



Health and meaning through “doings”: A qualitative study with young unaccompanied refugees in Norway

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ABSTRACT

Background: Young unaccompanied refugees who settle in a new country are at substantial risk of developing health problems while striving to uphold a meaningful, new life. We lack knowledge about how they use their personal agency to self-care in the context of their local communities. This article examines how young unaccompanied refugees create healthy identities and looks into the social structures that promote health in their everyday life.

Methods: Nineteen in-depth interviews were conducted with young unaccompanied refugees settled in Norway, originating from Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Syria. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used. Our theoretical framework combined Antonovsky's (1987) theory of health, Honneth's (2005) philosophy of recognition, and Prilleltensky's (2020) social psychological concept of mattering.

Results: Young unaccompanied refugees create healthy identities through “doings”, i.e. meaningful activities that provide recognition and the feeling of adding value. They confirm health as a relational phenomenon, including horizontal relations at, for example, school, work, gym, and other leisure activities in the local community. Vertical relations involving legal status, residence permits, and community values, were also highly important. The participants' relation to parents/families in their country of origin was often complex, associated both with burdensome obligations to provide and a potential to care and matter.

Conclusion: Young unaccompanied refugees are dependent on inclusive, supportive policies and structures which enable them to develop healthy identities. These findings should encourage policymakers and society to strengthen and expand arenas for “doings” and meaning for young unaccompanied refugees.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Modern biomedicine has made large inroads in life expectancy, curing diseases, and relief from pain and suffering. Knowledge on the molecular level has improved diagnostic competencies and precision (Mæland, 2020:16). Nonetheless, biomedicine has not been able to fully explain why we become ill or recover from illness. The social determinants of health (WHO, 2008) and research on health show that socioeconomic status (Krokstad and Mæland, 2020), lived experiences (especially in childhood and early adulthood) (Getz et al., 2011), and socially inclusive relations (Heimburg et al., 2021) appear to affect our health, not only in the “here and now” but throughout our life course. Extreme lived experiences are related to war and conflict, flight, and

migration. The United Nations (2021) has stated that flight and migration will represent a major global threat to healthy lives and well-being by 2030. Refugees are an exposed migrant group, and within this group young, unaccompanied refugees are among the most vulnerable (Bean et al., 2007). A refugee is defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (United Nations, 1951). This study explores the young, settled, unaccompanied refugees' creation of healthy identity through meaning, using Antonovsky's (1987) salutogenic approach. According to this approach, meaning is the fundamental prerequisite for good health. To better grasp the content of meaning, we have combined Antonovsky's theory of salutogenesis with the philosopher Axel Honneth's philosophy of recognition (2005) and Prilleltensky's concept of “mattering” (2020), where the aim

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is to increase our understanding of how young, settled, unaccompanied refugees create a healthy identity during their transition into their new home country. Before introducing the theoretical framework, we will examine what we currently know about young, settled, unaccompanied refugees' health.

1.2. Young, settled, unaccompanied refugees

Research on young, unaccompanied refugees is often placed in the risk- and problem-oriented discourse (Bilotta & Denov, 2018; Borsch et al., 2019; von Werthern et al., 2019). Many refugees have witnessed traumatic events, including extreme violence and carnage, loss of family members, persecution, and forced recruitment (Hopkins and Hill, 2008; Thomas et al., 2004) in their country of origin and during their flight (Giacco et al., 2018). Moreover, in the absence of parents or primary caregivers, their difficult life situation might affect their emotional well-being and health. Prevalence studies reveal that young, unaccompanied refugees are at higher risk of developing depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Jakobsen et al., 2014; Kien et al., 2018). Literature on coping strategies (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010) and resilience (Brook and Ottemöller, 2020; Johansen and Studsrod, 2019) show that unaccompanied refugees also possess important resources and strengths that help them cope with a range of stressful circumstances. They are often studied through trauma/victimization theory or a resilience lens. Still, in acknowledging the complexity of these young people's lives, both vulnerability and resilience are evident at the same time (Bilotta & Denov, 2018).

While there is an increasing amount of research on living conditions, health, and psychosocial issues concerning unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee minors (≤ 18) (Barghadouch et al., 2018; Chase, 2013; Sierau et al., 2019; von Werthern et al., 2019), we still know little about their situation over time and how their lives develop. The available research on their situation after several years in Norway has revealed that mean levels of depression tend to decrease after five years, but not mean levels of anxiety, PTSD, and externalizing symptoms (Jensen et al., 2019). Wallin and Ahlström (2005) found that some young refugees still did not feel part of the community and displayed a lack of well-being after ten years in Sweden.

We know that the transition from life in a reception center to resettlement in a municipality is challenging (Svendsen et al., 2018). Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to the fact that these young people have opted to leave everything familiar behind, relying on their agency and luck, the goodwill of foreigners, and their confidence in obtaining a meaningful life somewhere else. Daring to start on such a journey – where they put their own life at risk and develop skills through quick decision-making in unknown countries – we were curious as to how they create healthy identities in their new host countries. The research questions we aim to answer in this article are:

- How do the young, unaccompanied refugees (18–25 years) create healthy identities in everyday life?
- What kind of structures promote healthy experiences in the young, unaccompanied refugees' everyday lives?

1.3. The Norwegian context

In 2020, there were 240 239 inhabitants with a refugee background in Norway (Kirkeberg and Lunde, 2021). Of the group of unaccompanied refugee minors, 9943 were granted residence permits, out of 18 229 applications, and were settled in Norway between 1996 and 2018. The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors arriving in Norway varies from year to year. The majority today are young males, representing 84% of the group, most of them from Afghanistan, followed by Eritrea, Somalia, and Syria (SSB, 2020). The Afghani group peaked in 2015 when nearly 5500 applications for asylum were filed by unaccompanied refugee minors (Utlendingsdirektoratet, 2015).

In Norway, unaccompanied refugees under 18 years of age are the responsibility of the Norwegian child welfare services, whose statutory obligation is “to ensure that children and youth who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance and care at the right time” (Barnevernloven, 2022 §1). Additionally, according to sections 1-3 of this Act (2022) there are regulations governing follow-up care for the 18–25 age group. Few of those who were granted residence between 1996 and 2018 as unaccompanied minors are considered minors today, only 12% are still under the age of 18 (SSB, 2020).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Health

In the biomedical research tradition, health and illness are defined from an individualistic scientific point of departure where explanations are typically sought at the biomolecular level. Since the late 1970s alternative approaches and explanations have been developed from other perspectives, such as sociology (Mæland, 2020). In this article, we use Aron Antonovsky's (1987) theory of the origin of health, salutogenesis. This is defined as a dynamic state of being and developing through the construction of a “sense of coherence”. This refers to the individual's ability to use existing and potential resources to combat stress and promote health; it is measured according to one's perception of the three dimensions: manageability, comprehensibility, and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987). According to Antonovsky (1987), meaning is the most important dimension. He describes it in relation to the degree a person's life makes sense emotionally and is understandable. Crucial for the development of healthy identities, it is a motivational component that is related to a person's agency and what is worth investing energy in (Antonovsky, 1987). Since we are looking into how healthy identities come into being and want to identify health-promoting structures, we have chosen to combine Antonovsky's ideas with philosophical and psychological ideas of recognition (Honneth, 2005) and mattering (Prilleltensky, 2020).

2.1.1. Mattering

Isaac Prilleltensky (2020) claims that “mattering” (i.e. to matter) is a fundamental psychological need consisting of two essential experiences, *feeling* valued and *adding* value, which thus makes mattering relational. Moreover, mattering represents a compelling social obligation and a powerful source for social integration (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981). When experiencing mattering, individuals acquire a sense of meaning because they are recognized, acknowledged, and appreciated (Prilleltensky, 2014; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky, 2021). To be recognized and acknowledged we are dependent on our context, which underpins the social dimension.

2.1.2. Recognition

To substantiate the concept of recognition, we use Axel Honneth's different forms of recognition related to the creation of a healthy identity. Honneth (2005) argues that recognition must be seen as the theoretical point of reference in explaining the moral development of society. He describes three forms or levels of recognition: (i) *primary relationships*, (ii) *legal relations*, and (iii) *community of value*. The *primary relationships* level refers to love relationships insofar as they “[...] are constituted by strong emotional attachments among a small number of people” (Honneth, 2005, p. 95), for example, parent-child relationships and close friendship. These are of fundamental importance for a person's development of basic self-confidence. *Legal relations* recognition refers here to rights relations: “One can count as the bearer of rights of some kind only if one is socially recognized as a member of a community” (Honneth, 2005, p. 109). Legal recognition provides cognitive respect and is crucial to a person's development of self-respect. The recognition that comes from a *community of value* is to be understood as solidarity

and refers to relations that “[...] view one another in light of values that allow the abilities and traits of the other to appear significant for shared praxis” (Honneth, 2005, p. 129). Solidarity contributes to a person’s development of self-esteem, which is crucial for identity. Becoming aware of one’s own identity and developing it healthily means revealing how a subject becomes aware of the social meaning of their behavioral actions (Honneth, 2005).

2.1.3. Our theoretical lens

We argue that meaning, mattering, and recognition are constitutive (but not exhaustive) parts of health. We use this lens in our analysis to capture the complexity of creating healthy identities and living in everyday life, despite having endured extreme hardships before, during, and after an unaccompanied flight.

3. Method

3.1. Design

This study is based on a qualitative cross-sectional design. Qualitative research aims to capture the complexities of people’s lives and experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Our work uses an applied phenomenological approach, which is considered “to be the study of structures of a phenomenon as they appear to consciousness” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 10). However, whereas Giorgi (2009) stopped at the description of the conscious phenomenon, Alfred Schutz contributed to the “interpretive turn” and highlighted everyday life. By examining everyday life, it is possible to analyze essential structures, implied construction of meaning, social actions, social situations, and social worlds (Zahavi and Overgaard, 2005). This way of thinking may politicize seemingly apolitical actions in everyday life at the aggregate level and meaning may contain both the individuals’ “doings” and “beings”.

3.2. Sample

We used a purposeful sampling strategy to recruit young refugees settled as residents in a Norwegian municipality, using the following criteria:

- 18–25 years old at the time of the interview
- Fled from country of origin without parent or caregiver
- Have stopped fleeing and are settled as a resident in a municipality in Norway

The participants in the study were recruited from three municipalities in Norway, both urban and rural, with populations ranging from 7000 to 200 000 inhabitants. Each section responsible for the refugees in the municipality distributed information leaflets and formal information letters. In total, seventeen participants were recruited in this manner while two were recruited through the “snowball method”.

All those agreeing to participate answered the request directly to the first author and signed a written consent form. Information about the study was repeated verbally before the interview, and we were open to questions. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary and that the interview data would be kept confidential. Any personal identifiers and biographical data were anonymized prior to publication. The study has been approved by the Norwegian Center of Research Data (reference code 175 773).

3.3. Participants and data collection

The participants’ countries of origin were Afghanistan, Syria, and Eritrea. Thirteen participants fled as minors and six came after the age of 18 and have been in Norway between one to seven years. The gender distribution (16 males/3 females) reflects the composition of young, unaccompanied refugees that have arrived in Norway (SSB, 2020).

Table 1
Description of the sample.

Category		Participants
Gender	Male	16
	Female	3
Residence permit	Permanent	10
	Temporary	7
	ID in doubt	2
School/education	Introductory course ^a	2
	Primary School	5
	High School	10
	University	2
Living situation	Single household	13
	Shared housing with service provision	1
	Relatives/boyfriend/girlfriend	3
	Friend/roommate	2

Note. The participants are not presented individually to preserve their anonymity and protect their identity.

^a Compulsory introductory course for newly arrived migrants.

3.4. Individual semi-structured interviews

The data material was constructed through individual, semi-structured, life-form interviews (Andenæs, 1991) in 2020. Life-form interviews aim to obtain everyday life narratives from the participants, from wake-up to bedtime, to capture details and nuances before interpreting the data.

The interviews were carried out by two of the researchers in the research team, thirteen by the first author, and six by a researcher in the project group. All the participants were offered an interpreter, but all declined, some because they defined themselves as being fluent in Norwegian. Others declined because they did not trust the official interpreter service and feared reprisals if an unknown person from the country from which they had fled listened to their stories. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the interviews were held in a suitable room at the local authority’s offices, the university, or in the offices of a voluntary organization. The length of the interviews ranged from 23 to 85 min, where the average was around 48 min. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in their entirety.

3.5. Analysis

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was purposely applied in accordance with Brinkmann and Kvale’s (2015) recommendations for an analytical procedure:

- (i) Read through all the interviews to make sense of the whole
- (ii) Read each interview line-by-line and identify meaning units
- (iii) Compare the meaning units within and across the interviews to analytically construct meaning categories relevant to the research question
- (iv) Search for patterns that reveal the essence of the main categories

From step (iii) we leave the strict narrative descriptions and the interpretive turn commences.

The first author performed a complete analysis of all the interviews, and two interviews were analyzed separately by both authors. Throughout the entire analytical and writing process, the researchers had an active approach to reflexivity, possible interpretations, and categorizations. These were discussed through the theoretical lens, switching back and forth between the data and the theories. We reflected on conditions affecting the situation of the study and always remained aware of our roles as researchers.

4. Results and discussion

All the participants pointed out that language has been an essential

door-opener in their everyday life. One called it “the key to the country”, which is in line with research reporting that the lack of language skills undermines the possibility to achieve social interaction, pursue an education and acquire a job, and consequently affects a person’s health (Borscht et al., 2019; Taguma et al., 2010). In this article, however, the language curtain has been pulled aside, and we focus on other factors that contribute to healthy identities in everyday life for the young, newly settled citizens. While Western research literature talks about healthy living and health promotion, these young people talk about their “doings”, i.e. meaningful activities that give them recognition and help them to feel they are adding value to their local community in everyday life. The young, unaccompanied refugees are dependent on certain social structures in order to “do” healthy identities. Thus, activities that encourage mattering and recognition must be available, accessible, and affordable.

4.1. Searching meaning and recognition through “doings” beyond home

Becoming a resident in a Norwegian municipality includes establishing a home. For the majority of citizens in Norway, home is associated with primary relations that afford emotional support and loving relations (Gullestad and Miller, 2001, p. 97). However, our findings show that the structure of home is something the participants struggle to make sense of. Most of them were used to a much more crowded and informal social life in their countries of origin, which differs from the nuclear family Norwegian norm, where people only visit each other when invited.

The young refugees’ experiences of home in the local municipalities varied greatly. Some lived alone in small apartments, some lived with a friend or roommate, one lived in a housing collective, while others lived with either a relative, girlfriend, or boyfriend (Table 1). Those participants who had their own apartment described a feeling of freedom because they had their own place. This is a symbol of independence, but at the same time, it is also a place where they want to spend as little time as possible because it is not a place for receiving or adding value. When living alone or with people, they did not feel any emotional or social connection to, and the primary relationships that afford emotional support were lacking, which undermined their self-confidence. Consequently, their home did not become their castle but rather a place without existential meaning. As one male (20 years old) stated:

I think that it’s hard to be home. There’s nothing to do, there’s zero motivation to be home. Zero motivation. (Male 7, 20 years)

To “do” healthy identities through activities other people have to be present, usually outside the individual participants’ homes. When they “do” on their own at home, recognition is still lacking, and if this is lacking, their home is less meaningful and they feel lonely. Home then becomes a place where negative thoughts might develop along with a longing for their family. The situation was different for those who were able to use their home as a social arena with friends. They could have people around them with whom they could socialize, share meals, play video games, watch movies or just “hang out”. For these young people staying at home made sense. Their home was then what they anticipated and wanted a home to be: a place where they add and receive value through emotional support. However, the participants must first make social connections outside their homes before they can create a sense of home within their physical homes. This finding is in line with a study by Pastoor (2014) which reports that the feeling of being lonely and upset was more prominent when participants in the study were at home. This differs from native Norwegians’ associations of the warmth of homes as a place where you belong.

Several of the participants who avoided their homes describe the snowy Norwegian winter and “the dark” period of the year as more difficult than the summer:

During the summer there’s lots to do and you just enjoy the warmth. In the winter it’s just school and home and a little work and that’s it. It’s a little boring, but there’s nothing else to do than that. (Male 19, 20 years)

In the summer we play football outside, and then we have groups and we invite each other over ... to things we arrange, so when it comes to winter. So, in the winter the Red Cross gets involved, or arranges some activities like ... [indoor] football, Friday football, every Friday ... So, we have good possibilities through, or good things that are run by the Red Cross, because a lot, a lot of people come so they can cope with the stress of winter. (Male 7, 20 years)

During the winter it is difficult to play football outside or take part in other outdoor activities to keep busy. The lack of social contact and things to do is described as challenging. The participants, therefore, reported the importance of having other activities hosted by the local authorities or volunteer groups that they could join to keep them from dwelling on negative thoughts. In a study by Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010), activities are described as a coping strategy where young refugees manage to suppress their negative feelings by keeping busy. Social activities are a way to be seen and valued. Our study illustrates that there is a very thin line between the suppression of negative feelings and the creation of meaning in everyday life for these young people.

4.2. The experience of mattering through participation

Our participants create mattering by participating in ordinary and extraordinary youth activities. They have a limited network of significant others in everyday life in their new home country and express the need to belong and feel fellowship with others. The extraordinary circumstances mean that some of them need fellowship with others who can understand their situation and culture and act as a substitute for the absence of the family. This does not mean that they do not want to connect with locals in their community, but this is an important need to address to cope with everyday life. They describe Norway as a society that is hard to penetrate, where they struggle to feel valued on the existential level.

So, then there are the foreigners ... like me ... who see and who are open and talkative and ... easy to come by, they can communicate better or it’s easier than with Norwegians. Norwegians, they have their own things, they talk about different things, and they have their own interests too ... so we ... we also have our own interests, sometimes we have something in common, but sometimes it’s difficult to ... to mix or integrate the interests. (Male 7, 20 years)

The ordinary everyday activities make it more relevant for the participants to connect with Norwegian natives. Creating a sense of belonging to society and the culture, and not necessarily to the people themselves, is described as a remedy:

Here I start, to put it that way. With Norwegian and ... activities and everything ... generally. I started to take a Norwegian course ... I started to play football with [...] the A team ... the most important thing, I thought, was to make friends ... to learn Norwegian to learn how society works ... here in [...] and generally in Norway. (Male 17, 24 years)

Previous research claims that the sense of belonging is a fundamental part of the refugee’s conceptualization of well-being (Chase, 2020). In this context, our research emphasizes the fundamental importance of being recognized and valued as a human being. If we follow Prillelten-sky’s (2020) claim that exclusion is toxic for one’s health, the importance of inclusive structures, and social meeting places that allow the creation of a healthy identity becomes apparent. It is important to consider how this affects the young, unaccompanied refugees and their possibilities to accomplish mattering.

4.2.1. The experience of school attendance

School plays an important role as it provides an arena for socialization with local peers and the opportunity to learn. Other research reports that the need to feel that one belongs to a group is a crucial aspect (Dixon et al., 2009) and peers are more important during the adolescent years when it comes to the sense of mattering (Rosenberg and McCullough, 1981). The pursuit of belonging by participating in arenas where there are other peers is universal, but the participants' possibilities differ compared to the native population. By the time they have become resident in the country, their language proficiency, or their health status can have an effect on this, but regardless, their pursuit of meaning appears to be a necessity in their everyday lives. A sense of belonging and educational experience has important implications for successful adjustment, overall well-being, and future economic and occupational success in the country of resettlement (Kia-Keating and Ellis, 2007). Therefore, when it comes to mattering, the school is a highly important arena for the participants. If accepted by their peer community in inclusive school settings, they feel valued and can add value. Several of the participants in secondary school describe a positive development when they can attend school with young Norwegians of similar age. While they might be assigned to different classes, they could meet during recess and be part of the same structure:

Young people who go to upper secondary school who, for example, I'm 18 or 19 years old, I'm going to a school where all the kids there are 16, 17 or 18 and like ... that's better, we're together with Norwegians. Norwegian young people. That's better ... I think that's really good. (Male 3, 20 years)

However, they do not always have this opportunity. The school program they are attending is often separated from mainstream schooling (Pastoor, 2017). This will undermine the possibility to meet and interact with peers from the country of resettlement and the possibility to matter in that context, and illustrates their dependence on legal and solidarity relations to succeed in developing healthy identities (Honnet, 2005).

4.2.2. The responsibility of providing for others

Becoming a citizen in their new country makes the participants' relations with their parents somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, they have to compensate with "doings" outside their homes because they lack parents' love, caring, and meaning within their home. On the other hand, their parents often express an expectation of funding, which is hard to fulfill in a high-income country where school and education are a necessity before earning an income. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) claim that the feeling of mattering provided by parents is essential and adolescents who feel they matter little to their parents have lower self-esteem, are more depressed, and feel unhappy. The participants here have contact with their family to varying degrees. As parent-providers, they worry about their parents and family members, and helping them financially is something they find important for coping with their own concerns.

I try to talk with them and comfort them or try to send some money so they can ... don't manage to help that much really. The only thing I can do is to talk and send money. When I send money then I'm very happy. Because my family is important to me. (Male 9, 20 years)

As this participant explains, sending money to the family makes him matter. However, for some, the expectations the family has for financial support can be difficult to fulfill because being students means they have little money to spare.

Many times, they say to me "send money to us". I say, "how am I supposed to send [money] to you, I don't have much money" and stuff like that. I go to school, I don't work. If I get a job and stuff like that, then I will help them, but now ... (Male 8, 20 years)

The importance of getting a job is based on the need not only to be

self-supporting but to fulfill family expectations. Thus, even if the daily contact with their parents is limited, the need to be valued by their parents is still considered important. This means that through their "doings" of having a job, for example, they experience mattering because they are acknowledged as valued human beings by their families in the country of origin.

4.3. The struggle for recognition as a genuine citizen

When it comes to legal rights, obtaining residence permits is of major importance to the participants. They define pre-migration and migration as a life fraught with uncertainty. Their motivation, the activities that promote meaning, and the possibility of starting a "new life" in Norway, are affected by their legal status. This is especially visible for the participants with temporary permits (Table 1). Two of them said:

It's scary because I feel like I might be sent away at any moment, it's yeah ... Of course, yeah, that's so scary because I'm building my future for the third time. I don't want to deal with that again. (Female 11, 25 years)

I don't have that, like, you know, a residence permit yet, I got a [temporary] permit like, but my case is being processed, you know. So, I don't know when it will be settled [...] I'm still a little worried. (Male 1, 19 years)

These young people have a similar experience as others with temporary permits: Living in a liminal state is a constant burden that makes them feel as though they are not being acknowledged as genuine citizens. This leaves them feeling unsafe, and they express an unclear and fragmented state, which according to Antonovsky could cause a low sense of coherence and have a negative influence on their health.

Those who have residence permits experience and articulate a feeling of safety and freedom, and opportunities that serve as the foundation for everyday life.

Now I have, now I have freedom. Now I have time, so I want to work. It's more of a regular everyday life. (Male 9, 20 years)

When we got residence permits, we moved to [...], then we had many possibilities. Like, access to school, there was a school nurse that could help us, there were psychologists, but at the refugee reception center it's not like that. You're left to yourself. (Male 10, 22 years)

Being recognized by obtaining residence permits motivated them and created optimism and meaning when planning their future. They could then construct regular daily rhythms through activities like school or work, dinnertime, attending a fitness center, playing football, gaming, social media, and a part-time job or stable job for those not attending school. These of course are general needs relevant to all young people. But whereas the everyday-life rhythm for native Norwegians is often embodied and taken for granted, these young, settled, unaccompanied refugees are not in a "taken-for-granted" state. They have to create daily rhythms and identify structures that promote healthy experiences in their everyday lives in a new and unknown local environment. These youths cannot manage this on an individual level and the process of developing a healthy identity and becoming a genuine citizen is conditioned by having legal rights and a community that values them.

Since some of the data collection took place during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants' routines, rhythms, and social structures became unstable. In addition to recognition, one important attribute that the structures and routines offered was the concept of distraction, as many of the participants said that they kept themselves busy so they could maintain a positive mindset.

Not when you're busy, because if you work a lot and go to school, then home is just a place to sleep, like. But during the corona pandemic then it was a bit different [...]. It was hard, like. I'm a very

social type of person and I like to meet people, like spontaneously, what happens now. No, that was pretty hard. (Male 17, 24 years)

All the young refugees' "doings" that contribute to a healthy identity were restricted during the pandemic and thus it was difficult to find motivation and meaning. There were few possibilities for recognition, which gave rise to difficult thoughts. Recent research on how the pandemic affected adolescents has shown that the period with limited social contact and limited activity affected their mental health (Bekkhus et al., 2020). While this research reports that support from parents and siblings may have contributed to well-being through this period, this is not the case for the participants in our study. Hence, bearing in mind that meaning mainly takes shape outside their home, and when the structures they depend on in their everyday life are not as accessible, it becomes hard to add and obtain value. The negative feelings of aimlessness and distress may be less manageable and undermine their self-confidence. Those participants who were living with someone or were able to have continuity in their routines described the lockdown as being less difficult.

4.4. Struggling for a healthy identity through adding value

The participants, especially the males, stated that as they were adults now, they had to take responsibility for themselves. They also related this to the amount of time they felt they could spend pursuing an education before they had to have an income.

We don't have like ... you have a sentence "young people", when I was seven years old, I didn't feel like a child, like a young person. I feel like a man, I need to work. (Male 3, 20 years)

The participants state that they matured quickly but had divided feelings about becoming more independent. Those who have a part-time job or have started at school report a stronger feeling of being independent and mastering their lives. For those who are struggling either with school or finding a job, the situation is stressful. Nonetheless, this is something they find important and try to manage so they can become responsible adults.

Sometimes yeah, and you need a little care from others and to be together, but sometimes you need to be a little independent and take responsibility. You know, don't be dependent on others all the time. You know, it's for the future. (Male 7, 20 years)

This participant was struggling to become independent, something he felt was expected of him but also recognized as important for his future.

All the participants, with the exception of one, want to build a future in Norway and avail themselves of the existing opportunities. Getting a job and achieving financial security in Norway are reported as the most important aims.

But here it's hard to, because we live alone ... okay? So, we need to finish something, and you find a job. (Male 14, 24 years)

I try to get things right, to have a good education where I can ensure that I get a job in the future. Then I don't struggle with being unemployed. That's my dream. (Male 19, 20 years)

The participants point to the importance of education because it could improve their chances to obtain a secure job and income. This has also been found in other studies (Goodman, 2004; Sleijpen et al., 2017). However, even if they feel that they have opportunities in their country of resettlement, being part of an educational society is challenging. Now that higher education has become an expectation and not a privilege, it means that young people will become financially independent at a later stage in life (Frønes, 2011 p. 65). For the young, settled, unaccompanied refugees, the situation is somewhat different. The amount of schooling the participants have from their country of origin varies a great deal, from almost nothing to university education. Consequently, most of

them have a pragmatic approach when it comes to which type of education they should pursue, based on what type of schooling they have from their country of origin, possibilities for education and jobs in their community, and how much time they want to spend on acquiring an education. As also found by Wallin and Ahlström (2005), the young, unaccompanied refugees have ambitions, but also a realistic view of their future goals. The necessity to become financially independent affects what is seen as valued goals. Most of them dream of being valued and adding value, which means that securing a job and income so they can help themselves and their family in their country of origin is their highest priority. According to Prilleltensky (2014), to move in a healthy direction, individuals need opportunities and skills to add value and to contribute to others and themselves. The everyday "doings" also create meaning in the sense that it is something they find worth investing their energy in for their future situation. Eide and Hjern (2013) point out that the inner drive to create a positive future is a key factor for unaccompanied refugees' mental health and long-term adjustment. We suggest that their inner drive is to create meaning through different "doings" that lead them toward having a healthy identity and becoming a genuine citizen who adds value.

5. Limitations

As is the case with qualitative studies in general, the sample in this study most likely includes relatively highly-competent, young people. This imbalance has probably been more pronounced as recruitment took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, what highly competent settled residents experience as difficulties is probably even more difficult for less competent youngsters. Another challenge, also reported by Brook and Ottemöller (2020) when studying a similar target group, is communication, as they do not share a common native language. However, most of the participants had adequate language skills, and most of the interviews provided rich information. The interviews, transcriptions, and data analysis have been made as transparent as possible by the authors.

6. Conclusion

Young, settled, unaccompanied refugees create healthy identities through "doings," which for them are experienced as meaningful activities at available arenas in the local community. Their "doings" mostly take place at schools with organized educational programs, at voluntary or paid work, and at leisure activities that do not require specific levels of qualifications. Honneth's theory of recognition pointed out to us that healthy identities are created in social arenas with social relations where the young, settled refugees are recognized and experience existential meaning. In line with Antonovsky's sense of coherence (1987), they comprehend and manage their new lives by actively using their agency on the individual level to try to acquire a meaningful life and stay healthy. Moreover, they strive for recognition by attempting to matter (Prilleltensky, 2020). Through their "doings" they feel they are doing their best to contribute and add value to the local community, and want to be valued by peers, teachers, colleagues, and employers. Additionally, the males in our sample gained recognition by supporting their parents and other family members, mostly still in their country of origin. Our findings reveal that healthy identities are not something an individual can create by her-/himself, but comprise a relational phenomenon constituted between an individual and their context. Honneth's (2005) theoretical lens clarifies how recognition is achieved in different forms in society. His framework demonstrates how healthy identities are relational not only in horizontal relations like the primary ones (e.g. family and friends) but also in vertical relations like legal relations/-rights, and community relations/solidarity (e.g. school, local community, leisure activities). For young, native-born Norwegians, these structures will be taken for granted and have not been given much attention in research. The young refugees without physically present

parents/close family members, attending organized education isolated from native-born-Norwegian citizens and lacking a residence permit, run the risk of not experiencing recognition at any vertical level in the new country. With such exclusive practices, we run the risk of organizing toxic contexts, and consequently unhealthy, young, newly-settled citizens. This illustrates the importance of inclusive, supportive policies, structures, and practices. Our findings tell us that we still need more knowledge on *how* to compensate for the young, settled, unaccompanied refugees' lack of primary relations in their struggle for recognition, mattering, and living a meaningful life.

Credit author statement

Gjertrud Selnes Moe: Investigation, methodology, formal analysis of the whole material, writing- original draft and review and editing, **Borgunn Ytterhus:** Conceptualizing, supervision, methodology, formal analysis of parts of the data, writing-reviewing and editing, project administration.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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