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Alienating Narratives

**The professional challenge of preventing and responding
to sexual vulnerability amongst unaccompanied refugee
minors in Sweden**

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ABSTRACT

Alienating Narratives – The professional challenge of preventing and responding to sexual vulnerability amongst unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden

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This thesis explores the reception system for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) in Sweden, with a focus on preventive and responsive measures to sexual violence. The aim is to understand the professional challenges of actively working against sexual vulnerability and violence. Furthermore, it explores the interrelation between changes in laws and legislation and shifts in the public discourse, with the aim of understanding how they affect the reception system and professional practice. The qualitative material is gathered through interviews and focus groups with concerned professionals in the region of Skåne, Sweden. To contextualize the experience of the professionals a media content analysis is conducted, presented together with official reports and laws and legislation. Through concepts such as alienation and national identity the narratives in the media coverage is examined and it is argued that a shift in the public debate takes place in 2016, where a narrative of URMs as sexual perpetrators takes prominence. The shift correlates with a change in Sweden's migration policy that aimed to control and decrease the number of refugees seeking asylum. Through notions about trust development, where *consistency*, *persistence*, and *reliability* are key factors, the interaction between service provider and client is analysed. The study shows that the risk zones for exposure to sexual violence are closely connected to the asylum process. However, so are the possibilities for professionals to actively work preventive and responsive. Trust development is proved to be essential, but trust is difficult for professionals to inspire in youths with an unsure legal status or those waiting for a decision.

Keywords: Unaccompanied refugee minors, Professional practice, Social work, Sexual violence, Trust development, Media representation, Alienation

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Displacement, migration and flight are by no means a new global phenomenon. But in recent years the number of displaced persons has increased along with the increase in population worldwide. Millions of people live outside of their country of birth due to forced migration, conflicts, war, poverty, violations of human rights, violence, natural or man-made disasters and other factors. (UNHCR, 2019; UNICEF, 2018).¹ Many of these are children, and some are separated from their parents or legal guardian: unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs). In comparison with other European countries Sweden's migration policy have been perceived as more generous and in 2015 there was a peak in the reception of asylum seekers.² This peak (often referred to as the 'immigration crisis' (*Nationalencyklopedin*, 2019-04-29) caused the Swedish government to make restrictions in the asylum policy to control and decrease the amount of refugees seeking asylum in Sweden. (Act 2016:752).

In 2015, Sweden received 35 396³ unaccompanied refugee minors and this strained the reception system and the social security surrounding URMs. The topic of unaccompanied refugee minors was highly debated and it had gained great public interest both in media and politics, where Sweden's reception system was perceived as unprepared to receive the large number of children without a legal guardian. In addition, the debate circled around some other main topics: age assessment of URMs (are they really under 18?), the gender of most URMs (why are so many male?), reasons for asylum (are they in need of protection?), and Sweden's migration policy in large (is it too generous?). Apart from this, criminality and sexual violence were extensively debated in relation to URMs. Actors with different agendas and problem description conducted the debate where, in simple terms, one side advocated for an increased awareness of the groups vulnerability to sexual exploitation with hopes of protecting them from harm. The other perceived the group as perpetrators of sexual violence, in need of education and information on 'our' view on women, sexuality and equality. In this thesis it will be argued that a notable shift in the debate takes place in the beginning of 2016. At this point unaccompanied refugee minors were, to a larger extent, portrayed as perpetrators of sexual violence instead of victims and the number of articles regarding the topic

significantly accelerated. A narrative of unaccompanied refugee minors as sexual perpetrators were established.

These narratives about sexual violence and URM^s portrayed in the public debate create a polarized and discrepant image of the issue. By extension, it presents a challenge for professionals who, on all levels, work with these children and adolescents to prevent, identify and respond to sexual violence. Are they dealing with dangerous young men, or victimized and exposed youths? Hence, this thesis focuses on the professional challenges of working preventive and responsive against sexual violence by and against unaccompanied refugee minors, in the context of the intense and shifting public debate surrounding URM^s and within a political discourse where Sweden's migration policy turns towards a stricter path. The concerned professionals are those working within Sweden's reception system and with social security, as well as professionals in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with URM^s and refugees.

1.2 Aim & Research Questions

This thesis explores the reception system and the social security around URM^s in Sweden, with a focus on preventive and responsive measures to sexual violence. It also explores the interrelation between changes in laws and legislation and shifts in the public discourse, and by extension how these two affect professional practice. Hence, the aim is twofold: first of all, the aim is to understand the professional challenges of actively working against sexual vulnerability and violence. Furthermore, the aim is to understand how the reception system (and by extension the practice of professionals) can be affected by changes in Sweden's migration policy and shifts in the media coverage and the public opinion.

This gives rise to some concrete questions: *What challenges and possibilities there are for professionals to actively prevent and respond to sexual violence by and against URM^s in Sweden? What impact has the public discourse had on political changes, and vice versa? What impact has the public and political discourse had on the reception system and professional practice?*

1.3 Method

This thesis is part of the research project "Youth and Sexual Violence - A knowledge generating interaction between humanistic research on sexual violence and professional

practice”⁴ and conducted in collaboration with the City of Malmö. The project combines academic knowledge and professional practice for evidence-based approaches to youth exposed to sexual violence by using a method of ‘focus-conferences’ where relevant professionals and researchers gather during one day to deeply examine a delimited issue through interprofessional discussions. The focus-conference about URM and sexual violence was held on October 25th 2018 at Lund University. There were 28 participants from 18 different sectors in attendance, including both authorities and civil society.⁵ (See appendix A for the questions discussed at the focus groups)

A majority of the qualitative material for this thesis was generated at the conference and the broad reach of attending professionals were made possible due to the collaboration with the city of Malmö. They provided access to their networks and allowed for participation in meetings, seminars, and conferences. In addition to the official partner, several other organizations, including both the public sector and NGOs, have contributed to this research through participation in semi-structured interviews that were carried out continuously throughout the project. The organisations range from the National Board of Health and Welfare, the County Administrative Board in Skåne, Competence Centre Against Prostitution in Malmö, Competence Centre Against Domestic Violence in Skåne, Save the Children, the Association for Unaccompanied Minors, to the Skåne City Mission. This study is a case study of professional practice in the region of Skåne.

1.3.1 Material

The material used in this thesis can be divided into five categories: 1. Academic research, 2. Official reports, action plans and guidelines, 3. Media content analysis, 4. Laws and legislation, and 5. Qualitative material from interviews and focus groups. 1-4 was initially conducted prior to the conference as a knowledge inventory during the first half of 2018. This served as a way of pinpointing relevant professional groups and plan the content of the conference. After the conference, the material from 1-4 was revisited and analysed together with the qualitative material generated at the conference. The academic research and the official reports, guidelines and action plans are accounted for in chapter 3. The media content analysis is presented in chapter 5, and relevant laws and legislation will be continuously referenced throughout the thesis. The qualitative material is presented in chapter 5 & 6.

In order to understand the professional challenges of working preventive and responsive against sexual violence, there is a need to map out the risk zones where URM are exposed. In other words, an understanding of the occurrence of sexual violence is essential to analyse the challenges. Hence, a mapping of the risk zones for exposure to sexual violence by and against URM has been carried out. (See fig. 4.1, p. 25). The map is based on the general steps of the asylum process for URM, an action plan by the County Administrative Board in Skåne about URM that disappear from authorities (2018), and the focus groups and interviews and conducted throughout the project. The mapping is the base on which the analysis of professional challenges rests as it can help show different challenges in different stages of the asylum process. Furthermore, the public debate, seen through the coverage in Swedish news media, is examined to contextualize the experience of professionals.

The following analysis thus operates in three layers: *official laws & legislation*, *public society*, and *professional everyday experience*. It rests on the assumption that the three layers both affect, and are affected by, the others in an interrelated way. ‘Official laws & legislations’ concerns asylum laws and the legal framework in which concerned professionals must operate. ‘Public society’ refers to public opinion and the coverage in the media. The third layer, ‘Professional everyday experience’ accounts for the everyday work experience of professionals who work with unaccompanied refugee minors at some level. Sometimes changes in laws and legislation affect the public opinion and the coverage in the media, and vice versa. And both laws and legislation and public society affect the way that professionals can operate. The experience of professionals can, of course, also affect the other two. To analyse and understand this interrelation, sociology of law can be of use. Lynn Mather (2009) explains:

The study of law and society rests on the belief that legal rules and decisions must be understood in context. Law is not autonomous, standing outside of the social world, but is deeply embedded within society.” (Mather, 2009, p. 1)

Hence, the societal context of laws and law making is crucial to gain an understanding of both their origin and their implications. This point of view becomes useful when attempting to understand the recent changes in Sweden’s migration policy as an ‘event’ in a larger context, or discourse. But other than understanding the contextual construction of laws, this point of view can also highlight certain inequalities. Mather continues:

While political scientists recognize the fundamentally political nature of law, the law and society perspective takes this assumption several steps further by pointing to ways in which law is socially and historically constructed, how law both reflects and impacts

culture, and how inequalities are reinforced through differential access to, and competence with, legal procedures and institutions. (Ibid.)

Hence, the decision-making regarding asylum regulations in Sweden will be seen in a societal context through a media analysis. The societal context is both affected by, and affects, the construction of laws and legislation. Evident in the quote above is also the notion that inequalities can be created, or reinforced, through different knowledge on how to operate within a legal framework. For professionals working with URM, this is highly relevant. The knowledge and competence of a, for example, individual social worker influence how they can navigate within the complexity of the public sector with its many different agencies, and by extension in affects the help they can provide to their client. This will be addressed in chapter 6.2 ‘A Necessity or Luxury?’.

1.3.2 Media Content Analysis

In an analysis of public discourse on education in the USA performed by Nancy Green Saraisky (2016), she uses media content analysis to understand how ideas and trends affected the educational policy in the US. For the purpose of this thesis, her usage of content analysis proves useful when investigating how the public discourse and policy-making regarding refugees and URM are interrelated. She explains content analysis: “The analysis is often not of the literal description of the content, but rather the illumination of patterns and trends that are not immediately observable.” (Saraisky, 2016, p. 27). In the following content analysis of the media coverage on URM, the focus will be on *what* is reported on, to what *extent*, and how URM are *portrayed*, to be able to discern patterns, and potential shifts in the patterns. Moreover, Klaus Krippendorff (1989) focuses on how content analysis can be used to highlight changes in media coverage over time, as well as inequalities in that coverage:

Early examples [of content analysis] are analyses of how the attention by newspapers to particular news categories has changed over time, [...] Many of these studies are motivated by the feeling that journalistic standards are inadequately applied. For example, concerns for fairness are implied in numerous content analyses that aim to show the inequality of the coverage of the two (or more) sides of a public controversy, the imbalance in the favourable and unfavourable treatment of an issue, public figure, or foreign country. (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 404)

In line with this description, the following media content analysis will focus on how the public debate regarding URM have shifted, and on why there has been an increase of articles that discuss the group in relation to sexual offences in Swedish news media in recent years.

The analysis will be contextually bound by including changes in laws and legislation, publications of relevant reports or other event that affected the number of published articles.

The overview of Swedish media was conducted through the database *Retriever Research* with the following search words: “Unaccompanied” + “sexual” or “rape*” or “gang rape*” or “assault*” or “sexual harassment*” or “trafficking”.⁶ The selection consisted of news articles and debate articles in major local and national newspapers, stretching from 2012 to 2018. The number of hits on the search was 11 770 articles, as shown in fig. 1.1. Note that these are *hits* and not all are to be considered relevant for the study. In addition, one article can sometimes generate several hits. Despite that, it is evident that significantly more articles about URMs and sexual violence were published in 2016 compared to previous years:

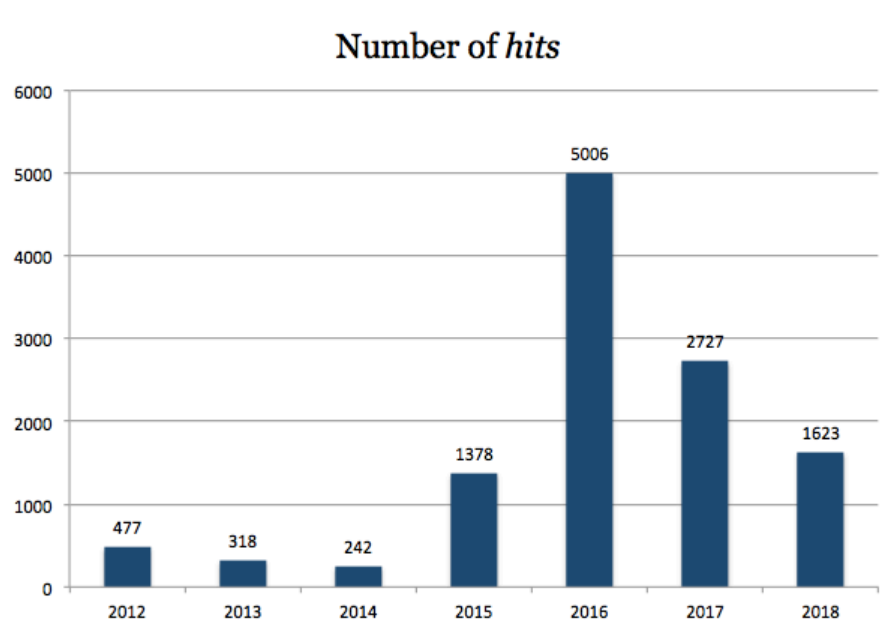


Fig. 1.1

However, a selection and categorization is necessary to produce useful statistical results that can point towards the *content* of these articles. After a read-through the articles were either deemed as relevant or irrelevant, and then categorized based on two criteria: 1. If the article reports on a specific *case* (fig. 5.1), or 2. If the article mentions a *general discussion* on the theme sexual violence and URMs (fig. 5.2). For example, an article that reports on, or mentions, a heightened risk for URMs to fall victim to human traffickers during flight counts as a ‘general discussion’ whilst an article that reports on a specific sexual assault counts as a case.

If a specific *case* is reported on in multiple articles, it still counts as *one* case in the statistics. This is done to get statistics on how many actual cases that was covered, and not how many times the cases were reported on. However, regarding the *general discussion* all articles are included because, contrary to the statistics on cases, the purpose is to show to what extent the topic was debated. Both the selection of cases and general discussions is categorised by how the text portray/discuss unaccompanied refugee minors: either as perpetrators, victims or both (when both the victim and perpetrator are URM). There are some specific conditions for the categorization of articles that belong to the ‘general discussion’ selection. The category “URMs as perpetrators” includes articles that *discuss* them as such, even if it is to criticize that image. Hence, not all articles in that category have the objective of portraying URM as perpetrators and they might, on the contrary, oppose that image. For example, an article might criticize the idea that URM are portrayed as perpetrators of sexual violence, where the source of that idea is not another article, but a “general public opinion” that the author criticises. Such an article would still be included in the “URMs as perpetrators”-category, because the aim is to get an indication on how well debated the topic has been. And importantly, it takes into account the opinions that most established media do not publish or support but only comments on. Hence, an article might criticize how the extreme right wing and their supporters view URM and how they spread this information in more obscure news outlets. By still including such articles in the perpetrator-category, it is possible to get an overview of the polarized debate and the different opinions that are aired. (e.g. *ETC*, 2013-02-16). Included in the ‘debate’ category are also articles that might not have sexual violence as their main topic, but they reference it somewhere in the text.

An important disclaimer about the selection and the generated statistics is in place: it might not be exact, due to a margin of error. First of all there is the human factor: it is easy when going through many articles to accidentally miss, or double check, one. Secondly, some articles were removed and no longer available to read or behind a pay wall. Those are not included. Thirdly, since some articles generated two hits they might have been registered twice if they did not appear in the same order. However, a majority of the articles were available, and the categorisation was carefully executed to minimize errors. The media content analysis is presented in detail in chapter 5.

1.3.3 Critical Reflection on the Method

The method chosen to gather the qualitative material (i.e. the conference and focus groups) highly affects the outcome. First of all, the participants have an impact on what kind of information that can be extrapolated. The invitation for the conference was widely spread thanks to the cooperation with the City of Malmö and it reached a large amount of relevant professionals that directly work with URMs, or on an organisational level related to social work and URMs. Some responded to the invitation and declined to participate due to a lack of direct experience with sexual violence and URMs. Amongst those that chose to participate many were well aware of sexual violence as a present and urgent issue. However, not all that chose to participate had a direct experience of sexual violence, but a *notion* that it was a big issue amongst the group. On the one hand, this may make the generated material point towards a greater occurrence of sexual violence than if others participated. On the other hand, it may point towards the extent of the issue if a large amount of professionals are aware of it. The fact that all participants chose to take part voluntarily and that they were familiar with the topic is an advantage in regards to the information they feel like sharing during the session, a notion stressed by Grahame Fallon & Reva Brown (2002):

Most authors consider it desirable for participants to have volunteered for the study rather than being nominated by others. [...] It is important to ensure that participants have something to say, and feel sufficiently comfortable in their groups to disclose their opinions willingly. (Fallon & Brown, 2002, p. 197)

This leads on to another important factor: how the focus groups are put together and carried through is a vital component in generating useful data. The participants needs to feel comfortable, the moderator needs to be adequately involved and the right questions needs to be asked, amongst other things. One strength of focus groups put forward by Fallon & Brown is that it makes it possible for the participants to *together* concentrate on a delimited issue, and this leads “to the generation of insights not readily obtainable from conventional group or individual interviews.” (Ibid., p. 196). This indicates that insights generated during focus groups are unique to that setting, and that it could be difficult to generate the same material otherwise. The interprofessional meeting that took place and the discussions and insights that followed could reasonably not have been obtained by other means. However, as is stressed by Fallon & Brown, focus groups are an unnatural setting and “it would be naive to assume that this technique gives access to ‘naturally occurring data’ such as might be collected by participant observation”. (Ibid.).

Taking all of this into account, the usage of focus groups for this study can be considered as positive and productive when it comes to generating insights through discussions between professionals that have an interest in the topic. On the negative side, a clear and outspoken focus on sexual violence in an unnatural setting can make the material point towards a greater occurrence of sexual violence. Due to this fact the material from the focus groups must be analysed together with other information, such as academic research, official reports and coverage in the media.

1.4 Ethical Considerations

In this study it is important to utilize the professional experience in a way that is not excluding and 'superior' to the experience of unaccompanied minors. Therefore, this thesis does not make attempts to speak for unaccompanied minors and their experience by demarcating it to the *professional experience*. Through the professionals that operate within the reception system, insight can be gained on how they are affected by changes in laws and legislation as well as shifts in the public debate. Hence, no attempts to express how individual minors experience the reception system are made (in light of the applied method that would be an unethical and inaccurate claim).

Furthermore, the term "unaccompanied refugee minors" has met with criticism because of its simplification: it puts together individuals that does not necessarily have anything more in common than the fact that they have migrated without a legal guardian. A study from the Netherlands about mental health issues amongst URM's states:

In terms of interventions in the field of mental health issues among URM's, it is essential to apply multi-modal and culturally sensitive methods. These children and adolescents belong to a diverse group but are collectively vulnerable due to their difficult legislative situation, their stressful past, and the sensitive developmental period of their lives during which these events are occurring. (Huemer et al., 2009, p. 9).

They suggest a multi-modal and cultural sensitive approach to encompass a group that is diverse but brought together by certain circumstances. Here it is important to note the distinction between *individual experience* and what brings URM's together *as a group*. The common properties in the group are their legislative status and a stressful situation during a developmental time. In addition, Lilja Cajvert states: "[t]he concept unaccompanied can become an obstacle in situations where one, as a professional, should start with the individual and the individual's unique experience and not from the fact that the person have migrated alone and without a legal guardian. [...] This concept is not the individual's unique

personality.” (Cajvert, 2018, p. 14). Hence, it is important, according to Cajvert, to not only see the shared experience of the group when meeting with a minor, but to see the individual with his or hers unique sets of experiences and personality. URMs may be brought together by legislative status, but to generalize further than that is a disservice to the individuals belonging to the group.

When studying sexual violence and URMs, the starting point is that there are some properties in *the (reception) system* that creates vulnerability, instead of properties of the individuals in it. This is a crucial difference. As quoted above: “these children and adolescents belong to a diverse group but are collectively vulnerable due to their difficult legislative situation.” (Huemer et al., 2009, p. 9). Therefore, no attempts to generalize the experience of individual minors are made, but instead the focus is on how the reception system can produce and reproduce vulnerability under specific circumstances. With this approach, valuable insights on the reception system that surrounds unaccompanied refugee minors can be produced through the professional experience, but the insights are limited to that context.

1.5 Demarcation & Definition

There are several professional groups that encounter unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden, all with different roles and expertise. Throughout this thesis, ‘professionals’ will be referred to in a general sense, and what kind of ‘professionals’ it concerned is highly depended on the context. In the chapter 4 “Mapping of Sexual Violence” it will be clarified which professionals that are relevant for a specific issue. However, this thesis lacks a micro-perspective on each profession where the specific conditions for different professional groups are studied in detail. Instead it attempts to give an overview of different challenges for different professional groups. The main professional groups referenced in this thesis are: the police Department, the Migration Agency, social services (both day-time and night-time), crisis centres, staff at group homes, social administration, family law office, municipal refugee units, school health and counselling, teachers, healthcare providers and NGOs specialized on refugees and/or sexual health.

The sexual violence under study is that which occur, or can be treated, when the unaccompanied refugees are (or should be) in the care of the Swedish state. That includes both those who are in, as well as outside of, the asylum process. In other words, the study is demarcated to the sexual violence that might occur in connection to an on-going asylum process, regardless of whether the URM have disappeared from authorities and/or live as

undocumented. Long term implications for URM's or the risk zones that might appear later in life in relation to their previous refugee status are not included. Since age assessment of URM's is highly controversial the situation for those that recently turned 18, or are considered as such, are also included. Hence, the term unaccompanied refugee 'youth' will sometimes be used alongside 'minors'.

There are several forms of housing for URM's in Sweden and the focus of this thesis are group housings, such as transit homes, HCL-homes (home for care and living) and group homes for adults. Transit homes are a short-term accommodation upon arrival in the first municipality and HCL-homes are the most common form of group homes in the assigned municipality. Group housings for adults are not commonly used for minors but it is still included in the study due to unsure age assessments, which can cause minors to live with adults.

1.6 Disposition

In **chapter 2** the theoretical framework is set out and this chapter serves as the foundation for the analysis in chapter 5 and 6. **Chapter 3** offers an overview of previous research with a focus on mental health issues, sexual exploitation and social work, all in relation to URM's. A presentation of relevant official reports and guidelines follows. The mapping of risk zones for exposure to sexual violence is presented in **chapter 4** along with an overview of the general steps of the asylum process. **Chapter 5** presents the media content analysis and contextualizes it with relevant events and publications that affected the coverage. This is followed with a theoretical discussion about narratives in the media where concepts such as nationalism and alienation are central. In **chapter 6** the analysis moves on to the challenges that professionals face in responsive and preventive work against sexual violence, viewed through notions about trust development. The thesis is concluded in **chapter 7** by a summary of the primary findings and how they relate to each other.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Alienating Narratives

While studying unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden in recent years, it is important to have an understanding of the overall political and public discourse on immigration and refugees, both in Sweden and in Europe. It is also important to have theoretical tools that can

explain how URMs, as a group, have been ascribed certain common features. More precisely, how the entire group got connected to sexual perpetrator-ness. The public opinion and the media representation of URMs have to be seen in a larger discourse of representations of immigrants and not as an isolated event. This prompts the question: what discourse is that?

Suspicion against, and alienation of, a certain group of people is a concept that can be found in different contexts and countries over time. Hence, it is nothing new and delimited only to URMs in Sweden: it resonates with a larger debate on immigration and ethnicity that, in a contemporary European context, is often connected to the rise of right-wing populism in Europe. (e.g. Lazaridis, 2016). Scholars that have studied the rise of populism in the Scandinavian countries argue that the welfare states have created (and was built on) a strong sense of ‘us’, ‘the nation’ and ‘the people’. (e.g. Hellström & Wennerhag, 2012; Siim & Meret, 2016). Hence, modern day populism in the Scandinavian countries is closely connected to a *welfare nationalism* (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012). Siim & Meret (2016) state that, within this welfare nationalism in Denmark, “the nation and those who belong to it are seen as threatened from outside by immigration and European integration and from within by Islam.” (Siim & Meret, 2016, p. 110). In short terms, welfare nationalism rests on the belief of *the people* and *the nation* are unison and there is a clear definition of who belongs to it. More importantly, this can be threatened from the outside (immigration) and from the inside (influence, different cultures and beliefs). Looking at an international example where Leo Chavez examines the narrative of the ‘Latino Threat’ and the construction of immigrants from Latin America as ‘alien’ and ‘illegal’ in the USA, he says that “restrictions on immigration and citizenship have always been about how we imagine who we are as a people and who we wish to include as part of the nation, whether this is explicitly recognized or not”. (Chavez, 2013, p. 25). The two examples goes well in line with Slavoj Žižek's (2000) explanation of the creation of national identification as a relationship towards a ‘Nation-Thing’, that is closely connected to a resentment towards ‘the other’ where, quite contradictory, our Nation-Thing is seen as accessible only to us, but still it can be threatened by those from the outside, the others. Žižek comments:

What is therefore at stake in ethnic tensions is always the possession of the national Thing. We always impute to the “other” an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. (Žižek, 2000, p. 596).

In this extract from Chavez, commenting on how the perception on Latina fertility is seen as a threat to the US nation, Žižek’s point is made clear:

The taken-for-granted assumption in the discourse on Latina fertility and reproduction is that Latinas are a population with “their pants down” and thus their reproductive behavior poses serious threats to the nation. Latina hyper-fertility threatens the nation’s demographic future by adding to population growth and changing its ethnic-racial composition. (Chavez, 2013, p. 109)

To make an analogy, although the specifics in the two cases differ, there are similarities found in descriptions about URM in Sweden and how they are represented in the media. In 2017, the debater and ethics scholar Ann Heberlein discusses the increase of rape in Sweden in a national newspaper. She makes a direct link to the increase of refugees in Sweden, and specifically names unaccompanied refugee minors in her text:

The gender imbalance in the group that have immigrated in recent years present special problems, especially for the police. During 2015 ninety unaccompanied young men arrived every day, to be compared with eight girls per day. [...] According to a report by BRÅ from 2005, the probability of committing crimes such as rape or attempted rape is five times higher amongst foreign born than men born in Sweden. (Heberlein, 2017-11-17)

In her text, the narrative of URM as perpetrators of sexual violence is made visible. On the one hand, Heberlein discusses ‘foreign born’ men in general, but still goes into detail about unaccompanied refugee minors, specifically pointing out the gender imbalance of the group. And even though the text is not about rape and *URMs*, but about rape and *refugees*, one group of refugees are singled out in this argument. It is also interesting how she uses the words ‘young men’ and ‘girls’: a, however subtle, indication on how these minors are viewed. Suspicion is built in the sentence and without explicitly stating it, this resonates with the debate about URM (male) that lie about their age and pretend to be minors. (e.g. Johansson, 2017-11-16). In line with Chavez argument about a deviating behaviour as a threat to the nation, it implicates that the behaviour of refugees deviates from the Swedish norm and thus challenges the societal order.

These types of narratives help create a ‘unaccompanied refugee minors-subject’ that is closely connected to sexual perpetrator-ness, in similar manners as Chavez argues that the Latino-subject is connected to fertility, sexuality and criminality. By extension, this is a way for the ‘Swedish-subject’ to dissociate from sexual violence as an inherent part of their identity. Looking at Edward Said (2001) and how he explains the connections between exile and nationalism, a parallel can be drawn. Even though the ‘Swedish-subject’ is not, physically, in exile in Sweden, it can be argued that there is a sense of threat and a feeling of alienation: some people claim that they do not recognize Sweden today. (e.g. *Stockholmdirekt*, 2016-05-15). In this experience of exile the sense of self and the sense of the national identity

are reinforced, as they are perceived as under threat. The self is constituted in contrast to the Other, where the boundaries of the self can be seen through the boundaries of someone else's. Thus, the importance of the own identity increases when faced with the Other. And in this case, the Other is the one committing sexual offences, and it is not something that belongs to the self. Going back to Zizek, this very much correlates with the possession of the 'Nation-Thing' that can be threatened from the outside by those that are different. Those that immigrate with different values and different views on women disturb the normal order in Sweden. And all in all, this correlates with the rise of right wing populism and the anti-immigration discourse that can be found in contemporary Europe.

It is within this narrative of nationalism, alienation and media representations of an entire group that the discourse about unaccompanied refugee minors and sexual violence in Sweden has to be understood. In the chapter 5.1 "Discursive Impact" these notions will be further developed and contextualised to the case under study.

2.2 Trust Development

In social work and health care, *trust* is believed to be essential for building a successful and productive relationship between social worker/health staff provider and the recipient. A trusting relationship is necessary for a client to reveal personal and compromising information to a professional, and this is especially important in regards to work with minors who have suffered sexual abuse or domestic violence. (Lefevre et al., 2017). Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the difficult situation that the minors are in (often without any other or few trustworthy adult relationships) social workers or health care providers are faced with the difficult task of creating personal and trusting relationships while maintaining a high level of professionalism. There is a need to look at different approaches to trust building in social and health care to understand how it is applicable for the case under study.

In a study by Behnam Behnia (2008), professor in social work, he describes four approaches to trust development in health and social care. The first three approaches describe the trust essential in the initial state of the relationship between a service provider and a client. Behnia argues that scholars in the field tend to emphasize one of these different approaches when studying trust development: the "clients disposition to trust", the "characteristics of the professional" and the "characteristics of the relationship that exists between the client and the professional." (Behnia, 2008, p. 1426). However, none of these three focuses on the development of a trust deeper than the initial. According to Behnia, this deeper kind of trust is

essential for a confidential and productive relationship, and he therefore presents a fourth approach. Behnia says that a deeper trust development “cannot be explained by the client’s propensity to trust, or that of the trustworthiness of the professional, or the characteristics of the relationship that exists between the client and the professional” (ibid). Drawing on symbolic interactionist perspective he develops this fourth approach where *trust* “is conceived as the outcome of a complex process involving the interpretation of the situation in which the two interacting individuals find themselves” (ibid). In the symbolic interactionist perspective, the individual’s interpretation of the situation is what shapes the person's perception and conduct. Behnia states:

In the absence of such a definition or interpretation, individuals remain hesitant or even paralysed in taking a course of action. Thus, to make him/herself vulnerable, it is crucial that the client defines the professional as a competent and benevolent person with a genuine interest in him/her. (Ibid., p. 1433)

Throughout the social interaction between the client and the professional, meaning is created by interpretations and definitions of the situation. The client is looking for confirmation that the professional is competent and knowledgeable enough to understand their, often complex, issues, and that they can offer sufficient help. The client has to feel like professional genuinely cares and has a positive perception of them. (Ibid.) It is within this interaction, and the constant interpretation of the interaction, that trust can be developed. To Behnia’s fourth approach some other aspects of trust development can be added. In a study by Michelle Lefevre et al. (2017) where they study trust development between professionals and children who suffered sexual exploitation, they present *persistence*, *reliability* and *consistency* as key factors:

Being persistent, reliable and consistent in a relationship over time is crucial: a “stickability” that will help a young person to recognise that you are on their side, undeterred by their challenging behaviour, not looking for any payback (unlike their abusers) and, ultimately, someone they can trust. (Lefevre et al., 2017, p. 2459)

Since they are highlighting long-term factors such as consistency, these notions belongs to the fourth approach more than the approaches that regards initial trust. In addition, in a study by Oguzhan Dincer (2011) about trust, social work and ethnic diversity he describes that optimism about the future is essential, and that trust “depends on how optimistic people are about their future and how optimistic they are controlling their own fate” (Dincer, 2011, p. 288). Hence, he adds aspects to trust development in professional relationships that are, in a sense, out of control of the individual service provider.

This leads on to an important factor of trust development: the view on professionals as part of a larger system. Behnia stresses the larger context in which the encounter between client and professional occurs. In that instance, previous bad experiences with social services or the reputation of the service provider in the community highly affects the trust development. Most professionals who work with social or health care operates within large scale, government or private, organisations with specific rules and regulations to follow. Thus, it is not only the competence of the individual social worker that affects trust development but the reputation and limitations of the entire organisation. Trust can be difficult to build if the person seeking to inspire trust operates within a system or organization that the client is suspicious about. In other words, professionals are not only building a professional and trusting relationship as a single social worker; they are doing it within a framework, a system, over which the individual worker have little control. Despite this lack of control over the framework the individual worker has to abide to it when meeting clients, and they are judged by it from the recipients perspective.

Behnia defines trust as “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to others on the basis of one’s positive expectations of the other’s intention and competence” (Behnia, 2008, p. 1427). In other words, and specifically in regards to social and health care, trust is defined as the client’s willingness to accept help from a service provider (making them vulnerable), and this willingness is based on the expectations of the service they are able to provide. Hence, if the client thinks that the service provider has the *willingness* and *ability* to help they will become more trusting of the professional than if they doubt it. And importantly, if the client does not have faith in the system the professional represents, personal trust becomes difficult to achieve. According to Behnia, this has the most implication in the initial stage:

The first level or the initial trust refers to the trust that exists in the early stage of a relationship. Initial trust encourages a client to approach a professional and to initiate a relationship. At this stage, trust is inspired less by the professional’s personal characteristics. The initial trust could be inspired by trust in the professional’s credentials and the system of education in which s/he studied. Initial trust could also be produced by the professional’s reputation in the community. (Ibid.)

The initial trust mostly refers to factors *outside* of the professionals’ personal traits and more on reputation and pre-existing expectations. However, even a client who has initial trust in the professional and the agency can become distrusting. If they later in the process realize that the professional cannot help them with their issue, whether it is the framework the professional operates within or the characteristics of the professional that causes this, trust can be lost. Behnia also stresses that the level of voluntariness of the person seeking help affects the level

of initial trust. Evident in the quote above is the fact that initial trust is dependent on the client's belief in the professional's competence and/or reputation, and this might be more difficult to achieve if the person receiving help have not gone there voluntarily. In that case, they might not have any, or bad, pre-existing views on the professional and the service they provide. (Behnia, 2008)

Different notions about trust development show that social and health care is highly dependent on personal interactions and relationships between the recipient and the service provider. In chapter 6.1 'Developing trust' the notions about trust will be developed further in connection to preventive and responsive work against sexual violence. The focus will be on how trust, or a lack thereof, can be a major obstacle for professionals to work against sexual vulnerability: trust in professionals and trust in the system. The analysis will mainly focus on the fourth approach to trust development where trust is seen as something occurring in an on-going process of interactions between two individuals. Concepts such as consistency, persistence, reliability, optimism about the future and self-control will be key factors in the analysis.

3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Research on unaccompanied children covers multiple disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. Some studies look at the pre-flight experiences of URM's (e.g. Hopkins & Hill, 2008; Thomas, Nafees & Bhugra, 2004), and some have a longitudinal perspective with follow up interviews with URM's (e.g. Backlund, Eriksson, von Greidd & Åkerlund, 2014a; Hessle, 2009). There are also studies from a child's rights perspective (e.g. Bhabha, 1999; Engebriksen, 2003; Lundberg & Dahlqvist, 2012). Though, much of the research focuses on mental health issues, trauma and emotional well being, with thematics of separation, trauma and loss. (Wernesjö, 2012, p. 495). Studies with a psychological perspective (e.g. Ascher, 2009; Ascher & Eastmond, 2011; Bean et al., 2007; Chase et al., 2008; Goodman, 2004) tend to view URM's as a high-risk group when it comes to vulnerability to mental health issues. A study from the Netherlands in 2007 compares the mental health and wellbeing of unaccompanied minors to children who migrated with family. They used children and youths that had been remitted to a psychiatric service centre between 2003 and 2004 as informants, whereof 59 were unaccompanied and 70 had migrated with their families. The study shows that those migrating alone were more prone to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological

issues (Wiese & Burhorst, 2007). Of all refugee minors in the study, both unaccompanied and those with family, 20 % had experienced sexual violence: 36 % of the unaccompanied and 7 % of those with family. (Ibid.). In a study by a research team from Austria and USA from 2009, where they did an overview of research regarding the mental health of unaccompanied minors, they concluded that most of the studies showed that the group was extra vulnerable and more prone to mental illness and PTSD compared to the general population and refugee children who migrated together with a relative. (Huemer et al., 2009). A study from Belgium in 2007 on emotional and behavioural problems amongst URM's concludes:

Unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents are a high risk group for the development of emotional problems, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Those who experienced many traumatic events and girls are even at greater risk for psychological distress. (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, p. 158)

Since there is, to an extent, consensus that the group in general is extra vulnerable to mental illness and PTSD, this offers specific challenges for the reception system in the host (asylum) country, in addition to the challenges connected to caring for children without parents or legal guardians. Social care in the asylum country have been addressed in several international studies (e.g. Eide, Kjelaas & Larsgaard, 2017; Kalverboer et al., 2017; Kohli, 2005, 2006, 2011; Newbigging & Thomas, 2011) as well as studies from Sweden (e.g. Stretmo & Melander, 2013; Backlund et al., 2012, 2014b; Backlund & Malmsten, 2013). A common concept found in this type of research is *resilience*: the child's ability to heal and develop despite being exposed to previous trauma. Lilja Cajvert (2018) describes it as "the individual's capacity to manage despite painful experiences. Good relations with friends, parents and peers are important and operates as a protection against self injury." (Cajvert, 2018, p. 180). The environment is declared as a crucial component in developing resilience, but the individuals own capacity is also proclaimed an important factor. Ulla Björnberg (2010) describes resilience as "both a result of an inherent ability of the individual and to what extent conditions in the family and in the surrounding community and culture convey health-promoting resources." (Björnberg, 2010, p. 116). This notion has further support in other studies of agency and resilience, as in a study by Ketil Eide & Anders Hjern (2013), and it implicates that to be successful in working with children and youth that have suffered traumatic experiences (such as sexual violence), providing a caring and safe environment is vital. Though, this might be a difficult and contradictory position for professionals to take when the migration and asylum policy allows for fewer to be granted residence permits (Eide & Hjern, 2013).

3.1 Sexual Exploitation

Studies with a specific focus on sexual violence and URM is scarcer in research with a medical/psychological perspective. Sexual violence might not be overlooked, but it is commonly mentioned as one risk amongst others that URM are more exposed to. In research focused on human trafficking with children, URM are often mentioned as a risk group. Farrah Bokhari (2008) performed a study of human trafficking for sexual or other purposes with children in the UK. It shows that most of the trafficked children were separated from their parents, either before or after they came in contact with the traffickers. Children with uncertain asylum status were extra vulnerable, and children who had fallen victim to trafficking had a high risk of disappearing from authorities if they ever make contact. (Bokhari, 2008). Bokhari uses the term 'separated children' instead of 'unaccompanied (refugee) minors' because not all trafficked children are refugees, and not all apply for asylum. Here is an important distinction between children who are being separated from their parents by traffickers, or those that for other reasons (war, poverty, violence, etc.) migrate alone. The definitions are not always crystal clear, and one child can potentially be defined in both terms. The distinction between smuggling and trafficking is also not easily defined. In a study of unaccompanied minors that cross the border from Belgium to the UK, Broekaert & Derluyn (2005) state that due to the restrictions made by the European member states to decrease the inflow of migrants, many have been forced to turn to traffickers and smugglers:

Networks of human smugglers have proven to be highly successful in moving large numbers of people illegally, and in amassing substantial profits. Violence, coercion, and exploitation are an integral part of smuggling, and therefore, it is impossible to discuss smuggling without trafficking, although it remains difficult to get a clear distinction between both concepts. (Broekaert & Derluyn, 2005, p. 32)

Hence, there is a clear risk for refugees trying to get into Europe to fall victim to smugglers and human traffickers and others that may exploit their situation. The high risk for sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking during war, flight and in asylum centres in Europe is something that NGOs have been raising alarms on for years. (e.g. Save the Children, 2018a, 2018b; UNICEF, 2016; UNHCR, 2003). In a study by Oliveira, Keygnaert, Oliveria & Dias (2018), they investigate sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in different asylum facilities in Europe. The residents in such facilities (refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers) are assumed to be extra vulnerable to SGBV. 562 respondents participated (375 residents and 186 professionals), and 56 % were males. The professionals reported on

370 cases of SGBV and the residents on 328 cases that they could recall from the year prior to the interview. (Oliveira et al., 2018).

Thomas et al. (2004) investigates the pre-flight experiences of URM's who applied for asylum in the UK by looking at social services case files and legal statement reviews, and conducted semi-structured interviews with 100 URM's. They wanted to identify the main reasons for URM's to apply for asylum in the UK as well as their pre-flight experiences from their home country, with the objective of improving health care and social services provided for the group. The study shows:

The most prominent finding of the study was that some form of violence was the primary reason for flight in almost all cases. Of particular concern was the finding that a third (32%) of the young people included in this study reported being raped before leaving their country of origin, with around half of these reporting multiple rapes. Rape as a weapon of war is not a new phenomenon, refugee women have a high risk of rape during conflict and flight. However, this study highlights that it is not only girls who are the victims of sexual violence. A number of boys in this study reported that they were raped or sexually violated either before leaving their country of origin, or on their journey to the UK. (Thomas et al., 2004, p. 119)

In addition to the pronounced risks for women, children and URM's during war and flight, an unsure legal status also increases the risk for sexual exploitation. In an article by Bishop & Ramirez (2014), directed towards physicians that meet URM's from Central America in the US, they offer advice on how to tackle the challenge of treating patients with uncertain legal status, fear of authorities and scarce resources. In the article they briefly mention that "[t]his population has a considerable risk of sexual violence before, during, and after migration." (Bishop & Ramirez, 2014, p. 656). In the same journal Brown, Powell & Pelletier (2014) writes a response to the article where they argue that Bishop & Ramirez overlooks one major challenge for health care staff: recognizing victims of trafficking when the patients have an uncertain legal status. They raise awareness on domestic sex trafficking of minors, where URM's are seen as especially vulnerable to sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation. They advise that physicians should be prepared to identify this group, and suggest education and the utilization of available resources to improve practice. (Brown et al., 2015). This discussion points towards the difficulties that health care staff and other official representatives face when directing help towards a group that due to their legislative status may be elusive. It is a catch 22: undocumented refugees are more vulnerable to exposure to sexual violence and in need of help and resources, but the fear of detainment and deportation if they are caught keeps many away from authorities. Hence, a spiral of vulnerability and exposure is maintained.

3.2 Official Reports & NGO's

In 2003, UNHCR noted with distress that refugees run great risk of exposure to sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation during the flight and upon arrival in the asylum country. Women and children, especially children without a legal guardian, were considered extra vulnerable. UNHCR made a connection between unequal power relations, humanitarian crises, lack of basic protection and access to material necessities and an increased risk for sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation. (UNHCR, 2003). Their conclusion carries great similarities with available information on the situation today. (Save the Children, 2018a, 2018b; UNICEF, 2016)

The group's vulnerability, both outside of and in Sweden, to exploitation and human trafficking has been highlighted in numerous recent official reports in Sweden. Though, none have a *specific* focus on sexual violence and it is often mentioned as one risk amongst others. In addition, the focus is foremost on the risk for human trafficking where URM's are identified as a risk group. Especially vulnerable are those that, for varying reasons, disappear from authorities. The County Administrative Board in Stockholm was tasked by the Swedish government to coordinate the national action against URM's that disappear between 2016-2018. They are also the national coordinator against human trafficking with children. This has resulted in numerous reports, action plans and guidelines for professionals to work preventive and responsive against disappearance and trafficking. (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b, 2017b, 2018). The reports show what URM's are extra vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual or other purposes, in Sweden as well as internationally. The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden was tasked with interviewing unaccompanied refugee minors to find out why they disappear and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance. They estimate that 1.736 (around 3,7 % of all URM's) disappeared between January 2014 and October 2017. By the time they published the report, only 300 had been found or located – 1 456 were still out in society without any protection or access to civil rights. The most common reasons for disappearance are assumed to be that the minor wants to go to another municipality, fear or distrust of authorities, or that they have no intention of applying for asylum. Fear of refusal, or enforcement of rejection (and deportation) are major reasons for disappearance as well. As far as current studies show, sexual violence is not the most common cause for disappearance, but how big a part it plays is unknown. (Barnombudsmannen, 2017; Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2016b). That URM's

disappear is not unique for Sweden. Europol reported that around 10 000 minors have disappeared from asylum centres all around Europe, which may be a possible underestimation. (Barnombudsmannen, 2017). In all the reports it is assumed that URM's are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation during the time of disappearance.

In 2017, the County Administrative Board in Stockholm lead the project "Dare To Be Important" ("Våga vara viktig"), that resulted in an educational concept for professionals that meet URM's in their home and care environment. The knowledge is based on trauma-conscious care and serves as help for professionals to create safe and trustful relationships with children and adolescents. (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2017a). In other official reports the focus is on mental health issues amongst URM's (Region Skåne, 2016), a knowledge foundation for the primary health care regarding young refugees and mental health (Socialstyrelsen, 2015a), and educational material for professionals who meet children and youth that sell sex (Socialstyrelsen, 2015b).

Even though URM's are acknowledged as vulnerable to different sorts of violence (including sexual), both in their home countries, during flight and in Sweden, the information at hand rarely focuses on how professionals in Sweden actively can work against sexual vulnerability. Sexual violence is often mentioned as one risk amongst others that constitutes the reality for unaccompanied children in Sweden. Therefore, by adding that perspective this study contributes to the knowledge development about the reception of unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden.

4. MAPPING OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The theme "unaccompanied refugee minors and sexual violence" involves several forms of violence and includes the violence committed against as well as by URM's. The following mapping departs from the general flight and asylum process for URM's applying for asylum in Sweden, and from where in the process there is a pronounced risk for disappearance from authorities. As will be explained further down, there is a correlation between exposure to sexual violence and disappearance. The different situations for sexual violence is classified into four main categories: **a.** Sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation during the flight, **b.** Sexual violence in different group housings in Sweden, **c.** Sexual offenses in public spaces in Sweden, and **d.** Sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation during disappearance from authorities and/or while living outside of the asylum process

(undocumented). In each category there are specific challenges for different professional groups to work preventive and factors that facilitate the violence. Visible in fig. 4.1 below are the *risk zones* and how they relate to the asylum process with risk zones for disappearance. The following mapping is based on the *general asylum process*, and not all unaccompanied minors go through all of the steps. Due to the heterogeneity of the group 'URMs', a mapping such as this must be seen in a general sense where common features are laid out.

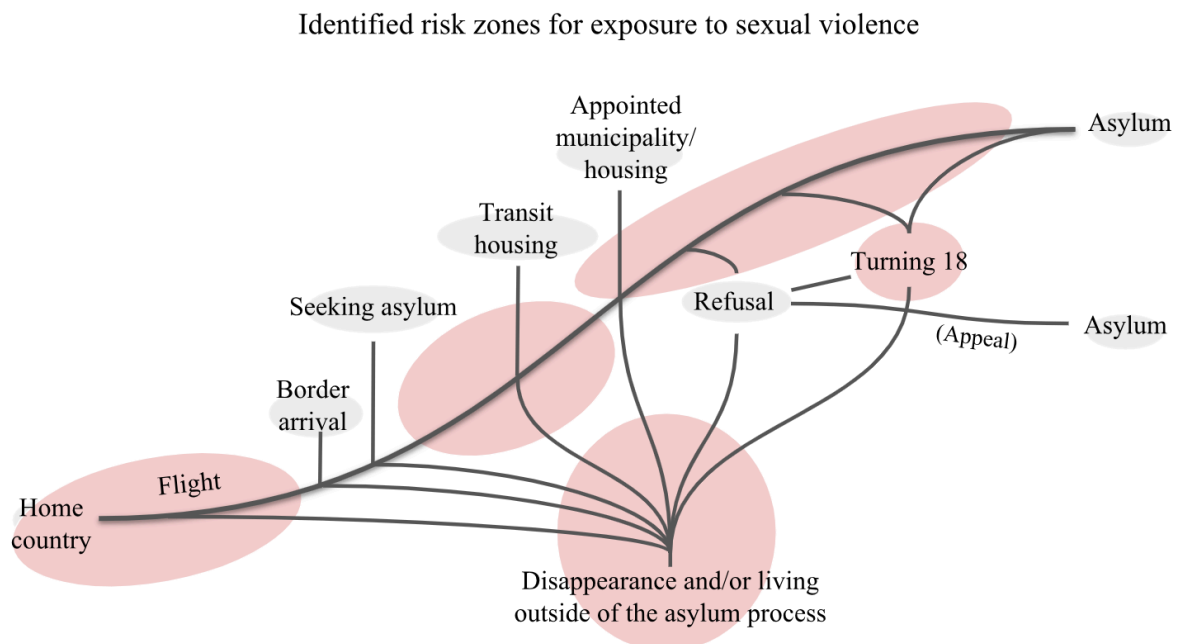


Fig. 4.1

Before going into the different risk situations there is a need to overlook the general asylum process that is laid out in Fig. 4.1. The list includes concerned professionals in each step:

The child arrives in Sweden

- The child makes itself known to Swedish authorities, or;
- If the police encounter the child at the border they will escort them to the Migration Agency.
- If it is past working hours, 'social jour' (social services that work nights and weekends) will be contacted, and a first interview at the Migration Agency will start after they arrive and the child can make its application for asylum.
- *Concerned professionals: Border police, the Migration Agency and social services, asylum lawyers*

Arrival municipality

- The Migration Agency starts an investigation to determine the identity and age of the child and they investigate if the child can apply for asylum in Sweden or if another European country is responsible (according to the Dublin Regulation).
- The municipality where the child first makes itself known to authorities in Sweden are responsible for housing during the time of investigation. (Transit homes)

- If the child can apply for asylum they are to be appointed to a municipality as soon as possible. The Migration Agency puts in a request for a legal guardian to the municipality that are responsible at the time.
- *Concerned professionals: Staff at housings, social services, health care staff, the Migration Agency, school staff and the Police Department (in case of crime by and against URM)s*

Appointed municipality

This is where the child stays during the course of the investigation on reasons for asylum by the Migration Agency. The municipality is responsible to investigate the child's needs and to offer housing, school, social services and health care.

- *Concerned professionals: Staff at housings, social services, health care staff, the Migration Agency, school staff and the Police Department (in case of crime by and against URM)s*

Refusal

If the child gets a refusal on the application they can appeal the decision two times. First the Migration Court will consider it, and if they stand by the decision made by the Migration Agency, an appeal to the Migration Court of Appeals can be made. They do not consider all cases.

- *Concerned professionals: The Police Department (Deportation), the Migration Agency, staff at housings, health care staff, NGOs and asylum lawyers*

Turning 18

If the child turns 18, or is considered to be 18 according the Migration Agency (age assessment), they are considered adult asylum seekers, and other rules now apply. They are not allowed to stay in housings for minors and they no longer have a legal guardian. Different rules for health care and founding applies, and the responsibility over the person is transferred from the municipality to the Migration Agency.

- *Concerned professionals: The Migration Agency, staff at housings, health care staff and NGOs, social services, school staff*

Approval

The appointed municipality are responsible to provide care of minors that gets a resident permit and they are to give the child a permanent legal guardian. The case gets disclosed at the Migration Agency.

4.1 Home Country & Flight

Sexual violence during flight and in the home country concerns human trafficking and exploitation as well as other forms of sexual violence for non-profit purposes. Perpetrators of rape and assaults can be smugglers, another, often older, refugee, personnel working with refugees, police and other officials, or other persons around refugees and asylum centres. The increased risk for sexual abuse and exploitation for children in migration is internationally acknowledged, and multiple NGOs stress that unaccompanied refugee minors are especially vulnerable. (e.g. UNHCR, 2003; UNICEF, 2016; Save the Children, 2018a). In the Swedish Police Department's annual report (2017) on human trafficking in Sweden they state that the number of reports on suspected human trafficking filed by the Swedish Migration Agency have increased with 30 % between 2015 and 2017. The majority of the crimes have been committed outside of Sweden. The increase is partly explained by the fact that the Migration

Agency have trained several of their officers in identifying potential victims of trafficking, but *also* that criminal networks are targeting migrants to a larger extent. According to the Police, there is a pronounced risk for people that migrate to Sweden from areas affected by war to fall victims to criminal networks, both during the flight (inside and outside of Europe) and in Sweden. Women and children run a greater risk of being forced to prostitution to pay for their journey (Polismyndigheten, 2017).

The notion that URM's are especially vulnerable to sexual violence during war and flight was well established amongst the informants. One, working with refugees at an NGO, said: "sexual violence is very present in these young people's lives. Either they have been exposed, or they know someone, or know *of* someone. The assault is often committed by adult migrants during the flight. That makes them scared of living with adults." (Personnel at NGO 1, Malmö). Another stated:

Most of them [afghan refugees] come from Afghanistan through Greece and Athens. In some areas in Athens a lot of refugees and lonely children and youths are staying. And in these areas you can see, quite clearly, young boys and girls in the company of older men and women. Whether they talk about it or not, they have been in that environment, and that is just Athens. Before, they were in Turkey, and then they go up through Germany and Austria. So, you don't know. They make jokes about brothels and such. We do not know for sure. But we know that it happens. (Staff at group housing, Malmö, FG 4:1)

Here the informant states that he knows what kind of environment the minors have been through, and because of that she can imagine what some have been exposed to. There is a perception that many might have been exposed that does not, necessarily, come from actual testimonies, but from pre-existing knowledge on the general situation. This notion will be addressed further in chapter 6.1 'Developing Trust'.

4.2 Group Homes

The category 'group homes' is divided into three subcategories: housing upon arrival (transit), housing in appointed municipality (HCL-homes), and adult group housing after turning 18 (or being assessed as 18). In each type of housing there are some specific challenges for professionals, and certain risk situations that are unique for that form of housing.

Upon arrival when a minor applies for asylum in Sweden, the Migration Agency can assess their age as different than they stated in their application. As a result, a minor could have to share transit housing with adults while the age assessment is conducted. That unaccompanied minors are housed with adults is not praxis in Sweden, but it can happen in the example mentioned above, or when they turn, or have their age reassessed to, 18 later in

the asylum process. They can no longer stay at their group home for minors, and they are in some cases offered a place at a group housing for adults that may be located in a different part of the country. The responsibility over housing moves from the municipality to the Migration Agency. (Under act 2001:453 & 1994:136) This could be a potential risk situation, as is exemplified in the quote above by the informant who states that there is a fear of living with adults due to experiences from the flight. One informant stated that she had heard youths say “I cannot live in this place with adults”, or if it was a girl living with boys “I cannot even go to the bathroom without having a fear of getting raped” (Social worker 1, Lund, FG 2:3).

Mixed housings (girls and boys) can occur both in transit housings and housings in appointed municipality. In a report by Human Rights Watch (2016) they criticise Sweden for not offering sufficient support for minors that suffered sexual abuse during flight, and for housing exposed girls in homes together with boys:

When we spoke with [name], she was living in Sweden at a home with over a dozen boys. She told her social worker she wanted to be in a group home without boys because of the rape and harassment she had experienced: “I told the social worker what happened to me. From the beginning I told them I don’t want to be in a camp with the 15 boys.” (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p. 10)

The report continues by criticizing the support offered to minors who have experience of sexual abuse during flight:

Although Nadia had a general health check-up, her social worker did not refer her for postrape care, gynecological care or psychological support. Nadia’s experience painfully illustrates the particular vulnerabilities of unaccompanied girls, and of unaccompanied children in general, as well as gaps in care and attention once they reach Sweden. Though Swedish law and policy provide that children should receive screening and support for their mental and physical health needs, our findings suggest that children are not always receiving such care. (Ibid.)

To arrange a housing for girls only have proven difficult for some municipalities to arrange, much due to the imbalance between the amount of boys (86 %) and girls (14 %) that arrived in Sweden between 2000 and 2017. (*Jönköpings-Posten*, 2016-07-11). There are also reports on sexual violence from ‘boys only’ homes, where the violence are directed from staff against residents, residents against staff, resident against another resident, or a resident against someone on the outside. (e.g. Alfredsson, 2017-12-14; Carp & Wierup, 2015-09-10; Peijel, 2016-12-30; Öfwerström, 2015-11-19). Therefore, it is a challenge for professionals (especially housing staff) to assess where the threat most likely is coming from. It is not as simple as assessing adult and mixed housing as ‘risk situations’ since the sexual violence takes many directions and can be found in different forms of housing. One informant reflects:

There is group behaviour amongst the boys. In a way it is positive, because sometimes someone in the group tells something that another boy have done. But they can also abuse each other in group, in a way. There are forms of sexual abuse that happens between the boys that does not happen between the girls. But at the same time, the girls are more alone and exposed, during the flight and all. All the problems that come with gender roles. I think that the girls disappear a bit in all of it, but at the same time you do not see the problems amongst the boys. (Social worker 2, Lund, FG 1:2)

Here the social worker expresses something interesting. That in a way, both the vulnerability of girls and boys is overlooked at the same time as both are being noticed. Girls are described as more exposed, but their situation overlooked all the same. The violence between boys is overlooked as well, due to misleading ideas on sexual violence and gender.

4.3 Sexual Offences in Public Space

One of the most occurring themes in the media coverage of URM and sexual violence regarded young migrants who sexually assaulted and harassed young girls in public spaces, such as bathhouses and festivals. As will be made visible in the overview of the media content analysis in chapter 5, this begun in 2016 when assaults at the festival *We are Sthlm* were uncovered.

These events made the Swedish national police chief initiate an investigation over the risks for exposure to sexual harassment amongst youths. In the report “Status report on sexual harassment and suggested actions” (2016) (“Lägesbild över sexuella ofredanden och förslag till åtgärder”) they look at all reported cases from 2011 to 2016 and it includes 10.000 cases. They note a 25 percent increase in reported cases between 2011-2015 (Polismyndigheten, 2016, p. 10). They state that a majority of the offences are committed against girls younger than 15. However, crimes against boys happen. Crimes committed in public spaces, such as festivals, only constitutes around one percent of the reported crimes. In addition, in most cases the perpetrator acted alone and there are few cases with more than one perpetrator. (ibid., p. 3).

The report shows that in sexual crimes committed in public and in groups, with two or more perpetrators, the alleged perpetrators were mainly foreign born. Asylum-seeking boys were mainly the suspects in harassment reported on in bathhouses. In crimes committed in streets, walkways and public transportation the typical perpetrator is a middle-aged man. Most sexual harassments are committed online, and a majority of the perpetrators are unknown. However, 85 percent of the known alleged perpetrators of online sexual harassment

are Swedish citizens. (Ibid., p. 17). In conclusion, asylum-seeking boys are overrepresented in crimes committed in bathhouses, and foreign born men and boys in crimes committed in groups. But in comparison with the total number of reported cases, these offences are few. Despite this, as the media content analysis will show, the media reported extensively about these types of sexual harassment.

4.4 Disappearance and/or Undocumented

As the reports from authorities about URMs and disappearance show, this is an exposed situation with a high risk of sexual exploitation. The reasons behind disappearance vary, as well as the level of voluntariness. When the County Administrative Board in Stockholm asked the municipalities in Sweden about their knowledge on the reasons behind disappearance, approximately 75 % of the answers were ‘unknown’ or ‘unanswered’. (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2016b). This points to a great lack of knowledge. As is stated earlier, the most common reasons are assumed to be fear or distrust of authorities, that the minors wants to go to another city or that they have no intentions of applying for asylum. And importantly: fear of a rejection or deportation. The information at hand indicates that sexual violence is not the most common cause, but it can be one of many reasons that eventually make the minor disappear. (Barnombudsmannen, 2017). A combination of factors, such as the conditions at the housing, fear of a new housing, and fear of the results from the asylum process can all together cause disappearance. Most minors disappear early in the process before they have applied for asylum, or before the investigation has started. The two most common nationalities that disappear from transit housings are Moroccan and Algerian. The reason for that is assumed to be their low trust of authorities and the knowledge of their slim chances of being granted asylum in Sweden. Disappearance after the asylum process has started and the minor have been appointed to a municipality is not as common, and it is often connected to a rejection of the asylum application. (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2016b).

During the time as ‘disappeared’, the youths are exposed to different forms of abuse and exploitation and there is no supervision from responsible authorities. Living as deviated from authorities, they run a risk of falling victim to human trafficking, and being taken advantage of due to their vulnerable position (Barnombudsmannen, 2017; Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2016b & 2018). Undocumented refugees (either those that came into the country as undocumented or those that disappear after rejection) live under similar conditions with the same vulnerability. The most prominent difference between ‘only’ being

disappeared and being undocumented and is that you can be deviated and not undocumented, but it is hard to be undocumented and not disappear from authorities out of fear of detention and deportation. Hence, for those that live as undocumented, contacting Swedish authorities is not an alternative.

During disappearance there is a pronounced risk of having to sell sex for housing, food and other necessities. Competence Centre Against Prostitution in Malmö have recently begun to have contact with unaccompanied youths that have turned, or are considered to be, 18 and live on the streets. They state that the problem is widespread within the group and that many sell sex to pay for necessities. (Oldberg, 2018-10-15). Since they no longer are considered minors, they cannot stay in their previous housing. Some are offered a place at a group housing for adults that might be located in another city, and sometimes in a different part of the country. For those that want to stay in school and with their friends, the situation becomes difficult. In addition, they can have a fear of living with adults. Due to this, some become homeless and live on the streets, or they run the risk of staying with someone who exploits their vulnerability.

This has proven to be an issue in regards to the new law adopted in 2018 (act 2018:756) that allows for URM's that had to wait long for their application and turned 18 during the process to re-apply for asylum for studies. They can apply if the following conditions are met: they applied for asylum before November 24 2015: they had to wait for a decision for over 15 months: the decision was taken when the applicant had turned 18: they are still staying in Sweden, and: they study or intend to study at a Swedish gymnasium program or equivalent. Since this law applies to those over 18, housing becomes an issue. Neither the municipality nor the Migration agency has a responsibility to arrange for housing (Odén, 2018-10-18), thus putting the youths at risk for homelessness and an exposed situation.

5. MEDIA OVERVIEW

The articles included in the study is categorized by how they portrayed/discussed URM's (as victims, perpetrators or both) and if the articles reports on a specific case or holds a general discussion about URM's and sexual violence. Notable in fig 5.1 below, showing the 'specific cases', is the peak in reported cases in 2016, a trend that followed in 2017. Importantly, the peak in 2016 only regards cases where URM's have been accused of sexual offence. In 2015

there is an increase in cases where URM are both the victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. 2017 sees an increase of cases where URM are considered victims of sexual violence:

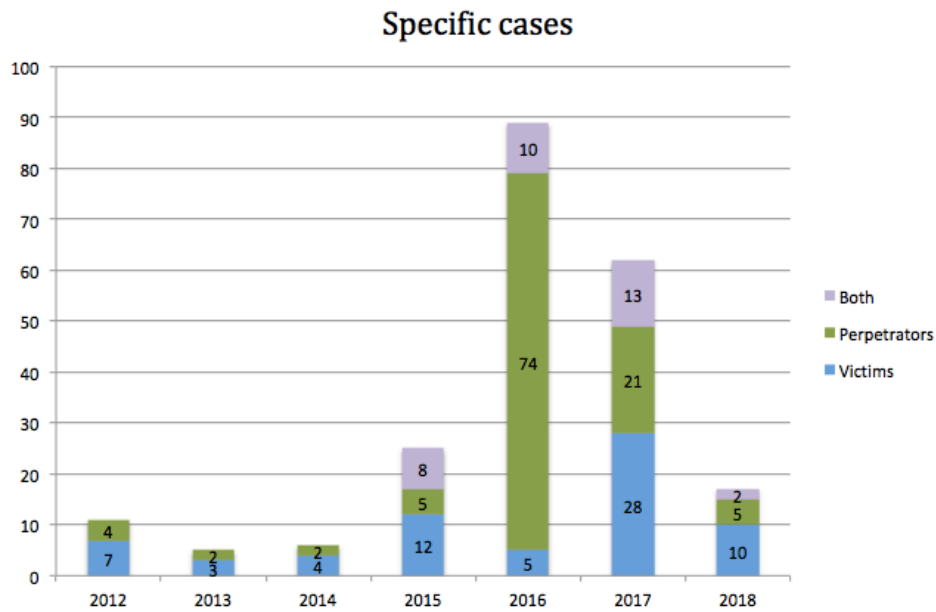


Fig. 5.1

Regarding the ‘general discussion’ (fig. 5.2) the trend is similar with a peak in 2016 on articles where URM are discussed in relation to committing sexual offenses. However, there is also an increase in discussions where URM are victims, or vulnerable, from 2015-2017 compared to previous years:

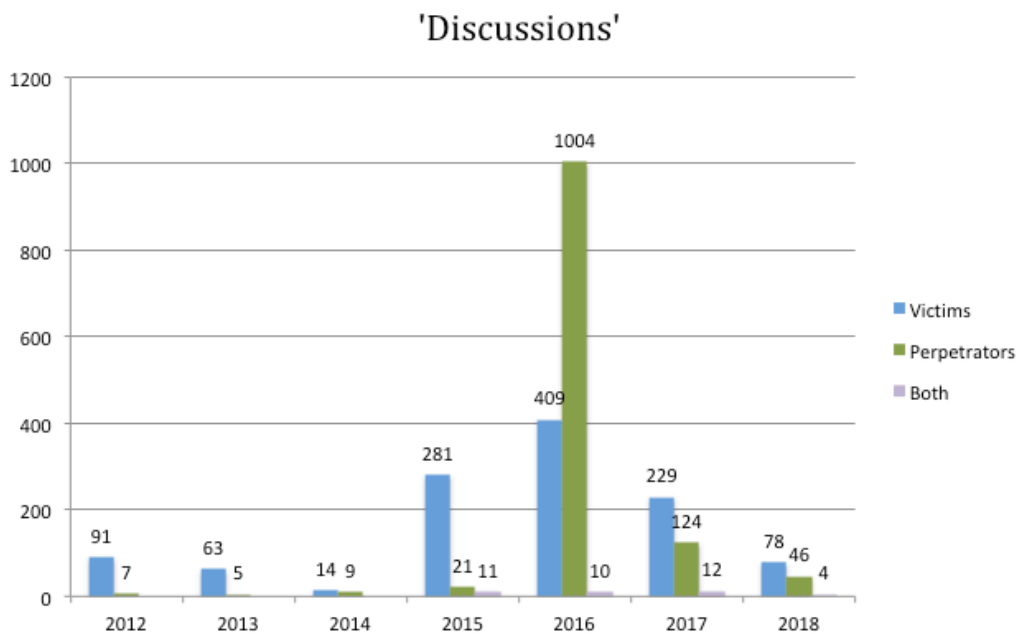


Fig. 5.2

These charts prompt some questions: what happens in 2016 that causes the number of articles regarding URM and sexual violence to increase, specifically in regards to URM as perpetrators? Why is there an increase in articles between 2015-2017 that discusses them as victims of or vulnerable to sexual exploitation? To answer that it is necessary to look back at the year's prior and what was reported on in those years.

Between 2012 and 2014, the most common topics about URM in Swedish news media regarded the reception and asylum system in Sweden (e.g. *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, 2014-09-27; *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 2014-06-27) and the situation in the municipalities regarding housing and social care (e.g. *Dagen*, 2014-09-30; *Laholms tidning*, 2014-12-23; Rönnsved, 2014-06-28). Thus, the debate had a practical, organizational approach. Between 2012 and 2014 there are a handful of specific cases of sexual abuse that were reported on, and a majority (14/22) were cases where URM had been victims of sexual abuse. The majority of the 'discussion' articles published between 2012 and 2014 were either as a reaction to a specific well known case or when a topic, such as URM that disappear, gain big media interest. The reports mostly highlighted the risk for human trafficking and/or exploitation during flight and in Sweden; hence the 'URM as victims' is high in comparison to 'URM as perpetrators' during these years. This lead to political discussions regarding how to prevent trafficking and exploitation of children in migration, inside and outside of Sweden. (e.g. Larsson, 2014-02-24; Ridell, 2014-03-22). The government then assigned the County Administrative Board in Stockholm the task of coordination the work against human trafficking with children and to investigate especially vulnerable groups. The topic of sexual vulnerability and human trafficking during flight and in Sweden (especially during disappearance from authorities) were put on the agenda and it later resulted in several published reports and action plans. Due to this, the risk for human trafficking, where children and women are described as most vulnerable, were more in focus in 2015 compared to before (e.g. *Aftonbladet*, 2015-10-25; Welin, 2015-11-10; Ahlstrand, Gyllenring & Wallin, 2015). In addition to this, the safety at group homes was discussed in relation to some cases of sexual abuse by staff against residents (e.g. Öfwerström, 2015-11-19; *Nya Värmlands Tidning*, 2014-12-18). A lack of background checks for personnel at group and family homes was raised as an issue.

During 2015 there are few articles mentioning unaccompanied refugees as perpetrators in comparison to 2016. This goes in line with the results from an overview done by the newspaper *ETC* where they show that between 2000 and 2015, 167 articles were

published regarding sexual violence and URMs. 152 of those portrayed them as victims, and 15 as perpetrators. In 2016, they found one article that portrayed them as victims, and 75 as perpetrators. (ETC, 2016-02-06). Note that this article was written in February of 2016, meaning that the statistics from 2016 only covered two months, and the former 15 years. Looking at both their overview and the one presented above, it can be established that the shift in media coverage of sexual violence took place in 2016. However, in a recent study by the Swedish Institute for Media Studies (ed. Truedson, 2018) they look at how Sweden is portrayed in the media, both in national and international press. The head of the institution, Lars Truedson, comments the book: “The coverage in media follows the political discussion, and when the government proposed a stricter migration policy in autumn 2015 the coverage in media changed regarding, among other things, unaccompanied children. A darker picture emerged where a higher proportion of the articles were about unaccompanied children in relation to criminality.” (Lundin, 2018-10-15). Since this “darker picture” does not really include sexual violence during 2015, it is mostly about violent crime in relation to asylum seekers. (e.g. Lund, 2015-12-26). Truedson argue that there is a shift in the way that media portrays URMs, and that this shift follows the political and public discourse regarding refugees. When looking at the statistics of unaccompanied minors that applied for asylum in Sweden it becomes clear that this shift coincides with a peak, and later decrease, in the reception.⁷ After 2015, the Swedish Government enforced a temporary law (act 2016:752) to decrease the number of refugees that applied for asylum in Sweden. Along with increased border controls, the new law restricted most granted asylums to temporary and not permanent. It was initially applicable until July 19-2019, but was later extended until July 19-2021.

The fact that the Swedish Institute for Media Studies identifies a darker turn in the coverage in 2015 and that this turn, according to *ETC* and this study, does not include sexual violence until 2016, it is interesting to investigate what happens in the beginning of 2016 that increases the number och articles on sexual violence and unaccompanied refugee minors.

On new years eve 2015 there were reports of mass assaults on women in Cologne, Germany: “What is particularly disturbing is that the attacks appear to have been organised. Around 1,000 young men arrived in large groups, seemingly with the specific intention of carrying out attacks on women.” (*BBC News*, 2016-01-05). Arabic asylum seekers and asylum seekers

from North Africa were identified as perpetrators. This was the start of an international debate about the connection between refugees and sexual assault. (Mikkelsen, 2016-01-17) In Sweden, the debate took off in earnest after the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* revealed that sexual assault had taken place during the festival *We are Sthlm* in Stockholm, and that these assaults, allegedly, had been covered up by authorities and police due to the fact that the perpetrators were unaccompanied refugee minors. (e.g. *Dagens Nyheter*, 2016-01-11, 2016-01-13; Bouvin & Wierup 2016-01-11; Wierup 2016-01-09).

The debate in Sweden was focused on sexual assaults in public places, such as festivals, bathhouses and in sports facilities and the crimes were often committed by a group of young boys. Unaccompanied refugee minors were pointed out as perpetrators of these types of offences and the narrative of URM as sexual perpetrators took a hold in the media, especially in some alternative media outlets. This is made very clear in an article about a six-year-old girl who was raped by a teenage boy, where the journalist ends by stating: "According to [the police] the teenage perpetrator is not a so called unaccompanied refugee minor." (Albinsson, 2017-07-20). The journalist must, presumably, have asked the police whether the perpetrator was an unaccompanied minor or not, since it would be unlikely that the police by themselves just mentioned that it was *not* a URM responsible for the crime. This question directed towards to police points towards an interest in finding out the identity of the perpetrator, and importantly: a presumption that the perpetrator *is* an unaccompanied refugee minor.

The public debate on URM as perpetrators in general, and on sexual offenses in public space in particular, has generated different suggested solutions to the issue as well as explanations to the root of the problem. The Minister of Home Affairs at the time, Anders Ygeman, commented: "It is not like sexual harassment comes with refugees, unfortunately we have our own tradition of that. It is a crime that has occurred all the way. But of course the women's movement in Sweden have made huge progress and if you come from a totally different context we have to have an introduction in Sweden where we talk about equality issues, openness and sexuality, says Anders Ygeman." (Nordström, 2016-01-17). He stresses that one should not focus on ethnicity and cultural background, but at the same time we need to have introductions in Swedish values. He gives this statement in connection to the events at the festival *We are Sthlm* and in Cologne. The events in both Cologne and at the festival led to political action and the government called for educational material as well as stricter policies regarding sexual violence. These two solutions that Ygeman proposes can be categorized as *educational* and *punitive*.

The *educational* solution takes two main directions: One argues that it is our duty to offer migrants a chance at integration through knowledge and inclusion and that society in general stands to benefit from it. (e.g. Thurfjell, 2016-01-22). The other sees the education in Swedish values as mandatory for refugees to be allowed to stay. Even though these directions differ, they share a common ground: there is a need to teach Swedish values, because ‘theirs’ differ from ‘ours’. The *punitive* solution promotes harsher punishment and does not, at it most extreme, suggest education and information. The perpetrators, the deviants, should not be allowed in Sweden. (e.g. Dahlman, 2016-12-31). It is in this instance that the media representation and the public opinion on URM’s can have its strongest impact: should URM’s be granted or refused asylum? If the solution is to deport sexual offenders, and URM’s in general are perceived as such, this has an impact on the entire group. In the next section, 5.1 ‘Discursive Impact’ this will be further analysed.

At the end of 2017 the debate took another turn and the view on URM’s as perpetrators were more and more criticized. To further fuel this notion was the #Metoo movement that shifted focus from the “imported” problem with sexual assault and harassment and shed light on the problems that have long been established in Swedish society. (e.g. Westerlund, 2017-12-01). Hence, the debate that had been intensely focused on URM’s as perpetrators after the events in Cologne and *We are Sthlm* was now starting to become more nuanced and problematized. The total numbers of articles in 2018 are comparative low, a fact that possibly can be explained by a decreasing public interest in sexual violence in connection to URM’s. Instead, the debate shifted focus to more asylum-related issues. The most prominent reason for that is the new law adopted in 2018 (act 2018:756). Due to public and political pressure, the government decided to allow URM’s that had waited long for their application and turned 18 during the process to re-apply for asylum. The new law was extensively debated and was said to encompass approximately 9000 URM’s. (e.g. Trus & Granlund, 2018-09-25: *Lärarnas Tidning*, 2018-09-25). However, this new law had some complications that put URM’s in risk for sexual exploitation, as is mentioned in chapter 4.4 ‘Disappearance and/or Undocumented’. These factors contributed to decrease the number of articles regarding sexual violence and URM’s after 2016.

5.1 Discursive Impact

At this point it is relevant to examine *how* the narrative got established. And furthermore, what implications this narrative has had on the overall political and public discourse on unaccompanied refugee minors. The suspicion against the entire group, instead of individuals belonging to it, is made visible in this extract from an article about age assessment:

During 2015 around 36 000 so called unaccompanied refugee minors came to Sweden to apply for asylum. Around 90 percent of these were men and a majority from Afghanistan. [...] The consequences have been murder, assault, sexual assault in group homes and harassment of girls in bathhouses, concerts and festivals. There are some "bad apples" that committed these offences and I personally do not think you should tar everyone with the same brush. But to cover up and deny like some mass media has, that has to be completely devastating. (Nyqvist, 2017-01-11)

Even though the author talks about 'bad apples' and indicates that not *all* URMs are prone to sexual violence, he puts an increase in sexual crimes in direct link with the number of young unaccompanied refugee boys. The narrative is also highlighted in two articles reporting on a gang rape. Rapes, and gang rapes, have often been in the media in relation to group housings for refugee minors. The case concerns a boy that got raped by other boys at a group housing for unaccompanied refugees. The verdict was: "The prosecutor went for deportation, but due to their low age and the security situation in Afghanistan where the boys originate from, the court decided that they can stay in Sweden. Both the victim and the perpetrators are unaccompanied refugee minors." (Peijel, 2016-12-30). News like this awoke feelings, but mostly it was directed as anger towards the perpetrators and not as frustration over the lack of security at group housings. In this case both the victims and perpetrators are URMs, but the perpetrator-ness is given prominence. One journalist writes:

Put this event against the fact that there are people who have been deported from Sweden because they several years ago earned a few hundred-kronor notes to little or against the man who got deported because he found a job through LinkedIn and not through the state's own employment agency. Put it against thousands of Afghan youths - often well-behaved teenagers - now waiting to be sent home because they did not receive asylum. [...] Remember, dear readers, that not all unaccompanied from Afghanistan are rapists or molesters. There are many in the group that are nice friends to the children in school and who ambitiously have established themselves in Sweden. (Dahlman, 2016-12-31)

This is representative of a debate where different groups of refugees are set against each other. The journalist makes a connection between individuals who get deported when the perpetrators get to stay, thus creating a direct correlation between individual asylum cases. The perpetrators also get their status as minors revoked: the underlying opinion is that they

should be prosecuted as adults. This very much correlates with the discourse that unaccompanied minors are deceitful and lie about their age. Probably unknowingly, the journalist is latching on to the larger discourse of suspicion against URM that extends beyond this specific case. The journalist also feels a need to remind the reader that not all unaccompanied boys from Afghanistan are rapists; there are those that succeed in their integration. This indicates that the basic premise is to *not* fit in. Some succeed in learning - some do not.

The narrative about refugees and unaccompanied have consequences. In one article a journalist meets two people who took in six Afghan youths, and one of the youths expresses that the prejudices against Afghans affects how other people see him:

It is difficult to dare to make friends. The language complicates. The different experiences. And then what has happened, young Afghans that commit crime and sexual offences. It spills over. Makes people suspicious.
-There are some bad. And some nice. It is like that everywhere - in Iran, Sweden and surely in Afghanistan as well. I want to be a normal person, but many see me as a terrorist. (Treijls, 2017-03-16)

Others express the existence of this prejudice as well. In an article named “Swedish view on women on the schedule”, three asylum-seeking students are interviewed because their school has had education in Swedish values. Most of them are positive to the education being given, but one of them says: “Perhaps you think ”all refugee youth are like that”. No, everyone is not like that. I was shocked over what happened in Cologne.” (Thurfjell, 2016-01-22). Here it becomes evident that there is a need to take distance from these events and the values that have been attributed to the group. They also express that “some Swedes are afraid of them, and that it has gotten worse after newly arrived [refugees] was pointed out as guilty of sexual harassment. - You feel like you are outside of the community after what have happened. Everybody thinks ‘that is in immigrant, that is an immigrant’”. (Thurfjell, 2016-01-22). And it is not only sexual perpetration that gets connected to the group: they are seen as suspicions, lying about their age, and engaging in criminal activity. Individual minors thus have to recognize what other connects them to and they have to dissociate from it. The narrative creates a strong ‘them’ that are in stark contrast to ‘us’, and to what is ‘Swedish’. As the quote above show there is a feeling of being outside of the community, to be marked as an immigrant with all the negative connotations that come with it.

Other than individual consequences, this alienating narrative can have a larger impact. It is, however, difficult to measure what direct impact the narrative in Swedish news media

and in (some parts of) the public opinion has had on, for example, the prospects of asylum for individual URMs. The information at hand indicates that there is an assumption that this narrative *makes room* for a stricter migration policy, even though it might not be its cause. The lawyer and author Viktor Banke is interviewed about the situation for young unaccompanied refugees in Sweden. He talks about how ambitious they are, but how the public image of them has taken a turn:

A dark picture of unaccompanied is painted in the debate. They are described as men with values distanced from Swedish society and as a threat.
– When certain groups put all their energy in describing them as adults, sexual savages and criminals, it affects peoples image. Without the frenetic fight to demonise the group, the hard path had not been as easy to continue with, says Viktor Banke. (Lindberg, 2017-03-12)

The ‘hard path’ he is referring to is that of Sweden’s migration policy that changed in 2016 where the norm became temporary asylum permits or denial. He is onto the notion that this ‘demonising’ of URMs has had direct political implications. And as is stated in the study by the Swedish Institute for Media Studies, this ‘darker picture’ emerges simultaneously with Sweden’s stricter migration policy. (Truedson, 2018, p. 7). Hence, the notion is that the darker picture and the stricter migration policy enable each other in an interrelated way. Though it can be difficult to draw direct lines between the ‘public opinion’ and the coverage in media. In the publication from Swedish Institute for Media Studies, Paul Frigyes performs the study of URMs in the media. He states:

However my personal assessment is that the major, crucial change in the media rhetoric occurred in chronicles, in editorials and other opinion journalism as well as in social media. Not because the sharper tone in traditional media in itself determines the opinion’s view, but because it points out the narratives in the contemporary debate. (Frigyes, 2018, p. 55.)

He is onto something important: that the coverage and the tone does not directly determine and reflect the view of the people, but that it shows the emphasis of a certain narrative. Going back to Mather’s (2009) comment on sociology of law and how it can highlight the historical and societal construction of laws, it becomes evident that the discourse on URMs helped give way for a stricter legal treatment of them:

The study of law and society rests on the belief that legal rules and decisions must be understood in context. Law is not autonomous, standing outside of the social world, but is deeply embedded within society.” (Mather, 2009, p. 1)

But to understand and define ‘the social world’ is a complex task, hence it is difficult to determine what context the law making has to be viewed in. One such entry is therefore to examine the media and the public opinion as *a* context for law making, not *the* context. Looking back at Saraisky and how she views media content analysis as a tool to illuminate “patterns and trends that are not immediately observable” (Saraisky, 2016, p. 27), it can help understand how ideas and trends affect policy making in a certain area. A media content analysis can also discern inequalities in the media coverage, something that is of importance regarding URM. As Krippendorff (1989) states, a media content analysis can show the “inequality of the coverage of the two (or more) sides of a public controversy, the imbalance in the favourable and unfavourable treatment of an issue, public figure, or foreign country”. (Krippendorff, 1989, p. 404). As the overview of the media content analysis of URM shows, this is certainly the case here. Two sides of the issue have failed to be presented and the topic is unfavourably treated. This is evident when looking at the amount of coverage on public sexual assault on festivals and bathhouses, given that it only constitutes one percent of the reported sexual harassment cases. (Polismyndigheten, 2016).

But what underlying currents gives room for this unfavourable treatment of an issue, and why does this narrative take root? The political columnist Karin Pihl reflects in an article upon why, as she perceives, Swedish people are naive in their view on ‘others’ and why there is a tendency to trust that everyone will behave in a good and morally correct manner:

We trust each other. That has made us misunderstand human nature. Humans have both good and bad sides. If the social pressure is heavy, as it has been in Sweden, the “you don’t DO that”-ideology works to a large extent. But in an increasingly heterogeneous society, where many individuals have more loyalty against their clan than the state and the Swedish society, you have to have a more realistic view on people. (Pihl, 2017-12-08)

Pihl’s text points towards something interesting: that the high level of trust in Swedish society makes us naïve. Swedish peoples trust towards the ‘Nation-Thing’ (Zizek 2000) defines us as a nation, and those that are loyal to something else (the clan, as Pihl exemplifies with) threatens our way of trusting each other, our way of life. And in a way, she is onto the notion of exile: how the Swedish identity becomes important to define and protect when faced with something different. Hence, the boundaries of the Swedish subjects are seen in contrast to those that do not fit in the category. And it is also a comment that fits the narrative of ‘welfare nationalism’ (Brochmann & Hagelund, 2012; Siim & Meret, 2016) where the people and the nation are in unison with a high level of social trust. In the same manner as Chavez (2013)

argues that the media representation of immigrants from Latin America have constructed them as ‘alien’ and ‘illegal’, unaccompanied refugee minors in Sweden have been constructed as sexual deviants and deceitful about their age. And as Chavez says that the narrative in describes Latina fertility as a “serious threat to the nation” (Chavez, 2013, p. 109), so do refugees in general and URMs in particular pose a threat to the Swedish order and equality. And in addition, it becomes a way for Swedish people to distance themselves from that kind of behaviour. When ascribing sexual perpetrator-ness as something inherent in the others identity, you can dissociate and free yourself of blame.

The narrative of URMs as perpetrators of sexual violence has been prominent, but it has not, however, been unopposed. Especially at the end of 2017 when the #Metoo-movement started, light was shed on sexual violence in all levels of society. In a chronicle commenting on the political implications of #Metoo, the journalist Erik Fichtelius comments:

The right-wing extremist propaganda have for long been that it is the muslim immigration that is the problem of crime, especially sexual crimes. The news-imitating hate sites concentrates their »reporting« on violent and sexual crimes committed by young men with arabic origin. That image becomes a bit more difficult to maintain when the worst offenders seems to be within the finery of culture. (Fichtelius, 2017-12-01)

The testimonies from women about sexual abuse taking place in prominent, cultural circles thus challenge this image of the ‘imported’ problem with sexual violence against women. In an interview with Lena Martinsson, professor in gender studies, she reflects upon these testimonies from women that came into light during #Metoo, and how that challenge the perception of the Swedish equality:

She says that the Swedish self-image is fundamentally shaken when testimonies come from a lot of different groups in society.

- It challenges the concept of the Swedish, white equality-identity. It is spoken of as a linear development and the rhetoric is that Sweden has come a long way in regards to equality.

When the refugee-wave hit Sweden unaccompanied children were viewed by many as a threat to the safety of girls in contrast to the equal and safe Swedish [way], says Martinsson.

- That narrative, that the problem would be people from the outside, is strongly challenged today. It is really important to make that visible, because that in and of itself is a nationalistic and racist understanding. (Westerlund, 2017-12-01).

Martinsson states that the (nationalistic) idea of the Swedish ideal as equal, non-sexual violent and safe in comparison to the ‘others’, who’s view on women and equality are not as developed, is challenged by the testimonies brought to light during #Metoo. Hence, the self-

image becomes challenged and perhaps it is more difficult to dissociate from sexual violence as part of the own, cultural and national identity. The shifting of blame becomes more difficult to maintain. And around the same time as the narrative about sexual violence shifted from being an imported problem that came with refugees to something that is inherent in the 'Swedish' identity as well, the public debate around URMs slightly changed. Instead, focus was back on reasons for asylum, and unsure and prolonged asylum processes. Hence, it can be argued that it made room for the later political changes that allowed URMs that had waited long for the processing of their application to re-apply. (act 2018:756, see p. 29 & 34).

At this point it is relevant to ask: what implications does this alienating narrative have on the professionals? In this extract two informants talk about how they feel about the image portrayed in the media, and how to counter it:

- You can sometimes feel that, with the job you have, when you step outside of that bubble, you need to defend the group you are working with. Like, there are so many preconceptions and it is very difficult sometimes to, well, sometimes you are taken aback because it is on such a basic level. When you meet a lot of people who does not deal with the group in any way, and there is a notion that well, of course all youths are older than they state. The assumption that they are not children is very present. Many think only about the negative that is reported on. There are never, very rarely, articles about how well they are doing and all the ordinary things that happen at the homes. (Staff at group housing, Malmö, FG 4:1)

- I recognise that. You feel like you are an advocate of this to compensate the image. I think that what we can do is to show this opposite image and keep on telling people about it. How well they are doing, how good they are and how they are fighting, and how, well, amazingly talented and good [they are] despite all the hardships. But I can absolutely feel a frustration, and do you always have the energy to deal with it? (School counsellor, Malmö, FG 4:1)

These statements are onto something important: why does their image differ so greatly from the image presented in the media? One reason is, as they say, that the media rarely reports on the positive, everyday events and only focuses on the negative. The nuanced picture is only available for those that meet the youths. And trust, or distrust, is dependent on closeness in social space. Distance in social space, and by extension the possibilities for distrust to develop or prejudice to take root, are considered to be determined by ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion or political ideology. (Triandis & Minturn Triandis, 1960). Hence, the 'general' person with prejudice against URMs might be far away from them in social space. And for those who work closely with URMs, the prejudicial image becomes nuanced; a 'group'

becomes individuals and the distance in social space decreases, giving room for other alternatives than the mediated image.

However, since none of the informants stated that the narrative and the negative image of URMs in the media *professionally* affected them, it is of importance to investigate the *indirect effects* of the media narrative and the stricter migration policy. By looking at what challenges they face, these indirect effects can be made visible.

6. CHALLENGES FOR PROFESSIONALS

Even though the different risk situations for sexual exploitation have specific preconditions and functions, they are connected and a preventive measure in one situation can work preventive against another. The violence that occurs during flight offers specific challenges to professionals. First of all, there is little chance of preventing abuse that occurs before arrival in Sweden. Secondly, knowing that many have suffered abuse during war and in flight requires that professionals can identify and respond to previous experiences. The response and treatment of previous exposure is, in a way, a preventive measure. In a report by The National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence Against Women (NCK) they conclude that children who suffered sexual abuse under the age of 18 runs a higher risk of being abused as adults. (NCK, 2014). This is why identification and appropriate treatment of previous abuse is an important step in preventing future abuse. By extension, it is also a preventive measure against disappearance because the situation at the homes can affect a minor's possibility to stay there.

Regarding housing, one challenge for professionals lie in knowing when to be attentive of sexual violence due to the complex perpetrator/victim situation. However, there are different challenges connected to different housings. In transit homes the minors stay a shorter time, and there are many minors coming and going. The staff at a transit home might not have the time to identify and respond to potential risk situations. The same goes for other professionals who meet the minors during their first time in Sweden. The border Police (who might encounter the minor and take them to the Migration Agency), the personnel at the initial meeting at the Migration Agency, and the social worker in the arrival municipality do not spend much time with the minors before they are appointed to another place. For the professionals that can form a long-term relationship with the minors, some other challenges lie both in identifying previous sexual abuse (during flight, for example) and in preventing future abuse. Housing staff has to have knowledge about the different risk situations to be

able to prevent and identify sexual violence. Regarding disappearance, perhaps the most important work is preventive since it is more difficult for professionals to prevent abuse that takes place when they minors are already missing. As Fig. 4.1 shows, the risk for disappearance is present throughout the asylum process but commonly takes place early or after a rejection. For individual professionals who have no control over the decision-making on asylum (for example housing staff and social workers), this is a challenging position. After a minor have disappeared, regardless if it is early or late in the process, it has to be reported to the police.

It is evident that the different risk situations are connected and that one situation can enable another. Therefore it is important to have a holistic perspective, while at the same time be aware of the preconditions in each situation. Professionals on all levels have to have knowledge of all these areas and respond to the different forms of sexual violence to ensure that children are protected throughout the asylum process. However, these challenges can be seen as *practical*: they concern what measures must be taken in order to prevent and respond to sexual violence. It can regard education, resources or collaboration between different actors or agencies. At this point it is inevitable to ask: what prevents these measures from being taken? When examining the interviews with professionals some more *abstract* challenges emerge. These challenges are classified into two categories: *Developing trust* and *A necessity or luxury?*

6.1 Developing Trust

In the following chapter the focus will be on how professionals can approach trust development with unaccompanied refugee minors, drawing on the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. At this point an important disclaimer is necessary: the focus will not be on the experience of URMs per se, but on how professionals can relate to and act on that. So, even though some sections talk about why URMs might interpret an interaction in a certain way, those statements draws on the interviews with professionals, on relevant research and on the theoretical framework about trust development.

Trust was something a majority of the informants perceived as essential in their work, especially when working against sexual exploitation. One informant working at a group home comment on what it takes to get a minor to confide and open up about sensitive subjects:

I think it has a lot to do with relationships, and relationships take a long time building. After I had been around for 2 years, some of them started to converse more openly. **If you can build a relationship where they have trust, it will come out easier. If you do not have that,** if the staff is replaced all the time, **that does not happen.** These conversations does not happen. (Staff at group housing, Malmö, FG 4:1)

In his statement he gives an example of the key factors of trust building that Lefevre et al. (2017) mentions: *persistence*, *reliability* and *consistency*. They mention this ‘stickability’ as essential when dealing with children who have suffered, or are in the risk zone, of sexual exploitation. The informant also shows how this ‘stickability’ becomes difficult to achieve because of staff-related reasons: how they are replaced all the time. According to the informant, this is a clear obstacle in developing the trusting relationship necessary to share compromising stories. In his experience the relationship needs to be developed over time and the minors needs to see that the staff stays around, that there is a consistency. In accordance with Behnia, the minors seems to decide on the trustworthiness of the professionals over time as they interact with the professionals, and at a certain time in this on-going interaction, trust is developed if the professional is deemed as someone who cares and will stay around. A school counsellor also makes a comment that resonates with these key factors:

I really believe in not stopping to ask the question, because you get a ‘no’ one time. So, this sexual violence that this person possibly have been exposed to, it is terribly coated in shame, so it might take 20 questions before you get a little... **That you are there and that you again and again,** like, now I’m going to ask this question again, what was *this* about, or... (School counsellor, Malmö, FG 1:2)

In her experience, showing that you are there and that you keep asking the right questions is key when trying to get someone to open up. This shows persistence (you ask again after a ‘no’), reliability (you are there for them again and again) and consistency (you keep doing the same thing).

Another theme that was identified in the informants statements was that of ‘having hunches’: many spoke of often getting a suspicious gut feeling that something was wrong, and that they had a general knowledge on the risk for sexual exploitation during war, flight and in Sweden. One thing that stood out was that this knowledge did not always come from actual testimonies from someone they met, but was based on prior knowledge on the situation. This is expressed in this quote about the situation for youths that turn or are considered 18 and have to leave their group housings:

It has not been evident in conversations with them, **I don’t have any experience** of sexual abuse or something like that. **But I have become worried because I know that**

they are so exposed. That they don't have a place to stay, that they live a bit here and there. (Social worker, Hässleholm, FG 1:1)

Despite not having any experience of cases with sexual abuse, this social worker knew that the youths were exposed. Where does this knowledge and assessment come from? Perhaps it is possible to talk about a 'vulnerability discourse'; in academic research, in official reports, in information from NGOs, and even in the media the vulnerability of URM's is proclaimed. Even though this theme did not get as much attention in the media as cases and discussions about URM's as perpetrators, it still received coverage. (See fig. 5.2 & 5.2). But how can professionals handle these 'hunches' of something that might be amiss when they experience that their relationship with the minor is too fresh, that they do not have any trust yet? And more importantly, when they only work with the minor for a short period of time? In another example an informant states that the minors are, indeed, exploited during the flight, and she talks about the notion of trust:

At first, **there has to be trust.** They have been **exploited on the way, during the flight**, that they have. And especially the boys from North Africa, when you ask them "where have you been living prior?", and they have been staying with some man that took care of them. **There are some small, underlying tones there, that make you really worried, what it stands for.** And, how do you know this man? Is it a relative? No, no. Why did he take care of you for three years? **We are the first** [government] **contact** with these children and we do not follow [them], so **how much are we supposed to try and drag out** of children that we cannot follow? **You should not drag out** too much at first. They have to **feel that there is safety when they expose themselves.** Because that is what they do. (Social worker, Malmö, FG 1:1)

Hence, just knowing that many, in general, have suffered from sexual abuse is not enough to take action in a specific case. The informant points towards the difficulty in meeting the minors early in the process before they have had time to build up a trusting relationship. When Behnia talks about *initial trust* he highlights that the client's view of the professional's reputation and credentials are essential, and also how the client's level of voluntariness matter. And as in the case above, the minors meet with these social workers upon arrival right after they have applied for asylum at the Migration Agency. This informant also works night-time, making them focus on only necessary and acute things such as immediate housing. And importantly, the minor have not chosen to speak to the social worker upon arrival and the voluntariness that affects trust development is, clearly, not present. In addition, the minor has, presumably, little to no knowledge of the professional's competence, intentions and resources to help, i.e. how the Swedish reception system functions and what type of social security that are in place. In Behnia's fourth approach to trust development he states that if there is an

absence of an interpretation of a situation/interaction, individuals become hesitant and unsure, unable to act in that situation (Behnia, 2008). Not knowing exactly what they can expect from the professionals they encounter can therefore be a major hindrance in developing trust. Though, it is possible to inspire trust in this initial stage as well. Behnia states that for a client to “make him/herself vulnerable, it is crucial that the client defines the professional as a competent and benevolent person with a genuine interest in him/her” (Ibid., p. 1433). The position the professional can take at this stage is therefore one of genuine interest and show honesty, warmth and care.

In the quote above the informant mentions ‘underlying tones’ that can speak of exploitation, and how these notions are difficult to follow up on in that initial stage due to limited time. And as stated trust development takes time, especially if the initial trust is lacking. And in addition to the trust the client needs to have in the professional, they need to trust *the system* they represent. In the following example an informant describes *distrust* of the asylum policy and in authorities as a direct hindrance in working against sexual violence:

Many of us are struggling in a system that we know are shit. And that is why I would like to see a massive change. Because the asylum system we have today always puts people against people. When someone gets asylum it’s always at the expense of someone else. **With the system we have, people will always be made vulnerable.** And the most exposed are children. [...] If people were allowed to stay in Sweden, getting your age revalued would not be as exposing. **You have to see that there is a system that creates vulnerability and confidence in authorities is decreasing.** The more you see people who get rejected, the more the confidence decreases. And with temporary asylum permits, **how are you supposed to trust authorities to tell your story, if you know that this sanctuary is temporary?** (Personnel at NGO 2, Malmö, FG 4:2)

Here the informant is onto something crucial: the contradictory position of the contemporary asylum policy and a rightful treatment of children and youth. Even though a majority of the professionals who work with URM are not directly linked to the Migration Agency, the minors on-going asylum process highly affects their view on all Swedish authorities. Eide & Hjern comments:

The dilemma between treating children and young people humanely and complying with current immigration and asylum policies is challenging. This applies to those who develop the political and administrative guidelines in this area and those who provide the practical care the children need. Caregivers working in this area find themselves in situations where they have to care for children who have been granted a residence permit alongside children who will be returned to their home country or sent to a third country. (Eide & Hjern, 2013, p. 666)

A school counsellor describes this dilemma when she comments on the challenge of working with youths with an uncertain asylum status. Before she knows whether they can stay in Sweden or not, she is cautious about taking action even though she might suspect something is wrong:

You don't always want to open that door because you **don't know if that person can stay in Sweden or not**. And if they cannot stay, you don't want that door to have been opened, because then you have been tearing up... and this person feels... when you start a treatment it gets even harder. A lot of people think "oh, good! They are in therapy". Yeah, but that is when the real job starts, where it gets really heavy for the youth. **And perhaps you choose not to open that door sometimes, even though you suspect, for the best interest of the youth**. Because it is not in the best interest of the youth to talk about it. (School counsellor, Malmö, FG 1:3)

In this example it is clear that the legal status of the child or youth has a direct consequence on how professionals can act upon a suspicion. This creates a complex situation that raises important questions: *can* professionals inspire confidence and trust in them when they operate within the same system that might decide to deny asylum? And do they *want* to inspire trust in a system that might reject the children and youths, if there is a fear of making things worse?

Different professionals meet URM's in varying stages of their asylum process, and some for a short period of time. Some only meet them upon arrival for a first assessment, and they do not have the opportunity to develop a deeper trust over time. Others might have the time and resources, but they are hesitant to act dependent on the legal status of the minor. Hence, all professionals who meet URM's cannot have the same approach to trust development and it is essential to examine different approaches that are dependent on the work situation for different professional groups.

Those working with the minors in the initial stage claim that they have trouble building the trust necessary for sharing sensitive information in such a short amount of time. Perhaps the goal of their interaction with the minors has to be different from those who work with them for an extended period of time. As have been stated, pre-existing expectations of the service someone can provide highly affects the trust in them. But in the arrival stage, a minor might not have any, or only bad, expectations of social services. This fact indicates that the first ones who meet the minors can *start over*: they can initiate a trust development that might take some time, but eventually it can lead to a more positive view on representatives of different health and social services. In other words, they might not be able to identify and respond to vulnerability right away, and they might not gain access to sensitive information,

but they prepare the minor to eventually trust in Swedish authorities. And if all encounters with representatives are positive, it creates the persistence, reliability and consistency, mentioned by Lefevre et al. (2017), on a structural level, as well as on an interpersonal level with the professionals. And a grounded trust in the system gives room for trustworthy professionals to gain a deeper trust and eventually gain access to sensitive stories, making them able to help. In this ultimate scenario, not all individual professionals around a minor have to have that deep of a trust and that good a relationship: it only takes a few that, on a personal level, connects with the minor and allows them to open up. A social worker expresses this when she reflects upon the appropriate approach to youths who might have been exposed to sexual violence:

I believe in a combination of having the **courage to ask the question, talk about what experiences you have from other youths**, like, other youths have told me this, so I know that, I have heard from many that during the flight... Like, give some examples, because then the one you talk to understands that **'okay, she gets some things that I might have suffered'**. And then **inform about human rights**, what rights do you have, what our laws are. How does it work, what kind of help is available if you need therapy. Well, a combination of those, and then of course you need **a relationship and some sort of trust**, but if you do not have that at least you can **inform about rights, talk about other examples, and then the youth can come when they feel like they are ready**. (Social worker 1, Lund, FG 1:2)

She is onto the notion of *starting* to build trust with representatives of government organisations in general, and even though she might not be the one who will hear the story, perhaps someone later in the process will. If all professionals who meet the minors have an informative, knowledgeable and competent approach, this gives way for trust development.

However, in a situation where a client already have developed a trusting relationship with a service provider and later on feels left down, the trust can be shattered. Perhaps a client confides in a professional and expects them to be able to help. Later, it turns out that they did not get the help they required from the service provider. This does not only affects the trust between these individuals: it also affects the trust in other representatives, since the pre-existing expectations are now low. Hence, it is important that service providers can live up to the promises they make. This is, however, not always within the service provides control. A minor who struggles with an asylum process and live in fear of rejection and deportation is not in a situation where trust in authorities is inspired. Hence, there are some issues that cannot be resolved by simply looking at the approach held by individual professionals. As Dincer (2011) states, a person's optimism about the future, and how they feel like they can control their own fate, is essential in trust development. And during an on-going asylum

process, the minors have no control over their own fates and they live in uncertainty over whether they can stay in Sweden or not. To gain optimism about the future and to develop trusting relationships is a difficult task in that situation. And for individual professionals, an unsure asylum process highly affects their ability to help, as the quote from the school counsellor shows. She does not want to ‘open that door’ and ask certain questions, because she is afraid that she will not be able to follow through if the minor gets a rejection. She does not want to betray their trust.

6.2 A Necessity or Luxury?

The notion that the asylum system as a whole produces vulnerability is quite a discouraging fact, especially when informants talk about the asylum process as a hindrance in working against the vulnerability it creates. If the system in place today will continue to produce this vulnerability, the key is finding ways that individual professionals can work within the system to *reduce* it. But here we are faced with another issue: do professionals have the possibility (time and resources) to work actively with these issues?

A sense of urgency can be found in statements from the informants. A frustration over the system, how it is overwhelming and how they must focus on the most necessary, like giving the minors a roof over their head and access to food. Many see the situation for these minors, especially those with an uncertain on-going asylum process or those who have gotten a rejection, as so serious that other issues cannot be addressed. This becomes evident when talking to them about actively working against sexual vulnerability amongst URM. One state:

I feel like we are only talking about putting **small band-aids on a giant, bleeding wound** here today. That is how I feel. And that is how we feel in our organisation, that we are only **putting out lots and lots of fires**, and at the same time you think **“but it is something completely wrong with the system!”** (Personnel at NGO 2, Malmö, FG 4:2)

The information does not mince her words: a focus on sexual violence by and against URM in Sweden is, right now, a ‘small band-aid on a giant, bleeding wound’. Other issues related to URM are far more urgent than having the luxury of focusing on details. Another informant states:

I think it’s good that we have been talking about sexual violence, **but that is not a priority for us right now**. The priorities are **housing, having a roof over your head, food, to be allowed to stay**. Some of them say “I can sleep in a park for 3 years, as long

as I can stay in Sweden”. **And that makes sexual violence a non-issue.** It is almost like if you don’t have dessert. We would all survive that, right? That’s where we are, in a way, and it is frightening. (Specialist in domestic violence, Skåne, FG 1:3)

This quote captures, in a very emotional and sincere way, the issues that professionals face. The person who calls sexual violence a ‘non-issue’ is not someone who does not care about these issues; it is someone who is so overwhelmed by the seriousness of the problem, and sees that it is a matter of life and death, asylum or rejection. Both of these statements should also be read with awareness on the situation for undocumented refugees. Perhaps it is possible to do something valuable for those that are under 18 and in the care of the state at a group housing and with possibilities for asylum. But what happens with those that live on the streets, outside of the asylum process? As is shown in chapter 4.4, this is one of the most exposed situations URMs can end up in, and in that situation they have little to no contact with government organisations and representatives. That leaves NGOs and volunteers who tirelessly work with the group to provide safe housing, food and activities.

And perhaps it is in this instance that the impact on professional practice becomes the most visible. That is, the impact of the narrative in the media and in the public opinion and of Sweden’s stricter migration policy. If the argument that the discourse facilitated a harsher treatment of URMs carries weight, this is when professional practice is the most affected. When they experience that the situation is acute and they only have time and resources for the most necessary, it highly determines if they actively can work against sexual vulnerability. And a focus on sexual violence becomes a luxury, a dessert.

However, as in every system or framework, there is flexibility, even for professionals in the public sector. If the professionals who operate within it have knowledge of the risk zones for sexual vulnerability they can steer their work, if only a little bit, in a direction that is safer for children. And to be informed and competent about legal procedures can help bridge the inequality gap where URMs are in a more, legally, vulnerable position and are, presumably, not as informed about the details of Swedish asylum laws and the regulations that determine the reception system, as the professionals who work within it. If their representatives, the professionals, can help them navigate they have a better chance of receiving adequate help. As Mather states: “inequalities are reinforced through differential access to, and competence with, legal procedures and institutions” (Mather, 2009, p. 1). Thus, social work with URMs is highly dependent on personal competence, a notion that is expressed by the school counsellor when she comments on how collaboration between different sectors work:

Overall I think it is working well... then, perhaps you encounter someone who is not... who is in the wrong position, who does not have commitment... Then it is difficult. **You have to have commitment**, the heart in the right place. [...] I have worked within psychiatry and in social services, and now I am at a school, and **I know what buttons to push** to make sure something is well received and acted on in social services, for example. So that is an advantage. (School counsellor, Malmö, FG 1:3)

In her statement it is made clear how personal qualities and commitment to work are essential factors for professionals to be productive and helpful. And she also implicates that her previous experience makes it easier for her to cooperate with other agencies since she knows how they operate. There are other examples of how professionals develop tricks when navigating the system. One informant says:

Sometimes you say ‘you should not apply for the gymnasium-law [act 2018:756, see p. 29 & 34] right now, because those that work there, well, there are a lot of denials. So wait a little’. So, you create your own ‘sub-cultures’, or strategies, for us that have a certain goal in mind: what is in the best interest of the youth? (Personnel at NGO 3, Malmö, FG 4:3)

In another focus group, the moderator asked the participants if they sometimes encouraged the minors to use storytelling in a way that is beneficial for them. She says: “do you have a strategic mind-set when meeting the youths, like, ‘if you talk about *this* it might increase your chances to get...’?” (Moderator, FG 1:2). What she is asking for is if the professionals sometimes encourage youths to share their story to help their asylum process or to receive some other help. The participants agree: they do that.

What this point towards is that professionals have their own tricks to help the minors, and thus the service a minor can receive is dependent on the service provider’s personal investment and professional competence. And even for those with the willingness to help, the acuteness of the situation hinders them. They have other urgent issues to attend to. If the migration policy, both in Sweden and globally, creates vulnerability, the chances for a quick change are slim. And since there is this sense of acuteness for professionals dealing with the group, a matter of life and death, perhaps it is impossible to implement ‘add-ons’, i.e. another task to be performed. But through a grounded knowledge of the risk situations for sexual violence, perhaps some can be avoided just through the decisions taken every day by individual professionals who strive for change.

7. CONCLUSION

By mapping out the risk zones for exposure to sexual violence, it becomes clear that they are closely connected to the asylum process and a present issue throughout its course. And even though the media coverage has leaned more towards discussing URM as perpetrators of sexual violence, their vulnerability in different situations has not been completely overlooked. Risks during flight, the exposed situation that comes during disappearance and the conditions at different housings has been extensively reported on. Hence, all the mapped out risk situations in chapter 4 has, to a varying degree, received media attention.

When talking to the professionals, the narratives they relate to the most are those that concern situations where URM are vulnerable to sexual violence (flight, situations at housings and disappearance). The narrative of URM as perpetrators of sexual violence was not as present in their statements as it was in the media coverage, where that narrative took prominence. The professionals were, however, aware of group behaviours amongst the boys that could be potential risk situations, and they discussed situations where both the perpetrator and victim were URM. Thus, the professionals did not completely disregard that URM sometimes perpetrated sexual offences. Nonetheless, they nuanced the issue by bringing up risk situations where URM were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. It can be argued that the testimonies from the professionals are more diverse (i.e. it encompasses all risk situations without highlighting *one*) than the media coverage that has zoomed in on and enlarged one. Not to say that the media *should not* report on and discuss cases where URM are perpetrators, but because the coverage in the media has undoubtedly favoured one narrative.

It is impossible to say with any certainty how much the media coverage and the public opinion about URM have affected the changes in the migration policy in recent years, and vice versa. It is, however, possible to identify when the narrative of URM as perpetrators and as deceitful took hold, and that this correlates with a stricter migration policy that limited the prospects for permanent asylum permits. And as the enforcement of the new law (act 2018:756, see p. 29 & 34) correlates with a public discussion and critique directed towards the unjust treatment of unaccompanied youths in 2017/2018, so does the narrative of refugees in general, and URM in particular, correlate with restrictions in the Swedish asylum policy. This points towards an interrelation where one aspect affects the other in a slow moving and complex interaction. One small step enables another that in turn enables a third. In addition, the new law got adopted around the same time as the #Metoo-movement further challenged

the idea of sexual violence as an imported problem and as something inherent in the ‘others’ cultural identity. And when the public focus shifted the blame from URM to prominent men in powerful positions, perhaps it was a good foundation for the new law to be grounded in. Hence, it is possible to trace political action back to shifts in the public discourse.

Going back to the three layers mentioned in chapter 1.3.1 (*official laws & legislation, public society, and professional everyday experience*) it is evident that the first two are highly interrelated and affect each other, even though it might not be possible to see a direct and clear causality. By extension, these two layers highly affect how the third layer, the professionals, can operate. The possibilities for professionals to actively work preventive and responsive against sexual vulnerability are as closely connected to the asylum process as the risk zones themselves. The professionals feel like they can offer help to those with a more secure legal status, but the help they can offer to those who are in the risk for, or already received, denial is limited. In addition, the professionals perceive them as the most exposed and the most in need of support and help. Trust development was identified as essential in working with minors and youth exposed to sexual violence, but trust was perceived as difficult to earn when they operate within a system that lets youth down. In conclusion, trust development is highly dependent on a safe environment, which is difficult to achieve with an unsure asylum status. And professionals with a genuine strive to do what is best for children and youths find their own strategies and tactics to work around the system.

NOTES

1. At the end of 2017, UNHCR estimated the number of people of concern (as either refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned refugees, stateless persons or returned refugees/IDPs) to 71.44 million worldwide. This is the highest number since they started to keep statistics in 1951. (UNHCR 2019). UNICEF states that out of the 20 million refugees in 2017, 10 million were children. In 2017, an estimate of 20 000 unaccompanied refugee minors were registered in Europe, in comparison to 2015 when nearly 90 000 URM were registered as asylum seekers. (UNICEF 2018)

2 & 7. The number of people who applied for asylum in Sweden between 2012 and 2018:

2012:	43 887
2013:	54 259
2014:	81 301
2015:	162 877
2016:	28 939
2017:	25 666
2018:	21 502

<https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Asyl.html>

3. Unaccompanied refugee minors are those under the age of 18 are separated from both their parents, or another adult who may be deemed to have stepped into the parent’s position, upon arrival to Sweden as an asylum seeker, or those that after arrival stands without such legal guardian. (Act 1994:137, 1b §). Sometimes the term “separated children” is used when referring to children that do not apply for asylum, or have been separated from

their parents by traffickers or smugglers. URM refers to a legislative status of those that have, or intend to, apply for asylum.

The number of URMs who applied for asylum in Sweden between 2012 and 2018:

2012:	3578
2013:	3852
2014:	7 049
2015:	35 369
2016:	2 199
2017:	1 336
2018:	944

Between the years 2000 and 2017 14 % were girls and 86 % were boys. The most common citizenships were Afghanistan (50 %), Somalia (11 %), Syria (9 %), Eritrea (6 %) and Iraq (6 %). Minors from other EU-countries (foremost from Romania) that resides in Sweden without a legal guardian are included in the statistics. (The Swedish Migration Agency, <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik.html>)

4. The research project “Youth and sexual violence - a knowledge interaction between humanistic research and professional practice” was initiated in 2017 by Gabriella Nilsson, Associate Professor in ethnology, and Inger Lövkrona, Professor emerita in ethnology, both at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University. It is done in collaboration with the City of Malmö and founded by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority in Sweden.

5. Four different NGOs that work with refugees and/or sexual health attended: Skåne City Mission, RFSU Malmö, Save the Children and the Association for Unaccompanied Minors. On local level there were representatives from three different municipalities in the Skåne region, encompassing different departments and functions: night- and daytime social services and crisis centres, HCL-homes (home for care and living for URMs), social administration, family law office, school health and counselling, refugee unit and specialists in honour related violence and oppression. On national and regional level representatives from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, the County Administrative Board in Skåne, the Police Department, youth health clinics in Skåne and Competence Centre Against Domestic Violence attended. Three rounds of focus groups were held during the day, and at each round 4 focus groups took place (12 in total). They were moderated by Gabriella Nilsson (Focus group 1:1, 1:2, 1:3), Inger Lövkrona (Focus group 2:1, 2:2, 2:3), Linn Björklund (Focus group 3:1, 3:2, 3:3) and Julia Degerkvist (Focus group 4:1, 4:2, 4:3). Quotes from the recorded and transcribed focus groups are referenced with a number that tells which focus group it concerns, and what position the speaker holds. For example: “Social worker, FG 1:1” All information except the speakers position is anonymized. For this thesis the quotes have been translated to English by me and the original transcripts are in Swedish. All informants at the conference signed a consent form where they were informed of the project and the usage of the material.

6. Swedish translation (the language that the search was made in): “Ensamkommande (barn)” + “sexuell*” or “våldtäkt*” or “gruppvåldtäkt*” or “övergrepp” or “sexuellt ofredande” or “människohandel”. All quotes from Swedish newspapers have been translated to English by me.

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- attending a clinic in the Netherlands. *Transcult Psychiatry*, 44(4).
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Interviews and focus groups

- Personnel at NGO 1, Malmö, Semi structured interview, not transcribed - quote from notes, April 18 2018
- Personnel at NGO 2, Malmö, in focus group 4:2, October 25 2018
- Personnel at NGO 3, Malmö, in focus group 4:3, October 25 2018
- School counsellor, Malmö, in focus group 1:2, 1:3, 4:1, October 25 2018
- Social worker, Malmö, night-time, in focus group 1:1, October 25 2018
- Social worker 1, Lund, Social Administration, in focus group 1:2, 2:3, October 25 2018
- Social worker 2, Lund, Refugee Unit, in focus group 1:2, October 25 2018
- Social worker, Hässleholm, Social Administration, in focus group 1:1, October 25 2018
- Specialist in domestic and honour related violence, Skåne, in focus group 1:3, October 25 2018
- Staff at group housing, Malmö, in focus group 4:1, October 25 2018

APPENDIX

A. Questions discussed at the focus groups, Lund University 25 October 2018

Focus groups round one - defining sexual violence

- Do you encounter sexual violence by and against unaccompanied refugee minors in your profession?
- How would you describe the issue in terms of extent and forms of violence?

Focus groups round two - identifying sexual violence

- What signals are there that someone is, or have been, exposed?
- How can you work in order to discover more minors that are exposed?
- What can you do upon discovery?

Focus groups round three - united action between sectors

- Give examples of when united action with other sectors or organisations have been working well. (In regards to preventive and responsive work against sexual violence)
- What flaws have you encountered in regards to united action?