Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the African refugee community in Newcastle

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Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19 states that every child should be protected from abuse.

Children and young people have the right to a safe environment and it is important to consider children’s individual needs.

Those who are different in any way may be vulnerable to abuse, for example, those from different communities, religions, cultures or those with disabilities. Particular thought needs to be given to the special needs of these children in our communities.

One of the most important lessons that inquiries into child deaths have taught us is that keeping children safe from harm requires professionals and others to share information. Often, only when information from a number of sources has been shared and put together does it become clear that a child is at risk of, or is suffering, significant harm. The Children’s Society is an organisation, which, in all of its activities, promotes the protection of children and young people and minimises the opportunities for them to suffer harm. We recognise the importance of working together with other agencies, to protect children and young people from harm and to promote their welfare.

These are the reasons why The Children’s Society in collaboration with ACANE and the Newcastle Local Safeguarding Board embarked on this research.

This work could not have taken place without ACANE who provided the contact with African families and community leaders, together with advice and knowledge regarding cultural and community issues.

I also wish to acknowledge the role of Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board in giving priority to this research and to its promotion within the public and professional sectors, therefore in highlighting its significance in the safeguarding of refugee children in Newcastle.

Safeguarding and protecting children and young people in Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

The Children’s Society has established work with young refugees as a pioneer area for the organisation and it has been agreed that we will work towards the following overall goal over a ten-year period and the four individual targets over a period of five years:

...
**Goal:** All laws and practices that protect, safeguard, and promote the welfare of children will be applied to refugee children and young people by 2014

<table>
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<th>Target 1:</th>
<th>All refugee children and young people will be assessed and supported in accordance with the Department of Health’s Local Authority Circular LAC(2003)13: Guidance on supporting children in need and their families.</th>
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<td>Target 2:</td>
<td>All refugee children and young people will have places in mainstream schools and have the opportunity to participate in activities in and out of school.</td>
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<td>Target 3:</td>
<td>The process for deciding children and young people’s claims for protection will be one that is child-centred, in which they receive all the support, advice and representation necessary for their claims to be judged fairly.</td>
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<td>Target 4:</td>
<td>No refugee child will be held in immigration detention.</td>
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**Background**

This research is the result of the collaboration between three agencies with a shared concern for safeguarding children from Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

It came about as the result of issues and concerns raised by children, young people and their families in relation to their safety and protection. The research follows on from an event held in Newcastle entitled ‘Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young People In BME Communities’.

This conference provided a unique opportunity to highlight the particular vulnerability of refugee children, the lack of information on child trafficking and the Children’s Society’s commitment to protect them.

**The conference aims and objectives were to:**

- increase awareness of the protection needs in Black and Minority Ethnic communities
- develop safe practice in working with Black and Minority Ethnic children, young people and families in the north east
- respond to the government agenda for the protection of children and young people (Every Child Matters)

**Why this research?**

Children in the African refugee communities are sometimes subjected to inappropriate and inadequate intervention in the child protection arena. Resulting from, stereotyping, lack of awareness amongst professionals of how various categories of abuse are manifested in these communities; and in some
cases racist attitudes expressed towards children and young people. Refugee children and young people are often more vulnerable and may be prone to inequalities due to the manner of their arrival. Immigration law in the UK is a barrier in relation to safeguarding refugee children and young people as in the case, for instance, of refugee children in detention. These children are subject to immigration control and they do not share the same rights as other children in the UK. They are an emerging category within the established Black and Minority Ethnic communities in the UK. As a social justice organisation The Children’s Society seeks to ensure that all our work aims to create and influence best practice with this group.

Through the work of our refugee activities we actively challenge the issues that lead to the inequalities and champion the need to address these issues which is why we are working in collaboration with ACANE and the Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board.

**Aims and objectives**

The overall objective was to carry out a study with the African refugee community in Tyne and Wear, in partnership with a community organisation (ACANE) looking at safeguarding and child welfare issues and practices in refugee communities.

The aims were:

- To increase awareness of the protection needs in refugee communities.
- To develop safe practice in working with refugee children; young people and families in Newcastle.
- To respond to the Government agenda for the protection of children and young people, as expressed within Every Child Matters.
- To inform the debate at policy and practice levels on protecting children and young people in African refugee communities and how it impacts on the child protection systems.

**Outcomes and next steps**

The Children’s Society, ACANE and Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) view this research as a significant and important step towards safeguarding African refugee children.

The research process has provided the opportunity for members of the African refugee community to identify and communicate issues they face in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in their community and how this impacts on existing child protection policies, procedures and laws.

The findings challenge us to understand that there are cultural differences which require understanding through the development of trusting relationships, within an environment that is often experienced as confrontational and hostile.
The research has initiated dialogue between children, families, professionals and community leaders. One of the messages we have received through this research is that people feel over-consulted and resent the fact they give information and nothing changes.

This provides an opportunity to do things differently and ensure the dialogue and collaboration continues. The future requires all agencies to work together in improving the existing safeguarding systems. In order to respond to and support members of the African refugee community to better safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Fran Johnson, Assistant Director (Northern Region), The Children’s Society
May 2006
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1. Introduction

This research project on safeguarding children in the African refugee community in Newcastle was funded by The Children’s Society and was developed by Young Refugees Project North East in collaboration with ACANE (African Advice North East) and the Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Young Refugees Project North East is a project of The Children’s Society which works with children and young people from 10 to 19 years of age. It is based in Newcastle and works with children, young people and families from a refugee or asylum seeking background in the city. They are funded by the Big Lottery Fund, to provide advice, information and support to young refugees in Newcastle and to facilitate the involvement and participation of young refugees. Their main areas of work are: advocacy, children's rights, participation, development, influencing and campaigning. They reach out to a wide range of families and young people as a result of their city-wide focus. They offer support on a wide range of issues and at different stages of the asylum/refugee process.

The Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do. The work of the LSCB fits within the wider context of Children’s Trust arrangements that aim to improve the overall well being (i.e. five outcomes) for all children. Whilst the work of the LSCB contributes to the wider goals of improving the well being of all children, it has a particular focus on aspects of the ‘staying safe’ outcome. Newcastle LSCB replaced the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) on the 6th December 2005 and is proactive in driving forward the duty of all partner agencies in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Its work crosses the boundaries between the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors and builds upon the best practice achieved by the ACPC.

African Advice North East (ACANE) is a support group which was founded in 2001 by volunteers who were African asylum seekers and refugees of different nationalities and ethnicities. This followed the Government’s decision of April 2000 to disperse the applicants for asylum to different regions of the UK, one being the North East of England. ACANE welcomes Africans who have sought refuge in the UK and who have been dispersed to the North East of England. It aims to promote the integration of Africans by raising awareness through effective advice, advocacy and information on issues including health, education, employment, training opportunities, housing, social welfare and legal services as well as through integration policy development. It encourages awareness of British cultures, structures and systems and also of African cultures in the North East.

The research was carried out by The Children’s Society Research Unit over a period of seven months. The study has explored differences in child rearing practices in the African refugee communities and dominant concepts about
safeguarding practices in the African refugee community in Newcastle in order to inform policy and practice. Although the findings of the project are specific to Newcastle it is hoped they also have an application in communities beyond the city and perhaps beyond the African refugee community in terms of provoking thought about issues relating to safeguarding children and difference.

Work carried out elsewhere suggests that British child protection values are culturally specific and that implementing them cross-culturally, without understanding issues of difference in the specific practices and beliefs in other cultures, can be problematic (Hearn et al 2004, Lidchi 2003, Welbourne 2002). In the case of refugees and asylum seekers who are frequently involuntary migrants and who have not actually chosen to live in (British) English society with the values and systems it holds there may be difficulty in understanding, what are experienced as, new rules in child care, discipline and protection. The work of Dioum (2005) in Hackney on African punishment of children demonstrates the importance of listening to African people’s (both children’s and adult’s) views on the issues.

We wanted to discover from members of the African refugee community themselves what issues in their lives impede them from taking these (for them new) values and regulations on board and what their specific concerns are in relation to safeguarding children and young people.

This report:

1. Identifies issues to consider in working with African refugee communities in general
2. Identifies issues of concern to the African refugee community in Newcastle in particular
3. Makes recommendations on how the existing child protection system might respond to and support members of the African refugee community to better safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

The report - which commences with a definition of safeguarding as broader and more preventative than child protection - includes the contributions of 20 safeguarding professionals and 40 members of the African refugee community (from a number of African countries) who are: professionals, community leaders, adults, young people (some of whom have babies) and children. In all 60 people were interviewed, individually or in groups, during the fieldwork process which took place over a period of six months. The report contains:

a. A summary of safeguarding issues raised by professionals and African refugee community members’ perspectives on these observations as well as on safeguarding children in general
b. A description of how the research process was carried out and how this became a participatory process by necessity.

c. A section on safeguarding issues as reported from the perspective of the African participants including issues of serious harassment,
largely associated with specific neighbourhoods, neighbourhoods in which they are obliged to live because of their immigration status.

d. A record of African refugee community participants’ descriptions of practices in their home countries relating to childcare, baby care, disciplining children and kinship systems.

e. Descriptions of perceived attitudes to parenting in the host community and, in the lack of witnessing positive models of child care, how members of African refugee community may take what they see to be the ‘English’ norm in terms of parenting.

f. Professionals’ and African refugee participants’ viewpoints regarding immigration officials and processes as well as interpreters.

g. A section on trafficking and going missing and a description of a more collective way of bringing up children by members of the African community.

h. An account of the importance of religion to participants and the role that church leaders take in working with families who are experiencing problems with their children and how that would be enhanced if the pastors, and their teams, had access to child protection training.

i. African refugee community participants’ views of Newcastle

Sections conclude with learning points, reflections and recommendations for practice.

The identities of participants have been anonymised in this report and the general lack of case studies is due to risk of their identifiability. Quotes from participants have been used wherever possible in order that the reader may hear the voices of members of the African refugee community in Newcastle and the professionals that work with them.
2. **Summary**

**Summary of issues among professionals**

- Many professionals said that the African refugee children and young people are a pleasure to work with – they respect older people.

- They had concerns about racism and bullying by the host communities. Many professionals reported host community attitudes and harassment in neighbourhoods as a problem for their clients.

- Some shared concerns about children who are dispersed by NASS with people who are not their biological parents. This is a government programme of dispersal, through the NASS system, which assumes that children are “accompanied” if there is an adult who is willing to take responsibility for them when they arrive in the UK.

- A few professionals spoke about incidents of parent(s)/carers leaving children alone or in the care of siblings.

- There was a suggestion that it is important that professionals should ask questions outside their normal brief – for instance a doctor might ask, “Do you have a solicitor?”

- It was suggested that when going to doctors there is a need for information – there was concern, for instance, about antibiotics and that doctors should explain why they are not being prescribed on that occasion.

- There was concern about the isolation of young women – especially unaccompanied young women with babies.

- It was suggested that young males are at significant risk of being beaten up.

- It was thought that Social Services were not interested in over-16-year-olds because of their targets.

- There were concerns about the possibility of trafficking and the importance of using trusted translators.

- It was thought that language is of primary importance to settlement.

- They suggested that members of the African refugee community were generally placed in poor housing in areas of deprivation.

- They said there were feeding issues with babies, particularly about semi-solids in bottles.

- There was mention of people being late for appointments and this (different sense of time) was thought to be a cultural issue.

- It was thought that uncertainty about immigration status affects parents and children.
• Where young people are seen to be assimilating to the host culture the resultant tensions can cause domestic violence between the older and younger generation.

Summary of issues among African participants

Community leaders, safeguarding and other African Professionals
• It was suggested that how people view things and answer the interview questions would depend on their immigration status.
• It was the case that uncertainty about immigration status affects both parents and their children.
• Although a new community, people already feel over-consulted and resent the fact they give information and nothing changes.
• There was a suggestion that ‘people learn to tell you what they think you want to hear’.
• Time keeping for appointments is not necessarily cultural – some people cannot read maps for instance and don’t want to say this is the case.
• People cannot change their culture immediately and take on ‘English’ ways.
• People who may be sent back to their country in Africa will not want their children to adjust to the host culture in case they are returned.
• Some children do not sleep in their own houses at night for fear of immigration officials.
• Faith is important to all interviewees and focus group members.

Children and young people
• The young women particularly felt they had been badly treated by immigration and resented the fact they were forced to have an interpreter even when they were able to speak English.
• The young people (male and female) felt in danger in specific parts of town.
• The young refugees were exposed to serious levels of harassment and at times physical violence.
• The young women were very much prisoners in their own homes. This was particularly the case for those living in Benwell.
• Young mothers feared not only for their own safety but also that of their babies.
• They claimed that the police were taking a long time to come to their aid (especially females) – males felt that the police had helped them.
• Religion was important to all the young people, Christians and Muslims.
• The young children said they feel safe at school.
3. **How the research was carried out**

The research fieldwork consisted of a series of face-to-face interviews and focus groups with members of the African refugee communities, both adults and children and telephone or face-to-face interviews with safeguarding professionals. As mentioned above, 60 people participated in all in the interviews and groups. Twenty of these were professionals and 40 were from the African refugee community from which there was also wider participation of ACANE members in terms of facilitation of access and events as well as interpretation skills both linguistic and cultural. The interviewees included community leaders, including two pastors, parents, young people and children. There was some overlap between members of the African refugee community and professionals. Access to professionals was discussed with and facilitated by the steering group and the Newcastle Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

These interviews and groups with African refugees were generally co-facilitated by project workers from Young Refugees North East who also arranged access to the young people. In the case of the children’s group two project workers who work with younger children in schools, employees of The Childrens Society’s LEAP project, designed and facilitated the group in consultation with the researcher. The researcher and the Programme Manager of Young Refugees NE were also present. The mothers’ and fathers’ groups were facilitated simultaneously by two researchers and translation was carried out by members of ACANE.

The interviews and focus groups were analysed using grounded theory – identifying themes arising from the data. This was crosschecked with the steering group who also acted as a reference group.

**Participants and access**

There are two African communities in Newcastle. These were described by a community leader as ‘British Africans’ who have been in Newcastle long-term and the new African refugee community which is the result of dispersal from the South East which started five years ago. The African refugee community members were described as being from 13 African nations and the main languages would be:

- French
- Swahili
- Portuguese
- Eritrean
- Ethiopian

It was suggested in the process of the research that “*Professionals need an awareness that Africa is not Angola or Congo – it is not one country – in Africa there is diversity just as there is in the UK.*” (Community leader)
Although the term ‘refugee’ is used here, many participants are not technically so, as most are still awaiting decisions regarding their immigration status and some have been refused.

The fieldwork process was by necessity organic and took on the form of a dialogue between communities. Interviews with professionals produced a number of safeguarding concerns as viewed from their perspectives. It was then possible to ask members of the African refugee community for their responses to these issues. At the same time members of the steering group fed into methodological issues. Because of the cross-cultural nature of the research all interview questions were checked out with the steering group and with the co-coordinator of ACANE.

Initially it was hoped that a French speaking African sessional researcher, employed by the research unit and whose culturally specific knowledge would have been invaluable, would carry out some interviews with parents. When it became evident that this would not be possible and that there were gender issues in terms of who should interview who, the next idea discussed by the steering group, was to invite members of the refugee community to do some research training. The problem was that although men were available to engage in this, women from the community were not. It became apparent at this point that if women were to participate this would necessitate the provision of childcare and that this was the case for women’s participation throughout the community. Eventually it was decided we would hold a parents event as a means of collecting data, a suggestion made by members of ACANE. A process of participation by necessity came about without which it would have been impossible to collect the data.

In terms of the parents’ groups, some female members of the steering group suggested that if men were present women would not speak. There was also the issue of Muslim women needing to be in a gender-segregated group. Three female members of ACANE agreed to facilitate the parent’s event, to access the mothers, and to translate as well as to cook African food. Two of these were experienced in translation. Meanwhile the co-coordinator of ACANE would access the fathers and religious leaders and translate at the event.

The organic methodology arose out of circumstance as well as out of consultation – the need to collect data in a way that fits with the African refugee community rather than fitting the researcher. It was pointed out that the word ‘interview’ can be intimidating. People can have bad associations with the interview, this is especially the case for people without refugee status.

A member of the steering group suggested that women may not wish to talk about things with the researcher, and that they might think the researcher is a social worker who is going to take their children away. It may indeed have been the case had we gone in ‘cold’. On the other hand if the researcher was not included in the groups and interviews how would she be able to interpret the data? After all it seemed that the research project is about building bridges between communities. Ultimately, through the participation of community members, we completed the fieldwork process.
Children’s and young people’s participation

The groups were as followed:

- Seven young women, six of these unaccompanied young women who are 16 years of age and over from a number of African countries and one 13-year-old who lives with her parents. Some of them are parents themselves and they live right across the city. They were in two groups, referred to in the report as ‘young women’ (those without babies) and ‘young mothers’ (those with babies).

- Three unaccompanied young men 16 years of age and over

- A children’s group of changing composition but of 16 children over all. These children were between the ages of four and 12. The LEAP project workers used Jenny Mosely Circle time, story telling and drawing as a means of collecting data.
Access and participation learning points

- Minority groups tend to get over-consulted and there was a feeling of this already happening at ACANE who had recently participated in some education research. The issue of over-consultation is getting worse now as projects have to carry out consultations in order to make bids for funding which may then go on to be unsuccessful. Minority communities then go on to feel they are over-consulted and do not see any results from the research. It is important that there should be some tangible result and dissemination that includes participants.

- It is important to try to fit into the communities' perceptions of how one should gather information and to go 'to places where parents feel comfortable and confident, go to their powerbase and not yours' (Kenyon 2006).

- The access in this case could only have taken place through Young Refugees North East and ACANE the latter which acts, like similar organisations elsewhere, as a bridge between communities (Sidibe 2004).

- Women would not speak at the parents’ event if they are in a group with the men. This included both Muslim and non-Muslim women.

- The participation by the African refugee community in the data collection, interpretation of data and other research processes came about by necessity – without this the research would not have happened.

- In order to get participation it is necessary to make it worth people’s while to participate – such as holding a social event.

- Checking questions out with the people who know is vital – steering group and people who work with the various groups, community leaders.

- Providing play leaders and crèche facilities is necessary in order to get women’s participation.

- It is necessary to pay bus fares.
4. Safeguarding

This section of the report commences with a description, from the perspective of a professional of what safeguarding is in its broader context, which includes a more preventative perspective than ‘child protection’. The focus then turns briefly to child protection issues that have arisen in the African refugee community in Newcastle from the perspective of a police interviewee at the end of 2005 followed by the main safeguarding issues in the African refugee community as perceived by other professionals.

In the broader sense a professional who works with young children described safeguarding as a preventative strategy:

“It is an awful lot wider (than child protection). Safeguarding is about the child having safe play in the house you know when it gets to the stage when it can have safe play on the floor and crawl around and giving information about safety in the home like plugs or keeping things out of reach like there’s no glass or bleaches around. You need to make sure that the children have got a safe environment because they need to be able to get down on the floor to develop appropriately they need to be able to sit up and crawl and things like that and if it’s not a safe environment then they aren’t able to do that. Other things are like making sure that the children are offered the immunisation programme to keep them safe from harmful diseases and to allow parents to do that they need to make an informed consent so we give them verbal information and written literature about that kind of thing as well. And you talk to parents about the child’s developmental needs and different stages they go through and what kind of stimulation and activities they need to help them reach the different stages of development at the age they should be reaching them at.” (Professional)

In order to discuss the broader aspects of safeguarding children in the African refugee community, from a number of perspectives, it is first necessary to gain an impression of the degree of prevalence of child protection issues in the African refugee community in Newcastle.

Child protection - police

According to a participant from the Newcastle police, at time of interview towards the end of 2005, the number of incidents involving child protection among the African refugee community were few and the ones the interviewee had seen related to over-chastisement (beating with implements) two cases, a proven branding injury, supervision issues and proving the identity of children. She feels that there is a need to offer parents information about child protection and safeguarding on arrival.

The interviewee suggested that over-chastisement happens in the host community too which can take the form of hitting with belts in Newcastle. There are also issues about supervision with the host community and that this is not just a peculiarity of the African refugee community.
The participant felt that the language barrier was the major issue. They have to work through interpreters. She said, “We’ve got to find out what dialect they speak and do everything through interpreters”.

A number of African professionals mentioned situations where child protection processes have been started when parents have been unaware of the child protection regulations. Professionals and African refugee leaders gave a few examples of children being removed when parents do not know about the issues. It is not possible to outline these specific cases but one such case might be for instance if a parent who was unaware of the regulations slapped a child in front of professionals.

Some professionals who go into people’s homes and deal especially with young children said they had not come across any issues of over-chastisement or supervision issues in the African refugee community.

Learning Points

- The incidents of child protection issues in the African Refugee community are low in number.
- Over-chastisement is also an issue in the host community.

Main issues for other safeguarding professionals

Most professionals were not aware of issues in their work with the African refugee community about inappropriate care of children

Professionals suggested the main safeguarding issues were those of finances, housing issues, isolation and harassment of African refugees. But there were also concerns about leaving children unsupervised and fears, for some, about the possibility of trafficking taking place.

There were concerns about children being dispersed with adults who are not their parents:

“It is in a sense private fostering but I don’t know that the adults involved see it like that. They maybe knew the child or found the child and brought them out to safety. It could be laudable but we don’t know what the situation is. They may have brought the child to do their housework.”

A few professionals (three in all) had concerns about domestic violence – this could be parents against children or children against parents. One interviewee said, “The issue of violence by children is because they have come into a different culture If at school they learn shouting they are going to come home and shout”. She suggested that nothing happens about this but if it is vice versa you bring social services in. She said it is something hard for parents to talk about:

“Which parents are going to come forward and say ‘my children are being violent’? When women are together they will disclose. Also when
it is a case of child abuse and you spend time with the parent they will tell you all the story. In relation to sexual health girls who are not listening to their parents any more will start sleeping around.”

There was an issue regarding the high anxiety of mothers about uncertainty and that children cannot go out and play because of parent’s fears about influence of host community children and harassment.

Some professionals had concerns about the isolation especially of the young women and fears about trafficking as a possibility. There are neighbours who report that they have seen unaccompanied children get out of taxis with suitcases and go into a house. Another professional suggested that neighbours sometimes report things (real or unreal) as a means of harassment.

The main concern however was about leaving children unsupervised at an early age or in the care of siblings.

Most of these safeguarding concerns are not relevant to the African refugee community alone. However it was an issue for parents who had never been informed about the regulations and the reasons for them. For instance an African professional explained – “where we lived everyone looks out for your children - it wouldn’t be just one person has that responsibility” – this can lead to people leaving children unsupervised. She explained that in terms of child protection issues this can be quite frightening because the parents do not realise this and “it can go quite far down the line”.

“We would expect in this country you know we talk about play and stimulation and about bonding. Things like that. Well sometimes the families that I’ve had when they’ve been brought up in their own country they haven’t always been parented by their own parents but often live in a big house with lots of other children. And often the oldest child who just might be sixteen or seventeen themselves they are the ones who do the parenting as a rule and its often about the physical needs of the children you know making sure they are fed and clean as opposed to meeting their emotional needs. And safety needs often can be lacking. Um parents sometimes in this country think they can leave their children at home from being quite young when they go out and do other things so I’ve had conversations with them because of the inability of the child to protect themselves from dangers in the home, from scalds and burns, from electricity and sharp objects you know you mustn’t leave the children for that reason.” (Professional)

“Well I think they (parents) are just beginning – looking at why the laws are here. You can’t leave a child on their own in the house. The reason for that is because of the fire. Its very much trying to explain it rather than ‘the law says this. The law says that’. We have to go back to basics and look at if from a Black African perspective. To explain why and that it’s not there to punish”.(Professional)

One professional said that she has now changed the way she works and informs people about the supervision issue at the outset, “So now when I do the
first visit I say ‘You're not allowed to leave your children until a certain age’”. Another professional gives information on this at workshops.

The other issue is over-chastisement, “You know like really hard smacking with implements. (she gives an example of a girl being hit with a belt buckle by a step parent) … For quite trivial things - In my belief it’s quite trivial things.”

There were issues about isolation and stress, not being able to allow children out to play and anxiety based on uncertainty about the future. This in parents transmits itself to the children. There was, according to one professional, conflict between parents and children and vice versa because of children’s learned behaviour – violent parents and violent children. According to the professional parents are ashamed and feel unable to talk about this generally though are able, with time, encouragement and trust building to talk about it in groups. Mothers become depressed.

![Learning points](#)
- Safeguarding is broader than child protection and is preventative
- Parent need to understand what is expected of them at the outset
- Parents need to understand the reasons for the regulations – these need to be explained to them
- Violence against parents should be taken seriously by services
- Women need more opportunities to meet and discuss between themselves

### Accessing healthcare
There were safeguarding issues concerned with accessing health care. A professional described how

“If parents do not take the child to the doctor it goes on until it can be quite a significant illness the child has got whereas if they had accessed services earlier it might not have got so difficult.”

The professional thought this could happen when there were concerns about having to pay. She said,

“Certainly I've been asked before about payment thinking they have to pay for these things. And yet I've always made it very clear at the outset that they don't have to pay and how they can get prescriptions free and things like that.”

A community leader explained how in Africa it is necessary to pay to go to see a doctor and the doctor will spend some considerable time with the patient. So it is a twofold adjustment in that the person has to understand that they do not have to pay and that the consultation will be brief.

With regard to making appointments
“It might possibly be the language barrier because they may struggle you know to get appointments. Because the appointment system has changed in that there are a lot of practices where you need to ring in on the day you know sort of 8.30 in the morning. Now if you can’t speak to the receptionist to get your point across or understand what they are saying then that could be a difficulty as well.”

There was some concern that some people did not keep appointments. There was a suggestion that this could be a cultural issue in terms of a different sense of time. But a community leader explained that it could also be the case, for instance, that some people are not able to read maps but do not wish to admit that this is the case.

An education professional said he was often asked for advice on other things than education. This included directions on where hospitals are. “They have to attend for tests and they’re just given an appointment card and they don’t know where the actual hospital is.”

- **Learning points**
  - We have to be careful not to put things down to culture and explore the possibility of other explanations.
  - How to facilitate appointment making for people who do not speak English needs to be considered.
5. Professional views on working with African refugees

Professionals were generally very positive about working with African Refugees. A number of people commented on how the young people are respectful of older people. Professionals expressed a great deal of concern about their clients. Here are some of the things they said:

“They are respectful of elders, a pleasure to work with.”

“It feels like quicksand working with asylum seekers because of legislation blocking the way.”

“I think there’s an idea asylum seekers and refugees are more amenable to education”.

“You know I think (we) often have the information of where to signpost them to. To other services where they can get the help they sometimes need. You know you’re saying ‘Yes come here. We’ll help you. We’ll try and help you and get you the services that you need to make you more comfortable’. I can’t even say happier because the things that they’ve gone through”.

One of the concerns for professionals involved in child protection is whether abuse can ever be regarded as cultural. The prevailing view among safeguarding professionals is that abuse can never be ‘cultural’. Nevertheless professionals struggle with this issue when they are trying to understand what is going on in any given situation:

“We are there to protect children and you’ve got to assess each situation. Professionals are frightened of being seen to be racist”.

Professionals thought it was important that professionals should have access to training about other cultures.
6. African refugee participant’s view of professionals

Young women thought that having professionals seen to be on their side helped to ward off harassment. All the young mothers said that if they had a problem the person they would like to talk to best was their social worker. When asked most interviewees did not have any problems with regard to visiting doctors. They seemed to feel that neighbourhoods were a more pressing issue.

A community leader said he thought it was important that Safeguarding and other professionals should “explain to people and not frighten them”.

He talked about how they have no GPs, as such, in Africa - if you go to a doctor you pay and they will spend three hours with you. There is a need to explain to people, for instance if they go to the doctor with a fever and they want antibiotics and the doctor refuses to prescribe them, it would help if the doctor would explain why this is the case.

As mentioned above, participants from the African refugee community did not generally describe problems with doctors. However one participant felt strongly about this

“I would like an organisation like this to tell those people to consider that Black African(s) are human being(s). To the doctors – some people do not feel they are treating (them as) human beings.”

With regard to the police, some participants, particularly fathers and young men, felt helped by them. Mothers in families said if they had a problem they would talk to the police. One young mother had a positive relationship with the police. The main criticism was the time it took for the police to respond to a call for help.
7. Keeping safe - harassment

A number of professionals recognised that there was a problem for young refugees and their families in relation to harassment. This harassment was not universal but connected to particular neighbourhoods in which the majority of our African participants live. That this is the case was amply verified and illustrated by the young people and parents we interviewed. Heaven Crawley (2005) has suggested that recent surveys provide us with evidence of negative public attitudes towards asylum and immigration but she pointed out they “provide limited evidence on the factors that underlie differences in attitude at local level and, in particular, over time and / or in relation to particular national or international events (Crawley 2005)". Some of the participants from the refugee community had good neighbours and a sense of safety seemed to be largely connected to where they lived.

“Obviously because of their colour they sort of stand out and they’re more sort of obvious targets for racism as asylum seekers are just generally” (Professional).

Being both black and an asylum seeker, it is a case of double jeopardy or perhaps triple jeopardy in the case of women.

Some of the children under 11 said they felt safe at school – one child added because there was a gate. An African professional and father said, “They are told when they are going to school that you are protected – no one will hurt you – no-one will hit you”. Another young child said he felt safe “Being at home playing with my toys”.

For the young people and adults it was necessary to identify the safe areas of the city. A father said, “You have to learn where to walk, where it is safe.”

One of the young men said that he did not feel safe on the Metro and another said he didn’t feel safe walking alone even in daytime but it was the young women who felt the least safe – even in their own neighbourhoods where they were harassed or even physically attacked and stones were thrown at their windows. The young mothers feared for the safety of their babies.

A member of the second mothers’ group encountered hostility in the neighbourhood, there was an issue of children spitting and also one problem with a teacher. Two of the fathers experienced stone throwing and all parents were concerned for the safety of their children. The fathers also had mentioned the issues of cars belonging to black people being smashed in Byker. Children throw stones at the houses of the African participants in Benwell and in Byker.

At the children’s workshop, children drew pictures that associated bullying with other children. One child produced a comic-strip style drawing that expressed a resilient attitude. In the picture a girl, (the bully) is saying, “I’m better than you” and the African child is answering, “No you are not. Everyone is different”.

One child identified bullying with a man that appears to be in a uniform and two brothers with what look like police cars or military vehicles (see cover). One of the brothers came up to the researcher, pointed at his drawing of the cars and
said: “bullies”. Some adults, from the African refugee community were asked what they thought these ‘police car’ pictures might mean. Was this a representation of events in Africa or in the UK? It was suggested by one African professional that the way in which people answered the question would depend on the immigration status of the viewer. So people with secure status might view it as happening in Africa while those with insecure status, who feared being returned, would interpret the bullies’ cars with their revolving lights as relating to Immigration.

Below are some accounts of harassment given by interviewees from the African refugee community so that the reader may judge for themselves how much of an issue this is.

“In Byker it is difficult because children… throw stones (at) the house and (at) other people which we believe that (host community) parents don’t have control on their children because the children they can do what they want.” (Father)

“Well this happen(s) a lot. I don’t know in some areas it happen and in some not. Myself, I have had stones thrown at me, everything, but you know there are some people who are racist and some who are not.” (African professional)

“I can say we are safe because we left our country where there is trouble but talking about safety … here I can say when I am walking (here) any young person can take a stone and throw it to me and I may be injured. I am not safe.” (Fathers’ group)

“Every time they throw rubbish on my veranda.” (Young mother)

“Every night they throw stone on my window. And I don’t know who is those children who are throwing stone on my window. Every time they pass they laugh at me, they insult me, So I never close my eyes any time when I do they stand on my door talking laughing saying those things I don’t have the courage to talk to them.” (Young mother)

“When I am angry I don’t want to call to the police because I have anger … I don't want them to harm little baby. I pray for my stepmother, even for my baby’s life all those things. I don’t sleep in the night. Sometimes I will take something or I will take drink to make (me) sleep (I)… think think think problems that … I can’t sleep any longer you will see me in the night just walking inside my house I don’t have anything to do just stay there. No sleep because I afraid all the time. I’m not staying there please because I don’t like the area its too danger and rough people is there. Sometimes the people in … they want to come down they push on my door.” (Young mother)

“Yes imagine that its snowing and you go outside they can throw the snow over his face (baby) because they didn’t care they just look at your face and throw snow in your face.” (Young mother)

“You know sometimes when I walk on the street some English people sorry to say ….even do me like this even spit on me. I don’t like to call
police because I always like to fight with my hand because I don’t like that I don’t like insult. I don’t want someone to insult me and I don’t want to insult anybody. That’s the way I lead my life. If you want to be a friend to you fine. Children where I live now you see all those children every time any time I pass they tell me they want to make sex, they love me. Why are they telling me this rubbish? I don’t like it. If it’s not the children I would beat them. So I refuse, I just pass, I pretend.” (Young woman)

“You can’t go out they throw stones when you go back home you can’t go back out (they throw stones) because you are scared. Its very hard.” (Young woman)

“Yeah down there I used to live down there…They go down break people’s doors and call people all kind of horrible names. It’s a really terrible place. Its not a good place.” (Young woman – now in better area where she feels safe)

“You can’t walk alone you like to take bus – if you get up on bus, if they see you they do something bad.” (Young woman)

Asked who did this they replied it was boys and girls and

“Sometimes its just a little baby like a six- seven-year-old. Their parents just look at you like I don’t know… sometimes if they have dog they let dog run (at) you …. ” (Young woman)

“(I feel unsafe) when I am walking out street.” (Young men’s group)

“Some people are nasty when you are out.” (Young men’s group)

Young women, young mothers and fathers all suggested the best way to deal with the issue was to move area but this is not possible as they are in NASS accommodation. A father suggested that there should be work done with host community children:

“I think that the government should plan something about the future of these (host community) children. Because this is something you see happening on the TV like the case in Liverpool where more black get attacked like they kill this young person in Liverpool. Was killed by … young person 20, 25. Its not normal in the future these young people can harm other people.”

Education was a concern of one of the pastors who said that although African people are very keen on their children’s education he suggested the children are “failing” in our schools. But in terms of schools it was felt by fathers that the problem was not in school itself where things are better managed, but outside of school and the behaviour of youngsters that is the concern.

Although they had bad experiences some of the interviewees knew that there are also good people in the host community but two of these no longer lived in the most difficult areas. People who live outside these areas commented on how not everyone is racist and generally had a more positive view of the host community.
Learning points

- A mapping exercise of this harassment and an attempt to identify and evidence the underlying factors that contribute to the harassment would be a useful exercise. Such a mapping process of hotspots of harassment might inform the city’s crime and disorder/hate crime work and in itself might drive forward some work on dealing with the underlying causes.

- A father’s suggestion that work needs to be done that includes children for the host community is an important one. There is a need for work that affirms these children and young people (host community and refugees) and offers them activities that have an anti-bullying impact.

Immigration status and neighbourhoods

Many of the participants live in Byker and Benwell because they live in NASS accommodation in these parts of the city. Single people, young mothers and families all have problems in these areas. A father said he didn’t know whether his immigration status affected the safety of his children because

“I never have been accepted in this country. If it was the case (that I am accepted) I should move to looking for another area just to secure the future of my children.”

A pastor suggested that sometimes

“If the problems become very serious you can contact NASS accommodation and NASS accommodation provider so they can do something just to move you from your house to another house. They can do it.”

Experience of police response

Generally participants were positive about the police, especially the males.

“The police came and the police arrest these two people and I automatically feel protected”. (Father)

He was advised not to walk that way again by the police.

Most said they trusted the police for instance a Somali mother said that if she had a problem with her children, keeping them safe perhaps she would first go to friends and talk to them, then go to the police but some felt that they took such a long time to arrive that it was too late when they came.

“The police they are very late. You can contact the police now you can call 999 but they always come very, very late. Sometimes an hour and it’s too late.” (Fathers’ group)

“When you call the police they take one hour to come. Because this happen to me this last winter. I was at bus stop there’s some boys and a big lad in the park so they started throw the snowball at me and I tell him to stop and the guy was there with him and he didn’t tell him to stop so
after I call the police I was standing there for nearly one hour the police they didn’t come... They know those boys but they don’t come.” (Young women’s group)

The problem is that if you do not know how to speak English you cannot call the police. This was the case for unaccompanied young people and adults.

“How horrible is this you can’t call the police you don’t even know how to speak English. So you see they know that even if you know your rights they can’t express it. (one) Because you are afraid, two you are a stranger in the country, three you don’t speak good language. You can’t even know how to explain yourself. If they see you around with a social worker (they think twice).” (Young women’s group)

There was also the issue of fear of the police:

“We’ve got a lot of cases you can call the police you have trouble at home the police come and start to investigate everybody you know – BME people are afraid of police sometimes but we don’t need to have to be afraid of the police – I know that if I’ve got a problem I can call the police to protect me but if I am afraid of the police then you don’t have any confidence in them.” (Pastor)

The responses were somewhat different, according to gender, as some young women felt they would not want to call the police.
8. Childcare

Views about host Community child care

Most of the participants from the African refugee community had concerns about neighbourhoods and harassment in neighbourhoods. This was frequently linked with concerns about behaviour of children in the host community. Generally parents thought that host community parents did not discipline their children and allowed them to wander the streets. One young mother, when she was expecting her baby, was hit by a child (in the street) who was accompanied by her mother. The mother did not intervene and acted as if nothing had happened. She just allowed her teenage daughter to do this.

Mothers, fathers, pastors, young mothers and young women all thought that English children have too much freedom and not enough discipline. A participant from the young men’s group suggested, “They should learn how to treat people. Especially young English people they shout at people”.

Participants in the second mothers’ group were also concerned about the behaviour of host community children, smoking, kissing, and perhaps influencing their children – one mother for instance worried about her daughter bringing boys back to the house, something which just would not happen in Africa.

Young mothers said that host community parents did not give their children any boundaries – they never tell them something is wrong.

“They (are) different because English people encourage bad behaviour of their children so it’s not good. Because sometimes they can hurt somebody and they react in bad way they could slap you again or punch him (my baby) and maybe (he) lose his eye or something like that its not good. It’s not good to fight you know.” (17 year old - young mothers’ group)

As for bullying in school, a quietly spoken thirteen-year-old in the young women’s group admitted that bullying did go on by the following statement,

“Teachers tell them to stop and they do” (Young women’s group)

A father explained how his daughter had a problem with another ten-year-old and the parent of the ten-year-old from the host community started to make false accusations against his daughter and the parent started to go straight to her and started to harass her. He said,

“That surprise me that the parent of the child started to attack my daughter so one day I went to pick up my daughter and I found out the parent had hit my daughter so I went to see the head teacher to complain but there was nothing done.” (Father).

For this particular parent, given that he is aware that smacking is not permitted, the fact that another child’s parent hits his daughter without any comeback must seem inconsistent at the very least.
“During the holidays you can see children two or four, five, six outside at 11 or 12 (at night) and that’s not normal… myself as a parent I cannot leave my children of ten and eleven outside at 11 or 12 to go and play.” (Member of fathers’ group)

The two mothers’ groups shared these concerns through an interpreter:

“They have no respect for elders. You give them too much freedom. You find kids, eight, nine, and 10 outside at 11 o’clock at night. Too much freedom.” (Mothers’ group)

“She says they know (right from wrong) because when they see someone looking at them when they are smoking they try to hide it.”

The mothers had seen ten-year-olds smoking and

“Kids in the park they are dressed in uniform but they haven’t gone to school and she says she sees them kissing as young as 11” (Mothers’ group through translator).

The African mothers are worried that this kind of conduct will influence the behaviour of their children. They said they feel that when their children grow older they won’t listen to their mothers because they are in school with the English children. Although one of the fathers thought that African children would never behave so badly (as to throw stones) a pastor said that in Newcastle the community was newer than the African refugee communities in say Manchester or Birmingham and that, “In Birmingham and London you can see that kind of thing.”

So there is a comparative issue to be explored between the children and young people in the African refugee populations of different cities which might give a longitudinal view of the effect on African refugee children in relation to length of exposure to the host community. The community has only been in Newcastle for a brief time and the children are young. This would identify the progress of transition to the ‘new’ culture and the effect this has on family life, on the process of integration and its impact on identity.

**Attitudes to parenthood**

**Differences between parenting in the UK and Africa**

We asked the parents to describe the main differences between childcare in the UK and in Africa. As mentioned above, the majority of the adults and young people who participated in the study thought that children in the host community were given too much freedom and lacked supervision – especially on the streets. This is an interesting issue because not being supervised in the home is a safeguarding issue. It must seem odd to the African refugee community that host community children as young as six (one person even suggests two) are apparently being left unsupervised on the streets even at night.

African parents said they could allow their children to play outside in Africa. They do not feel able to allow their children to play outside in Newcastle because they fear their children will be harassed or bullied as well as influenced by the behaviour they see in the host community children.
“They say the difference between home and here is at home you can allow your kids to roam anywhere because they feel they are safe whereas here you have to be extra careful in case they are kidnapped – everything is on TV and they are into things like drugs and cigarettes, alcohol” (Translator for mothers’ group).

In Africa there would also be family members nearby who would watch out for the children. The mothers said they come from close-knit communities where neighbours watch out for the children. In Africa they said they had big families and two or three doors away there would be another close family member so they could socialise, spend the day with their relative and not worry. It was a situation where, “every neighbour knows everybody’s business.” (Mothers’ group)

When asked, ‘Who takes the main responsibility for the care and protection of the children - is there a difference compared to here?’ members of the first mothers group described how neighbours can discipline children,

“If she sees that the kids are doing anything wrong (a neighbour) has a right to say something and they won’t take it wrong - they won’t take it in a bad way. Respect for elders is more there than here.” (Translator for mother)

That parenting is something that is shared by members of the community is something that was also confirmed by a community leader.

“In the African communities … I can see the child of my friend and straight away I give him instruction as if he was my own child ‘Come here, sit there’ and he sit because he call me ‘daddy’.”

And also by an African professional,

“In Africa neighbours would look out for the children and things like that. The children would be playing out.” (Professional)

Participants from mothers’ and fathers’ groups said that in Africa their children are allowed to go out during the day but in the evening (giving times between six and eight o’clock) they are inside and are not allowed out again.

According to a community leader parents from the African refugee community are sometimes so stressed they do not know what to do. It is not like in Africa where they have a kinship networks. Here they have to spend all their time with their children and they get stressed, especially the single mothers or mothers who have husbands who are out at work.

“They need to go to the shop. What are they supposed to do? This isn’t just an African problem but it’s difficult for those people to know what to do. I have to go to the shop. I have got two children the oldest may be five or six. And this one may be two month maybe three month….. Who will find the solution?” (Community leader)
Reflections

Being in the UK parenting is clearly a far more isolating experience for the African mothers than they would experience in Africa. Added to this they experience high levels of stress because of uncertainty and, for some, lack of a friendship group. Mothers are further confined with their children because they do not feel able to let them play outside for reasons of their safety as well as concerns about the influence of host community children’s behaviour.

Attitudes to the relationship between parent and child and the wider community are different. The model of the private ownership of children is not prevalent in African societies. Faith as well as culture may be an issue in this (see faith section) as people of strong religious faith may not regard their children as being their own personal property but believe themselves to have the stewardship of their children (who ultimately belong to their maker). It is also the case that fifty years ago, in many locations in the UK, the host community also had a more communal sense of childcare. This has changed through the breakdown of extended families and long-term neighbourhoods and neighbourliness in communities.

Discipline

It has been reported above that it was the view of the African participants that there is no discipline, no boundaries for English children. One of the problems is that many of these relatively new entrants to the country have not had the opportunity to witness alternative examples of good parenting in the host community that may not be visible on the streets. It might help if they had alternative methods of parenting that they could see.

“English people allow their children to do anything they want even if they can harm themselves or harm somebody else. They don’t care…. because sometime you see a teenager who insult their parents maybe break everything in the house. It’s not good. But it didn’t happen in Africa no.” (Young mother)

Through observing this a young mother thought that

“Maybe your children became the problem (because) here you’re not allowed to punish your children in Africa even if you are child if you do something wrong your mother or your father punish you right away so you don’t do it again but here its just ‘no don’t do that don’t do that’ and ‘see what happen’ and when they do nothing happen so it continue and grow up (like that)” (Young mother)

Another young mother talked about teaching a baby about danger in Africa:

“Its not all the time you punish the baby. When the baby do wrong thing you just smack the baby ‘don’t go there again’ and ‘that place is very danger(ous).’ Next time he won’t go there again. Next time he know that place is no good. Mummy say that place is no good. All the time he will learn from that. He will know mummy don’t like that. That will train him.”
Not all the time you smack baby. If you smack baby all the time he won’t be afraid of you any longer and …you can give a little smack not too much. He won’t go there again." (Young mother)

“I agree with her yes. In my country we do that. My mother don’t beat me on my leg but if my mother taught to me she repeat it three times ‘that place is not safe’ I know that place is danger(ous) and I won’t go there again. If I insult a lady my mother would say that is not good don’t insult her again. That’s how my mother teach me and I pray I won’t smack my baby and I teach my baby like that because I don’t want my baby to spit on my face (when she gets older). I don’t want it. (She) grow best way for her as a lady and tomorrow she appreciate what I have done for her.” (Young mother)

According to a professional who works with refugees, accommodation providers do prepare a leaflet translated into languages people will understand. The accommodation provider “must do all that is possible to make them aware of all the information and of course through drop-in and through college.” He said, parents say, “Well we can’t do anything, we can’t punish our kids”. Some research in the USA with Somali Bantu parents showed that in this situation parents can just give up trying to discipline their children (McCarthy et al.2004). The African refugee community need to be made aware of alternative models for disciplining their children. In order for them to have any faith in our safeguarding system they need to see some successful host community parenting. As it stands they are mainly in areas in need of regeneration where the host community may be hard pressed and largely impoverished financially and educationally. Parents we interviewed seemed largely unaware that there are English parents who discipline their children through alternative means.

Last words

In Circle time (children’s event) the children were asked to think of something that is the same in Africa as it is here:

“You have to be a good boy” (Six year old)

Caring for babies

The young mothers felt that the health visitors helped them with their babies. They thought that they give helpful advice and also suggest when they should take the baby to the doctor if the baby is not well and make suggestions regarding feeding practices.

“When she sleeping how can I cover her. I can’t cover her by heavy thing like a blanket and she give me advice about feeding the baby as well. About her health yes.” (Young mother about health visitor)

One mother in the mothers’ group used to translate for another. She complained that she did not have visits from the health visitor:

“She (1) says that the differences here they are looked after well by the midwives when they are pregnant and the health visitors after you have
had the baby they will come and explain stuff. But I used to do interpreting for her when she had a baby and it went on for quite a while, but when I had a baby it was totally different things had changed, I never got health visitors, so it was different then when she had hers. She had a health visitor at certain stages of baby’s development and would explain what to do in case she falls down the stairs she got all that I didn’t get any of that. That is the difference, they keep cutting off stuff”. (Mother’ group).

The process of giving birth and baby care are treated differently in the UK. A mother explained to the researcher via a translator how the rules here were completely different.

“Like for me when I had the older kids I used to lie them on their tummy whereas here you are not allowed to lie them on their tummy and you are supposed to put them at the bottom of the cot…whereas we didn’t know about that. So there are things that are very different and you don’t know about those things…” (Mother)

“In Africa when you deliver for 40 days you are looked after….your work is just to get out of bed go in the bathroom and have a massage with hot water and go back to bed and have some soup, tea on the bed…for 40 days you don’t do anything…your family does everything for you so that you can become strong again…” (Mother)

“She (2) says when she had a baby at home family members used to wash the baby, she learned how to wash her baby when she had her baby here” (Translator for mothers’ group)

“And you can get maids so they will wash for you and cook for you and they will clean the house, do everything, so can just sit.” (Mother)

Reflections

These mothers were not obliged to carry out certain aspects of baby care until they came to the UK and had the total care of their children. This means that they had to swiftly learn how to carry out these tasks. Their experience may not be typical because they are Muslim women from a particular part of the African continent. It may be that practices elsewhere vary. The key is that it is important to find the time to ask clients what the practices were in the home country. Many professionals we interviewed were doing this. The issue that is likely to remain constant is the concept of a more communal kind of baby care in Africa.

Handling and feeding babies

In relation to feeding babies it was suggested there was no familiar food here but that mothers have found alternatives. In terms of weaning they would look for the fruit of the Cassava which, ground up, is like semolina. The concern of a professional was that if they could not find this plant – they might use ordinary
flour. Weaning takes place later than does in the host community, some mothers breast feed until the child is three and it is not uncommon for the child to sleep with the mother to this age. The emphasis in the host community is to engender independence at an early age – this would seem to be a cultural difference.

A number of professionals were concerned about the issue of putting semi solids (Cassava or substitute) for weaning purposes in bottles because the baby could choke but a client told a professional “well my baby wouldn’t choke I’d never leave my baby with a bottle”. A professional commented that unlike some host community people in the same street who might leave the baby with the bottle propped up, which they tell them they shouldn’t do, the African mothers would be holding onto the baby. The African women say that in Britain most women are working whereas they are at home. It is difficult for them to understand what the norm is here – again because experiences of a broader sample of the host community by the new arrivals are limited.

Another worker suggested that new arrivals to the country do not necessarily understand that babies’ feed should not be made up with bottled water because of the sodium content. She says that mothers sometimes do this because they think they are doing something good for the baby. She thinks that professionals should never assume people understand and that “you mustn’t assume that because they know they should boil the water they are using water out of the tap.” Professionals who work with mothers and babies who have encountered this will get mothers to actually show them how they were mixing feed. A professional thought this is information that should be included at the induction centre.

Kin and kin systems

Kin systems are micro welfare systems in terms of being “a social contract of mutual assistance among members of an extended family” (Hoff and Sen 2005: 2). They are able to utilise “elaborate social sanctions to enforce and sustain a mutual assistance ethic” (Hoff and Sen: 5). This is something which Haleh Afshar refers to as ‘the moral economy of kin’. (Afshar et al forthcoming). So there is a two-way responsibility between the individual and the extended kin, a responsibility which is very much a moral imperative. Hoff and Sen explore the possibility that for members of these kinship networks who are working in the modern sector the kin system might prove to be a poverty trap. The extended family has supported the young person but in exchange the young person also has a responsibility to the family. A professional explained:

“These people, they aren’t coming alone – they are carrying with them the burden of a huge extended family (in Africa) and that’s the critical thing a lot of people forget and probably true of a lot of children too … a way of ensuring not just a future for them but perhaps for the whole family” (Professional).

Participants described living within a kin system, the extended family, as the norm in African society and it seems that members of the family and extended family are the people who are consulted about anything ranging from feeding
babies to sexual health. Talking to a health visitor or midwife about such issues is a new departure for them.

It was suggested by professionals that absence of extended family also influenced feeding practices. This is because the family were the support network so if a person was not really sure about feeding practices they could turn to its members for support and advice.

**Reflections**

The young people miss the opportunity to call on their extended kin for help, support and advice. They have lost the practical assistance the kin system can offer but at the same time they still have responsibilities to their kin. From the outside extended family may appear to be something of a mixed blessing nevertheless some host community professionals reported a sense of loss of extended family in the mainstream culture and the consequent isolation and separation that exists in the host culture.
9. Immigration

An African professional suggested the answers people gave to interview questions would depend upon their immigration status.

“So I can say (you) have two different side of feeling about safety of children… For asylum seekers with children the most worry they have is being deported back home” (Professional)

The immigration status of the interviewees was not always known but it is a thought provoking idea. What we do know is that the majority of the people we interviewed live with a high degree of uncertainty about their future and live with the fear of removal. This is deeply stressful for adults and is a fear that is passed on to their children. A professional who is also a father said:

“Well Parents sometimes transfer this to kids – you can hear an eight-year-old tell you she is afraid of being deported”.

At a recent Children’s Society event Alison Harvey, Legal Officer for the Immigration and Law Practitioner’s Association (ILPA) described the Home Office definition of ‘accompanied’ as covering a multitude of things. An ‘Accompanied’ child/young person could be in a caring or an exploitative relationship, they could be with a well meaning adult but one that is not fully competent to care for them, for example in cases where a child is put in NASS accommodation with a sibling who is only just an adult him/herself.

‘Unaccompanied’ is used to mean ‘alone’. Alison said that she regards children in families as being among those most at risk by the government’s immigration policies. For a child within the family there is the possibility of both NASS and detention. (There are families who do not get NASS support because they have independent means.) A framework at least exists in the case of those identified as ‘unaccompanied minors’ but they too can be detained if the Home Office disputes their age and for this reason they too can be housed in NASS accommodation.

With regard to unaccompanied young people a local professional described how some have been dispersed to Newcastle at the point of refusal and (as described above) some have been dispersed as adults but when they have arrived the housing provider has thought they were under 18. So in these cases there are age disputes but if they are over eighteen

“There is very little that can be done as they are already at the end of the line, over 18, … some of them have had babies and they are just getting vouchers. How can you support a baby on vouchers?”

There have been two removals of these young people in the last year (from Newcastle). A professional suggested that if they have previously had inadequate representation or “haven’t put the case together properly for the appeal by the time you have got to that stage and there have been adverse credibility findings made on them it’s really hard to resurrect the case and make a fresh application”.

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Another issue is increased difficulty in obtaining legal aid in order to get legal representation. The professional described how one of the obstacles to getting representation is the merits test where solicitors are having to ‘prejudge cases’ because they won’t get support unless there is a 40% chance of winning the case.

A professional participant suggested that for legal representatives there is a problem when the way in which the child or young person represents their journey to the UK seems unbelievable.

“They will say things like, ‘a charitable stranger’ got them here, so you think, ‘hang on a minute, how many charitable strangers are willing to fork out $2,3,4000 dollars to get a child here?’ or ‘I just met them and they felt really sorry for me and they popped me on the plane’. This brings concerns about trafficking because (you feel) somebody’s told them to tell a story and the money is coming from somewhere.”

Further “the things they tell you about can affect their whole story, their credibility in other ways”. Even though the means of arrival is irrelevant to whether the young person is a refugee or not it was suggested that solicitors find they have to focus on this issue because the Home Office does – so “It makes you obsessed with it as well because you also know how it is going to undermine the individual case”.

Summary

- The above material challenges the prevalent notion that it is necessarily unaccompanied children who are most ‘at risk’. Accompanied children may be at equal or greater risk, depending on the situation. The fears of parents of removal can be passed on to their children. Professionals are concerned about the difficulty in obtaining Legal Aid, which means that some children and young people are not getting adequate legal representation.
- Professionals can suspect that some young people are not telling them the whole story about how they got here and there are concerns that they may have been trafficked.

Participants and immigration

The young people found it difficult to discuss their feelings about their experiences with immigration officials and procedures. One of the young women became tearful and the young men’s group said they did not wish to speak about it. Later, one member of this group asked for the recorder to be switched on again and said “They made me feel like I didn’t have any rights”.

A member of the young women’s group said that sometimes the immigration officials ask the right questions and sometimes

“How can I say they ask really stupid questions…. Everyone does not trust us – they think everyone is a liar… that’s true… some (are). But in
any places you can meet a bad one you can meet a good one that’s the thing in the world that’s it. In Africa you can go places you can meet good people you can meet nasty people.” (Young woman 19)

It was remembering the issue of not being believed that made the participant so upset. She found this very hard and could not talk about it.

With regard to safeguarding children, a community leader described how immigration status can be

“like a barrier for some people to comply. They feel rejected and think maybe it’s for other people”.

He gave an example,

“One, a woman, has to go back home. Her children are speaking English. It sounds like a joke but it is also true. She said, ‘If the Home Office want to send me back they should start by teaching my children Swahili’”.

He said that integration starts with getting refugee status otherwise people are not part of society. He suggests that people think,

“I don’t want my child to get used to this system (in case tomorrow I am going back to my country). Don’t ask me to comply with all you ask. I am African and this is my child”.

An African professional remarked how if they are returned

“Those children who have been educated in nice schools will be going back to the wood bench – sitting down doing school like that you know.”

Reflections

• There are structural reasons based on uncertainty regarding immigration status why parents do not wish their children to become settled and immersed in host culture as should they be returned it would be difficult for their children to readapt to African culture and modes of child care as well as schooling.

Trafficking

As the reader will know, human trafficking is not the same as smuggling as trafficking entails deceit and coercion. Trafficking is global and affects every continent and it is an issue about which professionals are particularly concerned and this concern is not about new migrants from the African continent alone. A report produced by ECPAT UK (Somerset 2004) suggested that although trafficking of children is growing problem in the UK the majority of social workers, at least in the London area, didn’t feel they had the training or resources to help these children. At the same time many of them were anxious that they may have missed cases or trafficking. The problem about trafficking is its nebulosity – for instance Home Office Research in 2000 suggested that
in one year between 142 to 1420 women are trafficked into the country – these
statistics suggest there is a lot of leeway for making mistakes. It is suggested
that West African children are sometimes trafficked to do exploitative work of
different kinds (Anti-slavery International). For professionals, this is the nub of
the problem for them, their anxiety that they will miss such a case.

A Newcastle professional spoke about a known case where an orphan was
looked after by a neighbour who then sent her as a domestic servant to a
relative’s house. The relative then sold her to somebody who brought her to the
UK. She suggested that children can be sold and they might not even know that
this is the case.

Some professionals voiced concern with regard to the issue of how some
children come to be dispersed with families that are not their immediate kin and
so we asked the fathers’ group who it is who is responsible for the care of the
family. The fathers said that the father is responsible, he is the head (of the
family). If the father is killed then the mother is responsible. If they both die then
an auntie and/ or uncle become involved. Interestingly the mothers responded
to the same question with the communality of childcare describing how a
neighbour can take responsibility for reprimanding a child if necessary.

The interviewer asked the fathers: “You know why I am asking this because
some professionals are anxious because they say some children are being
brought in by African refugees who are not their biological parents. What would
you say about that?”

A father says this is normal. This is an excerpt from the fathers’ group:

*Interpreter:* “They say sometimes it happens even with a parent is alive
maybe the child (has) been living with an uncle or an auntie they said its
not most of the time. Maybe sometimes maybe both parents don’t have
means to take care of the children so one of the auntie or uncle say I
want to assist with your child. But usually children grow up with their
own parent and when they die in some case the uncle may come and
say I am now the parent.”

*Interviewer:* So do sometimes people bring children to England that are
actually relatives where parents have died?

*Father:* Yes in some cases.

A community leader explains the situation of safeguarding children in an unsafe
situation in his home country:

“That could happen we (are) maybe a little bit different from European
people … We don’t say ‘this is my child (this is your child).’ If I am in
danger and I’ve got a cousin I cannot look after my children. I believe
that if they don’t kill him physically that he is safe. So I am not surprised
if other relative or friend come with children of other African. For me if
someone from my family can at least (stay alive) that will be okay but I
don’t want to be in danger for them. It’s not just about the trafficking
children it’s about parent consent or friend…. I know that some
individual may say to children ‘yes I’ve done a lot for you and you have
maybe to assist me with this, this and this.’ It may happen but we’ve got a different view when we have to educate children. The children of my brother or my cousin I will ask them to do what I have to ask my children if I have to say clean I say ‘clean’ but social services think like you are using the children. You know when you are looking after a child who knows ‘this is not my parent’ sometimes he (will do) all you ask him to do but we say (you have to prepare child for the future) we say he can’t know not how to wash his clothes we are not for that. ‘you have to wash your clothes you have to cook you have to learn this, this’ “.

This throws light on the difference in concepts of safeguarding which may apply in a situation where a child’s life is under threat. It is hard for many of us in the host community to imagine how this would be.

An African professional agrees with this concept of shared responsibility – she says that “it is ‘very much kinship care’ this does not necessarily mean biological care.” But with regard to trafficking, she says, “Yes trafficking does exist – a kid is told not to say anything – they are ‘looking for survival’ they can be abused without anyone knowing, can be exploited.” (African professional)

With regard to children being dispersed with people who are not their direct kin

“Well what is happening at the moment I think that due to the fact that the house is cheaper here so these last year or so we had over 600 families. … Those families, their first call was in London. They have been separated in the London area. (separating people from their community)– And that is a big problem.”

The professional dilemma in this situation, as mentioned above, is that they might gloss over a trafficking case.

“You have families turning up with three or four children and it’s a situation of ‘Are we looking at trafficking?’ Back home they might be from a village and regard others as family. Do we need to put their care on a formal basis that they can be looked after by these people? It’s an issue (and) tricky at times. You get a member of public phoning up saying ‘I saw a child with a suitcase get out of a taxi and go into that house’. So then you have to investigate.” (Professional).

The suggestion of the professional above is that the informal system of kinship care should perhaps be formalised.
Recommendation

- Training for professionals that clarifies extended kin practices and African ways of safeguarding children is needed where professionals and members of the community can debate and define trafficking and ways in which informal systems might be formalised without damaging relationships. Without working with the community and having some kind of open discussion there is a risk that all migrant people become to some degree suspects.

Going missing

With regard to disappearing, in the case of unaccompanied minors, a professional thought that the situation has improved. Nevertheless she gave the example of a young woman who disappeared after a week of being in Newcastle leaving no way of tracing her – no finger prints and no photos. The young woman appeared to have come from an ‘impoverished family background’ and in such cases, “you worry about who has brought them here” (Professional). She commented that if a young person is being trafficked “If you can’t offer any degree of protection you are never going to get disclosure are you?”

Another professional interviewee said that in the last two to three months she was aware of ten families who had disappeared on account of losing their appeal and in fear of removal they have gone under ground. The children in these families are deeply at risk, because they are outside the frame of any kind of statutory protection and are open to exploitation. In a climate of media and political invective about ‘illegals’ it is a concern that pressure on these families (and therefore their children) will increase.
10. Interpreters

When asked about their use of interpreters professionals preferred to work with known and trusted interpreters. Some professionals had concerns about interpreters from the community where there might be issues of confidentiality. Another concern was that an interpreter could conceivably be involved in trafficking and might communicate something to a young person without the professional knowing. The experience of interpreters among the interviewees seemed to be largely gendered. The young men had not experienced problems with interpreters whereas the young women had, especially in the immigration setting. They were distressed that they were made to have an interpreter whether they wanted one or not. The worst of it was that they could hear the interpreter translating things wrongly. This experience was echoed by an account given by a professional regarding one of her adult clients who had been a high ranking official in his country. He could speak perfect English and went for an interview in Liverpool and they said he had to speak in his language – he took notes every time the interpreter made a mistake because his English was better than that of the interpreter. The professional pointed out that “The more obscure the language the more difficult it is to ensure you have someone who speaks good English.”

When the young women were asked if they thought immigration officials generally provide the right kind of people as translators young woman A answered,

“As for me I don’t think so. When you tell them this when you say ‘black they say ‘white’ they don’t tell actual what you said.”

Young woman B said

“Yes it is it is happening. Like the Home Office they force you to take a translator even if you don’t want. They force you.”

Young Woman A:

“Four or five month ago I went to London …When they ask me to fill the form I fill the form they say do you want a translator? I say ‘no’. They bring me a translator and I say ‘I don’t want a translator’. This translator is already here. … It’s like they force you to do things you don’t want to do and some of the translators because they work for the Home Office they just do what the Home Office wants them to do. They don’t do what is right because at least translators are supposed to be neutral. They are supposed to be with Home Office and they supposed to be with you. They supposed to say what you said or what they think is the truth but no they don’t do that. They just do what the Home Office want them to do I think.”

When the young women were asked if anybody had a good experience of a translator there was silence. In terms of their experience with interpreters, the young women seemed to have had more negative experiences than the males and part of this may be due to the difficulty in getting female interpreters.
A gender issue in finding interpreters is that “there are very few female interpreters in African languages.” (Professional) Sometimes this leads to women having to have a male interpreter and this might bar her from speaking about specific issues.

**Recommendation**
- A programme is needed to access and train more women as interpreters to a high standard.
11. Religion

African participants were either Muslims or Christians and the majority in this particular study were Christian. Two African pastors took part in the research. We were unable to make contact with an Imam. Religion is a sensitive area at the best of times but because of media coverage about exorcisms in Congo and concerns by Black church groups about media ‘witch hunts’ the situation has become even more sensitive.

One of the pastors made the point that pastors like himself are not regarded as bona fide church leaders in some quarters but are regarded as being ‘refugees’. These particular pastors have substantial congregations which meet in church halls. I asked if he was the pastor of an African church. He replied,

“We are not African Churches because we are part of The Church Together. If we were African Churches we wouldn’t be part of The Church Together. I’m the single pastor of ….. Church, which is part of The Church Together for the North East. I’m connected with other churches whatever their denominations we work together with all the pastors so we invite each other and I’m part of a conference that we call Life and Spirit. So I think specifically we are working with refugees as well and I’m leading a community group.”

Although his congregation meet in a church hall this pastor works the rest of the time from home, as he has no office. If people want to see him they have to go to his house. In this way they function more like the early church and host community ‘House Churches’ that meet in hired buildings which can include cinemas and sports halls. One pastor said his church had more than a hundred members.

The pastors said that parents bring their children and young people to them when they have concerns, for instance, about the child’s behaviour. One of the pastors spoke about parents bringing their children to see him for advice. He said,

“We believe that if the parents get stuck, struggle about their children they cannot do anything we believe you can bring children to God. I mean I am a man of God. I can give some council, advise and pray for the children with you that God can do something.”

One pastor was aware that there was an issue with bad press and he suggested that the problem was that the press was implying that what a bad pastor was doing was common to all African pastors and that this was clearly not the case. The second Pastor said he was not aware of this as an issue.

The other pastor confirmed that he had not had access to child protection training but was willing to do this.

A pastor was asked if he thought that there would be intergenerational problems in the future as the children get older and they might become more like teenagers in the host community? The pastor thought not because, as far as the children from his church were concerned
“When children go to bed they pray first before they go to bed and they preach to them the word of God. They pray together as a family.”

He felt this kind of guidance would suffice but he admitted there were issues in other localities where there were more teenagers, where the African Refugee communities had been present for a longer time.

The particular churches in this case believe in adult and not infant baptism. But at the same time the pastor was clear that God can use anybody. He talked about six-year-old twins in Angola who ‘preach the Word.’ This pastor was very young when he started to preach at the age of 17.

The pastor reminded the researcher that “You know that when Jesus Christ started to preach he was 12.”

The first pastor said that a child in Africa must subject him or her self to their parent’s authority. Here it is different. He was concerned that his children should have friends but the problem for his children was that the other children at school smoked and they could not make friends with children of whom their father would not approve.

With regard to giving advice to young people where parents are having problems the second pastor described how if the “daughter or son doesn’t listen (to the parent) he can directly say ‘go to see the pastor’ so the pastor can say ‘I have this from your parent, you don’t listen its not good.– you have to respect (them) because (otherwise) you will not be a friend of God’.” The pastor maintained that this worked.

Two of the pastor’s team were present in the fathers’ group. Asked what these duties involve, a member of the team said:

“The pastor can invite us (to lead) a prayer campaign or anything like the running of the church. (They) can invite us …to check with children or parent …it (may be) to deal with the spiritual thing but socially you may have an idea of how to assist the children.”

This suggests that the pastor’s team is also involved in work with children and families and that they too should have the opportunity of training.

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**Learning Points**

Pastors say that parents tell them about issues regarding conflict between children and parents and domestic violence and ask them for help and support. The pastors’ teams can also be involved in this work and therefore, if they are willing to take it up, safeguarding training should be available to pastors and their teams as well as support to work in conjunction with child safeguarding practices. Elsewhere in this document there is mention of the need to train women from the community in safeguarding guidelines as well because, given that there are taboo areas for conversation between women and men there need to be women from the community who are informed in the same manner in order that they can offer women help and support.
Faith and the participants

The young men’s group consisted of Muslims who affirmed that their faith is very important to them. They felt that their faith commitment was understood and commented that they had celebrated Eid with Social Services.

The young women’s group consisted of two Christians and two Muslims and none of them had encountered situations with professionals where their faith had been an issue.

The problems that three Muslim women – one a mother and two participants in the young women’s group, had encountered, one who covers her head and two who do not, is in the public domain where they have experienced or witnessed harassment and even violence post the London Bombings. A young woman (19) said the problem was

“Sometimes they think every Muslim is a terrorist. Terrorism is not in Islamic rules…. Islam is a peaceful religion and doesn’t say you should kill someone and do violent act. But some people think that. Every Muslim now is a bad person…. For me my faith is very important to me it guide me and encourage me always because at time I face some difficulties if I don’t have religion I don’t have faith I would do bad things you know but always when I want to do reach to those things you know … I say ‘I don’t know why God do this but there’s a reason for everything’ I just encourage myself.” (young Muslim woman 19).

The mother was attacked when she was away from the area in which she lives. The other young Muslim in the group said

“Two weeks (ago) at college (a) boy asked me if I was a bomber; Why he say like that? … It’s not everybody … he make me angry. That’s why If I see him I don’t want to talk to him” (young Muslim woman 16).

A positive example was given by two of the young women aged 17 and 16, who share a flat – one is Muslim and one is Christian. One of them says,

“No, it’s not a problem as everyone have their room. If I want to do my religion I go to my bed(room) and make my prayer. If she want to do her prayer (she can too). She’s friendly. Not any problem we eat the same food.” (Young Muslim woman 16).

The young mothers’ group were all Christians. All three said their faith is important to them and they all belong to churches. Two go to a Black churches and one to a ‘mixed’ church. For them, going to church was one of the few times they were able to go out in the week. Asked if their faith helped them in looking after their babies a young mother answered:

“Yes because God is for us, the one that (is) saving us from sickness and bad disease all these things then we go through the ways of God… I am going to church and I know I have faith and anywhere I go, anywhere I stand God is with me. Even though I can’t see him he is with me. … all the time I always pray God will take control for me and my baby and those other things.”
Summary
Faith is important to all the participants, it is part of their means of survival through difficult times and an ongoing source of support, and they feel that their faith commitment is being understood and respected by professionals. The young Muslim women had faced religious harassment in the public domain. A young Muslim and a young Christian are able to share a flat in harmony.
12. Isolation

Isolation was seen by professionals as being one of the biggest problems for the African refugees and particularly for the young mothers. When asked if they ever got to join in activities or events at ACANE the young mothers said they did not. They cannot participate in anything without the availability of child care. This was an issue throughout the research process in terms of women’s participation (as mentioned above).

In terms of isolation there were also issues about families being moved away from friends across Newcastle. In order to see them they have to travel from the West End across to the East of the city.

Not only isolation but also boredom were, according to one professional, the main issue for asylum seeking young parents who are not allowed to work. This is echoed by the young mothers we interviewed. Professionals who work in the statutory sector and who work with these young people are not generally allowed to introduce them to each other for reasons of confidentiality.

Here are some of the things the young women said:

“Sometimes I feel lonely. I just look after my baby.” (Young mother)

Asked what could make her feel less lonely she replied:

“If you have your friends – she can come and stay with you and you can go and stay with her. You can (ex)change ideas. Something like that. It would be good.”

When asked if there is anywhere they could take their babies so they could have time to themselves, a young mother replied “Yes but you can’t find a friend.”

“I sit at home with my baby nothing to do stay there maybe eat sleep – I need to go to school so I will know all those things you know if I stay at home I won’t know anything. What I will do (if) I can’t find a school?”

“I stay home every day. I am bored at home. Sometime when the baby sleep I go to sleep as well.”

“I stay at home every day to Sunday (when) I go to church. Sometimes if I feel like to go to my friend’s place… I go and spend some days there.”

One young mother was not so badly off as she was able to go to college.

“I go Monday to Thursday to college. I got a place in the crèche.”

A participant in the young women’s group expressed a similar situation:

“I haven’t got friend. It’s difficult to find friend. To find really friend it’s not easy.” (Young woman 17)
Recommendation

- The young women clearly experience a high degree of loneliness and stress, especially the young women with babies. The young mothers were generally unable to go out and most experienced harassment in their neighbourhoods. These young women need safeguarding as do their babies. They are not safe in these areas and they fear for the safety of their babies. Young Refugees North East already does work with these young women but there is clearly a need to find a way to offer childcare in a form that will give the young woman access to others in a similar situation as well as access to education and community events.

- Resources need to be directed in such a way as to enable culturally appropriate work, which connects these young women to their community, and to the wider community through the presence of a female worker and access to crèche facilities. There is also the need for the availability of facilities in order to offer the possibility of gendered space so that women can engage in separate activities.
13. Cultural issues

Culture relates to practices acquired through living in a specific social milieu. A community leader described how there were cultural issues for the African people, not being able to talk about sex for instance, yet here you are supposed to. He said this can be very difficult in the UK as there are taboo areas for Africans. He suggested as a community leader he cannot talk to women about some things and that, if necessary, his wife or mother would talk to them instead. He does work on domestic violence and sees the couple together at his home. He said that to be a community leader you have to be trusted and that, in the African case, means it is known you can keep a secret.

Some issues that are identified by outsiders regarding a specific group as being ‘cultural’ may not be cultural at all. For instance a community leader response to a professional’s comment about members of the African refugee community not keeping appointments and that being a cultural time issue – he pointed out that some people may not know how to read a map and will be too embarrassed to say this was the case, that missing appointments could be as practically based as that.

Children and acculturation to host community

With regard to the African refugee children a professional said:

“a lot of them don’t consider themselves African anymore and it’s the same with others. I have a little ….lad who says, ‘I’m a Geordie’. They are swallowed straight into the school system from an early age.”

There was evidence of this at the children’s event where 16 children between the ages of four and 12 came for circle time, story telling and mask making. The children showed they were perfectly adept at tuning into western story telling – in this case using Cinderella as a vehicle to discuss bullies. The children were able to identify it as a western narrative and drew illustrations of Cinderella with yellow hair.

Perhaps the most important thing was the response of the adults who were amazed how ‘unAfrican’ the children were. The masks they made did not look ‘African’. But this may have been something to do with the materials but also the behaviour of the children was totally adapted to the situation. They had already been socialised into playschool or school and knew exactly what to do. Also they behaved in a way that would be considered completely normal for the children of the host community. On reflection one of the project workers who co-facilitated the group said that the children were not really given an opportunity to show their African-ness. It was a pity we did not have more planning time and access to some African story telling. Nevertheless the children showed how adept they are at taking on the new culture - ‘being swallowed up’ but in all probability without losing a sense of their home culture. Perhaps it is more like they ‘swallow it (the host community) up’ and retain their own culture too. It would be worthwhile to carry out research on this issue. They have been acculturated through school or play school exactly how to respond in the kind of
situation we offered them. We cannot see how they behave at home where their African identity is probably more in evidence. The children just showed that they are masters of adaptation. Author Yasmin Crowther related her experience growing up with exposure to both Iranian and English culture in the following way which may suit the way these children are: “There were two different worlds but they were my one world”. The resilience of children is remarkable and their ability to incorporate difference is wonderful.

Many professionals commented on the fast adjustment of the African children:

“**When you see the kids they just got here they integrate very quickly – because (of) school ...so it’s very easy for kids they adapt quickly. They feel they are safe compared to where they came from so this is why they are frightened of being deported.”** (Professional)

This is why a community leader suggested that people do not want their children to adapt in case they are returned to Africa, a concern that they will not fit in at home.

When asked if they felt like part of a community the young men from Somalia said that they felt they had an African but not Somalian identity. More they said they felt they were part of community of young people as they had friends from different backgrounds including the host community. The young women are more isolated, especially the young mothers and it is difficult for them to have a sense of community. The mothers in larger families said they felt comfortable in the community and that they had friends who do not live right next door but spread out a little (around the area). They did not feel isolated because they have friends and they go to the toddlers group where they meet people and to college where they get together. The fathers were part of a Christian community, which the first pastor suggested transcends the African community because in his view Christianity cannot be particularised. They are able to identify themselves with African refugee community in terms of ACANE.
14. Newcastle

Things have changed since in 2001 (Hedges et al. 2001) when the numbers of young separated refugees in Newcastle were smaller – interviewers interviewed five of nine young people – one of whom was living with relatives. The problem then was that their needs were only being partially met – those concerned with education, language support and leisure activities and none of the young people had access to a community of people of any size from their own country. The same last issue seems to apply now especially for the young women although the number of young refugees have increased. Communities are being separated and a small pan-African community in Newcastle is the result. There are still issues over legal representation previously it was thought that solicitors were unhelpful or difficult to contact but now the issue is the merits test. Professionals felt they lacked training and guidelines and there was a shortage of interpreters and there was a history of little partnership between agencies. The professionals who have been interviewed for this study have been largely very knowledgeable and informative about their client group but many admitted that generally speaking they had to learn ‘on the hoof’ rather than receive specific training. The African safeguarding professionals in Newcastle are a great asset and were generous in trying to help the researcher to better glimpse an African point of view.

Despite the difficulties, most of the African refugees who participated, young and adult, liked Newcastle – many people remarked on how it was more peaceful than say London or Birmingham and that people had more time for them. Here are some of the things members of the African refugee community had to say about Newcastle:

“It is least racist, not so busy and everything is close – meaning the shops and post offices and stuff.” (Mothers’ group)

“Newcastle has a bit more respect when they see a push chair – they will hold open the door for you and when you down to Birmingham there is not that kind of respect, even towards elder people – they are more considerate here than in other places. In Newcastle people will stand up to let an elder person sit down in other places it is different.” (Mothers’ group)

“I was in London before. When you stop somebody to ask the person to direct you they go ‘oh sorry’ he cant wait to understand what you say. ‘Sorry.’ I think here in Newcastle people are friendly” (Member of young women’s group)

“I was in Manchester for 2 months and then Sheffield – I prefer Newcastle to other city …in London I feel sort of disorder.” (Fathers’ group through translator)

“Its peaceful.” (Young men’s group)

“We love this place.” (Young men’s group)

“I have been in London and this is quieter.” (Young men’s group)
“Its quiet(er) than London. London is very busy. I went there twice the first time we went to watch film - opera and the next time I went shopping. It’s very busy. Many people from Africa and a lot of countries. Very busy in the market and someone told me you have to look after your bag because someone can grab your money out. I was surprised – I say ‘Oh that not happen in Newcastle’.” (Young mothers’ group)

Summary
- Despite the aggravation that many participants reported there is still a pleasure in living in Newcastle. They generally seemed to like the fact that it was less busy than London and they felt that people had more time for them.
15. Conclusion

This report has explored the similarities and differences in perspectives among members of the African refugee community and professionals about safeguarding children. Some important reflections, learning points and recommendations have been highlighted in appropriate sections of the report, and it would be duplication to repeat those in this final section. The report therefore concludes with a summary of some of the implications of the research for practice in safeguarding children.

The importance of information

Located in an area in need of regeneration and having visible evidence of instances of neglect, it may be difficult to make sense of the child protection regulations which to the African refugee do not appear to protect these young children from the host community they see on the streets. The guidelines do not appear to apply to host community parents who ignore their children's behaviour or even appear to condone it. From the African refugee perspective there could surely be a suspicion that, intentional or not, there is some kind of discriminatory practice going on here.

There is also a tension between having fear of being returned to Africa and bringing up children in a host community way.

There is a need for information. Parents and pastors seemed to be largely uninformed of child protection regulations – for instance the mothers’ group were not aware ‘except for what they hear from other people’ and suggested that the interviewer, a researcher might inform them. So the information they are receiving is generally piecemeal. On the other hand health visitors inform mothers of babies and small children but they do not have access in the case of older children. An African professional also runs workshops training parents about child protection but this can only be occasional. If the African refugee parents are to have systematic information it needs to make sense to them within their specific context, physical, social and emotional.

It would be helpful to train pastors and their teams in child protection, especially as people turn to them for help with their children and young people but it would also be useful to train some women from the community who would be able to inform other women. This is an issue because we know from the research that the African refugee women feel more comfortable talking to women. This is why we arranged separate groups for men and women because we were aware of the Islamic requirement for gender segregation but we were also told that the women generally (Christians and Muslims) would not say anything if the men were there. We also know that certain areas are taboo and it is not possible for the women to talk to men about these.

Where a framework exists for the protection of separated minors the safeguarding of children in families is contingent, to a large degree, upon the immigration status of the parents/carers. Children in families can be at risk where the family has been refused – they may go underground where they may
have no access to services and are seriously at risk of exploitation. Further where parents are suffering from high levels of stress in relation to the uncertainty of their situation the stress is bound to impact on the children.

**Child protection action**

Child protection action can be experienced as inappropriate and threatening by parents who have not been previously informed of the guidelines and the regulations regarding child protection. Some such uninformed parents have had children removed which must be a terrifying experience. It is necessary to try to look at the situation from an African refugee perspective and at the same time safeguard children. A professional interviewee said, “You cannot give black children an inferior service” (because of ‘cultural paralysis’ – see below) the fact is that abuse is abuse.” This is the struggle that safeguarding professionals have and it would be helpful if people were informed on entry that they should not slap their children for instance. It would help if social services had the capacity to get in there before there is a problem. There are many risks in the home, most properties are run down and are not child friendly.

**Cultural issues – is abuse ever cultural?**

With regard to child safeguarding practices, one of the professional participants had suggested that it was their view that some professionals were afraid of being thought to be racist. An article which appeared in *Community Care* entitled ‘Paralysed by Culture’ (Sale 2006) suggests this idea, bringing up the issue of faith and how some practitioners are uncertain how best to raise ‘the subject of child protection with faith communities’. Sale quotes Perdeep Gill – child protection specialist – in saying “Social care has not worked out how to respect a culture while acknowledging its limits” (Sale 28). She criticises the view of “mainly white teams viewing a black colleague as ‘the expert’ on ethnic minority issues instead of being informed themselves” (Sale 29). This is why it is important that we carry out cross-cultural research of this kind in order to generate cultural knowledge that can be shared across cultures. The issue in terms of safeguarding is the *behaviour* and not the belief system according to Sale. This pragmatic approach would seem to be the most appropriate and it may be possible to find alternative substitute behaviours that do not contravene the beliefs.

An African professional participant contributed the following:

“Child protection has nothing to do with race, colour or gender it transcends all culture but my colleagues I work with, they do struggle, I also struggle myself working from that perspective I also have to follow those rules and regulations.”

It is by working together to safeguard the children of the African refugee community that they can be best protected. The struggle referred to above may also contribute to the production of creative ways of safeguarding children in host and settled communities. In conclusion, this research has highlighted that dialogue as a two-way process is vital as a means of exchanging information and developing services to safeguard children.
16. Literature


Beal, Frances M (1970) *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female* Detroit, Michigan: Radical Education Project


Crawley, H (2005) Evidence on Attitudes to Asylum and Immigration: What we know, Don’t Know and Need to Know Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Paper No 23, University of Oxford


Hedges, C; Render, A; and Stanley, K (2001) *Young Separated refugees in Newcastle* Save The Children


Ethics
The research unit has an agreed set of ethical principles which inform all the work it undertakes. These are to:
1. Consult as widely as possible
2. Facilitate opportunities for participation
3. Respect differing viewpoints
4. Be sensitive to diversity
5. Be open and transparent
6. Ensure informed consent
7. Respect privacy, confidentiality and anonymity
8. Recognise responsibility for the welfare of participants and others.

A detailed ethical statement was drawn up for the research project based on these principles and taking into account the specific context within which the research would take place.
Notes

i From Pupil Inclusion Network Meeting
From Conference entitled 'Working together to successfully include Gypsy and Traveller children in education’ held on Thursday 19\textsuperscript{th} January 2006, Luther King House, Manchester organised by National Children's Bureau. The paper given by Keanne Kenyon, Lancashire TESS and was entitled ‘Including Gypsy and Traveller children and families within a variety of educational experiences’.

ii Term first coined by Frances M. Beal 1970 in terms of being black and female.

iii The Children’s Society National Strategy Group Meeting, Leicester , May 2\textsuperscript{nd} 2006

iv http://www.antislavery.org

v Regarding a recent BBC documentary made by Richard Hoskins entitled ‘Witch Child’ aired on BBC 2 on April 4\textsuperscript{th} 2006 about exorcisms in Congo – a quote from Lingali ‘equality for African people’ reads, ‘Hoskin disingenuously sought to present the atrocities carried out by a few African Christian leaders as evidence of widespread child abuse by millions of parents on a continental level’. Bishop Joe Aldred, Secretary of Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs (MECA) part of the ecumenical organisation Churches Together in England said the BBC’s documentary implied “that abuse of children is widespread amongst black Christians in the UK” and that this was misleading. In a statement by Black Church Leaders issued Friday 7\textsuperscript{th} April 2006 responding to the documentary by Hoskins, Bishop Joe Aldred is quoted as suggesting that Hoskins rightly concluded the programme with a challenge to the church to address unacceptable practices, “that challenge must be to all churches in the communities, and indeed all faith based organisations impacting on the lifestyle and development of children. Evangelical organisations we represent and other organizations are continuing to show their commitment to the welfare and safety of children by accessing relevant training and support, and by working closely with local government agencies and the police, both as good practice and to address issues that come to light in their communities”. Det. Supt. Bourlet, together with the Churches’ Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS), is involved in running training workshops for pastors from churches across the Congolese and other African Communities in London.

vi Yasmin Crowther Woman’s Hour BBC Radio 4 15/5/06

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