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Refugees in Lothian: the experiences and aspirations of asylum seekers.

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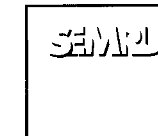

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INTRODUCTION

With the continued disintegration of many parts of Europe and growing political and social unrest throughout most of the rest of the world, major refugee flows have already come to characterise the 1990s. It is, therefore, important that, while the present research was confined to Lothian Region, something should be said of the general backdrop against which the particular lives mentioned in this report are lived.

Immigration and refugee issues have been in the forefront of many of the discussions in the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers for some time and decisions taken at these levels impact on refugees in Britain. One of the major problems facing refugees in Lothian is the difficulty encountered in attaining refugee status, which is directly linked to current thinking at a European level on the whole issue of immigration and asylum.

The decision to lift the internal border controls provided for by the Single European Act in 1986 was intended to lead to a common policy on immigration across all member states. (Cruz, 1993). Since then, and especially after the heated arguments surrounding the signing of the Treaty on European Union (The Maastricht Treaty) in 1991, there has been little sign of such a common policy emerging. Many individual states, and especially Britain, continue to appear determined to cling to their own immigration rules and to maintain their own border checks.

The European Commission has now adopted the Second Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on Immigration and Asylum policies. (Migration News, March 1994). All member states are now increasingly worried about rising immigration numbers, clandestine migration and a growth in asylum seekers. Clearly, no one government can foresee, far less control, the next refugee crisis. All that governments can know is that there will be another such crisis. As a

result of the concerns created by European fears of such crises, the legislation on immigrants and asylum seekers and the mechanisms required to make it effective have become extremely complex. All governments support the official policy on refugees where the emphasis is on meeting the 'humanitarian challenge' and ensuring that applications from asylum seekers are treated 'in a fair and efficient manner.' (Migration News. loc. cit.). However the messages of control are clear. Rather than highlight the human rights dimension, the Communication places greater weight on the guidelines for treatment of refugees as laid down in the Plan of Action approved by the European Council in December 1993, the emphasis of which is on the harmonisation of efficient procedures and on getting agreement on 'unfounded' asylum applications and the implementation of a third host country principle.

European governments continue to insist on the strict differentiation between immigrants, migrant workers, 'genuine' refugees and 'economic migrants' - those simply using a political or social upheaval in order to seek a better life elsewhere. However, it must be questioned how long these distinctions can be maintained in the modern world where so many causes lie behind a decision to become a refugee. 'Are people who seek protection in Europe and who come from economically underdeveloped and war-torn countries, escaping persecution, ethnic violence or civil war (refugees) or life threatening poverty (migrants)?' (Niessen 1993, p.10). The reality is that European governments continue to be obsessed with numbers and are only interested in the narrowest, lowest common denominator definition of 'refugee' which will allow them to refuse entry to as many as possible, all the while keeping one eye on the conscience of the voters and making the occasional humanitarian gesture, such as recent concessions on Bosnian refugees. It is argued that a liberal interpretation of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees is 'a prerequisite for the European policy towards refugees and asylum seekers.' (Refugees in the World, 1989). It could be said that few European governments make much pretence of such a liberal interpretation and that the time has come to change the narrow basis of the traditional definition. In reality, no current definition of migrant or refugee can reflect the complexity of the migrant's or refugee's social and personal circumstances. ' The violation of civil and political

rights often goes hand in hand with the violation of social, economic and cultural rights and vice versa.' (Niessen, op. cit. p.11).

There are an estimated 120 million refugees and migrants in the world. As far as Europe is concerned, a relatively small number of these (perhaps between 5% and 10%) are able to enter Western Europe and yet the European Community's policy is still to call for firm action on 'migration pressure'. Apart from this obsession with numbers of migrants and refugees, the European Community is equally concern about keeping policies and practices in these areas as secret as possible. There is now a proliferation of bodies set up to gather information on migrants and asylum seekers and to strengthen policies and their implementation on such matters. With the growth of inter-governmental bodies such as the Schengen, Rhodes and Trevi groups, has come the distancing of the work of these organisations from the democratic control of the European Parliament. (Druke, 1992). Decision-making processes in the crucial area of human rights are increasingly in the hands of civil servants and executive bodies over whom MEPs can exercise little control. This is one way of ensuring that the Community eventually arrives at a common policy and a common set of controls on refugees by the Year 2000.

The Second Communication on Immigration and Asylum also says a great deal on effective and efficient responses to the challenges on migration pressures, but very little on how to improve the lot of those few refugees lucky enough to find themselves actually inside 'fortress Europe'. Resettlement policies do not appear to be a major issue. 'Measures to ensure equality of treatment for all residents are urgently needed. Without them, and whatever new policies on entry are developed, we face the prospect of a permanent underclass in the European Union' (Dummett & Niessen, 1994.p. 26).

It could be argued that, unless steps are taken at governmental level to adopt a broader definition of who is a refugee, and policies are developed at local level to

assist their integration into our communities, not only will the social problems facing refugees continue to increase, but the risk of increased social tension will also rise as refugees are seen throughout the European community as unwanted, second class citizens. Thus it seems difficult to justify such anomalies as Germany continuing to recognise ethnic Germans in the former USSR as citizens of their country whereas refugees of many years residence are not. (Johal & Winstone,1992) Just how genuine is Britain, for example, on this issue of humanitarian concern when it goes to great lengths to avoid many of the appeals being made by asylum seekers? ('Government's pretence of asylum exposed', Observer, Nov.18th, 1992, p.2). Again, what position will Britain and other European countries adopt towards white South Africans by the end of 1994? Will there be yet another change of policy on asylum?

Legislation currently in place and contemplated regarding refugees is both 'harsh and security-oriented' (Le Courrier du Forum, June 1993.) and may in fact be helping to create the very racist and xenophobic responses that the European Community argues it is intended to avoid. The Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, with its provision to fingerprint all asylum seekers and their dependants, would tend to support this contention. The current policies towards asylum are increasingly incomparable with the stated commitment of the European Community towards the principle of asylum and the humanitarian treatment of refugees. They are also in danger of contravening international treaties and, at a crudely pragmatic level, they do not work since they only move the problem elsewhere. ' If we continue in the 1990s with a policy that does not work based on defensiveness and deterrence, then we are confronted by serious ethical difficulties: we shall encourage xenophobia, feed cynicism and we shall violate our own values, self esteem and human rights standards.' (Rudge, 1989, p. 12).

If the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers at the point of entry is so circumscribed by fear, control and secrecy, is it possible for those who manage, for whatever reason, to find themselves in Britain to believe that at least reception

policies and practices have improved? It is the stated policy of the European Community and the United Nations that much more has to be done to prevent the causes of refugee migration by means of improved economic development and social and political progress to ensure greater political stability through the globe. Nevertheless, as has been stated earlier, until such times arrive, the immediate future must contain a further series of refugee crises. Are European governments and local authorities, especially our own, now better able to cope with the social and personal problems experienced by refugees in the aftermath of their own personal crisis?

'It is important to consider establishing development programmes for and with refugees from the first day of their arrival....These programmes should involve significant numbers of the local population...' (Refugees in the World, p.77.) This is increasingly becoming the strategy of local authorities throughout the country. In addition, this report stresses the need to develop comprehensive programmes for resettlement which are properly resourced and pay attention to hitherto neglected problems, such as the needs of woman refugees. Ever since the days of the Ugandan Asian refugee crisis, those who work with refugees have argued for these types of immediate and comprehensive responses involving central and local government, the community and refugees themselves. 'There are lessons that can be learnt from the Ugandan Asian resettlement...not to be critical of the URB...but in order to assist in the formation of plans for the reception of forced migrants should at any time another crisis occur' (Refuge or Home?, pp. 51-52, 1976.) There have been many crises since then, some clearly 'forced' others created by less obvious or sudden means. The real question is whether our responses have improved and have lessons been learned?

In the first comprehensive report on the needs of refugees in Scotland (McFarland & Walsh, 1988.), four themes were addressed: the effects of increasingly restrictive asylum procedures; the effect of central government policies on resettlement policies; the increasingly wide range of problems still experienced by refugees even after a period of residence; the ability of the welfare services, not only to respond to

these needs, but also to develop longer-term strategies to deal with such problems. Since then, the general picture has been a mixture of progress and setback. The first two issues lay outside the remit of the present study and the report can add nothing further here, save to repeat the need for a change to the present narrow definition of 'refugee' and to advocate greater cooperation on refugee and asylum strategy between central and local government. The other two concerns, however, were central to the research and subsequent sections of the report deal in detail with the findings on needs and responses in these areas.

It has to be said that since 1988 there have been some notable areas of improvement in the treatment of refugees in Scotland. The recognition that there is value in coordinated responses between local agencies, voluntary bodies and specialist organisations to refugee problems has been recently noted (McFarland, 1993). In particular, the role of voluntary agencies in resettlement is worthy of further attention, as it is now a major element of strategy and their importance has been recognised in a variety of reports (Field, 1985). However, in the present research it is notable that, with the exception of the Scottish Refugee Council itself and Citizens Advice, there was very little contact between individuals and other voluntary agencies. Sadly, other areas of need: language skills, employment, training and trauma counselling appear to be as intractable as ever.

METHODOLOGY

To facilitate comparative analysis, the methodology was constructed along similar lines to the 1988 study on refugees in Strathclyde (McFarland and Walsh, 1988). Thus it was necessary to base the working definition of 'refugee' on the legalistic definition, originally employed in the 1951 UN Convention. As in the Strathclyde research, this was further expanded to include people without official refugee status but with exceptional leave to remain and those still hoping to achieve either. The sample was restricted to those who had become 'refugees' after 1974. While the researchers were aware that this excluded long-standing refugee groups in Lothian, such as the Poles, it was felt that subsequent shifts in government admission policy and the evolving socio-economic context made their experiences of exile difficult to compare with more recent arrivals. Such experiences might also have proved too distant to be recalled with confidence or accuracy for the purposes of the present survey, but are worthy of investigation in their own right.

The Sample

The selection of the sample proved to be an onerous task as a result of the degree of isolation and mobility among the refugee groups. A list of 125 addresses was provided by the Scottish Refugee Council and it was envisaged that this would provide the basis for the use of a 'snowballing' sampling technique. However, attempts to use this technique failed and the researchers were forced to rely solely on the original list. Of the 125 addresses provided, only 103 could be used since individuals from 22 addresses had moved elsewhere. In addition, approximately 50% (50) of the addresses refused to respond, perhaps indicative in itself of refugees' suspicion of external contacts and their reluctance to recount their past experiences.

Consequently, the final sample comprised 53 households which accounted for 126 individuals. (Table 1)

Table 1 Size Distribution of Households

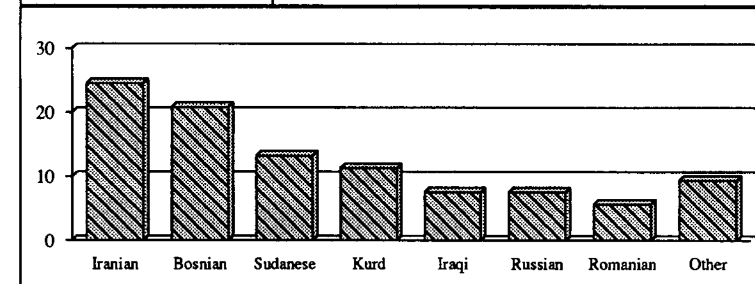
Number in Household	Number	(%)
1	23	43
2	9	17
3	10	19
4	5	9
5	2	4
6	3	6
7	1	2
Total	**53**	

The table (Table 1) shows that the sizes of the sampled households ranged between one and seven with almost half (43%) the households comprising single individuals only. Nineteen percent of the households had three individuals and 17%, two. A further 19% had between four to six individuals within their households and only one household (2%) had seven individuals.

The ethnic groups covered in the sample included, 13 Iranians (25%), 11 Bosnians (21%), 7 Sudaneses (13%), 6 Kurds (11%), 4 Iraqi and 4 Russians (8% respectively) and 3 Romanians (6%). A further 5 individuals (9%), whose ethnicity was not recorded, was also included in the sample. (Table 2)

Table 2 Ethnicity

	Number	(%)
Iranian	13	25
Bosnian	11	21
Sudanese	7	13
Kurd	6	11
Iraqi	4	8
Russian	4	8
Romanian	3	6
Other	5	9
Total	**53**	



Questionnaire and Interviews

To accomplish the aims outlined earlier, it seemed appropriate to focus on the experiences and concerns of the refugees themselves, rather than to rely on the perceptions of service providers.

A detailed questionnaire comprising both open and closed questions was used to ensure the extensive collection of both quantitative and qualitative information. The questionnaire was divided into 11 sub-sections, each including a series of questions covering various areas of interest, namely: Demographic Information, Problems Experienced/Areas of Concern, Health, Housing, Attitudes Relating to Local Area, Employment and Training, Services For Children Under Five, Services for Elderly, Advice and Information, Language and finally, Attitudes towards Refugee Status.

The interviews were conducted by two researchers who had a knowledge of refugee issues and interpreters were used when necessary. In-depth interviews lasting between one and two hours allowed adequate time for detailed discussion and explanation. Interviewers confirmed that the use of open questions assisted greatly in capturing certain emotional responses as well as allowing respondents to express themselves 'comfortably'.

Analysis

The quantitative data was processed through the University's computing facilities using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Both frequency tables and detailed cross-tabulations were processed and evaluated. The qualitative analysis was completed manually using cluster analysis techniques.

THE FINDINGS

General Profile of the Sample

Table 3 below illustrates that the majority of the sampled population (63%) were between the ages 16-60 years of age. Nineteen percent were between 5 and 16 years and 14% under the age of five. Only 4% were over sixty years of age. There are clear indications that the majority of the sampled population is young with approximately 88% of the respondents being under 49 years of age.

Table 3 Age Distribution

	Number	(%)
Under 5	18	14
5 < 16	24	19
16 < 60	79	63
60 +	5	4
Total	**126**	

These findings are significant, also, in that almost two thirds of the sample fell within the potential economically active age group and this fact alone has clear implications for both employment and training needs and is something that policy makers and service providers should note.

Table 4 Age / Gender Distribution

	Female	(%)	Male	%	Total	%
Under 5	11	9	7	6	18	14
5 - 9	8	6	9	7	17	13
10 - 15	3	2	4	3	7	6
16 - 19	0	0	1	1	1	1
20 - 29	14	11	18	14	32	25
30 - 39	19	15	17	13	36	29
40 - 49	3	2	5	4	8	6
50 - 59	1	1	1	1	2	2
60 - 69	4	3	0	0	4	3
70 +	1	1	0	0	1	1
Total	**64**	51	**62**	49	**126**	100

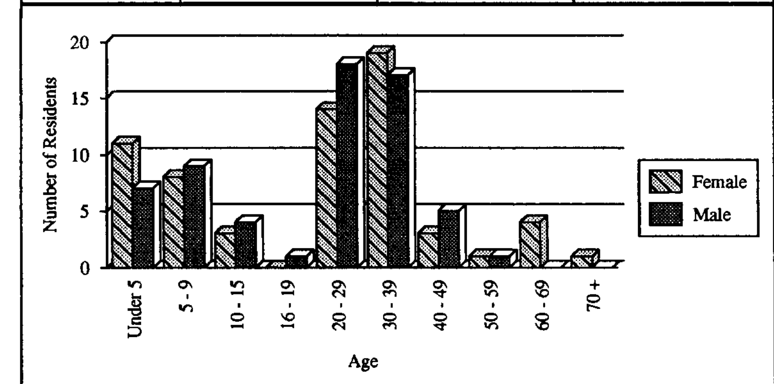


Table 4 above shows that distribution of males and females in the sample were fairly evenly divided with 51% being female and 49%, male. Overall, no significant differences were noted in the the age distributions as regards gender.

A similar pattern emerged with marital status in that the proportion of single and married respondents were evenly distributed, with 47% being married and 47% single. The remaining 6% were divorced. It should be noted that a substantial proportion of the single/divorced respondents are single member households (43%) and are most likely to be mobile and liable to secondary migration in the future.

In general, an evaluation of the cross-tabulations of age, gender and marital status by ethnic groups failed to reveal any significant patterns, with the exception of a small difference as regards the proportion of males to females in the age group 16-60 years for four of the groups. Slightly more Bosnian, Sudanese, Iraqi and Romanian males tended to fall within this age category as compared to their female counterparts.

Attitude Towards Refugee Status

Overall 85% of the sample indicated that they entered the country during the last 10 years. Almost two thirds of the refugees (62%) indicated that they had entered the country after 1990. A large proportion of this group were Bosnians, all of whom arrived between 1991 and 1992.

According to the interviewers, when asked why they left their own country many respondents appeared afraid and uncomfortable. The majority were only prepared to choose a given alternative and not elaborate any further. More than three quarters of the respondents (77%) indicated that they left because of political problems. This was especially true for Sudanese, Iraqi and Romanians all of whom cited political reasons for leaving. In addition, at least another 50% of all the other sub-groups, pointed to the same reason. Of the rest, 12% mentioned reasons relating to race/ nationality, (half of whom were Russians) and an equal number provided a variety of other reasons such as religious, economic, educational and personal. (Table 5 below)

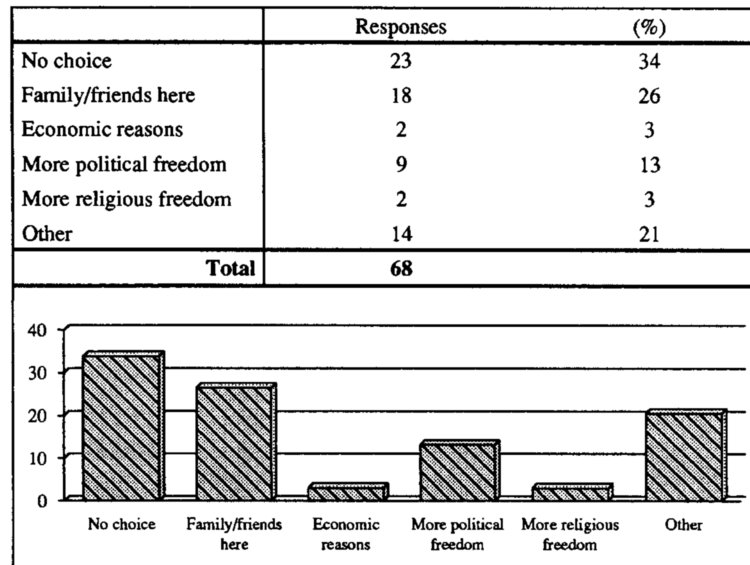
As has been noted, a central aspect of the refugee experience is its very suddeness (Stein, 1980). This was reflected in the large proportion of refugees in the survey (34%) who did not choose to come to Britain but were forced to do so as this was their only chance of resettlement. This was particularly striking in the case of the latest refugee group, the Bosnians.

'We were expelled from our area because of the war. We were in a refugee camp in Slovenia, but conditions were terrible there. We would have preferred Germany because we can speak the language and its closer to our home country, but Britain was the only way out.'

A further group (19%) of various nationalities similarly had little control over their fate, originally coming to Britain to work or to study, but becoming refugees through political developments in their home country which made it impossible for them to return as planned.

'I was sent here by my government to get a degree at a British University. I got out two days before the coup. The new regime wants to do away with all education from the west. I have been stuck her for the past nine months.'

Table 5 Reason settled in UK



	Responses	(%)
No choice	23	34
Family/friends here	18	26
Economic reasons	2	3
More political freedom	9	13
More religious freedom	2	3
Other	14	21
Total	**68**	

Of those who were fortunate enough to exercise some degree of choice, approximately a quarter (26%) indicated that they came to Britain because they had family or friends here and 13% felt that they would enjoy more political freedom in this country. A further twenty four percent of the respondents gave other reasons such as religion and education for coming to Britain. It is interesting to note in the light of prevailing official preconceptions of the refugee situation, that only two respondents (3%) offered any economic motivation for coming to Britain.

However, despite their initial reluctance to come to this country, the majority of the refugees (85%) now appear to prefer Britain to other potential destinations. Further, although 70% of the refugees admitted that they had experienced difficulties with settling, approximately two thirds (60%) regarded themselves as permanently settled

in the United Kingdom. But, the majority (77%) still do not have official refugee status and, as we shall see, this remains an area of key concern for many refugees.

Main Problems Experienced

The study aimed to focus on self-defined concerns and experiences and refugees were asked early in the interviews to indicate their feelings towards a variety of issues. A checklist covering potential problem areas was presented and they were asked initially to indicate, as well as to discuss in detail later, the nature of the main problems being experienced by themselves and their households.

Table 6 below shows the range of problems experienced by the sample as a whole. Only one refugee indicated that no major problems had been experienced since arriving in Britain.

Table 6 Main Problems Experienced

	Number	(%)
Youth Facilities	1	2
Services for unemployed	2	4
Discrimination	3	6
Advice-information	4	8
Further-Higher Education	7	13
Harassment	7	13
Health	8	15
Housing	12	23
Isolation	14	26
Money-Welfare rights	14	26
Employment	15	28
Language	16	30
Refugee status	21	40

Overall, there are clear indications that most of the refugees (40%) saw the circumstances surrounding their status as a major problem area. Many of the refugees expressed feelings of uncertainty and insecurity as regards their residence in Britain. They accused the Home Office of not making speedy decisions with regard to their position in this country and, as a result, they claimed that they were unable to plan for the future. This problem was cited by almost half of the Bosnian, Iraqi, Kurd and Romanian refugees. Beyond this, status was seen as lying at the heart of many of the problems of settlement and security which the sample faced and produced some of the most lengthy and deeply-felt comments.

'We have been here for a year and have an extension for a year, but we don't understand what we can do next. It affects all we do and we can't plan for the future-nothing else is as important as status'.

'At the time we signed the papers, we were unclear about exactly it was about-because of language problems. The details and implications of claiming asylum are still unclear. We had no papers on us when we arrived, we thought we would get documents here after six months, but we still haven't got them. We feel cut-off and trapped in this country. All our relatives are now in Belgium, but we cannot join them.'

'Higher education establishments will not accept you until status is established. You also cannot travel until status has been given. ELR status doesn't solve all these problems.'

Although the most pressing issue for many interviewees, status was by no means the only perceived problem. Two further issues were of a more chronic nature and were unlikely to vanish even after the respondents' legal status had been clarified. The second most prominent area of concern for the sample, for example, was that of language. Thirty percent of all refugees indicated that they had experienced some language difficulties. Language difficulties affected all refugee groups, but appeared to be particularly problematic amongst the Bosnians (46%) and Sudanese (43%). Similarly, as shown in Table 6, a significant proportion of the respondents (28%) also indicated that employment was a major problem. In this regard Bosnians,

Iranians and Romanians appeared to be most concerned, though again, this was an issue which generally cut across the various ethnic groupings.

Equal levels of concern (26%) was shown towards isolation and money/welfare rights. Iraqi, Kurds and Romanians felt more isolated than any other sub-group in the sample. Slightly lower levels of concern were recorded by all groups, for problems relating to housing (23%), harassment (13%), health (15%), and higher education (13%). Youth facilities, (2%) advice/information (8%), discrimination (6%), and services for unemployed (4%) appeared to bother fewer people in the sample, though in individual cases these too could be the source of pressing worries.

Analysis Of Selected Issues

Considering that the checklist on its own could not be a perfect indicator of either experiences or attitudes, the researchers included a set of detailed questions on certain key areas of concern to obtain more in-depth information. The rest of this Section will examine the findings of these and discuss some of the more important matters in detail.

Language

Although only 30% of all the refugees had spontaneously indicated language difficulties on the checklist, when probed, a much larger number appeared to have experienced various problems in this regard. Overall, 81% of the respondents admitted that they had experienced certain language difficulties since coming to Britain. (Table 7)

'None of us spoke English before we came. The children cried at school and wanted to come home. The children have adapted and can speak now, but its their parents who still have problems!'

Table 7 Experienced Language Difficulties since coming to Britain

	Number	(%)
Yes	43	81
No	10	19
Total	53	

Yes
No

All the Russian and Iranian refugees and over 86% of the Sudanese and Bosnians indicated that they had experienced some form of language difficulty. This was also true for approximately two thirds of all the other sub-groups. Despite the 56% who claimed to cope with language satisfactorily, a fair proportion of the respondents (23%) still saw themselves coping poorly.

Although a little more than half of the refugees (52%) could speak English fluently, a large proportion (71%), indicated that they still spoke their 'mother tongue' (ethnic language) at home. In 87% of the households, some household member had attended English classes and most (70%) had found these to be beneficial, though some had found them to be at too basic a level.

'It was at a low level. I needed something more challenging. The teacher talked about herself and didn't teach much grammar'

A least two thirds of the respondents (64%) felt that others in their household would benefit from classes at present.

In general, an evaluation of the qualitative responses showed that even though many refugees appeared keen to learn English, some felt that it was extremely difficult to concentrate on learning a new language. Again the insecurity of their situation in Britain had an impact here as many were uncertain as to how long they would be allowed to remain.

'It is difficult to find the motivation to learn something when we don't know how long we will stay here-the stress of our status also makes it difficult to study'.

There was no single 'refugee viewpoint' on the issue of language training. While some respondents felt that immediately after initial arrival was too traumatic a period in which to absorb teaching effectively, others suggested that English classes should be offered soon after refugees enter the country so that they can be utilised more effectively to aid settlement. It was obvious that a fair proportion of the sample still depended on friends, social workers and other organisations in the community to help them to communicate outside the home. Sadly, many of the refugees mentioned that language difficulties had prevented them from socialising with the local Scottish people and consequently, the only friends they had were those within their own ethnic group. Ultimately this compounded their feelings of isolation and despair.

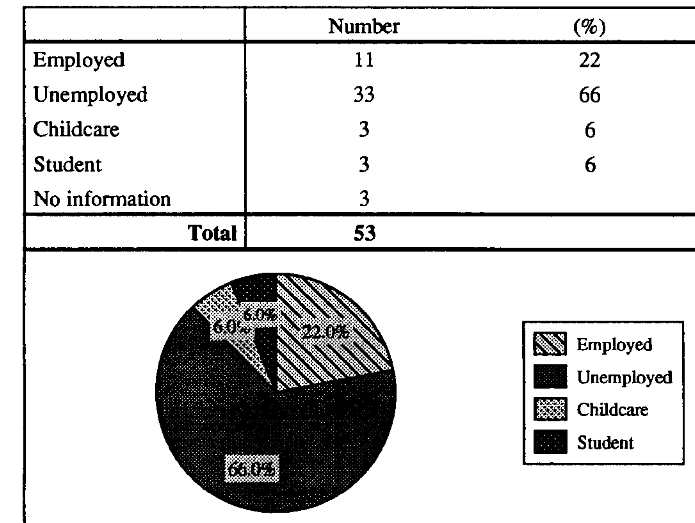
Employment and Training

Whilst twenty eight percent of the sample recorded employment as an area of major concern on the checklist, a detailed analysis of this issue presented a more realistic

picture of the situation.

As with the Strathclyde study, refugees suffered higher levels of unemployment than the indigenous population and again, there was evidence of wasted skills, talents and abilities. Overall, only 14 (22%) of the households (Table 8) managed to find some form of employment.

Table 8 Current employment status



	Number	(%)
Employed	11	22
Unemployed	33	66
Childcare	3	6
Student	3	6
No information	3	
Total	**53**	

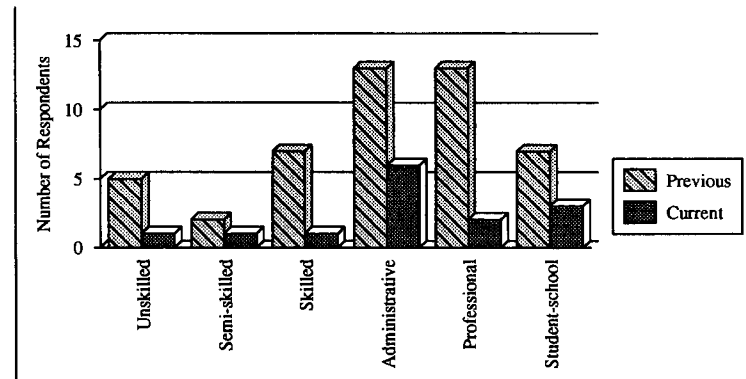
The above table (Table 8) shows that two thirds of the respondents were currently unemployed. An assessment of the previous economic status of the refugees shows

that only 2% suffered a similar fate in their former country. Also, although a small number of refugees managed to find some form of employment, it would appear that career choices were limited.

In general, the majority of those who were employed (69%), were in full time employment and about a third (30%) were self employed, possibly 'sheltering' from the realities of the job market.

Table 9 Comparison of Previous and Current Occupation

	Previous	(%)	Current	%
Unskilled	5	*10*	1	*7*
Semi-skilled	2	*4*	1	*7*
Skilled	7	*13*	1	*7*
Administrative	13	*25*	6	*43*
Professional	13	*25*	2	*14*
Student-school	7	*13*	3	*21*
No information	5	*10*	0	*0*
Total	**52**		**14**	



An evaluation of current and past occupations showed that the majority (43%) of those who were currently employed, were essentially engaged in administrative tasks (Table 9). Whereas previously a notable proportion of the sample (25%) were professionally employed, a relatively smaller number (14%) in comparison was currently employed in similar professional areas of work. Some of the diminutions suffered in occupational status were striking: jounalist to fast food vendor, vet to lab assistant and so forth. While 13% of the sample was employed as skilled labour, in their former country, a much smaller number (7%) was now able to find similar work. The actual number of students also appeared to have declined from seven previously, to three currently. Not all were studying at the same level as previously: one refugee with a BSc in Economics was completing a SCE Higher course in the same subject.

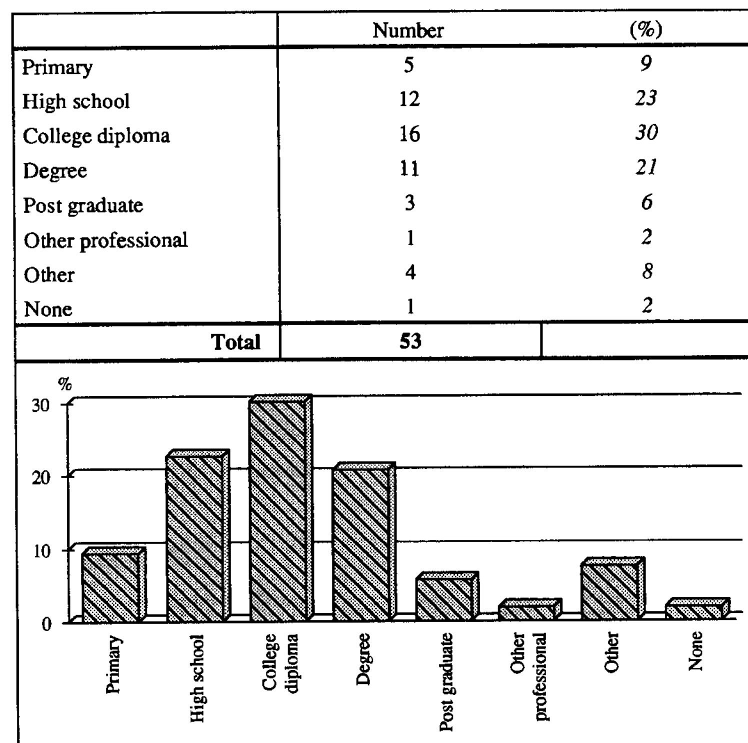
There are clear indications (Table 10) that these figures cannot be explained in terms of lack of education or skills. The table shows that a large proportion of the respondents were university graduates who possessed either a degree (21%) or post graduate qualification (6%).

In addition, 30% of the sample indicated that they had obtained college diplomas and 10% other professional or non professional qualifications. About a quarter of the refugees had been to high school and overall, only one refugee admitted to having no formal qualification whatsoever.

It was obvious that present occupations were not commensurate with either educational qualifications or previous work experience. During the informal discussions it became clear that this was a sore point for many. Refugees felt strongly about the non-recognition of foreign qualifications. Many were of the view that they were adequately qualified and could not understand why they had to re-train, sometimes for lower grade occupations.

'I have previous experience, I have medical qualifications. I was an MD at home. I can't find a job here, I am told I have to have very good English and have to pass other exams, but English courses don't teach medical subjects and medical courses don't offer any help. I'm not getting through interviews. I even tried to work unpaid in hospitals to give me something to do, but there were no opportunities. Now I'd settle for teaching biology or other medical subjects.'

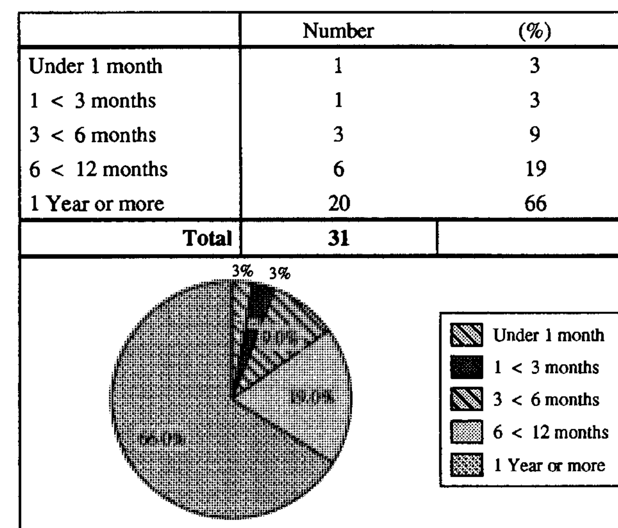
Table 10 Qualifications in Former Country



	Number	(%)
Primary	5	*9*
High school	12	*23*
College diploma	16	*30*
Degree	11	*21*
Post graduate	3	*6*
Other professional	1	*2*
Other	4	*8*
None	1	*2*
Total	**53**	

Almost all of the those who were unemployed had been so for a considerable length of time. Table 11 highlights the length of time respondents had been without work.

Table 11 Length of time unemployed



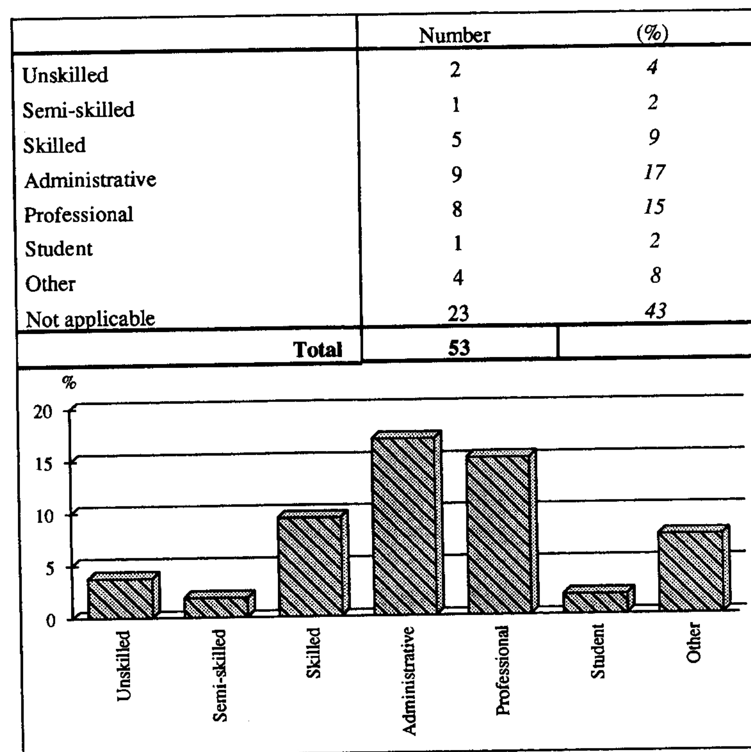
	Number	(%)
Under 1 month	1	3
1 < 3 months	1	3
3 < 6 months	3	9
6 < 12 months	6	19
1 Year or more	20	66
Total	**31**	

Two thirds of the respondents (66%) indicated that they were unemployed for more than a year and a further 19% for over six months. Needless to say, these trends toward long term unemployment and the bleak prospects that often face many refugee job seekers are a major areas of concern.

It was clear that many refugees were not unrealistic in their search for jobs. For example Table 12 shows that only 15% of the job seekers had sought professional-type jobs even though 27% (Table 10) were professionally qualified. Moreover, despite having a preference for a professional position, almost all (13%), of those who sought professional posts were prepared to settle for a different job.

'We would do anything now to pay the bills, it might also help our language problems.'

Table 12 Type of job sought



	Number	(%)
Unskilled	2	*4*
Semi-skilled	1	*2*
Skilled	5	*9*
Administrative	9	*17*
Professional	8	*15*
Student	1	*2*
Other	4	*8*
Not applicable	23	*43*
Total	**53**	

Seventeen percent of the job seekers looked for jobs in the administrative sector and 9% in the skilled. During informal discussions, it became obvious that some of the refugees took the rejection of unemployment very personally, especially those who had already spent many years gaining skills and professional expertise.

Although some of the respondents were prepared to accept any job on offer, they did realise that a lot of these jobs would not be able to pay them as much as they received from income support or housing benefit. In this regard fifty seven percent of the sample indicated that they were receiving income support. Nonetheless, the reality of receiving money from the government appeared to be a source of embarrassment for many who, according to the interviewers, were visibly uncomfortable with this question. Perhaps this could account for the large number (41%) who did not respond to this line of enquiry.

An assessment of unemployment patterns among other household members was similar to those above in that the majority (38%) were unemployed for over a year. As with the heads of households, several were well qualified and sought skilled labour (33%). None of these people had consulted with careers advisers.

More than two thirds of the sample (69%) indicated that they had experienced various barriers to suitable employment. Table 13 shows the main barrier to employment appears to be language (48%). It is important to note that language was mentioned earlier also as an area of concern (Table 6). A substantial proportion of the refugees (39%) saw both discrimination and the non-recognition of their overseas qualification as a barrier to obtaining employment. Almost a quarter of the refugees (26%) saw issues relating to legal status as a barrier to employment and 23% blamed lack of qualifications.

A further evaluation of perceived barriers to employment by ethnic group revealed varied responses. Most Bosnians (75%), Kurds (60%) and Romanians (66%) saw language as the main barrier to employment. All the Sudanese refugees perceived the non-recognition of their overseas qualification to be a serious problem. Further, approximately half the Iranian and all the Iraqis felt that they were unable to obtain employment because of discrimination.

'It is the accent. They won't say it to your face, but it is in the way they look at you'.

Table 13 Barriers to Employment

	Number	(%)
Lack of references	4	13
Other	5	16
Lack of qualifications	7	23
Legal status	8	26
Non recognition overseas quals.	12	39
Discrimination	12	39
Language difficulties	15	48

Sixty one percent of the the respondents indicated that someone in their household had been on a training course for further education in this country. These had been funded from various sources, such as the DSS, Lothian Region, the EC and Urban Aid. Most had been skills-based, including, typing, text processing, electrical engineering, and dental nursing. It was difficult to give an overall judgement on the

effectiveness of this provision as many of the programmes were still on-going, but a large number of refugees (67%) already felt that these courses were not assisting them in finding employment, as they were 'too basic' or 'too general', or because of the generally poor economic climate.

' I was studying language and literature at home, but I was put on a 'Training for Work' Course in Hotel and Catering: Reception Level. There are only a few people who acutally get a work placement out of it- so it is not as valuable as it is said to be. '

' I did a HE course in mechanical engineering. I sent off 140 applications without success. I am still keen to undertake further education and training.'

Table 14 Interested in FE or Training Course

	Number	(%)
Yes	43	81
No	8	15
Don't know	2	4
Total	**53**	

Nevertheless, refugees' willingness to continue to pursue further education and training is evidenced in Table 14 above by the substantial number (81%) who

indicated that they would like to attend training courses to improve their qualifications. These ranged from specialised courses in Higher Education at graduate and post-graduate level, such as pharmacology, linguistics and translation to a variety of skills-based training programmes. Those mentioned most frequently were computing and word-processing. There was also a demand for business and enterprise start-up courses from some interviewees. Further, many refugees (78%) felt that a course including a component of English language learning would be very useful. The willingness of refugees to improve their situation was supported further by the finding that most of them (68%) were prepared to stay away from home for a short period of time to attend college or a training centre should the need arise. In many of these cases, however, problems with funding were thought to make this potentially prohibitive.

In summary, the major issues as regards employment and training were found to be: the high level of long-term unemployment; the perceived barriers to employment and the wide range of wasted skills and work experiences. On the positive side, full advantage can be taken of the willingness of refugees to be trained to use their skills and experiences more effectively. In this regard, programmes should be devised to assist the refugees to use their past work experiences, qualifications and skills in more effective ways.

Isolation

Although the interviewers commented that indicators of isolation were apparent throughout the interview, only a quarter of the respondents (26%) were prepared to admit directly that they felt isolated. Isolation was perceived to be a particular problem for women in the household, but was by no means gender-restricted.

' My wife wife is very lonely and depressed, especially since her younger brother left a few months ago for Canada. We have no friends in the area, and this is difficult for us.'

' Until I started a degree course I was very lonely and depressed. I just sat alone and cried, and couldn't sleep. I was like a dead body.'

The interviewers observed that asking about making friends and whether respondents had any friends living locally, appeared to be personally intrusive. Refugees admitted that they had experienced difficulties with regards to socialising with the local Scottish people because of language problems. However, they appeared embarrassed to admit that they had few or no friends. Nonetheless, half of the respondents (51%) felt that it was quite easy to make friends in the area. Although 64% of the respondents had some friends locally, most of them admitted that these were people of their own ethnic group. In addition, as could be expected, only a very small number of refugees (21%) had relatives living locally. Further, the majority (81%) were not even likely to be members of social clubs or cultural organisations which might have brought them into contact with other refugees.

The degree of isolation experienced by many of the refugees was illustrated further by the their limited involvement in local organisations such as tenants associations, sports or recreation clubs and parent/teacher associations. Overall only six households (12%) indicated memberships of such organisations. Of those who indicated membership, four (9%) belonged to a sport or recreation club, one (2%) belonged to the local tenants association and one (2%) to a parent/teacher association. None of the households were involved in community councils.

However, many felt that belonging to, or being part of, society involved more than just membership of local organisations. One respondent summed up her feelings of isolation thus,

' It does not matter how many people you know or do not know, because when you are forced apart from family and friends you tend to feel very isolated and alone.'

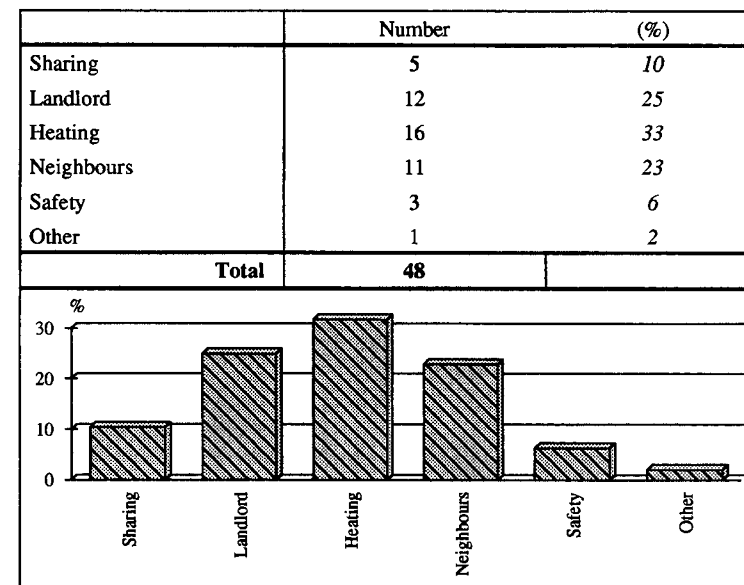
The complex social and psychological factors surrounding the issue of isolation need to be more fully understood so that appropriate counselling can be provided to refugees on arrival.

Housing

Housing, in relation to the other problems, presently appeared to be of secondary concern to many. In fact, less than a quarter (23%) of the respondents had indicated housing as an area of concern on the checklist (Table 6). It was nonetheless apparent, that getting a house and feeling secure were the main priorities of many refugees. According to the interviewers, questions relating to likes and dislikes of present accommodation were greeted with a degree of confusion, in that most of the refugees felt that having a house in the first instance was all that mattered.

There are clear indications in Table 15 that people felt they had very little to complain about as regards their present accommodation. The majority (45%), had not voiced any dislikes concerning their housing circumstances. Of those who did indicate dislikes, most of the responses (33%) were related to heating facilities. About a quarter of the responses involved problems relating to landlords (25%) and neighbours (23%). Ten percent of the responses indicated dislikes about sharing accommodation and six percent expressed concerns over their safety.

Table 15 Dislikes of house



	Number	(%)
Sharing	5	*10*
Landlord	12	*25*
Heating	16	*33*
Neighbours	11	*23*
Safety	3	*6*
Other	1	*2*
Total	**48**	

Almost all the refugees (96%) agreed that their house had all the required basic facilities such as running water (hot and cold), bathroom, toilet, kitchen, living room and bedrooms. The average refugee accommodation comprised between two and four rooms. All except five households (9%) had exclusive use of their accommodation. In cases where the accommodation was shared, the facility that was shared most often tended to be either living rooms, kitchens, or bathrooms. Although only a third of the households (30%) mentioned that they had too few rooms, about three quarters (74%) felt that they needed at least one more room.

Table 16 Tenure

	Number	(%)
Owner occupation	8	15
Council	19	36
Private landlord	21	40
Other	5	9
Total	53	

Table 16 above shows that the majority of refugees (76%) lived in rented accommodation. Twenty one households (40%) rented their accommodation from private landlords and nineteen (36%) from the council. Only a small number (15%) owned their own homes. With regard to mobility, forty two households (82%) said that they were thinking of moving in the future. More than half of them (51%) revealed that they would like to move elsewhere in Edinburgh. Six households (15%) preferred to move within the same area and nine (22%) wanted to move elsewhere in Britain. Only five households (12%) wished to move outside Britain completely.

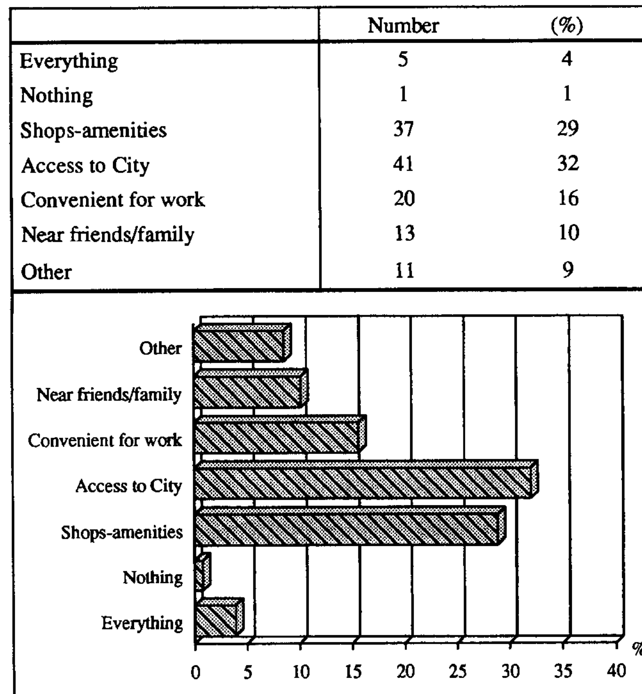
Table 17 Dislike about area

	Number	(%)
Everything	1	2
Nothing	19	32
Shops-amenities	3	5
Poor transport	1	2
Too far from work	6	10
Too far from friends/family	4	7
Other	25	42

In general, refugees appeared to be more positive than negative about the area in which they lived. Thirty two percent of the households indicated that there was nothing in particular that they disliked about the area. (Table 17)

In fact, of the respondents who did record dislikes, 42% did not specify their dislike as reflected under 'other' on Table 17. Of those who did, the main dislike appeared to be related to distance away from work (10%) and from family and friends (7%). A few respondents complained about the shopping facilities (5%) and poor transport (2%).

Table 18 Like about area



	Number	(%)
Everything	5	4
Nothing	1	1
Shops-amenities	37	29
Access to City	41	32
Convenient for work	20	16
Near friends/family	13	10
Other	11	9

Indeed, as reflected in Table 18, respondents tended to record more positive than negative impressions of their their area. The majority of the respondents (32%) said that they liked their area because it offered easy access to the city and because of the shops and amenities (29%). Sixteen percent said they liked their area because it was close to work and 10% because they were near friends or family. Five respondents claimed to like everything about their area and only one said there was nothing at all to like.

When asked if there was anything that could or should be done to improve the area,

many felt that it was not up to them to suggest such things. However, about half the respondents (56%) did agree that the area should be improved.

While welcoming the general satisfaction expressed by the sample over issues of housing provision and the local area, this should not obscure the fact that individual households were experiencing quite severe problems in this respect. Some of the worst cases revolved around issues of tenure and time spent on the District Council waiting list.

' I accepted a furnished tenancy which is expensive, and so this curtails the type of job I may accept and consider. It was explained to me that if I refused two tenancies I would be put on the bottom of the list. I now wish I hadn't accepted this - it is a ball and chain.'

For other refugees, however, dissatisfaction was in essence related to wider problems of harassment

Harassment

As with the Strathclyde study, harassment appeared again to be a significant problem. However, refugees in the Lothian Region appeared more reluctant to admit to being harassed. An assessment of the checklist of main problems experienced shows that only 13% of respondents considered this to be an area of major concern (Table 6). In addition, Table 19 shows that approximately a third of the respondents (28%) said that they had not experienced any incidence of harassment whatsoever. However, the types of harassment being experienced were often particularly distressing and it is disturbing to note that most of those who did admit to being harassed appeared to have suffered abuse at a personal level. In this regard 23% of the respondents recorded incidence of physical abuse.

' My son did go to a local community centre, but he was called a "Paki" and has been attacked with a knife. My son would like to join clubs etc, and he (and I) are scared now.'

In general, refugees appeared reluctant to highlight the problem for fear of appearing ungrateful or too critical. Although a number admitted that they had been verbally abused (21%), almost all of them hastened to add that they had actively avoided any possible confrontation by ignoring shouts and taunts. This has become the standard response of many who are the victims of racial harassment. Respondents explained that they were grateful for being allowed into the country and did not wish to complicate matters by complaining.

' I feel that myself and other refugees cannot complain: people will just say "Go back to your own country "'.

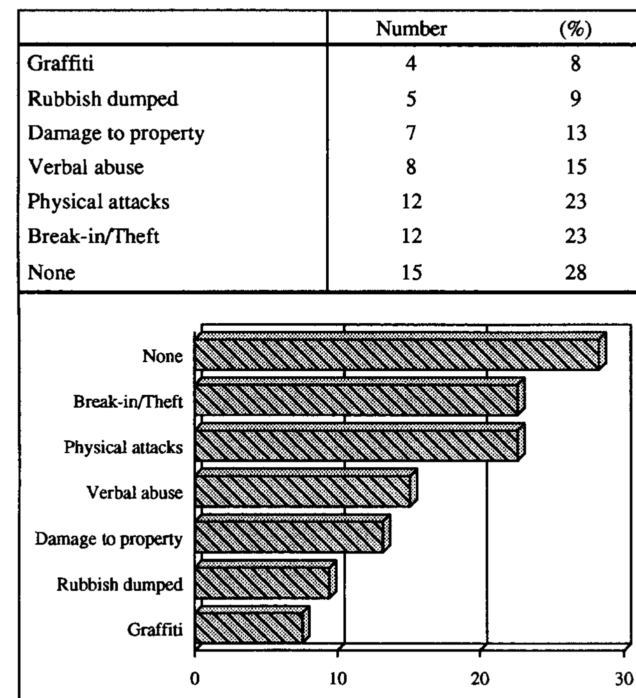
Others experienced various forms of attacks to property such as break-in/theft (23%), general damage to possessions (13%) and the dumping of rubbish (9%). The majority of those who had experienced some form of harassment (68%) chose not to report the incident to the police. This is more an indication that they were afraid to draw attention to themselves rather than being a comment on the Police's ability to solve the problem.

' The house is OK, but the neighbours don't like foreigners - they throw mud at the washing etc. They shout abuse at my wife and children. We would like to move to London. My wife is scared to leave the house'.

' I have high blood pressure due to stress. The children cannot play in the local park because they are picked on by other kids. Teenagers throw balls and stones at our window and ring the bell. We are told to " Go home". What can the police do? I don't feel I can identify people. We keep a low profile and ignore what we can regarding shouting and verbal abuse '.

Table 19 Harassment Suffered

	Number	(%)
Graffiti	4	8
Rubbish dumped	5	9
Damage to property	7	13
Verbal abuse	8	15
Physical attacks	12	23
Break-in/Theft	12	23
None	15	28



Advice and information

In general, responses to questions relating to advice and information highlighted the inadequacy of the present system in getting information to refugees. Overall, it was apparent that the majority, were reluctant to ask for more than income support and housing benefit. About half of the respondents (51%) felt that refugee families do not make full use of the advice and welfare services that are available in this country.

Critical comments particularly focused on the lack of accessible, translated material on initial arrival, a long standing problem which is often raised in refugee studies.

' There is a lack of knowledge among refugees. A proper briefing of the possibilities open to them is lacking, especially if you are not proficient in the English language.'

' For basic problems the information is OK, but there should be more information available early on, especially on status'.

More specifically, although many refugees still depended on friends and relatives for advice and information (21%), the majority (79%) indicated that they would approach some organisation for assistance. In this regard, preferences were restricted to either the public office concerned(18%) or a relevant advice agency (20%). Eighty one percent of the respondents indicated that they had never contacted their local MP, but about a quarter (26%) said that they had contacted social workers for advice or information. The majority (66%) found them to be useful and supportive, though they recognised that there were limits to what could be expected from these workers with regard to questions of refugee status.

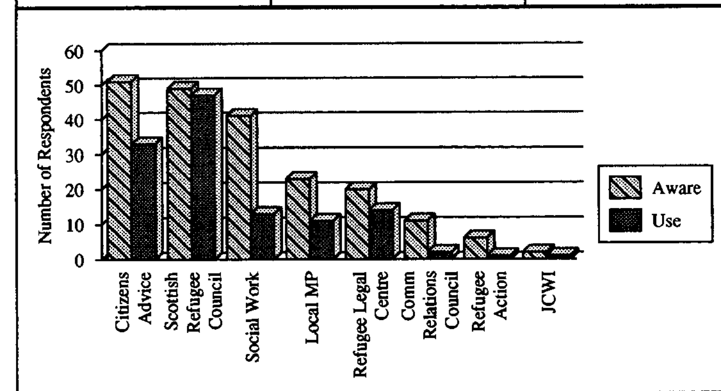
' I had a social worker while I was being detained in prison. I would listen to what he had to say and he was very pleasant, but talking into a tape recorder would have been just as helpful. The social worker could not change my situation.'

The interviewers observed that it was mainly the Bosnians who appeared to be aware of, and had made most use of, the services of the Social Work Department. This is no doubt due to the recent high profile of the Bosnian refugees. For the rest, the concept of 'social worker' had to be explained to them and they felt that some sort of regular contact with anyone would be beneficial, not necessarily on a 'professional' basis. This was seen as important, not just for informal advice but also for making real progress in language skills.

' I feel we need more contact with local English-speaking people to learn more about their culture -either some sort of gathering or even home-visiting would be a good idea'

Table 20 Awareness and Use of Services

	Aware	(%)	Use	%
Citizens Advice	51	*96*	33	*62*
Scottish Refugee Council	49	*92*	47	*89*
Social Work	41	*77*	13	*25*
Local MP	23	*43*	11	*21*
Refugee Legal Centre	20	*38*	14	*26*
Comm Relations Council	11	*21*	2	*4*
Refugee Action	6	*11*	1	*2*
JCWI	2	*4*	1	*2*



An evaluation of the awareness and use of agencies involved in the provision of advice and information revealed that, while there were relatively high levels of awareness of some organisations, contact was nonetheless limited. Table 20 shows that almost all the refugees were aware of the Citizens Advice Bureau (96%) and The Scottish Refugee Council (92%) and that a significant number had used them. In

fact, 89% of the refugees had made use of the Scottish Refugee Council and 62% the Citizens Bureau. About a quarter had used the Refugee Legal Centre.

Health

In general, there appeared to be a high level of satisfaction with regard to the health services in Lothian. Only eight respondents (15%) mentioned health as area of concern on the checklist (Table 6).

The majority of households (83%) were registered with a local GP, and 78% were happy with the GP services they received. 85% felt the location of the surgery was convenient and 76% were not prepared to approach any other source of assistance should a health problem arise, again showing a relatively high level of satisfaction with current medical services. Indeed, most refugees felt that medical services in Britain were of a similar, if not higher, standard than those in their home country.

' My doctor was very helpful and supportive, especially in the beginning when I had to use a dictionary.'

An evaluation of the nature of illness amongst the refugee sample revealed that very few households had seriously ill (8%) or disabled (6%) people. Nevertheless, the most significant finding in this regard was the high incidence of stress-related illness. Forty five per cent of households indicated that they were suffering from 'Nerves'. This term was generally used to describe various psychological-related conditions such as depression, recurrent nightmares and sleeplessness.

' I still dream about my country and want to return. Sometimes I get depressed when I think about my situation'.

As with the Strathclyde survey, the majority of the stress-related problems were in part related to the trauma of persecution and the loss suffered by most of the refugees. In addition, many felt worried and guilty about the relatives they had left behind. Since the overwhelming majority of households (93%) had left behing immediate family members such as parents or children in their country of origin, these feelings of guilt were often referred to during interviews and were clearly a further source of stress for refugees.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The data from the Lothian survey, both qualitative and quantitatve, indicates that the 'refugee experience' includes a series of interlinking difficulties in areas such as political status, employment, language and isolation. These problems, at times, have been a source of great stress and trauma. Yet at the same time, the respondents have often been determined and resourceful, not only in escaping persecution in their country of origin, but also in their attempts to make a new life for themselves in Scotland. The research also shows that areas such as housing provision and awareness of information provision do seem to have undergone a fair measure of improvement, compared with the situation revealed by the Strathclyde research in 1988.

As with the Strathclyde research, the basic right of asylum seekers to remain in Britain emerged as the key concern for interviewees. Despite the efforts of agencies at local level to offer a good standard of material provision, it is ironic that the most pressing concern bearing on the families' lives lay outwith local control. There is an ongoing need to keep pressure on the Home Office over the issue of status. However, even if issues such as asylum and family reunion are resolved, the needs of refugees in Lothian are likely to undergo incremental development and sophistication, particularly in the field of language, employment and training. English language proficiency and economic self-sufficiency continue to be major problems. The link between the two is far from simple. English language competence for all refugees is a goal which must be achieved as the base from which to address so many other problems. However there is no evidence to suggest that, were language skills to improve dramatically, employment prospects would be greatly enhanced. Research elsewhere shows that 'even if English language competence appears, or ... is allowed

affects all refugees, regardless of their involvement in English language training programmes.' (Haines 1988). It could be argued that, if the desires expressed in the report for additional language training were to be met, this might lead to further frustration when expected job opportunities did not materialise. Since English skills are more a matter of time and practice rather than taking a formal course, it might be better to seek to place refugees into early employment where their skills are forced to develop, or better, ensure that those who are qualified in various ways at the time of arrival have these qualifications recognised. The disparity between employment and qualification level is as marked as it was in the Strathclyde survey and the frustrations among the refugees equally strongly expressed. Research elsewhere, (Carey-Wood, 1993) suggests also that participation in training schemes does have a substantial impact on the chances of gaining employment. In the case of Lothian, however, many respondents who had made use of existing schemes were sceptical as to their value . On the other hand it could be the case that what is available makes no special provision for refugees and their previous education. It is obvious that in Lothian, as elsewhere, there is a great deal of talent and ability which is not being used, to the distress of the refugees and the detriment of the community.

In short, it is vital that the momentum of care and support be maintained to meet refugees' changing needs from both the public and voluntary sector. One of the main weaknesses of previous settlement programmes was precisely the short-term, temporary and under-funded nature of these initiatives. This had made any strategic overview of community development difficult to sustain. Instead, close working relationships between different agencies must be placed at the centre of the planning and delivery of refugee services. Moreover, in planning future service provision it would also mistaken for policymakers to treat refugees in Lothian as a single undifferentiated group. Apart from the variety of ethnic backgrounds revealed in the survey, as their needs have developded it has become increasingly evident that individuals have different perspectives and demands, making standard provision undesirable. Their needs change over time, and as one issue is resolved so another takes priority.

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