how long you'd be there for...

T: Yes, yes...then the other thing is that you have to learn the language so that you can have contact with the people and everywhere you go people ask you where you from and things like that...it wasn't easy.

A: Sorry to hear that. Have you heard any problems since you arrived in South Africa?

T: Problems?

A: Apart from that person leaving you with the other person that you didn't know.

T: With a person?

A: Any issues you've had since your arrival

T: My problems... I had a problem with that guy that left me because that guy it was...he wanted me to be his wife but he did not wanna tell me but the way he was doing things it was like he wanted me to be his wife not actually he was telling me

A: So that's the only problem you've had?

T: No it wasn't the only one...it was sometimes the problems in the house of that person that I was living with, his wife and children and so maybe the problem with the children...perhaps sometimes I don't want to do for her children like the stuff for them...maybe wash them and do things like that...but small problems in the house.

A: and how did you cope with some of these problems?

T: Cope?

A: Yes, how did you deal with some of these problems?

T: I don't know how to say that but every time I have a problem with a person maybe we can be angry now and then we're back that moment we get it right with the person

A: How do you get it right with the person?

T: I think me I'm the person like if I've done something wrong to you or you've done something wrong to me and then I'm cross with you but if maybe you're just gonna come and tell me one thing or a word ten my heart is then going to like cool down then I can talk to you again.

A: so one way in which you cope with your feelings is to talk about them

T: Like I talk about them to a person, yeah yeah I express my feeling to that person.

A: And do you also talk to other people?

T: To other people like how?

A: Like your friends, teachers...

T: Yeah, I do explain...talk to them sometimes if I feel like explaining to them.

A: Ok...now you're attending school?

T: Yeah

A: What's the name of your school?

T: Koeberg Primary

A: And you're in what grade?

T: Grade 7

A: How do you find school? Are you enjoying it?

T: School is as usual...its school...it's hard sometimes...it's easy sometimes...having to cope

A: and how are you coping with school?

T: The way I cope with school is when it's...something is hard for me then I like I don't like to be comfortable I don't like...I have like...I try hard to understand something that's hard for me.

A: If somebody was to ask "Thandeka how's school? Are you enjoying school?" How would you reply the person?

T: Sometime I enjoy school...actually I enjoy school especially when I have done all my home work and I know that my books are clean...everything is ready for school then I know that I'm enjoying school. If I know that my homework is not done then I don't know what to do then I feel like not going to school I feel like just staying at

home from school...because I know Miss is gonna ask me where's your homework and things like that, but I enjoy school.

A: Do you have lots of friend sat school?

T: No...not so many...but few, I know then we used to talk...we're not close friends.

A: so you generally get along well with people at school?

T: Yes.

A: Have you ever been bullied in school?

T: Being bullied like being beaten up by somebody?

A: Yes, but also having someone swear at you or call you bad names

T: yeah, yeah, yeah, actually that's something that always happens at school...you know those rude children and also to other children.

A: How do you spend your free time?

T: My free time... I spend it having fun with my friends, visiting my sister, playing, dancing and if I don't have something to do then O just sit and read or think of things that happened or I was doing long time ago.

A: Foe example?

T: say things that I still wanna do

A: At school do you take part in like activities like sports, or drama or music?

T: But I was taking part but now in Koeberg Primary sports and things like that like soccer and those kind of things...there a kind of age...it depends on the ages. Like you don't go...you don't go to sports anyhow like that anywhere you want to must be under age or above age...it's more about your age.

A: and what about dram and music?

T: We do drama and music when its activity like when its arts and culture or in oral.

A: Do you watch tv?

T: Yeah

A: Do you listen to radio?

T: Yeah

A: Do you read newspapers and magazines?

T: Yes, actually I don't like reading newspapers but I like looking at magazines, but not reading...I used to read but rarely not every time.

A: When you're watching tv and they show people from other countries, how do they show them?

T: Some of the programmes or maybe the news they used to show people from other countries like suffering or maybe they used to show people from other countries come here to commit crime, fighting but not like fighting fighting but like in wars things like that so I think it wasn't nicely.

A: Have you ever seen when they have shown then nicely?

T: Nicely? Not really.

A: Do you miss your country?

T: Yeah, I used to miss my country sometimes but sometimes I don't know actually know my country because I have been to so many places

A: Would you like to go back one day?

T: Yeah, I would like to go back one day and visit but I don't think I want to go and stay there.

A: Because...

T: Because I am now used to being here in South Africa. I'm used to the things here.

A: Like...

T: the language, food, school. I think it's going to be difficult from there. So I don't think like I have feelings of wanting to go and stay in my country home country but I accept that it's my country. I'd like to visit one day.

A: Ok...you have mentioned that there are a lot of things that have happened in your life since you left Congo...how have you been able to deal with these changes? a

T: Dealing with the stuff...when I deal with the maybe if I don't know the language then I just keep quiet or maybe if I have a problem with somebody then I just watch it and keep quiet.

A: So at times you talk about them with the person but at times you keep quiet and hope that the problem will go away?

T: No, I mean like if I had a problem with somebody most of the time I don't go and sit down and talk to that person I will maybe go and explain to another person maybe that person will give me advice, tell me do this, do that...

A: And for the change taking place n your life now?

T: At times I think that that's just part of life and I think that it's not only happening to me and that maybe it's also happening to other people. So I have to deal with it.

A: Do you talk to a counselor/ social worker about your issues or whenever you feel like talking about the changes happening in your life?

T: sometimes no...probably no...because when I have a problem or maybe there's something that has changed to me like I don't get that mind that I must go maybe speak to my life story person unless she calls me and asks me the questions, but just to come out, come up with something is very hard...it's not that I don't want to tell the social worker but I can't tell if she asks me but for me to just express it for myself even if I find it difficult myself.

A: For example...have you been able to talk about your feelings, thoughts and what you went through since you left Congo until now. Have you been able to talk to someone?

T: No.

A: You haven't?

A: Like talk to somebody just sit and say this is what happened . yeah, I did do talk about it sometimes with my sister.

T: Anybody else

A: No.

T: With my sister yes because at times she used to remind me when we speak like maybe we're just talking then I remind her or she reminds me...remember that thing!

A: so you traveled to South Africa with your sister?

T: No

A: What has made it easy for you to talk about some of the things you've mentioned?

T: What has made it easy is that it was difficult for me...to talk about everything but no I don't think...

A: What made it difficult for you?

T: It's because sometimes I used to feel embarrassed or shame and that maybe it's only happening to me...nobody else so it was difficult for me to express it out so...I feel like when I tell somebody then that somebody will look badly at me then think a lot of things about me like about my family but now I realize that it's not only me it's a lot of people also and people can understand me so that's easy for me to talk about it.

A: If somebody came to you and said "Thandeka, you've got 3 wishes" what would those 3 wishes be?

T: Wishes?... the first wish will be I'd like to find my mother to see her again and I don't even know if I can remember her but I think God will help me and the second wish is that I would like to be patient with my school work and not be like any person

out there not finishing school leaving school in the middle and doing nothing in the streets

A: So you'd like to finish school and

T: and the third thing is that I'd like to be a normal person I mean like a person who works for herself, do things for herself and a person who's capable of everything that

*Ruzany* <sup>need in</sup>  
I nee din life.

A: Thandeka, anything is possible! I wish you all the best in your life and as you pursue your dreams. I'd like to say a big thank-you for taking your time and having this discussion with me.

University of Cape Town