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Unaccompanied refugee minors and resettlement: Turning points towards integration

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Abstract

Resettling into a new country may pose many challenges for unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs). In this study we seek to get a better understanding of these challenges through analysing interviews with 48 URMs five years after their arrival in Norway, using the concept of turning points as an analytic frame. Gaining a sense of security, feeling affiliated, being loved and cared for, and becoming independent were identified as important turning points. Despite high levels of agency, many of the youths struggled to fulfil these basic needs, possibly due to limited relational and cultural resources. These struggles seemed to interfere with their capacity to participate in important developmental activities, affecting their well-being and making integration difficult. This study's results accentuate the need for better systems and assistance from people in their support system to help URMs towards feeling secure, affiliated, loved, and independent as this may facilitate resettlement and integration.

KEYWORDS

asylum-seeking children and adolescents, post-migration factors, unaccompanied refugee minors, youth development

1 | INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2019, there were an estimate of 153,300 unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) worldwide. However, due to lack of reporting, the available figures are probably highly underestimated (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019). URMs are defined as someone under the age of 18 years who arrives without parents or other adults who cares for them, either by law or custom, to seek asylum (The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, n.d.). Unaccompanied refugee minors are often in a state of vulnerability due to various pre-flight distressing experiences. In addition, they usually travel in the absence of their caregivers and the quality of their caregiving on arrival in the host country can be variable. Being separated from family members at a crucial developmental period and subsequent lack of support may affect their sense of security and sense of belongingness. Distressing experiences along with a lack of social support are often associated with higher levels of psychological distress (El Baba & Colucci, 2018; Höhne et al., 2020; Müller et al., 2019; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015), and studies indicate that many URMs struggle with mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety and externalising symptoms even long after they are resettled (El Baba & Colucci, 2018; Fazel et al., 2012; Jensen et al., 2019; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015; Vervliet et al., 2014). At the same time, many demonstrate resilience in their navigation towards a new life (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Vervliet, 2013). Kohli (2007) reported, for instance, a willingness to succeed and overcome challenges as significant characteristics of many URMs, while Brook

and Ottemöller (2020) described female URMs adapting well in their country of refuge, based on social, academic and linguistic success.

1.1 | Challenges and supportive factors during resettlement

During resettlement, URMs may face developmental challenges that are considered normal for all youths, such as becoming more independent and establishing romantic relationships. However, they have also unique challenges that are part of the acculturation process, such as learning a new language and understanding the values of their host countries (Lustig et al., 2004). They may experience acculturation hassles such as discrimination and stigma, but also isolation and economical strains. Furthermore, their process of moving into adulthood could be disrupted by mental health problems and uncertainties about their futures (Keles, Friborg, Idsøe, Sirin, & Oppedal, 2016, 2018; Oppedal et al., 2004).

Studies have shown that having strong social support alleviates many of the daily stressors URMs experience (Höhne et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2019). Sirriyeh and Raghallaigh (2018) identified receiving love and care as important to easing the progress to adulthood among URMs. Furthermore, asylum centre staff and the ethnic community of the URMs have been described as the most important resources for different types of support and coping (Mels et al., 2008). Yet, relationships with professionals and new peers can also be complex. Eide et al. (2018) documented for instance feelings of ambivalence in URMs' relationships with social workers, where the youths expressed a need for close relationships while not knowing whom they could trust.

In addition to social support and feeling loved, help with the asylum-seeking process and educational guidance has been identified as important for integration and well-being among URMs (Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh, 2018; Thommessen et al., 2015; Unterhitzenberger et al., 2019). Similarly, Ager and Strang (2008) identified four over-arching themes as important for integration: employment, education, and housing; citizenship and rights; social connections; and language and culture. This is in line with Seligman (2011), who found that well-being for people in general is related to feeling engagement and connectedness; feeling socially integrated, cared for, and supported; having a sense of achievement and feeling capable of doing daily activities.

For refugee youths, adapting to the culture of residence while preserving parts of their culture of origin has been found to be associated with greater well-being (Berry, 2007). Cultural competency has been identified as facilitating social support and feelings of self-efficacy among URMs (Höhne et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2019; Oppedal & Idsoe, 2015). Thus, it may be that feeling at home in both their host culture and their culture of origin creates a sense of connectedness and continuity in their lives that fosters well-being. On the other hand, there may be a cost to cultural adaptation. For instance, Brook and Ottemöller (2020) reported a tension among female URMs between the need to belong, which implied adopting an assimilation acculturation strategy, and the need to hold on to their original cultural identity, consistent with an integration strategy. Furthermore, for some people being denied asylum and subsequently were deported, being "westernised" has been associated with stigmatisation and subsequent difficulties with gaining work and housing in their country of origin (Bowerman, 2017). This is in line with Keles et al. (2016) and Oppedal et al. (2004), who identified both out-group and in-group hassles and challenges in ethnic identity formation among young immigrants.

Despite the above literature, little is yet known about the youngest URMs' pathways to integration and well-being from their own perspectives. Such knowledge would be important to ease integration for these youths into a new country. In this article, we will describe some developmental trajectories that are involved when URMs resettle. This is done through the reflections of URMs five years after arrival in Norway. The concept of turning points is used as a theoretical lens to understand the process of resettlement and development for URMs (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Kuczynski et al., 2011; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009; Rutter, 1996).

1.2 | Turning points and developmental pathways

Social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009) offers a dialectical view on individuals´ socialisation processes. According to the theory, children are viewed as agents who actively contribute to their own development within systems of culturally embedded social relationships. Past experiences and future goals shape how youths interpret and construct meanings that they act upon. However, agency is influenced by the context in which it is embedded, and individual differences in the expression of agency can reflect differences in individual, relational, and cultural resources. Individual resources reflect physical and cognitive abilities while relational resources refer to access to support and help from others. Cultural resources refer to rights and constrains by laws, customs and practice of a culture (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015). Due to their specific situation, URMs may have limited individual, cultural, economic, and relational resources, which may affect their sense of agency and limit their ability to exert agency. Considering how having a sense of agency is associated with well-being (Gong et al., 2011; Greenaway et al., 2015), this in itself may be a source of distress and may inhibit healthy development. For URMs, immigration restrictions, laws governing family reunion, a (sometimes) hostile public opinion, shifting governments, racism, and social inequality all play in and may limit their basic capacity to excerpt agency and influence their own development.

According to social relational theory, the process of change begins with a catalysing event, defined as an event or an environmental or developmental change. In the subsequent meaning-making process, several elements of contradictions and subsequent states of tension and uncertainty might be recognised. Motivated by seeking resolution to these tensions, either by engaging in a problem-solving process or by accepting the tensions as a new part of life, one may

experience turning points that lead to new pathways in life. A turning point according to social relational theory is seen as a qualitative change of representations and may involve alterations in how one sees oneself or others, how one behaves, relates with others, or perceives situations (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009). According to Rutter (1996), turning points have been associated with a wide range of experiences, both those over which the individual has no control and those which can be said to be the result of individual actions. Both Rutter (1996) and Kuczynski and Parkin (2009) agree that rather than continuity, the expected outcome of a turning point is novelty with regard to generating new pathways, new meanings, or new ways of thinking and acting. A turning point can occur suddenly, but it can also occur after a period of gradual change. This might be the case when incremental changes accumulate until reaching a turning point, resulting in a qualitative change of existing patterns. Turning points are also associated with both positive and negative effects and may, according to Rutter (1996), denote important developmental shifts linked to developmental psychopathology. Analysing turning points may thus shed light on important developmental processes (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009; Kuczynski et al., 2009; Rutter, 1996).

1.3 | The present study

Considering its role in giving directions for new pathways, turning points is an important developmental concept. Subsequently, turning points are important in understanding long-term effects on life span developmental processes and subsequent lasting alteration in life trajectories (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009; Rutter, 1996). This present study includes interviews with 48 URMs about their time in Norway and their present situation, five years after arrival. The concept of turning points is used as a sensitising concept when analysing the participants' reflections on their time in Norway. Our aim is to understand more about self-experienced turning points and subsequent pathways linked to resettlement from a developmental perspective. Applying the concept of turning points to the resettlement process of URMs provides us with a unique vantage point from which to understand both the ordinary and the exceptional developmental processes URMs undergo in their progress from adolescence to adulthood in a new country as well as their pathways to integration (Kuczynski et al., 2011).

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Recruitment and participants

The data are from a longitudinal study of URMs arriving in Norway before the age of 16. Participants were recruited from five of six care centres provided by the State Child Protection Service for the youngest URMs while they were waiting for their asylum application to be processed (see Jensen et al. (2015) and Jensen et al. (2019) for a more detailed description of the study). These care centres are smaller and better staffed than the reception centres intended for older URMs and adult asylum seekers. Here, the URMs were attended to by social workers and they participated in school and leisure activities. If asylum was granted, they obtained a residence permit. A grant of asylum entitled them to permanent residency after three years. However, this was conditional to certain requirements being fulfilled, such as the requirement for asylum still being present, and no criminal convictions. A time limited residence permit was granted to those URMs who were entitled to asylum but could not confirm their identity (IMDi, 2017; utlendingsloven, 2008). Upon being granted asylum, the participants were moved to different municipalities and often placed together with four to six other URMs in apartment units where they were attended to by social workers. Some youths were placed in foster homes.

The participants in this study were contacted at three time points, the first approximately 6 months after arrival and the second after about 2½ years after arrival. At the last time point (T3) they had all been in Norway for about five years. The data for this article is from the last time point and all those who agreed to participate are included in the analysis ($n = 48$). The mean age of the participants at T3 was 20.0 years (ranging from 17 to 24), of whom 40 (83.3%) were boys, reflecting a typical gender imbalance among URMs. They came from 10 different countries, the majority from Afghanistan (47.9%). Prior to their arrival in Norway, the youths had experienced several potentially traumatising events, the most prevalent being the witnessing of violence (74.5%, $n = 35$), drastic changes in their family (68.1%, $n = 32$), death of a close person (68.1%, $n = 32$), and war or armed military conflict (63.8%, $n = 30$). Furthermore, many reported experiencing new stressful life events during their time in Norway, most frequently the witnessing of violence (see Jensen et al., 2019). Even though all the youths participating in this study are referred to as URMs, it is important to acknowledge their heterogeneity in response to adversity as well.

2.2 | Interviews

The open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted in person and contained the following topics: their experiences living in Norway and their present situation, friendship, aspirations, social support, well-being, agency, daily stressors, and identity. Most interviews were conducted in the participants' homes and took between 24 and 119 min. All 48 interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and citations were later translated for inclusion in this article.

2.3 | Ethics

Ethical approval was gained from the Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research Ethics. All audiotapes and transcriptions were stored in a secure data storage system, only accessible

to the researchers. In addition to the authors, the interviewers were either masters in psychology or master-level students in psychology. The participants were not pushed to talk about anything they did not want to talk about. Contact with the appropriate resources was facilitated when further health services were required during the interviews.

2.4 | Analyses

Since we were interested in the participants' own understanding of their experiences, the analysis was conducted using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This qualitative analysis method examines how people make sense of major life by exploring these experiences. The researcher attempts to make sense of how the participants make sense of their experiences, called double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009).

The first analytical step involved becoming familiar with the data by listening to, reading, and re-reading all 48 interviews with a focus on the participants' perspectives. During this part of the analysis, we discovered how they described aspects of their experiences as turning points in their lives. They could say things like "and *then* I understood" or "and *that* is when…" or "*suddenly* I felt…". Even when they described a series of events or experiences these seemed to accumulate to a realisation or a meaning that constituted a meaningful change. With this in mind we then applied turning points as a sensitising concept further in the analysis to understand the youths' pathways to integration (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Rutter, 1996). Descriptive and interpretative notes were taken, focusing on exploring and identifying what the youths expressed as important turning points in their lives during resettlement. The interviews were first analysed vertically, focusing on one interview at a time, and then horizontally, across interviews. Subsequently, we began to identify emergent turning points for each participant, and then searched for patterns and connections across all participants. The final turning points were named to reflect their conceptual nature and to mirror the youths' words and thoughts as well as the researchers' interpretations.

The first author analysed all the interviews. To reduce interpretative bias in the analysis (Hill et al., 2005), the second and third authors read all the interviews and analysed randomly selected interviews. The analyses were then compared, and any disagreements were discussed, and consensus was obtained. Finally, the results were presented to two study participants, one girl and one boy, to ensure the reliability of the analysis. Both youths expressed agreement with the turning points and felt the analysis reflected their experiences.

3 | RESULTS

In the analytical process, four turning points were identified as important to the participants leading to new pathways: gaining a sense of security; feeling affiliated; being loved and cared for; and becoming independent. In this section, we describe these turning points and the experiences affiliated with them. Direct quotations are used as examples illustrating the participants' perspectives. All names are altered to ensure confidentiality.

3.1 | Gaining a sense of security

Most of the participants discussed how gaining a sense of security was an important turning point in their lives. The experiences most often associated with this turning point were obtaining their residence permit, feeling safe from physical violence, and learning that close relatives were safe.

The youths arrived in Norway with the hope and expectancy of a safe environment and stable future and not having to return to the unsafe situations in their home countries. However, many challenges continued after arrival. Having to wait for their residence permits created feelings of uncertainty, tension, and frustration, and were described as a very challenging situation. Furthermore, lack of information made it difficult to navigate this process. Many participants explained how this insecurity spread itself to several aspects of life and made it difficult to focus on their daily lives and begin planning their futures:

> When I didn't have my residence permit, it was very […] In a way, I felt very insecure; I did not know what would happen to me. If I were to be sent out of the country, if I could stay here? I went to school. […] During class, I didn't know what I should focus on—should I do my homework, or should I focus on getting those papers sorted out?
>
> (Tariq, 21)

The youths described how they experienced gaining a sense of security through residence permit approval as a turning point in their lives:

> After I got my residence permit, I was like, "Wow, now I know I can stay, so now I can focus on what I'm supposed to do". […] I actually waited for a long time to get my residence permit. Before I got it, I was a bit difficult—acting out, but when I got my residence permit, I calmed down.
>
> (Yusuf, 23)

Here, Yusuf and Tariq described a prolonged state of uncertainty and how this affected them emotionally, interfering with many aspects of their daily life. Being granted asylum entitles a person to residence permit and subsequent permanent stay (conditional certain requirements being fulfilled) in Norway. In line with this, gaining residency was experienced by the youths as a defining moment when they gained a sense of security, and subsequently could calm down and turn their

attention elsewhere. Several of our informants shared this feeling that as long as their future was uncertain, they could not concentrate on living in the present or prepare for the future. Schoolwork, leisure activities and establishing social connections suffered from this uncertainty. Although this turning point by most participants was described as something out of their control, many showed signs of strong agency and willpower. Like Tariq, they engaged in a problem-solving process and continued trying with few resources even when they felt hopeless:

> It looked like it was hopeless. Three rejections on my asylum application and a date for departure, but now I am here with a Norwegian passport and citizenship! And this is because I refused to give up; I found good lawyers and tried to do everything for my case. [...] I won't give up until I have succeeded, I'm very hard working.
>
> (Tariq, 21)

For Tariq, the feeling of insecurity regarding residence permit can be seen as a driving force for his engagement in a problem-solving process, resulting in a turning point which led him onto a pathway with an increased sense of security and a boosted sense of self and agency.

Another experience associated with gaining a sense of security was feeling safe from physical violence. Most participants came from countries with war, conflict, or social unrest. Many had also experienced violence at home or in school and being abused and misled by traffickers. Furthermore, some youths experienced violence at the community centres after they arrived (see author's own publication: Jensen et al. (2019)). Davut (18) fled from his country of birth when he was 11. In the interview he explained how his earlier experiences with violence from his schoolteachers affected him and how his performance in school changed when he realised that he was now safe:

> Yes, it was very difficult to get used to the school system. I was away from school a lot in the beginning [...] But this changed. Now I'm often at school. It was both the subjects [which were very different] and the kind teachers. You know, I was very scared during lessons and expected the teachers to hit me, but they didn't.
>
> (Davut, 18)

For this boy, the experience of non-violent schoolteachers became an expectancy violation due to his earlier experiences. He expected the teachers to hit him when he did not achieve. Over time he experienced a qualitative change of representations with regard to schoolteachers and subsequently a turning point in terms of gaining a sense of security. Davut did not describe this as a sudden realisation nor something he was in control over, but more as an insight that was built up over time as his day-to-day experience was non-violent. His reflection was nonetheless that when this became evident to him and he gained a sense of security and could relax and focus on schoolwork it became a turning point in his life. He could now pursue his aspiration to receive a higher education. Nearly all youths in this study described a striving towards education (often within a health or legal profession) so they could give something back to the society that had taken care of them. Feeling safe in school made it easier to follow that ambition.

A third experience associated with the turning point gaining a sense of security was receiving information about the life circumstances of close relatives from their country of origin. Some of the youths described arriving in Norway without having had any contact with their biological family for several months or even years. Not knowing whether their family members were alive or how they were doing was described as very stressful, creating a state of tension and uncertainty. Many participants explained how regaining contact with their families and knowing they were safe gave them peace of mind and a strength to carry on with their lives. When Ahmet (19) arrived in Norway at the age of 13, he found out that his younger brother had travelled the same route as him. For several months, he did not hear anything from him, which made Ahmet extremely worried and unable to focus on his daily life. When his brother arrived in Norway, Ahmet suddenly felt a sense of security, and his life changed:

> I am so relieved my brother is here now, I'm not worried about anything now. When he wasn't here, I thought about him all the time. [...] I couldn't focus on anything else, only him. Regardless what happened, I focused on him. I know the traffickers don't give them enough food. I know what it's like. [....] They will beat you if you can't manage. And he was so young, so I was extremely worried about him. [...] They [the professionals] tried to talk to me, and comfort me, but it wasn't helpful, two minutes later I started to think about him again.
>
> (Ahmet, 19)

At his brother's arrival, Ahmet went from having his mind preoccupied with worries to having mental capacity to focus on his daily life, new relations and his future, which subsequently made new pathways possible. Ahmet experienced this turning point in his life as associated with circumstances beyond his control. Again, Ahmet's story shows us how this specific turning point of gaining a sense of security is characterised by a lack of control. Even though many participants described continuous efforts to gain information regarding their loved ones, their fate was not in their control. Furthermore, it was as if this situation made the youths overwhelmed by sadness and/or anxiety, which left them without resources or agency to focus on their own developmental needs. A key issue regarding the nature of turning points is that the experience entails an opportunity to make a difference (Kuczynski & De Mol, 2015; Rutter, 1996). Acquiring a sense of security enabled these youths to exert agency. In this sense agency is not something they have or do not have but it is woven into the relational encounters with others (Burkitt, 2016; Spyrou et al., 2019).

In seeking a resolution to the state of insecurity and uncertainty, many participants described a process of problem solving, such as fighting for their rights to asylum, or striving to find their relatives. However, some circumstances were out of their control, and some

participants felt they could do nothing to alter their situations, and they were therefore not able to exert agency or engage in a problem-solving process. Instead, they were required to accept the state of tension and uncertainty, which for many led to frustration and agitation. This indicates that turning points can include events both subject to individual control as well as events over which individuals have no control. Precipitating events are often, but not always, temporally elongated.

3.2 | Feeling affiliated

Feeling affiliated to their host country and community was described by most of the participants as a very important turning point. The feeling of affiliation came through language acquisition and learning cultural codes and values, and was often attained through school, leisure activities, and friendships. These attainments introduced a sense of belonging:

> I think life has improved. Because you move forward with [learning] the language, and you become integrated. You get friends, and network, and affiliation.
>
> (Chamara, 21)

Most of the youths described how, in the beginning, they struggled with not knowing the language, not understanding the culture, and not having any friends or family nearby. This hindered them from achieving expected goals and was often a source of frustration and conflict:

> Well, I used to get easily very angry, but I'm not like that anymore. It was because of… […] it had something to do with not knowing the language, culture, and those things.
>
> (Davut, 18)

Feeling disconnected also left many participants feeling restrained and powerless, such as Farrid:

> Even though there were so many nice people here and I was finally in a developed country, I felt really alone and not connected. It felt like I didn't have arms or legs, like I was handicapped, just having to wait for things to happen.
>
> (Farrid, 19)

In Farrid's story, he tells how feeling estranged left him almost paralysed. Nonetheless, he persuaded the local grocery store to give him an unpaid internship to learn more about how Norwegian society works:

> So I said, "You know what, you don't have to pay me or anything, just let me work here, because I want to learn the language, know about the culture, how the milieu is and all that". Because it didn't work having all those ideas from my home country and living the way I did. I wanted to become integrated as much as possible.
>
> (Farrid, 19)

Understanding the language was seen by many participants as the gateway to understanding new cultural codes, acquiring friendships, managing school and work, and subsequently feeling affiliated. Others, however, discussed how learning the language was not enough; they felt required to learn more in order to make friends, feel connected, and fit in:

> I tried to learn to talk the way they talked and learn how I could behave the way they behaved, so that I could get in touch with them. I wasn't very good at it, but I continued trying. And then I suddenly got it! I realised how I should behave to people my age, how I should talk to them. So now, I have good friends. It's like my [foster] mom says: "You have made friends for life". And that's really, really nice.
>
> (Abel, 20)

The stories of Abel and Farrid reflect how most of the participants engaged in a problem-solving process to move forward from the struggles of feeling disconnected and how over long periods of time they worked hard to become affiliated. Although Abel described how he suddenly 'got it', changing his life for the better, he referred to a series of events that led to this realisation he described as a turning point. For most of the participants, feeling affiliated by learning the language, making friends, or understanding the culture most often entailed a period of gradual change, accumulating until reaching a turning point that gave rise to new opportunities for relating with others, as described in both Kuczynski and Parkin's (2009) and Rutter's (1996) understanding of turning points. This shows the importance of understanding turning points as they shed light on important developmental processes. Many participants described the subsequent pathways resulting from the experience of this turning point as positive, resulting in a greater sense of belonging and greater possibility to exert agency. Again, agency seems to be woven into the relational encounters with others (Burkitt, 2016; Spyrou et al., 2019). However, many youths also expressed an understanding of having to work hard over long time to gain entry into society, which might indicate that Norwegian society has high expectations of what is acceptable behaviour among immigrants. As a society, one could problematise the notion of having to sacrifice one's own cultural norms and ways of being to feel affiliated and question whether the host culture should bear more responsibility. Nonetheless, on a personal level people need to feel connected, and the need to fit in is especially significant in adolescence, and is often expressed in youths walking, talking, and dressing alike.

However, feeling affiliated through changing and sacrificing norms and values from one's own culture may be a double-edged sword. Several participants (mostly females) described how attaining a sense of affiliation became a negative turning point, leading onto a pathway of cultural conflict and expectancy violations by people from their countries of origin. While the boys ascribed these conflicts to clashes between two different cultures, girls to a greater extent experienced them as gender specific. Fatima (22) stated that when she adapted to the Norwegian culture, people from her country of origin began to treat her badly, making her life very difficult:

> In my culture, they don't approve of… girls have to behave properly, they can't drink, can't talk to boys. I haven't done that, but still they talk badly about me behind my back. They call my friends, and then my friends don't want to be with me because I talk to boys.
>
> (Fatima, 22)

Here, Fatima described affiliation as a negative turning point, as if she is trapped between expectations from two different cultures, leaving her with no sense of belonging to neither of them. Although analyses of the youths' narratives suggest that most informants experienced feeling affiliated and connected to their place of residence as important to their well-being, not all participants experienced feeling affiliated, and others experienced negative consequences similar to Fatima's.

3.3 | Being loved and cared for

Many of the participants described the development of positive relationships which made them feel being loved and cared for as an important turning point, changing their lives for the better. The experiences most often associated with this turning point were moving in with loving and kind professionals or foster parents, finding a significant other, and being reunited with biological family.

As previously mentioned, the first period spent in Norway was often described as both difficult and demanding by the youths. Many struggled, but feelings of solitude, fear, and hopelessness were counteracted when they realised someone cared for them. For some, this person was an employee at the centre in which they were residing:

> She used to sit with me in my room, and I told her things about my mother and my father, and we cried together. […] I realised she really cared; it wasn't just a job to her. And it really helped me, her being there listening. I felt so much relief.
>
> (Farrid, 19)

Here the healthcare worker over time behaved in ways that Farrid interpreted as personal and not just professional. These experiences culminated in a realisation that she cared for him and this is the turning point he highlighted as important in his life. He felt relief as if he was reassured that he was worthy of love. This opened up a host of opportunities for future relations. Feeling loved is a basic need for all humans, and perhaps it needs to be reinforced in adolescence as they developmentally continue their path towards independence. However, for some URMs, it seems that this affirmation of being a person worthy of love is deeply existential in nature. It may be hard to grasp how lonely many URMs feel and that having just one person to attach oneself to can become a turning point. The significance of this is described in almost all the interviews, and so eloquently articulated in Kavith's interview:

> I got a girlfriend […] and from that day everything was very different. […] I finally got an inner peace. […] I was very happy and was feeling so much better, my thoughts stopped ruminating, and I could concentrate more. […] You know, I was totally alone in Norway and didn't have anyone else who loved me that much, so that made it feel especially good, that I got someone who cared so much about me […]. When I had her, other things became important in my life […] my social life, my work life, school. I realised I also had to do something about that, so then I started focus a lot on school and my career.
>
> (Kavith, 18)

Essential in turning points is the generation of novelty (Rutter, 1996). Being loved and cared for generated new pathways by making it possible to engage in other important developmental processes. For Kavith, being loved and cared for made new friends and planning his future possible. The analyses of the responses suggest that this turning point provided the participants with inner peace and subsequently a greater ability to concentrate and focus on present and future tasks and responsibilities. Consistent with Kuczynski and Parkin (2009) and Rutter (1996), some participants, like Kavith, experienced this turning point as a sudden change, while others, like Farrid, experienced it as something occurring after gradual changes, accumulating in a turning point.

3.4 | Becoming independent

The analyses of these interviews indicate that becoming independent was a central turning point in the lives of the participants. Receiving advice, help, and guidance on practical issues over time led to this turning point by increasing a sense of safety and control over their own lives, leading onto a path to independence. Aaron (22) discussed how through practical support he learned how to do things on his own and subsequently how to become independent:

> The professionals at the care centre made it easier to move forward; they have helped me so much and

> contributed to the life I am having now. […] When I stayed there, they taught me how to become independent and to do things on my own. For example, making a phone call or visiting the bank. Even though I knew the language, I was shy, and everything was new to me. […] They came along with me, but said, 'You have to ask [by] yourself, I'm not doing it for you'. He tried to integrate me, and it helps me so much in life, being able to be independent.
>
> (Aaron, 22)

Even though increased independence is a normal developmental process for all adolescents, Aaron continued by explaining *why* independence was so important to him:

> Because you are all on your own. There is no one to save you.
>
> (Aaron, 22)

His statement highlights a central issue for most URMs; they *must* make it on their own, because they have no one but themselves to depend on. This feeling of solitude generated anxiety and concerns for their future. To handle the tension arising from this, many seemed to engage in a problem-solving process with the aim of obtaining skills and knowledge to mend themselves. Thus, becoming independent entailed gradual changes, accumulating in a turning point, making new pathways possible.

In contrast, some youths described being pressured to independence before they were ready as a turning point with negative consequences. This was often the case when leaving a care centre to live either by themselves or with biological family and they no longer received support and follow-ups from the care centre. These informants described a more challenging daily life with more responsibility for themselves and their families than they felt they could manage, and with no one to ask for help or guidance. Azzat (22) explained that when his application for family reunion was granted and he moved out from the care centre to live with his family, the roles changed and his responsibilities increased immediately. Suddenly, he was the head of the family, the only one who knew the Norwegian language and the culture:

> It's just yourself, and that's difficult. They [professionals at care centre] ended all contact with me, and suddenly it was the direct opposite. I had to take care of my mother, my family, integrate her, and help them. You forget about yourself. […] When my mom came, I had to take care of her and do everything for her. I lost so much time because up until now I've had to focus on her and my family. It affects me a lot. Sometimes I can't go to school because I have to take her to the hospital.
>
> (Azzat, 22)

As exemplified in Azzat's story, becoming independent for some participants entailed a drastic change in their situational context, leading to a more challenging everyday life. This is in contrast to becoming independent after gradually acquired sufficient knowledge. This supports the notion that a wide range of experiences and circumstances may be associated with turning points, and that they can occur either suddenly or after a period of gradual change.

4 | DISCUSSION

To understand more about the developmental trajectories involved when young URMs resettle, the aim of this study was to explore how the youths themselves describe their lives during resettlement. This was done by using turning points as a sensitising concept to analyse interviews conducted five years after their arrival in Norway. Gaining a sense of security, feeling affiliated, being loved and cared for, and becoming independent were identified as important turning points in the lives of these youths during resettlement, leading them onto new pathways.

According to the analyses, these four turning points seemed in different ways to make space for psychological and mental capacity, allowing the youths to focus on important developmental activities. For example, most participants described how they gained a sense of security after receiving residence permits, which made it possible to focus on school and plan for their futures. Furthermore, when they were loved and cared for, they felt less lonely and more confident in pursuing emotional bonds with others. As such, it seems these turning points in different ways represent basic needs for these youths.

In accordance with Kuczynski and De Mol (2015), several turning points seemed to be driven by inter-relational processes, such as feeling loved and cared for. For the participants in this study with fragmented or absent relations to their parents, it became evident that employees, foster parents and significant others were important persons involved in the turning points driven by inter-relational processes. However, some turning points were driven by contextual factors, such as gaining a sense of security through a residence permit. This indicates that a wide range of experiences may be associated with turning points in line with Rutter (1996).

The concept of turning points may intuitively be understood as immediate changes. Accordingly, the analyses showed several examples of such instantaneous changes, such as the immediate sense of security when regaining contact with close relatives and learning that they are alive and safe. However, some of these turning points occurred after a period of gradual change. Examples of this include when learning the language, making friends and getting to know the culture over a period of time accumulated into feeling affiliated, as well as gradually getting to know someone, which eventually lead to a sense of being loved and cared for. Thus, according to the analyses and in line with Kuczynski and Parkin (2009) and Rutter (1996), turning points can occur both immediately and gradually over time.

4.1 | The ordinary and the idiosyncratic

The two turning points being loved and cared for and becoming independent arguably reflect normal and basic developmental needs that are important for all youths. In line with this, Seligman (2011) found that well-being for people in general is related to feeling cared for and supported, having a sense of achievement and feeling capable of doing daily activities. In contrast to most youths, URMs are separated from parents or other primary caregivers during an important period in their lives, and they cannot take new attachments for granted. Most URMs do not automatically have access to a person who can fulfil these needs, as youths living with caregivers often do. They are in a situation of needing to establish new close relationships while being in the developmental process of becoming more independent. In this regard, both turning points of being loved and cared for and becoming independent might have a slightly different meaning for URMs than for other youths their age.

The importance of being loved and cared for expressed by the participants in this study aligns with findings from other studies on URMs, which also have emphasised the importance of emotional support and a longing for people who understand them (Eide et al., 2018; Mels et al., 2008; Thommessen et al., 2015). Sirriyeh and Raghallaigh (2018) also found positive emotional relationships to be important to URMs' development and well-being, and social support has been found to alleviate the impact of daily stressors and psychological distress among these youths (Höhne et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2019). However, many youths in our study also experienced difficulties establishing new close relationships. This is not uncommon and was also found in Eide et al. (2018), where URMs reported feelings of ambivalence when establishing new relationships, not knowing whom they could trust. Thus, although establishing close relationships may be important for URMs' well-being, many struggle to achieve this.

When they experienced having the necessary knowledge and resources, the youths in our study perceived becoming independent as an important achievement, leading to a pathway where they could feel comfortable to deal with daily life and future challenges on their own. Many participants emphasised the importance of professionals advising, guiding, and teaching them to be independent, in line with previous studies (Mels et al., 2008; Thommessen et al., 2015). However, some participants experienced being pushed into independence without having the necessary competency or resources to fend for themselves. Consequently, they experienced becoming independent as a turning point leading them onto a pathway with a more challenging daily life. Becoming independent without having adequate social support may add to daily stress. In fact, participants reported that having strong social support alleviated the impact of daily stress (Jensen et al., 2019). While many adolescents yearn for the "road to independence", the urgent need for independence by the youths in our study seemed to be driven by a concern for being all alone and *being required* to manage life on their own. Hence, for URMs who are alone without support from others, becoming independent might be a matter of necessity, not just a developmental task. Although moving into adulthood might involve mixed feelings for many youths, this progress might be especially challenging for many URMs, considering that they must learn a new language and culture, establish new social networks, and manage school and work while being expected to be independent. Feeling capable of accomplishing daily activities has been associated with well-being (Seligman, 2011). Hence, for URMs to succeed in the long run, it might be crucial to provide them with sufficient support and knowledge so that they are comfortable with fending for themselves.

As with being loved and cared for and becoming independent, having a sense of security and feeling affiliation is important for all adolescents. However, for youths born and raised in one country, these two turning points are to a large extent given. Native citizens automatically learn the language and the cultural codes of their country, and they do not need to fear being sent out of the country. Furthermore, most will not be in the situation of worrying about their families' well-being or location or not being able to contact them. In this regard, the importance of these two turning points may be distinct for URMs. Citizenship, rights and security have been identified as important to integration and well-being (Ager & Strang, 2008; Unterhitzenberger et al., 2019). Participants in our study described how feelings of uncertainty created tensions and frustration. As their minds were occupied with worrying about their future, they had limited capacity to focus on school and learning the language, making integration difficult. This indicates how important having a sense of security is for the process of integration.

Seligman (2011) related connectedness and feeling socially integrated to well-being, while Ager and Strang (2008) identified social connections, language, and culture as important themes in regards to integration. Accordingly, most participants in our study described feeling affiliated to their host country, its community, and its people as a central turning point with a positive outcome, making their lives better and increasing their possibilities in life. The importance of host competence with regard to both social support and feelings of self-efficacy has been highlighted by Höhne et al. (2020) and Oppedal and Idsoe (2015). For URMs, who have arrived in a foreign country without family, the need to feel affiliated and connected may be particularly important for counteracting loneliness and thus might enhance well-being. Additionally, feeling affiliated seemed to facilitate some of the other turning points. For example, it is easier for URMs to be independent when they know the local language and the cultural codes.

Feeling affiliated means being given access to a community, but in this process the youths might risk losing contact with their cultures of origin. According to Berry (2007), adapting to a new culture while preserving parts of one's culture of origin has been found to be associated with greater well-being for refugee youths. However, studies have identified the presence of both out-group and in-group hassles as well as challenges in ethnic identity formation among young immigrants (Keles et al., 2016; Oppedal et al., 2004). Furthermore, immigrants adopting to their host culture have

reported stigmatisation and discrimination by people from their culture of origin (Bowerman, 2017). Accordingly, immigrant youths risk being torn between expectations from two different cultures. This parallels the findings from our study. Some participants, and the girls in particular, also experienced negative consequences by attaining a sense of affiliation, leading onto a pathway of cultural conflict and expectancy violations by people from their countries of origin. This is an example of how one turning point can have both positive and negative outcomes and how difficult this in-between position can be. Furthermore, the results from this study indicate that being affiliated was both necessary and difficult to obtain, and many participants experienced expectations and pressure from the host culture with regard to adapting to the local culture. This is in line with Brook and Ottemöller (2020), who reported that female URMs needed to adopt an assimilation acculturation strategy in order to feel belonging. The issue of gender differences among URMs needs to be explored more, but Iqbal et al. (2012) found that refugee girls felt more restrained compared to boys due to different expectations of boys than girls, and due to the notion of shame and honour within their culture.

4.2 | Agency: Social, cultural and relational constraints

The degree of agency experienced in challenging situations was significant in many of the interviews. In social relational theory, the concepts of turning points and agency are embedded within a dialectical framework in which people are considered to mutually influence one another. According to Kuczynski and De Mol (2015), differences in the ability to exert agency are thought to reflect differences in individual, relational and cultural resources. Spyrou et al. (2019) on the other hand, places children and their development in a relational field, as necessarily and inevitably interdependent on other human, non-human and technological forces. In contrast to the individuated discourse of agency as properties of an entity, the concept of agency is seen as a relational dynamic, a complex element consisting of multiple bonds. In our study, many youths reported feelings of low agency; they felt inhibited and controlled in meetings with larger institutions and authorities upon which they were dependent, such as schools, the social services and the directorate of immigration, but also in more personal relationships with teachers, caregivers and employers. Considering that the participants did not know the language or culture on arrival, and that many did not have friends or family nearby, this feeling of low agency could be related to limited cultural and relational resources. However, external forces such as immigration restrictions, laws and social inequality also seemed to contribute to restricting agency, in line with Spyrou et al. (2019). Furthermore, many of the participants also expressed an imminent feeling of being all alone while *being required* to resolve their troubles themselves, as expressed in the importance of the turning point becoming independent. There is a paradox in the participants' feelings of low agency in meetings with institutions and people they are dependent upon while being expected to manage their lives by themselves. This leaves these youths in a very demanding situation. On the one hand they are compelled to exert agency, while on the other hand, they have few resources with which to do so. Considering that agency is associated with well-being (Gong et al., 2011; Greenaway et al., 2015), this feeling of low agency might contribute to negative mental health trajectories.

It is important to highlight that most of the youths in our study also showed signs of astonishing strength and agency, in addition to an impressive will to use their resources to continue striving for their aims. Despite feelings of hopelessness, many of the participants handled the difficulties they experienced by engaging in a problem-solving process. Other studies have also found resourcefulness and a willingness to succeed and overcome challenges as characteristics of many URMs (Eide & Hjern, 2013; Kohli, 2007; Vervliet, 2013). Also Callaghan et al. (2018) describe how children and youths adapt to meet and manage adverse experiences, developing a range of spatial, cognitive and relational strategies for dealing with the impact of coercive control in their lives. From a developmental perspective, succeeding in a problem-solving process and experiencing a turning point might lead to an enhanced sense of agency and trust in one's own abilities. However, some scholars (e.g., Bernardini, 2019) question the prevailing discourse of agency as a remedy to experienced difficulties, claiming it portraits agency as individualistic and unquestionably positive, which might cloud the complexity of vulnerabilities. We will argue for the importance of not portraying youths along a victim–agent dichotomy, which risks reinforcing a discourse of blaming youths for not succeeding or being agentic enough, but rather to acknowledge that youths can be both vulnerable and agentic (Bernardini, 2019; Callaghan et al., 2018). We claim this illuminates the importance of nuances when discussing URMs. On the one hand, they are especially vulnerable as they are in difficult and challenging situations; on the other hand, they show incredible strength and individual resources.

4.3 | Implications

In this article we address the very youngest URMs—all participants arrived in Norway before the age of 16, and were interviewed approximately five years after their arrival. Few studies have focused on the youngest group of URMs, and to our knowledge none have examined their own experiences of important turning points during their time in their host country over a period of five years. Arriving at a young age meant that they, contrary to older URMs and adult asylum seekers, were placed in small care centres where they were looked after by social workers. In this regard, these younger URMs might have been more protected. Furthermore, these URMs had several years to resettle before reaching their legal age (18 years old) and were expected to manage on their own. According to Gonsalves (1992), the resettlement process can be described containing different stages, where four to five years after arrival is characterised by a "return to normal life", when things are more settled. Since the

results in this study reflects the participants' experiences as they look back on their five years in Norway, this is probably from a more settled standpoint. In their reflections on their lives now and what matters to them, they take us through a series of moments that, at this particular time of reflection, stands out as important to them. What is reflected on as important in our lives is always in relation to where we stand today. In this sense these reflections should be viewed as "moments of meeting and reflection" in a particular setting, at a particular time, in their lives.

Achieving a sense of security, feeling affiliated, being loved and cared for, and becoming independent seem to be important to integration and new positive pathways for URMs. These results have multiple possible implications. For example, it is evident that residence permits are important for gaining a sense of security, and that having to wait for their residence permits leaves the youths in a demanding state, being torn between hope and despair. Knowing this, it is crucial that authorities strive to reduce the time required for processing the applications and to provide accurate and easily available information on how the application is proceeding. The youths may also require more emotional and legal support in this process, giving them a greater sense of control and agency, as well as feeling cared for. Considering the impact feeling safe from physical violence has on gaining a sense of security, it is important that URMs are informed that any form of physical punishment and violence is illegal in Norway. Employees working close to these youths should be trained in how to recognize signs of mental health problems in general and post-traumatic stress symptoms in particular, and those who struggle should be offered treatment. To ensure that these youths have access to continuous emotional support from at least one adult, authorities should avoid URMs being moved more than necessary. Stability with regard to residence is also important for making friends and building a network. To further help URMs feel more affiliated to the society, it is essential that participation in leisure activities, social networks, school activities and learning the language are encouraged and facilitated. It is also important to be aware of the challenges these youths encounter, such as experiencing rejection from the local immigrant community when feeling affiliated. The girls in particular expressed concerns related to this. Furthermore, it is crucial that URMs are not forced into independence without having sufficient resources or knowledge to take care of themselves. Subsequently, these youths should get the possibility to gain knowledge essential to manage life on their own, and authorities should offer economic and social support beyond turning 18, making sure that no youths are on their own without being able to fend for themselves. Altogether, this knowledge can be used to develop recommendations with the aim of offering the best possible care for these youths.

5 | CONCLUSION

For the URMs in our study, the four turning points of gaining a sense of security, feeling affiliated, being loved and cared for, and becoming independent emerged as important turning points in their lives during resettlement, leading them onto new pathways. These turning points represent universal basic needs that are important to all youths. However, the meaning these basic needs represent and the resources URMs have access to when working towards these goals differ from those of most youths. Nonetheless, despite having few assets linked to relational and cultural resources as well as external limitations, many participants had individual resources that helped them reach their goals. Providing additional developmental support in these four areas may accentuate individual resources, aid integration and increase well-being.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The study has been approved by The National Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics and has therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. All persons gave their informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study. Details that might disclose the identity of the subjects under study have been omitted.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

The data will not be made available online due to the sensitivity of the material and the impossibility of anonymisation.

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