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# **Unaccompanied minors and young adults**

**Assimilation into the Swedish society**

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Kandidatuppsats: SOCK04, 15 hp

Vårterminen 2019

Handledare: Sophia Yakhlef

# Abstract

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Unaccompanied minors and young adults is a phenomenon that has been a part of Swedish society for a couple of years due to the refugee crisis from the year 2015. What is interesting to explore is how are they assimilating to their new surroundings, and how they are experiencing that process, what kind of impact has this unique situation had on their development. Another important aspect is exploring what resources do these young individuals see as necessary in order to improve their assimilation. The reason for why it is important to discuss this subject is because unaccompanied minors and young adults are an active part of the society and are still contributing to the community, regardless of if it is a positive or a negative contribution.

In order to find answers to these questions a semi-structured group interview was conducted with three former unaccompanied minors about their experiences, opinions and their lives in general.

In order to analyse the collected data previous research was used, together with three sociological theories, "Stigma" by Erving Goffman, "Labeling theory" by Frank Tannenbaum and "Theory about integration in the society" by Jeffrey C. Alexander. That last theory explains exactly what assimilation and interconnection are, which is how the majority is allowing and encouraging the minority to enter the society. The findings of this study suggest that the stigma and being labeled does affect negatively the assimilation of unaccompanied minors and young adults. What they themselves ask for in order to make this process less difficult is some understanding and acceptance. Another point that this essay touches upon and discusses is the question of mental health of unaccompanied minors and young adults.

Keywords: unaccompanied minors, assimilation, mental health, stigma, immigration.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

According to the “Committee on the Rights of the Child” a definition of an unaccompanied minor is: “Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so”<sup>1</sup>.

A phenomenon of unaccompanied immigrant minors and young adults has been present all over the world as a consequence of wars, political conflicts and natural disasters for years. The situation in Europe has, however, been quite calm since the 1990s and the war in the former Yugoslavia<sup>2</sup> until the Europe refugee crisis in 2015. That year over one million refugees and immigrants arrived in Europe running away from war, conflicts and poor economic situations in their home countries<sup>3</sup>. Among these refugees were not just adults and whole families, but in many cases children and teenagers who had to embark on this long and dangerous journey all on their own, while leaving their families behind in search for a better future and hope that one day they will reunite with their close ones.

In Sweden alone 162 877 refugees sought asylum in the year 2015 which was double the amount from the year before. Out of those 162 877 refugees 35 369 were unaccompanied minors and most of them were from Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Somalia. It is important to keep in mind that this amount which is extremely high is the statistics only for the country of Sweden. In the entire Europe 96,000 unaccompanied minors applied for asylum in the same year<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), “*General comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin*”, 1 September 2005

<sup>2</sup> BBC News, “*Balkan war: a brief guide*”, 18 March 2016

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, “*Refugee crisis in Europe*”, 20 Jun 2016

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, “*Children in migration*”

The fact that so many unaccompanied minors and young adults arrived in Sweden did bring a change to the society at large. Having a high number of new and still not quite assimilated young individuals meant that some modifications had to be made, from providing homes and staff or families to take care of them, to creating new laws that would accommodate and protect them during their stay here. A good example of such law is “lagen (2005:429) om god man för ensamkommande barn” which was put into effect in the year 2005<sup>5</sup>. There is also a pressure of sorts for these young individuals, and in some cases even children, to assimilate to the new country that they arrived to, and that will be the focal point of this research.

## 1.2 Definition of the problem

The main focus of this essay is to discuss unaccompanied minors and young adults, their lives, and most importantly the issue of assimilating to the Swedish society and style of living. It is interesting to see from their perspective how they look on their new lives. What kind of benefits, but maybe even difficulties, has life in Sweden brought to them? Do they try to fit in or are they trying to rebel against what is socially acceptable here?

It is also very important to touch upon what kind of impact has the move to Sweden had on their mental health. A great reference for this question is the book written by Ridha Al-Sudany called “Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn” (Mental health in unaccompanied children)<sup>6</sup>.

Important theories that can be applied to the certain behaviours that unaccompanied minors tend to express is the concept of stigma presented by Erving Goffman in his book by the same name<sup>7</sup>, and even “Labeling theory” associated with theorists like George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley and its founder Frank Tannenbaum<sup>8</sup>. Lastly there is Alexander’s theory about assimilation and interconnection<sup>9</sup> which is of crucial importance for this essay.

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<sup>5</sup> Von Scheele, Eva & Strandberg, Ingemar, “*Ensamkommande barns rätt*”, Författaren och Norstedts Juridik AB, Poland, 2015, p. 5

<sup>6</sup> Al-Sudany, Ridha, “*Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn*”, Recito Förlag AB, Borås, 2017

<sup>7</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”, Norstedts Akademiska Förlag, Stockholm, 2009

<sup>8</sup> Newburn, Tim, “*Criminology*”, Routledge Oxon, 2013, p. 219

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, Jeffrey C., “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”, Oxford University Press, 2003

## **2 Main focus**

The point of this essay is to study unaccompanied minors and young adults, tell their stories and experiences and to see how the refugee crisis affected their lives. Sometimes what they have to say gets overshadowed with statistics and numbers, but this study is going to be different, it will give them a voice. Therefore the main focus of this essay will be the unaccompanied refugee minors and young adults, how are they assimilating to the Swedish society, how are they experiencing the process of assimilation and what resources do they experience as necessary for assimilation. In order to answer these questions, their own stories and/or feelings about the variety of important subjects need to be discussed. The subjects in question are: their journey to Sweden; their new life in Sweden; how do they see their future; and the topic of mental health. Other points that will be brought up throughout this text are professionals' opinion on the subject of unaccompanied refugee minors in the form of previous research and theories by established theorists that explain certain behaviours that unaccompanied refugee minors and young adults seem to express.

### **2.1 Research questions**

1. How are unaccompanied minors assimilating to the Swedish society?
2. How do they experience this process of assimilation?
3. What resources do the young asylum seekers experience as necessary for assimilation?

### **2.2 Limitations**

There was a criteria that had to be set and followed in regards to picking the subjects to talk to while doing this research. The most important thing was that all the subjects i.e. former unaccompanied minors that were interviewed are considered to be over the age of 18 in Sweden at the time of the interview, while they were minors when they arrived.. The reason for why they

had to be of legal age at the time of the interview is because it can be very difficult to interview underaged individuals without their parents' or legal guardians' approval or even presence and that can be very problematic and hard to arrange in this case. They also had to be underaged when they arrived to Sweden in order to match the description that is needed for this essay, unaccompanied minors, with an emphasis on the word minors.

When it comes to sources that I will be using to write this essay's part that does not include the interviews or sociological theories, i.e. the previous research paragraph, I will be limiting myself to the ones that seem most relevant and reliable. The type of research that I decided to focus on is books written on this subject instead of shorter texts, articles or statistics. The books in question are the above mentioned "Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn"<sup>10</sup> (Mental health in unaccompanied children) by Ridha Al-Sudany, but also "Flyktens barn" by Elisabeth Elmeroth & Johan Häge, "Ensamkommande barns rätt" by Eva Von Scheele & Ingemar Strandberg and "Att förstå flyktingar, invandrare och deras barn" by Binnie Kristal-Andersson. These will be discussed more in-depth in the next paragraph.

### **3 Previous research**

Considering that unaccompanied minors have been a very current and relevant topic in Sweden for a couple of years as a result of the refugee crisis from 2015 there has been a lot of research done on this subject. The best example are the above mentioned books that focus both on unaccompanied minors and even refugees in general.

#### **3.1 Unaccompanied minors and young adults and mental health**

"Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn" (Mental health in unaccompanied children) goes in depth with the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors from the start, when they were still in

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<sup>10</sup> Al-Sudany, "Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn"

their home countries, until their arrival to the new country. The first chapter tackles the beginning stages of their journey: childhood in their home country; the time when the family plans to send their child away; their time during the journey; and the asylum period. What this book focuses on the most, however, is the minors' development and mental illnesses that could occur in such individuals. Just some examples of problems that could manifest during their process of maturity are issues with separation and contact with strangers<sup>11</sup>, having body image insecurities<sup>12</sup> and lack of connection as a consequence of them being separated from their parents<sup>13</sup>. And the list of possible mental illnesses is even longer, from depression, to different kinds of stresses like cumulative and traumatic stress, anxiety and crises. The research also touches upon the culture shock<sup>14</sup> that unaccompanied minors in most cases feel, and how they deal with it. Lastly there is even information on how to treat these children and young adults in order to help them as much as possible.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.2 Stereotypes and prejudice**

“Att förstå flyktingar, invandrare och deras barn” (Understanding refugees, immigrants and their children) does not focus solely on unaccompanied minors, but it does discuss some important factors that are very relevant to the subject. The part of the book that felt very important to mention and that is actually a very big part of these young individuals' lives are stereotypes and prejudice. Kristal-Andersson talks about stereotypes going both ways however<sup>16</sup>. The person coming to the new country could have certain prejudices against the natives, while the natives could also have certain negative feelings towards the newcomers. What in most cases is the cause of this is simply ignorance and a lack of knowledge about other cultures, and people while trying to protect their own culture tend to attack what is unfamiliar<sup>17</sup>. Kristal-Andersson also

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<sup>11</sup> Al-Sudany, “*Psykisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn*”, p. 33

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 42

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 27

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 44

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 88

<sup>16</sup> Kristal-Andersson, Binnie, “*Att förstå flyktingar, invandrare och deras barn - en psykologisk modell*”, Studentlitteratur AB, Lund, 2001, p. 149

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 150



mentions many of the feelings that refugees and immigrants, including unaccompanied minors, have, which are alienation, feeling lonely, missing home, feeling guilty, embarrassed, sad, angry and so on.

### **3.3 Laws regarding unaccompanied minors**

The study “Ensamkommande barns rätt” (The rights of unaccompanied children) focuses on laws regarding unaccompanied minors. It opens with why is statutory regulation important, statistics about unaccompanied minors and why do they come to Sweden, which is in most cases because of war or natural disasters, to avoid military service, or to bring the rest of their family to the new country<sup>18</sup>. Then Von Scheele and Strandberg proceed to explain the entire legal procedure of what unaccompanied minors have to go through in order to stay in Sweden, and they also discuss certain terms, for example: legal guardians, social services, translators, and public assistance. Furthermore, they mention unaccompanied minors in the rest of Scandinavia and Europe.

### **3.4 Trauma and unaccompanied minors**

The book “Flyktens barn” (Refugee children) tackles the subject of unaccompanied and refugee children in Sweden, and furthermore takes a look at this phenomenon throughout history, from the Second World War to Talibans taking over Afghanistan. It explains how the Swedish Migration Board works<sup>19</sup>, refugee status<sup>20</sup> and the process of waiting for the asylum<sup>21</sup>, but also discusses how refugee children are affected by this, often being forced to grow up too fast<sup>22</sup> and how they can develop apathy syndrome in some cases<sup>23</sup>. Trauma and posttraumatic stress that refugee children and young people experience are also written about in depth. This book is a

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<sup>18</sup> Von Scheele & Strandberg, “*Ensamkommande barns rätt*”, p. 14

<sup>19</sup> Elmeroth, Elisabeth & Häge, Johan, “*Flyktens barn*”, Studentlitteratur AB, Malmö, 2009, p. 33

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 66

great mixture of laws and rules regarding refugee children, but also their behaviours, feelings and issues that they face in their day to day life.

## 4 Theory

In the analysis of the empirical material, I turned to theories that can explain the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors, their behaviours and their assimilation to the Swedish society, or lack thereof. Theories in question are “Stigma” by Erving Goffman<sup>24</sup>, “Labeling theory”<sup>25</sup> and “Theory about integration in the society” by Jeffrey C. Alexander<sup>26</sup>. From the start these were not made with unaccompanied minors in mind, however they apply very well to this concept. For example Alexander discusses in his book “Kulturell Sociologi” (Cultural sociology) the concept of assimilation which is an essential part of what unaccompanied minors and young adults have to go through, and what is the main focus of this essay overall. He defines assimilation as a core group allowing a group of outsiders to be a part of the society and public life<sup>27</sup>. Another relevant theory is “Labeling theory”<sup>28</sup>. This is particularly important considering that during the interview the informants pointed out how often people attach certain stereotypes and labels to them. This can be very problematic for their further development and an example of this can be seen very clearly in this quote by Newburn: “Delinquents (...) are good kids doing bad things, they become labelled as bad kids and continue in that vein”<sup>29</sup>. Lastly there is “Stigma” by Goffman<sup>30</sup>, which shows how unaccompanied minors and young adults, which are often victims of stigma, deal with that burden and how it affects them and their lives.

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<sup>24</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”

<sup>25</sup> Newburn, “*Criminology*”, p. 219

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19

<sup>28</sup> Newburn, “*Criminology*”, p. 219

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 219

<sup>30</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”

## 4.1 Theory about integration in the society

This segment is supposed to further explain the theories in question, and we will start of with the one that could be considered the most important out of the aforementioned three, and that is the “Theory about integration in the society” by Jeffrey C. Alexander. Here the idea of assimilation, which is one of the most relevant concepts regarding the unaccompanied minors, is explained in full detail. Other two forms of initiation are interconnection and multicultural initiation<sup>31</sup>.

Alexander writes that assimilation is the most common form of initiation in the society. What that entails essentially is that the core group allows or encourages a group of outsiders, to join the society and the public life. There are some conditions to this, however. In order for the minority group to be accepted in the society, they need to follow some rules, especially in public institutions like schools for example. They need to conceal their own identities in order to fit in and be approved by the majority. A good example of this is the question of religion. If the minority group is Muslims, they still have to attend school with the rest of the children from the majority group, and try not to overly express their religious beliefs, but keep them private<sup>32</sup>.

Another point that is important is that the minority group should acquire civic understanding of the institutions that are part of the society. The entire point of assimilation is to turn new members into citizens who have knowledge of the norms and values that the majority believes in<sup>33</sup>. This goal of maintaining and creating national identity can, however, have negative consequences towards the minority group. Simply by forcing them to hide or at least minimize their own identities can be met with a rebellion of sorts, which then leads to the minority group to be stigmatised<sup>34</sup>. Nonetheless it is important to point out that this is just Alexander’s main concept and that there are different levels regarding the “forced” assimilation. Sweden is a very liberal country which encourages religious freedoms, so this concept might not be as extreme as in some other countries, but is still present in a way.

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”, p. 18

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 20

Other two parts of Alexander's theory are interconnection and multicultural initiation. A concept that could explain interconnection quite well is the one of the "melting pot"<sup>35</sup>. The melting pot represents a monocultural metaphor which entails that different ethnicities, are "melting together" in one joint culture, i.e. a heterogeneous society is turning homogeneous, or vice versa<sup>36</sup>. What could be seen as the main difference between the concept of assimilation that Alexander discusses, and interconnection, is the fact that with the interconnection the minority is in a way encouraged to take their own identities from the private sphere and bring it into the public one. In most ideal cases this can lead to the main group understanding that the "outsiders" are a lot more like them than they initially thought. This also works the other way around, the group of outsiders could get attracted to the certain properties found in the core group of the society<sup>37</sup>. This very well represents the willing assimilation of unaccompanied minors and young adults into the Swedish society, things that they applied to their lives not because they had to, like some well known and stereotypical Swedish norms, but the ones that they actually liked, like for example fashion, music, and lifestyle in general.

Lastly there is multicultural initiation which encourages different identities and characteristics to be shown instead of hidden and eliminated<sup>38</sup>. Very simply put, multicultural initiation is the right to diversity and integration<sup>39</sup>. This is a concept that is a lot wider than the previous two and is implied to the entire society rather than a certain group, like for example unaccompanied minors and young adults, so it will not be discussed in depth in this essay.

## 4.2 Stigma

Next theory which is of major importance is "Stigma". Goffman writes that in ancient Greece stigma ment: "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal or a traitor - a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander, "*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*", p. 20

<sup>36</sup> Thought Co., Crossman, Ashley, "*What Is the "American Melting Pot?"*", 12 March 2019

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, "*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*", p. 20

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 22

public places”<sup>40</sup>. He however used to refer to it as “spoiled identities” and define it as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction”<sup>41</sup>. These attributes are in most cases physical and mental traits or certain behaviours<sup>42</sup>. Goffman mentions in his book “Stigma” how stigmatised individuals often feel and think when they are in the presence of other, non stigmatised people. He mentions that the stigmatised individuals get the feeling that they do not know what other people actually, deep down, think about them and that they most often feel questioned and challenged in a way. This pressures them to essentially doubt themselves and try to evaluate in advance what kind of impression they are leaving on other people, down to small details<sup>43</sup>. These are exactly the types of feelings that unaccompanied minors and young adults seem to express and have mentioned during our interview, constantly being on the lookout and very aware of their own behaviour while in public.

### **4.3 Labeling Theory**

Lastly there is “Labeling theory”. This is the theory that can best describe why unaccompanied minors seem to often get involved in criminal and illegal activities. Frank Tannenbaum points out that delinquents are not much different from non-delinquents. He discusses that if some non-delinquents are labeled as delinquents, that forces them in a way to live up to that identity. Tannenbaum says: “The process of making the criminal is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasising, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of stimulating suggesting, emphasising and evoking the very traits that are complained of... The person becomes the thing that he is described as being...”<sup>44</sup>. What unaccompanied minors seem to express with their criminal behaviour is secondary deviance, which according to Edwin Lemert is using this type of behaviour as a defense mechanism as a response to the society's reaction to them<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Newburn, “Criminology”, p. 223

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 223

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 223

<sup>43</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”, p. 23

<sup>44</sup> Newburn, “Criminology”, p. 219

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 219

## **5 Method and material**

Unaccompanied minors can be viewed as a very sensitive subject hence it should be approached in an appropriate way. In this section the matter of method and material will be tackled: How I collected all the data and information used to write this essay and what things one should be aware of while getting in contact with unaccompanied minors and young adults who have endured the trauma that comes with the journey that they embarked on.

The reason for why I chose to write about unaccompanied minors is because that is a very current and relevant topic in Sweden at the moment, and has been for a couple of years, as a consequence of the refugee crisis from 2015. Some people villainize them, some defend them, while I am trying to give them a voice and make it heard. It is important to present them realistically and approach the research very objectively. Instead of focusing on how society views these individuals it is more important for me to see how these individuals see the society.

How are unaccompanied minors and young adults assimilating to the Swedish way of life, how do they experience that process and what can help their assimilation are the main questions. The reason why these questions are relevant is because unaccompanied minors and young adults are an active part of Swedish society, and it is important to analyse them considering that they do contribute to the community. If it is a negative or positive contribution is yet to be determined.

### **5.1 Interviews**

The focus here was qualitative method, most prominently interviews. This type of method felt the most appropriate considering that the focus of this research is experiences, feelings and attitudes of said unaccompanied minors, and that is something that can not be expressed properly in a survey of any kind. The interview method that I chose is semi-structured group interview.

The reason for why I chose a semi-structured interview is because there are some basic questions that have to be answered in order for this essay to be completed, but it also leaves some room for them to talk about things that they find interesting and worth mentioning. It also creates a possibility for them to take the conversation in a direction that makes them comfortable and not limited by pre-written questions. The type of analysis that was applied to their answers is the narrative analysis, which will be explained in depth further in the essay.

Group interview was chosen for the sake of the informants' comfort<sup>46</sup>. These are young individuals who during their time in Sweden, but even on their way here, encountered many people who had many questions for them, from the police to the migration officers and social workers, so it is not wrong to assume that they do not associate interviews as something positive, but instead frightening and uncomfortable. For exactly that reason I wanted to make this feel more as a relaxed and almost casual conversation instead of something formal and very structured. In order to achieve that I did not want to separate them. This way they could also reflect on each others' stories, compare experiences and even take some needed breaks while someone else was talking. There is one problem with this approach, however. Group interviews leave some room for certain individuals to talk a lot less than others which can lead to some stories being untold, or not discussed to their full potential<sup>47</sup>. However, I will take that risk for the sake of making interviewees more comfortable.

Deciding who should be interviewed was easy considering that the entirety of this essay relies on unaccompanied minors themselves and their stories. The choice that had to be made, however, was if I should talk with them, with people who work with them, or both. In the end it was decided that the interview should be conducted on the former unaccompanied minors only. This can be seen as "targeted selection" which Bryman talks about in his book "Samhällsvetenskapliga Metoder" (Social Sciences' Methods)<sup>48</sup>. Getting in contact with the said

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<sup>46</sup> Get Revising, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Group Interviews", 10 May 2016

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Bryman, Alan, "Samhällsvetenskapliga Metoder", Graphycems, Spanien, 2011, p. 434

former minors, or to be more specific, young men, was not particularly hard since I know an official who works with them really closely through her job at Socialförvaltningen (Social Services Department). She is the one who put me in contact with three boys who were interested in discussing this subject, so in a way they chose me, and not the opposite. Before conducting the actual group interview I did get to meet them and socialize a bit just to make things as comfortable as possible for them when we do the official interview. This seems to have had a positive impact on them considering that the interview went very well and they shared a lot of important and interesting facts and stories, even some that do not present them in the best light. When it comes to their age, their current documents claim that two of them are 18 years old, while the third one is 19, so from a legal standpoint I was allowed to interview them only with their consent, without the involvement from their parents or other type of legal guardian, which would be very difficult to arrange in this situation.

As mentioned before, I did have a gatekeeper in this situation, which was of major importance. She is a person that sees them daily and has developed a very good relationship with them during their stay in Sweden. What also helped is the fact that they really value her and see her not just as someone whose job it is to spend time with them, but someone they view as a friend and even as a parent figure. She helped just by being present during the interview. That made them a lot more relaxed and willing to talk, knowing that someone that they actually know very well is there for the conversation. What could have been an issue in this situation, however, is the fact that her presence potentially could have prevented informants from sharing some negative stories about themselves. This did not seem to be a problem after all, considering that they still mentioned situations which do not present them in the best light. The reason for why this could have been the case, is the informants' close relationship with the gatekeeper.

The interview guide<sup>49</sup> that was used, was as mentioned, semi-structured and made up of three different categories of questions<sup>50</sup>: Their journey to Sweden, their life in Sweden, and how they see the future. While the interview was conducted, it was recorded with their consent in order for

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<sup>49</sup> Bryman, "*Samhällsvetenskapliga Metoder*", p. 415

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 419



me to not miss anything that they mention and that could be of crucial significance. It was also important for me to be able to replay the interview not just to hear what they said, but also *how* they said it, what kind of emotion was coming through. The interview lasted a bit over an hour and was done in the apartment of the gatekeeper i.e. the official who works with them.

## 5.2 Ethical aspects

Before the group interview started, all the interviewees, and the gatekeeper who was also present, were made aware of the four ethical principles, the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the requirement of usage<sup>51</sup>. I made sure that they know that the interview would be anonymous and that I will be the only person listening to the recording of our conversation. When it comes to the information that was shared, interviewees were assured that it would be used only for the purposes of this essay, and the entire concept and point of this research was explained to them beforehand. It was very important to discuss all of these points before the actual interview started, to make sure that all ethical aspects were covered, especially considering that the interview was conducted with young people who might not be aware of all of their rights. It is also important seeing that the subject of conversation can be viewed as sensitive, since those are young men who have been faced with some traumatic events.

All the names that are used in this essay are not the informants' real names, in order to protect their privacy.

## 5.3 Analysing the data

When it comes to analysing collected material after transcribing it there are three important steps to it, sorting, reducing and discussing it<sup>52</sup>. Starting off with sorting, I categorised different subjects that were talked about, their journey to Sweden, how does it feel living in Sweden, how do they see their future and mental health. The subject of mental health was not part of the

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<sup>51</sup> Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, Svend, "*Den kvalitativa Forskningsintervjun*", Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2009, p. 131-132

<sup>52</sup> Rennstam, Jens & Wästerfors, David, "*Från stoff till studie*", Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2015, p. 67, 103, 137

official interview guide, since it seemed like a subject that could have been too sensitive. However, during the interview mental health happened to be discussed, therefore it was included as data and sorted accordingly. Sorting made it a lot easier to find and use their answers later while actually writing the essay.

When it comes to reducing the material this is a very important aspect considering that it is impossible to include all of the information that was received. Here I tried to include all of the most important material and quotes that well represent the overall feel of the interview.

When it comes to the analysis of the actual data I chose to do narrative analysis, as already mentioned previously. This felt very appropriate considering that interviewees described their life histories<sup>53</sup> and that is something that is the core of this type of analysis. Bryman writes that here people are seen as narrators of the stories from their lives<sup>54</sup>. Instead of focusing on events it is in most cases more important to pay attention to what meaning the person found in the situation in question<sup>55</sup>. For example, instead of concentrating on the simple statement “I arrived to Sweden in 2015” the focus lies on what that actually meant for him, how did he see that influencing his future, his plans and ambitions. Another example could be that at the moment one of them is waiting for the decision if he is going to be deported. He then proceeds to say that he is not planning to leave Sweden unless someone physically throws him out because he would see that decision as injustice. That last sentence gives a lot more information than if he just said that he is waiting to see if he is going to be sent back, and that is the type of information that is important for this essay, how unaccompanied minors and young adults feel and what they think. Miller points out that narrative analysis, which is based on life histories, is mostly focused on the perspective of the interviewee instead of objective facts, and that is exactly what I am seeking after in this research<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Bryman, “*Samhällsvetenskapliga Metoder*”, p. 416

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 527

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 530

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 532

## **5.4 Finding previous research**

Finding previous research to use for this essay was not difficult as the subject of unaccompanied minors is a quite relevant topic at the moment. There are countless articles and studies on the Internet, however instead I decided to concentrate on books regarding this subject. That felt most practical considering that most of these books covered multiple issues all collected in one place. It was also the safest choice regarding the quality and reliability of the information presented. I chose these particular books based on research done on the Internet and with the help of library staff at the Lund University.

## **6 Analysis**

In this section, the empirical data will be presented and analysed using theories and concepts previously mentioned, and also compared with previous research. All three aforementioned theories fit in very well with most of what former unaccompanied minors that were interviewed for this research had to say and how they feel about certain topics, and the same can be said about the previous research that is also mentioned above. The only book from the “Previous research” paragraph that will not be mentioned here is “Ensamkommande barns rätt” (The rights of unaccompanied children) considering that it covers the topic of law which is something that these young men did not seem to know much about, or were interested in discussing. In this chapter the main questions of the essay are also going to be answered and discussed in depth

### **6.1 Integration in the society**

Two out of three theories that Alexander talks about in his “Theory of integration in the society”<sup>57</sup>, them being assimilation and interconnection, can very accurately explain the experience that most unaccompanied minors and young adults have when they arrive to the new country, in this

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<sup>57</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”

particular case, to Sweden. Alexander's assimilation, which is in a way aggressive and forced, and interconnection which is more voluntary and optional, are something that these young people come in contact with soon upon their arrival. One of the interviewed boys, Daniel, said:

“Life here is different. You need to adapt, and you need to do it quickly if you want to make something of yourself. The school is different, people are different than back home, even the smallest things. And very fast I realised that I need to change if I want to be accepted here, for example, be more private, that is like a thing here. I would never bring my parents to Sweden, even if I could. You know, back home, everyone knows everyone, you know all of your neighbours, the entire street, and their families and friends, and here in most cases you don't even know who lives next to you. For my parents that would be so lonely. I agree that it can be lonely, but I'm adapting, I got used to it.”

This is a good example of something that is a norm in a way, it is not necessarily forced upon anyone, but most people in Sweden just agree on it, and live by it, so he felt the need to do the same in order to fit in better. That could be considered a form of assimilation according to Alexander's theory. Just by being accepted in the society Daniel feels the need to then obey by that unwritten rule, even though he feels lonely and it is not something that he prefers. He does point out that he is trying to get used to it however, to assimilate.

Ali mentions another way in which he had to adapt, that could be seen as more serious than simply not knowing your neighbours, and that is the question of religion and prayer. He talked about the fact that he feels very uncomfortable when he has to go and pray while in public, like for example in school or library. He said:

“I know that it is allowed to do it here, Sweden is a very open country and respects all religions. It never happened to me that I was about to do it and someone had a negative comment or anything, but it still feels kind of uncomfortable, like I should not be doing it. It feels like I am breaking the rules, because most people do not do it here, and I do not want to stand out in any way. It is enough that I look different, I don't need to act different, too, it just brings unwanted attention.”

This is another good example of what Alexander talks about in his theory about integration in the society<sup>58</sup>. There is one major difference though, in his theory he expresses that the majority group seem to encourage that minorities conceal their religious beliefs. Here Ali points out that that is not really the case, but just the fact that he deep down feels like he should keep his religion as private as possible, can be seen as Alexander's theory of assimilation shown in practice.

Not everything is so negative however, the boys also show signs of interconnection, mostly when it comes to friends and school. They seem to appreciate the culture that young people in Sweden are a part of. Social media is one of those things that Daniel, Ali and Omar say that they really enjoy. They say that they had Internet back home, but it was never on this big of a scale. Fashion is also something that they did not really pay attention to before, but are now very aware of.

Omar says:

“Before I could not pick what I wanted to wear, or how I wanted to look, I had to be happy with the little that I had. But now I get to have my own style which I really enjoy. I also got a tattoo, which is something that is still frowned upon back in my home country, but here it's like a cool thing, and I'm really happy about it. My parents still don't know though, they would not be thrilled to hear about that. But I have freedom here, I can do whatever I want, and that makes me feel joy.”

So an answer to the question, how are unaccompanied minors assimilating to the Swedish society, the most general answer would be slowly, but effectively. This does not apply to every single unaccompanied minor and young adult out there, this is a study on a very small scale. But yes, they are trying to follow the rules and norms even if it does not always seem right and easy, as it can be seen from their answers, but they are doing it so that they could be accepted. That is an effort that should be recognized and praised, even though that is not always the case, considering how these young people do get labels attached to them and are exposed to racism and discrimination quite often.

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”

## 6.2 Dealing with the stigma

Goffman mentions that reasons for why someone could be and often is stigmatised is because of three things, physical traits, mental traits and/or certain behaviours<sup>59</sup>. It was already pointed out above by one of the interviewed young men, Ali, how he feels different than most people based on how he looks, and sometimes that did get him in trouble he says. This could be considered a stigmatisation and discrimination based simply on physical traits alone. He talked about an incident that happened to him in 2017 at a music festival:

“I was there with my friends and we were minding our own business, just standing, listening to music, until two Swedish men saw us, recognized that we are very obviously not Swedish and came up to us and started yelling “Oh you fucking immigrants, all immigrants need to leave Sweden, we don’t want you here! If we see you in the city once again you will be dead, this is not your country!”. I understand that they were probably drunk, but I was concerned about our safety, and those kinds of words hurt, no matter who says it, even a drunk fool. Thankfully the police removed them from us very quickly.”

Also when Ali mentioned him praying in designated, but still public places, and how uncomfortable that made him feel can be seen as a behaviour of a stigmatised person. Goffman talks about stigmatised people overthinking everything that they do and being worried about what other people think about them, how are they being perceived in the society. This is exactly the type of behaviour that this young man seems to express. Overall, the fact that all of them seem to be overly aware of how they act and are constantly trying to follow all the rules and not make any mistakes, from simply not talking to neighbors to concealing their religious practices, so that they would be accepted by others, shows how stigmatised they really feel.

Omar touched upon his journey to Sweden, and how on the way here he met many people who were not the kindest and how that affected him. He mentioned that he can even remember the looks that he and the people who traveled with him would get, how they were put in camps with horrible conditions and were mistreated by people smugglers and even police and migrations

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<sup>59</sup> Newburn, “*Criminology*”, p. 223

officers in multiple countries and on multiple occasions. He said: “Some people were nice, it went very well in Greece for example. But I know that they were good to us just because they wanted to send us away. They did not want us to stay, no one wants *immigrants*, it almost feels like a dirty word”. That word, immigrant, is at the core of the stigma that follows these people. There are certain prejudices that come with that label and these boys seem to be aware of it. So in a way one of the reasons for why they seem to want to assimilate to the Swedish society is to try and avoid the stigma of being an immigrant, become the part of the majority. Daniel talked about the day when he got his residence permit:

“I was so happy, I wanted to yell, scream, party. That day I went to school and did not miss a single lesson. I felt like I was finally Swedish. I know that it is not really, truly the case, but it was a step closer. Now I have documents that prove that I live here, that I am one of them, and no one can tell me to leave and that I don’t belong.”

Goffman talks about this phenomenon in his book “Stigma”. What he mentions is moral career<sup>60</sup> and two phases that occur with stigmatised individuals. The first phase is the one where the stigmatised person learns the attitudes and outlooks that the “normal” people, or the majority, seem to have, and the types of identities that are most prevalent in the society, but also how it is to have a stigma attached. In the second phase that individual realises that he is the one who is stigmatised, learns about it in detail and what consequences come with it. The combination of these two phases and its timeline are crucial elements regarding the individual’s further development<sup>61</sup>. This is exactly what these three former unaccompanied minors seem to be doing and have been doing in the past, analysing the majority and trying to fit in, but also looking at the issues that seem to follow them as a result of their stigma, like for example being attacked in a public place.

The concept of stigma is something that almost always goes hand in hand with the subject of refugees. It is not always called by that name, the term prejudice is also used quite often,

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<sup>60</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”, p. 40

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40

however, the point is the same. Kristal-Andersson talks about this in her book, explaining what prejudice is, generalization or deeply rooted belief, which can sometimes manifest in attacking the person in question, verbally or even physically. What she points out however is that prejudice should not be excused, but needs to be understood<sup>62</sup>. It is mostly done out of fear and ignorance<sup>63</sup>. So what has to be done in order to work on this issue is to educate people more.

Here, the question “How do they experience this process of assimilation?” can be answered. Trying to assimilate has been made harder for unaccompanied minors and young adults due to the stigma of being an immigrant that follows them wherever they go. It was first experienced early on their journey to Sweden, and they are not fully free from it even now that they have arrived to their destination. It is positive to see, however, that they do not seem to be discouraged and are still trying to fit in the best that they can. This is something that can not be achieved in a day, but the time will show if they ever truly feel at home here in Sweden.

### **6.3 Living with a label**

What closely follows the phenomenon of stigma is being labeled. This is where the “Labeling theory” comes in<sup>64</sup>. The fact that these young men are immigrants brings certain stamps and labels that they have to deal with in their day to day life. Daniel talked about his first experiences in school and how that made him feel. He said that just because he did not know Swedish or English, people would sometimes think that he is not quite bright. He said: “My lack of knowledge of these two languages does not mean that I’m stupid, but people used to think that. I went to school in my home country you know, for example I am very good at math and geography, but that kinda got ignored. Even in the migration office when there was no translator around they would talk to me like I am slow or something”. Daniel proceeded to say that it really made him doubt himself, that maybe they were right. Maybe you really needed to know English at least in order to be perceived as smart, so if he does not know it, it has to mean that he is

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<sup>62</sup> Kristal-Andersson, “Att förstå flyktingar, invandrare och deras barn - en psykologisk modell”, p. 149

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 150

<sup>64</sup> Newburn, “Criminology”, p. 219



unintelligent. Today it is different however. Daniel learned Swedish really fast and is already in high school and has enrolled in the science programme. “I still doubt myself sometimes though, whenever there is something that I do not know or understand it takes me back”.

Omar had a different story regarding labels. He was very open and admitted that he had been participating in some illegal activities. What he used to use and even sell on some occasions is Tramadol pills. Tramadol is a prescription medication used for severe pain, very similar to morphium, and is classified as a drug in Sweden for its addictive nature<sup>65</sup>. Sometimes he would also use and sell marijuana. He would even actively try to avoid obligatory drug tests that he had to participate in while living in the unaccompanied minors foster home. He explains:

“You know, it was a type of escape for me, I would forget everything that would be happening that day, all the problems, waiting for the residence permit, not being with my family, being bullied, it would all go away. While selling would provide me with some cash which was always needed, who does not need cash. And you know people would assume that I was doing it even before I started, so I thought, what the hell. When I would smoke [cigarettes] at the train station people would sometimes come up to me and ask “Hay, do you have some?”, and I didn’t, so one day I decided, maybe I should have some, they already expect me to. So I talked to some friends who have some friends and started selling it. And then when you have it on you, you get curious, so I tried it. I wanted to know what I’m selling and in the end I started to like it, really like it”.

At the core of this story, that might seem very simple at first, we see that the main cause, at least at first, was the label that was put on this young man. He says “[...] maybe I should have some, they already *expect* me to” and the most important part of that sentence is the highlighted word “expect”. The fact that people have already labeled him as a drug dealer, a criminal, is what made him want to try it in the first place. What is the harm of actually doing something if people already think that you are doing it, you are just living up to their expectations. This is exactly what lies at the core of the Tannenbaum’s “Labeling theory”, as he says: “The person becomes the thing that he is described as being...”<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> 1177 Vårdguiden, “Tramadol”, 5 June 2018

<sup>66</sup> Newburn, “Criminology”, p. 219

## **6.4 Resources needed for a better life**

What resources do the unaccompanied minors and young adults experience as necessary for assimilation? This is a very important question, that could open people's eyes on how to help them, but also even other refugees that came to Sweden. It can be beneficial to both sides, for the minorities and the society at large. For the minorities this could mean just fitting in better and feeling positive about their new lives in Sweden, while for the society it would mean that more people are actually adapted and ready to contribute to the community in the right way. All three former unaccompanied minors that were interviewed say that they are very grateful for the opportunities that they were given during their stay here. They say that on their journey they would not have food for days sometimes and that on some occasions they had to sleep on the street, so when they arrived to their destination and were provided meals and housing that was more than they could have even imagined. That was a couple of years ago however, and even though they say that they are forever grateful for that, now they have some other needs that could and should be fulfilled, some more complicated than a plate of food and a bed to sleep on. First of all, being accepted by the majority can mean a lot for unaccompanied minors and young adults. They point out that this is not the case for the entirety of the Swedish population, some people have been nothing but kind and helpful, but there still are some people who are judgemental and express discriminatory behaviour. From small things like a woman holding her purse a little closer on the bus when they come on board, to bigger ones like them being attacked in public and being threatened to be murdered if they do not leave the country. The informants say that right now after they managed to settle and take care of important things like documents and residence permits they only need kindness and acceptance. Ignorance, prejudice and fear that some people still seem to show them is what, according to them, stands in their way to actually assimilate and interconnect fully into the society.

Other from being separated from their families, not being fully accepted is the other main reason for why unaccompanied minors seem to express sadness, depression and anxiety. Ali remembers his psychological evaluation:

“They told me that I am depressed and that I also have PTSD. I didn’t really know how to comprehend that. I knew that I was sad, and often not motivated and very cheerful, but I did not think that I was depressed, that seemed too serious. The PTSD thing I could kind of understand. I still have dreams from when I was on the boat from Turkey to Greece and how it started sinking while there was almost 50 people on it until the Greek coast guard saved us. I did not really know what it meant, but I had a feeling that it was not good. Now I am using prescription drugs that they gave me and it seems to be helping. There are still some bad days of course, but at least now I understand why that is happening”.

It is positive to see that unaccompanied minors and young adults do seem to get help regarding mental illnesses. For Ali, though, it was something new and a pleasant surprise. He pointed out that mental illnesses are something that is not really in focus in his home country, so he himself did see it as one of those tools that were helping his assimilation. He says: “If I feel good I will automatically be more motivated to live a good life”.

According to Al-Sudany the main reason of depression in unaccompanied minors and young adults is deep sadness that occurs as a consequence of the individual being separated from their family, friends, home country and familiar environment. It can especially be heightened if said individual does not adjust in the right way in the new country and society<sup>67</sup>. When it comes to posttraumatic stress disorder as the name suggests it is about experiencing a traumatic event, but instead of putting that behind and managing to continue with life normally some people tend to relive these events which can lead to a lower quality of life<sup>68</sup>. These two mental illnesses are something that Ali has to cope with every day and are the consequence of him being a former unaccompanied minor.

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<sup>67</sup> Al-Sudany, “*Psyisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn*”, p. 65

<sup>68</sup> Elmeroth & Häge, “*Flyktens barn*” p. 94

From what they expressed in the interview these former unaccompanied minors do seem to understand that the majority of the responsibility regarding their assimilation to the society is laying on their own shoulders, however, what they are asking for, is some understanding and support from the majority. They expressed that they believe that that is not too much to ask for considering their circumstances.

## **6.5 The future**

In this analysis section many subjects were covered while also being connected to the appropriate theories. Interviewees touched upon some important details from their lives. Lastly it is important to talk about their view of the future. The informants seem to think that the stigma of being an immigrant is going to keep following them for a little longer. Daniel said that the fact that he received the residence permit made him almost feel Swedish in a way, but also that he knows that it is not truly the case. He pointed out that at his core he is still very much an immigrant and that he can not escape from that label, at least not for now. Regarding the future, Omar said that he believes that it will be better as time goes on, even if people do not accept them fully they will at least get used to the fact that they are here, and that is enough for him, for now.

“God knows how many years need to pass in order for us to be seen as equal members of society, but I am kind of okay with that. You can’t really force people to like you. When the time comes they will realise that we are not that bad. There are some of our own people though who give us a bad name, I mean I was one of them in a way, considering my criminal past, but the only thing that we can do is try to right our wrongs and hope for the best”.

Ali, on the other hand, is not very hopeful. He talked about many of his friends who decided to leave Sweden, and he says that he fully understands them. According to him, some people can not take the pressure that comes with being in this situation, and fears that he might be one of them. “The only reason for why I am still here and want to stay is because my brother’s son who is only 11 came here with me and is now in a foster family. I can’t be with him all the time, but

he needs to have someone here who is his own blood, to take care of him, even from afar”. If things will change here he is not very sure of, but is ready to find out, for the sake of his little nephew and his future.

## **7 Results**

### **7.1 Conclusion**

The main focus of this essay was the question of unaccompanied minors’ and young adults’ assimilation into the Swedish society, how are they adjusting, how are they experiencing that process and what tools do they need in order to do it even better and more effectively. In order to get answers on these questions some other topics also had to be mentioned so that everything would be put in the right context. This is where their journey to Sweden, their time spent here and how they see the future comes in. These three time periods of their lives are the foundation of their assimilation and that is why those were important to talk about. An individual’s past experiences, but also expectations for what is to come, can have a major impact on how he or she will develop in the future.

To go back to the actual assimilation however, the interviewed former unaccompanied minors do claim that they are working on their assimilation. They understand the rules and norms that are present in the society, and that is the first step to actually fitting in. Some rules are harder to follow than others, but the fact that they are showing initiative is very positive. There are also some aspects that they seem to enjoy very much, like for example certain freedoms that they did not seem to have back home. This is especially beneficial since it creates an exchange of sorts, if you follow these rules you will get various freedoms in return, so it can be seen as profitable for both sides.

Theories that explain the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors and young adults and their behaviour are as previously mentioned “Theory about integration in the society”<sup>69</sup>, “Stigma”<sup>70</sup> and “Labeling theory”<sup>71</sup>. The “Theory about integration in the society”, or to be more specific its first two points which are assimilation and interconnection is what best explains what these young individuals had to go through and are still dealing with to this day. According to Alexander assimilation is essentially the rules and norms that the majority seem to impose upon the minority so that they would be accepted into the society<sup>72</sup>. It is important to point out, however, that it is not always done forcefully and very directly. A very good example of this is Ali saying that he feels uncomfortable praying in designated, but still public places, because that is not the norm in Sweden. Interconnection on the other hand has a more positive connotation in this theory. Here both the majority and minorities are encouraged to show their own identities and experience other cultures<sup>73</sup>. This is where the concept of freedom that unaccompanied minors and young adults are experiencing shows. Things that at first glance seem very small, for example fashion, tattoos and social media, however, mean a lot to them since they did not have the chance to fully experience that before. So the conclusion that we can come to is that them trying to fit in is a constant alternation and combination of these two concepts, Alexander’s view of assimilation and interconnection.

Stigma is something that can be seen as an obstacle that is standing in the way of unaccompanied minors and young adults and their assimilation. The fact that there is a certain stigma, mostly the one of being an immigrant, that keeps following them can discourage their attempts to fully try to fit in the society. Simply the feeling of not being wanted somewhere can affect a person, especially at a very young age. This makes them overly aware of everything that they do, and keeps them in constant worry which can be very stressful. Simply looking different from the majority can create an uncomfortable feeling and the wish to try and be as invisible as possible so that the stigmatisation could be avoided, or at least lessened.

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*”

<sup>70</sup> Goffman, Erving, “*Stigma - Den avvikandes roll och identitet*”

<sup>71</sup> Newburn, “*Criminology*”, p. 219

<sup>72</sup> Alexander, “*Kulturell sociologi - Program, teori och praktik*” p. 19

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20

Being labeled is another phenomenon that can affect the assimilation in a negative way. A good example of that is Omar's usage and selling of drugs which originated from the fact that he was simply expected to be doing that by the majority. Being labeled as a criminal actually made him pursue that path, and if you are a criminal, regardless of if you are an immigrant or not, that automatically means that you are not well adjusted into the society. Since then Omar did try to correct his mistakes, which is positive, but he is a living proof of how labeling can affect someone's life.

Another point that is important to mention is unaccompanied minors and young adults and their mental health. Ridha Al-Sudany talks about this in his book "Psykisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn"<sup>74</sup> (Mental health in unaccompanied children) which is mentioned in the section about previous research, and I did ask the interviewees if they wanted to say something about this. Ali did open up and say that he has depression and PTSD which is most likely the consequence of this entire experience, from leaving his family behind, to traveling alone all the way to Sweden, to his first years spent here. That lines up perfectly with what Al-Sudany talks about in his book, how these young individuals quite often seem to suffer from mental illnesses, among them being depression and posttraumatic stress disorder. It is positive to see, however, that the health system in Sweden does seem to try and take care of this issue and help these young people.

Overall, the conclusion that this research came to, based on shared experiences by the interviewed former unaccompanied minors, is that they are trying their best to assimilate into the society. They are aware of the obstacles that are standing, and have been standing in the past, in the way of their adjustment and development, but they claim to mostly feel quite positive about their stay in Sweden. The one thing they ask for, for an easier assimilation is understanding and support by the majority. Time will tell, however, how their situation will progress in the future. What would be interesting is returning to this subject in 15, 20 or even 30 years. It would be

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<sup>74</sup> Al-Sudany, "Psykisk ohälsa hos ensamkommande barn"

fascinating to see how these individuals fully develop as adults, did they actually manage to assimilate all the way? Did the trauma of the entire experience leave any long term consequences on their health, behaviour and just coping with life in general?



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# Appendices

## Interview guide

- **Background information**
  - How old are you?
  - Do you have any family in your home country? Do you have any family in Sweden?
  
- **Journey to Sweden**
  - Why did you leave your home country?
  - When did you come to Sweden?
  - Was Sweden your predetermined destination?
  - How did you come to Sweden?
  - How long did the journey take?
  - Did you travel with someone or alone?
  - Were there any incidents during your journey?
  
- **Life in Sweden**
  - What did you do first upon your arrival to Sweden?
  - Can you describe your first year living in Sweden?
  - Can you describe your life in Sweden today?
  - Do you feel discriminated in Sweden?
  - How are you assimilating/trying to assimilate to the Swedish society?
  - How are you experiencing the process of assimilation?
  - What resources do you see as necessary to help your assimilation?
  
- **View of the future**
  - Do you see yourself living in Sweden in the future? If no, where do you see yourself in the future? If yes, how do you think your life in Sweden will look like in the future?

- Do you ever see yourself fully assimilated in the Swedish society?
- What are your goals and ambitions for the future?
- Do you think that people in Sweden will be more accepting of you in the future?