Asylum Seeker Mothers' Concerns for Their Children in Reception Centres in Norway

by

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Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

which you can not visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward, nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends

you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

for even as He loves the arrow which flies,

so He loves also the bow which is stable.

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Acknowledgments

The writing of this thesis has been a challenging task due to several factors. Finding the material, then the participants, getting permits for the interviews and especially gaining the final REK approval has implied numerous hurdles. As Nietzsche said: "That which does not kill us makes us stronger". This appears to be true in the case of this particular accomplishment and my life as an immigrant in Norway as in the case of the mothers interviewed for this thesis who have shown incredible resilience. Family dynamics have been one of my main academic interests and in particular mothers and children and so have human rights and peace and conflict studies. With this thesis I have been able to combine my interests and background in psychology with peace and conflict studies and I hope my hard work will shine through it.

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Introduction

This thesis is going to focus on asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children in reception centres in Norway. The relationship children have with their mothers is particularly relevant to the children's development. But, when the mothers are also going through a traumatic state, they are not always able to fulfil their children's needs. Different mothers find different ways of coping with their situation as asylum seekers and mothers. In addition, different mothers from the same country, and especially from different countries, could be expected to have different ideas of motherhood and of what their children's needs.

So, the purpose of this thesis is to explore through the literature and interviewing, in Norway what are asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children. In particular, how do asylum seeker mothers feel living in reception centres. Also, if life in reception centres influences them in their concerns for their children. In addition, what kinds of child rearing practices they use and what advice they would have to other mothers living in reception centres.

There are several reasons for considering mothers' concerns. Mothers´ concerns provide a way to understand parental actions. Also they are one major aspect of the context in which the child develops. Moreover, mothers' concerns provide an insight into a process of culture and cultural transmission (Harkness & Super; 1996: 63). Finally, the way children are shaped from the interaction with their mothers will have an effect on the next generation.

In order to concentrate on asylum seekers mothers' concerns for their children's needs; the thesis will review the research done on the stressors weighing on asylum seeker families before and after their migration. Then, the literature on parental exposure to violence and its effects on children and on parental support for children handling traumatic reactions will be examined. Following, the attachment theory and cross-cultural attachment patterns related to migration will be analysed. Moreover the factors

affecting asylum seeker families coping will be reviewed. Furthermore, this thesis will review the cross-cultural research on parental beliefs on child rearing.

After the theory review, the method used in this thesis will be described. Then, it will be showed how the data has been collected and this will be followed by presenting the results. Following, the results are going to be discussed and evaluated. Finally, conclusions will be drawn by exposing a critical evaluation of the theories used and possible improvements for a way forward will be suggested.

The reasons for considering those topics are that when analysing mothers' concerns, it is necessary to take into account the traumatized history and the whole background affecting mothers and children living in reception centres. This history weighs on their uncertain lives as asylum seekers and on them as individuals and parents. Hence, those factors affect their choices as mothers and their concerns for their children.

Asylum seekers in Norway

"An asylum seeker is a person who on his or her own initiative, and without prior notification, comes to Norway and asks the authorities for protection and recognition as a refugee. If the application is granted, the asylum seeker will be called a refugee" (UDI; 2007: 1). UDI (*Utlendingsdirektoratet*) states that a person has a right to asylum in Norway if he or she has a well-substantiated fear of persecution in his or her country of origin. The cause of the persecution must be race, religion, nationality and membership of a particular social group or political opinion (UDI, 2007: 1). Fear of persecution is considered a valid motive for seeking asylum. It may still be possible to obtain a residence permit on protection grounds. Examples may include general unrest that may lead to the risk of losing life, or because the person is at risk of torture or other inhuman treatment (UDI; 2007: 1).

The process of seeking asylum in Norway starts with an interview shortly after the arrival. The interview and the application with the personal statement constitute the

basis for assessing whether the applicant has grounds for being granted asylum (UDI; 2007: 1). If a person is not granted asylum, the Norwegian authorities will automatically assess whether he/she should be granted a residence permit on protection grounds or a residence permit on humanitarian grounds. If the asylum application is rejected, the person may appeal the decision (UDI; 2007: 1). The person should be able to stay in Norway while the appeal is being processed. If the authorities reject the application for asylum, the person must leave the country (UDI; 2007: 1).

1. The asylum seekers' past and present stressors

This chapter is going to examine what are the past and present factors affecting a great portion of asylum seekers. In the recent past as many as 16-20 million people a year have had to flee their homelands due to different circumstances, protracted conflicts and political violence among the main ones (Aunaas; 2000: 16). This displacement may create great strain particularly on families in relation to where to go, how to survive and how to overcome their traumas. Those families need to adapt to a new lifestyle, a new array of family roles and life in a new country among other traumatic factors.

Repeatedly, asylum seekers from war-torn countries coming to Norway have experienced several traumas such as the loss of relatives, problems in the refugee camps, problems during the flight to Norway, etc. before entering the country. When they arrive in Norway and start living in reception centres waiting to know if they will be given permission to stay from UDI or if they will be sent back home, their unsettling circumstances continue to cause them stress.

Then, asylum seekers in reception centres have to live in a confined space with people also affected by mental health problems. Often there is no safe or clean space for children to play except for the one room where the whole family lives (psychologist at R-BUP: [Interview] 22-04-07). In those disquieting circumstances parents do not find it easy to raise their children. Many children and parents arrive at reception centres in a traumatic state (Aunaas; 2000: 12). But parents are supposed to provide for their children economically and emotionally in spite of their stressful situation.

1.1. Stressors from the past affecting asylum seekers in the host country

In several circumstances, flight to another country is the only available option left for those who become refugees. In many instances, before making the decision for flight the individual or family are often marked by fear, harassment and humiliation in their

homeland (Aunaas; 2000: 1). The journey of escape includes risks and dangers in particular for vulnerable groups like children and women. Disintegration from family and their cultural environment, physical and psychological pressure traumatise to a certain extent the lives of most refugees. Most of them have been exposed to violence in different circumstances. These memories are often hidden due to their pain but may contribute to the psychological background to their integration in the new host country (Aunaas; 2000: 1).

1.2.   Current stressors in the new country: practical level

Asylum-seekers in a new country meet a high number of daily stressors and are often unable to cope with them due to multiple disadvantages (Aunaas; 2000: 9). When asylum seekers arrive in the reception centres in the country of exile they experience a cultural shock due to different uses, language, norms and climate and they have to learn to adapt to them. Culture shock often leads to confusion and loss of stimuli that provide the contextual framework for individuals' behaviour. The greater the gap, the greater the culture shock and social isolation (Aunaas; 2000: 15).

Guarnaccia (in Aunaas; 2000: 5) claims that no single factor is sufficient for understanding the nature of stresses created by migration and its consequences. Psychosocially, asylum seekers differ from other type of migrants in the forced nature of their homelessness. Moreover, asylum seekers have in many cases experienced loss of loved ones, health, freedom, and income. Also, they have lost their homeland, social status, material possessions and their sources of identity and validation (Aunaas; 2000: 10).

Furthermore, the long-term effects on personality and relationships of living under a repressive regime and the complexity of the forces acting on children and adults are strong. Possibilities of normal development may have been severely restricted for the children for months or years before their arrival in exile (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 178). Children may have experienced deprivation, harassment, destruction of

normal social life and difficulties in reunification with their family. Even if parents survive and the family is eventually reunited, relations may be strained and difficult after years of separation (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 178).

When arriving in the new country, asylum seekers must learn to speak a foreign language, adjust to the environment, to their minority status and the uncertainty brought by their condition. All of those factors test the asylum seekers' emotional resilience and coping resources and produce severe psychological distress (Aunaas; 2000: 10).

Moving to a reception centre in the country of asylum will often result in the loss of the asylum seekers' social network. Hence, this may deprive them of their emotional support. On the relational level, asylum seekers may experience isolation from their surroundings and loneliness due to communication and language problems. The individual lack of references, different interpreting skills and cognitive maps are sources to insecurity, role confusion, conflicts and communication barriers and tend to have a negative effect on each individual psychological functioning (Aunaas; 2000: 11).

1.3. Current stressors in the new country: the sociocultural level

The sociocultural level represents values and habits from the home culture and country of exile. By living in exile the individual meets a new worldview. According to Schancke and Luckwago (in Aunaas; 2000: 11), this may represent a great growth potential but it may also create difficulties to the individual. Values and norms in the Norwegian society are found very different from the ones individuals are used to. They experience unknown religious customs, food and eating habits and the change of diet also affects their body.

When asylum seekers enter the reception centres they arrive with a set of behaviours and attitudes in relation to moral norms, which they bring, from their former

environment (Aunaas; 2000: 13). But their known human references cease to exist the moment they step into the reception centres. At the reception centre, language, norms, rules, the people, are all unfamiliar to the new asylum seekers (Aunaas; 2000: 14).

1.4.   Current stressors in the new country: the psychosocial level

The psychosocial identity of the individual may be threatened by the changes and new structures in the environment when the individual moves into the reception centre (Aunaas; 2000: 12).

According to Goffman (1961: 137), total institutions, such as reception centres, have the feature of breaking down the separation of three spheres usually encountered in a person's everyday life. These are work, play and sleep. Those activities are generally conducted with different co-participants from different environments but at the reception centres, this changes. This increases the individuals' psychological distress.

Sollund (in Aunaas; 2000: 13) has looked at the most common traits of Norwegian reception centres and identified some of the stressors, which make living difficult for the individuals. The first is the simple standard that most reception centres offer their residents. They have small rooms and they often have to share a bathroom and a kitchen with other people. Their communal areas are often not clean enough. In addition, the individuals sharing the facilities often come from different countries and have a different language. This creates a series of misunderstandings (Sollund in Aunaas; 2000: 13). So, when the asylum seekers arrive at the reception centres they realize that their behaviour needs to adapt to the different circumstances.

For asylum seekers to be able to learn about the new culture and its norms and values they need to be able to master the language in the country of exile. For many, the inability to communicate with the host nationals is yet another source of stress on a verbal and non-verbal level (Aunaas; 2000: 15).

In her autobiography, Hoffman (1989: 209) discusses the dangers of clinging to the past for immigrants in a new country. She writes: "I have to make a shift in the innermost ways. I have to translate myself. But if I'm to achieve this without becoming assimilated- that is, absorbed- by my new world, the translation has to be careful, the turns of the psyche unforced" (Hoffman; 1989: 211). The processes of making oneself understood and understand new norms and a new language can be particularly complex for asylum seekers who have to deal with understanding a new society.

1.5. Current stressors in the new country: the parenting level

Families may also come in contact with new models of behaviour for children, which might lead to friction (Bracken & Petty; 1998: 175). In the country of exile, parents are faced with new social rules about child rearing where transgression may even lead to the intervention of social workers. For example, it might have been acceptable to hit a child to discipline him/her in the parents' country; but this may not be accepted in the host country. Roles in some cases might have to shift. The capacity of the family to support children may be strained because of the parents' own difficulties in adjusting to the new cultures and mourning their losses. In this condition, women in particular are struggling with changes of role and responsibility and the lack of support they might have been used to from their extended family network (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 175).

On one hand, living with parents, maintaining contact with their culture and community of origin, appear to be important, protective factors for children (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 178). On the other hand, children's view of their future may differ from that of their parents. Young people usually have more contact with the receiving society through school and friends and generally feel more comfortable with the values and behaviours of the host society than their elders. Their home culture may seem distant or be viewed as oppressive (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 176). This may create conflicts with the parental values.

All in all, the variety of current stressors affecting asylum seekers' mental health seems to be as important as the past ones (Richman in Bracken & Petty; 1998: 179). Many asylum seekers seem to be not only in a post-traumatic condition, but to be currently experiencing trauma, as they continue to be subjected to a variety of distressing occurrences as those mentioned in this chapter Thus researching asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children requires an understanding of the complexity of the situations that many mothers may have to face in their singularity or as a family and how that affects their social identity. Then, it can be possible to proceed on to explore the other variety of factors affecting their beliefs as parents.

2. Parental exposure to violence and its effects on children

The negative impact on children of parental exposure to traumatic events was highlighted when children of the survivors of the Holocaust received growing clinical attention in 1970 (Almqvist; 1997: 11). Psychoanalytical literature emphasized how the relationship between parent and child became destructive due to the negative impact of the war on the survivors. The theories of the "pact of silence" and of the mother acting as a "protective shield" used to analyze parents and children after the World War II are of lasting importance. Those theories continue to help us understanding also the present situation of refugees and asylum seekers. Due to their relevance they are going to be hereby discussed.

2.1. The theory of the "pact of silence"

It has been suggested that parents´ traumatic experiences may cause the initiation of a process of alienation and isolation among family members. Due to their traumatic experiences, parents feel ashamed and insecure and shy away from sharing their experiences. Those feelings of shame contribute to the fragmentation of the family system. This leads families to be trapped "in a pact of silence" where neither parents nor children share their traumatic experiences. It has been claimed that this behaviour may cause negative effects on the children's further development. On the other hand, children may manage to overcome those effects and achieve a healthy development (Almqvist; 1997: 12).

Many asylum seeker families often speak about how necessary it is to move on from the past and to look forward. This is because to recollect and describe what has happened to them can open old wounds and open further suffering (Almqvist; 1997: 12). Thus, asylum seeker parents often avoid asking their children about their traumatic memories in order to protect them. By doing so, they tend to underestimate or deny the possible presence of posttraumatic reactions in their children. Within those

families, the silence is commonly described as a wish to protect each other from additional pain. But it may often lead in the opposite direction.

2.2. The theory of the mother as a "protective shield"

The mutual protection from emotional pain within families can be thought to have some adaptive advantages and can be examined in relation to the notion of the mother acting as a psychological "protective shield" for her child (Freud & Burlingham; 1973). Being a protective shield for a child in wartime means maintaining faith by focusing on positive aspects and the hope of survival in combination with the denial or the underestimation of the actual threat to be able to keep the child calm (Freud & Burlingham; 1973). What seems to drive mothers in those circumstances is a sense of certainty and the illusion that she can really keep her child safe whatever happens.

On the other hand, in wartime when dangers increase and children's exposure to traumatic events is unavoidable, the negative effects of adaptive denial become more salient. As a traumatic experience such as the loss of family breaks through the protective parental shield the strategy of denial breaks down and both children and parents find themselves in an acute crisis (Almqvist; 1997: 13). Mothers are then unable to emotionally support their children due to their internal struggle and children, who may feel the need to discuss their emotions, feel the parental unavailability.

As silence and denial continue even when psychic trauma is a fact, children in many asylum seeker families appear to be left to handle painful memories and posttraumatic symptoms without parental support (Almqvist; 1997: 13). Bowlby described how parents press their children to shut off from further conscious processing of information the children already have about events that their parents wish that they had never observed (2004: 18). He noticed that many of the children's psychological problems were directly traceable to their having been exposed to traumatic events which they were pressed by their parents to ignore.

So, the way parents handle their own reactions to traumatic events as well as their children's, seems to have a meaningful impact on their children. In addition, parents´ traumatized behaviour also seems to also affect children's development. For those reasons, "many asylum seeker parents might need extra emotional support in handling their reactions. By supporting the parents to support themselves, they will be enabled to better support their children" ([Interview] 22-04-07 psychologist at R-BUP).

3. Child rearing in relation to handling children's traumatic reactions

It has often been claimed that children are dependent upon their parents´ ability to create a sense of stability, coherence, and competence (Montgomery; 1998:21). Several studies have focused on parental roles in situations where children are confronted with violence. It is consistently shown that parental reactions, specifically in terms of their responses to the trauma, to the child and to their own stress reaction are extremely relevant to the child's development (Shmukler; 1989: seminar 7). Research shows that children are affected as much by parent's attitudes and mental state as they are by their own stress reaction.

3.1. Parental presence as a key (positive/negative) to the child's development

The conclusion reached in a number of studies is that parental presence has a modifying effect on the consequences of traumatic experience (Montgomery; 1998:21). Parental presence may also worsen the child's perception of the situation if parents feel incompetent, helpless and lacking in the ability to ensure protection (Montgomery; 1998:21).

The importance of parental and in particular maternal actions has been established especially in connection to younger children (Montgomery; 1998:23). Separation and strong emotional reactions in the parents seem to have a deeper effect on younger children than older ones. But when parents succeed in maintaining a close and secure relation, smaller children often will react to a lesser extent than older children (Montgomery; 1998: 23).

Freud and Burlingham´s (1973) descriptions of children's reactions to bombardments during World War II have emphasized the children's need for maternal care and for the mothers to act as a buffer (protection) for children and the adverse effects that resulted from separating children and mothers. This view has dominated and it has found proof in the results showing that parents underestimate or deny posttraumatic

reactions in their children and that children tend to protect their parents from information about the full traumatic impact (Almqvist; 1997: 8).

In the late 80s Hjern (1990: 70) conducted a study in Sweden on recently arrived refugee children from Chile and the Middle East. He found out that family strain was strongly associated with behavioural deviance, which brought people to believe that the family has a very fundamental role in the long-term adjustment of refugee children. So, parents do appear to have an important role in helping their children to create a sense of stability, coherence and competence.

3.2. <u>Social support as a help to stress reactions</u>

In general, there seems to be an acceptance that social support can mediate the effects of violence. For children the potential sources of support can be the close and extended family, the child's peers and the wider community (Dybdahl; 2001: 9). Nevertheless, most empirical studies have concentrated their attention only on the parental presence (Cairns; 1996). In fact, parents are the ones who generally provide the most important care for their children. Their love and protection can act as a buffer (Dybdahl; 2001:9).

However, when, due to the circumstances parents do not manage to function healthily, then they may not be able protect their children adequately (Dybdahl; 2001: 9). It has been shown that maternal depression can have negative consequences on infants and that dysfunctional behaviour in social interactions may occur (Dybdahl; 2001:9). "The family and family dynamics are likely to be affected as the very nature of war disturbs and breaks up the life of a family" (Dybdahl; 2001: 9).

On the whole, it can be pointed out that when young children are exposed to war or protracted conflicts, they may suffer extensively if there are no significant adults available to them (Shmukler; 1989: seminar 7). In conclusion exposure to violence may have a long-term impact on the child's cognitive formation, psychological adjustment, and socio-cultural activity (Netland; 2002: 102).

4. Cross-cultural attachment patterns and migration

This chapter will first present a brief overview of the main points of the attachment theory. Then, it will examine the different factors affecting attachment behaviour between mother and child. In particular, the factors related to migration and resettlement that affect attachment behaviour will be analysed. All these three factors (attachment, migration and resettlement) are of great importance to the relationship between mother and child and in particular in the case of asylum seeker mothers and their children.

4.1. The fundamental principles of attachment theory

Attachment theory has focused primarily on individuals and on dyadic relationships (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 44). Attachment theory provides a framework organized around the original family members' interaction that sets the emotional tone for the subsequent development of the individual and his/her relationships (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 44). The fundamental principle of attachment theory is that people of all ages show a preference for one primary attachment figure above all others. This will usually shift from the primary attachment figure, usually the birth mother, to other figures over time (Bowlby; 2004: 17). The arrangements of someone's attachment figures can be described as such: friends and familiar neighbours at the base, secondary attachment figures (extended family network) above them, and the primary attachment figure (mother and father) at the top (Bowlby; 2004: 17).

This view has been contested by Harris (1995) who believes that the environment children share with their peers and teachers influences them at least as much as their parents. She believes that there is not a hierarchy of attachment figures but that all the figures in the child's life are of equal importance, in particular their peers. The thesis started with the belief that parents and mothers in particular are the primary attachment figures in a child's life. Harris however has a larger emphasis on the extended family network and the outside family environment (teachers and peers in particular). They

are of great influence to a child's life and to his/her attachment relationships. Hence this thesis tries to consider Harris´ view an implementation of attachment theory – rather than in juxtaposition with it.-.This is accomplished by considering the extended family network and the outer environment as also influential factors in a child's attachment relationships.

4.2. Attachment practices

Because attachment involves the establishment of a deep and enduring connection between a child and the child's mother, the family, and the child's peers in the early years of life, it profoundly influences every component of a child's development (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). Attachment practices are those practices that parents use to develop a deep and lasting connection with their child, and to respond to their infant's attachment behaviours (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). Best practices in promoting secure attachment between children and their mothers, family or teachers and familial neighbours, include practices that encourage the emotional, cognitive, motor, language, and social development of children aged 0-5. When children are securely attached, they are more likely to follow a healthy development (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9).

Individual family members generate mental representations of the self and of the self in relation to others, including attachment figures. It is suggested that family members develop shared expectations about themselves and about the safety and stability of the world they live in and the people they encounter (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 44). Their representations of others may include not only dyadic relationships but also representations of how the family operates as a system (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 44).

4.3. Attachment during and after protracted conflicts

Asylum seeking families faced with the deprivation and the loss accompanying protracted conflicts may develop expectations that become integrated into the family

system and affect interactions among family members and between the individuals and the broader environment (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 45). For example, during times of conflict, families faced with loss or ongoing fear may experience an emotional numbing (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 45).

Furthermore, families struggling with the emotional devastation of protracted conflicts might have parents turning to their children for comfort (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 46). So this environment may lead to poor parent-child differentiation and to the child's assumption of care-giving responsibilities. Because protracted conflicts may often disrupt family functioning, the ability of family members to promote extrafamilial independent experiences may be impeded (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 46).

Therefore, it is possible that insecure attachment relationships may occur especially during and following times of protracted conflicts. Because parents may be traumatized and overwhelmed, their ability to consistently meet the needs of a young child may be compromised (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 52). If an insecure attachment does develop, the child incurs the risk that his/her future relationships will fail. At the same time, exposure to protracted conflicts and stress, directly and indirectly may accelerate the development of fear and increase the likelihood that unhealthy patterns of attachment may develop (Leavitt & Fox; 1993: 52).

4.4. Mothers and attachment in the host country

Reebye et al. (2007) performed a study on asylum seeker women who moved to Canada. They found that women talked of the varying impact of migration and resettlement depending on whether they came to Canada with their children, or whether they became first time mothers in Canada. Some mothers who gave birth to children in Canada felt that their relationships with their children was less affected by migration and resettlement than if their children had been born in their countries of origin and migrated to Canada with them (in Reebye et al.; 2007: 6). Depending on how soon after migrating mothers gave birth, they may not had to deal with some of

the aspects of resettlement (finding housing, employment, learning a new language, etc.) while simultaneously having to care for their very young children (Reebye et al.; 2007: 6).

At the same time, the mothers in the Canadian study also recognized that although they may not currently feel the impact of migration and resettlement in their relationships with their young children, they may feel that impact as their children get older, and start attending school (Reebye et al.; 2007: 6). Migration is a process that may start long before an individual's or family's actual arrival into a new country and go far beyond the first few years of their life in that country (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). All the factors that contribute to the mother's stress during and after migration can have a detrimental effect (cf. 1) to the attachment practices. Those, along with the process of acculturation that they experience as they adapt to life in a new country, have a significant impact on the mental health of mothers and children and thus provide challenges to their attachment relationships (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7).

"It's very hard to adjust to a new life. When you come here you don't know the language. It's the first barrier you have, to feeling like you're in your own country, plus you don't have your family here when you come for the first time, and it's as if something was cut and you're trying to find that part, and you don't know where to start, how to start, and that makes you feel bad. It's a process but it takes lots of time" (in Reebye et al.; 2007: 7).

On the other hand, many mothers show great resilience in their ability to continue to promote secure attachment to their children despite the many challenges they face. Because of all the losses they have experienced, mothers tend to focus their energy into creating a better future for their children, a future where their children do not have to suffer from the same hardships they have endured (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). This entails evaluating their own beliefs, and values as well as the new ones they are exposed to, in an attempt to decide what is best for their children and themselves.

Newcomer mothers often sacrifice their own needs to invest in the future of their children (Reebye et al; 2007: 7).

4.5. Mothers and attachment: attachment to own country and its effects

The first part of the process that mothers go through when they migrate and resettle into a new country is the feeling of a loss of home. It seems relevant to think of attachment in the context of whether or not mothers feel at home (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). How a mother defines home, and whether or not she feels at home in the country she lives in, has implications for her attachment: ability to provide love, nurturing, and security, with her children (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9).

The loss of one's home and feeling of belonging has a deep impact on the relationship between a mother and child (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). If parents do not feel supported or secure, it is difficult for them to provide their children with a sense of security. Vice versa, children themselves suffer from the loss of home and then are affected by the fact that their parents are suffering, and cannot provide them with support and a sense of belonging and safety (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). Mothers recognize this and try to compensate by responding to their children's heightened need for love and support.

4.6. Effects of family loss on attachment practices for mothers and children

The loss of their family members, extended family, and community, and the associated isolation that mothers experience also has an impact on their attachment practices (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). Sometimes separation of immediate family members occurs during the process of migration. Some family members may come first while other family members follow a few months or years later (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9).

Some of the mothers in Reebye et al's (2007: 8) study talked of the importance of extended family in mediating the relationship between mothers and children, and the difficulty they face in trying to negotiate the multiple roles they have to fulfil as

parents. The loss of immediate family, extended family, and community due to the move, leads to a feeling of great isolation in many mothers (Reebye et al.; 2007: 8).

4.7. Effects of mothers' isolation from their families on attachment practices

The loss of the mothers' ability to communicate within their families and communities using their mother tongue has an impact on attachment (Reebye et al.; 2007: 8). Some mothers experienced this challenge in communicating with their own children. This factor seems to affect their attachment to their children (Reebye et al.; 2007: 8).

Mothers with young children often feel responsible for their children's process of acculturation while they are dealing with their own. "For immigrant parents, it's too hard to raise children because you must try to keep your own culture within a different culture. And the children are so small. They don't understand when you try to tell them to do things because they are children. They don't know"(in Reebye et al.; 2007: 8).

4.8. Attachment and acculturation: cultural diversity and attachment beliefs

Mothers' and families' attachment beliefs, values and practices evolve through the process of acculturation (Reebye et al.; 2007: 8). Mothers base the changes they make to their attachment practices on the different attachment beliefs, values, and practices they are exposed to in the country of exile and their own experience of what is effective and what is not (Reebye et al.; 2007: 8).

Most parents choose to raise their children according to the long-term development goals they have for them, balancing what they view as culturally appropriate with what is both possible and seen as appropriate in the environment they live in (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). This process can become particularly challenging for parents when what they have learned as culturally appropriate may have to adapt to the environment they live in.

4.9. Parental intuition

There is a component to parenting that Reebye et al. describe as instinctive (2007: 9). This component of parenting does not involve consulting other people. This instinct is part of a definition of attachment as a reciprocal relationship between infant and caregiver found in the literature (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). Infants instinctively reach out to a caregiver for security and protection whilst caregivers instinctively protect and nurture infants. This mutual responsiveness is what sets the secure base for early development (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9).

4.10. Learned practices

Parenting practices that are solely based on instinct may not always be reliable nor particularly open to change (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). In addition to following their instinct, parents adopt a variety of learning parenting practices. Learned parenting practices refer to parenting practices that are learned informally or formally. Many parenting practices are learned informally through experience, family, friends, and community (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). Formal learning is the learning that takes place in school, classes, from professionals, or from reading (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9).

Parental beliefs, values and practices are influenced by parental intuition, learned parenting practices, parents' own attachment history, accepted cultural and societal parenting norms, socioeconomic status, religion, and generational change (Reebye et al.; 2007: 9). So all the factors that affect migration and resettlement have an impact on the attachment practices between mothers and their children. Those factors should be evaluated when considering asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children.

5. Coping in asylum seeker families

When people migrate to a country that is culturally different from what they are used to, most of them may experience the shift that takes them to a minority group. The shift from becoming part of a majority to a minority can put a lot of pressure on people. Asylum seekers are seen to experience stress when they try to adapt to a new environment in their country of exile. The responses an individual makes to a stressful situation depend on how the situation is assessed. Lazarus & Folkman (1991) identified two processes in the individual as critical mediators of the stressful person-environment relation: cognitive appraisal and coping.

5.1.   What coping entails: problem focused/emotion focused coping

Several dimensions of coping can be defined. The two main components are: coping resources and coping strategies. Coping resources are resources available in the environment as well as belief in one's abilities. Coping strategies are the cognitive or behavioural actions that an individual engages in. Psychological stress can be claimed to reside neither in the person nor in the situation but depends on the transaction between the two, it is important how a person appraises the event and how he/she adapts to it (Lazarus & Folkman; 1991).

Cognitive-phenomenological theory suggests that two processes are involved in the relationship between stress and psychological adjustment: appraisal and coping (Cairns; 1996: 49). Through the appraisal, the individual evaluates the personal significance of the stressful situation. Then, coping regulates the way in which the person thinks and behaves in relation to the stressful experience. According to this framework, the psychological outcome of a stressful experience depends on the way the stressor is evaluated and the strategy used to deal with it (Cairns; 1996: 49). Bat-Zion and Levy-Shiff (in Cairns; 1996: 50) have produced evidence which suggests that young children may not engage in much cognitive appraisal because they rely on parental emotional cues to interpret threatening situations.

Lazarus and Folkman (1991: 309) suggests that coping changes with changing demands in the situation as they are perceived by the person, but there are also stabilities in people's preferred modes of coping with similar sources over time. Their classification of coping modes: problem focused coping –trying to manage the source of the problem, emotion focused coping- trying to manage or reduce emotional stress, has been widely used in research on coping behaviour in children. Brotman Band and Weisz in Almqvist (1997: 23) reported that coping strategies in children varied according to situations. Children used problem focused coping in situations which are possible to change and emotion focused coping in situations which have to be endured, for example, getting a vaccine. They found that children's' ability to use emotion coping focused strategies (e.g. thinking happy thoughts) increased with age. The importance of emotion focused coping in children has been highlighted in several studies. Coping strategies described as helpful for children's well being are: humour in the form of witty jokes, helping others, positive thinking that is maintaining an optimistic view, including the hope of a good future (Almqvist; 1997: 24).

5.2.   Asylum seekers and coping

Asylum seekers will try, as others do, to lessen the stress they experience. All individuals have a repertoire of coping resources available to them for lessening stressful encounters. But for asylum seekers, their coping resources may be damaged as a consequence of being exposed to different stressors they are currently experiencing, or have experienced prior to migration. It is important to find if the strategies they employ are of use, because if individuals are unable to cope, psychological or physical harm is often seen to be as a solution (Compas & Epping in Saylor; 1993).

According to Hobfoll (in Aunaas; 2000: 30), loss of resources is the primary operating mechanism driving stress reactions. As a whole, transitions in a person's environment are seen as stressful upon the individual. Asylum seekers often experience loss of several coping resources and due to that they become less able to cope with changes in

their environment in a problem solving manner. Asylum seekers have limited control to their lives due to their status. The way immigrants experience their surroundings, interpret them and give meaning to them, is a major factor in how they are able to cope with their situation (Hobfoll in Aunaas; 2000: 31).

Asylum seeker children grow up in the midst of a process which continues to expose them to negative life events for a long time: exposure to traumatic events as a result of protracted conflicts, loss of home and social context, loss of significant persons, temporary parental separations, changed family dynamics and acculturative stress (Almqvist; 1997: 22). In spite of the adverse circumstances, the majority of asylum seeker children eventually appear to recover from their psychological symptoms and adapt well to the host society. The positive outcome is explained by the children's ability to cope with their situation, based upon parental and social support (Almqvist; 1997: 22). Rutter described the ability to make active plans in relation to key life transitions and challenges as an important factor in fostering resilience (Almqvist; 1997: 23).

At the same time, research has suggested that when children are exposed to political violence not all will suffer serious psychological consequences (Cairns; 1996: 29). Studies based on surveys of children in Northern Ireland have estimated that around 10 per cent of children may be possible cases (Cairns; 1996: 30). Cairns points out that only a small proportion of children exposed to violence requires special treatment and suffers serious pathological conditions (1996: 33). So the findings are that children at different ages may respond to stress in different ways and different stressors may have a different impact at different ages (Cairns; 1996: 36).

5.3. Mothers and children's modes of coping

What distinguishes the high risk child from other children is the exposure to certain risk factors and in particular a life history characterized by multiple familial disadvantages such as impaired parenting, a neglectful and abusive home environment,

parental conflict, family instability, family violence, and high exposure to adverse family life events (Fergusson & Horwood; 2003: 130).

Previous experience of war and protracted conflicts can continue to affect traumatized refugees and asylum seekers in exile though traumatic reminders such as nightmares or intrusive memories (Almqvist; 1997: 25). So, coping in refugees and asylum seekers should not simply be understood in terms of posttraumatic stress disorders and memories of traumatic events. The stresses of every day life are sometimes even more important for this group than the previous ones. Therefore asylum seekers children's coping behaviour needs to address past and present stressors. When asylum seeker children arrive in the host country, if they are not infants, they will face similar adversity of adaptive challenges to that faced by adults in exile such as learning a new language, establishing peer relationships and managing their school work (Almqvist; 1997: 26).

5.4. Effects of maternal coping on children

In a study of two groups of internally displaced refugee families in Croatia, one group living in a refugee camp and the other staying with families in local communities, it was found that children whose mothers encountered difficulties in handling refugee life, assessed by general stress index, had more stress symptoms than other children and that children from the refugee camp had greater risk of emotional problems than children who were accommodated privately with their family (Montgomery; 1998: 21).

In an investigation conducted by Dawes (in Shmukler; 1989: seminar 7) on children between 2 - 17 years, results showed that there was a significant relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder in mothers and the presence of multiple stress symptoms in children. This finding confirms that there is a direct relationship between the child's reaction and the parent's attitude.

At the end of the 1980's Punamaki (in Montgomery; 1998: 15) carried out a study of 174 Palestinian mothers and their children living on the West bank and in Gaza under Israeli occupation. She found that the primary predictor for mental disturbances in the children was found to be the mothers' depression (Punamaki in Montgomery; 1998: 15). She suggested that high levels of political violence are bound to affect the mother's health and therefore it becomes unlikely for the mother to act as a buffer. The role of acting as a buffer during huge difficulties is also likely to be a stressor for the mother (Punamaki in Cairns; 1996: 47).

So in the Punamaki´s study, "war trauma was found to be related to children's perception of negative parenting" (Dybdahl; 2001: 9). This study points to the fact that protracted conflicts influence mothers and children (in Montgomery; 1998: 15). Also, that the mother's psychological condition does play a very important role in how the child's handles stress and traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, it can be claimed that the reaction of children rests very much on how the significant adults in their lives, especially the parents, perceive and deal with threatening situations (Shmukler; seminar 7: 1989). Research shows that children are affected as much by parent's attitudes and mental state as they are by their own stress reaction. Good copers have parents who are models of good coping with whom they can identify (Shmukler; seminar 7: 1989). A significant overall conclusion is that children's responses to psychosocial stressors depend on the frightening event and the parental perception of it, and on whether it has personal connotations in terms of changed personal relationships or negative self appraisals (Shmukler; seminar 7: 1989).

As we move further outward from the family to the community, we find that high social support makes a great deal of difference in terms of coping and resilience. In situations where highly stressful events are associated with high social support, considerably less pathology is found than when the social support is missing (Shmukler; seminar 7: 1989).

5.5. Coping in families: positive/negative effects on children

Family characteristics and processes may be related to coping in a variety of ways. First, family members can serve as resources for children and adolescents who are coping with wars or protracted conflicts through the provision of social support and information. Second, family members can be impediments to the coping process by interrupting or constraining the coping efforts of a child. Also, they can impede the coping process by turning to the child for help in coping for themselves in ways that exceed the child's developmental capacity. In addition, wars and protracted conflicts can stop the family's ability to aid children in coping if there is separation or loss of family members as result of the event. Third, family members and parents in particular, can serve as models for coping strategies that may be employed by the child. Finally, families operate as systems in which the coping efforts of individual family members may affect and be affected by the coping efforts of other family members in addressing a common problem (Compas & Epping in Saylor; 1993: 21).

According to Lystad (in Saylor; 1993: 154) the family is a major resource for a child experiencing trauma. Tsoi, Yu and Lieh-Mak (in Saylor; 1993: 154) interviewed Vietnamese children who were refugees in Hong Kong following the fall of the South Vietnam regime in 1975. They found that remaining with their families and receiving emotional support from their families seemed to buffer some children from the adverse psychological effects of the war.

Nevertheless, while in general, family support is expected to have beneficial effects on children at all levels of socioeconomic status, the ability of parents to provide support may not be equal across socioeconomic levels. Thus, a parent's socioeconomic status has a pervasive effect on his/her ability to be supportive (Wills et al. in Hetherington & Blechman; 1996: 110).

5.6. A family's sense of coherence

In presenting Antonovsky´s theory, Haour-Knipe says that an important factor in coping with stress is an individual and a family's "sense of coherence" (2001: 5). Antonovsky performed a study on Israeli women in menopause (1981). He saw that a certain number of the women studied had been through the stressful experience of having been incarcerated in concentration camps and yet they had maintained good physical and mental health. So he focused on what allows people to remain healthy. Among a number of cultural, psychological and social resources appeared a way of making sense of the world called "sense of coherence".

The sense of coherence is "a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive enduring feeling of confidence that the stimuli deriving form one's internal and external environments are structured, predictable and explicable. Also it points to the resources available to the person to meet the demands posed by these stimuli and that these demands are challenges, worthy of investment" (Antonovsky in Haour-Knipe; 2001: 5). The sense of coherence has three components: First, comprehensibility; the extent to which one perceives the stimuli derived from internal and external environment as ordered structured information. The second component is manageability, where life events are seen as events one can cope with and challenges that can be met. Third, meaningfulness, where one feels that life is full of things worthy of investment.

Haour-Knipe points out that Antonovsky argued that people with a strong sense of coherence will tend to accept the challenges of a situation and are more likely to confront stress with an appropriate response (2001: 6). Moving to a new culture contains several elements requiring coping and adaptation and a sense of coherence makes a crucial difference to this experience.

Family migration is often seen in terms of permanent relocation, the adaptation to which may precipitate a crisis period (Haour-Knipe; 2001: 221). Such period may

entail conflicts and difficulties as a family learns to reshape its new reality. So the family needs to find ways to become compatible with the new environment and to preserve its identity. Stress is a normal component of family life, but it becomes problematic when the degree of stress in the family system reaches a level at which family members become dissatisfied or show symptoms of disturbance (Haour-Knipe; 2001: 221). It can be claimed that resilience may be forged through adversity and that moderate doses of stress forge its development. A high sense of coherence leads to willingness to deal with a new situation and the ability to more clearly assess a given situation. A parent's sense of caring deeply about something is at the core of the sense of coherence. This feeling will become evident to the children in the family. (Haour-Knipe; 2001: 224).

5.7.   The importance of parental coping in relation to children

The importance of parental coping modes and parental functioning for coping in children exposed to organized violence is frequently emphasized. Almqvist (1997: 23) has stated that young children will continue to cope with difficult environments as long as their parents are not pushed beyond their stress-absorption capacity. Once that point is exceeded there is a great danger of rapid deterioration. Therefore coping in children needs to be analysed in the context of family dynamics (Almqvist; 1997: 23). Hjern (1990) also points out how children's coping in war and violent societies strongly affects the parents, emphasizing the mutual impact between parents and children.

Overall, social learning theory asserts that supportive parents help children develop competence because they model effective coping, allow children to learn on their own and provide positive reinforcement for good performances. In a family where emotional support is high, children and parents communicate in a meaningful way that boost their sense of self-esteem and validates their feelings (Wills et al. In Hetherington & Blechman; 1996: 116). In a family where emotional and other types of support are available, children learn how to cope with challenges. A supportive

environment also helps children to get integrated in the community. A family with good support and communication skills appears to model important attitudes. In particular, children learn an optimistic approach to adversity, observe people to take an active problem solving approach, and participate in discussions which allow for differences (Wills et al. In Hetherington & Blechman; 1996: 116).

5.8.   Overall factors affecting coping in children

On the whole, exposure to protracted conflicts has been shown to constitute a powerful risk factor for children's emotional health and development. Children who are exposed to conflicts and violence may develop signs of trauma, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Also, children may be indirectly affected by their parents' exposure to protracted conflicts by a decreased parental functioning and negative changes in family dynamics. Risk factors associated with forced migration, such as temporary separation, permanent losses and culture shock, have also shown a negative effect on the family as a system and on the parent-child interaction (Almqvist; 1997: 27). As a result asylum seekers' children constitute a vulnerable group in need of attention and particular care. In spite of the events though, many asylum seekers appear to recover and adapt well to life in the host country. This outcome is due to the asylum seekers' children coping ability, based primarily on parental, but also on societal support (Almqvist; 1997: 27).

In conclusion, it would appear that the circumstances in which people grow up will colour their personalities and view of life thereafter. These factors are complex and include the intrapsychic, interpersonal, familial and community level. So, in order to gain a full picture of families´ coping modes, there is a need to look at those in a multifaceted way (Shmukler; seminar 7: 1989).

6. Cross-cultural research on parental beliefs on child rearing

The study of parent attitudes, belief systems and thinking has taken place along with changing conceptions of child-rearing that have emphasized the bidirectional nature of interactions, with children influencing parents as well as parents influencing children. Although many studies have addressed links between parents' thoughts and actions, the role of society and culture in the creation of parental beliefs, more and more investigation is being extended to the influence of parents' thoughts on child behaviour, with parental actions as the connecting link (Kojima in Stevenson et al.; 1986). Most of the work has been done with mothers, although increasingly research is being extended to fathers.

6.1.   <u>The social construction of parenting</u>

The adult's view of the child is partly a product of socialisation. Throughout the formative period, the adult constructs a view of the child adopting suitable beliefs and values from society and modifying them on the basis of personal experience (Kojima in Stevenson et al.; 1986: 52).

The child's experience of parent-child interactions also forms part of his/her life history and becomes part of the process of socialisation for parenthood for the next generation. It can be claimed that adults' experiences as children will influence how they view their child. Individually, the adult's view of the child may influence adult-child interactions and vice-versa. So, it can be argued that the adult's view of the child is the outcome of a reciprocal relationship with adult-child interactions working as a mediating factor (Kojima in Stevenson et al.; 1986: 52).

Hence, parents' experiences while structured by their beliefs about how their children learn are also affected by the way the children respond to their actions. The parents may alter their beliefs as they interact with their children and their children's' peers

and learn about how their own children's individual characteristics are relative to their peers (Sigel & Myung-In in Harkness & Super; 1996: 89).

The behaviour that parents exhibit towards their children and expect from them daily is complex. Several factors contribute to a particular pattern of behaviour seen between the parent and the child, for example: the immediate social contexts of interactions, the current desires, obligations, and preoccupations of parent and child, the history of parent child interaction built up daily and in the child's lifetime, and the expectations that come with that history. These factors are also influenced by more abstract and more general cultural beliefs about what the child should become. Thus to interpret the ultimate goal of parents' actions toward their children, one should have a broad understanding of their cultural beliefs as a whole (Gaskins in Harkness & Super; 1996: 345).

Following, child rearing is goal oriented. The long-range goal of socialisation is becoming a competent member of a society so socialisation is designed to accomplish whatever it takes to ensure this goal. The concept of socialisation has been claimed to imply a unidirectional process of causation moulding a passive child. But socialisation here implies an active interaction between the caretaker and the child (Kagitcibasi; 1996: 35). Whether or not caregivers see themselves in an active child development oriented role appears to be important.

6.2.   Parents' attitudes and beliefs

Child-rearing attitudes are cognitions that can be predictors for an individual to act either positively or negatively toward a child. They have been considered to be good predictors of parenting behaviour because they are an indication of the emotional climate in which children and parents operate and therefore of how good their relationship is. The attitudes most frequently considered have to do with the degree of warmth and acceptance or coldness and rejection that exists in the parent-child

relationship, as well as the extent to which parents are permissive or restrictive in the limits they set for their children (Grusec; 2006: 1).

A large body of research on attitudes indicates that parental warmth in combination with reasonable levels of control or restrictiveness produce positive child outcomes. The results are quite consistent. Researchers have also noted that what is seen to be a reasonable level of engagement and control varies as a function of the sociocultural context (Grusec; 2006: 2). For example, the level of parents' involvement in the children's school can vary according to countries.

It can be claimed that all beliefs and theories parents have about the socialisation of their children might be anchored in a specific cultural context. Beliefs seem to rule the behaviour and the actions of parents toward their children. Beliefs are set in a schema that includes affect, intentionality and value that in their totality guide parent's actions. Beliefs are mental representations that influence behaviour because they are considered inclusive of all aspects of child rearing (Sigel & Myung-In in Harkness & Super; 1996: 85).

Research shows that parental beliefs have a demonstrable effect on diverse developmental outcomes across cultures (Kagitcibasi; 1996: 30). Bornstein found significant cross-cultural differences in modes of parent-child interactions (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29). These variations in parental orientations are found to have consequences for children's cognitive development. Roopnarine and Talukder (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29) noted cultural specificity of certain parent-infant activities in India. Pomerau et al. (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29) working with Quebecois, Vietnamese and Haitian cultural groups in Montreal, Canada identified differences in beliefs and concerns about babies in these groups and noted variations in the social and physical environments that distinguish immigrants and natives. Thus cultural differences between childrearing environments appear to exist from early on.

Parental beliefs are expressed in the way parents teach their children how to behave. So, it can be claimed that children's competencies to understand symbolic material are the outcome of social experiences that first occur within the family. Parents are the primary teachers and socialisation agents of their children followed by the extended family and the community where they live and interact. Parents introduce the children to the physical, social and cultural worlds in a variety of ways. The activities parents provide, the books they read to the children, the television programmes they allow their children to watch, and the kinds of conversations they have with their children, are bound to have a strong effect on their children. At the same time, parental activities evolve from parents' experiences with their children and the children's responses (Sigel & Myung-In in Harkness & Super; 1996: 89).

Moreover, the importance of parental beliefs about their children should not obscure the presence of children's experiences outside the family and with people other than parents. Attention to parents' beliefs seems often to be based on the assumption that children's' encounters with the social world always involve parenting as introducers, interpreters, buffers. Parents often act in those ways. But there are other times where the child's experience is not filtered through the family and may exceed its parents' (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 150).

6.3.   Parents' ideas

Parents' ideas are assumed to come from tradition. This tradition considers direct experience with the children as a factor. But in addition the cultural images of what children, parenting and family life should be also prevail (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 74).

Parents build up expectations for the development of their children as well as ideas about appropriate parenting behaviour instrumental to achieve the desired developmental outcomes. These expectations, ideas and beliefs constitute subjective theories of parenting and child development that play an important role in guiding

their behaviour. Child rearing goals are part of these subjective theories. The child rearing goals define preferences which characteristics the child should acquire. Parental goals vary among cultures. The subjective theory of parenting is constructed in the process of interactions with the sociocultural environment and therefore it is influenced by norms and values of the respective culture, other persons, social groups, and social institutions including the media (Schwarz et al. in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 204).

Parents seem to be inclined toward ideas that help sustain hope and maintain effort within the task of parenting. On the other hand, another theory suggests that parents´ ideas about their children function as expectancies to which existing ideas predispose one towards self-confirming information. For example, if one is a single parent but clings to the idea that children without two parents head for disaster (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 79).

6.4. The developmental niche

The concept of developmental niche (Harkness & Super; 1996) helps to understand the interrelation between norms, values, parental theories and child rearing goals. The developmental niche consists of three interdependent systems: first the physical and social environment (climate, people), second, the culturally regulated customs of childcare and child rearing (time of weaning), third the caretaker psychology (affective orientation of the caregiver). The latest component includes values and attitudes as well as child rearing goals. These goals are influenced by the physical and social environment. The whole developmental niche is embedded in the larger sociocultural context and mediates the cultural influences onto the child. So in order to understand child rearing goals and parenting within a cultural context, relevant cultural characteristics need to be acknowledged, one can be seen in the dominant cultural values like individualism and collectivism (Schwarz et al. in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 204).

Whiting (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 117) points out that the very significant actions parents take may concern the assignment of children to various niches, areas or habitats: from playgroups to sports clubs, ethnic associations, private schools, etc. Many of the child's activities and friendships are then constrained by those niches rather than by continued parental action. Each of these niches has a flow-on effect upon the people children encounter, their opportunities to play with peers and their opportunity to acquire informal cognitive skills. What is unknown is the expectations parents have of these various niches, the degree of influence they feel they have over what happens in them, and the way parents respond to a lack of match between their expectations and what they perceive as happening (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 151).

Research has been carried out on how a parent's ties to the outside world can influence ideas and outcomes. This recognition is particularly evident in studies that explore niches where children may be exposed to conditions that are outside the knowledge of parents and beyond their expertise (Whiting in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 151).

6.5. The influence of culture on parental beliefs

When studying the ideas that parents have about the development of children many authors have concentrated on the differences between some parents and others. The most frequent variables have been found in relation to parents' ethnic, cultural origin and socioeconomic status.

It can be noticed that parents´ understanding about their children, their development, and the meaning of their behaviour are to a large extent shared by members of a cultural group (Harkness & Super; 1996: 2). This understanding is developed in the context of life in a particular cultural place and time and is related to the understanding about other aspects of life as experienced by parents, as for example the nature and meaning of parenthood or the family. The cultural understanding that parents hold is referred to as "parents' cultural beliefs" (Harkness & Super; 1996: 2). With the

increased research on parents' beliefs, has also come the knowledge that much of parental cognition is socially or culturally organized.

Parents' cultural belief systems provide an insight into how the self becomes constituted by culture and influences behaviour (Harkness & Super; 1996: 5). Parents' cultural beliefs gain particular importance especially in the case of problematic development in a child life (Harkness & Super; 1996: 5).

Parenting is a complex phenomenon which can be looked at from many levels of analysis (Valsiner & Litvinovic in Harkness & Super; 1996: 56). Parenting is strongly influenced by the cultural communications' processes between the parents and different social institutions and persons. So, it is important to approach parenting as a cultural phenomenon by focusing on the parent as a self constructing individual who develops within a broader social world while continuously being challenged by the necessity to resolve real-life situations (Valsiner & Litvinovic in Harkness & Super; 1996: 56).

When looking at the individual parent who is constructing one's role on the basis of collective cultural notions about parenting; an interconnection of different levels and their influence on each other can be noticed (Valsiner & Litvinovic in Harkness & Super; 1996: 60). This influence does not appear directly but seems filtered through the social roles.

A major goal of parenting is to socialize, to support the child in successfully adapting to the conditions of its society and culture, so that the child can become a functioning member of society. Parenting is influenced by the cultural norms and values which are reflected in the child rearing goals of the parents and their views of the development of their children (Schwarz et al. in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 203).

A person therefore develops within a collective culture. This happens through constructing the contents of his/her mind on the basis of whatever he/she learns from

the social world. It also happens through the elements already existent in a personal life history that operate as constraining devices. At the same time, the person develops and acts through the continuous exchange with the other people around him/her (Valsiner & Litvinovic in Harkness & Super; 1996: 62).

Families vary considerably in the views they take about the expression of emotions (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 112). Many families appear to see one's children as better than they are or even as "the best". Different families and different cultural groups' expectations in relation to emotions and rationality have yet to be determined. But it is suspected they are a substantial part of differences among families and cultural groups (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 112).

Culture provides parents with particular beliefs about how children become functional members of their culture. These include the nature of children, how they learn and develop and the parents' role in socialising their children. Understanding these beliefs provides the basis for understanding any parental cultural motivation that underlies the specific of the way they structure their children's experience and therefore the children's development. Without this foundation, parents' actions toward their children could be claimed to be interpretable only by our own cultural system of beliefs and values that we carry (Gaskins in Harkness & Super; 1996: 345).

At the same time, the beliefs do not provide a complete answer to the question of how socialisation takes place. Because every culture's set of beliefs about children and parents is different, each is a unique influence on the nature of children's' experience (Gaskins in Harkness & Super; 1996: 346).

So, individual representations of values should be considered when comparing cultures which have been classified as individualistic or collectivistic, as to take into account intracultural differences in values and child-rearing theories. Furthermore, Schwartz et al. (in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 207) claim that individual differences should be explained on the basis of theoretical assumptions. One assumption is that certain value

orientations predict specific parental goals on the individual level. Also, goals include certain expectations and wishes as to how the child should develop. Such goals may motivate the parent to behave in certain ways, which facilitate the development of certain characteristics in the child. Parenting behaviour can be claimed to be a mean to achieve child-rearing goals (Schwarz et al. in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 207).

6.6.   Cross-cultural differences in child rearing goals

Parents from different cultures differ in their child rearing goals and parenting behaviour. Also, cross-cultural studies show that parents differ in the way they personally feel responsible for or powerful enough to influence the development of the child (Schwarz et al. in Friedlmeier et al.; 2005: 208). Individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in their child rearing goals and parenting behaviour because collectivistic cultures emphasize integration into the social group and their hierarchy, while in individualistic cultures a person is considered self responsible and pursues his own goals (Valsiner & Litvinovic in Harkness & Super; 1996: 62).

Parental goals, beliefs and values rearing children can be claimed to reflect societal values. First of all there may be differences between the two value systems at different levels depending especially on the social class status of the parents. Second, parental values have a more direct impact on the child than societal values. Thus parental orientations constitute an important aspect of the context of development. On the other side, it can be true that parental beliefs are cultural constructions (Kagitcibasi; 1996: 28). Goodnow (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 28) found greater between group differences than within group differences in parental beliefs across social class, ethnic, and cultural comparisons. Cross-cultural differences in parental values can reflect more general cross-cultural differences in societal values.

LeVine et al. have hypothesized that differences in childrearing patterns evolve in response to environmental risks threatening the child's survival and self-maintenance (1988: 99). Hoffman (in LeVine et al.; 1988: 99) proposed that parents rear their

children as to encourage the development of those qualities and attitudes needed for their expected adult roles, which differ from society to society. Harkness & Super (1996) see cross-cultural differences as resulting from the fact that adult beliefs on the world in general and the nature of children differ from group to group. These beliefs affect parenting behaviour.

At the same time, Le Vine et al. (1988: 99) pointed to the adaptation to environmental requirements as a basis for parental goals and behaviours. For example, in agrarian societies with high infant mortality and hazardous environments, parental goals of protection and survival of children lead to conformity oriented child socialization. So, in all the different research, there is a common emphasis on the importance of parental belief systems for parental behaviour and for developmental outcomes.

Cashmore and Goodnow (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29), observed the importance of social class in Australia. When this variable was controlled, the originally emerging ethnic differences in parental beliefs and attitudes disappeared. Similar findings were obtained by Lambert (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29) in a cross-national study and by Podmore and St George (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29) comparing New Zealand Maori and European mothers (in Kagitcibasi; 1996: 29). Those findings pointed to a common methodological problem of confounding ethnicity and social class standing. Because ethnic minorities seem to often have lower social economic status than the majority of the population, the observed differences are difficult to interpret.

LeVine et al. (1988: 100) suggest that where infant mortality is less but subsistence resources are scarce, parents will be preoccupied with the child's capacity for future economic self-maintenance. Many anthropologists have observed that obedience is a particularly valued trait in a child in agricultural economies and LeVine et al. suggest that this is because obedience is a necessary trait for surviving economically as an adult in rural societies (1988: 100). This theory is supported by studies in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines where obedience is endorsed as the most desirable quality.

Hoffman (in LeVine et al.; 1988: 102) proposed that children might satisfy certain basic needs for parents such as the need for love, fun and stimulation, or economic security. The needs that children satisfy are affected by the social and economic structure of a particular society.

The general view of the parental role has indications of parent-child relationships extending in time through the life cycle. For example cross-cultural comparisons of Japanese and American mothers´ maternal role perceptions show differences in definitions of responsibility and in time perspectives (Kagitcibasi; 1996: 31). The American mothers' definition of maternal responsibility is short term until children reach adolescence and involves physical care and love with no duties. The Japanese mothers´ self-definition of maternal responsibility is lifelong and embedded in the husband's structure where she is responsible for bringing up a respectful, cooperative and highly achievement oriented child (Kagitcibasi; 1996: 31).

6.7. The influence of maternal history on the child rearing behaviour

An emphasis on cultural values, maternal beliefs and caregiving practices can help toward a more thorough understanding of maternal behaviour at the individual level. An analysis of those levels should include the recognition of the interaction between cultural models, individual beliefs, and the contribution of the child him/herself (Harkness & Super; 1996: 400).

A woman who sees herself responsible for contributing to the creation of knowledge and ideas is likely to search out the reflections of others, invite feedback and look onto others as important partners in the process of constructing and understanding the world. If women manage to value others as a source of support, they will work to draw out the best of one another's thinking and in doing that, promoting their own skills (Bond et al. in Harkness & Super; 1996: 474).

On the other hand, it can be suggested that women who rarely rely on words for problem solving and communication might be more likely to turn to power-oriented techniques for influencing their own children. Not feeling the power of their own voices and minds, these mothers would not draw such capacities in their children. Not thinking and talking things through with their children, the mothers would be unlikely to explain what they themselves know. Mind and voice would be more likely to go unrecognized and unnurtured in both mother and child, and the child would be left with many of the thinking and parenting strategies of the parent, thus perpetrating these patterns through subsequent generations (Bond et al. in Harkness & Super; 1996: 474).

Epistemologies will frame a mother's understanding of child development and her own role in supporting that development. These conceptions influence the parent-child transactions. On the other hand, a mother's belief and parent-child transactions contribute to establishing the context that reinforces and perpetuates the underlying assumptions and epistemologies (Bond et al. in Harkness & Super; 1996: 492).

Women seem to be presented in many texts as incompetent, victims, and inextricably tied in their identity and their fate to children. For example discussions of social policy for children typically assume that the major responsibilities for children will rest with women and the increasing autonomy of the women is presented at the expense of the child (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 99). It has been argued that this view seems to alter the capacity of women to see themselves as competent and able to act.

For example, in the case of the many women who grew up in impoverished, isolated, rural settings experiences of being truly listened to have been scarce. This has been experienced outside the family like in the school system where their clothes were being demeaned by their peers (Harkness & Super; 1996: 493). Also this has happened in their families too where they have been marginalized and made voiceless by parents and other adults in the household who appeared to be threatened and being made voiceless themselves. Verbal and physical abuse appear to have been prevalent among

those families. Intellectual dependency and personal isolation were the norm within many of these households. So attempts to deviate from these norms were often treated as additional evidence of stupidity and met with rejection (Harkness & Super; 1996: 493).

Bugental and colleagues have studied mothers who believe their children have more power than they do in situations where events don't seem to be going well. These mothers appear to be threatened and become either abusive and hostile or unassertive and submissive (in Grusec; 2006: 2). They seem to send confusing messages to their children, with the result that children stop paying attention to them as well as showing a decrease in their cognitive ability. This view of the power relationship appears to weigh on mothers' ability to problem-solve and therefore to operate effectively in their parenting role. Likewise, mothers who are low in self-esteem do not seem to believe they can parent effectively. So they give up on parenting when the task is challenging and become depressed (Grusec; 2006: 2). They appear cold, unemotional and disengaged in interactions with their babies.

Brody and his colleagues, in a study of single-parent African-American families, reported that efficacy was related to the goals mothers set for their children, such as being well educated and well behaved (in Grusec; 2006: 2). It was these goals that predicted parenting practices that were ultimately linked to children's ability to regulate their own behaviour and to plan ahead. Other mothers seem to entertain unrealistic positive beliefs about their ability to parent, and were likely to be angry and critical of their preschoolers, who in turn seem to respond defiantly. Researchers have also assessed parents' ability to take the perspective of their child. Children of parents who can accurately predict their children's cognitive performance perform better, presumably because they can better match their teaching efforts to their children's needs (Grusec; 2006: 2).

Hess et al. (in Harkness & Super; 1996: 217) dealt with mothers' expectations with respect to children's acquisition of different competencies. Research has been done on

the role of cultural differences making use of the ethnic and cultural diversity in the country of research as in the case of Australia. Here mothers with Anglo-Australian, Lebanese, Vietnamese and Greek origins were compared. The results provided solid evidence leading to the assertion that the differences linked to cultural origin have a greater influence on the contents of ideas than do the differences related to socioeconomic variables (Harkness & Super; 1996: 218).

A Californian study looked at the role of strain caused by work and parenting and to which partners consider each other as supportive (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 77). The study showed that both mothers and fathers found that higher level of strain were associated with negative perceptions of children. Higher levels of perceived spouse support were associated with more positive perceptions. Also, for mothers, a joint commitment to work and parenting was associated with more positive perceptions of children (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 77).

Ruddick (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 110) made an analysis of maternal thinking and said that the job of mothering is characterised by three responsibilities and by three sets of conditions. Those are: the responsibility for the child's preservation, its growth, and its acceptability to him/herself and others. As for the conditions; one is related to the nature of children, the other to the demands of the job, and the third has to do with the conditions of the world in which the child is raised. The result is that the mother comes to feel and to value a particular set of feelings and ideas. For example, the child's vulnerability encourages her in her attempt to protect him/her. At the same time, the changes constantly occurring in children encourage a respect for growth (Ruddick in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 112).

Conger et al. (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 115) performed a study where they wished to predict the affective quality of mothers' interactions with their young children. Most of the children were preschoolers. Interactions were coded as positive, neutral, or negative and the outcome measures dealt with both the frequency and the relative proportions of these. The models considered all started from environmental

stressors as the initial variable, with stress defined mainly as the demographic conditions: income, dependence on public support, family structure, educational achievement and mothers´ age at first birth. Those stressors were considered to have a direct effect on maternal behaviour (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 116).

A study by Krasnor (in Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 139), on children's' interactions in preschool to determine their strategies, asked their teachers to rate each child's social competence. The results showed that children rated by observers and teachers as socially competent were likely to have mothers who rated social skills like making friends, sharing possessions, leading or influencing others, as important. Also those mothers attributed factors of low social competence to factors external to the child. Another finding was that children were carrying over strategies developed with mothers. The children of mothers who suggested the use of high power strategies to improve children' social skills, tended to be rated as fearful and anxious by teachers. Also they were thought of using unassertive interactions with others. In contrast, children who were more sensitive and independent in classroom interactions tended to have mothers who proposed effective strategies for themselves. In general, what appears to be carried over is not so much the model that the mother provides but the kind of behaviour and the expectations of influence that the child has practiced with the mother (Goodnow & Collins; 1990: 140).

There seems to be a variety of social, political, historical and economical forces on the global, national community and family levels that contribute to the greater marginalisation and silencing of certain individuals as well as groups of people (Bond et al. in Harkness & Super; 1996: 493). These forces often appear to sustain a series of beliefs and systems that are in several ways self-perpetuating.

Conclusion

So, when discussing mothers' concerns for their children, the cultural and societal belief system inherent to the parental culture is an important factor to consider. As

belief systems that are socially constructed and shared by individual parents, parents' cultural beliefs represent the basis of mothers' ideas of children's needs (Harkness & Super; 1996: 6). In addition, it is important to undertake cross-cultural comparisons to define the role of cultural beliefs as influences on child developments and to discover what the inherent differences in the distinct cultures are.

It is claimed that parents observe their children through a filter of conscious and unconscious thoughts and attitudes, and these filters direct the way they perceive their children's actions and how they behave toward them. When the thoughts are accurate, they appear to direct positive actions. When they are distorted, they appear to distract parents from the task at hand as well as leading to distressing emotions and attributions that prejudice effective parenting (Grusec; 2006: 3).

Harkness & Super (1996: 71) emphasize that parental reasoning is oriented toward future encounters with children's novel conduct. Present time generalizations are functional in the preparation of the adults for the future. So, the processes of parental reasoning seem to be constructed by personal and collective cultural resources. Those resources are then, according to this theory, employed in the solutions of immediate real life situations as well as in a transformation of the personal systems of memories and beliefs (Harkness & Super; 1996: 71). Ultimately, those resources could influence future social interactions with members of the same culture and in some cases they might even influence the source of parenting ideas in general.

7. Method

7.1. <u>Qualitative semistructured interviews in this research and their analysis</u>

The method used in this thesis has been qualitative semistructured interviewing and the interview questions have been used more as a checklist rather than a formal questionnaire. The interviews have taken one hour each and have been recorded on a tape recorder and notes have been taken at the same time. After that, the interviews have been transcribed on the researcher's computer. Each participant has been interviewed once and has been given the possibility to see the interview's transcript for feedback.

Then, the methodology of content analysis has been chosen as a strategy for the qualitative analysis of the interviews' transcripts of this research (Storsul; 2005). The choice of his strategy has been due to the limited size of this sample and the interview method adopted. The interviews have been analysed by identifying recurrent themes. Recurrent themes and words have been counted for the analysis. Themes have been selected in relation to their representativity. The themes have been suggested already in the interview guide, and further themes have arisen during the interviews. The interview guide has been designed to provide a tool to either reject or accept the hypothesis put forward in this thesis. The recurrent themes have been linked, when possible, to the theoretical literature used for this thesis. However, if particular themes have been considered relevant, even if not directly connected to the literature, they have still been included in the discussion.

The analysis has attempted to go beyond the literal meaning of the answers, and sought to explore the context of the interview answers as well as the possible intentions and hidden motifs of the interviewees. The analysis thus attempted at finding the objective meaning and compensate for bias. Biased answers may have still been present. But, it has been claimed that biased answers can be valuable in a text

analysis (Storsul; 2005). Also, the participants' body language and tone of voice have been considered through the analysis.

A semistructured interview is defined by Kvale as an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (1996: 5). The main aim of the qualitative research interview is to understand the world from the subjects' point of view and to uncover the meaning given to it (Kvale; 1996: 1). "The qualitative interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inter-view, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale; 1996: 2).

Kvale points out that in the qualitative semistructured interview "many decisions have to be made on the spot", during the interview (1996:13). The main challenge through the interviews in this thesis has been how much freedom should be left to the subjects in straying from the interview guide. If too much freedom is allowed, then there is a risk of not finding out any answers to the formulated hypothesis. If too little freedom is left to the subjects, then there is a risk of unduly influencing the subjects. This may lead them toward the desired results and in this way manipulating them. Another consequence of leaving too little freedom might be to make the subjects nervous and uncomfortable and therefore unable to reveal all the answers needed. Hence relevant information may not be revealed (Kvale; 1996: 13).

7.2. Validity and Ethical issues in this thesis

In relation to validity, Kvale (1996: 65) asserts that "reliability is a measure on whether or not the researcher is able to reflect upon his subjectivity during the cause of analysis and interpretation of the material". The validity of the research is concerned with the interpretation of observations. With a qualitative approach to this phenomenon, it is impossible to avoid the effect of the interviewer on the respondent and vice versa (Kvale; 1996: 35).

Kvale points out that the interview situation may be "anxiety-provoking and induce defence mechanisms in the interviewee as well as the interviewer" (1996: 35). The interviewer should be conscious of the personal dynamics within the interaction and take them into account in the interview situation and in the later analysis of the finished interview. "The reciprocal influence of interviewer and interviewee on a cognitive or emotional level, is not necessarily an error but can be a strong point of qualitative research interviewing" (Kvale; 1996: 36). The interview approach relies heavily on the respondent's response. Interviews as a research method will always be affected by the social interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Aunaas; 2000: 43). But in order to make the results reliable, the researcher needs to account for those factors and reflect upon his subjectivity when interpreting the material.

These issues have been addressed at the start of each of the interviews. In fact, having met the interviews' subjects only at the time of the interviews, probably created some stress in the subjects. Hence, possibly not all of their feelings may have been expressed. In fact, it is never a simple task for individuals to reveal personal information to persons unfamiliar to them (Bengston et al.; 2005: 109). But the interviewer tried to build trust with the interviewees and made all possible efforts to assure that they were comfortable.

Furthermore, the mothers might have given answers according to what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear rather than their true feelings. For example, the mothers were told that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their application with the UDI or the placement at the reception centres. Nonetheless, it is possible that from the encounters that the mothers had experienced with the police and the UDI, they might have had some reservations in expressing their true feelings with the interviewer. The reasons for this could be the fear of losing their place in the reception centre, or due to past traumatic experiences in an interview setting.

In particular there was the distinct feeling that due to this perceived risk, one mother (mother B.) might have given an inflatedly positive stream of answers because she

thought that was what the interviewer wanted to hear. On the other hand, the other two (African) mothers interviewed, although not interviewed at the same time, both seemed to attempt at giving a more balanced response that weighed the positive and negative sides of life as an asylum seeker mother in a reception centre in Norway. Those mothers told the interviewer that they tried to give a fair account of their situation because they wanted people to know the reality of raising children in a reception centre.

Moreover, the fact that the interviewer and the interviewee spoke a different language undoubtedly did not help the subjects to be able to convey all their thoughts properly. In the group interview, the mother from a country in Central Africa spoke English with the interviewer and the mother from a country in the Balkans spoke Norwegian. But English was not the first language for the Central African mother and the same was the case for the Norwegian spoken by the Balkan mother. Those circumstances may, despite the interviewer and interviewees' best efforts, have influenced the interviews´ results.

The interview situation and the analysis have proved challenging for the interviewer during this research. There is awareness that the interviewer may have been influenced by certain answers and possibly certain elements of non-verbal communication in the interviews and in the analysis. So, due to this awareness, the interviewer has tried to avoid these possible pitfalls. That has been attempted by, during the analysis, first transcribing the notes and secondly listening to the tapes. In the notes, the interviewer tried to write about the other elements that were present in the interview beside the actual words. That helped the interviewer in the analysis in trying to discern between her subjective interpretation of a particular statement and its actual, objective content. It is also possible that the interviewer's situation as an immigrant female in a foreign country may have brought her to sympathize with the situation of the mothers interviewed. This factor was considered constantly during the analysis of the transcripts. As Kvale points out, the bias of the interviewer may not always be a source of error (Kvale; 1996: 36).

When considering the ethical side of this research, it is necessary to state that this research was approved by REK (*Regional Komité for Medisinsk Forskningsetikk*) and NSD (*Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste*). Following, still in relation to the ethical side of this research, it is important to consider interviewing asylum seeker mothers in its complexity and sensitiveness. First, the women in question have undergone several traumatic events such as family loss, or being witness of violence for example, from which they may not have recovered completely at the time of the interview (cf. 1). Secondly, dealing with financial instability, lack of social support, language barriers, unfamiliar social institutions and raising their children in a reception centre may create extra stress on them (cf. 2). Finally, living in a situation where they do not know if they will be sent back home or they will be able to stay in Norway, is also considered a special circumstance.

7.3.   Qualitative interviews and generalizations

Kvale (1996: 54) expresses that by conducting in-depth qualitative interviews "one may be better able to obtain an experience of some knowledge of the complexities of individual lives. One needs to be highly cautious in advancing generalizations from such studies as they do not allow statistical generalizations but provide the basis for theoretical generalizations" (Kvale; 1996: 56). However it is important to bear in mind those cases where the theory needs more elaboration or qualification because the facts do not appear to fit with it. In the case of this thesis, an example might be that in spite of their difficulties, the mothers and children interviewed appeared to be resilient which seems to be in contrast with the theories on this subject which would lead to the conclusions that the more difficulties, the more troubled life for the child will be (cf. 9.7).

7.4.   The aim of qualitative interviews

On the whole, the aim of the qualitative research interview is not to end up with "unequivocal and quantifiable meanings on the themes in focus" (Kvale; 1996: 34).

What is relevant is to describe precisely the possibly ambiguous and contradictory meanings expressed by the interviewee. "The interview is neither a subjective nor an objective method; it is an inter-subjective interaction" (Kvale; 1996: 66). The qualitative interviewing and interview guide and techniques used in this thesis have attempted at adopting those precepts. For this thesis, the qualitative semistructured interviewing method was chosen because it provided a deeper understanding of the respondents' lives respect to a questionnaire.

7.5.   The challenges brought by the interviews

In relation to the interviews, the first challenge faced by the researcher was of how much freedom to allow the interviewees in straying from the interview guide. A methodological decision from the researcher was taken to allow the subjects some freedom to wonder toward other directions not strictly connected to the questions. Nevertheless, that freedom was allowed mainly in the circumstances where it helped the interviewer to figure out the frame of mind of the subjects involved (cf. 7.1).

Secondly, another challenge faced by the researcher was the need to develop culturally sensitive information that dealt with the uniqueness of each culture. One way to develop measures was by gathering information on asylum seekers perceptions of their families' strengths. That was accomplished by asking the subjects to consider what they found helpful in their child-rearing strategy in their present situation in the reception centre. Other challenges have been the language differences between the researcher and the mothers and the interpretation of the results.

8. Data collection

The method used in this thesis has been qualitative semistructured interviewing. Subjects have been chosen according to a number of criteria. Due to the small numbers of subjects and the time restrictions, the sample has not been random. Altogether ten subjects have been interviewed: three asylum seeker mothers living in reception centres in South East Norway, two members of staff and the head of a reception centre in South East Norway, two volunteers from Save The Children Norway (STC) working in two different reception centres, two professionals from R-BUP (*Region Senter for Barn og Unges Psykiske Helse*) services in Norway who have extensively worked with asylum seeker mothers and children.

The reason for the composition of this sample is to show whether being in a reception centre will create a change to the mother-child situation and if mothers can adjust their concerns in relation to child rearing to the reception centre setting. Also to explore if different mothers from different countries have different concerns. The objective has not been statistical generalizations due to the nature of the method used. The reason for the choice of the sample interviewed is that it is representative. In fact, even if the sample is restricted in size, the accumulated knowledge of its subjects represents a broad experience with a very large number of cases.

8.1. Criteria for choosing the asylum seeker mothers to interview

The choice of the mothers has been according to a number of criteria. First of all, mothers were chosen from different nationalities or at least cultures. Secondly, mothers with at least one child of at least age two were chosen. The mothers from Africa had each two children. The mother from Central Africa, mother C.A., had a child of two years and a daughter of six. The mother from the Horn of Africa, mother H.A., had a child just over two years and a child of nine months. The mother from the Balkans, mother B., had a child of five months and a child of nine and a child of 10 years.

Thirdly, mothers who had been in Norway for at least one year were chosen. One mother (mother C.A.) had lived in Norway for five years. First in one reception centre outside one of the main cities in Norway and now in the reception centre where she was interviewed. Another one (mother H.A.) had been in Norway for four years. The first three years she had also lived in a reception centre outside one of the main cities. She moved into the reception centre where the interview took place one year ago. The mother from the Balkans (mother B.) had been in Norway for two years always living in the reception centre where she was interviewed.

The reason for choosing mothers who had been in Norway for longer than a year was that the research needed mothers to have adapted to life in Norway in a reception centre. Also, the reason for choosing mothers with children aged two upwards was due to bonding. During the first two years of life, mother and child enter a very exclusive relationship where the child is very dependent on the mother (Bowlby; 2004). But after those first two years the child becomes gradually more independent of the mother and starts to interact further with the external world. Finally, mothers had to be living in reception centres and have a legal status of asylum seekers.

Following those criteria, reception centres in Oslo were contacted to ask if workers and mothers there were interested in participating. Mothers were made aware that the participation was voluntary and that participating would not improve or worsen their application for asylum at UDI (*Utlendingsdirektoratet*). Then, two members of staff who worked closely with mothers and children and the head of one of the reception centres were asked to participate. From the same reception centre, three mothers came forward too.

8.2. Description of the professionals interviewed

The professionals interviewed were chosen in relation to their work. Two female workers from the reception centres where the mothers had been interviewed were chosen. This was due to their close knit work with asylum seeker mothers and

children. For the same reason, the head of the reception centre was also interviewed. Then, Save The Children Norway (STC) was contacted and two young women, who are volunteers at a reception centre outside Oslo, came forward to be interviewed. One of the women works specifically with asylum seeker mothers and one with asylum seeker children. Following, the two members of R-BUP services (a researcher and a psychologist) interviewed have been working closely with asylum seeker families in Norway.

8.3.   The aims of qualitative interviewing in this thesis

The qualitative research interview aims at obtaining direct descriptions (Kvale; 1996: 32). To find out about direct descriptions of asylum seeker mothers´ lives has been the main aim of the interviews conducted in this thesis. The reason for the researcher to interview asylum seeker mothers and the professionals involved in caring for them, has been to get an overall description of the mothers´ situations from different angles even if ambiguous or contradictory. The aim in the data results chapter is to attempt at describing such views even if contradictory or ambiguous.

Qualitative interviewing "seeks to describe specific situations and action sequences from the subject's world" (Kvale; 1996: 33). This has been the aim when the interview guide has been created. "Analysing why the subject experience what they do and act as they do is the primary task of the researcher" (Kvale; 1996: 32).

8.4.   The interviews' settings

The interviews have taken place between April and May. Generally it was carefully explained to the mothers that the interviews were totally independent of the decision regarding their permit to stay in Norway. The mothers seemed to be generally engaged in the conversation but the presence of the children might have proved to be a distraction.

The first interview was done with two mothers at the same time at a reception centre in South East Norway. The mothers knew each other. One mother came from a country in Central Africa and one of her children, age two, was present during the interview. The other mother came from the Balkans and one of her children, aged five months, was asleep in her room, one floor down. The second interview was conducted with a mother from a country from the Horn of Africa from the same reception centre. Both of her children, aged two years and nine months, were present. In none of the interviews the children were exposed to any interview-like situation and the researcher did not interact with them.

Then, the workers of the reception centres were interviewed. In the same period of time the volunteers from STC were interviewed and the professionals from R-BUP were interviewed. The choice of the interviews' settings was made by the subjects interviewed.

9. Data results

9.1. <u>What are reception centres in Norway</u>

In order to explain the interviews' results better, it is necessary to clarify what is a reception centre. It is generally believed that a reception centre is a public institution where asylum seekers must live while their application is being processed. But as UDI points out, a reception centre is an offer of temporary housing for persons applying for asylum in Norway (UDI; 2007: 5). Asylum seekers may live in reception centres during the processing of their application and until they are settled elsewhere or until the application is rejected and they have to leave Norway. According to UDI the goal is to provide an as normal place to live as possible for persons in an abnormal life situation (2007: 5). The UDI believes that the standards in reception centres should be simple but adequate. So a reception centre is "an offer of temporary housing and accompanying financial benefits and programmes for residents who are applying for asylum in Norway" (UDI; 2007: 5).

It is also stated that the activity groups for residents of reception centres should help them deal with their life situation during their stay in the reception centre and help them to create a "meaningful day-to-day life" (UDI; 2007: 5). Further, UDI asserts that reception centres should offer a series of different activity groups to suit the residents who are staying in the reception centres and to enable them to maintain their own language and culture (UDI; 2007: 5). Also the activity groups are meant to prepare the residents for the possibility of life in Norway or for the possible return to their country (UDI; 2007 5). In spite of those objectives, reception centres' workers have pointed out that the guidelines offered by the UDI have not been specific enough to enable properly tailored activity groups. So the groups organized, although varied have not appeared to have a huge attendance. The mothers interviewed have also complained about the activity groups ([Interviews] 13, 16 and 22-04-07).

9.2. Mothers' background

All mothers came from countries that had either been affected by war or protracted conflicts and were here as asylum seekers. None of the mothers had been separated from their children before coming to Norway but two had been separated from their husbands for some time. Mother C.A. had been separated from her husband for one and half year. Mother H.A. had been separated from her husband for four months. All mothers had lost contact with part or all of their family at some point. All mothers had been living in other places, including refugee camps, for at least a year, before coming to Norway.

According to the psychologist at R-BUP: "The previous stressors such as the loss of relatives and problems in the refugee camps, what they experienced in the flight over here, whether they have good coping resources etc, this all affects how asylum seeker mothers will deal with their life in the reception centre" ([Interview] 22-4-07). The escape to another country, the loss of relatives, life in refugee camps where all families have a small space for themselves and not sufficient hygienic conditions or food; those and other similar stressors all affect the asylum seeker behaviour and how they will deal with their current situation in the reception centre because, for example, they may still feel anxious or mourning their losses (cf. 1).

9.3. Professionals' background

The two members of staff at the reception centre had been working in the reception centre for more than a year and in particular with asylum seeker mothers and children. One of them was the deputy head of the reception centre. The head of the reception centre had been working there for five years. The two volunteers at STC have both been working in reception centres for two years, generally visiting two times a week, and in particular with asylum seeker women and children. The two professionals (one psychologist and one researcher) working at R-BUP services have been researching

and working with asylum seekers and refugee mothers and children in Norway and abroad for the last few years.

9.4. Mothers in reception centres

All mothers complained about the lack of space in the reception centres. They all live in a one-bedroom flat with a connected small bathroom and a small corner with a cooker. Regardless of the amount of children, families are just given one-bedroom flats. All mothers found it hard to only have one room for all the family activities to be carried out and to sleep. As all of the families interviewed had more than one child, they all complained about different children having different sleep patterns and the same for the parents; but they all had to sleep in the same room. Finally, all mothers reported distress in relation to having to wait for the answer from UDI to know if they could stay in Norway or if they would be sent back.

All mothers interviewed had much the same life every day. They took their children to school or nursery school, and then they went to shop food. After that, they went home and cleaned. Then they picked up the children at school, made dinner for the family and helped the children with their homework. After that they watched TV with their husbands. This type of repetitive life seemed to hugely affect and frustrate the mothers. Two out of the three mothers did not have much contact with any of the other mothers in the reception centre and felt very isolated. In addition, two out of the three mothers did not participate very often in the activity groups organized by the reception centre because they could not leave their youngest children with anyone else during those groups.

Mother C.A. said "It's very hard, if someone from outside hasn't had our life, they can not understand it. My daughter was ok before but now she is growing up, she asks a lot of questions: why are we living in the reception centre? Why don't we have a house? Why can't I take my friends at home on my birthday? The other kids have toys, they have their own room and I don't. It's hard to take! We used to watch the news and she

saw many things happening in Africa, so she knows what's happening and I tell her that's why we are here and one day we will have our own house and get what you want" ([Interview] 16-04-07).

Mother B. said: "It is difficult to raise kids in the reception centre because the house is small and so the children are happier when they are out. Children ask sometimes why they are here and I say to them because of the war in the Balkans. So here it is not perfect but at least it is a free place where they can go out without worrying and have a life" ([Interview] 16-04-07).

Nevertheless, all mothers spoke well of the reception centre workers and found them helpful, even if they did not enjoy living and raising children in the reception centre. In general, the psychologist at R-BUP asserted that "staff at reception centres plays a very important role in creating a supportive environment where people can do meaningful activities and come to feel competent in child rearing. Usually the staff at reception centres is very good and helpful in this regard" ([Interview] 22-04-07).

The general opinion of the professionals and volunteers working with asylum seekers (Interviews 22 and 23-04 and 06-05-07) has been that although conscientious, the staff at reception centres does not always manage to help the people there. Also, another issue has been that the rooms are too small and the standards too simple. This point was also reiterated from the staff and the head of the reception centre ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07). In addition, often there is a lack of play areas for children in reception centres and when those are provided; they are not clean or big enough. Moreover, the staff at reception centres often lacks psychological qualifications, the right training and the right supervision held by professionals used to deal with psychological issues ([Interviews] 22 and 23-04-07). In particular, the psychologist interviewed at R-BUP ([Interview] 22-04-07) is not sure that all reception centres are safe. She believes that there are a lot of people there with several different problems, for example some struggle with not being violent. So it is a different situation from what children need.

According to the researcher at R-BUP: "reception centres are a situation that can make new problems for a family. Many parents have problems with their own traumatic situation from their own country, and then they live in a reception centre, which is a very different context from a normal one" ([Interview] 23-04-07). Being in a reception centre can aggravate the problems of a family that already has had problems in their country. It is important to focus not only on the difficult background of the asylum seekers but also on what migration does to them ([Interview] 22-04-07 psychologist at R-BUP). Since the staff often lacks professional training, there is not enough possibility to give good support.

Moreover, fathers also have an important role. The relationship between mothers and fathers is also very important in this situation. Because this setting can cause strains also on their relationship, the consequences can be domestic violence, mental health problems, etc. This will affect children and child rearing. In turn it will affect the mother-child relationship ([Interview] 23-04-07 researcher at R-BUP). However the mothers interviewed spoke of good relations between them and the fathers.

The overall findings point to the fact that the mothers interviewed very often found it quite hard to cope with raising children in a reception centre, especially the ones that have lived there for longer than two years. In particular, two out of the three mothers interviewed (the African mothers) complained about lack of social support. Those mothers felt they could not rely on other mothers or staff members in the reception centre for childcare and so they felt generally alone and unsupported in this task. The mother C.A. distinctively felt the lack of social support and of her relatives. She told the interviewer that in her country all members of the family contribute to the upbringing of the children whilst in Norway that was confined solely to her and her husband ([Interview] 16-04-2007).

On the whole, all the mothers interviewed encouraged their children strongly to participate in the reception centre's activity groups and to go to school, socialize and learn Norwegian. Due to this attitude, all the mothers have reported their children as

generally well adapted to life and school in Norway but not necessarily to life in the reception centre. In fact, especially the older children have started to suffer from life in the reception centre, as expressed in the interview with mother C.A.

9.5. Activity groups in reception centres

The staff interviewed at the reception centres ([Interviews] 13 and 22-04-07) explained that they organized various activity groups of different sort every week for mothers and children. But there were no groups for children under five. Also, they organized a women's group where mothers are encouraged to go and discuss different issues that may be troubling them. Mothers with very young children are however often unable to go as they have to look after the children. In addition, volunteers from the Red Cross came once or twice a week to organize children's groups and Norwegian lessons for the people living in the reception centres. Finally, they were trying to organize a summer camp as they organized one last year and children from reception centres all over the East of Norway came.

But, mothers complained about the activity groups. They pointed out that there were no activity groups for children under 5years of age ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07). This meant that mothers with small children did not get any time off from their children. In this way, they did not have any time for themselves or to go to school and learn Norwegian. The lack of activity groups for very young children was also pointed out by the reception centre workers ([Interview] 13 and 22-04-07) and the volunteers at STC who work in a different reception centre from the ones where the mothers in this research have been interviewed ([Interview] 06-05-07).

At the same time, the mothers who requested it were given the possibility to bring their small children to an open nursery school for two hours at a time two times a week. They took this opportunity, but still they had to remain with their children.

The STC volunteer who works with asylum seeker mothers pointed to the importance for mothers to have a small job, even voluntary. The opinion of the STC volunteer working with asylum seeker mothers was that having a small job would allow mothers to do something meaningful and socialize with other people ([Interview] 06-05-07). In fact, due to their daily repetitive routines and the constant presence of their children, the mothers of small children were suffering. The deputy head of the reception centre ([Interview] 13-04-07) pointed to the fact that she saw mothers who were so tired and apathetic due to their life in reception centres that they were in need for someone to help out with looking after the children.

9.6.   The need for psychological support

The volunteers at STC claimed that it was necessary for the women to get psychological support. In the time spent with the asylum seeker mothers, the volunteer at STC realized that most women she came in contact with are still suffering. For example, music from their country might trigger pain and uneasiness in them, but they have not been offered any psychological help. The volunteer reported that one of the mothers during an activity group for women had said: "I like that we listen to music and dance here but please don't put any music from Afghanistan on as I'll start to think of my family and cry. I'd rather hear other types of music and try not to think of my country!" ([Interview] 06-05-07).

A similar issue in relation to the lack of psychological support was raised from one of the mothers interviewed. She complained of finding it difficult to cope and having been in a reception centre for 5 years still without being able to move. She craved support from a psychologist and she wondered why she could not get any help. Another of the mothers interviewed was also having difficulties in raising her children in a reception centre and wished for someone to talk to. She now found comfort in going to church. But she complained of how desperate she felt the first two years in Norway, living in another reception centre which was located outside one of the main

cities in Norway, getting severely depressed and not getting any psychological help ([Interview] 16-4-07).

When asked about psychological support for mothers, the head of the reception centre interviewed ([Interview] 13-4-07) answered that mothers could be referred to a psychologist from their doctor or from a special service for refugee/ asylum seekers at Ullevål Hospital where they could go directly. As far as reception centres' workers, they would contact the doctor on the mother's behalf if the mothers asked but mothers could not contact a psychologist directly.

9.7. Coping in reception centres

When asked what mothers found as useful coping strategies in relation to their situation as asylum seeker mothers bringing up young children in a reception centre, there were different responses. The mother B. thought that the only way was "to look forward". Also she found helpful to ask for help from the reception centre workers and other mothers in the reception centre and to go out for a walk when feeling low. This was what she advised to other women in the same position too. The mother C.A. believed in "never give up hope". In particular she referred those words to the process of the granting of the permit to stay in Norway. The mother H.A. advocated "having faith" as a useful strategy. She found that going to church where other people from the same country go and meeting "good people" there, gave her the strength to carry on. Those were the coping strategies that those mothers found useful and recommended to other mothers in the same position ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07).

9.8. Factors affecting attachment practices

The lack of extended family support affects mothers and children living in a reception centre. Children miss their secondary attachment figures from the extended family members such as uncles, aunts, grandmothers etc. This situation weighs on the mother-child's attachment practices. This has been pointed out in the interview with the

psychologist from the R-BUP services: "if they come from a culture where the all family (also extended) is used to take care of each other; mothers and children will be affected" ([Interview] 22-04-07).

Other defining factors that can impact mothers in reception centres are personal characteristics such as apathy and depression, information (where is the nearest doctor, where is the closest support group) and social support. Also other factors which have an impact are emotional support (someone you can show love to and they can show love to you) and practical support (money, looking after children). In a new country they have to develop a new social support, which include all these factors ([Interview] 22-04-07 psychologist at R-BUP).

In relation to this, the mothers H.A. and C.A. both said that they missed their family's network and felt very isolated as in their countries the whole family helps to raise the children not only the parents and now this role was confined only to them and their husbands ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07).

Many mothers equated their concept of home with a sense of belonging ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-2007). In connection to this, the mothers interviewed at the reception centres talked about the difficulty they had in expressing themselves in another language, and the frustration, loneliness, and depression they felt as a result ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-2007). In particular, the mother H.A. complained of having this problem ([Interview] 22-04-2007). She speaks to her son in her mother tongue and at the nursery school they speak to him in Norwegian. So he has some difficulties in understanding both languages and communicating. This mother talked about the struggles she faced in teaching her children their mother tongue when it is not part of their life outside the home ([Interview] 22-04-2007).

The lack of knowledge of the country and its language could also affect the attachment practices between mothers and children. The deputy head of the reception centre talked about a mother who has been in the reception centre for a while but due to small

children and the legal obstacles she had not had access to Norwegian classes. On the other hand, her daughter learned Norwegian and also went to the local school. When her daughter brought home school reports or notes on her behaviour, the daughter constantly twisted the truth due to the mother's ignorance of the Norwegian language. As a result, her mother was unable to behave appropriately with her daughter and to take full responsibility as usually expected from a parent ([Interview] 13-04-07).

As the psychologist at R-BUP pointed out; "it can be difficult to provide stability for mothers when they do not know what is happening in the new country. The best protective factor for children is a strong emotional bond, so even if the mothers cannot provide stability they can at least try to provide that" ([Interview] 22-04-07).

On the whole, parents need to get adequate help with their children especially if they leave a familiar network which contributed to raise their children and to which the children were attached to. "To support parents to support their children is more fruitful than to work with the children directly" ([Interview] 22-04-07, psychologist at R-BUP). At the same time, it needs to be highlighted that more work needs to be done on attachment theory because in spite of all the factors that have an effect on attachment practices on asylum seeker mothers in general and in particular on the mothers interviewed; the mother-child relationship of the mothers interviewed appeared to be strong and positive in spite of those factors. Also children appeared to be well adjusted. So there is a need for further research on the qualification and applicability of the theory.

9.9. Mothers' concerns on child rearing

All the mothers interviewed lived with their husbands in the reception centres and they made decisions together in relation to their child rearing. All mothers believed to be less punitive with their children than their parents were with them. All mothers tried to educate their children with the same cultural and moral norms that have been taught to them from their parents and in their country. At the same time, due to the fact that their

children were growing up in Norway, all mothers attempted at communicating with their children on a small scale in Norwegian alongside their native language. Also, all the mothers aimed at teaching their children Norwegian culture and values as well as their own.

In relation to child rearing, those mothers recommended other mothers to send their children to school, to Norwegian classes, and to the reception centre activity groups to give them a chance to integrate into Norwegian society and to socialize. Finally, they suggested that if the children asked questions in reference to why they lived in a reception centre and why they could not go back to their country of origin, mothers should be open and explain the family situation. This was also the advice of the professionals interviewed at R-BUP ([Interviews] 22 and 23-04-07).

9.10.   Mothers' intuitive and formal child rearing practices

The mothers interviewed in the reception centres in Oslo talked about informal learning as being the main method of learning about parenting and child rearing in their countries of origin. Interviewees talked about learning from family, especially their parents about child rearing techniques. For example they learnt things such as how to hold their baby, when to punish him/her, how to follow a child's school progress, etc. Also they tried a bidirectional approach where they adjusted parenting according to what they thought suited their children better and learning by their every day interactions with them ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-2007). For example, when they saw that a certain disciplinary approach did not work, then they tried different things to see what would work better.

At the same time, one mother who studied to be a teacher learned several things from her psychology classes and admitted to use them in her approach to parenting. So she admitted to couple informal learning with a more formal learning process ([Interview] 16-04-2007).

9.11. Mothers on the future

All mothers had a feeling of freedom and peace in Norway, as opposed to their countries. Also, all mothers hoped to be able to remain in Norway and give their children the possibility to grow up in this country.

For example, the mother H.A. thought that it was good that her children were born here and she hoped to stay in Norway in the future as it was a good place to grow up for children and it was a place where they could be free unlike what would be in the case of the country where she came from ([Interview] 22-04-07).

9.12. Interviewees on how to improve reception centres

According to the researcher and the psychologist at R-BUP ([Interviews] 22 and 23-04-07), what is important in reception centres is the professional level of the staff and to establish close supervision with professionals. In addition, lack of staff was highlighted from the head and the deputy head of the reception centre. In particular the deputy pointed to the necessity of more female workers to work with mothers and children to facilitate the mother's life ([Interview] 13-04-07).

Furthermore, higher standards are needed. Recreational activities are important so that mothers and children do not think constantly about their problems. Also, the researcher at R-BUP pointed out that a reception centre should look into using the local area services, organizations, volunteers as much as possible, so that mothers can get integrated into society. So even if the families get sent back, if those tasks are achieved at least the families do not feel isolated. In addition, it is important, in his opinion, to establish trust between families and the staff at reception centres so that the families can be helped and if people from outside are needed, the staff is aware of it ([Interview] 23-04-07).

Another important point raised by the researcher at R-BUP is to use professional workers for health, mental health and social workers from community to visit them as soon as UDI's final decision has been taken. Following, there should be special activity for children such as schools and kindergarten. There needs to be a person who takes care of the children in the reception centres ([Interview] 23-04-07).

Moreover, there should be groups for mothers held by professionals where mothers can talk about their issues rather than just information on Norwegian society. Such groups should be held without the children so that the mothers can be able to relax and talk ([Interview] 23-04-07, researcher at R-BUP). This point was also raised by the reception centre workers in relation to the reception centres' groups and the women's group in particular ([Interviews] 13 and 22-04-07).

In addition, the psychologist at R-BUP asserts that staff needs to support mothers and give them more confidence and skills so they can help the child even in the new country where they are going. Doctors also need to get involved in looking after asylum seeker families by working with interpreters and take health seriously (physical, social, mental well-being, not just absence of disease) ([Interview] 22-04-97). In addition, the UDI process is very difficult, so the asylum seekers need to be helped in dealing with it.

The psychologist at R-BUP believes that it is important to provide schooling and a kindergarten and most reception centres manage that as well as teaching Norwegian, work skills, etc. Also, several activities groups should be organized for mothers and especially children. The troubled children should be given help in playing. "Children should be facilitated in playing with other children and in structured activities such as music, drama, dancing or drawing groups. Moreover, it is important for them to do activities like the ones they are used to do in their own country" ([Interview] 22-04-07).

Moreover, she suggested that there is a need to listen more to asylum seekers and take their advice on how to deal better with their situation and involve them more in this process. It is difficult for people who haven't been a refugee to know what is like so it's important to listen to them. Finally, it is emphasized that the services involved should focus on not making things worse in the reception centres but better. It should not be dangerous for kids to live there. "The evaluation of risks should be planned first and not after, as very often happens" ([Interview] 22-04-07, psychologist at R-BUP).

9.13. General evaluation

Due to the small number of those interviewed, these findings cannot readily be generalized. Nevertheless, many of the statements from the mothers have been reiterated by the reception centre workers, the volunteer workers at STC who operate in a different reception centre and the experts from R-BUP. Therefore, even if the findings can be considered as specific case studies, they nonetheless point toward certain common situations. Those situations may possibly apply to other mothers in similar circumstances in reception centres in Norway. Finally, many of the interviews with mothers, workers and experts are consistent with the theories reviewed in this thesis even if not all of the findings seem to reflect them.

On the whole, according to the interviewees at R-BUP ([Interviews] 22 and 23-04-07), in general there are several points to be taken into account when considering asylum seeker mothers and children and life in reception centres. Previous traumas, as those mentioned in the first chapter, are not the only problem for asylum seekers. There are traumas from the journey to Norway and the situation in the reception centre in Norway that also affect them. The R-BUP researcher believes that if people don't help the current situation, it is not possible to cure the past wounds. Also, the insecurity about their future plays a big role. Their situation needs to be considered in its globality: future expectations, past traumas, worries, money problems, and adaptation to the new society. All of this makes it difficult to establish trust between the families

and the staff, together with the language difference, culture difference, etc. where misinterpretations can happen.

Also, when considering asylum seekers mothers' situations the problem of lack of resources needs to be taken into account. Reception centres are in need of professional staff to assist the staff working there, the rooms given to families need to be more spacious, and more activities need to be provided for mothers and children in reception centres. In particular, as the UDI states, the reception centre needs to provide more specialized activities that can help the families deal with their own life situation during their stay there and help them to improve their daily life (2007: 5). The activity groups should be suited to the residents who are staying in the reception centres and should facilitate them in maintaining their own language and culture (UDI; 2007: 5). Also the activity groups should prepare the residents for either life in Norway or the return to their own country (UDI; 2007 5). In order to achieve this, reception centres should be given a bigger budget to afford more staff to conduct those activities and clearer guidelines.

10. Discussion

10.1. The influence of previous stressors

It has been pointed out in chapter one and chapter two in this thesis, that past stressors have an effect on asylum seekers' current lives and on how they will adapt to current situations (Almqvist; 1997). When the asylum seeker mothers arrived in reception centres in Norway, they had also undergone several traumatic experiences. Those ranged from the violence witnessed in their country and to their friends and family, to the stresses brought on by the journey of escape to another country, to the separation from their husbands, for two of them. Those factors have very likely played a part in the way mothers posed themselves with their children.

For example, due to the anxiety provoked by their past experiences, mothers may have been particularly protective with their very young children. For example, during the group interview, the youngest child (nine months) of the mother B. was asleep in the mother's room, a floor down in company of the father. In spite of this, every time there was an unusual noise, the mother would pause and listen and explained that she was worried that her child might have woken up downstairs. She said that the child was with the father who was very capable of looking after her, but she was still tense for the fact that she was not with her. This reaction may be interpreted as a normal reaction for a new mother. But this mother already had two children and her anxiety may have been due to the anxiety provoked by her past experiences ([Interview] 16-04-07).

10.2. The theory of the "pact of silence"

Due to their traumatic experiences, parents may feel ashamed and insecure and shy away from sharing their experience with their children (Almqvist; 1997). This leads the family to fragmentation and to be trapped in a "pact of silence" where neither parents nor children share their traumatic experiences (cf. 2.1). The interview of the

mother B. may, at least partly, be an example of this theory. But it is difficult to interpret her behaviour and whether it should be seen as a defence mechanism or as a coping strategy ([Interview] 16-04-07).

In the interview, mother B. said that "the only way is to look forward rather than to the past" ([Interview] 16-04-07). This kind of behaviour is often displayed in asylum seeker families who have problems dealing with their traumatic experience and where to recollect and describe what has happened can open old wounds and further suffering (cf. 2.1). Also, when asked about if she missed not being able to talk to her family as she did not know where they were, she affirmed that it was "ok" not to have this contact.

Finally, when asked about her children and their feelings about the war they had witnessed and how they felt living in a reception centre, she said they were fine and settling well. She said they were not happy about living in a very confined space and not in a house of their own but she did not seem to think that their discomfort went any further than that. She also said that she prompted her children to look forward and to the future ([Interview] 16-04-07). This showed resourcefulness in the children in asking about their surroundings and articulating their possible distress.

So, on one side the mother's behaviour could be seen as defensive and trying to repress painful feelings. On the other side, the mother's behaviour could be thought of as resourceful and helpful as a coping strategy in her daily life. The mother's tone of voice of almost forced happiness seemed to mask hidden unprocessed traumas. At the same time, due to the language barriers, there could also have been the possibility that the mother was really not experiencing any distress, and this coping strategy was a very functional one for her. Another interpretation may be that this mother did not trust the interviewer to share her real feelings.

10.3.   Current stressors in the reception centre

According to Aunaas (2000), when arriving in a new country, asylum seekers experience a series of stresses such as having to adapt to a new life, new language, new situation, lack of emotional and social support. Their lack of cognitive maps is sources of insecurity, confusion and communication barriers. All the mothers interviewed had experienced those conditions and some still were experiencing them after two years in the reception centre. Also, as Goffman points out," total institutions such as reception centres break down the three spheres of a person's life: work, play and sleep" (cf. 1.4). This exacerbates the asylum seekers' psychological distress. As it was pointed out in chapter 9 (in this thesis), mothers and professionals agree that reception centres are not a safe and welcoming environment for mothers to bring their children up.

Nevertheless, as has been stated before, all mothers remarked about the helpfulness and good will of the workers at the centre as it was also pointed out from the psychologist working for R-BUP ([Interview] 22-04-07). Also all mothers encouraged their children to participate in the activities organized by the reception centre which happened every week and where the children had fun.

10.4.   The need for psychological support

Two out of the three mothers wished for some psychological support and they wondered why they had not been able to receive it. "The mother's psychological condition mediates between the child's psychological function and his/her traumatic experiences" (cf. 2.2). In addition, it has been argued that the reaction of children rests very much on the perception held by the significant adults in their lives especially the mothers (cf. 3). Research shows that children are affected as much by parent's attitudes and mental state as they are by their own stress reaction. According to such theories, these mothers' psychological state should have affected the children's state of mind. Yet the mothers reported the children to be reasonably adjusted to Norwegian society

and to be coping well for their situation ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07). As the children were not interviewed directly, there is no direct proof, but many other answers in the interview point to the conclusion that the children of the mothers interviewed seemed to be reasonably well adapted to life and school in Norway in spite of their circumstances. Hence those cases call for qualifications in such theories.

10.5. The mothers' "sense of coherence"

It has been claimed that "resilience is forged through adversity and that moderate doses of stress forge its development". A parent's sense of caring deeply about something is at the base of the sense of coherence. A high sense of coherence allows an individual to better cope with a new difficult situation. This feeling becomes clear to the children in the family (cf. 5.7).

Antonovsky points out that the "sense of coherence" expresses the extent to which an individual has a feeling of confidence that he/she can deal with the situation presented. Also a sense of coherence helps the individual to better use his/her resources to deal with a difficult situation. In addition, through the "sense of coherence" an individual looks at those situations as achievable challenges (cf. 5.7).

The mothers interviewed appeared to have adapted remarkably well to life in Norway and to have made good use of their sense of coherence through the use of very good coping strategies. The head of the reception centre felt great admiration for the mothers living there ([Interview] 13-04-07). He admitted that in spite of the difficulties that living in a reception centre and being an asylum seeker can bring, the mothers were showing great resilience. He said that every time he met them, in spite of what might be happening in that moment of their day or life, they were kind and smiling and they seemed to be investing all their energy in being optimistic and not giving up.

10.6. <u>The mothers' coping strategies</u>

All mothers had found ways of dealing with their situations and ways of coping. They would also recommend those to other women in the same situation. In their own way, all mothers tried to look at the future with a positive perspective. By advocating: "looking forward, never giving up hope and having faith" ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07) the mothers believed that their and their children's future still had the possibility to improve in spite of their past and present experiences and were trying not to let their past affect a positive view of their future.

Also when asked what mothers found helpful strategies in relation to life in the reception centres and raising children there, they were all in agreement concerning certain strategies ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07). The strategies they recommended were to send the children to school and to nursery school so they could socialize with other children and learn the language as well as get an education. Secondly, they recommended sending the children to the activity groups organized in the reception centre. This would give the mothers a break and allow the children to socialize and have fun with other children. They also found it useful to ask for help to the reception centre's workers if they had any practical issues. Finally, they all believed in being truthful to their children. So, when the children had asked the reasons of why they lived in a reception centre, all mothers had explained them why they were there and what was happening in their countries and why they could not go back ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07).

On the whole, all mothers had reported their children as well adjusted to Norwegian society and enjoying school. This pointed to the fact that the children were coping well in spite of the discomfort brought by living in a reception centre and the insecurity of the wait for their final permit to stay in Norway. It has been previously remarked in this thesis (cf. 5.8) that good copers have parents who are models of good coping with whom they can identify. This again highlights that, in spite of their difficult condition, the mothers interviewed were coping well and were able to show that to their children.

Nevertheless, two of the three mothers (the mothers H.A. and C.A.) did not seem to be in favour of leaning onto other mothers in the reception centre for moral support and child-care. They felt that due to language and cultural barriers, it would be a difficult task. Those mothers were the mothers that felt isolated and missed the social support from their extended family network. Mother B. that did interact and asked for help, as well as giving help to the other mothers, did not express many feelings of isolation about her life in the reception centre. ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07).

10.7. Mothers´ intuitive and formal child rearing practices

Mothers come in contact with new models of behaviour for children when they enter the host country. This brings them to a dilemma as to how to educate their children (Bracken & Petty; 1998). All mothers interviewed asserted that they tried to educate their children with the values from their country but also that they were trying to incorporate some of the values from the host country. For example, mothers were used to a more firm approach with children in their country, but in Norway they tried a more open one. The mothers had seen the parents at their children's school using, what they thought of as a less punitive approach, and so they were trying to adapt to that ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-07). In general, the Norwegian child rearing practices that the mothers were trying to incorporate in educating their children, had been witnessed at their children schools or nursery schools, or they had been discovered through talking to other parents at their children's school.

The interdisciplinary educative approach may be due to the mothers' intuitive parental model (cf. 4.9). In this model, caregiver and child have a bidirectional relationship and mothers are responsive to what they feel are their children's´ needs and vice versa. In addition, mothers stated that they tried to educate their children less severely than they were educated so they tried to use a less punitive model. Finally the less firm approach could be due to their effort to adjust their model to the Norwegian one which they perceived as giving children more independence. So the mothers appeared to retain uses from their culture such as cooking their type of food or praying at particular

times, for example to preserve their identity. At the same time, they seemed to take from Norwegian culture what they thought suited their lives best.

At the same time, mother C.A. also asserted that with her intuitive strategy she also used more formal learned practices (cf. 4.10) in her parenting approach, which she learned in her teaching classes. This also pointed her to a less firm behaviour with her children. On the whole, all mothers believed in having an open relationship with their children in relation to why they were in Norway and why they were living in a reception centre ([Interview] 16 and 22-04-07).

10.8. Mothers and attachment practices

Life in reception centres and the waiting for the UDI's answer (where families are informed if they can stay or have to return home) can cause stress. During particularly unstable and stressful times, a parent's ability to meet the needs of a child may be compromised (cf. 3.1). But if stability cannot be provided to a child, it is necessary to provide at least a strong emotional bond that will be the best protective factor (cf. 9.8). The mothers interviewed showed the presence of a strong and healthy emotional bond with their children. This was reflected in the children's adaptation to life in Norway and in Norwegian schools and the fact that the mothers reported that their children had all made friends with other children.

The loss of family members, or the separation from them, due to migration and the associated isolation felt by the mothers in another country does have an impact on the attachment practices. Also, the loss of family members to which the child had displayed an attachment can have an influence on the child's development (cf. 4.6). Two of the mothers interviewed said that they felt very lonely and missed their families' help with the children. They wished somebody here would help them. For this reason, it is important that services such as the social services support mothers so they can support their children better. Nevertheless, those particular mothers worked very hard in giving the children all they needed and were very close and very

protective of them. The result was that they described their children as well-adjusted and open. So they managed to use their coping resources remarkably well.

In addition, many mothers equated their concept of home with a sense of belonging ([Interviews] 16 and 22-04-2007). In this connection, the mothers interviewed at the reception centres talked about the difficulty they had in expressing themselves in another language, and the frustration and depression they felt as a result ([Interview] 16 and 22-04-2007). In particular, mother H.A. complained of having this problem (cf. 9.8). She speaks to her son in her mother tongue and at the nursery school they speak to him in Norwegian. So he has some difficulties in understanding both languages and communicating. The loss of one's home and feeling of belonging has a deep impact on the relationship between a parent and child (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). If parents do not feel supported or secure, it is difficult for them to provide their children with a sense of security, yet the mothers interviewed talked about a strong emotional bond between them and their children, which as stated previously, is the best protective factor for children.

The lack of knowledge of the country and its language could also affect the attachment practices between mothers and children (Reebye et al.; 2007: 7). The deputy head of the reception centre talked about a mother who had been in the reception centre for a while but due to several factors she had not had access to Norwegian classes. On the other hand, her daughter learned Norwegian and went to the local school (cf. 9.8). This issue is to consider as many other mothers may be facing the same situation. Hence, more help should be given to those mothers by allowing them to go to Norwegian classes and possibly for teachers to speak to the mother directly with the help of an interpreter rather than having the daughter to translate as stated in chapter. 9.8.

10.9.   Mothers and the future

All the mothers interviewed still strongly believed Norway was a better alternative to their country for bringing up their children and build a future. This was despite the

difficulties faced in their daily life in the reception centre, the stresses brought by the wait for their final answer from UDI and how much they missed their country.

10.10. General assessment

On the whole, it would appear that the mothers interviewed are showing remarkable resilience and therefore demand great respect. In addition, the fact that mothers are coping reasonably well seems to emphasize that it is positive for mothers to be exposed to Norwegian culture. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that their daily living conditions are far from perfect and their living environment and social support need to be improved. So, although some of the findings have been found to be consistent with some of the theories, not all of the findings seem to be in harmony with the theories. For example, the mothers interviewed have said to have good relations with the fathers of their children. An implication to this could be that with good nuclear family relations, the extended family may not be so important as the nuclear family can compensate for this. But according to Harris (1995), the role of the extended family is also very important. So, resilience and compensation may make up for the insufficient support. At the same time, if this proves right, then single mothers need special support from other mothers and special psychological support in order to make up for the lack of nuclear or extended family.

11. Conclusion

Human Beings, indeed all sentient beings, have the right to pursue happiness and live in peace and freedom (Dalai Lama; 2007).

The primary aim of this thesis has been to explore what are asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children in reception centres in Norway. In this connection, the theories that are more directly connected with mothers' concerns for their children's needs have been presented. Some of those theories, such as the ones presented in the discussion for example, have been found to have a link with the experiences of the mothers and/or the professionals interviewed in Norway. Other theories, such as the theory of the mother as a protective shield, for example, although not directly relevant to the analysis of the cases, have been considered relevant to the broad framework used for the analysis of the asylum seeker mothers' situations in this thesis. Even if there are cross-cultural differences in the way mothers rear their children and in the nature of their concerns, the theories used in this thesis are mainly western theories of development. The reason for this choice is that they are part of a cultural matrix in which asylum seekers and immigrant people in Norway raise their children.

Before discussing the main considerations reached through this thesis it is important to bear in mind the dilemma hinted at in chapter 4.1 between the fundamental principles of attachment theory versus Harris' theory. This thesis has tried to use those theories as supplementary rather than seeing them as a dichotomy. In order to facilitate secure attachment, the infant must be able to build on his/her primary relationships for successful adaptation to the Norwegian environment (Reebye et al., 2007: 132). As seen in the chapter on attachment, primary relationships involve the child's relationship with the mother and the father. When parents do not feel supported due to the lack of their family in Norway, it is difficult to provide their children with a sense of security. Yet the mothers interviewed apparently managed to maintain a strong emotional bond with their children and that has been found to be the best protective factor for children. Also, as seen in chapter 4.8, the mothers interviewed for this thesis

have been found to use a mix of child rearing practices. Some of those were connected to their culture and some adapted to the host country. This is in accord with the theories explored in chapters 4 and 6.

Moreover, although mothers used culturally specific child rearing methods mixed with practices from the host country, they all seemed to have similar concerns for their children. They all had the best interest of their children in mind and were prepared to live apart from what was familiar to them in order to guarantee a better life for their children than the one they have currently. Also, it did become clear that those mothers' concerns increased with life in a reception centre. Issues related to space, safety, cleanliness, lack of support, delays in the UDI's response all seemed to affect the mothers interviewed in spite of their resilience. Those issues also appeared to be of concern to the staff and volunteers at reception centres as well as the professionals interviewed.

Another important reflection that emerged was that maintaining contact with the community of origin can be a protective factor especially for children. So, a very important step toward asylum seekers families' well-being in reception centres can be to re-create this social support by utilizing available formal and informal support systems to replace their absent families and social networks.

In relation to a family's external environment, as it has been pointed out in chapter 4.1, Harris (1995) claims that the external environment is at least as important as the family environment to a child. She believes that the environment that children share with their peers is bound to leave permanent marks on the children's personalities. Furthermore, it is claimed that even if the parents' behaviour does affect how their children behave with them, it may not affect how their children behave with other people (Pinker; 2002: 86). So, according to this theory, even if asylum seeker mothers may not succeed in providing the secure attachment relationship they wish for their children, children may still turn out to be well adjusted due to the influences of their play group. This may put more pressure for parents in deciding which niches children should fill,

as it has been discussed in chapter 6. On the other hand, this should reassure asylum seeker mothers that even if they are having difficulties in caring for their children due to their situation, their children may yet grow up well adjusted.

Moving on, another important consideration which matured through this work has been that the change for the mothers interviewed has been from a more collectivistic to an individualistic culture as Norway. This may have been easier than the opposite and this may throw light on their remarkable resilience. Their lack of social resources may have paradoxically proved an advantage in a way that encouraged self-sufficiency and socialisation in an individualistic culture like Norway. This would follow a non-linear thought-process as this outcome would not be expected if linear thinking is pursued.

On the whole, from the data and the material explored in this thesis, it is not simple to predict whether and to what extent the mothers and children of this study will have difficulties in the future. Although at the moment they appear to be coping reasonably well, their past scars and their vulnerabilities may appear more visibly in the future. As expressed in chapter 4.4 in the mothers from Reebye et al.'s study (2007), many mothers and children may not be currently affected by the impact of migration but the impact may become clearer when the children start to grow up. Hence, resources need to be improved.

Furthermore, the theories explored in this thesis in general seem to provide evidence that adversity promotes ill being. Nevertheless, in light of the findings on coping, the general impact seems to be that it is even more important for mothers and children to have a positive psychological outlook as stated in chapter 5.7. In particular, Seligman et al. believe that to improve their circumstances and their future outlook, mothers can teach their children to look at life with an "accurate optimistic" view since they are infants (1995: 293). By this it is meant that mothers and fathers can teach children to take an active stance in the world and to shape their own life rather than being passive recipients of what happens to them (Seligman et al.; 1995: 297). In the same way as a good "sense of coherence" helps families to face adversities as seen in chapter 5.6,

teaching a child an optimistic style equips him/her with perseverance in the face of adversity and helps him/her to struggle to overcome his/her problems.

As Seligman et al. point out, accurate optimism is a way for children to think proactively and see how they can provide hope and help social justice (1995: 298). Although it is not a substitute for good parenting, this view can be a tool to help mothers and fathers to empower their children.

As it has been discussed in the method chapter, although the sample interviewed may be restricted, in its unity it is representative of a cumulative extensive experience. Therefore, as argued in the previous chapters, in order to ameliorate asylum seekers mothers and children's condition in reception centres, several things need to be improved. Overall, for asylum seekers it is important that the duration of the UDI's processing of the applications is shortened. Whilst they wait for their applications to be processed they should be encouraged to work in order to experience healthy self-sufficiency. Language classes should be made available again. Mothers and children should be followed more thoroughly and helped with their needs and their parenting skills. Those parenting skills should empower them and include the fundaments of accurate optimism. Families should be helped in finding support and a social network.

In addition, the staff in reception centres seemed to be committed and helpful, but more staff is needed, in particular more female staff, to work with mothers and children. Also, the staff should undergo supervision from professionals from the psychological and health field. Following, the spaces given to the families should be bigger and communal play areas safer and cleaner. Moreover the reception centres should receive clearer guidelines from the UDI. Furthermore, asylum seeker mothers and children should be extensively consulted on what their opinion is. They are basically the experts on specifying their own needs. Summarizing, more and better resources need to be provided.

In conclusion, as it has been highlighted through this thesis, exposure to protracted conflicts, the losses associated with it, forced migration and life in a reception centre may have a long term impact on a mother as well as a child's functioning on several levels. To channel this in a positive direction, it is important to encourage parents' progress toward a fuller understanding of their children's development and it is important to focus on implementing resources at the local and national level. Finally, to recall Gibran's poem at the beginning of this thesis, children's "souls dwell in the house of tomorrow" (1995: 19). Thus "the house of tomorrow" should be made a maximally hospitable environment. In fact, the current experiences of children coming from societies in conflict can have serious repercussions both for their individual future and society as a whole.

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Participant Letter

UNIVERSITETET I OSLO
STATSVITENSKAPELIG FAKULTET
MASTER IN PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES

Dear Participant,

I am a master student at the Master in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway. I am writing my thesis on "Mothers´ concerns for their children in reception centres in Norway". The purpose of this thesis is to learn more about what are asylum seeker mothers' concerns for their children in reception centres in Norway. How do asylum seeker mothers experience living in reception centres and having to share their living environment with people they have never met, often with different values and culture from their own. Also if they feel there is any advice they can share with the other mothers in relation to their child rearing practices.

For this reason, I aim at interviewing a maximum of 4 asylum seeker mothers who have children between 2 and 15 years old and who have been living in the reception centres in Norway for at least a year. I also aim at interviewing the staff at the reception centre. It is my objective to carry out two interviews with two mothers singularly and one group interview with all four mothers. Finally, I aim at interviewing professionals who have worked with asylum seeker mothers and children.

The interviews will not reveal your name or any personal information and they will be safely stored until and after I hand in my thesis on the 21st of May 2007. Once you decide to participate you can withdraw at any moment. Your withdrawal will have no consequences. Also, whether you withdraw or participate in the interviews will not have any consequences on your resident permit. Any particular private information you may discuss in the interview will be confidential. I will record the interviews on a tape recorder and store their content also on my laptop. I'm the only one that can access the laptop and tapes. The interviews should take from 45 minutes to an hour.

I do not get paid to perform the interviews. They are a part of my thesis work. After I transcribe the interviews you will be able to look at the transcripts and give feedback on them if you wish. I will make my thesis available, once finished, if you wish to read it at any time.

This study will be submitted to the Personombudet for Forskning, Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste A/S.

If you would decide to participate, or you have any questions, you can contact me by telephone on: 92422410, or by email on: emanuelu@student.sv.uio.no

Thank you for your time.
Emanuela Luglio

Interview questions

[The list below has been used more as a checklist rather than a formal questionnaire]

For the mothers:

Background questions:
- What is your nationality:
- When did the family arrive in Norway?
- Describe what led you to leave your home country and if you are here with all your family
- Where did you live before coming here?
- How many children do you have?
- Have you or your husband been away from the child or from each other in any of the previous years? Who was the child with?

Mothers on the reception centre:
- Can you tell me about your situation in the reception centre?
- What do you usually do on a typical day?
- How many people (adults and children) are living here?
- Do you and the other mothers here help each other with the children?
    - How?
- Tell me how the reception centre helps you in managing your children.

Mothers' ideas of child rearing:
- How do you cope with being in a reception centre and raising children?
- What do you do to help/ support your child?
- Has your child's behaviour or yours changed in relation to each other since you left your country and how?
- In what way does the reception centre help you and your child?
- What do you find to be helpful strategies in relation to your child?
- What advice would you give to someone else in the same position?

Mothers on the living environment and on the future:

- What do you like the most about living in the centre?

- What do you wish could be different here?

- How do you feel in relation to Norwegian society?

- In what way do you see your future and your family's?

For the Head/staff of the Reception Centres:

- Tell me about your experience with asylum seeker mothers and children

- Can you describe the mothers' situation in the reception centre?

- Describe the relationship between mothers and children. Are there any activities for mothers and children?

- What do you think could be improved in this reception centre and in reception centres in general to help asylum seeker mothers in their child rearing?

For the professionals and the volunteers:

- Tell me about your experience with asylum seeker mothers and children

- What is your opinion on reception centres and having to bring up children there?

- What do you think can be improved in reception centres and in general in the social services to support asylum seeker mothers and children?