
Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of research and rise in public awareness highlight multiple risks to separated children who seek asylum in the UK. Concerns usually revolve around their past trauma experiences, which are deemed to increase vulnerability. More recently post-migration stresses have been highlighted to negatively impact on wellbeing. Concerns about how to protect separated young people from further trauma within hostile asylum processes have been raised. Legal and healthcare professionals in particular have expressed concerns about the process of age assessments and their impact on young people trying to settle in the UK. This study aimed to qualitatively explore separated young people's experiences of undergoing an age assessment. Participant perspectives on the age assessment processes, outcomes and impacts on their lives were sought. Findings are presented from interviews with seven male young people who experienced age assessments when they first arrived in the UK. Qualitative findings based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis revealed three broad themes; 'Confusion', 'Power' and 'Consequences'. Participants' experiences of 'confusion' was influenced by unfamiliarity of language and customs, but also by a lack of transparency and communication about the age assessment process. Misunderstandings and cultural differences in the conception of age further confused and unsettled the young people. Mutual misunderstandings between the assessors and young people, confusion and lack of power over the process led to the participants feeling categorically disbelieved, judged, dehumanised and interrogated. Participants' accounts offered an insight into the wide-reaching consequences on young people's psychosocial wellbeing, their development and relationships with their past, present and future. Attention was paid to multiple layers of contexts involved in the age assessment process. Participants' experiences and their perspectives are utilised to outline implications for future research and practice.

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1. CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chapter Summary

This chapter gives an overview of current research with separated young people seeking asylum and outlines the study rationale. An overview of terms, statistics, policies and processes is provided. After outlining the current state of research with refugees, the focus turns to separated young people's post-migration experiences. Dominant themes of vulnerability and resilience are explored, before the introduction of more contextual approaches to understanding developmental and psychosocial needs. It will be argued that to improve our psychological knowledge of young asylum-seeking people's needs and clinical practice, an exploration of how young people make sense of their experiences of post-migration processes is necessary. A rationale for this study's focus on age assessments is provided. Research aims and questions are delineated to conclude.

1.2. History of Children Seeking Safety in the UK

Young people seeking refuge in the UK from war or persecutions is not a new phenomenon (Kohli, 2011; Mitchell, 2008). In this country, we are especially aware of stories of parents handing over their children to strangers before World War II, when 10,000 Jewish children were sent to the UK to escape the Nazi regime across Europe (Harris & Oppenheimer, 2001). Stories about the 'Kindertransport' children have been depicted in films, plays and books (e.g. Samuels, 2009; Sebald, 2001).

Separated young asylum seekers in Western Europe and the UK today often navigate long, dangerous journeys, suffer protracted stays in adverse conditions in other countries and endure many uncertainties about their family's whereabouts and their own welfare in their prospective host countries (Wade, 2011).

There has been growing public awareness of the risks to children and young people who seek asylum alone. However, the concerns and initiatives raised by organisations and public figures did not hinder the government's 2015 change in regulations, leading to a further reduction of support for children. Child poverty and destitution is on the increase in the UK, specifically for separated children and young people who seek asylum (Pinter, 2010; The Childrens Society, 2015).

1.3. The Current Situation of Refugee and Asylum-Seeking People

A consistent rise in forced human displacement has been recorded since the 1990s. By the end of 2016, there were 65.6 million displaced people in the world, the highest number recorded ([UNHCR], 2017). Driven by ongoing conflicts, an increase of people fleeing was recorded specifically between 2013 and 2015. At the time of writing, there were more than 38 ongoing highly violent and armed conflicts in the world (Heidelberg Institute for Interactional Conflict Research, 2017). In 2016, there were 22.5 million refugee people, 40.3 million internally displaced and 2.8 million asylum-seeking people, of which 51% were children (UNHCR, 2017).

Asylum claims in the UK have decreased from approximately 11% of asylum applications made in the EU (plus Norway and Switzerland) in 2008 to 3% in 2015 (Refugee Council 2017). In March 2017, a total of 28,891 asylum applications meant a decrease of 17% compared to 2016. However, 3,680 of all independent applications were made by children who arrived in the UK alone, which is a 9% increase on the previous year (Home Office, 2017). Asylum applications made by separated young people make up just above 8% of all individual applications (Refugee Council, 2018). A decline in numbers of separated young people reaching the UK was recorded for the year 2017. Young males accounted for 89% of separated young applicants (Refugee Council, 2018).

The increase of people seeking safety in the EU and the stories of the 'Refugee Crisis' in 2015 have given rise to discussions about political and legal landscapes impacting on the wellbeing of people seeking safety in Europe. Specific concerns about children and young people seeking asylum revolve

around their early experiences of traumatic events, which, combined with their age, deem them to be more vulnerable to further harm during their journeys (e.g. Gandham, Gunasekera, Isaacs, Maycock, & Britton, 2017; van Os, Kalverboer, Zijlstra, Post, & Knorth, 2016). However, psychologists working with asylum-seeking and refugee people of all ages, including children, have raised concerns about the likely harm caused by post-migration processes (BPS, 2018; Bowley & Bashir, 2015; Robjant, 2017), specifically the stress of navigating the asylum system (Byrne, 2017; Crawley, 2010; Halvorsen, 2005).

Whilst around 40% of all separated children were granted refugee status in 2016 (Refugee Council, 2017), just over 3% were granted humanitarian protection and around 15% were refused any form of protection. Around 42% were granted 'UASC [unaccompanied asylum-seeking child] leave', a category of discretionary leave, introduced in 2013, which is granted for up to 30 months where an asylum claim is rejected. 'UASC leave' is granted based on the applicant's child status, however, reapplication is necessary at the age of 17½ (Refugee Council, 2017). Some asylum applications were refused because a young person is assessed to be over 18 (Home Office, 2017).

In the context of escalating conflicts and pressure for tighter border controls for European countries, how to best protect refugee young people is an ongoing concern for those supporting them. Lawyers, psychologists, social workers and health care professionals have raised concerns about the age assessment process (BPS, 2018; Busler, 2016; Cemlyn & Nye, 2012; Newbiggin & Thomas, 2011; Silverman, 2016). This study responds to calls to explore the impact of age assessments in the UK (Crawley, 2007; Crawley, 2012; Gower, 2011).

1.4. Terms and Definitions

1.4.1. Children and Young People

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) a child is defined as any human being under the age of 18, "unless under the applicable law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".

In the UK "anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday" is a child. When someone's age is in doubt, "they must be treated as a child unless, and until, a

case-law compliant age assessment shows the person to be adult” (Department of Education, 2017, p.5).

1.4.2. Refugees

International law defines a refugee as a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or (...) unwilling to return to it” (United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees, 1951, Article 1; UNHCR, 2007). In the UK, refugee is the term used for those who have been granted asylum by the Home Office.

1.4.3. Separated Children and Young People Seeking Asylum

The term ‘unaccompanied asylum-seeking child’ (UASC) describes children and young people under the age of 18 who arrive in a host country alone and make an independent asylum claim (UNHCR, 1994, p. 121). A separated child is defined as “a person under 18 years of age who is outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver” (SCEP, 2009, p. 9). Although ‘UASC’ is commonly used in policy and research, the terms ‘unaccompanied’ and ‘separated’ are often used interchangeably.

Organisations like the Separated Children and Europe Programme prefer the term ‘separated’ as an apt definition of the crucial problem for these children (SCEP, 2009). The emphasis on separation moves away from the discourse of needing to seek and be granted asylum to prove legitimacy (Hughes & Rees, 2016; Save the Children, 2004).

Therefore, the terms ‘separated children’ and ‘young people seeking asylum’ will be used for this research. No acronyms will be used when referring to separated children to counteract the portrayal of these young people as a homogenous group with fundamentally different needs.

1.5. Legislation, Policies and their Implications

The United Nations state that separated young people seeking asylum should enjoy the same rights to care and protection as children of the host country (UN,

1989; 2010). In the UK, support for children who are in need or require protection is determined under the Children Act (1989). A separated child should automatically be considered under the Children Act (1989) and their care transferred to their local authority's children services (Wade, 2011). Local authority duties under the Children Act (1989) include supporting 'children in need' (Section 17), providing accommodation in specified circumstances (Section 20) and acting when a separated child needs protection (Section 31). Most separated young people should fall within the remit of Section 20, as they meet the criteria for 'looked after children' and for receiving ongoing financial support and housing. Nevertheless, many separated young people are considered 'children in need' and provided accommodation under the less supportive Section 17 (Newbigging & Thomas, 2011).

The decision of whether a young person is formally looked after under Section 20 is often based on age. Initial foster or residential placements under Section 20 are mainly used for younger children, and those 16 and older are often provided with supported or semi-independent housing under Section 17 (Barrie & Mendes, 2011; Wade, 2011). Local authorities receive higher grants for children under 16. Studies have indicated that placement decisions for separated young people are resource led, not needs based (Wade, 2009).

Since the introduction of the Leaving Care Act (2000), the support for care leavers has increased for children previously accommodated and supported under Section 20. Although separated young people represent between 7% and 50% (in some London areas) of care leavers (Westwood, 2012), supporting them under Section 17 means that they are excluded from ongoing support.

For young people over 18 whose support under Section 17 lapses whilst their application for leave is pending, responsibilities for financial support transfer from social services to the UK Border Agency (UKBA). Young people face risks including return to their home country or dispersal to other parts of the UK, and further separation from support networks and education.

1.6. Age Assessments

'Age assessment' refers to the process which aims to determine the age of a person whose stated age is disputed. Disputes arise when a young person is

perceived to be lying about their age or where documents are believed to be invalid (Busler, 2016; Home Office, 2018).

Despite Article 7 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (“The child shall be registered immediately after birth”), each year an estimated 51 million births go unregistered. War and poverty mean that individuals may lose existing documentation with no access or means of replacements. Thus, many asylum-seeking people cannot evidence their age. This is particularly difficult for Afghans as no governmental structures were in place to register births during the 1980s and 1990s wars (Silverman, 2016). Ever since, live birth registrations have remained low; 6 % in 2003 (Aida, 2015).

In Europe, a range of methods are used including medical, dental and psychosocial age assessments. However, no method produces exact results (Abbing, 2011; Coghlan, 2012; Crawley, 2007). Medical methods have been deemed legally, ethically and medically controversial (Abbing, 2011; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). X-rays and dental checks are not only imprecise but come with ethical and clinical issues when applied without adult consent or clinical benefit. Questions around confidentiality arise when physicians are asked to provide opinions to legal authorities (Sauer et al., 2016). The European Academy of Paediatrics proposes that no paediatricians, or other physicians, should participate in age determination of children who state they are minors and seek asylum (Sauer et al., 2016). The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) have also warned about the inexact science of medical age assessment, especially for young people aged 15-18, with no reliable method and error margins of up to five years (RCPCH, 2016).

Questions around the legal basis of age as a distinct cut-off point to separate minors and adults also arise. Marking the age of 18 as entering adulthood was established for children growing up in Western countries. Arguably, the best interests of a young person should trump legal guidelines (Sauer et al., 2016). Calls for EU-wide best practice guidelines that reflect the interests of the young person remain unanswered (Abbing, 2011; Byrne, 2017).

1.6.1. Age Assessments in the UK

In the UK, most age disputes arise where the young person enters the country (e.g. at ports) or at Home Office screening units (Crawley, 2007). Social

services carry out age assessments on behalf of the Home Office or when doubts about age arise during their assessment of needs (Kralj & Goldberg, 2005). X-rays and other medical tests are not officially used for age determination. However, many mistakes have occurred when young people's ages were judged on appearance or behaviour shortly after arrival (Gower, 2011). The UNHCR recommends well-defined procedures to conduct safe, dignified age assessments, without violating human rights (Michie, 2005).

Recent years have seen improvements in policy and practice. The RCPCH (2016) states that any assessment of a young person should incorporate their family, social and medical history. The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017) recommends a multidisciplinary approach and warns that no single discipline has the expertise to determine age. However, the responsibility for carrying out and implementing age assessments currently lies with social workers in local authorities.

Since a High Court case involving Merton Council, courts have set out standards and minimum guidance on age assessments and what they consider to be in accordance with case law. This is often referred to as 'Merton compliant'. In accordance, best practice guidance for social workers was published (ADCS, 2015). Recommendations include that assessments should be conducted by two specially trained social workers. In the context of rising criticism, social workers are advised to focus on the wellbeing and safety of the person under assessment; their holistic needs rather than on immigration controls. Young people should be assessed in comfortable environments. Past traumatic experiences and their implications for behaviour, emotional wellbeing and memory should be considered. In 2018, the Home Office (2018) followed with guidance on policy and procedures for their staff.

1.7. Literature Review

After outlining concepts, policies and procedures, this section reviews current psychological research with refugee and asylum-seeking children. A focus will be on separated young people, their psychological and social needs and how these are currently met and understood. The process of age assessments will be a central theme and gaps in the literature will be identified.

1.7.1. Literature Search Strategy

Between September 2015 and December 2017, literature searches were conducted across EBSCO databases (Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO) and Science Direct. Search terms included variations of: asylum, refugee, unaccompanied minor, child, UASC and age assessment, age dispute, age determination. Snowball effects through reference lists were utilised to find relevant articles. See Appendix A for details on the search procedure.

1.8. Research with Refugee and Asylum-Seeking People

Most psychological research with refugee and asylum-seeking people to date has emphasised pre-migration trauma and explored vulnerability and risk factors for developing mental health¹ difficulties. More recently, recognition has been given to difficult social and political contexts in which people seek asylum. Asylum processes have been highlighted as risk factors (Eastmond & Ascher, 2011). However, the trauma discourse generally stands out in the literature.

1.8.1. A Word on Trauma Discourse

In practice and research within clinical psychology, dominant frameworks employed when working with refugee and asylum-seeking people largely condense them into the descriptions of problems related to past traumatic events or the diagnosis Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Brewin, Dagleish & Joseph, 1996; Ehlers & Clark, 2000; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, [NICE], 2005). This conceptualisation situates and accepts refugee people as generally traumatised and requiring specialised psychological and psychiatric treatments. This widely accepted way of approaching the work with refugee and asylum-seeking people has become known as the Trauma Discourse and frequently remains unquestioned within the Eurocentric context, views and values in which these concepts originated (Patel & Vara, 2012).

¹I acknowledge that 'mental health', associated 'mental health difficulties' and 'wellbeing' have not revealed a unified cross-cultural understanding or validity (Alemi, James, & Montgomery, 2016;; Morrow & Mayal, 2016)

Critical approaches have explored how past and current hardship experienced by refugee people are frequently interpreted as individual crises and classified as mental illness (Boyle, 2011; Patel, 2011). Bracken and Petty (1998) highlight that the emphasis on psychological trauma distracts from processes of social recovery. Facilitating psychological and social recovery through social security in post-war (Summerfield, 1997) and 'host' societies is costlier than individual psychological treatment (Bracken & Petty, 1998).

Applying diagnostic labels and treatments to suffering risks diverting attention from ongoing social and personal hardship (Summerfield, 1997). Diagnoses strengthen the discourse of refugees requiring mental health interventions and quell diversities and strengths amongst refugee people (Fernando, 2010). Bracken, Giller and Summerfield (1997) highlight that Western² models of trauma view individuals as capable of self-transformation independent of social context. People who grow up in regions where a more socio-centric view prevails may have interdependent beliefs of the world and self. However, Western assumptions of universal responses to trauma inform psychological approaches towards research and practices can be described as 'cultural imperialism' (Afuape, 2011, p.32). This can perpetuate "the colonial status towards the non-Western mind" (Summerfield, 1997, p. 1568).

This raises ethical questions around how psychologists have worked with and within this discourse. The focus on diagnosis to explain difficulties is very evident when reviewing the literature on refugee and asylum-seeking people.

1.8.2. Mental Health Needs of Refugee and Asylum-Seeking People

Though prevalence rates vary widely, past experiences of traumatic events are generally seen as a major risk for poorer psychological wellbeing (Bogic, Njoku, & Priebe, 2015). Risk factors for poorer mental health associated with living in high-income countries include loss of culture and connection, exposure to racism and xenophobia, lengthy asylum processes, unsuitable housing, lack of social support, and lack of access to health and legal aid (Masocha & Simpson, 2011; Quinn, 2013; Chakraborty, 2013). Uncertainty regarding legal status, possibility of detention and forced return, and acculturation to a new country

² For this study, 'Western' refers to viewpoints that have emerged in Western contexts. I acknowledge the term 'Non-Western' risks positioning "Western" as the norm and thus aim to avoid it where possible.

and language have also been linked to increased distress, anxiety, depression and self-harm and suicidality after migration (Carswell, Blackburn, & Barker, 2011; Li, Liddell, & Nickerson, 2016; Robjant, Hassan & Katona, 2009).

The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2015) has called for meeting the needs of refugees at a planning level so that responses are psychologically informed. They have repeatedly called for holistic, multidisciplinary and psychosocial approaches to assessment of asylum-seeking people's needs by professionals, including psychologists, from the NHS, social services and immigration authorities to ensure adequate care for those in need (BPS, 2017).

Contextual factors, such as the impact of lengthy asylum application processes and detention (Robjant et al., 2009), distressing and unwelcoming experiences of the 'culture of disbelief' (e.g. Crawley, 2007; Woolley, 2017) or direct and institutional racism (e.g. de Antiss, Ziaian, Procter, Warland & Baghurst, 2009; Fernando, 2010) are increasingly recognised (e.g. BPS, 2018). However, this widens the gap between policy and practice guidance and every-day practice for psychologists as the 'trauma discourse' continues to predominate in psychological approaches.

1.8.3. Focus on Children

High prevalence rates of emotional and behavioural problems amongst refugee children compared to children born in host countries is a well-documented concern (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008; Lustig et al., 2004). Research focused on children is also predominantly rooted in the trauma discourse.

It is thought that a large number of children from refugee backgrounds are at risk of developing PTSD (Gandham et al., 2017). Precarious journeys to safety are recognised to be major contributors to trauma reactions and coping difficulties upon arrival (Dura-Vila, Klasen, Makatini, Rahimi, & Hodes, 2012; McKenzie, 2012). When systematically consolidating research with refugee children, Bronstein and Montgomery (2011) concluded that ongoing psychological and behavioural problems were influenced by age, gender, origin, experiences of violence, separation from families as well as post-migration stresses and support available to the young people. Depression experienced by children was specifically linked to ongoing uncertainties around their asylum status (Heptinstall, Sethna, & Taylor, 2004;). Further risk factors included

problematic living conditions, no access to education, parental illness, social exclusion and hostility from host societies (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012).

1.9. Separated Young People

Separated children and young people are understood to be specifically at risk of developing emotional and behavioural difficulties (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007) as many of the risk factors and social disadvantages listed above apply to them. The dominant discourse of separated children's traumatic experiences and heightened vulnerability is sometimes responded to with an alternative, increasingly influential perspective; resilience. However, the division of being either resilient or vulnerable has been challenged (Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). Taking into consideration the complexity of experiences, past and present, contextual approaches to understanding a child's situation, including their emotional and social wellbeing, have also been proposed.

1.9.1. Risk-Related Perspectives

This section gives an overview of perspectives, theories and research which aim to determine and respond to the risk and vulnerability factors associated with separated young people's development of psychological distress.

1.9.1.1. Dose-Response Theory

Separated children have been found to have experienced twice as many traumatic life events and to be at higher risk for developing symptoms of PTSD and depression compared to asylum-seeking children who fled with their families (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert, & Spinhoven, 2007; Jensen, Fjermestad, Granly, & Wilhelmsen, 2015; Vervliet, Lammertyn, Broekart & Derluyn, 2014). Such findings support a theory of dose-response relationships between traumatic events and symptom severity.

1.9.1.2. Age: Being younger at the time of migration and separation from families was found to increase vulnerability for emotional problems further (Sourander, 1998). Commonly, decisions to leave at a young age seem to be influenced by political instability, poverty, death or imprisonment of family

members and exposure to violence (Vervliet et al., 2014). These are factors also known to increase the risks of longstanding distress (Hopkins & Hill, 2010).

1.9.1.3. Acculturation Stress: A growing body of evidence demonstrates associations between stress around acculturation (Berry, 1997) and mental health problems in young people (Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Studies have begun to challenge the notion of the traumatic event dose-response theory serving as sole predictor for ongoing psychological distress (Eastmond & Ascher, 2011).

Many separated children have grown up in communities where the self is defined in relation to their families or wider communities (Bracken, Giller, & Summerfield, 1997; Chase, Knight, & Statham, 2008). Loss of links to families, language, role and culture and restrictions during the asylum process may all lead to a reduction in agency and diminish the ability to acculturate to new countries (Bowley & Bashir, 2015).

1.9.1.4. Early Intervention: Most studies on young people's responses to trauma emphasise the importance of offering early psychological support. Policy makers, researchers and support providers for separated young people have been advised to pay attention to support provision when the young people first arrive, as well as afterwards (Vervliet et al., 2014) and to improve early intervention pathways for psychological difficulties.

Yet only a small number of separated children are in contact with mental health services (Sanchez-Cao, Kramer, & Hodes, 2013). Barriers to access seem to influence referrals to and attendance at Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). More referrals to CAMHS from social workers than GPs are observed (Michelson & Sclare, 2009). Wade, Mitchell and Baylis (2005) suggest social workers still overlook psychological difficulties in the context of social needs. Addressing the gap in service provision for separated young people is subject to both difficulties of accessibility and acceptability of services (Bean et al., 2007; Majumder, O'Reilly, Karim, & Vostanis, 2015). A significant delay between problem onset and accessing help was found amongst separated young people living in London (Sanchez-Cao et al., 2013).

It is acknowledged that not all separated young people need psychological interventions. Many thrive with protection and enhanced care and adequate support (Jensen et al., 2015). Suggestions for CAMHS to build links with and

offer consultation to educational and voluntary settings to create community-based services have been supported by research that showed that many concerns around behaviour and emotional needs can be successfully managed with consultation (Dura-Vila et al., 2012; Hodes, Jagdev, Chandra, & Cunliffe, 2008).

1.9.2. Resilience Perspectives

Resilience research has diverted attention away from problem-focused approaches to alternative discourses of understanding individuals' endurance and strengths to cope with adverse circumstances (Fernando, 2010; Sleijpen, Haagen, Mooren, & Kleber, 2016; Sleijpen, June ter Heide, Mooren, Boeije, & Kleber, 2013). Literature suggests that despite exposure to multiple traumatic events, not all separated young people develop significant psychological difficulties (Given-Wilson, Herlihy, & Hodes, 2016).

It has been observed that positive changes can occur after experiencing traumatic events. This phenomenon has been termed post-traumatic growth (PTG). For young people PTG has been found to be positively related to being optimistic, resilient and receiving social support (Sleijpen et al., 2016).

Resilience and PTG are commonly constructed to be individuals' strengths to adapt to and cope with adverse conditions (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Resilience is defined as "a dynamic state that enables an individual to function adaptively despite significant stressors, by utilizing certain protective factors to moderate the impact of certain risk factors" (Huemer et al., 2013, p 40). Hopkins and Hill (2010) note a remarkable capacity in separated young people to cope with adversities.

Resilience and vulnerability are frequently constructed as mutually exclusive; PTG is understood as the absence of PTSD symptoms. Furthermore, they are conceptualised as individual and measurable (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009).

Despite being strengths-based compared to the trauma and vulnerability discourses, similar critiques apply. Resilience and PTG can be seen as decontextualising people's responses to hardship (Patel, 2003). Furthermore, interdependent relationships and community support that foster processes of resilience are often ignored in these individualised conceptualisations (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012; Ungar, 2013). Additionally, stories of strength and

survival can be used as evidence to justify the lowering of protection and support thresholds for separated young people (Hughes & Rees, 2016). Panter-Brick and Eggerman (2012) warn against social policies expecting resilience without providing the resources to support this.

1.9.3. Contextual Perspectives

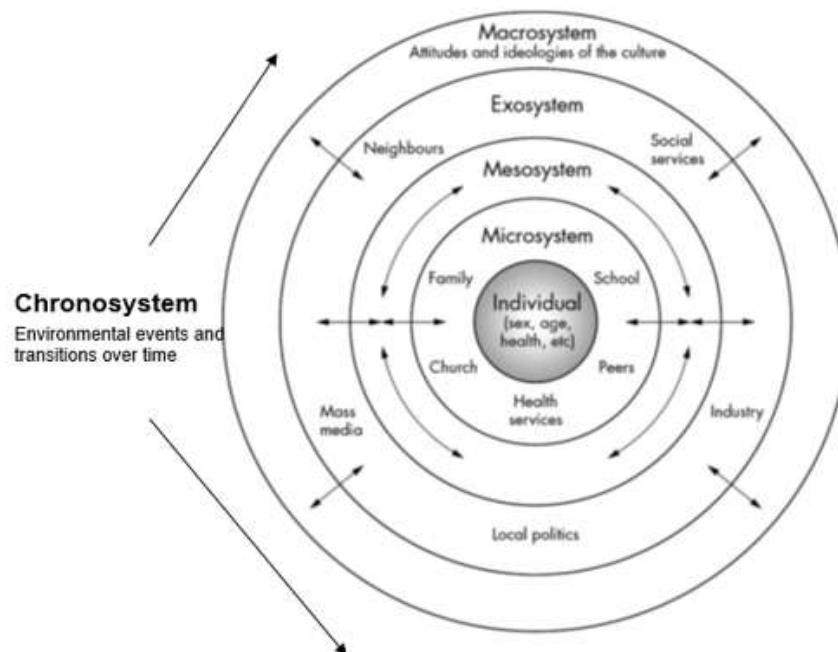
The theories outlined above aim to understand and assess the risks, needs, vulnerabilities and resilience experienced by separated young people. Even though these perspectives accept the influence of wider social factors, young people are predominantly described as at risk and hard to engage. They essentially continue to locate blame in the young person and their background, only occasionally considering the wider contexts in which they exist. Despite evidence that behavioural problems and emotional distress are reactions to life events and stressors, clinical psychology continues to avoid these contextual forces by giving prominence to individuals' presentations (Boyle, 2011; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018; Read, Dillon, & Lampshire, 2014). Psychology's focus on past traumatic experience often clashes with young people's concerns for their future. In Kohli's study (2006a), the order of successful resettlement was 'the present first, the future next and the past last' (p. 5). Recovery, for many, does not mean re-engagement with past traumatic events but with everyday life (Summerfield, 2001). This requires access to educational, religious, sociocultural and economic activities. Social networks have been found to provide emotional and structural support for separated young people. Wells' (2011) study explores the strength of relationship young people form with networks. Separated young people's networks were found to consist mainly of repeated contact with the same organisations or institutions that help the young people access material and cultural resources. If institutions provide robust and sustained support, the relationships can strengthen. Emotional attachment and developing a sense of belonging to educational institutions is associated with psychological wellbeing (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Wells, 2011).

There are theories that help consider the importance of interactions between multiple layers of context, actors and individuals when trying to understand the experiences of separated young people. Examples of such approaches include Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994),

Ungar's (2003) theory of environmental resilience and Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

1.9.3.1. Ecological Systems Model Approach: For Bronfenbrenner (1979) child development, adolescence and becoming an adult are a result of an ongoing negotiation and interaction of social relationships, all of which are nested in layers of systems. The model draws attention to understanding a young person's reactions as influenced by their environments. The layers of social relationships are conceptualised in five major interacting systems (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Ecological Systems Model (based on Bronfenbrenner, 1994)



The 'microsystem' represents the immediate social environment which includes those who have direct contact with a young person. Adolescence is seen as a phase of complexity and transition, with shifting patterns of relationships and changes in sense of belonging. It should be noted that Western conceptualisations of 'adolescence' may be incongruent with the cultural perspectives of many separated young people (Connolly, 2014).

The 'mesosystem' is understood as a collection of little 'microsystems'. For young people who have limited numbers of 'microsystems' the relationship between them might be difficult. The experience with one 'microsystem' is expected to impact people's relationship with others. Due to lack of connections to local layers of support and resources, separated young people have few interacting systems, which are often dominated by repeated contact with

institutions such as Home Office, social services, school or language classes (Connolly, 2015).

The 'exosystem' includes systems such as the community, policies or the media, which may or may not be directly involved with the young person but play a significant role in their development. Separated young people who reach the UK can find themselves caught in a net of different narratives, national and international laws, policies and entitlements (Byrne, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Inconsistencies in support provisions are understood to contribute to emotional and behavioural problems and unmet needs (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Goosen, Stronks, & Kunst, 2014).

The 'macrosystem' represents the most distant layer, incorporating people, places and systems that still have a significant influence on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It includes dominant cultural scripts, values and attitudes which make up the organisation of a society at any given time. These factors influence the young person's beliefs as well as economic, judicial and political systems. This layer can explain why children growing up in war-torn countries develop differently to children in more stable areas. It also offers perspectives for how changing 'macrosystems' over the course of migration and their interaction with the inner layers, can influence the development of a separated young person (Drozdek, 2015).

The 'chronosystem' aims to conceptualise dimensions of time and demonstrate how change influences the environment. The 'chronosystem' can include changes in families, locations, status, societies, economic systems, or war.

1.9.3.2. Resilience as Environmental Interaction: Research with separated children frequently challenges the notion of internal resilience by noting that environmental factors predict risk and resilience (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012). Resilience has also been explained as "the capacity of both individuals and their environment to interact in ways that optimizes developmental processes" (Ungar, 2013, p 256.). This definition implies that individuals can only show their resilience and engage in behaviours to secure necessary resources if their environments are able to provide these resources in a meaningful way (Sleijpen, et al., 2013). Resilience therefore is a quality of the environmental capacity to facilitate individual and collective growth. Thus, a

young person is not vulnerable, but is being made vulnerable in their interaction with their environment that may lack resources or be unwilling to keep them safe. Studies exploring vulnerability and resilience factors commonly conclude that stable settlement and high support for separated children in host countries fosters resilience and psychological wellbeing (Fazel et al., 2012; Hodes et al., 2008).

1.9.3.3. CMM Approach to Understanding Meanings and Actions

CMM (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) also respects the impact of multiple layers of context on a person's experiences, actions and reactions. Developed by communication theorists, CMM offers a way to understand how social forces shape individuals' experiences (Hughes & Rees, 2016). CMM considers how changes at any level of context can affect the others. Emphasising the power of language, CMM shows how some narratives have a greater force in influencing people's (re)actions than others (Afuape, 2011). Appendix B depicts CMM in more detail. A person's response to higher context is often referred to as resistance, which can take many forms and can be liberating or subjugating, depending on the context (Wade, 1997). Separated young people frequently interact with disempowering higher context narratives (Silverman, 2016), which will be explored in the next sections.

1.10. Responses to Separated Young People Seeking Asylum

Cemlyn and Briskman (2003) underline that responses and attitudes towards young refugees determine the weight of their experiences on their lives and on host societies. Empathic attitudes and actions from host countries create stability for young people and afford them the confidence to become adults in the UK. Social constructionist positions acknowledge that power is held by language (Burr, 2003). Peoples' experiences of differences and oppressive practices are understood to be influenced and determined by discourse. There is a common awareness of separated children being vulnerable. However, there seems to be a fine line between being perceived and treated like a helpless child and a "bogus adult (...) threatening to con people out of public services and taxpayers' money" (Gower, 2011, p. 326; Silverman, 2016). It is important

to consider the role of dominant discourses and how they influence the experiences of separated young people seeking asylum.

1.10.1. Media Responses to Asylum-Seeking People

Negative descriptions of asylum-seeking people are perpetuated by stories in the media. Current discourses position the British public as compassionate, cohesive and generous, and asylum seekers as a threat and a deviant social group. Newspaper stories describing people as ‘bogus refugees’ with economic motivations, in need of state finances and taking advantage of British generosity, are examples of linguistic strategies that foster assumptions of a ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ form of social mobility and asylum seeker identity (Zimmermann, 2011). These discourses perpetuate racism, xenophobia and discriminatory practices (Masocha & Simpson, 2011). Crawley (2012) calls for policy makers and the media to challenge discourses which lead to the ‘othering’ (Riggins, 1997) of refugee and asylum-seeking people. However, Crawley (2011) also underlines that implementing policies driven by misconceptions about why asylum seekers come to the UK serves wider political agendas.

Attitudes towards refugee people are usually determined by dominant discourses which coincide with political agendas (Lynn & Lea, 2003; Woolley, 2017). Migration featured heavily in the campaigns leading up to the 2016 referendum resulting in the UK preparing to leave the European Union (EU), and refugees were usually depicted as a threat to British social integrity. It was suggested that leaving the EU served to save the UK from being governed by others, for instance by the EU guidelines for handling the ‘refugee crisis’. Such narratives strengthen the opinions that politicians who oppose these views are weak or deluded (Masocha & Simpson, 2011).

Increasingly exclusionary discourses have an impact on welfare provisions and remits of social services for separated young people seeking asylum (Masocha & Simpson, 2011). In 2016, Lord Dubs, himself saved as a child by the ‘Kindertransport’, sponsored an amendment to the Immigration Act 2016 to enable separated young people to gain a safer passage to the UK. Despite local authorities being informed to prepare for 3,000 separated children, a mere 350 children were accepted before the scheme was abandoned (BBC, 2017).

1.10.2. Media Responses to Separated Young People

As acknowledged by contextual approaches to development and social interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Ungar, 2013), local, national and international attitudes relate to how young people are treated upon arrival in host countries. Goodman, Sirriyeh and McMahon (2017) have described changes to descriptions of refugees. Public views were negatively influenced by the discourse of the 'Calais migrant crisis'. Chaotic conditions of 'the jungle' were perceived to be a threat posed by people waiting to travel to the UK. However, the widely published photograph of a drowned child shifted the threat discourse to that of the 'refugee crisis in the Mediterranean', representing more humane and sympathetic responses. When the increasing numbers of terrorist attacks were linked to the 'refugee crisis', and specifically to young men, the narrative reverted to that of threat (Goodman et al., 2017) .

The discourses of separated children are loaded with legal, ethical and political constructs, which create a disconnect between life in the UK and their lives before, and positions them as in need of rescuing (Wells, 2011). Their biological ages act as barriers between deserving care and being perceived as intruders. Age-disputed young people often fall in the gap between two attitudes; "victim or villain" (Gower, 2011, p. 326). As 'victims' they are perceived as vulnerable, deserving of protection. On the other hand, they are seen as adults posing a threat to the welfare system.

A growing hostility towards asylum-seeking people described as "adults pretending to be children" has been noted (Stevens & Glanfield, 2016). When separated children resettled in Britain under the Dubs Amendment, British Members of Parliament (MPs) were cited by the *Daily Mail* to have called for "tests on teeth to verify the age of teenage migrants, who are all male and don't look like children" (Tolhurst, 2016). At the time, research found the general public perceived young refugees judged to be over 18 as deceitful criminals who should be exposed and removed from the UK (Silverman, 2016).

The UK media, public figures and politicians frequently refer to threats posed by refugees, specifically those who are of Islamic faith. MP David Davies linked the "common place" practice of "lying" about age to terrorist incidents in Europe (Silverman, 2016). Such stories are usually publicly responded to by calls for tighter border controls to limit immigration (Wood & Patel, 2017).

Refugee people often arrive in a country with little documentation and may only have stories to evidence their claim for protection (Given-Wilson et al., 2016) and legitimise their existence in the host society (Goodman et al., 2017). Only asylum-seeking people conforming with narratives around persecution are considered deserving of the status of rights-bearing citizens (Woolley, 2017). At the heart of all major narratives about asylum-seeking lies the assumption that there is a discoverable truth, that people either choose to tell, or not.

Separated young people who reach the UK will often have crossed the Mediterranean and stayed in Calais. They are also predominantly male and have Islamic faith (Refugee Council, 2016). The intersectionality of contexts and related discourses around deserving support create a complex life for separated young people. It is important to understand the implications that follow.

1.10.3. Authorities' Responses: Age Disputes

Most separated young people who arrive in the UK are teenagers. Whilst it is always difficult to determine age exactly, it is even harder between 15-18 years. The inexact science means that margins of error can be up to five years on either side (Hek, Hughes, & Ozman, 2012; Mitchell, 2008). MPs who called for dental and medical age assessments have therefore not only ignored warnings of inaccuracies in available tests but have accelerated the discourse of 'imposter children', which soon became the dominant concern when dealing with young people who seek asylum (Silverman, 2016, p. 30).

The Home Office has interpreted the ever-increasing number of age disputes as evidence for "a serious abuse of the system" by adult asylum seekers (Home Office, 2007, p. 12). However, there is significant evidence that suggests that this rise in age disputes is related to a 'culture of disbelief' towards asylum seekers, including separated children (Crawley, 2007; Gower, 2011).

Researchers have warned that dominant discourses unavoidably infiltrate professional spheres and, in turn, influence young people and their presentation to authorities (Gower, 2011; Herlihy, Jobson, & Turner, 2012; Kohli, 2006b). For instance, social workers have come under scrutiny for acting like border guards who fail to realise that power structures underlying guidelines and laws that are designed to keep young people out also coerce them to tell only those stories

that get them in (Kohli, 2006b; Masocha, 2015; Silverman, 2016; Woolley, 2017).

There have been warnings that an ever-increasing number of separated children and young people who seek asylum in the UK experience Home Office or local authority officials disagreeing with their stated age (Crawley, 2007; Gower, 2011; Silverman, 2016). The number of young people whose age was disputed significantly increased from 318 in 2014 to 928 in 2016 and 80% of all age disputes affect young people from six countries: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Sudan, Iran and Vietnam. Despite a notable decline in arrivals of young men and boys from Afghanistan, they remained the group faced with the highest number of age disputes (Refugee Council, 2018).

With few exceptions, knowledge in this area has mainly been informed by social work research. Furthermore, the impact of the age assessment process has predominantly been highlighted in reports published by charities working with separated young people seeking asylum.

1.11. Implications of Age Assessments

Age disputes have been reported as more traumatic than fleeing home (BPS, 2018) and can have devastating effects on young people.

1.11.1. Distress

Crawley (2007) described the age assessment process as “one of the most distressing things” that can happen to young people (p. 102). The distress linked to uncertainty around processes can cause or exacerbate anxiety, anger and low mood (Groark, Sclare, & Raval, 2011). Age assessment interviews have been found to be re-traumatising and to affect the integrity and coping strategies of a young person (Gower, 2011). Whilst previous hardship experienced by the young people needs to be considered, their reactions to distressing situations such as the age assessments, cannot be solely interpreted as individual crises or mental illness (Boyle, 2011; Patel, 2011).

Bracken and Petty (1998) highlight that the emphasis on psychological trauma distracts from processes of social recovery. This is underlined by current processes where precarious social situations are understood to contribute to

mental health problems, but procedures such as age assessments continue to lead to such situations. Young people aged assessed as over 18 frequently face detention, exclusion from support, education and peer networks. These common consequences can (understandably) have a detrimental impact on a young person's sense of self and their mental health (Deveci, 2012; Kralj & Goldberg, 2005).

1.11.2. Risk of Harm

If a young person's age is disputed, they may face detention as adults (Busler, 2016; Dennis, 2012). Detention is described as causing high levels of fear and desperation and being harmful to the integrity of a young person (Refugee Council, 2016). Being detained was found to be a long-term risk factor for raised levels of anxiety, self-harm and suicidality (Robjant et al., 2009). A child assessed to be an adult is also more likely to face removal, which can pose a risk to life (Busler, 2016; Hek et al., 2012; RCPCH, RCGP, RCPSYCH, & Faculty of Public Health, 2009).

A young person who is considered too old for support systems may also be at risk of harm (Newbigging & Thomas, 2011). Whilst adults who indicate they are children may pose risks to younger children if placed together in accommodation, the contrary is also true. However, without alternatives, separated children, considered to be adults, frequently live in unsuitable, risky housing or face homelessness and destitution (Jones, 2001; Pinter, 2010).

1.11.3. Development and Identity Formation

Age assessments are found to undermine young people's sense of identity, seen as crucial for acculturation to host societies (Chase, Knight & Statham, 2008) and development (Crawley, 2017). Having basic emotional needs consistently met is considered important for development. In the lives of separated young people consistency might be hampered by inequities, inequalities and their effect on accessing support for social matters, health and mental wellbeing.

The stories of young people presented to authorities are often stripped of diversity. It is the stories of young age and vulnerability that are perceived as acceptable (Kohli, 2006a). Conversely, all other stories might be discouraged as these may be interpreted as signs of resilience. Those silenced stories might be

protective factors in keeping a relationship with their identities. The silencing processes produce one-sided narratives, or 'thin descriptions', of the young people (White & Epston, 1990). 'Thin' descriptions of child refugees are taken up and spread by media and politicians to create a discourse that positions them as vulnerable and adults as a devious outgroup. This practice, described as 'rhetorical othering' (Riggins, 1997), can lead to marginalisation and leave the young people feeling distant to societal roles and identities they might have previously held.

1.11.4. Missed or Delayed Support

The assessment of a young person's age affects their access to education, housing, support, welfare, legal and health services (Crawley, 2007). Being assessed to be an adult, or having to undergo lengthy assessments before age is determined, has been shown to lead to delays and lower standards of support for separated young people (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007).

The age assessment process can take months, sometimes years. This means some young people might be too old for social work input by the time the dispute gets settled (Jones, 2008). Social work support is often abruptly terminated if a young person is judged to be an adult.

During the age assessment process the young person should continue to access the care of social services (Kralj & Goldberg, 2005). However, if young people who were deemed to be over 18 by an immigration officer upon arrival are treated as such consequently, they do not get referred to social services, nor do they enter the system as separated young people (Crawley, 2012; Refugee Council, 2017). Many young people are unaware and are not informed about their rights to appeal to social services under the Children Act (1989) (Deveci, 2012; Kralj & Goldberg, 2005).

1.11.5. Losing Support

Even if a young person is initially allocated a social worker and receives care under section 20 or 17, this can stop abruptly when someone is aged assessed to be over 18. Research has underlined deficiencies in leaving care provision of 'aged-out' separated young people (e.g. Barrie & Mendes, 2011; Ni Raghallaigh & Thornton, 2017; Wade, 2011). Those accommodated under section 20 should be entitled to the full range of leaving care provisions (Leaving Care Act, 2001).

Barrie and Mendes (2011) state that the practice of supporting people under section 17 has meant that most young people are excluded from ongoing support. However, even those who are supported under section 20 frequently receive only a short period of ongoing support that can be more task focussed (e.g. income support applications) and not based on wider needs (ensuring ongoing peer group and emotional support for daily concerns) (Wade, 2005). For 'aged-out' young people, the sudden lack of support often leads to enormous emotional and practical consequences and impacts on the young people's desires and ambitions to move on with their lives (Wade, 2011). Abrupt and further separation from networks, foster parents, peers and staff at supported accommodation can act as stark reminders of leaving their home and families. Furthermore, young people often lose the support they need to find their way through asylum application and appeal processes. Many young people perceived to be over 18 live in fear and danger of dispersal, detention and deportation (Jones, 2001).

1.11.6. Access to Education and Social Support

Whether a child is placed with foster parents or in shared accommodation, or goes to secondary school or college, is also age-dependent. Age assessment influences immediate and long-term placement options, as well as social and financial support for separated children and young people (Barrie & Mendes, 2011). Warren and York (2014) report that the most common outcome for young people is to be assessed two years older than their stated age.

In the UK, children under the age of 16 are entitled to education regardless of their immigration status. Those over 16 can attend Further Education colleges but admission is at the discretion of the college (Deveci, 2012). During the age assessment process, social services are reluctant to offer a school place if they are not sure a person is under 16. Colleges frequently share this reluctance. During waits for allocation of social, educational and housing support or foster care, young people face extended periods of isolation and boredom which is associated with stress and emotional problems (Sourander, 1998).

1.11.7. Mutual Mistrust

Hek, Hughes and Ozman (2012) argue that the "culture of age disputing" (p. 339) means that age assessments occur very regularly. The increase can also

be linked to a general 'culture of disbelief' towards young asylum seekers (Gower, 2011). It means that many separated young people experience anxiety and confusion about recurrent threats to their credibility (Given-Wilson et al., 2016). Early encounters with immigration and welfare professionals who are themselves entangled in the 'culture of disbelief' coincides with young people experiencing fear and confusion about adjusting to an alien society.

Policies around who receives care under which section present considerable legal, social and ethical issues for social workers. Many perceive themselves as being in the crossfire of helping and gate-keeping duties (Cemlyn & Briskman, 2003; Cemlyn & Nye, 2012; Hek et al., 2012). These interactions often result in mutual fear and mistrust between young people and authorities (Ní Raghallaigh, 2014; Thomas & Devaney, 2011). Age assessments are experienced as intrusive and oppressive, which is contradictory to the trusting relationships social workers are expected to build with young people (Hjern et al., 2012) .

1.11.8. Asylum Process

The assessment process also adds to delays in asylum decisions and the feeling of being in 'limbo' (Groark et al., 2011). During the age assessment and dispute processes, the Home Office issues application registration cards (ARC) stating that the person's date of birth is disputed. If the age assessment concludes that a young person is 18 or above, they are transferred into the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) and required to regularly attend at a Home Office reporting centre (Bowley & Bashir, 2015).

Legally, the age of a person who seeks asylum is irrelevant. In practice, a refusal to consent to age assessments has resulted in prejudiced age determination and outcome of asylum applications (Abbing, 2011). Furthermore, age disputes and disagreements may be perceived as indicators of poor credibility during later asylum hearings (Given-Wilson, et al., 2016; Kralj & Goldberg, 2005; Warren & York, 2014). Age disputes, therefore, hold serious implications for young people's asylum claims.

1.12. Rationale for Current Study

The number of separated young people seeking safety in European host societies has increased over recent years. Whilst pre-migration stress, the impact of war, conflict and stresses before and during migration are well researched and documented, less emphasis has been put on post-migration stresses (Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2015). Schiltz and Schiltz (2013) suggest moving the focus of research from past traumatic events to current factors influencing young people, their identity formation and integration into new socio-cultural environments. The paucity of literature in this field is cited as a major concern (Bogic et al., 2015; Connolly, 2014). Several studies conclude with the recommendation for more exploration of ongoing challenges that separated young people experience after resettlement; what ongoing risks affect their suffering as well as what protective factors exist, and could be in place for them (Seglem, Oppedal, & Raeder, 2011; Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016). Additionally, Drywood (2010) highlighted the scarceness of research investigating the psychological impact of asylum processes for children.

Calls for a commitment to needs and rights-based approaches to supporting separated young people, their wellbeing and development intensify with increasing demands to protect borders (Thomas & Devaney, 2011). The lack of consistency of legislation and legal processes around protecting separated young people neglects the rights of children and causes them further harm.

Studies focusing on psychological distress and needs have largely relied on quantitative investigations. Refugee voices are largely absent, especially those of separated young people. Unless this changes it will remain difficult to provide services that respond to needs and challenges arising from within the context of young people's current social and political situation (Groark, et al., 2011; Michelson & Sclare, 2009). This study responds to calls that highlight the critical need for more qualitative explorations of young people's perspectives and lived experiences (O'Toole Thommessen, Corcoran, & Todd, 2017; O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018; Schiltz & Schiltz, 2013; Wernesjö, 2012).

Providing social support during the asylum processes and clarifying and explaining these processes are seen to be critical tasks for the professionals involved, including psychologists (O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015). However,

little is known about how young people experience the procedures and what they would find helpful. This study reacts to the suggestions of psychologists, counsellors and social workers working with separated young people seeking asylum. They agree with the potential harm age disputes can cause and have identified impacts of the age assessment on the distress of the young people as an important area to research.

This study seeks to help bridge existing gaps in knowledge by examining the experience of undergoing an age assessment as a separated young man after arriving in the UK. The ways in which the UK has positioned refugees within social imagery and discourses of belonging will also be considered (McKinnon, 2008). Based on socio-cultural and ecological development approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ungar, 2004, 2013) and considering the construction of everyday life experiences through language (Pearce & Cronen, 1980), interviews with separated young people will examine how they have made sense of their experiences and how their understanding of their experiences has developed over the course of time. Attention will be paid to what meaning they have made of their individual age assessment experiences and how these might have influenced their existence, development and socio-cultural adaptation to surviving in the UK.

As far as I am aware, accounts of separated young people's own experiences of age assessments in the UK have not been examined in psychological research studies.

1.12.1. Research Aims

This study aims to explore the ways in which a sample of separated young people have experienced the age assessment process in the UK.

1.12.2. Research Questions

The research aims to answer these questions:

- How have these experiences impacted on the young people psychologically and socially?
- How do they talk about their experiences in relation to their social position of being asylum-seeking and refugee people?
- How have they perceived the system of support around their assessments?

2. CHAPTER TWO – METHOD

2.1. Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will describe the methodology utilised to approach the research questions. I will attend to my epistemological position and discuss the rationale for selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The design and procedure of the study will be described, and attention paid to the core ethical issues. I will reflect on the research process, topic and my role as a researcher and conclude with an overview of the analytic process.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Epistemological Position: Critical Realist–Social Constructionist

It is important for research to be rooted within and follow an ontological and epistemological framework (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Ontology is concerned with existence and reality, epistemology with the theory of knowledge and what we can know (Willig, 2008).

As highlighted in chapter one, much of the research with separated young people focuses on quantitative investigations of individual trauma and vulnerability and is aligned to a realist position. These concepts and approaches are criticised for decontextualising experience and neglecting social contexts (Wernesjö, 2012). In response, this study takes a critical realist–social constructionist approach, which enables me to consider structural conditions, processes of power and how these impact on lived experiences (Elder-Vass, 2012). It attends to adverse experiences, which are directly linked to the social construct of 18 being the ‘onset of adulthood’ (Rader, 1979).

Smail (2004) emphasises that people are “held in place” by their social world and that the ability to change depends on powers and resources accessible to them (p. 132). Social constructionists are therefore interested in why some reality claims are given more credibility than others (Harper, 2011b). Research from this epistemological position is concerned with how people construct their social realities and how these impact on human experience (Willig, 2008).

Critical realism recognises 'a reality' but acknowledges that constant interactions of different mechanisms and systems make effects unpredictable and identifying causal factors complicated, especially when analysing social behaviours (Hood, 2015). In contrast to social constructionism, critical realism proclaims that we can and should aim to investigate 'reality' but do so "cautiously and critically" (Pilgrim & Bentall, 1999, p. 262).

Elder-Vass (2012) argues that social constructionism must be accompanied by a critical realist ontology to develop critical social theory, and social change. In line with my research aims I am adopting a stance that recognises the influence of social structures on beliefs, actions and experience, as well as the 'reality' of the agentic subject, able to identify and facilitate change in real-world settings (Elder-Vass, 2012). By taking a critical realist–social constructionist stance I aim to highlight that experiences and knowledge are products of social, historical and cultural contexts and structures, which are enabled by discourse. These structures have a 'real life' impact on my participants (Harper, 2011b). The stance accepts that different 'realities' exist. My own 'reality', my experiences and contexts, unavoidably influences the interpretation of this study.

Additionally, I have adopted an interpretative phenomenological stance which is supported by using the method of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This approach acknowledges the process of a hermeneutic cycle in which the participants and I will be involved in the development of meaning.

2.2.2. Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology

As indicated by my research questions, aims and epistemological position, this study is concerned with exploring embodied lived experiences of the age assessment process and therefore a qualitative methodology is deemed most suitable. In contrast to hypothetico-deductive objectives, exploratory aims are best suited to qualitative approaches (Robson, 2002).

Qualitative research aims to understand experiences and the contexts in which these are rooted (Robson, 2002). The call to focus on contextual forces (Wernesjö, 2012) is attended to by qualitative methodologies' emphasis on reflexivity and language. Researchers are required to be aware of, reflect upon and integrate how their own contexts influence the research process and results (Willig, 2008).

2.2.3. Rationale for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is designed for research concerned with lived experience and to shed light on areas that are under-researched (Smith et al., 2009). It has been utilised to allow the silenced voices of young refugee people to be heard (e.g. Groark et al., 2011; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015).

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) argue that IPA is particularly well suited to exploring idiographic accounts situated in broader contexts. With its roots in phenomenology, IPA requires us to think beyond the idea that people exist as independent minds relating to an external world (Bracken & Thomas, 2010). IPA recognises the difficulties of accessing someone else's personal world. However, through careful consideration of the researchers' own contexts in relation to the topic and participants, IPA encourages us to engage closely and reflexively with idiographic accounts to gain as best an insider perspective of participants' lived experiences as possible (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). Responding to Pilgrim and Bentall's (1999) call to cautiously explore reality and Elder-Vass's (2012) advice to critically analyse social systems and facilitate change, IPA stands out as the most appropriate methodological approach.

2.2.4. Consideration of Other Methodologies

Initially, I considered analysing the participants' accounts using Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, advocates of IPA assert that their approach gives greater precedence to a detailed and robust examination of idiographic and contextualised accounts to gain insights into subjective experiences when compared to TA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Grounded theory (GT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was also considered. Once the research aims were developed, it became clear that this study is concerned with subjective experience and not with developing a theory of social processes, which is the aim of Grounded Theory (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002).

Narrative Analysis (NA) and IPA share an interest in participants' narratives of how experiences are understood and made sense of. Both attend to language (Crossley, 2007). However, NA focuses on how people construct narratives with which they interpret the world. A main aim is to understand how each participant's narrative functions, how and which stories are silenced, contested or accepted (Frost et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008). IPA's aims to gain an in-depth

understanding of lived experiences are more aligned with this study's assumptions and questions. Similarly, discursive approaches, such as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) (Foucault, 1988) or Discursive Psychology (DP) (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) which place an emphasis on language as a mechanism in constructing 'reality' seemed initially suitable. In consultation with some separated young people, their desire to share their experiences was highlighted. Exploring the use of language and links between their talk and experiences of power were not deemed sufficient for this. However, IPA recognises language as vital and I will focus on how participants speak to describe their experiences (Langdridge, 2008; Larkin et al., 2006).

2.3. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA draws on theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

2.3.1. Phenomenology

IPA is shaped by phenomenology specifically in its aim to examine and understand lived experience and how participants assign meaning to specific experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue that IPA draws on Husserl's (1970) emphasis on close examination of lived experience. Heidegger (1962) shaped IPA in its notion of humans as situated in context, in a world of relationships, language and objects. Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasised physiological aspects of human 'embodied' experience (Shinebourne, 2011). This study aligns itself with the view that we are situated within our bodies through which we know the material world. Our ability to make sense of experiences varies according to our body's capacity to interact, see, hear, feel, and so on. Variation of this capacity can be biological. However, bodily capacity can also vary according to sociological factors (Johnstone and Boyle, 2018). For instance, good hearing does not guarantee understanding foreign languages. The experiences of the participants in this study are viewed as intertwined with bodily interactions and functions and embodied feelings that give meaning to their experiences.

2.3.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, predates phenomenology. However, Heidegger (1962/1927) understood phenomenology as inherently interpretative and therefore paved the way for a hermeneutic turn in phenomenology.

Applying these ideas to qualitative inquiry in psychological research means that researcher and participants exist in contexts that influence their accounts. Consequently, the concept of 'double hermeneutics' is important; the researcher making sense of the participants making sense of the phenomenon under investigation. The process of reflexivity allows the researcher to increase awareness of how their pre-conceptions and thoughts impact on the analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This is important as IPA aims to produce descriptions that comes as close as possible to the lived experience of the participants.

To consider the context in which experiences arise, researchers need to engage with an iterative process of analysis; moving back and forth through an account to increasingly make sense of what is being said and how meaning is conveyed (Smith et al., 2009).

2.3.3. Idiography

IPA emphasises the idiographic level, which encompasses the study of individual experiences, and phenomena. Commitment to understanding how experiences have been understood by individuals is key to IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

The analysis involves a detailed investigation of one account before moving on to another. IPA aims to present overarching themes as well as draw attention to the rich distinctiveness of how individuals' experiential accounts differ, even if the phenomenon is presumed to be the same.

2.3.4. Language as a Vehicle to Make Sense of Experience

I respond to calls for flexibility within IPA (Larkin et al., 2006) and attempt to integrate aspects of discursive investigations. By doing so, I aim to avoid the "pitfalls of methodological tribalism" (Hood, 2015, p. 12). Paying attention to discursive elements, what participants say and how, is a way of further linking idiographic details of personal experience to broader contextual issues.

2.4. Researcher Reflexivity

Our experiences determine how we understand phenomena and it is impossible to assume a neutral position in this regard (Ricoeur, 1996). Within this research, the narratives of the young people's experiences of their age assessments were co-constructed with me as researcher. It is vital to reflect on my context as well as my position as a Trainee Clinical Psychologist (TCP) and how my beliefs, experiences and stances have developed throughout and shaped this research.

2.4.1. Personal Reflections

The notion of personal context taking precedence over personal vulnerability has been central to my training. Working with 'trauma' has furthered my belief in the need to challenge the systems around those we label as 'traumatised'. In my experience, people know what is needed to get better. This has led me to question psychology's role of 'reframing' people's contextual knowledge and embodied experiences to internal processes and personal responsibility.

Entrenched Eurocentric perspectives of psychology typically neglect the contribution of practitioners' backgrounds and belief systems when making sense of clients' experiences (Patel, 2003). The same can be said of research (Patel, 1999). As a 31-year-old white German woman, I have been influenced by my sheltered early life in a village, by complex feelings about my 'home country', by attending schools named after people who stood up to the Nazi regime and where history was a mandatory subject for 13 years. It might come as no surprise that this study commenced at the height of the 'refugee crisis', when my grandmother began to speak about her journey to safety, aged 18, with full responsibility for her younger siblings. The young people probably share some experiences with her, but there are many differences.

It was important to consider that participants were aware of my role as a female TCP and that interviews were held in places where they sought support. Despite many efforts to attend to issues of power and being transparent about the aims and rationale of this study, the interviews highlighted the stark inequalities the participants have been exposed to, their ongoing oppression and my position of power. These factors are likely to have influenced what experiences participants felt able to share and what questions I felt able to ask.

2.4.2. Reflexive Diary

I kept a reflective journal throughout the research – for extracts, see Appendix C. After each interview I assigned some time to reflect on initial thoughts, feelings and interpretations. This helped to become aware of my presumptions, how I had influenced the interviews and how the research process had further influenced my views and assumptions. These notes helped me to stay with participants' individual accounts during analysis (Smith et al., 2009). I also reflected on personal observations, changing discourses and political agendas which influenced the various contexts in which this research was grounded.

2.5. Consultation

Refugee and asylum-seeking people are often seen as passive recipients of interventions and subjects of studies (Fernando, 2010). The active incorporation of refugee young people in the planning of research can highlight important aims of the study, procedural issues, and focus research around the needs of the young people (Fernando, 2010; Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007).

With respect to this study's central aim to represent young people's perceptions and experiences, participatory ideas were drawn upon to enable an iterative research process (Mackenzie et al., 2007). In their guidelines for research with separated young people, Thomas and Byford (2003) state that "consultation is vital in assessing the best way to carry out research. Young people may have strong preferences about how the research should be conducted" (p. 1400).

2.5.1. Consultation with Experts by Professional Background

Consultation meetings with a counsellor, a social worker and a clinical psychologist with considerable experiences in working with separated young people in different settings (charity sector and NHS) were held to discuss the design and operationalisation of this study. These clinicians had previously raised concerns about the practice and impact of age assessment on separated young people and had helped to form the idea of this study. For this study I did not include ongoing consultation with social workers working in social care directly due the focus on implications for the field of clinical psychology. However, the social worker involved in the initial consultation meetings had previously headed a social care team in an area with high numbers of

separated young people. The meeting highlighted practical considerations such as interview locations, access to interpreters and organisations for sign-posting.

2.5.2. Consultation with Separated Young People

Early in the research process, a consultation with two young people took place. Both had experienced age assessments and our collaboration involved discussing the study's aims and research process. The interpreter present had a background in research and acted as a translator as well as cultural broker and consultant (Raval, 2003). See Appendix D for a summary.

The young people felt it was important to highlight how age assessment procedures could affect young people, which helped formulate the research questions. Focus groups were perceived as too intrusive and semi-structured interviews were preferred. The consultants helped to structure the interview schedule. They advised me to start with gentle questions and be transparent when moving onto more difficult topics. They reviewed the Information Sheet and highlighted that participants might be unfamiliar with constructs like 'research' and 'confidentiality'. I revised the forms accordingly and included a sample academic journal in the materials.

2.6. Participants

2.6.1. Inclusion Criteria

Overarching themes are created for shared experience and thus, homogenous samples are desired in IPA (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2004). For this study, being a separated young man and having undergone an age assessment in the UK is the basis of common specific experience, regardless of country and culture of origin. Additional criteria were:

- Being 16 or above. It is recognised that the developmental stages of older adolescence mean that over-16s are able to reflect on and evaluate experiences differently to those in younger adolescence (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). Children aged 16 and 17 have the right to consent (BPS, 2001). Participants were recruited based on their stated age³, which was in line with the principles of partner organisations.

³ The age a young person states themselves to be

- Being male. Over 80 percent of separated young people are male (Home Office, 2017) and their ages are more frequently disputed than females.
- As the age assessment process is often ongoing due to young people legally challenging the decisions reached, the study included people who had experienced any part of the process within the last two years, with the understanding that this may be ongoing.

2.6.3. Sample Size and Demographics

IPA requires a nuanced analysis of individual accounts. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) argue for a sample small enough to trace each case throughout the study (between 4 and 10 interviews for doctoral studies).

Seven male young people participated in this study, with five now considering themselves as adults. Participants had arrived in the UK between two and ten years ago. The duration of their age assessment process (from initial age dispute to final appeal) ranged from two months to nine years. Participant demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Nationality	Age Assessment Outcome	Duration of Process	Language used in Interview
1. Abdul	Afghan	Assessed >18, stated age accepted on appeal	2 years	English
2. Belal	Afghan	Assessed >16, stated age accepted on appeal	2.5 years	English
3. Chris	Congolese	Age disputed but accepted on assessment	2 months	English
4. Deldaar	Afghan	Assessed >18, appealed, ongoing	2.5 years	Dari
5. Emad	Afghan	Assessed >18, stated age not accepted on appeal	2 years	English
6. Freddy	Afghan	Assessed >16, stated age not accepted on appeal	9 years	English
7. Ghaswan	Afghan	Assessed >18, not yet appealed	Unknown	Pashto

2.6.4. Pseudonyms

All participants were given a pseudonym. In the process of explaining confidentiality and privacy, all participants were given the option of choosing their own pseudonym. Two young people picked their own pseudonyms. For the others, I assigned a name to them with the help of a website for Afghan names.

2.7. Recruitment

A purposive sampling method was utilised to recruit participants from two non-statutory organisations offering counselling and support to separated young people. I presented the research aims, criteria and design to the directors and staff of both organisations. They offered to support the recruitment process. After the University of East London (UEL) had given ethical approval, I circulated the Information Sheet (Appendix E), which staff handed to young people who showed an interest in participating. An optional Information Sheet for social or key workers was available (Appendix F). Interested participants met with me for the research interview.

2.8. Data Collection

2.8.1. Development of the Interview Schedule

This research took an explorative stance. It is probable that 'Western' researchers have different backgrounds to separated young people, which will affect how experiences are viewed and understood (O'Toole Thommessen & Todd, 2018; Patel, 2003). I aimed to reduce presumptions by utilising a semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended, non-directive questions (Robson, 2002). The interview schedule (Appendix G) was developed alongside a review of the literature and the young people consultants to make the construction of questions more iterative in its process (Mackenzie et al., 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Interviews focused on memories of the age assessment process, their understanding then and how it might have changed over time.

2.8.2. Interviews

All interviews were held in quiet and confidential spaces on premises used by the partner organisations.

Where requested certified interpreters, recommended by the organisations, were booked. On two occasions male interpreters aided the interview process, once through Dari and once through Pashto. I set aside time before each of the interviews to meet with the interpreter to discuss the research aims and process with a view to facilitating the interpretation. Specific concerns of the interpreters, their reflections or feedback from previous experiences were encouraged to inform the research process as well as to address and respond to interpreters' potential apprehensions (BPS, 2017). This briefing also included close examination of the Information Sheet and Consent Form to facilitate informed consent (Patel, 1999). The interpreters used the linguistic mode of interpreting (neutral stance, word-for-word translations) during the interviews, and a service user-centred approach during the phases of information giving and consent seeking (Baylav, 2003). Both interpreters stayed for a debrief after the interview finished to discuss matters around the interview process and research, ethical issues or give reflections and feedback. During one debrief session the interpreter reflected on his experiences of interpreting at age assessments. I have included reflective notes on this conversation in Appendix C. I checked in with both young people if the interpreter was acceptable to them and whether they could understand the language and accent.

All participants were asked to sign the Consent Form (Appendix H). Interviews commenced with a set of 'warm up' questions to help build rapport and help me to decide how to tailor my communication to their language ability or the interpreter's style. A conversational style was employed, and each interview loosely adhered to the schedule. Interviews were audio-recorded.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 65 minutes. An informal debrief followed each interview. Participants were asked about any distressing aspects of the interview and were given contact details for me and my supervisor and information on organisations that could offer further support (Appendix I). I checked with participants whether they wished to delete any aspects of what they had said during interviews.

2.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the UEL School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-Committee (Appendix J). The partner organisations considered UEL's approval as sufficient. Two minor amendments were also approved over the course of this study (Appendix K).

The research complied with the BPS Guidelines and considered ethical principles of informed consent, avoidance of harm and ensuring privacy and confidentiality (BPS, 2014). Furthermore, I drew on guidelines for research with separated young people (Thomas & Byford, 2003), and recommendations for research with people from minority ethnic backgrounds (Patel, 1999) and refugees (Mackenzie et al., 2007).

The organisations involved in recruitment offered to take an active role in the consent procedure. Staff discussed information and concerns with potential participants prior to arranging an interview. They also ensured that young people could return to them if difficulties arose during or following participation.

It was emphasised that participation was voluntary and separate from the organisations providing support. The decision of whether to participate would not have any consequence for the young people's relationship with staff at the organisations or affect their stay in the UK.

All participants were provided with several opportunities to ask questions before, during and after the interviews. Prior to signing consent to take part in the study, the Information Sheet was read aloud with the young person.

Separated young people represent a relatively small participant pool and their stories might be well-known to local services, therefore extra care was taken to remove identifying information in all transcripts. It was explained that the results would be shared with partner organisations and that cautious selection of quotations aimed to ensure that even people familiar with the participants would not be able to identify them.

To protect confidentiality, consent forms were shredded after scanned documents were password protected. All research documents were saved on a

password protected computer and encrypted memory stick. Audio-recordings will be deleted once the research is completed. Transcripts will be erased after five years. Participants were made aware that only the researcher, supervisors and examiners would have access to transcribed and anonymised material. All participants were informed that I did not have access to their clinical records.

To minimise distress and possible re-traumatisation during the interviews, my questions did not inquire about participants' experiences prior to coming to the UK. All participants were informed of this. However, I anticipated that some young people might want to tell me about their experiences in the context of their wider story. I aimed to use interruptions carefully to avoid participants feeling as if their difficulties did not matter and that I was only there to hear specifics about age assessments (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2006). I repeatedly assured participants that they had control over what they shared. They could decline to answer, take breaks or end the interview any time. Prior to commencing the interviews, I explored with participants how they would let me know if they became upset and their preferred methods of handling this (e.g. drinking water, changing conversation, terminating the interview).

2.9.1. Interviews with Interpreters

Interpreters were available to enable participation. It is important to acknowledge that this is methodologically and ethically challenging. Interpreters can limit informal conversations and are active co-producers of the research accounts (Keselman, Cederborg, & Linell, 2010; Raval, 2003). This is important for hermeneutic processes and means that three people engage in the sense-making of experience, instead of two.

Smith and Osborn (2008) state that it is best to conduct interviews alone, unless ethical or practical reasons indicate otherwise. Psychological research has traditionally excluded participants who do not speak English (Vara & Patel, 2012). Considering the gap in knowledge about separated young people's experiences of difficulties in the context of post-migration, it was not ethically justifiable to exclude those who could not speak English.

Afghan language interpreters are likely to encounter and interpret for the same young people within certain regions. However, previous interactions between

the participants and the interpreters in this study were not brought to my attention during briefing or interview sessions.

2.9.2. Reimbursement of Participants

Payment of participants in research is ethically controversial. Having considered the pros and cons as well as consulted with young people and partner organisations, it was decided that for this marginalised group of young people of low socio-economic status, a form of reimbursement was important and that the participants should be offered £20 each in gift vouchers. Participants were also offered certificates to mark their involvement in a research study (Appendix L).

2.10. Analytic Process

Having reviewed a number of different perspectives on the processes of analysis using IPA (Larkin et al., 2006; Shinebourne, 2011; Willig, 2008), I utilised an adaptation of the stages of analysis described by Smith et al. (2009).

2.10.1. Transcription

IPA involves transcription of the entire recorded interview and exact words used by interviewer and participant (Smith et al., 2009). For interpreted interviews the English translations of the participants' responses were transcribed. Though there is no prescriptive method of recording pauses and conveyed emotions, such as laughter, these must be presented consistently throughout the different interviews (Smith et al., 2009). A key is provided in Appendix M.

2.10.2. Stages of Analyses

Five major analytic stages were employed. In practice, analysis is an iterative and fluid process with researchers moving back and forth through these stages (Shinebourne, 2011).

2.10.2.1. Engaging with the text: After transcription, I read each transcript several times to familiarise myself with the data. Initial observations, reflections and thoughts were noted. This allowed for immersion in the data and for each participant to become a focus of the analysis.

2.10.2.2. Initial noting: Exploratory notes on content, context, use of language and initial interpretative comments were recorded in the right-hand margin of

the page (Smith et al., 2009). Words and phrases that seemed important were highlighted. Reflections and spontaneous reactions to the participants' accounts were also noted. Appendix N shows an example extract of this process.

2.10.2.3. Developing Emergent Themes: Next, I examined the transcript line-by-line looking for content, context and language used to describe experience. In conjunction with my exploratory notes I began to develop emergent themes. I focused on discrete chunks of text and annotated theme codes in the left-hand margin (also Appendix N). In this process I aimed to distil the data whilst also conserving its richness (Smith et al., 2009).

2.10.2.4. Searching for Connections between Themes: All emergent theme codes were transferred from the annotated transcripts into a document listing all themes with representative quotes. Each participant was assigned a colour, so they could be followed throughout the process. To map connections and patterns between the emergent themes, codes and quotes were transferred on to coloured index cards. These were used to manually arrange codes and themes into cluster groups. Clustering similar themes together led to developing sub-ordinate and superordinate themes (Smith, et al., 2009). I identified patterns between emergent themes and used abstraction to create sub-ordinate themes. Themes were also clustered according to contextual and narrative elements. Emergent or sub-ordinate themes which captured wider themes were elevated to be super-ordinate themes in the processes of subsumption. Themes were frequently and reflexively reviewed. Appendix O shows the process described.

2.10.2.5. Patterns across cases: Once I had repeated all previous steps for each participant's account, I began to consider the entire data together. To search for patterns in themes across interviews, each participant's individual sub- and superordinate themes were compared to identify similarities, overlaps, contrasts and connections. Themes were organised in clusters together and revised until overall superordinate or central themes stood out. Appendix P shows how connecting sub-ordinate themes were clustered around these central themes.

2.10.3. Use of Supervision

Regular academic supervision helped to assess the quality of the analysis and assure a deeper level of interpretation. My academic supervisor coded and themed one transcript to ensure the approach to analysis was in line with IPA. I also exchanged extracts, shared reflections and discussed potential themes with fellow trainees who were using IPA.

2.11. Evaluating the Quality of the Study

Qualitative research claim to be unbiased due to the researcher's distinctive interactions with their data. However, Henwood and Pigeon (1992) argue that qualitative research should exhibit internal coherence. I have provided transparency and information in the write-up of this study to enable readers to evaluate its quality and my ability to remain reflexive. As a framework for ensuring quality I drew on Yardley's (2000) criteria for evaluating qualitative approaches.

- Sensitivity to Context
- Commitment and Rigour
- Transparency and Coherence
- Impact and Importance

These will be considered in detail in chapter four.

3. CHAPTER THREE - ANALYSIS

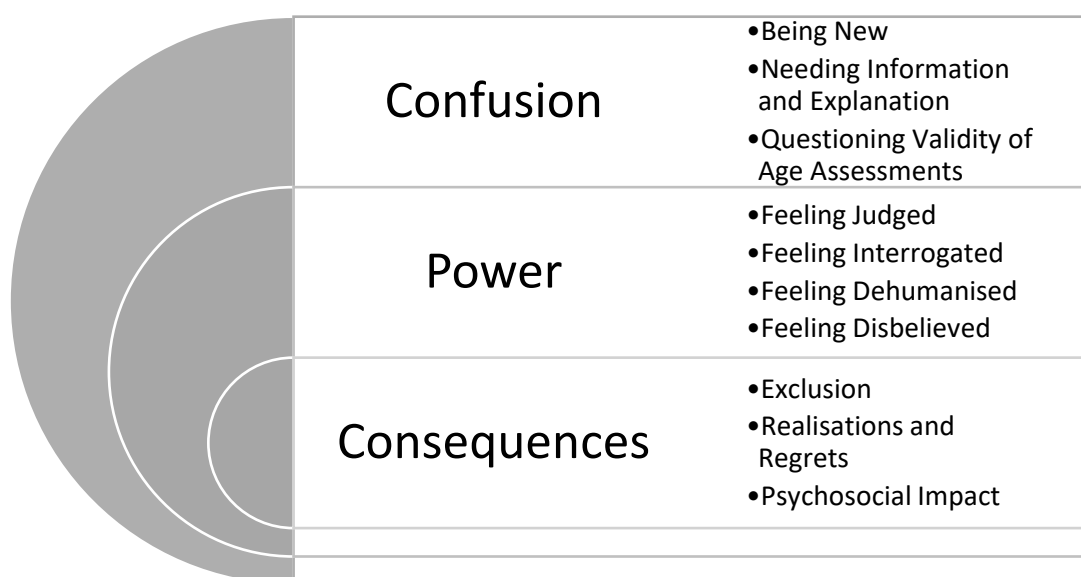
3.1. Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will present common themes of experiences which arose from detailed analyses of all participants' accounts.

3.2. Introduction to Themes

Three cross-sample themes are utilised to articulate the young people's experiences: Confusion, Power, and Consequences. It is important to note that there is a relationship and fluidity between the sub- and superordinate themes depicted in Figure 2. In line with IPA principles, pertinent quotations of participants' experiences (with pseudonyms and line numbers) are provided as evidence to demonstrate each theme (Smith et al., 2009). Appendix Q demonstrates the prevalence of the themes across all participants whilst appendix R maps further quotes for each theme. These themes will be further discussed in the final chapter, which will explore their relationship to the research questions.

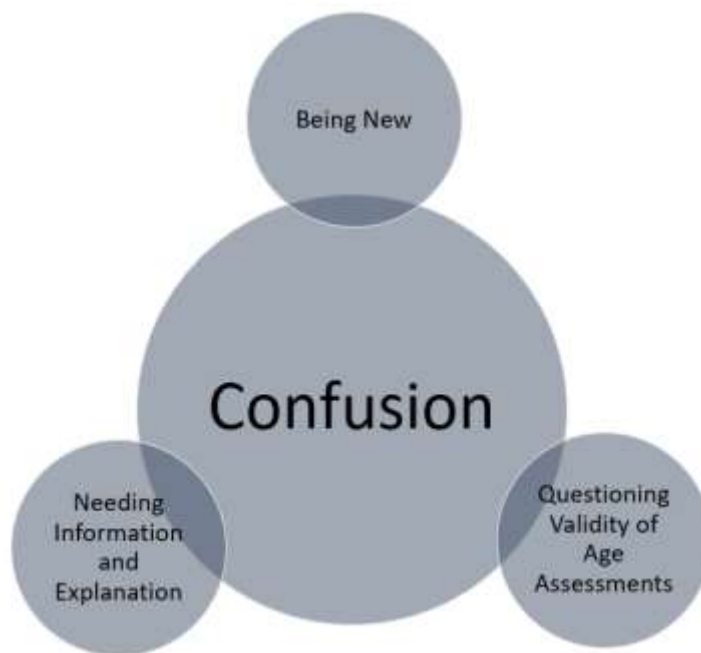
Figure 2: Super- and sub-ordinate Themes



3.3. Confusion

A consistent finding across all interviews was the lack of clarity about the processes and purposes of age assessments. Figure 4 shows the most prominent sources of confusion as sub-ordinate themes clustered around the main theme: 'Being New', 'Needing Information and Explanation' and 'Questioning the Validity of Age Assessments'.

Figure 3: Confusion



3.3.1. Being New

Being new to the UK and the concepts, rules and language was frequently described as confusing. These themes recur as descriptions of what it was like to arrive in the UK and as reflections of what was learnt over time. Confusions also featured in participants talking about regretting initial reactions, which will be discussed later.

Belal depicted an image of himself in a country where he did not even have the language to greet somebody. He emphasised how different AND difficult “everything” was. He used a comparison between the UK and Afghanistan’s infrastructural rules to highlight that he was struggling with observable differences. His vivid account of first impressions was directed at me, to make me understand how difficult his situation was.

Yeah, when I arrived here, I couldn't speak like, I couldn't say hello how are you? Because, obviously everything, was like soooo difficult and different. If you see my country, even the road, the cars drive from right-hand side. You know? Whereas here it is left-hand side. And the people, culture, language, you know. Everything is different. (Belal, 118-131)

His account also implied that his context was necessary for other people (like me) to understand how he was feeling; how can he be expected to understand invisible cultural norms, such as the importance of age, if he cannot understand the language or navigate through traffic? This linked to the young people feeling that their contexts of being separated and new were not considered.

Abdul recalled feeling lost after he first came to the UK. He was assessed to be over 18, moved to the outskirts of London and was separated from the connections he had just made. He recalled his caseworker informing him that she was powerless to do anything about it. Abdul expressed helplessness, wondering where to go and who to speak to. He reflected on how much ("oh my god") he wished he had the knowledge he has now to avoid years of hardship following his age assessment. He emphasised that he could now solve difficulties that were impossible for him to deal with then.

I was thinking that, why she say this to me? Where shall I go? I don't know no one. If I knew now, like now. If I am thinking, Oh my god, I should have this knowledge that time which I have now. (...) I know the people. I now I can speak like a bit English, mine is not that good but I am just trying to solve, I can solve my problems. (Abdul, 652-662)

Abdul's age was accepted two years later, when he appealed with a solicitor. His narrative underlined that age assessments are done at a time when a young person does not have the necessary knowledge of the system and language.

Freddy, whose age was assessed as two years above his stated age, felt saddened and ignored when he tried to question his assessed age. The 'theme of not being heard' will be explored further under section 'Power'. However, it seems that his status of 'being new' and unfamiliar might have been taken advantage of as he was simply instructed that "we can write 15 now", downplaying the official documentation of his assessed age.

My solicitor told me "this is your age" and "now we are going to accept your age of 15 years old". 15. And I asked my solicitor, this is not my age. My age is 13. (...) Then after that, thing was, the solicitor says "ok you age is 15, we can write 15 now". And then after that, he write that on the paper. Then I didn't just say "Oh, I am going to go to court" because I didn't know everything that time. I didn't know laws are provided. (Freddy, 211-210)

Due to the initial confusion Freddy lost the opportunity to appeal his age decision. He did not know there were laws in place that would have enabled him to appeal. This was not just a source of regret but also a source of guilt when others asked him why he had not appealed at "that time".

Young people arrive in the UK being unfamiliar and confused and having experienced disempowerment on their journeys. They are then pushed into further compliance following instructions within a system and language they do not understand.

3.3.2. Needing Information and Explanations

Many participants felt that in addition to being new and unfamiliar with processes in the UK, these were not explained to them, or at least not in a way they could understand. Deldaar remembered his confusion while passively waiting in a room and not knowing anyone or what was happening.

I didn't know anybody, I didn't know what was happening. I just went and sat there and they came, the social guy came and said "Do you know me?" and I said "No". (Deldaar, 142-145).

It is important to note that information and power are linked. The participants relied on information and procedures being explained to them. This rarely happened, rendering them powerless and dependent. Emad explained to me that all he knew was that he was having an interview. He found this particularly confusing because multiple assessment processes happened at the same time.

They said just interview. So I didn't know if it is Home Office interview or for age assessment (Emad, 109-117)

All participants depended on interpreters. Some described interpreters speaking other languages or accents that resulted in misunderstandings. Even when Emad politely asked to have a different interpreter as he was worried about the accuracy of the interpretations (which he referred to as not “explain to you nicely”), he was ignored.

I told them, I say "He is not from my country, he does not exactly know what I say", "He not explain to you nicely". So first day they didn't change it (Emad, 313-316)

Chris remembered getting worried during a meeting, in which his assessors did not explain the processes to him, shook their heads and talked without an interpreter present. He provided me with a powerful image of feeling a mix of confusion and fear about what was going on and being said.

I didn't know what was going on and got no explanation. (...) I couldn't understand the language. I was just seeing them, erm, just seeing them shaking their heads saying "No." And what was going on? I was actually worried. (Chris, 464-473)

Chris recalled, hesitantly, that he was thinking of the worst-case scenario: that assessors were about to send him back. As a separated child, after a long journey from the Congo, this must have been a terrifying prospect.

I thought they were saying, they were saying them stuff for, like, I was about to, they would sent me back home (Chris, 466-468)

The unpredictability of meetings and lack of communication between organisations meant that participants often attended assessments alone. This increased confusion and decreased the chances of clarifying questions. Abdul shared the uncertainty he experienced by explaining that his assessors told him that he remained age disputed and “they might” book another appointment, giving him no indication of the process ending.

A: They just said, "Okay, we might book another interview for you between these days. But, you still in, er, age disputed".

J: Did you know your appointments in advance? (...)

A: No, short notice (...) My keyworker used to drop me there, at the office and he was going. And every single meeting, when I meet her, at least I was waiting for half an hour. (Abdul, 622-637)

Abdul told me that he liked to be on time. For him the unpredictability of meetings increased his feelings of stress, worry and not being in control. Having to wait was a common theme and linked to 'power' and 'consequences'.

3.3.3. Questioning the Validity of Age Assessments

There was a consensus that age assessments were not only confusing but also flawed. The only participant who did not say much about this was Chris, whose age had been accepted after medical testing.

Some participants expressed confusion about age being assessable. Freddy, who recalled being 13 when his age was disputed, said he felt "honestly" shocked at and doubted the idea that someone could assess his age.

Honestly, I was kind of shocked. How could he find out my age? You can't find that out (Freddy, 828-829)

The participants felt confused by the importance of age determination in the UK. Freddy added weight to his argument by outlining to me that even powerful figures in Afghanistan do not know their age. Additionally, he explained an important cultural norm; to believe and respect a mother's word.

...the prime minister of Afghanistan, who living there, they don't even know their age, exactly when they born. And they believe what their mums say (Freddy, 304-306)

For most of the young people in this study, age did not have the same meaning as for those who assessed it. The misunderstanding of cultural norms led to mutual mistrust. Assessors seemed to perceive the young people as argumentative and disrespectful and the participants experienced their assessors as disrespectful to their mothers and families. Deldaar talked about questioning his assessors, stating that they could not know his age because they "did not bring me to this world". He resolutely informed his assessors that he would not accept their age but keep his own. He was told that he was disrespectful but disagreed with their definition of disrespect.

I said "you are not my father and you are not my mother, you didn't bring me to this world so you do not know how old I am", "I know my age and that's it, I don't accept your age, this is my age". And they said, "you are disrespectful to us" and I said "no, this is not disrespectfulness". (Deldaar, 248-253)

Several young people remained loyal to the knowledge and belief held in their families. This may be specifically significant as the separated young people often only have memories and stories of their families to hold on to. Participants described the questioning of these memories and their families' beliefs and knowledge systems as confusing and disrespectful, if not harmful to their sense of belonging. Like Deldaar, Belal stuck with his age ("identification"). His argument about the assessors not being "better" made me wonder if he felt that professionals claimed their knowledge to be superior to his family's.

I said, this is my identification, I said to them you know, you are not better than my mother and my father (Belal, 185-187).

I wondered if it felt as if assessors in the UK tried to separate them even further from their families by disrespecting and rejecting their parents' knowledge. I will discuss how some of the young people felt perceived as lacking knowledge in section 3.4., 'Power'. The young people's opposition to the age assessment process, systems and outcome seemed to be a source of resistance, often the only way for participants to take control.

Another dominant narrative was being judged by physical appearance. This view links with media discourses proposing that many young refugees 'look' over 18. Deldaar explained that his face had "totally" changed and looked "awful" due to the weather conditions he had endured. People in Calais are often stranded for prolonged periods without much shelter. Deldaar felt that he was assessed based on his altered physical appearance.

I was in Calais, because of the sun and the weather affects my skin and my face, my complexion totally changed and looked bad, looked awful and that is why (Deldaar, 76-79)

There was a strong agreement amongst participants that the conditions they had experienced mattered to how they presented physically and behaviourally. Abdul explained how growing up knowing only war shaped young people. He highlighted that “they” fought, and “we” (people) suffered, indicating a power imbalance between him and those who fought. Abdul’s father was killed by the Taliban. He wondered how we could expect him, or his peers, to look young (“fresh” and “good” faces) or think and behave like young people (“fresh thoughts”) when growing up with guns and the noise of bombings.

We passed too bad situation in our country, forty years they fight, we grew up in a fight, we grew up in a gun, we grew up in ah,eh, bad voices, we grew up in a bombed voices, so how can you expect that I have good faces, fresh faces, fresh skin, and also, fresh thought. I don't expect
(Abdul, 553-558)

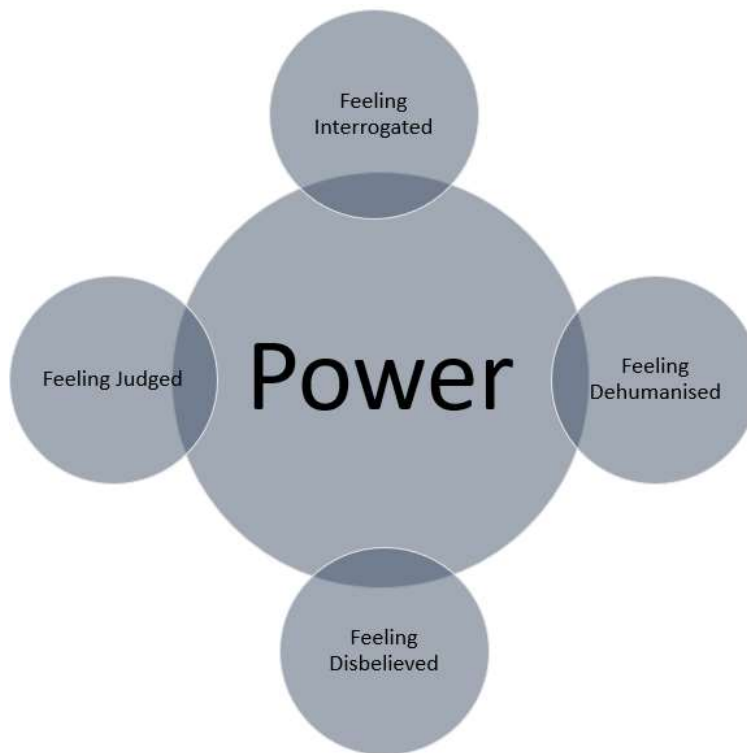
Ghaswan made a clear distinction between age and appearance, stating that he felt his assessors were not really looking at him but how he looked.

They are not looking at my age but looking at my appearance (Ghaswan, 170-172).

3.4. Power

Feeling judged, dehumanised, disbelieved and having meetings that felt like interrogations left the participants feeling powerless (see Figure 4). For some it felt like an abuse of power against them and their values, looks, behaviours and traditions. It is important to consider that this population is likely to have experienced abusive power relationships before and during their journeys to the UK. Circumstances of separated young people commonly include betrayal of trust, entrapment, pain, separation and loss. Research suggests that separated young people who have experienced abuses of power are sensitive to similar experiences (Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Sleijpen et al. , 2017).

Figure 4: Power



3.4.1. Feeling Judged

As already discussed, most participants felt judged, for either their physical appearance or their behaviour. Belal, for instance, recalled being told that he both looked and acted mature enough to be an adult.

And they said to me “The way you look, the way you talk, those stuff, you are enough mature, you look older”. (Belal, 187-189)

Chris remembered his age and looks being discussed and disagreed over in front of him. Being talked about as if he was not there was not just disrespectful but created a sense of invisibility and powerlessness.

They just, the woman, the woman said no, no to my age. And other woman said, oh yeah, he looks 16, but the other one said no. (Chris, 33-34)

He later explained that the woman who thought he was 16 was not tasked with his assessment but had briefly come into the room for a different reason. This indicated to me how readily people made a judgement on something as important as his age and felt they could comment on it in front of him.

Freddy concluded that his appearance must have given people, including the assessors, an indication about having undesirable characteristics or that he was a “bad person”. He explained that it is when people really get to know him “from inside” that they review their initial assumptions and become attached to him.

Because I meet someone from the beginning, they think, I don't know, the way I look, or something like that. That I look bad person, or something like that. But afterwards, when they spend time with me, then they just totally change, you know, they are happier and everything. And something, like you know, because the way I, probably, I look bad from face, my looks everything, but the way I treat everyone, the way I get along with someone, then the person never wants to leave me. They will know from inside, outside me, then this. Same with those family and this family (Freddy, 705-717)

I wondered how much discrimination Freddy had had to experience to have developed these beliefs about himself. He often spoke about having made deep connections with his foster families. He spoke of treating “everyone” well. I wondered if he felt he had to compensate for his “bad face”, that he needed to be especially kind to override people’s initial judgement. I was struck by the image of a young boy who could only present as overly positive in the fear that he would be rejected. I also wondered what emotions were shut down in this process? Could he be angry without fearing judgement? Was he allowed to be sad? I noticed that Freddy did not talk about emotions much in comparison to others. We briefly spoke about him crying and he underlined that he never showed these emotions to anyone:

I never cry in front of people (Freddy, 963)

3.4.2. Feeling Interrogated

Most participants spoke in detail about the intensity and intrusiveness of being questioned. Participants did not speak about these experiences when referring to physical tests which have been widely discouraged, partly due to the intrusive nature of medical examinations (Hjern et al., 2012). However, the experience of the young people in this study indicates that their assessments with social workers were not less, but possibly more humiliating.

Several young people reported feeling forced to answer the assessors' questions. Belal underlined this through repetition. He specifically attributed his 'tough time' to the pressure and force he felt under during the assessment.

If I didn't know, like, a question, they forced me to answer. I was forced by them to answer. So at that time, I was like, I had a really tough time (Belal, 168-171)

Abdul also spoke about not knowing the answers to questions. His account of being required to know specifics about his journey (which took place at night) gave me an insight into how difficult the questions were for him. Abdul asked (me) twice: "how can I remember?" Research has shown that traumatic experiences and confusion impact on the ability to form coherent memories and that details of autobiographical memory are not reliable (Graham et al., 2014). Additionally, separated young people often depend on agents and thus have very limited awareness of how they have travelled to the UK.

It was quite difficult, I was thinking about my way, what's gonna happen, where are in middle of the night? How can I remember in the jungle [Calais]? The way I am going? Which country is this? How can I remember? (Abdul, 682-686)

Chris explained feeling coerced into giving answers that the assessors were looking for. This left him feeling suspicious and distrustful of the assessors.

It is just like, they were trying to convince me [to be an adult]. And I was most of the time stuck and confused (Chris, 682-683)

Emad felt that he could not give answers that would be good enough for his assessors, which left him feel powerless and helpless. He sensed that whether he answered them truthfully or not, they would get angry.

I was confused, what can I say? If I tell this one, true, they angry. If I tell them something wrong, they angry. So I tell them truth. She was angry (Emad, 1026-1028)

Emad also recalled his first meeting lasting 8 hours, and not having any food. He still suffered pains from an injury he got during the journey. He felt sad whilst

the assessors were angry. Above all Emad remembered them 'making' him hungry, which he underlined by repetition. I wonder how this impacted on Emad's sense of feeling safe and welcome in the UK.

They took 8 hours, they made me cry, they made me sad, they angry and made me hungry as well. I was so hungry (Emad, 962-966)

Prolonged meetings, being forced to give answers, feeling coerced, being shouted at and starved bears a striking resemblance with methods of interrogation. Given the young people's backgrounds and possible previous experiences of violent interrogation methods, the assessments had the potential to cause great distress and re-traumatisation.

Abdul gave an insight into how fearful he felt, particularly at first when he was unfamiliar with UK laws and practices. He explained why he felt so scared to speak in the meetings, making links to his context and expectations of violence. For me this explanation highlighted how terrifying the meetings must have felt.

Because in our country, if we shout at somebody, they can slap us. They can kick us. I was thinking, if I say something, they might slap me, and I do not know want to be, I don't want somebody to beat me (Abdul, 308-312)

Not all participants had been able to stay calm under threat. We know from research that young people's anger often gets interpreted as behavioural or conduct problems (Given-Wilson et al., 20016). However, Emad assured me that his angry response, which he described as "lost my way", was an uncharacteristic and unplanned reaction to feeling forced and threatened. He used repetition to indicate how pressured he felt.

Cause lady was so bad, she was pressure on me, pressure on me, shouting me. So I lost my way. I didn't know that's happened again with somebody (Emad, 1015-1017)

Ghaswan had difficulties remembering details he was requested to give. He described feeling overwhelmed by questions and experiencing dizziness.

When I was asked so many questions, err, I become a bit dizzy (Ghaswan, 113-114)

I wondered whether the dizziness itself indicated physical distress related to trauma memories he was asked to recall. Common trauma reactions involve feeling emotionally, cognitively and physically overwhelmed. Given-Wilson et al. (2016) underline that emotional states influence coherence, which is regarded as important by decision makers at assessments. It is thus not surprising that Ghaswan, who was feeling dizzy, could not give coherent answers, nor remember what he had said in the sessions.

It is important to note that not all interactions and questioning felt like interrogation. Several young people appreciated sincere questioning about their wellbeing and questions to which they knew the answers. Abdul and Deldaar both spoke to their counsellors about their age assessments and highlighted that “basic” questions helped them.

X (counsellor) always helps. Basic questions, he asks me the basic questions, if I need help and if I am okay. So he helps in that regard (Deldaar, 397-399).

3.4.3. Feeling Dehumanised

Several participants expressed their powerlessness using language that described being treated like ‘lesser humans’ or objects.

Deldaar described their experience as being part of someone else’s game, likening themselves to toys. Deldaar felt that his assessors had already made up their minds and just used him “to have fun”. As someone whose future depends on this ‘fun’, Deldaar felt disregarded and unheard, indicating by repetition how much he felt they did not listen. Helplessness and humiliation are common responses to this type of dehumanisation. Perhaps he was also angry.

They did not listen to me at all, at all, they did not listen. I just think I, the questions that I give, I was just talking to myself and they made the decision according to what they had on their mind. As if they just asked me to come there, like a toy, they just wanted to have fun (Deldaar, 274-283)

Freddy compared his powerlessness with that of a voiceless heavy object that could be moved by others. I wondered about his choice of a “tree”, and whether a tree, with roots, is harder to move than other objects he could have chosen.

Had he chosen a tree because of his resistance? The tree metaphor also reminded me of the assumption that people's ages can be measured like those of trees. Perhaps he was referring to being simplified.

*I was like a tree, wherever people were moving me, I was going there.
Wherever then, I was going there (Freddy, 948-950)*

Ghaswan frequently used the word 'injustice'. He strongly felt that it was unjust to treat him like a criminal. This indicated that he felt that the assessors saw him like a criminal, which contrasted with how he viewed himself.

This is an unjust thing. And I said "What is my crime?" (Ghaswan, 329-330).

Similarly, Belal likened his relief, when succeeding in the appeal process, to being "released from prison" (Belal, 844). Being treated like objects and criminals lead the young people to feel unwanted and perhaps raises fears of being returned to their home country by force.

The perceived unfairness of the age assessment system was often experienced as unlawful by the young people. Some participants spoke about the importance of feeling believed, accepted and treated like lawful citizens. Abdul, for example, expressed his gratitude to the role of the law and how the legal system 'brought him here' (referring to his asylum status and access to education). In this part of our conversation he used the word "we" to indicate feeling accepted and included due to being equal under the law.

So the law bring me here. Thanks God that we have a law and also we are living under one law (Abdul, 193-195)

3.4.4. Feeling Disbelieved

Participants described being categorically doubted and disbelieved without consideration of their evidence or circumstances. In the context of being separated young people, whose stories are their only means to prove their identities, repeated doubt seemed to lead to secondary victimisation.

Secondary victimisation includes victim blaming, scepticism and inappropriate behaviour of professionals after trauma. The term was coined in the context of sexual violence (Campbell & Raja, 1999) but also applies here.

Chris found the experience of being disbelieved the most humiliating as he felt he was singled out as being dishonest. He felt wronged by the targeted nature of the assessment process, in that it did not apply to all young people.

But, if they just say oh you have to do this, that, this, assessment, then it would normal. That sounds more okay than just saying "you are lying about your age and you have to do this and you have to that" I think that is embarrassing. (Chris, 854-859)

Acceptance and solidarity for the young people meant being believed, taken seriously and treated with respect. Some participants underlined that they would have given up had they not had support from others. Belal described his foster mother as very supportive ("good woman") in encouraging him to "fight" in moments when he no longer wanted to pursue his appeal.

I was upset and I said to them, like, "I am not gonna go". Whatever they wanna say, I am gonna accept. And my foster mother, she was a good woman, she said to me "No", you have to fight against them. (Belal, 417-420)

Most participants had few people to confide in during their age assessment. Belal had a comparatively large support network. He recalled his foster parents, teachers and sports coach supporting him and believing his age. However, his assessors disagreed with his support network, leaving him feeling even more powerless. Again, Belal felt that the assessors viewed their knowledge as being superior to that of his network.

And they kinda of ignored my foster dad. And my foster mum, she was supporting me as well. Even my [sport] teacher spoke to me, my school teacher, all of them support me, yeah. But they were saying to me, "Nah. All those people support you are wrong. Just we are right". (Belal, 194-198)

Research with refugees has found that host societies frequently create disempowering socio-political environments when listening to asylum seekers' stories (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). The narrative of people claiming to be children to access support affected participants' interaction with their assessors. Misunderstandings between needs, expectations and discourses of being undeserving, were demonstrated during our conversations.

Emad recalled how the same sentence can imply different meanings depending on a person's context and power. At the time, Emad was sleeping on his brother's floor. When he persisted with stating "I need house", assessors understood him to be demanding and blamed Emad for being a deceitful adult. When Emad realised what had happened, and how much more powerful their narrative of accusation was over his need for housing, he felt "shocked". He wondered how ten people could think "something wrong" about him and how his needs could be so overlooked. He recalled feeling "totally broke", indicating how defeated, silenced and misunderstood he felt in his pursuit to prove that he was under 18 and in finding a place to live.

They say "No, you are not younger, you are 18 plus. You are doing this because you need house". I said "Of course I need house, where can I live?" They said "No, you want freedom like under 18, free house, free bus pass, free education". I was shocked (...) I feel like totally broke. I said "This is my age, I have proof". Why ten people thinking something wrong. Of course I need house, I need some space to live. (Emad, 346-359)

As seen in this extract, the understanding of the age concept as well as the agendas of the young people and their assessor differed fundamentally. Furthermore, this links to the concept of age as an inclusion and exclusion criteria for necessary support, which will be covered in the next section.

3.5. Consequences

All participants spoke about the consequences of their age assessment and how these had impacted on their lives. Feeling excluded, having regrets and reflecting on psychological and social impacts were the most common themes, as seen in Figure 5.

Assessment outcomes influenced the developmental trajectory of the young people and the sense they made of their experiences. It also impacted on their relationship with the UK, their wider network, as well as their hopes. Some feelings arising from confusing processes were later internalised as guilt and shame. However, exclusions from support systems were seen as something 'done to them'. Many participants made sense of their experiences in relation to their wider context, including their position as asylum seekers in the UK.

Figure 5: Consequences



3.5.1. Exclusion

The young people all spoke about being, at least temporarily, excluded from support systems and thus missing opportunities. A major sub-theme mentioned by each participant was the importance of education. It is well documented that many separated young people are ambitious and eager to adapt and succeed, get (back to) education and move forward with their lives (Kohli, 2011; O'Toole Thommessen et al., 2015; Oppedal, Guribye, & Kroger, 2016). The restrictions of age and age assessments often clashed with young people's ambitions. Being excluded from education left participants feeling disappointed in themselves and guilty towards their families, who had often instilled in them the hope of creating a better life in the UK.

Unlike the other participants, Ghaswan's exclusion from education was current at the time of interview. He was also homeless, yet his primary concern remained education, which indicated how important this was to him.

They did not send me anywhere. The day I was asking them to send me to school or college. (Ghaswan, 188-189)

Abdul, too, pleaded with his assessors for access to college. He was told to wait for his age to be determined. Abdul argued that age and access to education should not be linked, however, the reality of the UK context determines they are. Abdul highlighted that having nothing to do led to boredom.

I asked here, during the age assessment, that in, weekdays I am so bored at home, put me in college. And she was saying, no, your age is not, we don't know how old are you. I was like, even if you think 30, put me somewhere because I am getting bored. I don't have nothing to do. (Abdul, 197-200)

Boredom was frequently spoken about as being a hindrance to starting a new life. The exclusion from education also meant the young people could not build up a social network. Abdul had not been placed in foster care and was living in a hostel without clear support structures. I wondered whether boredom increased worrying and ruminating, which will be discussed later.

Abdul explained that not studying was especially difficult for him because education was embedded in and expected by his Afghan middle-class family's values. I wondered whether he felt guilty for letting his family down. Perhaps that is how Abdul persisted until he was allocated a place in college.

My dad was engineer, my brother was engineer. I was also studying back home as well. So, for me it was very difficult. (Abdul, 822-824)

Freddy reflected on the age assessment having cost him time: by changing his date of birth, by the prolonged process and by cutting short his education. Initially he was deemed too old for school and when he 'prematurely' turned 25, he was excluded from education again. Freddy describes feeling stuck now.

I couldn't go further because of my age gone up and then next "we cannot support you anymore". Then, I had no means for further education. From there, last year, since 2015, I am just stuck. (Freddy, 1058-1062)

This stuckness was intensified by his friends moving on to successful careers and comparing himself to them.

One friend "is nurse. One of my friend, he is getting a degree for doctor. My other friend, he became doctor" (Freddy, 925-927).

The comparison created complex emotions of envying them and regretting his initial confusion and decision not to appeal.

Age decisions were also directly linked to access to other support. After being ruled 18, Emad had to choose between leaving London or living in destitution. He refused to leave London and his brother, with whom he had recently reunited. He remembered the time as one of having no access to support.

That time, no college, no GP, I think ... pause... Lots of time I didn't have good, not good clothes, nothing like this as well. (Emad, 225-227)

Foster parents were frequently highlighted as a source of protection and trust. Freddy recalled his foster father 'siding' with him and protecting him by keeping information secret from authorities.

...you know the foster father, X, he says he not going to show my age, that letter, to a social worker or to Home Office. (Freddy, 184-196)

Deldaar experienced a distressing and abrupt ending of his entire support system after he was assessed to be over 18. He stated that "everything was stopped" and listed the discontinued support systems. Deldaar suffered especially from the enforced separation from his foster family, stating that he "was not allowed to be with" them, underlining that he had no say in this. He described how minor problems, such as a sore throat, became insurmountable due to the lack of support. He described this helplessness as "really awful".

They stopped everything. Money was stopped, college was stopped, I was not allowed to be with foster family. Then I had sore throat and I did not have a single penny to treat myself. It was really awful. (Deldaar, 124-128)

The young people's educational, social and legal trajectories were impacted following the outcomes of their age assessments. As were their abilities to trust others in fear of further consequences. Abdul's forced relocation affected his academic achievement and connection to his peers. However, when his teacher inquired about it, Abdul, who prides himself in being academic, initially felt blamed. His "bla" indicates annoyance at being made responsible for his circumstances. That Abdul spent all his money and time on a four-hour commute to college remained unknown because he was suspicious that his teachers would 'side' with his social worker.

My teachers used to say "Abdul, you was very good, why are you doing this?" bla. (...) also she said "Why are you so different these days?" I couldn't say it to them that I moved all the way down there and I coming and I was; "No, I am okay". And she was, she took me, one day, one-to-one, me and her, she said to me "If you have any problems, let me know, we can help you". I said "No, I don't have any problems, I am okay". I was shy (...) And I could not say. No. But If I say, what was going to happen? I don't know, she might be my social worker side as well. So, I did not say nothing to her. (Abdul, 397-410)

Fear and distrust continued beyond the young people's immediate systems, as will be explored in the next section.

3.5.2. Realisations and Regrets

Over time, most participants had made sense of their age assessments. As discussed under 'Confusion', many participants regretted missing opportunities and realised that their unfamiliarity with procedures had been a disadvantage. This was linked to complex emotions and internalised responsibility.

Freddy spoke about being made to feel responsible for not knowing procedures and reported feeling regret for not knowing the system well enough at crucial times. Freddy recalled and reflected on a range of feelings and motives, including regretting his own inabilities, explaining lethargy ("I could not be arsed"), and retracting lethargy by contextualising his experience of being new and unfamiliar with the English language and systems. He ended by blaming the solicitor for not fulfilling their duty to explain processes properly, contrasting it to my explanation and transparency of this research interview.

He told me, like, "Oh, there is another thing, you know", "Why did you not raise then, before, that the judge accept your age?" So, I didn't think. "Why you never raise the issues?" I didn't feel arsed. (...) How could I do that? I was sooo bad in English, not bad but okay, but I didn't know this, I didn't know all of this. Imagine, the solicitor has the right to explain, the way you do it now. (Freddy, 367-377)

The above extract shows the complexities that these young people must navigate not only during the procedures but when making sense of them after, and when justifying their reactions to others.

Several participants thought the purpose of age assessments was linked to power structures and financial gain at the cost of the young people. Chris, Belal, Emad and Freddy specifically made links between funding and age. They felt that assessors judged young people to be older to save costs. Chris proposed that social services coerced young people to accept adult ages to "get rid of them". Chris felt saddened by his realisation that money mattered more than people.

I was sad. You just want someone to be older so you can get rid of them, instead of you support them. (Chris, 618-620)

Freddy suspected personal or financial gain as an incentive for social workers to assess someone as older.

Probably they just want to get promotion, get something on a higher level. Something of that sort. If my age is gone, if my age is higher, probably getting something for that. You never know. (Freddy, 866-868)

He also felt that power differences between social services (as placement allocators) and foster families (as financially reliant) made it harder for foster parents to stand up to the age assessment procedures as they feared suffering financial losses.

Social services appointed them, so they won't go against them (Freddy 532-536)

Several young people spoke about regretting having come to the UK when they discovered the inequalities they were faced with following their age assessments. Abdul shared how his realisations had made him feel anger towards his family for sending him away. He underlined how hard his separation from his family was by listing each member.

Why did I, who told me, to come to this country? Why did you send me, my dad and my family, send me to this country? Without my mum, without my sister, without my father, without my brother. (Abdul, 566-570)

The more Abdul integrated, the more he perceived the system as unfair and discriminatory towards those born outside the UK. When comparing himself to his English friends he realised the “only thing” he did not have in common with them was his place of birth. Abdul’s awareness made him wish that the Afghan government would care about their young people and their ambitions. Abdul’s words indicated sadness, anger and hopelessness about his situation. Perhaps his powerlessness was exacerbated by barriers he faced in the UK.

And I was thinking, okay, because he is English, that's why, that's the only thing, he is English. I wasn't born here, that's the only thing. And sometimes I am just thinking about my back home, my president, that why they made that country so bad, to the young people are going from that country. Sometimes I just think, (...) just, like, they're rubbish. (Abdul, 805-812)

Several young people commented on how much age mattered in the UK. Over time, Freddy noticed that formal age assessments were not the only time people’s ages were judged. He realised that people commenting on his age seemed to be a cultural norm, which required adjustment.

It happens most of the time, every week like. Okay, people say how old I look like. Not assess your age, just how you look like. For me, like so many people, like in one day, comment on how old you look like. (Freddy, 532-536)

3.5.3. Psychosocial Impact

For Abdul, each time someone asked his age (a regular occurrence) this brought back painful memories of his age assessment and its life-limiting consequences. He wondered about the intention of the questions and felt suspicious.

Even now, if someone ask me, as a normal, as a friend, "how old are you?" (...) I am remembering that time. I say "Why are you asking me question?" (Abdul, 173-176)

Perhaps the example of everyday reminders indicates that the stress of his age assessment continues to the present day. Abdul explained how he could not eat or drink with the worry of his upcoming age assessment appointments.

I was quiet, just thinking about my social worker. What she is gonna ask me? what I'm gonna say to her? Erm, I don't know, what's gonna happen? And I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink. (Abdul, 602-605)

Abdul also spoke about long-term impacts of age assessments on young men. He thought his experiences had affected his health globally and referred to his headaches as a measure of hardship and stress.

This can affect young man, or young person, brain, health, and everything. On here, because since that time I have a headaches (Abdul, 691-693)

Headaches were often reported, mirroring research which identified headaches as common reactions to stress amongst people in Afghanistan (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Miller et al., 2006). Belal's migraines impacted on his ability to practise sports. This was particularly hard for him because exercise had always been a way to manage stress and a source of success.

You know I have migraine, that is why I can't do [sport discipline] much because all the time I have got headaches (Belal, 64-66)

Belal remembered dreading his assessment meetings because of the pressure. He shared how feeling constant stress had pushed him into breaking a mirror. I wondered whether the "big mirror" had a significance and whether his image in it reminded him of being judged on his appearance.

One night I got upset, and then I smashed, you know, the big mirrors. The police came, you know, to the house. They said "What is going on?" I said "I am fed up, I am not going to go anymore for interviews. I am done"
(Belal, 402-405)

Overall, the age assessments took an emotional toll on the young people. Between assessment meetings, Chris recalled feeling lonely and depressed.

I was just lonely in my room. thinking. It was depressing, yeah. I was depressed. (Chris, 501-503)

Chris's stress and loneliness were worse when he was at home. He felt that college and being around peers was a distraction and he could forget about the age assessment temporarily, until returning home.

I wasn't really thinking about the situation. At college. But it was affecting me more once I was at home. It was like, once I am out, the stress is gone but once I am in, all the stress is coming in. (Chris, 516-520)

Not all young people were able to access college and thus had little distraction. Emad recalled feeling like there was nothing ("in his hands") he could do to change his situation. Staying in and feeling powerless and bored exacerbated his sadness further. Emad relied on his brother and his friends to distract him, which helped him to feel "good" sometimes.

That time I didn't have something in my hands so I couldn't do nothing. So, I was just sad and stayed at home. (...) my brother friends, he have good friends like brothers. Always they come, they take me to outside, teach me about road, they teach me about everything, yeah. I was sad. They take me to X [landmark]. Everywhere. So that I feel good. (Emad, 558-566)

Others could access education but experienced additional social consequences due to their assessed ages. Belal was assessed to be 16 which meant he was placed in college, where he experienced bullying and racial abuse from older students. Belal usually escaped college and spent breaks at the adjacent school with pupils he felt closer to in age.

I was bullied every day by this college boys (...) Cause they was older than me. A guy, he used to call me like monkey (Belal, 322-327)

Like most participants Chris, Emad and Belal associated distraction with peers. However, they generally spoke about seeking emotional support from adults. Belal's foster mother comforted him with support and hugs when he was crying.

She just saying to me "Okay, I can help you, do this, that". She used to hug me. (Belal, 977-978)

Emad felt he could only share his worries around the age assessment uncertainties with his case worker. He did not want to upset his brother. He described his case worker as "part of my family" whom he trusted and confided in whenever he felt sad, guilty or hopeless about the assessment process.

If anything happened, I told her. She is not like my case worker, she is like my best friend. Like part of my family. What happened, I straight away tell her and say "I felt like this, I feel no good", "I done this one", I can't say my brother some things, I say it to her. (Emad, 878-883)

Overall, the young people felt their hopes for a better life diminished because of the age assessment and consequent effects on their opportunities. Deldaar, who lost foster care and support, summarised that he did not believe that anyone could remain hopeful during the age assessment processes (including appeals). With the statement that without exception "everybody becomes hopeless" Deldaar underlined his own "despair", hopelessness and frustration.

I don't think someone somebody would go with good hope and they would come out with good hope. It is just despair. Everybody becomes hopeless. (Deldaar, 41-42)

3.6. Summary

This analysis showed the emotional and social impacts of the age assessment processes. It also explored participant's experiences of power abuses in the context of being separated young people and in the light of current UK procedures. These themes will be further discussed in the next chapter.

4. CHAPTER FOUR – DISCUSSION

4.1. Chapter Overview

In the final chapter, I will discuss how this study's findings address the research questions and how they relate to theoretical frameworks and existing literature. The study will be critically evaluated and implications for clinical practice, policy and future research will be discussed. This chapter will conclude with some final thoughts and reflections.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

Due to the interconnected nature of psychosocial impacts, the participants' position as separated young asylum seekers and their perception of support structures, it was a challenge to answer the research questions independently of each other. The current findings go beyond earlier research by offering a contextualised and psychological perspective on how separated young people experience age assessments. Age assessments were found to be perceived as confusing and as an abuse of power, with varying but harsh consequences for the young people who took part in this study. The themes reflect how both ecological and systemic frameworks formulate meaning-making processes and development of identity as well as resilience (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Ungar, 2004). These frameworks fitted with the formation of the themes, partly because I found them to be helpful in conceptualising different layers of complexities. However, the young people themselves spoke and made sense of their experiences taking place within context and layers of power.

4.2.1. How have their age assessment experiences impacted on the young people psychologically and socially?

The seven separated young people in this study spoke about their age assessments as socially and psychologically unsettling with short- and longer-term impacts.

4.2.1.1 Initial Reactions and Impacts: Many participants highlighted the cultural norms and meanings they drew upon to make sense of their experiences. The differences between understanding age as a standardised marker for maturity stood in contrast to many of the young people's conceptualisations of their identity and age.

Epistemic injustice, a term coined by Fricker (2007), includes testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Grounded in feminist theory, these concepts also apply to minority groups such as age-disputed separated young people who have been judged, disbelieved and silenced by structural discrimination against their own knowledge. Participants' reflections on their initial confusion illustrate how they were faced with these injustices from the moment they arrived in the UK. Testimonial injustice is marked by prejudices that lead to the discrediting of someone's words such as disputing someone's stated age. Systematic disbelief, lack of support and stark power imbalances mean that young people were also affected by hermeneutic injustice. They were denied the social resources, such as stable homes, comprehensible information and access to interpreters, to make sense of their experiences. Hermeneutic injustice is conceptualised as being wronged in our capacity to know (Fricker, 2007). These injustices may lead to secondary harms and create obstacles to marginalised groups' resistance to their social positions (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018).

In line with Crawley (2007), all participants felt aggrieved and wronged by their age disputes. Age assessments were experienced as denying participants parts of their identity. The question about who awards us our age and helps us construct our identities seems to be at the heart of the confusion and distress experienced by the participants. In the UK the state legitimises people's existence through official documentation. Many participants spoke about their families taking this role, especially their mothers because they had "brought them to this world". UK authorities replacing these responsibilities and accusing young people of being wrong can pose a threat to their identities and ties to those they left behind. These findings stood out in this study and have not yet been reported by other explorations into the age assessment processes. However, the finding links to the growing awareness that the individualistic culture of the UK differs from that of many separated young people who have

grown up in communities where the self is defined in relation to the family (Bracken et al., 1997; Chase et al., 2008).

As in Gower's (2011) report, age assessments were experienced as (re-) traumatising prolonged interrogations. Due to experiencing the meetings as threatening and intrusive, participants spoke about dreading their age assessments, feeling pressure and worry. Difficulties in gathering information from refugee children and young people have been well documented (Goodman, 2005; Keselman et al., 2010; Kohli, 2006a), as have constraints in relying on autobiographical memory (Graham et al., 2014). Assessors in asylum interviews have been found to expect older children to give more coherent and consistent accounts (Given-Wilson et al., 2016). Similarly, participants in this study felt that assessors did not consider that they might be unable to recall memories and life events accurately. Secondary-victimisation, or feeling blamed for their own situation, due to assessors doubting their memories, accounts and ages, were reported.

Derluyn and Broekaert's (2008) study indicates that uncertainty can lead to ambivalence between the wish to integrate and the feeling that it is impossible to do so. This study's participants described sadness about losing their hope for stability and safety. Age assessments were linked to threats of forced returns, barriers to education and limitations to social support, which exacerbated hopelessness, feelings of pressure, guilt, social isolation and rumination. Participants linked their worries about age decisions to loss of appetite, tension, anger, headaches and other physical pains. These emotional and behavioural reactions are often presented as internalised processes, or symptoms (Summerfield, 2001). However, it was felt by participants that these reactions were embedded in their situations as separated young people.

4.2.1.2. Longer-term Impact: For separated young people, as for all people, it is important to be able to develop a sense of identity that is based on strengths, not weaknesses (Hughes & Rees, 2016). Practices such as age assessments have humiliating and victimising effects, which inevitably co-construct the young people's identities. Erikson (1968) points out that members of communities that experience oppression may internalise views held by the dominant society. Taifel (1978) underlines that members of minority groups are faced with limited choices. They can either accept negative views directed at them or reject them

in search of ways of keeping their own identities (Phinney, 1989). However, the absence of sustained relationships to friends, family, or trusted members of society further impacts on young people's identity formations (Ilse Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). Thus, young people who are excluded from support networks based on their judged ages are more likely to internalise discourses of blame, vulnerability and exclusion when alternatives are not provided.

These factors, as well as loss of identity, role, self-worth, language, culture and stability (Vitus, 2010), are understood to decrease people's agency and to impact on long-term ontological security and its reciprocal concepts of belonging and acceptance. 'Ontological security' is described as the intersect of one's own feelings of belonging and being accepted by others. 'Home' is consequently understood as a place where a person's identity is best grounded (Yuval-Davis, Kannabirān, & Vieten, 2006). Long-term ontological insecurity involves people feeling anxiety and dread due to restricted acceptance and ability to make sense of events in their lives (Sirriyeh, 2010). Shame occurs when feeling negatively judged for being inferior or having violated moral standards (Tracey, Robins, & Tangey, 2007), such as 'lying' about age to access benefits. The rhetoric of blame is associated with shame. Separated young people who have additional shameful memories of past experiences may be more prone to believe that others view them as undesirable (Cunha, Matos, Faria, & Zagalo, 2012).

Thus, systemic inequalities exacerbated participants' separation from their roots (including their cultural and familiar means to make sense of experiences) as well as their hopes and dreams for their future.

4.2.2. How do the young people talk about their age assessment experiences in relation to their social position of being asylum-seeking and refugee people?

Separated young people encounter hostile environments that can involve years of uncertainty. As highlighted by the current 'Windrush Crisis', the UK government employs powerful practices, discourses and instructions to make life most difficult for 'illegal immigrants' (Hill, 2017). These practices affect separated young people as they are frequently faced with a culture of disbelief (Crawley, 2007, p. 26), of which age assessments seem to be an aspect. Gender, religion, origin and entering the country through 'illegal' routes also

contribute to society's and thus the assessor's prejudices around young people's status, age and intentions (Kohli, 2006a; Silverman, 2016).

The way young people spoke to me in our interviews resonates with the above. CMM (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) perspectives can help to understand the young people's experiences by considering how social and political structures and discourses impact on the young people's experiences and their reactions.

Separated children can often only provide 'proof' of their legitimacy through their verbal accounts (Given-Wilson et al., 2016). Being doubted and accused leads to defensive positions. Most participants felt obliged to constantly contextualise and justify their experiences out of fear of being misunderstood. Many explanations focused on how different their lives were prior to coming to the UK.

At times they drew on what they knew about me to persuade me to be on 'their side'. Some contrasted the problems young Afghans have with those that Germans have. Others asked me to imagine what leaving my family would feel like to further highlight the difference between us. Some people utilised repetitions and metaphors to emphasise their position and experiences of hardship during and after their age assessments.

Being accused of lying, feeling homogenised and labelled as stupid felt particularly disempowering. The young people's forms of resistance included distrust, guarding of their age identity and fostering ambitions to succeed academically. Many young people used language describing conflict such as "taking sides" or "fighting decisions", placing their position opposite to that of assessors and thus resisting their limited power and agency in the process.

The powerful discourse of 'bogus children' positions separated young people outside the realms of 'normal' childhood, which is symbolised by security and stability (Wernesjö, 2012). This was underlined by the young people describing oppressive power structures and limited support as consequences of their age assessments. In line with Kirkwood's (2017) observations, participants used explanations and familiar terms ("my mum", "my family") to humanise themselves and create a link with positive associations of being part of a family. Similarly, participants contrasted their position of being age-disputed to the situations and successes of peers who were either British-born or had their ages recognised. These observations echo Engebritsen's (2003) findings that

the circumstances of asylum-seeking youth are not comparable with what it means to be a young person in Europe.

The participants highlighted the disconnect between the construction of separated young people as *being* vulnerable and the process of age assessments *making* them vulnerable. Separated young people are commonly constructed as in need of protection and support because of their previous experiences and their child status (Wernesjö, 2012). Young people in this study instead constructed themselves as in need of protection and support because of their initial limited understanding of British customs, their ambitions to do well and their status as humans. Several participants perceived age assessments as a way by which Local Authorities abdicated their responsibilities to protect them.

4.2.3. How have they perceived the system of support around the assessment?

Separated young people are often left with considerably less support than they need to thrive. The experiences explored in this study indicated that the more interlinked and stable support systems were, and the less discrimination was experienced, the better participants felt supported during and after their age assessments. This highlights Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'reciprocity' (p. 22) of interactions between individuals and their environments.

The scarcity of microsystem level support after arrival coincided with the age assessments. Looking at participants' narratives through the lens of 'embodied' experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) revealed that their encounters were marked by limited ability and support to communicate with their environment.

Participants' interpretations of age assessment meetings might have varied from social workers' intentions, however, the young people spoke of being frightened and unsettled by their experiences. Life stressors are often understood as rooted in social problems. Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010) report that family connection, harmony and religion are major mitigating factors for people in Afghanistan. For the separated young people in this study, these protective features were limited.

In line with O'Toole Thommessen and Todd (2018), participants often had more encounters with authorities (e.g., lawyers, social workers) than with consistently available and trustworthy peers and adults. The macrosystem's "culture of disbelief" (Crawley, 2007) as well as experience of racism and discrimination

had disadvantageous effects on the young people and their systems.

Macrosystem discourses portraying generalised mistrust and disbelief lead to increasingly harsh immigration control. In line with previous research, immigration procedures, such as age assessments, resulted in mutual fear, mistrust and disbelief between young people and authorities (Ní Raghallaigh, 2014; Thomas & Devaney, 2011). Threats associated with disbelief included fears of being inadequately treated during, between and after the assessment meetings, limits to hopes and ambitions and risks to their cultural connections. Young people frequently expressed their suspicion towards their social workers and authorities. Fears that others would take the 'social worker's side' and turn against them were common, even years after assessments.

Participants stressed the importance of social support across the exo- and mesosystems. Some young people highlighted that when their age assessment process commenced, not enough time had passed to build trusting relationships nor had their support systems connected with each other. Participants valued educational settings as sources for social, academic and cultural learning. Peer groups were highlighted as a means of social support and specifically as a distraction from their ongoing stress around the age disputes. Participants also highlighted valuing emotional support from adults within their immediate environment, specifically foster parents or key workers, indicating a need for guidance and support by people who could take parental roles.

The participants spoke about their experiences of exclusion as hurtful. They valued a sense of belonging that was enabled by their immediate social networks (Caxaj & Verman, 2010). It was positive to find that a range of people within some participants' social worlds had provided encouragement, guidance and mutual appreciation as an alternative to the 'culture of disbelief'. However, it was the loss of these emotional connections and the relative social stability after age assessments that hit the young people the hardest. Ongoing impacts of chronosystem factors such as political conflicts and wars which led to significant life transitions and displacement for these young people cannot be forgotten during times of constant insecurity and further separations in the UK. Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights that young people's developments are adversely influenced by moving, changing routines, disrupting peer groups or links to their communities.

Addressing this study's three research questions highlights the interplay between individual, contextual and historical factors supporting ecological models of resilience (Bronstein et al., 2013; Sleijpen et al., 2017; Ungar, 2004, 2013). Therefore, it is paramount that resilience is placed in ecological context to avoid overestimations of 'internal' resilience being held against young people and leading to less protection (Hughes & Rees, 2016; Mitchell, 2008). For instance, doubting their ages might result from overestimating their internal resilience. Given the ordeals that they are likely to have endured to arrive in the UK, it is hardly surprising that separated young people might appear 'resilient' compared to their British peers, yet this fails to make visible their often incredibly vulnerable and precarious contexts.

4.3. Critical Review of the Research

Drawing on Yardley's (2000) principles, the trustworthiness of this study will be evaluated to ensure quality and coherence. Limitations will be discussed in relation to quality, epistemological and methodological approaches.

4.3.1. Context

In line with Yardley's (2000) recommendations to situate studies within relevant research, I performed a broad literature search to ground myself in the complex arguments relevant to the topic. As the subject is heavily politicised, it was vital to get a nuanced view of age assessments and be aware of different interpretations and stances towards these.

Sensitivity to participants' contexts includes ethical considerations (Harding & Gantley, 1998). I ensured that every attempt was made not to replicate distressing experiences during research interviews. Meetings were held at comfortable places, at times chosen by the young people. I was careful not to probe too much and tried my best to attend to any signals of discomfort.

I considered my own context and relationship to the research topic as well as that of the participants. Initial assumptions about the topic, such as questioning whether participants would be able to remember details of their age assessments or common beliefs around separated young people were challenged, as shown in reflective diary extracts (Appendix C).

4.3.2. Commitment and Rigour

Commitment to IPA was addressed in supervision and by engaging in relevant reading. My supervisor had experience in conducting IPA and could give guidance as well as point to suitable literature for specific concerns. The research diary was useful to aid reflection and track the development of research skills. Entries were used throughout all research stages; to capture impressions after interviews, help generate ideas, aid coding and help with theme development and making connections.

Rigour becomes evident from the thoroughness applied to the analysis. Two stages of coding of transcripts were used to remain as close to idiographic accounts of experience as possible before considering themes (Smith et al., 2009). Commitment to three layers of interpretation (descriptive, linguistic and conceptual) aided the move beyond pure description. Smith's (2011) principle of rigour refers to the reader getting a sense of the prevalence of overall themes as well as participant representation for each theme. Within the constraints of the word limit, I have included participants' accounts that represent the themes. The prevalence of themes can be seen in Appendix Q.

Drawing on theoretical and clinical knowledge, each quote is discussed, and interpretations are made. Clinical Psychology training, using formulation and helping people make sense of their experiences have helped me to make links to conceptual interpretations.

4.3.3. Transparency and Coherence

To adhere to the transparency criterion, several techniques were drawn on. Chapter two outlined data collection and analysis to aid the reader in understanding the processes and progression of IPA. Examples of the coding and theme formation processes are provided in the Appendices to underline claims made throughout chapter three.

Internal coherence was addressed by considering the consistency of the research aims, the critical realist–social constructivist position and the methods of IPA. To ensure aims and methods used were compatible with the proposed epistemological position, this IPA acknowledged language and context as especially important (Langdrige, 2008).

4.3.4. Impact and Importance

As with all qualitative research, this study does not seek to make generalisable claims beyond the young people involved (Willig, 2008) as there might be other viewpoints and experiences this study did not convey. Smith et al (2009) highlight that detailed examinations of a few participants' perspectives lead to rich and nuanced analyses of experiences. It is recognised that the specificity and size of the participant sample was restricted to certain criteria such as gender. Exploring separated young people's perspectives of their age assessments has provided relevant and novel insights. These contribute to the existing body of research. The participants' construction of their experiences was grounded in specific circumstantial and cultural belief systems, which also apply to broader populations of separated young people. Therefore, the findings can help inform guidance, policy, intervention and prevention processes as well as implications on future research.

4.3.5. Epistemological Limitations

This study aligns itself with a social-constructionist approach by acknowledging diverse realities and perspectives and questioning the assumptions around the universal applications of age. Approaching this study from this epistemological position, the willingness to make sense of the intersecting contexts was key (Willig, 2008). It was at times difficult to distinguish between psychological, social, political and legal perspectives, as all determine power, language and 'real-life' implications for the young people.

Relative and discursive approaches are frequently critiqued for avoiding non-discursive factors that contribute to the construction of phenomena (Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007). Integrating critical realism allowed me to also recognise 'real' and material consequences and their influences on participants' understanding of their experiences. It also allowed me to hold in mind different psychological and sociological approaches. However, as a novice researcher, my attempts to avoid methodological tribalism (Hood, 2015) might have led me into presenting rather confusing epistemological pluralism (Clarke et al., 2015).

In line with Madill et al (2000) I aimed to position and understand participants' perceptions, my experiences conducting this study, psychological conceptions and analysis within socio-political, personal and historical contexts. Reflexivity

was key in this process. However, carefully considering contextual influences meant that at times I struggled to move away from descriptions, in case my interpretations were too daring, or my understanding of participants' narratives too authoritative or invalidating, thus rendering them unheard once more.

4.3.6. Methodological Limitations

4.3.6.1. Design: Mackenzie et al (2007) suggest that research should aim to create reciprocal gains for refugee participants. Whilst all participants underlined that they participated because they felt it was an important project, practical limitations meant that young people were not continually involved in the research process. Consultants were only included in the design of the study and participants only met with me once for their interviews. In line with Patel and Vara's (2012) reflections, more time, and more connections to organisations and resources would have been needed to access and continuously involve separated young people in co-creating the study in a meaningful and accessible format. There are plans in place to feed research outcomes back to the partner organisations, their commissioners and stakeholders and provide results in comprehensible ways for young people to access them, if they wish.

4.3.6.2. Language: Neither the participants nor the researcher spoke English as their first language. It is important to note that conveying and making sense of experiences bore multiple complexities to both the participants and me. All participants who opted to meet me without an interpreter were able to comprehensively speak about the research topic. The two interviews which were conducted with interpreters were shorter and less detailed. However, their accounts have added richness by giving an insight into the experiences many others spoke about; feeling confused and having difficulties making sense of their experiences and environments. This could have been due to not having had as many opportunities to reflect on their experience through a widely shared language and relying on interpreters to convey and co-construct their experiences. Although the interpreters were briefed on the research purpose, their own values and beliefs may have influenced their interpretations. I recognise the limitations associated with using interpreters as participants' responses may also have been influenced by their attendance.

4.3.6.3. Participants: Although the study did not set out to explore the experiences of young people from one country, it is not surprising that most of participants were young Afghans as they have faced the highest number of age disputes (Refugee Council, 2017). Chris, the only non-Afghan, was also the only one whose stated age was accepted after assessment. Although this outcome might have been co-incidental, it fits with narratives around Afghan young men and the construction of 'bogus asylum seekers' (Robinson & Williams, 2015) or 'imposter children' (Silverman, 2016). Nevertheless, themes from Chris's experiences overlapped with those of the other participants.

It needs to be noted that access to support might have enabled participation. Young people with fewer resources or more distressing experiences may be less inclined or not considered to participate in research. The voices of individuals who suffer the most may thus never get heard (Thommessen & Todd, 2018). Most participants had attended counselling sessions and might have processed their experiences in ways and in a language that enabled them to share and construct these in conversation with me. This might have also influenced how they spoke about the impact on their wellbeing and the way they related to me, a psychologist. However, the link to the partner organisations may have restricted what participants felt they could say.

Some young people spoke about certain experiences after the Dictaphone was switched off. I suspect that some participants remained suspicious of the interview being recorded or particularly painful parts of their stories being shared. More than one interview per participant could have enabled a more balanced power dynamic. However, repeated meetings could also have been counter-productive in avoiding the replication of assessment experiences.

Religion is seen as a major protective factor, specifically for people from Afghanistan (Bronstein et al., 2013; Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010). I wondered why religion had not be discussed more. It is possible that the people had not related it to their age assessments. Wider narratives and the media's portrayal of Islam, and specifically Muslim men, may have impacted on how comfortable Muslim participants felt to speak to me, a white non-Muslim woman. No question about religion was included in the schedule, which could have also hindered the conversation. Had I been in a therapeutic role I would have explored these areas further.

4.4. Reflexive Review

Ongoing reflexivity was central to this study. This acknowledges the impossibility for me, as the researcher, to take a position of neutrality and objectivity and invites the reader to evaluate how meanings were constructed (Willig, 2008).

4.4.1. Power and Difference

Reflecting on power relations has been fundamental in the process of both conducting and presenting this research. These factors raise moral and ethical dilemmas and decisions, some of which are discussed in other sections (e.g. 4.3.6.3. explores how power processes and imbalances may have influenced what participants felt able to speak about).

Power differentials become obvious in this study, where I conducted research with a group of young people who are frequently given less of a voice than most other citizens. In this context, researchers risk further subjugation of participants by disseminating their results and findings (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

Subsequently, researchers have the responsibility to reflect on moral aspects of choices involved in telling other people's narratives. Especially during the analytic process, I reflected on and questioned whose interests my interpretations served and whose stories I was prioritising. These issues will also be further discussed in the next section (4.4.2. Personal Reflexivity).

Whilst it is impossible to reflect on all aspects involved in power and differences, I would like to reflect on those particularly pertinent to this research.

4.4.1.1. Naming Participants: A key finding of the current research is that age assessments impacted on the young people's sense of identity and belonging. The question of who awards them their age and therefore part of their identity was highlighted as central to these aspects. By awarding names to the participants in form of pseudonyms I held the power to change their identities in similar ways. Although this served the purpose of protecting them, it was a task I did not take lightly.

I felt it was a big responsibility to name someone. I wanted to choose a name they liked, with a meaning they agreed, that would possibly strengthen their sense of self. I looked up names on a website for Afghan names and awarded

pseudonyms alphabetically to somewhat randomise the selection. Furthermore, I chose names, which had a nice meaning or meaning of strength and endurance. Of course, this method of selection represented my views and not necessarily those of the participants.

To avoid having to award someone with a name they did not like or agree with, all participants were given the chance to choose their own pseudonyms. However, only two picked names for themselves. I wondered whether the young people were not used to be given opportunities to choose these things for themselves. Perhaps I did not give them enough time to consider this matter carefully in the context of presenting a lot of information prior to commencing the interviews. I wonder whether it would have been different had I allowed more time at the end to support the participants in choosing their pseudonyms.

The two young people who choose their own pseudonyms, Freddy and Chris, selected names commonly found in the UK. Especially for one of them, the chosen pseudonym differed widely from his birth name. Upon asking if he would not prefer to choose an Afghan name, he explained he felt quite British now and would prefer this. This mirrors various aspects of power, acculturation and what is expected of these young people and seen as acceptable in the UK context. Whilst it would have been disempowering to choose a different name for them, it also showed how their cultural identity and sense of belonging had been challenged and changed by their experiences of life in the UK.

4.4.1.2. Choosing Terminology around Age and Gender: A further difficulty was to choose the most appropriate language to define the young people in relation to their age and gender. Whilst the term 'boy' seemed inappropriate for their life stages, describing the participants as 'men' raised several concerns. Although most of the participants reflected on seeing themselves as 'men' now, they made it clear that at the time of their age assessments, they did not. It is debatable and context dependent at which stage 'boys' become 'men'. In the UK context, the age of 18 is seen as a determinant of adulthood and thus whether someone is described as a 'man'. By using the term 'men' for the participants, I would have contributed in making them older and acted like those who assessed and disbelieved them. In the end, I described the participants as young people, used the term 'male' if gender clarification was necessary and described them as 'young men' only when directly quoting participants.

4.4.2. Personal Reflexivity

Throughout the research I have tried to be transparent about my personal and professional contexts and their influences on my engagement with participants, the power differences between us, their accounts and my interpretations. I am conscious that my stance and interpretations are motivated by my interests and experiences. I am also aware that before emerging myself in this study, I had never worked with separated young people. Being on placement in a 'trauma' service that embraced 'Western' approaches to traumatic experiences, whilst conducting this study, meant that I had to learn these models and distance myself from them at the same time.

As a Western-educated woman, I sometimes struggled to think outside the dimensions I had taken for granted. I was aware of my various privileged positions and feared that my blind spots for oppressive practices would fail my participants. Meeting the young people and immersing myself in their accounts also reminded me of the responsibility I held, as a psychologist, researcher and person, to use opportunities that I was given by my education and background. At different times during the study, age assessments were heavily discussed in politics and media. I felt overwhelmed by the responsibility this seemed to bring. As a novice researcher I felt inadequate to fulfil the expectation to create change. I felt I lacked the ability to think 'academically'. In line with dominant narratives about women I labelled myself as overly empathic for crying whilst engaging with the research. At times, my sense of age assessments being oppressive and unjust prevented me from extracting nuances within the participants' experiences. Drawing on the contextual and epistemological approaches utilised in this study, I realised that the responsibility for creating change was not solely on me. My support network could enable me to do my best and therefore contribute to change in small ways. I reflected on these aspects during regular thesis supervision and in my reflective journal.

To avoid the analysis being grounded in my own experiences and assumptions, I asked myself several questions throughout the analysis: "Is this based on my experience?", "Where does this idea come from?", "What would the participants say if I shared this with them?" However, my active role in categorising data and presenting the themes remains undeniable (Smith et al., 2009).

4.5. Implications and Recommendations

O'Toole Thommessen and Todd (2018) underline that research findings need to lead to developing skills, guiding policy or changing social attitudes. The young people in this study identified their distress during and after their assessments in terms of their historical and current contexts. Further to offering theoretical perspectives, these findings can help to understand where prevention and intervention can take place. For the young people in this study, having their ages, their stories and their families' values disrespected exacerbated distress. These aspects lead to important implications for clinical practice and beyond.

4.5.1. Implications for Preventative Practices from Social Care and Other Agencies

It is not possible to prevent the historical factors affecting a young person arriving in the UK, and their separation from families, networks, culture and peers. However, we have a duty not to exacerbate suffering and pursue prevention of further harm. In line with best practice guidelines published by ADCS (2015), this study does not claim that young people who state their age to be younger purposefully do not exist. However, instead of 'aging-out' those who are suspected to lower their age, we need to think what barriers our policies and criteria create to make young people consider these options.

This research reveals important factors that determine the consequences for the young people. If an assessment is considered necessary, the themes 'Power' and 'Confusion' indicate what needs to change during assessments to limit the consequences.

- It is important to make age assessments transparent. Explaining purpose and processes in accordance with the young person's ability to comprehend is vital. Having language-appropriate, knowledgeable and culturally competent interpreters to help increase understanding of processes can lessen confusion. For the young person to feel more at ease and able to answer questions, it is vital to refrain from disbelief, blame, accusations and anger.
- Limiting experiences of implicit and explicit power processes by developing an increased understanding of the young person's

experiences before and during assessments is vital. For the young person to feel at ease an understanding approach to asking questions needs to be adopted, without pressure and force. Limitations of autobiographical memory and recall of traumatic events need to be taken into consideration.

- Ideally the basic needs of a young person should be met before they undergo an age assessment for them to feel supported and a sense of safety. However, there can be real difficulties in finding and maintaining stable placements.
- Food and breaks should be provided during the assessment meetings. Meetings should be time limited and take place in accessible and comfortable environments.
- Young people's networks should be involved. The opinions of foster parents, keyworkers or teachers should be heard and taken into consideration.

Overall, these recommendations are in line with best practice guidance (ASCS, 2015) and underline the importance of assessors adhering to these (Michie, 2005). In line with Gower (2007), I would like to acknowledge that working in the context of limited resources, exclusionary discourses and conflicting government policies, assessing social workers face significant ethical dilemmas and huge responsibilities in their task to determine a young person's age. To illustrate these complexities, Appendix S depicts the age assessment processes as outlined by the Home Office (2018). Clinical psychologists should be placed in Social Services and Looked After Children teams alongside social workers to support, share and consult on difficult assessment decisions and processes.

4.5.2. Implications for Mental Health Professionals Working to Support Separated Young People

The absence of age assessment-specific psychological research underlines Crawley's (2007) conclusion that the psychological impacts of these procedures are underestimated amongst clinicians. Depending on the assessment outcome, age-disputed young people might be referred for psychology within CAMHS, Looked After Children or adult mental health services. It is important to increase awareness of age assessment-related processes within teams that are

likely to receive referrals for separated young people. Based on this study, I suggest the following considerations for assessment, formulation, intervention.

4.5.2.1. Assessment: One of the most distressing experiences for the young people in this study was the questioning of their identities and the discrediting of their stories. Assessing clinicians in mental health services should refrain from expressing disbelief of young people's accounts to avoid further re-traumatisation and re-victimisation. Like getting a picture of what happened to the young person prior to coming to the UK, clinicians should carefully explore what procedures they may have had to undergo in the UK and what their experience of these were. Implications such as further separation from foster carers or peers should be noted and integrated into the formulation.

4.5.2.2. Formulation: Formulations should exceed individualised explanations for distress (Patel, 2003). It is important to truly acknowledge cultural, historical and current contexts in the complexities of the young person's life. This study shows that young people may interpret assessments as dangerous and threatening, whilst clinicians may presume these are harmless processes. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, CMM (1980) or the Power-Threat-Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) can be useful aids in considering feelings of powerlessness and incorporating ways in which young people already resists oppression.

4.5.2.3. Individual and Group Level Interventions: Revisiting Kohli's (2006a) findings of young people's preferred approach to recovery as "the present first, the future next and the past last" (p. 5), strength-based models that consider all aspects of the young people's story and identity are beneficial. Problem-solving and practical help as well as therapeutic interventions using narrative, systemic or liberation psychology approaches can help young people to cope and recover (Afuape & Hughes, 2016; Dura-Vila et al., 2012).

Narrative Therapy (White & Epsom, 1990) allows clinicians and young people to consider all aspects of their story and identity. This is seen as a helpful way for clinicians to understand and work with multiple discourses and narratives told about separated young people and how these stories determine how others relate to them or how they should live their lives (Hughes & Rees, 2016). Separated young people encounter problem-saturated narratives during their

age assessments, within the trauma discourses in psychology as well as numerous other societal and media discourses. These stories have the power to shape a young person's identity and influence their view of themselves within their environment. The narratives can be the biggest challenge for separated young people who seek asylum (Hughes & Rees, 2016). This study shows how much the age assessment and discourses associated with it can undermine a young person's sense of a coherent identity and hamper their hopes for security. Hughes and Rees (2016) highlight the important role of clinicians in helping separated young people to re-build a secure foundation and to re-build coherent identities. A safe base which allows young people to experience sense of agency, purpose and connection is vital to uncover strengths and resilience.

Whilst not ignoring previous traumatic events, narrative approaches can explore power and how young people resist oppression to create alternative stories that fit with their identity and who they want to be (Clayton & Hughes, 2016). This approach can be used to strengthen own identities and relationships with others within a group setting as shown by Hughes and Kaur (2014) and their work inspired by the Tree of Life approach (Ncube, 2006). This method uses the metaphor of a tree to invite people to collectively explore preferred narratives about themselves, their cultural and personal roots, their strengths and hopes and dreams. Hughes and Kaur (2014) have shown how the metaphor can be adapted to match the needs and interest of the group it is used with, for instance by using a sporting metaphor and creating a Team of Life.

Groups can also serve the important aim to 'spread the news' (Freedman & Combs, 1996) because other members of the group can witness and strengthen the narratives of preferred identities, foster connection and safety as well as share hopes for the future. If deemed acceptable to a group of young people affected by age assessment processes, a narrative group approach could help members to reconnect with their identities and dreams as well as share their experiences of the age assessments. Clayton and Hughes (2016) write about using creative media and film in narrative approaches to further 'spread the news' by inviting people to be 'outsider witnesses' (White, 1995) to the young people telling or performing the preferred stories of their lives. A film co-produced film can inform professional training and create an opportunity to

invite the audience to feedback on what moved them, as demonstrated by Clayton and Hughes (2016).

It is important to recognise that identities are created within social and political contexts. The current study shows that the participants understood age assessments as serving to oppress people from refugee communities. It is therefore important that therapeutic interventions allow to witness, name and underline injustices that age assessed young people experience (Martín-Baró, 1996) to inhibit these practices to prosper. It is vital for clinicians to facilitate conversations with separated young people and to think together how alternative stories can be shared to challenge those narratives that harm the young people's sense of self.

Although not all young people experience long-standing nightmares, flashbacks or other distressing experiences linked to traumatic memories, these can seriously impact on a young person's life. If a securer foundation has been accomplished for a separated young person and they wish to speak about their past experiences, an opportunity for this should be offered. As the majority of separated young people have had multiple painful experiences, Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) (Ruf, Schauer, Neuner, Catani, Schauer & Ebert, 2010) could offer an appropriate and acceptable approach to therapy. Whilst NET is based on principles of cognitive behavioural exposure therapy and relies on the individual reliving of traumatic memories, the approach aims to situate experiences in personal, social and political contexts. Furthermore, NET also draws on positive stories of success and growth. Both, traumatic and positive events, represented by stones and flowers respectively, are placed on a rope on the floor. When NET or similar approaches are used, it is vital for practitioners to keep in mind asylum processes, including age assessments. These can be traumatic experiences and thus it is important to give separated young people the permission to treat these as such, include them as stones on their lifeline and give the appropriate attention to them when 'narrating' or reliving the experiences. NET incorporates the therapist to produce a written testimony of events that happened in a person's life. These testimonies can be used to inform legal proceedings if the person wishes so. It is vital that age assessments are included to demonstrate that the young person's story is fully

heard as well as to highlight and bear witness to the harmful effects of UK immigration procedures.

To foster stability, security and a coherent identity, interventions could also involve long-term low-intensity work, which would give the young people time to express themselves without pressure and allow them to build up a relationship slowly. Ideally, such interventions would link the young person in with community organisations and meaningful activities to allow for continuity and for support network to develop outside of services.

4.5.2.4. Systemic Level: The re-victimisation of a young person trying to cope alone with difficulties linked to structural inequalities needs to be avoided. Young people should be encouraged to attend appointments with members of their network. Awareness of the impact of age assessment procedures should be raised with those who support separated young people through the process. For instance, foster parents, keyworkers and charity staff often take an important role for the young people during this time. It is possible that they also experience confusion, anger and powerlessness. Support should be available for them. 'Family' or systemically informed interventions should be offered through direct therapy or consultation.

Support around the age assessments, in individual or group settings, would be ideally placed in services which do not exclude a young person at 18. Local adolescent mental health services could offer consultations on age assessment-related psychological processes, co-facilitate groups or offer drop-in services for young people and those trying to support them.

Supporting young people and their networks should involve more than merely working from within the therapy room, helping people to cope with and survive in disempowering environments (Hughes & Rees, 2016). As psychologist we occupy a more powerful and privileged position, which enables us to represent people in court, talk to journalists, collaborate with other agencies (e.g. film makers, artist, theatre directors) or contribute to government policies on immigration procedures. We need to use the knowledge we have from practice and research and take seriously our social responsibility to serve those we are aiming to help by highlighting the inequalities and challenging the status quo.

4.5.3. Consultation and Training

Clinical psychologists are well placed to consult on processes and facilitate indirect interventions (Onyett, 2007). Many concerns around separated young people's behaviour and emotional difficulties have been contained through consultation (Dura-Vila et al., 2012; Hodes et al., 2008). One possibility is for clinical psychologists to offer consultation to social workers who are concerned about a young person's behaviour at assessment (e.g. non-compliance, withdrawal, confusion, etc) to help understanding why they feel or react in certain ways and carefully suggest amendments to the assessment process accordingly. However, this work needs cautious clarification and support from Social Care management initially and asking social workers what support they need around age assessments.

Clinical psychologists often take the role of facilitating reflective practice for multi-disciplinary teams (Onyett, 2007). Regular reflective practice sessions for social workers who conduct the age assessments may also offer an opportunity for them to reflect and share experiences as well as to seek advice from colleagues or facilitators.

A potential role for clinical psychologist is to support existing training to social workers around age assessments. This study raised important points about of the tone of voice and style of questioning used during assessment meetings. It also highlighted the importance of making the processes transparent and using languages and interpreters that the young people can understand. These aspects are important to incorporate into regular training and need to be maintained within continued professional development for social workers.

Given that the voices of separated young people are often absent, it needs to be considered how these voices can be integrated in training. It would be vital to consider of how to support some young people who may be interested to share their stories and who would like to get involved in training. As shown by Clayton and Hughes (2016), one way would be to co-produce training videos. A recent community based participatory research project by Rogers, Carr and Hickman (2018) used Photovoice methods with separated young people. They found that the videos and creative media produced increased the foster carers' and wider audience's understanding of the young people's experiences. They concluded this method to be a meaningful way to engage separated young people in

research and to engage the public in seeing the realities of the young people's lives.

Sharing knowledge and findings with and offering consultation on age assessment-specific concerns to the wider network would be a way of indirectly supporting separated young people. Working alongside foster parents, staff at residential and educational settings and charity organisations could also serve to manage concerns around behaviour and emotional needs in the home and school environment. Sharing the findings of this research could lead to improved understandings in those who support separated young people. The importance of being believed and accepted needs to be taken into consideration when supporting a young person at home during age assessments. Awareness of how the young people experienced certain questions and behaviours as intrusive could also lead to improved support from their immediate environment. Furthermore, it is important for those who support the young people in their everyday life to understand the age assessment processes as they are likely to know the young people better and may find ways to explain what is happening to them. All these considerations could make the age assessment process less stressful outside the formal assessment meetings.

4.5.3.1. Sharing Findings of This Study: There are plans in place to feedback, share and reflect on findings of this study with psychology colleagues, partner organisations as well as with colleagues in social care. I am aware that social care staff and management have high level of expertise with age assessments. Each session will be carefully planned and arranged alongside people working in the specific services and contexts to allow their perspectives and needs to be incorporated in the presentation of these findings. My connection to the University of East London allows for potential research ideas arising from these sessions to be forwarded and suggested to be taken up in the future.

4.5.4. Service and Policy Level Implications

A major challenge for services is their cut-off age of 18. The transition from child to adult services is difficult for most service users and their families (Munson, Scott, Smalling, Kim, & Floersch, 2011). The age barrier presents a major obstacle to accessing services for age-disputed young people. It is likely that

prolonged assessment procedures impact on a young person's stress levels. Additionally, most educational settings hesitate to offer a space for young people under assessment and therefore stress is coupled with boredom, hopelessness, uncertainty and isolation. If the distress of a young person is detected during this time, a referral to children services is possible. Uncertainty around age should not present another barrier to accessing mental health services and these should set an example of person-centred care in these circumstances. Awareness of these concerns should be raised with commissioners and local and national policy makers.

This study highlights that separated young people are a heterogeneous group and their experiences depend on a multitude of factors. We therefore cannot make assumptions about which interventions and approaches are most appropriate. In line with community psychology approaches (Orford, 1992), young people should be involved in setting up a support system they think would be appropriate for them. Separated young people could work alongside each other and practitioners/keyworkers, build mutual trust and have influence over the structures of support to make them both accessible and acceptable.

4.5.5. Future Research

Mackenzie et al (2007) underline the need for reciprocal gains for refugee participants in research studies. One way of doing that is to draw on principles of participation action research (PAR), as shown by Quinn's (2013) study with refugees in Scotland or the Photovoice study by Rogers et al (2018) described above. These studies ensure an action-oriented approach aiming at directly impacting on local communities. Engaging the public with the projects by locally and publicly exhibiting creative media can facilitate a change in perception of separated young people. For future research on processes related to age assessments, direct and ongoing participation and contribution from young people would enhance mutual understanding and appreciation. As these young people are likely to face a multitude of difficulties and barriers, flexibility and time are important factors in setting up and carrying out research together. This would be easier for researchers who work in or have close links to organisations that offer support to separated young people.

This study included a small number of male young people, most of whom were from Afghanistan. It will be important to explore the age assessment processes experienced by other cultural groups as well as explore the experience of separated females.

This study was not looking specifically at appropriate support structures for both young people and assessors during the age assessments, and this is an area that should be explored in future research. What would make the processes easier and more humane? What structures should be in place to support young people, assessors and associated networks? Studies could explore the views of young people and social workers as well as foster parents and interpreters.

Social workers should be incorporated as direct participants in research as well as consultants in further studies on age assessment. They are also a group whose voices often remain unheard or 'unlistened' to. An exploration of their experiences of conducting age assessment would be important, especially after new best practice guidance was implemented in 2015 (ASCS, 2015).

There has been criticism of the lack of consistency in approaches to assess age across the EU, and indeed no comparable study from other countries was found when conducting the literature search. The differences between approaches might directly impact on the young people, should they have been assessed elsewhere. Conducting studies about age assessments across countries would help member states to inform each other and recommendations on processes could be shared to improve and unify approaches. The aim should be to minimise further traumatising and victimisation of young people who are already criminalised by asylum systems.

4.6. Concluding Thoughts

The 'victim' or 'villain' (Gower, 2011) discourses position separated young people under 18 as socially preferable and deserving human beings and consider slightly older young people to be "bogus refugees" (Silverman, 2016). As psychologists, we are seen as experts in the field of human development. Therefore, we have a responsibility to question our (mostly) Western constructs, especially when the power of our expertise is asserted to oppress. Age and developmental stages are often understood as fixed and are accompanied by

age role expectations, such as independence and increased responsibility, which determine what support structures are in place and what life activities someone is allowed to take part in (Rader, 1979). This was also demonstrated in this study, where young people judged to be adults faced considerable barriers in accessing continuity, education and social support networks.

Instead of blaming, victimising and 'ageing-out' those who are suspected to 'lie' about their age, we, as professionals and as citizens, need to raise awareness that accommodating (young) people's needs does not equate to providing unnecessary 'luxuries', but meeting basic needs, many of which are in line with the Human Rights Act (1998). Controversially, Western concepts have long acknowledged that development is neither static nor ends at 18. It has been recognised that ongoing support is important for development and we pride ourselves on the virtues of mutual respect, compassion and kindness. However, these somehow do not seem to extend to everyone. This study is an appeal to change this situation and with that in mind I will end with a quote from Abdul:

When they are doing the age assessment, if they are with the foster carer, they should be there (...) til they finish. Everything is done, like the process. If the person find solicitor, he should be there til the judge decides. Or if he is in shared accomodation, he should be there. They should ask him "are you happy there?" "do you wanna go there?" because he don't know, he don't have no one, no their family, no sister, no brother, no mother. They should ask him "what do you need?", "Are you happy?", "What's your situation?", "Where you gonna go?" They should do this, but they don't (769-780).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Literature Search Procedures

The following search terms and filters were used to identify the literature surrounding age assessments in separated young people seeking asylum. Searches were carried out from June 2017 to November 2017.

Search Term 1	AND/OR	Search Term 2	AND/OR	Search Term 3	AND/OR	Search Term 4	Number of Results	Abstracts Screened	Duplicates	Full Articles Screened
Asylum Seek*	OR	Refugees	AND	Age	AND	Child*	492	135		
Asylum Seek*	OR	Refugees	AND	Age Differences	OR	Age Determination	3512	120	90	
Asylum Seek*	OR	Refugees	AND	Age Assessment			13	6	3	
Refugees			AND	Age Difference	AND	CHILD	487	53	14	
Academic Search Complete. Filters: 1980-2017; Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals; Languages: English and German; Searches conducted: June-July 2017										
Refug*	AND	Unaccompanied Minors					77	38		
Refug*	AND	Age Assessment					7	4		
Asylum	AND	Age Assessment					6	3	2	
Asylum Seek*	OR	Refugees	AND	Age	AND	Child*	132	39	23	
Asylum Seek*	OR	Refugees	AND	Age Differences	OR	Age Determination	220	51	19	
PsycINFO (incl. PsycARTICLES); Thesaurus. Filters: 2018-2017; Journals; Peer Reviewed; Languages: German and English; Age: Child-Young Adult; Searches conducted: June - July 2017										
Academic Search Complete and PsycINFO searched via EBSCO: Combined number full number of articles										120
Asylum	AND	Unaccompanied Minor					115	25	3	15
Asylum	AND	Age Dispute					430	5	1	2
Asylum	AND	Unaccompanied Minor	And	Age Assessment			42	12	5	1
Science Direct. Filters: 1980-2017; English and German; Searches Conducted: October - November 2017										18

Relevant papers were identified through title and abstract reviews. A paucity of age assessment-specific research literature, not concerned with methods of physical assessments, has been recognised. Therefore, broad categories of literature were considered to inform this study. Peer-reviewed studies, psychological research not solely focused on psychiatric diagnoses and qualitative studies were prioritised.

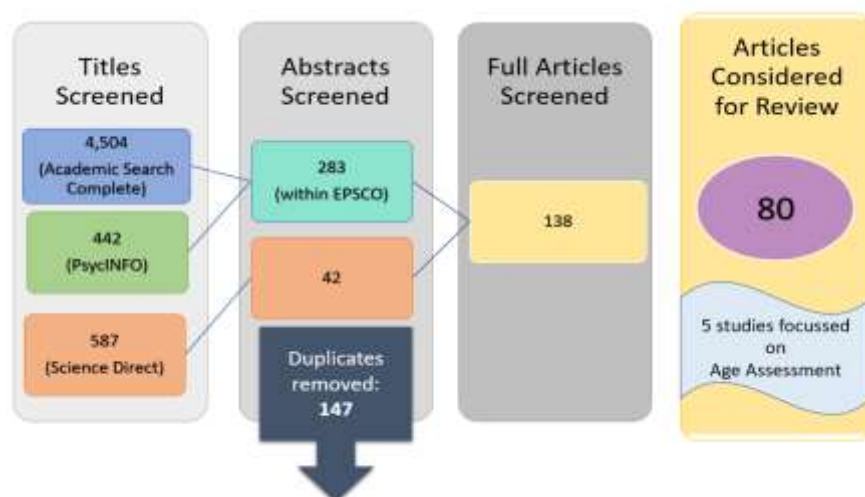
Generally, research was included if it had a focus on young people and their psychological and psychosocial needs in relation to their immigration status and age. The following broad categories were used for literature to be considered for inclusion:

- Systematic literature reviews examining impacts on asylum-seeking and refugee people in general
- Reviews concerned with factors impacting on experiences of asylum-seeking and refugee young people, especially post-flight
- Studies and articles addressing or summarising impact of age assessments on separated young people
- Qualitative research with separated young people and their experiences of the host countries

Specific exclusion criteria included:

- Studies investigating a very specific group in specific contexts not relevant to the UK (specific groups adjusting to Australian law)
- Studies based in the refugee and asylum-seeking people's country of origin
- Studies primarily concerned with psychiatric diagnoses
- Comparison between countries, UK not included
- Research focusing on specific groups that are not common in the UK
- Studies only concerned with physical health
- Studies with girls only

The following flowchart illustrates the process of identifying articles that informed the study and review of literature:

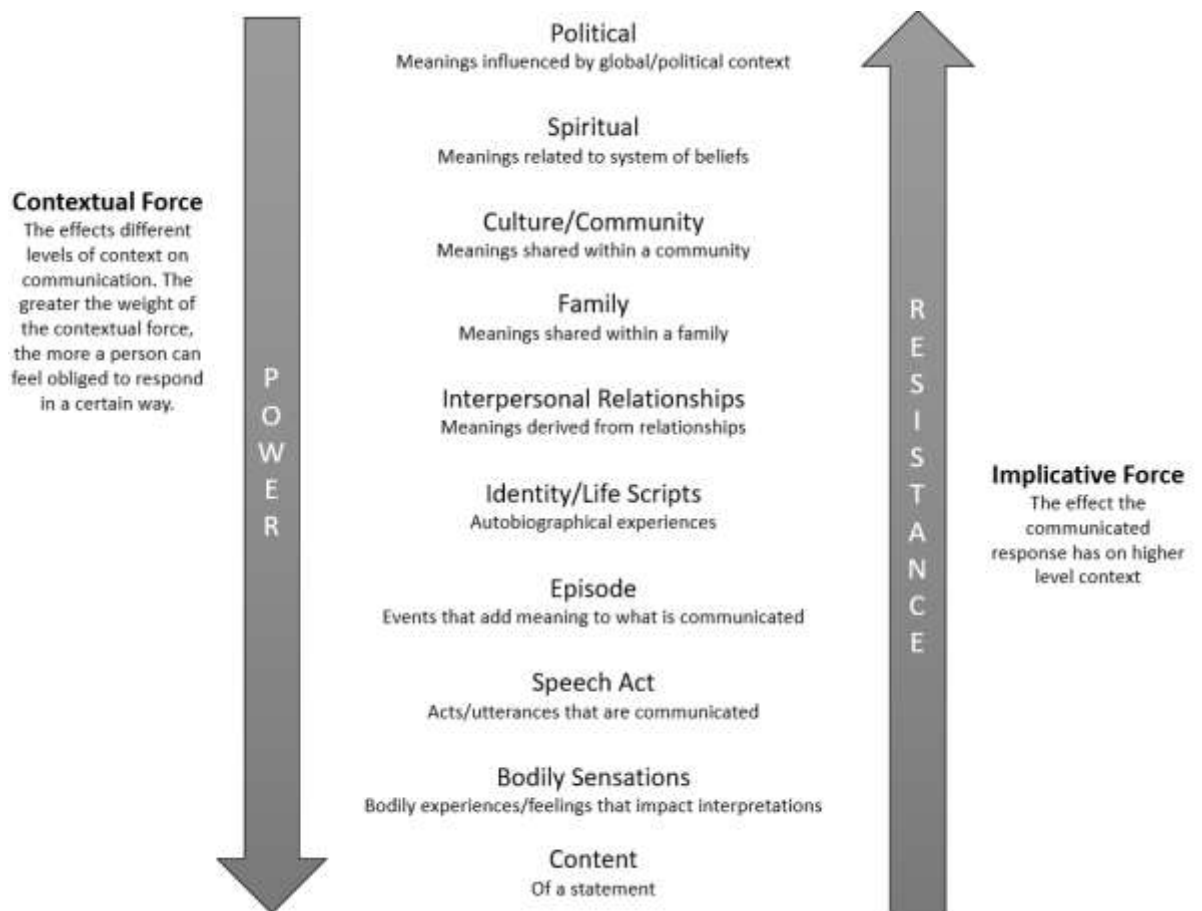


Five articles focusing on the age assessment process were found. These are tabulated below. However, none of them were specifically about psychological factors or impact. In the light of paucity of research, a specific literature review was not considered, and a narrative review of the wider literature was pursued.

NO	Research Article	Area
1	Cemlyn, S. J., & Nye, M. (2012). Asylum seeker young people: Social work value conflicts in negotiating age assessment in the UK. <i>International Social Work</i> , 55(5), 675–688.	Social Work
2	Chase, E., Knight, A., & Statham, J. (2008). <i>Promoting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in the UK</i> London: Coram.	Policy and Law
3	Crawley, H. D. (2007). <i>When is a child not a child? Asylum, age dispute and the process of age assessment</i> . London: Immigration Law Practitioners Association.	Policy and Law
4	Gower, S. (2011). How Old Are You? Ethical Dilemmas in Working with Age-Disputed Young Asylum Seekers. <i>Practice</i> , 23(5), 325–339.	Social Work
5	Hjern, A., Brendler-Lindqvist, M., & Norredam, M. (2012). Age assessment of young asylum seekers. <i>Acta Paediatrica, International Journal of Paediatrics</i> , 101(1), 4–7.	Paediatrics

A general internet-based search was used to access general information, such as newspaper articles, statistics, and briefing papers from non-statutory organisations. Books, relevant grey literature, reports and policy documents were also important. The relevant literature was located online, via The University of East London and The British Library and with the help of colleagues and friends at other universities.

Appendix B: CMM



Coordinated Management of Meaning Framework (Pearce & Cronen, 1980; Cronen 1994), adapted from Afuape (2011, p. 89)

Appendix C: Reflexive Research Journal Extracts

a) Contextual Observations and Notes over the course of the research

A visit to the Theatre “Dear Home Office” (November 2016)

I went to see a play directed and presented by separated young people. It was aimed to really challenge the public’s attitude and to bring out subjugated narratives. Some aspects really stood out for me:

- our prejudices about young people’s education (being the exceptionally bright students in their home countries and being labelled as uneducated here).
- the difficulties with living in constant doubt and uncertainty was highlighted by the chant “All I want is some peace, all I want is some rest”, which sent tears to my eyes.
- In one scene a young man says: “Sometimes I feel 25, and sometimes I feel like an 8-year-old boy” and showed powerfully how age is a number which, in context of different experience, is meaningless.

After the play I felt energised, sad, hopeful, hopeless and envy. How can my study make a difference? I know ‘science’ is well positioned to create change but I think that ‘the arts’ have more power over emotions, which seems to be important in this topic. A combination is probably highly necessary.

Notes on literature search (June 2017)

I think I finished the first round of literature search. Repeatedly the same articles came up so it is time to look into what I found. However, I have noticed something I would like to reflect upon. So many studies are solely about trauma (or PTSD), mental health problems, stress, acculturation problems or resilience. Not many titles imply that we, as a society, inflict further harm, oppress or label refugees or young people ‘traumatised’, etc.

Trauma must be the single most term that appeared in titles resulting from a search in which TRAUMA WAS NOT A SEARCH TERM. It is not surprising that people think about trauma when they hear the word ‘refugee’. I am aware that when people hear/see the word trauma, they do not automatically also think of events that happen to a separated young person in the UK or other host countries.

Positioning Social Workers? (July 2017)

Today I went to a talk on 'interviewing refugees'. Unsurprisingly there were many social workers in the room. They voiced their concerns about many aspects of interviewing unaccompanied minors. A good amount of time was dedicated to their concerns about conducting age assessments. Some things went through my mind:

- Who am I to research this topic without much knowledge of what it is like to be tasked with age assessments?
- The social workers all did not agree with age assessments and the current guidelines. My research is probably going to agree with their concerns but the young people in my study are likely to blame their social workers for their experience. My research study might not be so welcome by social workers as they will (again) be blamed.

With all that in mind I think I need to be careful how I position this research in relation to social workers and will ask about this in my next supervision. I concluded for now, that this study is primarily concerned with separated young people's experiences and thus I need to focus on this without worrying about how assessors are perceived. There should be a separate study involving social workers in the future.

Today felt quite intimidating and I did not dare to put up my hand. Hopefully this will change once I have completed the study.

'German Compassion' turned Dominant Discourse? (November 2017)

Over the past weeks I noticed that Germany has risen in popularity. I was so used to the 'Nazi' comments and 'you must like sausage' stereotype that I did not notice how these have subsided a little over the past years. And how I have personally benefitted from the changing narrative of being German. When I now meet someone, I am asked about what I think about Merkel's approach to hosting "so many" refugees and not whether I like 'beer'. I wonder whether the country offered to "host so many" to clean up past images and stereotypes (incl. for people like me)?

I became aware of how much easier it was for me to answer questions about my country of origin during the research interviews. Some young people picked up on my accent, or I told them that I was German when they asked me. I usually feel a deep sense of shame and guilt (unjustified many tell me but still there). I noticed I was taking advantage of this new image. Many young people had heard of the 'German Compassion' (as I have called it) and wondered if life was better there than in the UK. Once I realised all this, I became more aware of how I could potentially misuse my new 'compassionate image' and might be perceived as more kind and trustworthy than I could be. This all was a strange new experience and showed me how discourses can empower people and change relationships (with my national identity). I must bear this in mind for analysis of the interview; how conversations are constructed between the young people and me. But also how negative images (being 'underserving and deceiving imposter children') might impact on the young people, their identity and feelings of empowerment.

b) Excepts of Post-Interview Reflections

August 2017

Meeting Abdul and Belal

Today I went to [organisation] and met my first participants. I was very nervous beforehand. At the end I felt really inspired to be able to do this research. It seems like it is very important. Both said that they “will never forget the age assessment”. There were a lot of differences between their experiences. Abdul had never lived with foster parents, but really wished he had. Belal had foster carers. However, both had periods of homelessness.

Today there was a mess up with the time. The participants had been given a different time to me and therefore Abdul was there before I was. He spoke about being made to wait many times during the age assessment interviews and I felt guilty. I also wondered how much the narrative of young people, especially asylum seeking young people, being late all the time, influences professionals also being late for their appointments with the young men. I was late today due to a misunderstanding. Both participants arrived on time. This certainly challenge my own assumptions about punctuality.

I reflected with X [head of organisation] on the above. We agreed to be more careful with our communication re timing room bookings for future interviews.

Some things the two young people said made me feel more sad and guilty than others. For instance, when both young men asked me to imagine what it was like to be far from home, I felt conflicting emotions of empathy, guilt and sadness. When I left Germany aged 16, it was hard, painful and sad but it was entirely voluntary, and my welfare was secured with ample opportunities for contact and visits. I told one of them that I was German when he asked but I did not tell them anything about my experiences because that would have just been patronising.

I was aware of feeling very reluctant to ask probing questions and worded things very careful. However, often I ended up asking convoluted questions. I also felt I could not follow up with questions in case they felt interrogated (which both reported they had felt like during the age assessments) I believe I probably missed some good opportunities to follow up on things they said, e.g. on headaches they experienced and when they spoke about being worried and stressed I left this at that to avoid them thinking I was labelling them.

I felt good after the interviews , but they also made me very sad. I am aware that this topic will possibly be even more emotive than I expected. I hope I will find a way of managing my emptions doing this and my upcoming ‘Trauma’ placement.

Meeting Deldaar

I met participant 4 today (pseudonym Deldaar). He seemed nervous at first, fiddling with his water bottle a lot. This went away after a while, but I was very aware not to probe too much. I also was quite apologetic when he said that he did not like to talk about his age assessment normally.

This was my first interview with an interpreter. I suddenly felt more conscious what to ask. However, the interview seemed to flow well, and I actually think my questions today were less convoluted, probably better than in previous interviews.

The interview took 65 minutes. I think it is shorter than the other ones. I could not have kept him any longer though. He was very engaged and spoke in a very animated way, I am not sure the interpreter always got everything he said. Deldaar understood English quite well and often nodded to what the interpreter said. I acknowledged this during the interview, but of course a power imbalance remained and things could have been misunderstood or remained unheard.

I really got a sense of how disbelieved and unheard he felt during his age assessment. Like some other participants, he used the words describing him like a toy, played in someone's game. The loss of social support and leaving his foster family straight after the assessment had a big impact. I was thinking how it must have been like being separated again. He spoke about many people being on his side, which I understand from being with him today.

Interpreter Debrief

The interpreter stayed for a debrief. He spoke to me about how important he felt this research was and how many times he has witnessed and felt very helpless interpreting at age assessments. He said he often disagrees with social services on their decisions and often feels like saying something to them. He underlined that he cannot really do that and explained that once he actually did tell them what he thought (I am not sure at what stage of the interview/assessment process). He said that his intervention did not change the results, but he was never asked to interpret for the team again. He said he felt torn between justice and keeping his income going.

I was very touched by the interpreter's story and was thinking how incredibly hard this must be for someone who understands the culture and language, what the young person is thinking, better than the assessors. Power imbalances are also experienced by interpreters. Researching the impact on and impressions by interpreters would be a good/necessary topic to address in future research.

Meeting Freddy

Today I interviewed participant 6 (pseudonym Freddy, chosen by him). Freddy came across as very reflective about his experience. The actual age assessment was a long time ago and he had clearly thought about it and tried to make sense of what happened to him. The ongoing confusion and re-assessments and disputes went on for much longer, partly due to clerical errors that lead to more confusion and judgement. With Freddy I got the sense that he had a lot of conflicting emotions, both, about himself and others. He sometimes spoke as if he was blaming himself and sometimes as he blamed other people for neglecting their duty of care. 'Careless' is a word he frequently used.

Freddy also spoke about feeling that people judge 'his bad face', which made me deeply sad. He said people usually change his mind about him after getting to know him but the fact he feels that way made me really think how we treat young people like Freddy when they first arrive (and after).

Freddy alluded to the age dispute, which in his case lasted for about 9 years, seemed small at certain times when he had other problems. He did not talk about these during the interview. As soon as I turned off the Dictaphone, he spoke to me about other experiences he has had, many as a result from the age assessments. He said he did not want it to be recorded, so I will not speak about this in my research.

However, it made me think what the young people tell me and how many more unspeakable aspects there are amongst the experiences they do share with me. I also wondered which experiences they speak to me about and which they choose to omit and why. This could be linked to many interlinking factors. Some hypotheses:

- Trust; they only meet me once. Freddy spoke about needing time to building up trust
- Differences between us (gender, ethnicity, religion, age, power, immigration status, etc) could also link to previous experiences with white females; whether they assessors might have been female social workers, whether their counsellors were female, etc
- Their judgement of my competence in general
- Fear of someone finding out what he said despite confidentiality agreement

Appendix D: Summary of Consultation with Young People

Meeting at a college, present also: Interpreter and Organisation Link

General Ideas about Research of Age Assessment

- Both young people underlined that age assessments determine much of how young people are taken care of, where they are placed, etc.
- They agreed that the process was stressful, they expressed having experienced a lot of distress and a lot of worries around the time and about their age assessments
- Both highlighted the need for improving age assessments and the process around them, including people's understanding of their culture and why they do not know their ages
- They underlined that psychologists, social services, etc need to know more to help in a better way
 - o To understanding why sharing their story is hard
 - o To not just look the young people "in the face but also look inside"

Research Process

- Explaining what we do and who we are can be difficult; both explained that many young people are not familiar with what psychologists and researchers do
- Consent forms should be given to them before the research, however they might not be looked at, or understood, even if translated. I should go through it with them together.
- The consent process will have to start before we meet them, in the services they are linked in with. I will have to speak to participants after the interview to make sure they still understand the process and how they can get in touch if they need to. I will plan to make debrief specific and clear.
- They both said that meeting in the counselling centre is better for them than a youth club or college because it is more private and quiet
- Vouchers would be good, certificates would also be appreciated

Tips for the interview

- Use simple questions, especially at the start
- Start the questions with general closed questions (for young person to "relax and calm your mind"), start with just a chat, e.g.
 - o Where are you from?
 - o What do you like doing?
 - o Who told you about your age for the first time?
 - o Who said it was not true?
 - o Do you remember your age assessment?
- General advice was to start narrow, and with closed questions, and gauge how the young person is feeling and then go a bit broader and deeper.
- Only go as far as young person volunteers to go to avoid replication of previous experiences of feeling forced to answer in a certain way.

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

INFORMATION

Project Title

Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

The Principal Investigator(s)

Janin Eberhardt

Janin.eberhardt.research@gmail.com

This letter is to provide you with all the information you need to consider whether or not to participate in my research study. I am completing this study as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

What is the Project?

I am interested in finding out about the experience of young people who arrived in the UK separated from their parents and who are currently seeking asylum. With the help of this research I hope to understand what sense young people, like yourself, make of the age assessment process. I would like to hear about how you experienced your age assessment, what you found helpful in the process and what you thought was difficult.

The media has covered many stories about young people who have been separated from their families and now seek asylum in the UK. However, there is not very much information from young people like yourself. The articles often do not say how you are feeling or how you experience the processes and services in the UK. But there are people who work with separated young people, who want to hear more about your experiences, so they can help in a better way. This way they can also improve the ways in which other professionals work with young people who seek asylum.

What would I have to do?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form before we start. You and I will meet for about one hour to talk about your experience of having an age assessment. I will ask you some questions about how much you knew about the age assessment before and after it took place, what it felt like, what was good and what was difficult about it.



A professional interpreter will be available, so you can speak in the language you prefer. I will record our talk and type it up afterwards. What you say in our talk will be kept confidential. Like myself, the interpreter will be bound by rules of confidentiality, which means he or she will not be able to tell other people what you have said, or that you have taken part in the research

This project will be conducted in collaboration with [organisations], where you received some help or are still receiving support. Though the staff at [organisations] will have helped me to identify you as someone who could help me with my study, I will not be able to access your files or records and I will know nothing about you that you do not tell me yourself

If you would like some support at our meeting, you can bring someone with you. This could be a friend or someone you trust.

Where would I have to go?

We will meet at [organisations], wherever you would prefer to meet. You may already know the buildings and it will be a safe and quiet place for us to talk.

Will the things I say be kept private?

What you say in our talk will be kept confidential. I will record our talk and then type it up later. Instead of using your name I will give you a made-up name, so I will be the only person who knows who you are or what you have said.

I will type up exactly what you say, or what the interpreter tells me you say. I will make sure I take out names, places or information that could give your identity away. I will store all of the typed-up notes on a computer that has a password. I will also password protect the document themselves. After my study is finished I will keep the notes with a record number on them for three years and I will destroy the voice recordings in 2018.

If you were to talk about something serious that meant that you or someone else was not safe I would have to talk to the [organisations] team or someone who can help you or other people to stay safe. I will try to tell you if I have to do this. I will remind you of this at the beginning of our talk.

If I don't feel ok after the talks, what will happen?

There is a chance that what we talk about may be upsetting for you. Please remember, it is your choice what you decide to tell me. If you were to become distressed during our chat, we



could think and talk about other things, take a break, or stop altogether. I could also talk to the [organisations] worker you know, and they may be able to help.

At the end of our chat you will be able to talk about how it felt to speak about experiences. If you feel upset, you can speak to a member of staff at [organisations], or you could talk to your GP. I would always check in with you after the talk and I can tell you about some places in the area who offer extra support to young people and give you information about some organisations that support you in the future.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this study is completely your choice. If you do not want to take part, you can say no. Please don't feel that you must because you have been asked.

If you decide to take part and then you later decide you don't want to carry on taking part, you can contact me and I will accept your decision. You don't have to explain why. If you decide at a later stage that you do not want me to include what you said in my report, you can let me know and I will remove your contribution. I can only do that before January 2018 because I will be finishing my research around this time. Whether you want to take part or not, it will not affect the support you receive from [organisations] and you will not have to explain your decision to the staff there.

Will I get anything in return?

To thank you for your time and for telling me about your experience you will get a £20 voucher for a shop of your choice. If it helps with your CV, I can also give you a certificate to say that you have helped in some academic research.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form. Please keep this information sheet.

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely,
Janin Eberhardt
Trainee Clinical Psychologist

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor [Dr Neil Rees, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. 020 8223 4475. N.Rees@uel.ac.uk]

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.; Tel: 020 8223 4004. Email: m.finn@uel.ac.uk

Appendix F: Information Sheet for Social Workers/Key Workers



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

School of Psychology
Stratford Campus
Water Lane
London E15 4LZ

Information for Social Workers and Key Workers

Project Title

Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

The Principal Investigator

Janin Eberhardt

Janin.eberhardt.research@gmail.com

This letter is to provide you with some information about my research study because a young person you work with has consented to participate. I am completing this study as part of my Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at the University of East London.

What is the Project?

I am interested in finding out about the experience of separated young people seeking asylum and their experience with undergoing an age assessment. With the help of this research I hope to understand what sense young people make of the age assessment process. This area was identified to be an important topic for young people and those who work with them. Psychologists, counsellors and social workers have been involved in setting up this study.

There has been a consensus that people who work with separated young people want to hear more about their experiences, so they can help in a better way and the system around the assessment process can be improved.



What does this involve for the young person?

The young person who chose to take part has signed a consent form before we started. The interview was held at the premises of [Organisation] and an interpreter was made available to aid communication, if the young person thought this would be useful. The interview was carefully planned to avoid re-traumatizing the young person. It was not centred around the journey to the UK or about reasons for leaving their country of origin. However, if the young person desired to include such information, it was handled professionally and attentively.

The young person was informed about confidentiality and its limitations due to potential risk. They know how data be transcribed, anonymized and stored on password protected documents and devices. The young person has been informed that they can contact me to withdraw any time until January 2018.

This study is conducted in collaboration with [Organisation], where the young person received some help or is still receiving support. All participants have been made aware that I cannot access their therapy notes, neither can [Organisation] access data gathered during our interview. We have ensured that the young person is adequately supported by [Organisation] if they get upset during and after the interview. Furthermore, I have signposted participants to other organisations should they need to seek further support.

The young person has received a £20 High Street voucher to show my gratitude for their participation. I have also offered a certificate to say that they have helped with some academic research.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via email on janin.eberhardt.research@gmail.com or contact my supervisor Dr Neil Rees n.rees@uel.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Janin Eberhardt

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor [Dr Neil Rees, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ. 020 8223 4475. N.Rees@uel.ac.uk]

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Mark Finn, School of Psychology, UEL, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.; Tel: 020 8223 4004. m.finn@uel.ac.uk

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

Warm up Questions

What would you normally be doing if you were not meeting me?

What do you like doing? Follow up on interest.

Where are you from? How long have you been in the UK?

Do you have any questions for me?

1) General memories of the age-assessment

What do you remember about your age-assessment?

- When did it happen?
- Did you know why it was happening?
- Did you know how old you were? / Did you have any documentation? (if appropriate)

2) Experience of being informed about the age-assessment

- How did you find out that you had to undergo an age-assessment?
- How was the process explained to you?
- What did you understand about the process at the time?
- What did you understand about the process later?
- Do you remember how you were feeling about it when you found out?

3) Experience of the age-assessment

- How did you feel when you went to the meeting(s)?
- What were your worries or concerns, if you had any?
- Who did you meet for your age-assessment?
- Where did you meet?
- Who attended the meetings?
- What was your experience of the age-assessment meetings?
- What happened during the meetings?
- What do you feel they were trying to achieve? What did that feel like?
- How long did it take, how many times did you meet?
- What did you think what was happening between the meetings?

4) Making sense of the experience

- How did you feel after the process was over?
- Did you have to wait for a result? How long? How did you feel?
- What happened after the process was over?
- What were the implications of your age-assessment?
- Did you speak to anyone about the assessment?
- Did you speak to anyone about how you were feeling?
- How did other people react?
- How did you think other people thought of you?

Prompts

- Could you tell me more about that?
- How did that make you feel at that moment?
- What do you think about that? What went through your mind at the time?
- Can't you give me an example of what you are talking about?

Debriefing

- How do you feel about the conversation we have just had?
- Is there anything that you did not like about the interview? Is there something I asked that I should not have asked?
- Is there anything you would like me not to type up?
- Do you have any questions?

Explain what happens now / Give Debrief sheet and highlight contact details

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form



UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in the research study:
Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

Please read the following page carefully and sign on the next page if you agree to it.

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy of the sheet to keep.

The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about it. I understand my involvement in this study.

I understand that taking part in this study and the information I share will remain strictly confidential and that my name and any details which might identify me will not be used. I understand that the exception to this is if I say something which may lead the researcher to be concerned about my safety, or that of someone else. If this does happen, they will talk to a member of staff at [organisations] or another professional that can help keep people safe. Janin will discuss it with me first.

I understand that our conversation about the age assessment will be recorded and it has been explained to me how this information will be used and stored. I understand that only the researchers involved in the research will have access to information that might identify me. It has been explained to me what will happen with all this information once the research has been completed.

I freely and fully consent to participate in this research, which has been fully explained to me. I understand that I can decide not to take part in the research at any time until March 2018 without having to give a reason and at no disadvantage to myself.

Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Signature

.....

Name of Researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix I: Debriefing Sheet



Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

Thank you for coming to our meeting and taking part in my study today. This information sheet is to remind you that if you have been affected in anyway by what we have spoken about please speak with a member of staff at [REDACTED] or contact your GP. You can also contact one the organisations listed below:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- Refugee Action – London
Victoria Charity Centre, 11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB
Phone: 0207 952 1511
- British Red Cross – Refugee Support
Aztec Row, 5 Berners Road, Angel, London, N1 0PW
Phone: 020 7704 5670
- The Refugee Council
Phone: 0207 346 6700
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>
- The Samaritans
Phone: 116 123 (No Charge)

If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by email, janin.eberhardt.research@gmail.com , or contact my supervisor Dr Neil Rees, N.Rees@uel.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Janin Eberhardt
Trainee Clinical Psychologist,
University of East London

Appendix J: University of East London Ethical Application and Approval

1) UEL Ethics Application

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON
School of Psychology

APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

FOR BSc RESEARCH

FOR MSc/MA RESEARCH

**FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE RESEARCH IN CLINICAL,
COUNSELLING & EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**Students doing a Professional Doctorate in Occupational & Organisational Psychology and PhD candidates should apply for research ethics approval through the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and not use this form. Go to:*
<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/>

If you need to apply to have ethical clearance from another Research Ethics Committee (e.g. NRES, HRA through IRIS) you DO NOT need to apply to the School of Psychology for ethical clearance also.

Please see details on www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/external-committees.

Among other things this site will tell you about UEL sponsorship

Note that you do not need NHS ethics approval if collecting data from NHS staff except where the confidentiality of NHS patients could be compromised.

Before completing this application please familiarise yourself with:

The *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2014) published by the British Psychological Society (BPS). This can be found in the Ethics folder in the Psychology Noticeboard (Moodle) and also on the BPS website

http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/Public%20files/code_of_human_research_ethics_dec_2014_inf180_web.pdf

And please also see the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (2015)

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/>

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION

1. Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).
3. Include copies of all necessary attachments in the **ONE DOCUMENT SAVED AS .doc** (See page 2)
4. Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as **ONE DOCUMENT**. INDICATE 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF THIS EMAIL so your supervisor can readily identify its content. Your supervisor will then look over your application.
5. When your application demonstrates sound ethical protocol your supervisor will type in his/her name in the 'supervisor's signature' section (5.2) and submit your application for review (psychology.ethics@uel.ac.uk). You should be copied into this email so that you know your application has been submitted. It is the responsibility of students to check this.
6. Your supervisor should let you know the outcome of your application. Recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your ethics application has been approved, along with other research ethics approvals that may be necessary (See 4.1)

ATTACHMENTS YOU MUST ATTACH TO THIS APPLICATION

1. A copy of the invitation letter that you intend giving to potential participants.
2. A copy of the consent form that you intend giving to participants.
3. A copy of the debrief letter you intend to give participants (see 23 below)

OTHER ATTACHMENTS (AS APPROPRIATE)

- A copy of original and/or pre-existing questionnaire(s) and test(s) you intend to use.
- Example of the kinds of interview questions you intend to ask participants.
- Copies of the visual material(s) you intend showing participants.
- A copy of ethical clearance or permission from an external organisation if you need it (e.g. a charity or school or employer etc.). Permissions must be attached to this application but your ethics application can be submitted to the School of Psychology before ethical approval is obtained from another organisation if separate ethical clearance from another organisation is required (see Section 4).

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION

1. Complete this application form electronically, fully and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (5.1).
3. Include copies of all necessary attachments in the **ONE DOCUMENT SAVED AS .doc** (See page 2)
4. Email your supervisor the completed application and all attachments as **ONE DOCUMENT**. INDICATE 'ETHICS SUBMISSION' IN THE SUBJECT FIELD OF THIS EMAIL so your supervisor can readily identify its content. Your supervisor will then look over your application.
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Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates:

- **FOR BSc/MSc/MA STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** A scanned copy of a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate. A current certificate is one that is not older than six months. This is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone 16 years of age or under) or vulnerable adults (see Section 4 for a broad definition of this). A DBS certificate that you have obtained through an organisation you work for is acceptable as long as it is current. If you do not have a current DBS certificate, but need one for your research, you can apply for one through the HUB and the School will pay the cost.

If you need to attach a copy of a DBS certificate to your ethics application but would like to keep it confidential please email a scanned copy of the certificate directly to Dr Mary Spiller (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) at m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk

- **FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS WHOSE RESEARCH INVOLVES VULNERABLE PARTICIPANTS:** DBS clearance is necessary if your research involves young people (anyone under 16 years of age) or vulnerable adults (see 4.2 for a broad definition of this). The DBS check that was done, or verified, when you registered for your programme is sufficient and you will not have to apply for another in order to conduct research with vulnerable populations.

Your details

1. **Your name:** Janin Eberhardt
2. **Your supervisor's name:** Dr Neil Rees
3. **Title of your programme:** Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
4. **Title of your proposed research:** Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK
5. **Submission date for your research:** May 2018
6. **Please tick if your application includes a copy of a DBS certificate** ☒
7. **Please tick if you need to submit a DBS certificate with this application but have emailed a copy to Dr Mary Spiller for confidentiality reasons (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee) (m.j.spiller@uel.ac.uk)** ☐
8. **Please tick to confirm that you have read and understood the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014) and the UEL Code of Practice for Research Ethics (See links on page 1)** ☒

2. About the research

9. The aim(s) of your research:

Most separated young people who seek asylum in the UK arrive in their mid-teens. They are automatically considered a child in need under Section 17 of the Children Act (1989) and their care lies with their local authority's children services. However, authorities need to be confident the young people are legally children. This is a difficult task as most young people arrive without any documentation and therefore an assessment of age is carried out with those young people whose stated age is then disputed. According to recent statistics, the number of age assessments increased by 148% between 2014 and 2015, with statistics for 2016 still unpublished (Refugee Council, 2016). The assessment itself can take a few months and legal challenges of the decision often take several years.

Crawley (2007) described the process as very distressing for separated young people. The age assessment process was found to undermine young people's sense of identity (Chase, Knight & Statham, 2008). Whilst pre-migration stress is well researched and documented, less emphasis has been put on stresses after arrival. Furthermore, studies focusing on psychological distress and needs have largely relied on quantitative investigations. The voices of refugees have been mostly absent in psychological research studies, especially those of young people. Unless this is changed, it will remain difficult to provide services that respond to the young people's needs; needs that require to be understood within the context of their current social and political situation.

This research project reacts to the suggestions of a group of clinicians working at [Organisation], a counselling organisation for separated young people in the London Borough of X, as well as workers at the [another Organisation]. They agreed age disputes can cause harm to the young people and identified the impact of the age assessment on young people as an important area to research.

The research aims are to explore

- a) ways in which separated young people experienced their age assessment as part of their (ongoing) immigration process in the UK
- b) how the age assessment impacts on the life of these young people
- c) how they perceived the system of support they received around the age assessment and what they found most and least helpful in the process
- d) and to give separated young people a chance to have their voices heard

A Note on terminology:

I propose to use the term 'separated young people seeking asylum' instead of the more commonly used term 'unaccompanied asylum-seeking child' (UASC) for this research project. Some organisations, like the Separated Children and Europe Programme (SCEP, 2004), prefer the term 'separated' as it better defines the crucial problem. It moves the focus away from needing to be granted asylum to successfully prove legitimacy.

10. Likely duration of the data collection from intended starting to finishing date:

Data collection will be aimed to start in May 2017, to be completed by October 2017.

Methods

11. Design of the research:

(Type of design, variables etc. If the research is qualitative what approach will be used?)

A qualitative design will be utilised to conduct this study. By doing so, this research responds to calls that highlight the critical need for more qualitative explorations of young people's perspectives and lived-experiences of the process of entering their prospective host country (Schiltz, & Schiltz, 2013; Thommessen, Corcoran & Todd; 2015; Weinesjö, 2012).

Data collection will involve qualitative interviews with six to eight young men who have experienced an age assessment. These interviews will be semi-structured and aimed to explore the experience of the young men, during and after undergoing their age assessments.

An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) will be used to analyse the transcribed interviews. An IPA provides an adequate framework for this research as it attempts to come as close as possible to an individual's experiences drawing on phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. IPA is a method particularly suitable for research concerned with lived experience. Furthermore, it often serves the aim of shedding light on areas that are under researched and enables quietened voices to be heard. On a methodological level, an IPA usually involves a detailed and intensive analysis of accounts supplied by a relatively small number of participants.

12. The sample/participants:

(Proposed number of participants, method of recruitment, specific characteristics of the sample such as age range, gender and ethnicity - whatever is relevant to your research)

For this study I aim to conduct semi-structured interviews with six to eight separated young men who have undergone an age-assessment within the last two years.

Participants will be recruited with the assistance of the staff based at [Organisation], a counselling centre for separated young people seeking asylum. This research has been a collaboration with the staff at [Organisation], who have helped with designing this research project and are able to identify and recruit participants.

Over 80 per-cent of separated young people are male. The highest numbers of separated young people in the UK were from Afghanistan, Eritrea and then Albania (Home Office, 2016).

Being male and having undergone an age-assessment in the UK is the basis of common specific experience for these young people, regardless of country and culture of origin. Thus, having had an age assessment within two years will suffice as inclusion criteria.

Given that age, and the doubts arising from the very concept, is a key issue in this study, I aim to record participants' ages on the basis of their own stated age. This is in line with the principles of [Organisation]. I am going to include young men over the age of 16.

13. Measures, materials or equipment:

(Give details about what will be used during the course of the research. For example, equipment, a questionnaire, a particular psychological test or tests, an interview schedule or other stimuli such as visual material. See note on page 2 about attaching copies of questionnaires and tests to this application. If you are using an interview schedule for qualitative research attach example questions that you plan to ask your participants to this application)

This study will utilise an interview schedule to collect data/accounts of participants. The schedule is attached to this application (Appendix 4)

14. If you are using copyrighted/pre-validated questionnaires, tests or other stimuli that you have not written or made yourself, are these questionnaires and tests suitable for the age group of your participants?

NA

15. Outline the data collection procedure involved in your research:

(Describe what will be involved in data collection. For example, what will participants be asked to do, where, and for how long?)

As most widely recommended for IPA, a semi-structured interview will be utilised for data collection. To ensure I ask questions in a contextually relevant way, the interview schedule was he developed alongside a comprehensive review of the literature and discussions with the professionals in the field. As the purpose of this study is to explore how the young people experienced their age-assessment after arriving in the UK, questions will focus on memories of the topic, their understanding at that time and how it may have changed. Participants will be invited to talk about their recollections of finding out about the age-assessment and their memories of and impressions during and after the process.

The interview questions will be discussed and trialled in a consultation with some young people who have experienced the phenomena of interest prior to commencing with the interviews/data collection. The date of this consultation is currently the 3rd of March 2017.

Interviews will primarily take place at the premises of [Head-Organisation], the counselling service organisation that [Organisation] is part of. They share a building at [redacted]. The facilities are familiar to the young people and were identified as a suitable location by staff at [Organisation]. On a first visit clinic rooms were seen as suitable and it was ensured these could be booked for conducting interviews. Furthermore, the staff provide services within schools and colleges. One particular college has been identified as a suitable location as several of the young people known to [Organisation] attend there. Staff at [Organisation] have good relationships with the school and are currently investigating whether the school could be an appropriate space for the interviews.

The interviews with the young people will be aided by interpreters, if necessary. [Organisation] have recommended a number of different interpreters (for different languages). The interpreters are known to the service. UEL funds are available to cover the cost of interpreters.

All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

3. Ethical considerations

Please describe how each of the ethical considerations below will be addressed:

16. Fully informing participants about the research (and parents/guardians if necessary): Would the participant information letter be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary?

The attached participation information sheet, consent form and debriefing sheet were developed for young people. The style and content will be discussed in the upcoming consultation with the young people and amendments to clarify will be made if necessary.

All participation information sheets will be translated in the languages of the participants. Interpreters will be present at the time of the interview if needed.

17. Obtaining fully informed consent from participants (and from parents/guardians if necessary): Would the consent form be written in a style appropriate for children and young people, if necessary? Do you need a consent form for both young people and their parents/guardians?

In their guidelines for doing research with young people seeking asylum, Thomas & Byford (2003) stressed that separated young people need to give their consent to participate freely and without coercion. With subjugated groups, such as separated young people, this bears more complexities, leading to less obvious or visible coercion. The complexities may involve decisions around participation and withdrawal. Although it may be tempting to assume participants' approval once they signed the consent form, it is necessary to regularly re-establish consent.

McKenzie, McDowell and Pittaway (2007) argue that researchers should seek ways to move beyond traditional harm minimisation when asking refugees to participate. They put forward the idea of an iterative model of consent, where participants play an active role in developing research and consent procedures reflecting on and considering the issue of trust, what people want to share in reports and how data collected is being used. This process has been started by setting up a consultation with some young people during the planning stages of the research project.

Furthermore, aware of difficulties around consent and potential exploitation, [Organisation] offered their expertise in the assessment of the capacity to consent. The organisation has already been involved in the consultation stage and offered to take an active role in the consent procedure, ensuring that young people can return to them if difficulties arise after participation.

Additionally, informed consent will be sought from all participants. The forms regarding this are attached to this application (Appendix 1&2). The finalised version will be given to the young people participants in their preferred language and the consent process will be completed prior to commencing the interviews. However, it might be revisited at various points depending on the iterative processes at the time. Throughout the development of consent procedure and research it will be underlined that participation is voluntary and separate from the organisation providing support. It will be stressed that their decision whether to participate will not have any consequence for their relationship with staff at [Organisation]. Furthermore, it will be emphasised that participation is in no way related to any ongoing asylum claims.

18. Engaging in deception, if relevant:

(What will participants be told about the nature of the research? The amount of any information withheld and the delay in disclosing the withheld information should be kept to an absolute minimum.)

There will be no deception in this study.

19. Right of withdrawal:

(In this section, and in your participant invitation letter, make it clear to participants that 'withdrawal' will involve deciding not to participate in your research and the opportunity to have the data they have supplied destroyed on request. This can be up to a specified time, i.e. not after you have begun your analysis. Speak to your supervisor if necessary.)

The right to withdraw is clearly outlined in the participant sheet and will be reiterated to the young person during the interview. The participants may become upset when speaking about their experiences. Before the interviews, all participants will be reminded that they are free to reschedule, withdraw or take a break from the interview. They will be able to return to [Organisation] for support, if they are not currently receiving help. Additionally, they will be provided with contacts for further support (see Debrief Sheet, Appendix 4).

Furthermore, if participants withdraw after they take part in the research, this will be accepted, and their accounts will be removed from my data collection. The only exception is, if this happens after January 2018 as the final drafts of the write-up will be produced around that time. This is being made clear in writing on the information sheet and will be explained before the interview.

20. Anonymity & confidentiality: (Please answer the following questions)**20.1. Will the data be gathered anonymously?**

(i.e. this is where you will not know the names and contact details of your participants? In qualitative research, data is usually not collected anonymously because you will know the names and contact details of your participants)

N/A

21. If NO what steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of participants?

(How will the names and contact details of participants be stored and who will have access? Will real names and identifying references be omitted from the reporting of data and transcripts etc? What will happen to the data after the study is over? Usually names and contact details will be destroyed after data collection but if there is a possibility of you developing your research (for publication, for example) you may not want to destroy all data at the end of the study. If not destroying your data at the end of the study, what will be kept, how, and for how long? Make this clear in this section and in your participant invitation letter also.)

Information about the participants and contents of the interviews will be kept confidential. The limits of confidentiality will be clearly explained before beginning. Confidentiality will be broken only when serious concerns about the wellbeing of the young person or any person's safety arise and only in consultation with supervisors. In case of such event, I will seek to discuss this with the young person when possible.

All interviews will be transcribed and documents (consent forms, transcripts and analysis in progress) will be stored on password protected devices. Only supervisors, examiners and I will have access to transcripts and this will be explained to all participants before seeking consent. The transcripts will be safely stored until 2020.

The information sheet outlines how the data will be stored and when it will be destroyed. Consent forms and transcripts will be stored in a locked environment, in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act. Only I will be aware of the identity of participants. To protect anonymity, all names and possible identifying information will be changed in transcripts, thesis extracts and in future publications. It will be made clear that the final research will be shared with [Organisation] and the [Organisation].

All participants will be informed that I do not have access to their clinical records.

22. Protection of participants:

(Are there any potential hazards to participants or any risk of accident or injury to them? What is the nature of these hazards or risks? How will the safety and well-being of participants be ensured? What contact details of an appropriate support organisation or agency will be made available to participants in your debrief sheet, particularly if the research is of a sensitive nature or potentially distressing?)

N.B: If you have serious concerns about the safety of a participant, or others, during the course of your research see your supervisor before breaching confidentiality.

To minimise distress during the interviews, my questions will not directly inquire about the young men's experiences that led to fleeing their homes or of their journeys to the UK. However, I anticipate some YP may want to tell me about these experiences and it requires careful consideration and the use of my clinical skills to bring the phenomena under investigation back into the centre of the conversation. It is important to recognise in those moments who I aim to protect, the participants, myself or my project and for what reasons. Regardless of whether I ask about their homes or journeys, the YP all have experienced loss and separation. Therefore, an interruption to their accounts may carry a message about whether their hardship matters and who and what I am there to hear about (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2006). If the young people were to become distressed during the interview, I would encourage them to think and talk about other things, take a break or stop altogether, depending on the situation and appropriateness. I will offer to talk to a member of the [Organisation] team who knows the young person and may be able to help in the future.

The limits of confidentiality will be clearly explained before beginning. Confidentiality will be broken only when serious concerns about the wellbeing of the young people or another person's safety arise and only in consultation with supervisors. In case of such event, I will seek to discuss this with the young person when possible. As the young men will be in contact with [Organisation] I would inform their worker there, in close consideration with my supervisor. [Organisation] have offered to take responsibility to support the young person in these circumstances. They will also know the details of other agencies in the borough. I am also aware of the social services operating in the borough.

23. Protection of the researcher:

(Will you be knowingly exposed to any health and safety risks? If equipment is being used is there any risk of accident or injury to you? If interviewing participants in their homes will a third party be told of place and time and when you have left a participant's house?)

I do not anticipate health and safety risks and will conduct the interview during work-hours in a clinical space, with other people in the building. My supervisor will be informed when I conduct the interviews and he will be contacted when I finish to let him know I am safe.

Potential participants will be identified by [Organisation] staff and will be well known by them. They will indicate if there are any risks associated with individuals.

24. Debriefing participants:

(Will participants be informed about the true nature of the research if they are not told beforehand? Will participants be given time at the end of the data collection task to ask you questions or raise concerns? Will they be re-assured about what will happen to their data? Please attach to this application your debrief sheet thanking participants for their participation, reminding them about what will happen to their data, and that includes the name and contact details of an appropriate support organisation for participants to contact should they experience any distress or concern as a result of participating in your research.)

All participants will be debriefed after their interviews and I will check how they are feeling and whether they feel they need to access additional support. I will provide them with contact details of local youth centres and other organisations. They will be able to contact me if they have questions after the meeting.

25. Will participants be paid?

YES

If YES how much will participants be paid and in what form (e.g. cash or vouchers?)
Why is payment being made and why this amount?

Payment of participants in this study was carefully considered. Generally, one side argues payment can lead to coercion to partake or discourage withdrawal (Wendler, Rackoff, Emanuel & Grady, 2002). The other side argues omitting a reimbursement can be unethical and offering payment may reduce the power imbalance between researcher and researched individual (Head, 2009). Having considered both sides, and gathered views from clinicians at [Organisation] it was felt that for this marginalised group of young people of low socio-economic status, a form of reimbursement was important and that the participants should be offered £20 gift vouchers to thank them for their time and effort. This amount was considered adequate by all parties involved.

26. Other:

(Is there anything else the reviewer of this application needs to know to make a properly informed assessment?)

N/a

4. Other permissions and ethical clearances

27. Is permission required from an external institution/organisation (e.g. a school, charity, local authority)?

YES

If your project involves children at a school(s) or participants who are accessed through a charity or another organisation, you must obtain, and attach, the written permission of that institution or charity or organisation. Should you wish to observe people at their place of work, you will need to seek the permission of their employer. If you wish to have colleagues at your place of employment as participants you must also obtain, and attach, permission from the employer.

If YES, please give the name and address of the institution/organisation:

[REDACTED]

[Organisation] require a written statement of the registration and the Ethical Approval of this research. Furthermore, please find attached their permission to carry out the research with them (Appendix 5).

Please attach a copy of the permission. A copy of an email from the institution/organisation is acceptable.

In some cases you may be required to have formal ethical clearance from another institution or organisation.

28. Is ethical clearance required from any other ethics committee?

NO

If YES please give the name and address of the organisation:

Has such ethical clearance been obtained yet? YES /
NO

If NO why not?

‘[Organisation]’ is satisfied with UEL’s Ethical Approval System.

If YES, please attach a scanned copy of the ethical approval letter. A copy of an email from the organisation is acceptable.

PLEASE NOTE: Ethical approval from the School of Psychology can be gained before approval from another research ethics committee is obtained. However, recruitment and data collection are NOT to commence until your research has been approved by the School and other ethics committees as may be necessary.

29. Will your research involve working with children or vulnerable adults?*

YES

If YES have you obtained and attached a DBS certificate? YES

If your research involves young people under 16 years of age and young people of limited competence will parental/guardian consent be obtained.

If NO please give reasons. (Note that parental consent is always required for participants who are 16 years of age and younger)

* You are required to have DBS clearance if your participant group involves (1) children and young people who are 16 years of age or under, and (2) ‘vulnerable’ people aged 16 and over with psychiatric illnesses, people who receive domestic care, elderly people (particularly those in nursing homes), people in palliative care, and people living in

institutions and sheltered accommodation, for example. Vulnerable people are understood to be persons who are not necessarily able to freely consent to participating in your research, or who may find it difficult to withhold consent. If in doubt about the extent of the vulnerability of your intended participant group, speak to your supervisor. Methods that maximise the understanding and ability of vulnerable people to give consent should be used whenever possible. For more information about ethical research involving children see www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/involving-children/

30. Will you be collecting data overseas?

NO

This includes collecting data/conducting fieldwork while you are away from the UK on holiday or visiting your home country.

* If YES in what country or countries will you be collecting data?

Please note that ALL students wanting to collect data while overseas (even when going home or away on holiday) MUST have their travel approved by the Pro-Vice Chancellor International (not the School of Psychology) BEFORE travelling overseas.

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

5. Signatures

TYPED NAMES ARE ACCEPTED AS SIGNATURES

Declaration by student:

I confirm that I have discussed the ethics and feasibility of this research proposal with my supervisor.

Student's name: Janin Eberhardt

Student's number: u1524910

Date: 15/02/2017

Declaration by supervisor:

I confirm that, in my opinion, the proposed study constitutes a suitable test of the research question and is both feasible and ethical.

Supervisor's name: Neil Rees

Date: 21.02.17

II) UEL Ethical Approval

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates

REVIEWER: Dr David Harper

SUPERVISOR: Dr Neil Rees

COURSE: Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

STUDENT: Janin Eberhardt

TITLE OF PROPOSED STUDY: Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved with minor amendments

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

1. Are any of these young people in the care of the Local Authority? If so, does the Local authority's permission need to be sought?
2. Individual electronic files should be password protected (not just the computer).

3. It is good that the supervisor will be notified of the start and end of the interviews. Will anyone in the buildings where the interviews take place be notified?

4. I would recommend setting up an email address specifically for this study rather than using your UEL email address.

5. Information sheet:

p.16: Will the participants be familiar with the term 'age assessment' used throughout the sheet (I presume so but thought I should check)

p.17: You use simpler language later but on lines 1-2 you say 'transcribe' and that their identity will be anonymous – you should use the same phrasing you use in paragraph 8 of p.17

p.17: Paragraph 5: I would rephrase to 'safe for both of us to meet'

p.18: para 3: Maybe explain what 'withdraw consent' means in simpler language.

6. Consent form:

p.19: typo on line 13

p.19: line 19: rephrase 'identifying data', for example to 'access to information which might identify me'

Major amendments required (for reviewer):

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEARCHER (for reviewer)

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

<input type="checkbox"/>	HIGH
<input type="checkbox"/>	MEDIUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Although the interviews are taking place off campus and with young people the interviewer may not have met before, steps have been taken to reduce risk: a well-respected voluntary sector organisation will be selecting participants; the interview setting will be familiar to the participants; and the researcher's supervisor will be notified before and after interviews have been conducted.

Reviewer (Typed name to act as signature): David Harper

Date: 10 April 2017

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (Typed name to act as signature): Janin Eberhardt

Student number: u1524910

Date: 27/04/2017

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

PLEASE NOTE:

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/>

Appendix K: University of East London Ethical Amendments

Amendment I)

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON School of Psychology

REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impacts on ethical protocol. If you are not sure about whether your proposed amendment warrants approval consult your supervisor or contact Dr Mary Spiller (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee).

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

1. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3. When submitting this request form, ensure that all necessary documents are attached (see below).
4. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Dr Mark Finn at M.Finn@uel.ac.uk.
5. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.
6. Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

1. A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendments(s) added as tracked changes.
2. Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information letter, updated consent form etc.
3. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant:	Janin Eberhardt
Programme of study:	Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
Title of research:	Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK
Name of supervisor:	Dr Neil Rees

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
It was previously proposed that written information, consent and debrief documents would be provided to participants in both English and in their primary language. I also proposed that I would not specify ethnicity and therefore not specify any given language. I would like to propose to change my aim of providing written information, consent and debrief documents in the participants' primary language, using interpreters to translate the information in person (which was previously proposed as a secondary means of further clarification only).	<p>Many separated young people who seek asylum come from different regions and therefore a number of different languages may be spoken. Due to this I am faced with an increased cost of translating multiple documents into multiple languages which exceeds the minimal and uncertain budget proposed by the university.</p> <p>It has been highlighted to me by people working with separated children that many of the young people cannot read well in their primary spoken language. Interpreters could aid in this case and it would allow for further information and explanations to be given in person. Furthermore, as an iterative consent process has been advocated, I would have ongoing discussions with the young person around the topic of consent. I would be checking and re-checking their understanding of their voluntary participation. This process would make a translated consent form less vital.</p>

	Furthermore, I was advised that translating materials can take up to 6 weeks to complete, which would delay the commencement of participant recruitment. I proposed that I would get documents translated once a potential participant and their first language is identified (due to diversity of participants), which would mean this time period of wait could repeatedly delay the process.
--	--

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	x	

Student's signature (please type your name): Janin Eberhardt

Date: 30/06/2017

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Amendment(s) approved	YES	
Comments		

Reviewer: Mary Spiller

Date: 3rd July 2017

Amendment II)

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON School of Psychology

REQUEST FOR AMENDMENT TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed amendment(s) to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.

Note that approval must be given for significant change to research procedure that impacts on ethical protocol. If you are not sure about whether your proposed amendment warrants approval consult your supervisor or contact Dr Mary Spiller (Chair of the School Research Ethics Committee).

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

1. Complete the request form electronically and accurately.
2. Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3. When submitting this request form, ensure that all necessary documents are attached (see below).
4. Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Dr Mark Finn at M.Finn@uel.ac.uk.
5. Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.
6. Recruitment and data collection are **not** to commence until your proposed amendment has been approved.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

1. A copy of your previously approved ethics application with proposed amendments(s) added as tracked changes.
2. Copies of updated documents that may relate to your proposed amendment(s). For example an updated recruitment notice, updated participant information letter, updated consent form etc.
3. A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant:	Janin Eberhardt
Programme of study:	Doctorate in Clinical Psychology
Title of research:	Separated Young People Seeking Asylum and their Experiences of Undergoing an Age Assessment in the UK
Name of supervisor:	Dr Neil Rees

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed amendment(s) and associated rationale(s) in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
<p>I previously proposed to recruit from the organisation 'Y' only. I now propose to extend the recruitment to 'X'. They offer a young club, key working and peer support services to separated young people seeking asylum in the LBX Region.</p> <p>Their address is: XXXX</p>	<p>I have recruited just above half of my participants from 'Y'. However, it has become increasingly difficult for reasons including, change in leadership and the departure of our close collaborator at 'Y' and clashes with room availability at 'Y' and our DClinCourse time table.</p> <p>'X' have a weekly youth club where I could attend and speak to the young people about my research and therefore will not solely rely on staff at the organisations to identify and recruit on my behalf.</p> <p>'X' and 'Y' work in close collaboration. However, 'X' reach a wider population of separated young people.</p> <p>They offer a different type of support (counselling at 'Y'), legal and social support at 'X'). They have ensured the support for the young people if necessary after interviews. I will signpost the young person to the other organisation in a debriefing sheet. Most young people are likely to know both already.</p>

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	x	

Student's signature (please type your name): Janin Eberhardt

Date: 30/11/2017

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Amendment(s) approved	YES	
<p align="center">Comments</p> <p>The amendment request is approved having sited written permission from 'Y' as an organisation to be involved with the research (as email from Neil Rees).</p>		

Reviewer: Mark Finn

Date: 1/12/17

Appendix L: Certificate of Participation

<hr/>	
CERTIFICATE	
<hr/>	
FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH	
<hr/>	
is thanked for his excellent participation and great help.	
	Presented by:
	<hr/>
	Janin Eberhardt Trainee Clinical Psychologist
On this day:	
<hr/>	Dr Neil Rees Programme Director (Clinical) Consultant Clinical Psychologist Professional Doctorate in Clinical Psychology University of East London

Appendix M: Key for Coding, Extracts and Themes

Minor changes were made to interview extracts and quotes to improve readability for presentation. The following styles have been used to indicate changes:

- (...) - Omission of text to shorten quotes
- [text] - Explanations to the reader
- ..pause.. - Short pause
- ...pause... - Long pause
- *laughs* - laughter
- (inaudible) - not able to transcribe due to utterance being inaudible

Identifying information has been removed and pertinent characteristics were omitted to protect the participants' anonymity.

3 Levels of Exploratory Codes

- Content - black writing
- Context - [blue writing](#)
- Use of language - *green writing*

Colour Codes for Participants

on Index Cards and Theme, Code and Quote Tables

Abdul	Turquoise
Belal	Red
Chris	Yellow
Deldaar	Pink
Emad	Purple
Freddy	Blue
Ghaswan	Green

Appendix N: Initial Coding and Emergent Theme Formation

Example Extract from Deldaar

Step 2: Emergent Themes	Interview Transcript	Step 1: Exploratory Comments
<p>39</p> <p>40</p> <p>41</p> <p>42</p> <p>43 Feeling hopeless after</p> <p>44 assessment</p> <p>45</p> <p>46</p> <p>47</p> <p>48</p> <p>49</p> <p>50</p> <p>51</p> <p>52</p> <p>53</p> <p>54</p> <p>55</p> <p>56</p> <p>57 Afghan national ID card was</p> <p>58 not accepted</p> <p>59</p> <p>60</p> <p>61</p> <p>62</p> <p>63</p> <p>64</p> <p>65</p> <p>66</p> <p>67</p> <p>68 Lack of transparency before</p> <p>69 and during age assessment</p> <p>70</p> <p>71</p> <p>72</p> <p>73</p> <p>74</p> <p>75 Felt judged for how he looked</p> <p>76</p> <p>77</p> <p>78</p> <p>79 Explaining situation about his</p> <p>80 looks at the time of ax</p> <p>81</p> <p>82</p> <p>83</p> <p>84</p> <p>85</p> <p>86</p> <p>87</p> <p>88</p> <p>89</p> <p>90</p> <p>91 All support withdrawn at once</p> <p>92</p> <p>93</p> <p>94</p> <p>95</p>	<p>J: And the age assessment, a social worker was doing it?</p> <p>D: Well, the people, I don't know. I don't know such people, I don't think somebody would go with good hope and they would come out with good hope. It is just despair. Everybody becomes hopeless.</p> <p>J: By everybody you mean, people like you? Or your social worker as well?</p> <p>D: Even the social worker was not in my good.</p> <p>J: And how old did they say you were?</p> <p>D: They were telling me that "You are over 18".</p> <p>J: Oh, okay.</p> <p>D: I have given them national ID card. They said "we don't believe in this".</p> <p>J: Okay</p> <p>D: First they told me "bring it" and we will decide your age according to that. And when I brought that, they said, err, it didn't help and didn't do it. And it's just lost now.</p> <p>J: And then disputed, you, errr appealed challenged?</p> <p>D: Erm, in the beginning you told me, if you make a mistake then we will correct it. But then, they removed me from the family.</p> <p>J: Because, they thought you were older?</p> <p>D: Yes, because they said "you are over 18". And er, then they said, because of my colour complexion of my face. Er, when I was in Calais, because of the sun and the weather affects my skin and my face, my complexion totally changed and looked bad, looked awful and that is why.</p> <p>J: So you felt judged for how you looked at the time?</p> <p>D: Yes, because of that. And if I looked at myself, I looked very young. Too young. I don't know, they just decided for how they decided.</p> <p>J: And when they decided to do an assessment, do you remember how it was explained to you? The process?</p> <p>D: They said, we stop each and everything here and your social worker will stop, means, you don't have a social worker anymore, and we stop everything here now. And the benefits, etc that you get will be stopped.</p> <p>J: So everything was on hold?</p>	<p>He is not sure who attended/conducted meeting Feeling hopeless, feels like people's hopes are crushed? <i>Everybody becomes hopeless – he is very hopeless! I wonder if he means the age assessment alone or his journey as a whole?</i></p> <p>Social Worker did not agree with him on age</p> <p>He was judged to be over 18</p> <p>His national ID card was not accepted <i>"We don't believe in this" They did not believe in his nation's ID card, they believe in UK ID cards. I wonder how that felt for him?</i></p> <p><i>Was asked to bring ID card, which was then seen as not real?</i> Afghan National ID did not help <i>What is lost, age dispute or ID card? Does he mean worthless?</i></p> <p><i>It seems he was reassured initially. Given hope? Hope seems to be a theme</i> Was removed from foster family as result being assessed as over 18.</p> <p>They said he was over 18 because of his face colour complexion Deldaar explains how the sun in Calais and being outside affected his skin Reflects on looking awful Feels judged on his looks? <i>Does he feel that all the experiences he has had to make made him look older and how he is being punished for that on top?</i></p> <p>He looked young at the time Does not understand their decision <i>Too young? Too young for what? Being over 18? Or is it a way of saying "very"?</i></p> <p>Everything (all support) stopped after age assessment It stopped abruptly Everything you get will be stopped (by social services)</p>

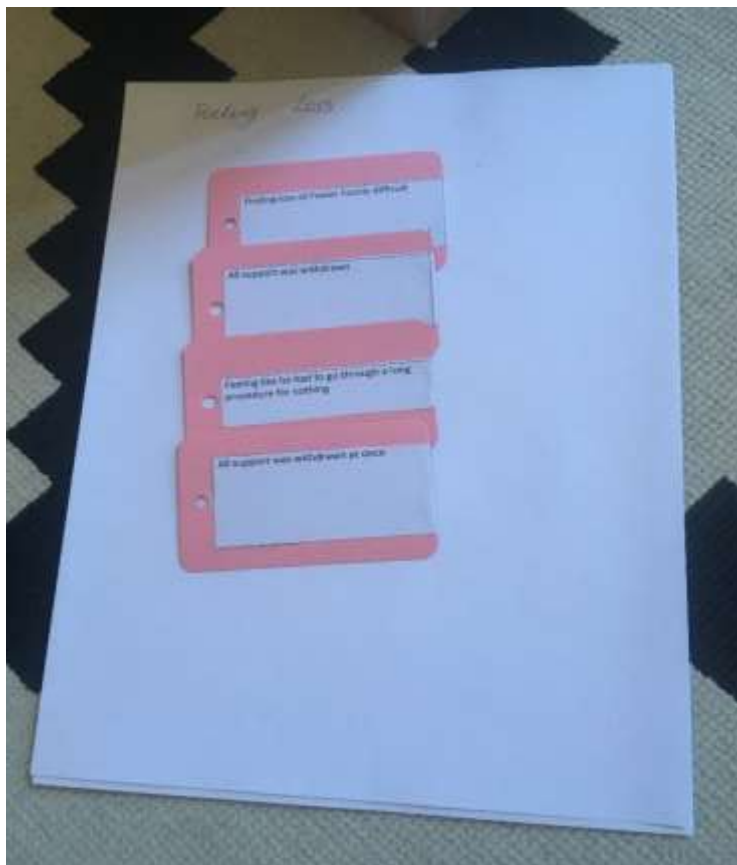
96		D: Yes, everything. They did not not even allow me to go to	
97		that foster family. And they removed my clothes. The	
98		foster family themselves went home and collected my	
99	Finding loss of Foster Family	stuff and brought it. That is how difficult it was.	Disconnected from Foster Family after assessment
100	difficult		Foster family had to go home and collect Deldaar's
101		J: Do you remember what your foster family thought?	belongings. <u>It seemed that this was very sudden.</u>
102			Suddenness stands for how awful it was?
103		D: Ohh, they were surprised. Just surprised. How come this	
104		is happening?	
105		J: They believed you?	Suddenness and abruptness seemed to have
106			surprised Foster Family. <u>They also seemed to not</u>
107	Foster Family surprised at		<u>expect this?</u>
108	decision	D: Yes, auntie, the foster mother, auntie saw me because I	Foster Family surprised at decision and
109		lived there. They know how I behaved.	implications
110		J: Mhh, and erm, when they did not believe you, this is a	Felt believed by foster mother. He felt she knew
111		hard question I think. How did you feel?	how he behaved. <u>He seems to think he was</u>
112			<u>behaving like someone who is not like over 18?</u>
113	Felt believed by foster family		<i>Auntie – respected Foster Mother</i>
114		D: I felt really sad and down. I said, you took a lot of my	
115		time, a few months of my time, and asked me so many	Feeling sad and down
116		questions, and at the end, no result. What is this?	Feels cheated, a few months taken away
117	Feeling sad and down	J: What implications did it have? You said, benefits were	Felt exposed to many questions
118		stopped, you had to move out of your foster family, what	Had to work very hard and no reward?
119		about college, did it affect that as well? Or school?	<i>Rhetorical: what is this?</i>
120			
121		D: Yes, everything, finished. They stopped everything.	
122		Money was stopped, college was stopped, I was not	No support left; no money, access to college, foster
123		allowed to be with foster family and then, I had sore throat	family, physical health was also affected
124		and I did not have a single penny to treat myself. It was	<i>Not allowed to be with Foster Family</i>
125	All support was withdrawn	really awful. According to me, it is really awful.	Feeling awful
126			Feeling a lot of loss
127		J: Yeah	Cannot even help himself for physical problems
128			
129		D: If one person is totally new, he does not know anything	
130	Feels he complied with	and they answer all the questions, and they show you the	Not knowing anything
131	assessors and got nothing	proof that you want, nationally card, or whatever,	At mercy of assessors (you do everything they ask
132		whatever they want, you provide to them. And at the end	you to do)
133		of the day, everything is just nothing, meaningless.	And all the work for thing
134			<i>Choice of word. Meaningless. It was without</i>
135		J: Do you remember when you actually went to the	<i>meaning for him, or now he means nothing.</i>
136		meetings, how did you feel when you went to the actual	
137		age assessment meetings?	
138		D: In fact, I didn't know, I didn't know anybody, I didn't	
139		know what was happening. I just went and sat there and	Did not know what was happening.
140	Feeling confused about what	they came, the social guy came, and said "Do you know	Initially passively taking part
141	was happening to him	me?" and I said "No". And they said, "Relax, don't worry,	
142		everything is okay, we have a few questions and you	Was reassured and calmed
143		answer a few questions and that's it". So I just answered	Recalls it was explained that it would be an easy
144		the questions and I still didn't know what was happening.	process
145		And at the time, when they removed me from the foster	Was not sure what was happening
146	Made connections between	family, at that time I understood that that was LBX was	Only realised what had happened after he was
147	age and implications later	asking me questions, etc. And they said "It's nothing	removed from foster carer. <u>He then realised</u>
148		serious, don't worry" and if it was nothing serious, how	<u>implication and importance of the meetings.</u>
149		come, three years of my life is just wasted?	<u>Sounds like they were minimised to him. It reads</u>
150			<u>like he is quite angry at this. Feels cheated.</u>
151	Lack of transparency during	J: Like on hold, huh?	Life is wasted?
152	age assessment		

Appendix O: Individual Sub- and Superordinate Theme Formation

All emergent theme codes and matching quotes were transferred onto coloured index cards. The following pictures depict the process of individual participant theme formation



To map connections and patterns between the 'emergent themes', codes and quotes were transferred on to coloured index cards



Example of sub-ordinate theme (Feeling Loss) cluster for Deldaar

For a systemic overview, the index card theme clusters were tabularised. Below is an example: complete table of themes for Deldaar

Subordinate and Super-Ordinate Themes for Deldaar

Emergent Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes
Feeling hopeless after assessment Feeling sad and down Feeling "crazy" and full of pressure Feeling worried (2x) Coping by avoiding thoughts Copes by occupying time; e.g. going to college All support was withdrawn (2x) Feeling like he had to go through a long procedure for nothing (x2) Finding loss of foster family difficult	Feeling hopeless, sad and worried Feeling loss	SADNESS AND LOSS
Feeling unheard My age is my age and only my parents can know Played like a toy Viewing decision about age as predetermined Feeling labelled disrespectful Felt judged for how he looked Explaining situation about his looks at time of ax	Feeling Unheard Questioning practice of judging Appearance	
Feeling disbelieved Being accused of deception Afghan national ID card was not accepted Gives context: Past affects presents Feels disbelieved despite developmental and medical evidence Age Disputed from moment of entry to UK	Feeling disbelieved	LACK OF POWER
Lack of transparency before and during age ax (x2) Conflicting information Caught in unfamiliar system Did not understand age ax, process or meaning Made connection between age and implications later Feeling confused about what was happening to him Not being sure of who holds what role at age ax Age assessed after being allocated to foster family All day meetings	Feeling Confused and Caught in unfamiliar System	
Values basic questions about his wellbeing Values emotional and practical support Thankful for support Felt believed by foster family Support of Foster family "Young men should be believed, and their age should be accepted" Support from solicitor Being proactive	Valuing being believed & supported	APPRECIATING ACCEPTANCE
Foster mother confused Foster family surprised at decision Support network feel upset and angry about age dispute Shared his concerns with professionals, not friends Not aware others are going through similar experiences	Sharing concerns with Adults	

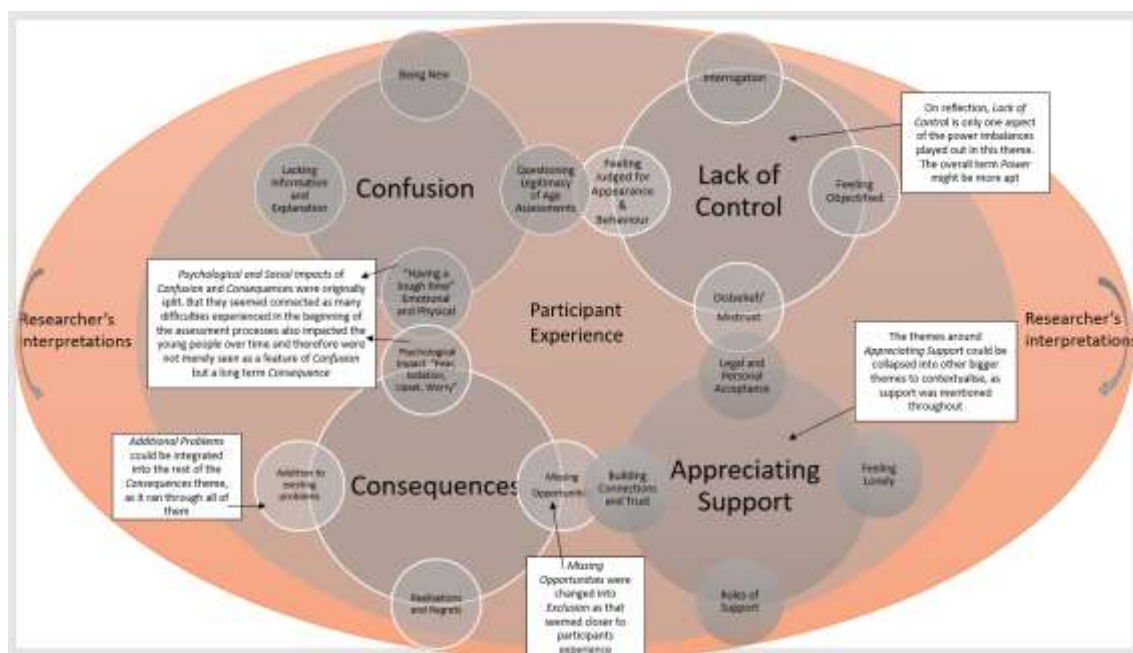
Based on the above table, an additional table with the all themes, matching quotes and line numbers was created to ease location of quotes for write up.



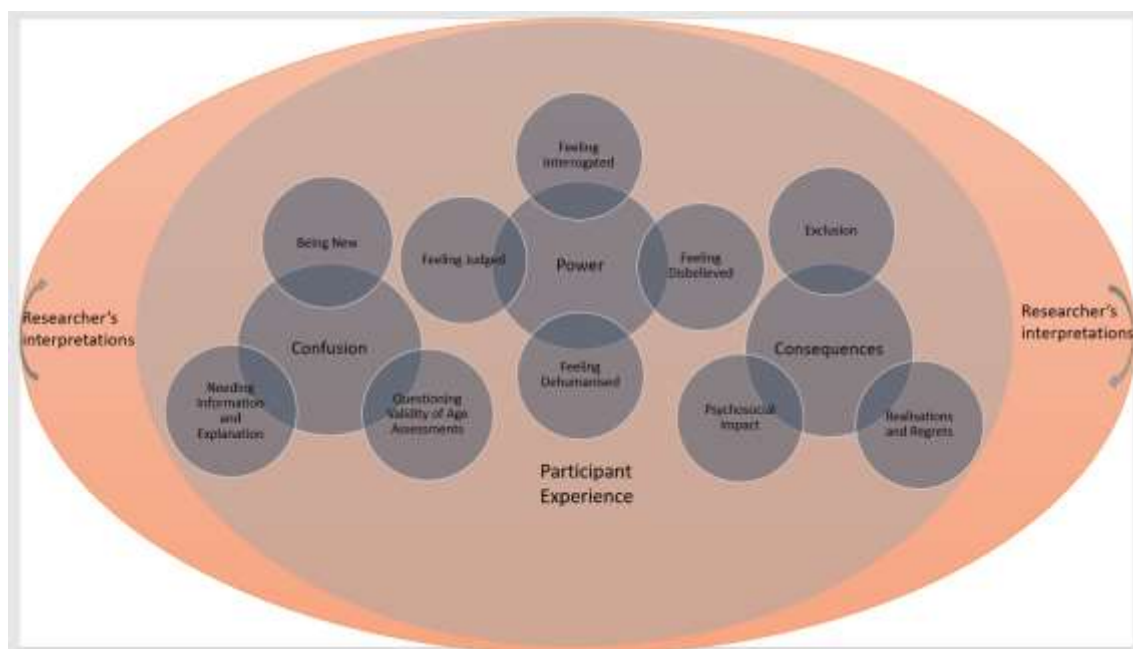
Only after I repeated the previous steps for each participant, I began to consider the entire data together

Appendix P: Theme Formation Process (Whole Sample)

The first diagram shows an earlier theme formation with initial theme titles. The overlap in themes is visually represented.



After supervision, peer consultation and reflection themes were revised, moved around and collapsed. The diagram above shows the initial formation and the changes made. The diagram below shows the final formation with the three central Superordinate Themes.



Example table of how participants' individual themes matched the Superordinate Theme 'CONFUSION'. (capitalised themes indicate SUPERORDINATE THEMES)

	SUPERORDONATE Theme	Sub-ordinate themes		
Participant	CONFUSION	Being New	Needing Information and Explanation	Questioning Validity of Age Assessment
Abdul	FEELING CONFUSED	Feeling lost	Feeling Confused	Questioning Legitimacy of Age Assessment
Belal	FEELING CONFUSED	Feeling Confused	Feeling Confused	Selfhood discredited
Chris	CONFUSING TIMES	Having to Cope Alone	Vague memories and little information	
Deldaar	FEELING CONFUSED	Feeling Confused in Unfamiliar System		Questioning Practice of Judging Appearance
Emad	CONFUSION	CONFUSION	Unaware of what was happening to him	Disagreeing with Judging Appearance
Freddy	CONFUSION	Not Knowing		Questioning Legitimacy & RESISTING
Ghaswan	CONFUSION	Unsure of What Happened		Questioning Legitimacy of Judging physical appearance

Appendix Q: Tabulated Overview of Theme Distribution

Prevalence and distribution of overall of super- and sub-ordinate themes for the whole participant group

SUPER ORDINATE THEME	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Abdul	Belal	Chris	Deldaar	Emad	Freddy	Ghaswan
CONFUSION	Being New	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Needing Information and Explanation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Questioning Validity of Age Assessments	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
POWER	Feeling Judged		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Feeling Interrogated	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Feeling Dehumanised	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
	Feeling Disbelieved	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
CONSEQUENCES	Psychosocial Impact	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Realisations and Regrets	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
	Exclusion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Appendix R: Table of Overall Themes and Participants' Quotes

Overall superordinate and sub-ordinate themes were tabulated with participants' individual themes. Individual superordinate (CAPITALISED) and sub-ordinate themes were lifted from individuals' tables and quotes are provided to evidence each theme. There was more than one suitable quote in participants' individual tables. This table shows one quote per theme as example.

SUPER ORDINATE THEME	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Participant	Participant Theme (SUPER or sub-ordinate theme)	Quote	Line Number
CONFUSION	Being New	Abdul	Feeling lost and trying to survive	<i>I didn't know no one here. Where should I go? Why I am doing this?</i>	186-197
		Belal	Feeling Confused	<i>because, obviously everything, was like soooo difficult and different. If you see my country, even the road, the cars drive from right hand side</i>	120-122
		Chris	Having to Cope Alone	<i>I hadn't any friends, I could not speak English. So yeah.</i>	368-369
		Deldaar	Feeling Confused and Caught in unfamiliar System	<i>I didn't know anything. I was not familiar with anything.</i>	321
		Emad	Unaware what was happening to him	<i>It took me from LBX to somewhere else, East London or somewhere. I don't know. They took me in the car, about one hour.</i>	62-72
		Freddy	CONFUSION	<i>I, was like, I haven't you seen such thing, like, you know. Here it is big difference, honestly.</i>	832-834
		Ghaswan	CONFUSION	<i>I don't know. I did not know what should I say.</i>	438-439
	Needing Information and Explanation	Abdul	Feeling confused	<i>They say whats your date of birth and I said this is my date of birth and I also, on that time, first day, I didn't have proper, em, the interpreter as well.</i>	119-122
		Belal	CONFUSION	<i>And all the time, like, suddenly they were sending taxi. Said to me, like, come</i>	450-451
		Chris	Confusing times; vague memories and little information	<i>Cos I didn't know what was going on and got no explanation.</i>	464-465
		Deldaar	FEELING CONFUSED	<i>In fact, I didn't know, I didn't know anybody, I didn't know what was happening. I just went and sat there and they came, the social guy came, and said "Do you know me?" and I said "No"</i>	142-145
		Emad	CONFUSION	<i>They said just interview. So I didn't know if it is home office interview or for age assessment.</i>	109-117
		Freddy	Not Knowing	<i>No, they didn't explain me. Even the time when they were going to take me, noone.</i>	812-813
	Questioning Validity of Age Assessments	Abdul	QUESTIONING CONCEPT OF AGE	<i>Sometimes people have beard and they are still young, have beard and they are 30 and they have beard and they are 16, 17</i>	263-265
		Belal	Selfhood discredited	<i>I said, this is my identification, I said to them you know, you are not better than my mother and my father.</i>	185-187
		Deldaar	Questioning Practice of Judging Appearance	<i>And if I looked at myself, I looked very young. Too young. I don't know, they just decided for how they decided.</i>	83-85
		Emad	Disagreeing with Judging Appearance	<i>Basically, I am not believing to look someone to decide their age.</i>	588-587
		Freddy	Questioning Legitimacy	<i>if you are look at this country here, Germany, other countries, people are older, they look, you know, young. It is because they have got no problem, they haven't faced any problems.</i>	255-258
		Ghaswan	Judged of Appearance	<i>And they are not looking at my age but looing at my appearance.</i>	170-172

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Participant	Participant Theme (SUPER or sub-ordinate theme)	Quote	Line Number
POWER	Feeling Judged	Belal	Selfhood Discredited	<i>And they said to me, the way you look, the way you talk, those stuff, you are enough mature, you look older</i>	187-189
		Chris	Feeling Speechless - Being Accused of Lying	<i>And other woman said, oh yeah, he looks 16, but the other one said no.</i>	33-34
		Deldaar	Questioning Practice of Judging Appearance	<i>they said "you are over 18". And er, then they said, because of my colour complexion of my face</i>	74-75
		Emad	Disagreeing with Judging Appearance	<i>They said you look so, so I say "he is my brother, look at him, he is older than me but he looking like younger" My skin is like different colours, he is white, I am different colours. They said no, it is like this.</i>	260-84
		Freddy	Looking beyond Surface; Getting to Know Me	<i>I look bad from face, my looks everything, but the way I treat everyone, the way I get along with someone, then the person never wants to leave me. They will know from inside, outside me, then this. Same with those family and this family.</i>	714-717
		Ghaswan	Judged for Appearance	<i>they said, they looked at my feature and said this part is big, or that part is big and you're not looking at my age, they are looking at my appearance</i>	235-237
	Feeling Interrogated	Abdul	Feeling Interrogated	<i>Several time I said to her, please, don't ask me those kind of things</i>	101-102
		Belal	Interrogated	<i>I was forced by them to answer. So at that time, I was like, I had a really tough time.</i>	166-171
		Chris	Feeling Worried and Alone	<i>It is just like, they were trying to convince me. And I was most of the time stuck and confused.</i>	682-683
		Deldaar	Feeling Confused and Caught in unfamiliar System	<i>I should come at 9 o'clock and then I would go in the late afternoon.</i>	187-188
		Emad	Having Context Ignored (physical and historical)	<i>Then, that time was finished, I was so hungry in the morning, I didn't get my breakfast and lunch. They didn't buy it for me, nothing</i>	123-125
		Ghaswan	BEING QUESTIONED	<i>some three people approximately each time with him, someone will ask something, someone else will ask something. Even auntie used to ask me something as well.</i>	138-41
	Feeling Dehumanised	Abdul	No control – being done to	<i>Obviously, court not gonna say this. They were just playing with me</i>	776-737
		Belal	Feeling Caught like a Criminal	<i>When I, when I went there, it was like difficult. Those asking me a lot of questions. Like, you know, someone doing some criminal, you know. And the police come and interview and ask a lot of questions</i>	316-320
		Deldaar	LACK OF POWER	<i>As if they just asked me to come there, like a toy, they just wanted to have fun and had fun over there.</i>	281-283
		Freddy	No Power	<i>I was like a tree, wherever people were moving me, I was going there. Wherever then, I was going there.</i>	948-950
		Ghaswan	Feeling Injustices	<i>and this is an unjust thing. And I said "What is my crime?"</i>	329-330
	Feeling Disbelieved	Abdul	Personality and Respect questioned	<i>Because if they think, research, they know better than us.</i>	552-553
		Belal	Powerlessness; their words against ours	<i>And they kinda of ignored my foster dad. And my forster mum, she was supporting me as well. Even my (sport) teacher spoke to me, my school teacher, all of them support me, yeah. But they were saying to me, nah. All those people support you are wrong. Just we are right</i>	194-198
		Chris	Being Accused of Lying	<i>But, if they just say oh you have to do this, that, this, assessment, then it would normal. That sounds more okay than just saying "you are lying about your age and you have to do this and you have to that" I think that is embarrassing.</i>	854-859
		Deldaar	Feeling unheard	<i>To be honest, they did not listen to me at all, at all, they did not listen. I just think I, the questions that I give, I was just talking to myself and they made the decision according to what they had on their mind</i>	278-281
		Emad	Feeling Powerless and Disbelieved	<i>I feel like totally broke. I said "This is my age, I have proof". And why ten people thinking something wrong</i>	358-358
		Ghaswan	FEELING UNHEARD	<i>I asked for help from the people but they said, they cannot help anyone</i>	328-329

SUPER-ORDINATE THEME	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Participant	Participant Theme (SUPER or sub-ordinate theme)	Quote	Line Number
CONSEQUENCES	Psychosocial Impact	Abdul	Physical Pains	<i>I used to have it back home as well. But that was very light, you know, sometimes, maybe one month two days, or three days, but now every day, every single day I have headache.</i>	695-698
		Belal	HAVING A TOUGH TIME – emotional consequences	<i>One night I got upset, and then I smashed, you know, the big mirrors. The police came, you know, to the house. They said "What is going on?" I said "I am fed up, I am not going to go anymore for interviews. I am done".</i>	402-405
		Chris	Feeling worried and alone	<i>I wasn't right. I was just lonely in my room. thinking. It was depressing, yeah. I was depressed.</i>	501-503
		Deldaar	SADNESS AND LOSS	<i>I don't think somebody would go with good hope and they would come out with good hope. It is just despair. Everybody becomes hopeless.</i>	41-44
		Emad	Ongoing Sadness and Worry	<i>So, I was just sad and stayed at home.</i>	559-560
		Freddy	Lost opportunities	<i>Then, they could, simply, that they couldn't change my age and give me chance to go to school</i>	1248-1249
		Ghaswan	Unmet Needs	<i>When I was assessed over age, I was neglected and noone even started helping me after that</i>	224-225
	Realisations and Regrets	Abdul	EXPLANATIONS AND REFLECTIONS	<i>If I knew now, like now. If. I am thinking, Oh my god I should have this knowledge that time which I have now.</i>	655-657
		Belal	Suspicious of Facades	<i>My last social worker, he was nice and friendly. In front of me, but I don't know, behind me. Because you know, he gave me a lot of trouble as well. I was like, nice, talked to me, like. But I don't know if he was that good. Cause you know, some social workers say "Them people, they gonna get deported back", this that...</i>	1121-1127
		Chris	NOT REALISING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT	<i>I just learnt. Because they keep on reminding about the age. And only this age. Make sure you gonna do this and that. And then I just realised, ohh maybe they are just doing it to get rid of him.</i>	611-614
		Emad	UNDERSTANDING CONNECTIONS	<i>What you want to do, that is your problem. That is not the Home Office problem. If you want space to home office, they sent you outside. (...) For this, I think, it is my opinion, they try to make everybody over 18 to send them back or different city, there is cheaper (...) London is too expensive. They thinking about money. Maybe</i>	659-669
		Freddy	SEEING A BIGGER PICTURE	<i>Probably they just want to get promotion, get something on a higher level. Something of that sort. If my age is gone, if my age is higher, probably getting something for that. You never know.</i>	866-868
	Exclusion	Abdul	Missing Opportunities	<i>I asked here, during the age assessment, that in, weekdays I am so bored at home, put me in college. And she was saying, no, your age is not, we don't know how old are you.</i>	197-200
		Belal	Social Implications	<i>How continue? Cause that time I was supposed to go to school. But they sent me to the college.</i>	320-321
		Chris	Support Limiting	<i>Because the process is, nothing went fast. Because I was 16 and then they didn't really believe it but then I had to move, errr, and become independent at 17. Or 16 and a half. I mean, 17 1/5.</i>	101-105
		Deldaar	Feeling Loss	<i>They stopped everything. Money was stopped, college was stopped, I was not allowed to be with foster family and then, I had sore throat and I did not have a single penny to treat myself. It was really awful</i>	124-128
		Emad	Losing Out	<i>I was feeling worry, not good. Cause I'd really liked to study. That time my own year study gone. Was no money. They didn't pay me nothing. No house, no GP, was not good life.</i>	511-514
		Freddy	Missed Opportunities	<i>F: Just, I want to say, my experience it does affect me big, in life. It does affect too much, if the age is disputed. Problem with your age does affect you a lot, actually. Like the way it did to me. Like, what happened, fist from age, into other. If there was no age problem, say, now I would be somewhere, I wouldn't be here now. I would have like, a better life. Better education, completing my degree, whatever.</i>	1268-1275
		Ghaswan	IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT	<i>Noone helped me in the past. Just now started people helping me.</i>	188-189

Appendix S: Home Office (2018) Flow Chart of Age Assessment Process

This page contains a flow chart of the age assessment process.

