

# The challenges experienced by social-care workers, working with migrant children in residential care settings

STUDENT NAME: BAMIDELE AZEEZ (1419289), Supervisor Name: Dr. Anna Wolniak

**Abstract:** The study examined and analysed social care workers' account of their work with migrant children in a residential care setting. Irish social care professionals are confronted with new ordeals linked with disruption, control and prejudice. And the findings emerged with three themes: cultural differences, language difficulties, and lack of recourses.

**Introduction:** Ireland has become visibly diverse in a comparatively short period of time (Smyth et al, 2009), as a result of the remarkable boosts of inward migration. This increase was due to; not just returning emigrants, but also asylum seekers, refugees and a significant number from the new European Union member states, as a result of the "Celtic Tiger" boom, which coincided with the lifting of control on people's movement within the European Union. Amongst the new settlers in Ireland, there were 'unaccompanied minors' or 'separated children' seeking asylum.



*Separated children are under 18 years of age, outside their country of origin and separated from both parents, and their previous legal, or customary primary caregiver.*

These migrant children were "mostly accommodated in specially designated hostels, by the Health Service Executive, whose statutory duty it is, to officially care for unaccompanied children" (Smyth et al, 2009, p. 8). However, according to Joyce & Quinn (2009), some of the hostels are extremely under-resourced. Social care workers, working with these children from varying ethnic, religious, social and cultural backgrounds, continue to face immense difficulty focusing on their needs. Furthermore, the key legislation significant to the care of these unaccompanied migrant children: The Child Care Act, 1991 "makes no specific reference" to them (Joyce & Quinn, 2009, p. 28). Particularly in response to the care needs of migrant children in residential care settings. According to the Ombudsman for Children's Office (2009) these migrant children, experience severe poverty, social exclusion, language difficulties, racism, and institutional barriers, placing them at "risk of multiple breaches of their rights". This research aim to explore the professional skills, levels of awareness, experience, and the outcome of social care work with these vulnerable groups, with the objective to identifying areas of conflict, whilst informing and promoting better awareness of cross-cultural values and beliefs.

**Method:** This study used a qualitative research method. The research design used for this study requires primary and secondary data collection. Primary data collection involves the researcher collecting first hand data in the form of interviews utilizing a semi-structured face to face and email interview technique with open-ended questions, to gather in-depth information Materials . The secondary data collection was taken from past research, on-line report, books, and journals.

**Participants:** This research adopts a purposeful sampling with a criteria sampling and a small snowball sampling techniques . The sample size was 7 social care workers, aged 18 and above, both male and female, including Irish and non-Irish to gain wider experiences and for different opinion. The respondents were specially selected for the study based on their direct work with separated migrant children in residential care setting, they were full time as well as part-time social care workers .

**Procedure:** the interview took two forms: first one was a semi-structured face to face interview, organized and conducted in one of the respondent home and second interviews was email interview, a copy of the questionnaire was sent to the respondent through email and question was answered and sent back to the researcher by email. As well. The data were collected with a digital recorder; pen and paper, all of the interviews were subsequently transcribed and transmitted into Nvivo 9 for analysis. Nvivo 9 is a qualitative data analysis which allows the researcher to conduct a thematic analysis of each question. Data Analysis is The final part of this procedure which involved the analysis of the interview data, coding and sorting codes into categories and themes.

**Ethical consideration:** Researcher maintain confidentiality and inform consent is very important as it's a major ethical issue. A consent form were issued to the participant to be signed. All information collected are kept confidential and respondents will remain unknown. The researcher will ensure that data are accurately reported.

**Limitations:** The small samples used cannot serve for the broad generalizations and cannot represent all social care professionals working in residential care setting, so the outcome of the research cannot be projected onto general population of care workers.

**Results:** This research explored the challenges facing social care workers in their work with separated migrant children in residential care settings. The findings which arose from the analysed interviews emerged with three major themes. Data are analysed under this three main themes and they are discussed with reference to the purpose of the aims and objectives of the study. The three major themes that emerged from the data gathered are: Cultural differences, Language barrier and Lack of resources. Unanticipated Data/Findings arrows' which is racism. In the analysis, quotes from the respondents are used to illustrate the contents of the themes.

**Discussion:** This study explore social care practice with migrant children focusing on separated children in residential care settings in Ireland. It looks at the social changes: immigration and cultural diversity as underpinning the existence of separated children today's Irish society. The participants for the survey were social care workers working in children's residential care settings. The interviews with the respondents enabled the researcher to explore current practices, and drew attention to cross-cultural awareness as a means to inform best practice when working with separated migrant children from various ethnic origins in care. Cultural difference came as a major challenge to social care professionals in their work with children from ethnic background. Secondly, Language barrier is also a huge problem for social care workers who are overstretched and under-resourced. Thirdly, this study find out that some of the residential care centres lack resources such as cultural training for social care workers, facilities to meet the cultural needs of these separated migrant children in care and social support for migrant children is found limited. Finally, racism came as unanticipated findings. This study recommended that, promoting and suggest best practice for separated migrant children in residential care centres in Ireland, that, the best interests of these children should be considered first in all child care services and interventions.

**References:** Smyth, E., Darmody, M., McGinnity, F. & Byrne, D. (2009). *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute.

Joyce, C., & Quinn, E. (2009). *Policies of Unaccompanied Minors in Ireland: European Migration Network*. Dublin: The Economic and Social Research Institute

Share, P. & McElwee, N. (2005) *Applied Social Care. An Introduction for Irish Students*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan

Ombudsman for Children's Office. (2009). separated children living in Ireland: A report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office. Retrieved [12/11/11] from: www.oco.ie