

## Understanding the Perspectives of Refugee Unaccompanied Minors Using a Computer-Assisted Interview

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**Key words:**

computer-assisted interview;  
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**Abstract:** This article reports analyses of the perspectives on their wellbeing expressed by four unaccompanied minor refugees resettling in Australia. We used a computer-assisted interview (CAI) to set up a research environment to facilitate young people's expressions and to treat them and their expressed perspectives with respect and integrity. Participants' data are represented in tables as full transcripts with CAI questions and tasks, and are analyzed using exegetical textual analysis. Analyses reveal similarities and differences in young people's themes and personalized concerns in relation to their life circumstances in resettlement. All four unaccompanied minors were worried about the families from whom they were isolated. Two young women who were humanitarian refugees were preoccupied with family separation and reunion, and also with their own inner states and behavior. Two young men who had been asylum seekers were focused on family and their own educational advancement. The value of the CAI approach is discussed in relation to criticisms of reductionism in quantitative and qualitative data; its ability to support young refugees to express their views with agency and confidence; and the representation of young people's expressed perspectives as a basis for understanding and for supportive programs.

### Table of Contents

- [1. Overview](#)
  - [2. Introduction Rationale](#)
    - [2.1 Understanding the perspectives of refugee unaccompanied minors](#)
    - [2.2 The wellbeing of unaccompanied refugee young people](#)
    - [2.3 Respect and appropriate methods](#)
    - [2.4 Methodological approach: A computer-assisted interview](#)
    - [2.5 Expectations for textual analysis of young refugees' perspectives](#)
  - [3. Method](#)
    - [3.1 Participants](#)
    - [3.2 Procedures](#)
    - [3.3 Data management and representation](#)
  - [4. Results](#)
    - [4.1 Contrasting perspectives on personal wellbeing](#)
    - [4.2 Themes in individualized profiles](#)
  - [5. Discussion](#)
  - [6. Conclusion](#)
- [Acknowledgments](#)
- [References](#)
- [Authors](#)
- [Citation](#)

## 1. Overview

This article reports an innovative method of using a computer-assisted interview (CAI) and textual analysis to enable four refugee unaccompanied minors to express their perspectives on their wellbeing in resettlement in Australia. The report is organized in six sections. Section 2 gives an introduction and the rationale of the approach, pointing to the need to understand unaccompanied minors' perspectives on their own wellbeing (Section 2.1, 2.2); and with due attention to respect (Section 2.3). Section 2.4 describes our development of a computer-assisted interview that yields a form of qualitative data suitable for textual analysis enabling the voices of individual young refugees; and Section 2.5 the expectations for the analyses. Section 3 presents the method, describing the participants (Section 3.1), procedures (Section 3.2), and data management including the representation of complete texts of all questions and responses in tables (Section 3.3). Section 4 presents the results of the study in contrastive analyses of the perspectives of the four unaccompanied minors (Section 4.1) and the four individualized profiles (Section 4.2). Section 5 is the discussion of the results and Section 6 the conclusion. [1]

## 2. Introduction Rationale

Among the record numbers of people currently seeking refuge are many children, and among the children are many young people under the age of 18 years who arrive in new countries without parents or guardians. Resettlement in a new country is one of the UN High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) "durable options" for assisting these young victims of war and displacement to "rebuild their lives with dignity" (UNHCR, 2014, p.18). They start their new lives in a variety of circumstances that range from living with relatives or foster families to shared housing, but beyond having in common the absence of parental support, they are individuals with their own experiences and hopes (RESSLER, BOOTHBY & STEINBOCK, 1988). Accordingly, programs seeking to assist them to rebuild their lives and to promote their wellbeing need to be grounded in an understanding of what their lives involve and of their individual concerns, needs, and rights (MALMSTEN, 2014). Gaining such an understanding, however, largely depends on the availability of research that assists these young people to express their concerns, needs and hopes and that treats their contributions to knowledge with due respect (LAWRENCE, KAPLAN & DODDS, 2015). [2]

The available evidence on the perspectives of unaccompanied young refugees is limited and varied in its proximity to their experiences and perspectives (CARLSON, CACCIATORE & KLIMECK, 2012; HOPKINS & HILL, 2008; WERNESJÖ, 2011). At least two interacting factors limit the trustworthiness of information of their perspectives. On one side is the reticence by many of these vulnerable young people to reveal too much about their lives, especially to people who appear to them like authority figures (CHASE, 2013; KOHLI, 2006; NÍ RAGHALLAIGH, 2013). On the other side is the frequent inability of researchers to conduct research that facilitates refugee young people's self-expressions (LAWRENCE et al., 2015). This research addressed the aims of developing a

research environment that, with due respect, gives young refugees the means to express their perspectives; and then represents their perspectives appropriately. [3]

## **2.1 Understanding the perspectives of refugee unaccompanied minors**

The traumatic experiences of young refugees are well outside the normal transitional experiences of childhood and adolescence, and put at risk their present and long-term wellbeing (CHASE, 2013). The differences between their experiences and those of young people settled in their own families are exacerbated because these young people have to negotiate changes in cultural contexts, language, and social expectations, at the same time that they are adjusting to changes within themselves and their close relationships (GOODNOW & LAWRENCE, 2015; OPPEDAL, 2006). Their life circumstances are made more difficult because they have to manage ways through these multiple challenges without parental support. In these unusual and demanding circumstances, individual young people are likely to have developed personal views about what they need to help them feel that life is worthwhile. Like all young people, they are active in forming perspectives about what is happening in their social environments, especially about what is expected of them, and what they can expect for themselves (GOODNOW, 2014). Young people's understanding of their own wellbeing is an important aspect of their success in resettling. [4]

## **2.2 The wellbeing of unaccompanied refugee young people**

Wellbeing is generally used as an umbrella concept that is variously defined and described to reflect the qualities of life and "the many possible dimensions of a good or bad life" (BEN-ARIEH, CASAS, FRØNES & KORBIN, 2014, p.1). When related to isolated young refugee's experiences, however, interpretations of their wellbeing are often unbalanced and focused on negative rather than positive dimensions of their lives (DERLUYN & BROEKAERT, 2012). Vulnerability and passivity, for instance, are emphasized more frequently than the independence and resilience that many young refugees display as the survivors as well as the victims of war and dislocation (NÍ RAGHALLAIGH & GILLIGAN, 2009). In focusing on these young people's sense of the quality of their individual lives in resettlement in isolation from their families, we paid attention to two specific aspects of their wellbeing that have opposing valences and often are mentioned by clients using refugee services: the worries that disturb a sense of wellbeing and the motivating goals that enhance it. [5]

Worries are intrusive thoughts that disrupt everyday life for refugee young people (McFARLANE, KAPLAN & LAWRENCE, 2011). They are a normal part of the ways that adults and children remember, anticipate and elaborate actual and possible events (MURIS, MERCKELBACH, MEESTERS & VAN DEN BRAND, 2002; VASEY, CRNIC & CARTER, 1994). Research on the worries of children and adolescents, however, has tended to focus on identifying pathological worries (e.g., worries related to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression) rather than on understanding the general and normal worries of childhood or the specific worries related to refugees' resettlement. There is little evidence about

the meanings young people give to their everyday worries (BACOW, PINCUS, EHRENREICH & BRODY, 2009). Refugee young people, however, seem to be willing to express the worries they carry with them as well as their losses, lack of interest or physical symptoms if they are asked appropriately (McFARLANE et al., 2011). MALMSTEN (2014), for example, found that unaccompanied minors living in Swedish transitional houses were willing to report their everyday worries in interviews that were carefully designed to ensure their confidence as well as their rights. [6]

Personal goals for the future also are often mentioned when refugee young people talk about what is important to them and what they are striving to achieve, often in relation to family and community connections, or education (McFARLANE et al., 2011). Goals and aspirations give meaning and direction to life, and are endemic to feeling good about one's life in the present as well as in the future (JOHNSON, BLUM & CHENG, 2014; WEISNER, 2014). Future orientations and goals are particularly important when young people live in challenging circumstances (SEGINER, 2009). Possibilities and hopes intertwine with other aspects of refugees' thoughts and help them "make sense" of events (BROUGH, SCHWEITZER, SHAKESPEARE-FINCH, VROMANS & KING, 2012). Being held in detention, for example, is deleterious to mental health, at least in part, because people's goals are thwarted and their feelings of hopelessness are heightened, and limitations on future possibilities detract from the quality of life in the present (COFFEY, KAPLAN, SAMPSON & TUCCI, 2010). General wellbeing and its positive and negative dimensions of worries and goals, accordingly, formed the theoretical basis of the study. The methodological focus involved constructing a method that would allow unaccompanied minors to report on their wellbeing with confidence and safety. [7]

### **2.3 Respect and appropriate methods**

Refugee unaccompanied minors are due respect on the bases of their common humanity, their vulnerable status as children, and the particular vulnerability to further harm that follows from their traumatic experiences of flight from their homelands to foreign countries. Researchers who seek to understand their perspectives are under obligation to construct research environments, methods and measures that allow these young people to work on research tasks with safety and confidence (BEAZLEY, BESSELL, ENNEW & WATSON, 2009; LAWRENCE et al., 2015). [8]

That kind of research, however, is not uniformly found when researchers ask for information from refugee and migrant young people (GOODNOW & LAWRENCE, 2015). The concepts and research measures used within a dominant European, American or Australasian culture, for instance, do not easily transpose into suitable means of assisting young people from dispersed communities to express their ideas. There can be a particular mismatch if measures were developed and standardized for dominant white settler populations and sometimes, originally for adult populations (GOODNOW, 2014). [9]

Criticisms of the reductionism of quantitative analyses point to a failure to capture the meanings of individual research participants, especially those whose life circumstances put them at the edge of normative experience (e.g., SEPALI et al., 2015; TOOMELA, 2011). Qualitative research, however, also can be in danger of using a form of reductionism that relies on selective reporting of quotes from banks of participants' comments that essentially support the researcher's position. MORSE, (2010, p.3), for example, describes how this "cherry-picking" produces thin, reduced and potentially misleading qualitative analyses. PONTEROTTO (2006, p.547) pointed to the importance of providing "thick" instead of "thin" descriptions in qualitative analyses. "Thick descriptions" are marked by the provision of context that supports researchers' interpretation of meaning in participants' talk in interview studies, and give research participants "adequate voice" to convey their meanings. PONTEROTTO also argued that results that involve thick descriptions are dependent on the development of thick methodology that is specifically designed to give research participants appropriate ways to report their meanings and perspectives. [10]

#### **2.4 Methodological approach: A computer-assisted interview**

We developed a methodological approach specifically to enable refugee young people to express their thoughts about their wellbeing using computer-assisted interviews (CAIs) that would avoid reduced and unauthentic research information. The method supports the confidence, autonomy and privacy of young research participants by providing them with accessible and attractive tasks, and facilitates their expressions of their thoughts and feelings (e.g., BARROW & HANNAH, 2012; DE LEEUW, HOX & KEF, 2003). [11]

The CAI *Young people living in Australia* (LAWRENCE & KAPLAN, 2012) is theoretically oriented to asking young people about their wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> This CAI instantiates in research practice the principle of respect for refugee young people (the practical translations of respect are described in detail in LAWRENCE et al., 2015). It is built on the premises that young people have insights into their own wellbeing, and that they are able to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge. The use of multiple forms of data and theory-directed sequencing and branching tasks with illustrations and animations support requests for participants' perspectives. This attention to meanings and support for young participants' agency differs from a growing tendency to digitize standard questionnaires and interviews without changing the basic form of the stimulus materials. [12]

Young research participants are invited to work on questions and tasks presented digitally with a researcher beside them to assist but not take charge. Tasks include ratings with explanations of their meanings; animated scenes with follow-up questions; choices of alternative experiences with color-coded "yes," "no," or "not sure" responses; constructions of lists and diagrams with animated

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1 The approach to using the *Young people living in Australia* computer-assisted interview is described in LAWRENCE et al. (2015). The authors are willing to make the CAI available on request.

instructions; and typed, open-ended comments. These tasks were designed with input on language and concepts from cross-cultural and child advisors, and with technical expertise on its interface and procedures. This ensured the accessibility, attractiveness of the tasks and the CAI's suitability for assisting young people to express their thoughts and feelings. [13]

The CAI allows the downloading of a complete record as each research participant's individualized profile, allowing analysis of patterns across the full set of questions, tasks and responses as a participant's profile. This also allows comparisons of this participant's patterns of response to those generated by other participants. We see this profile as providing the context for thick descriptions, although responses to individual questions and tasks may be short and not over-taxing for young participants. [14]

Having the complete profile allows for the transparency and checking researchers' inferences in relation to specific questions and tasks. In this study, we were able to represent each participant's full profile in tabulated form. This makes it possible to analyze and interpret the themes in individuals' responses and to compare themes across individuals. VON EYE (2010) demonstrated that it is possible to investigate patterns in the expressed ideas that may be typical or atypical of any group, and we would add, typical or atypical of any individual research participant across a set of activities and questions. [15]

LAWRENCE and VALSINER (2003), for example, were able to trace through the full data sets of two police officers' responses to information about a shoplifting act by young shoplifter Mark as the information was progressively presented to them in a computer program. The officers made progressive ratings of levels of penalty and blame for Mark as they processed incoming pieces of information and accompanied their ratings with think-aloud running verbal commentaries. Qualitative analyses of the sequenced data revealed the officers' personally constructed versions of Mark's shoplifting act and character. They explained their ratings with personal meanings, transformations of the incoming information, and interpolations of their own material. Recent developments in digital presentation and tracking now make it possible for CAI interviews to flexibly follow participants' individualized lines of thought and ask them to give their meanings and interpretations in type-in boxes. [16]

## **2.5 Expectations for textual analysis of young refugees' perspectives**

We treated each participant's whole research experience with the computer-assisted interview as a text for analysis. WELSH (2009-2010) similarly used multiple sources of evidence as texts for analyzing beginning teachers' experiences. SCHOSTAK (2006) described how exegetical approaches can be used to uncover meanings and their contextual bases when analyzing qualitative data. We used a process of textual analysis with close reading of the whole text (transcript) to identify and interpret both common and individualized themes and features in these young people's perspectives on their wellbeing. The accompanying representational system, following LAWRENCE and VALSINER

(2003), involved presenting all questions, tasks and responses in tables for analysis and scrutiny. [17]

It is reasonable to expect variability within any group of young refugees in relation, for example, to their age, cultural background, prior experiences of displacement, past and present family circumstances as well as to personal, cognitive and affective dispositions (GOODNOW, 2014; KAPLAN, 2013; McFARLANE et al., 2011). We also could expect variability from whether young people came as humanitarian refugees or as asylum seekers who in Australian conditions are detained in locked facilities until their status is determined. Our focus, therefore, was directed to comparative and thematic analyses of individual young people's perspectives. [18]

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Participants

Participants were four unaccompanied minors who were clients of Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture (VFST), an Australian non-government agency providing counseling, support and advocacy. Counselors obtained young people's willingness to be contacted by a researcher who explained the study and obtained their informed consent. These were the only adolescent unaccompanied minors currently involved with VFST that counselor-advocates could contact. We used identification numbers and minimal personal details to preserve participants' anonymity. [19]

*W1* was a 16-year-old Eritrean young woman who had arrived in Australia from Eritrea via Egypt two years previously as a humanitarian refugee. She now lived with an Egyptian foster family. Her brother lived across the city, two hours away by public transport and worked long hours. They could not often meet. [20]

*W2* was a 17-year-old Dinka young woman who was born in Sudan but had grown up in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya.<sup>2</sup> She had arrived six years previously as a humanitarian refugee and now lived with an aunt and cousins. She had been separated from both parents for years, and until recently had not known if they were alive. She now had contact with both parents who live separately in South Sudan. She financially supported her mother and a younger brother on a regular basis. [21]

*M3* was a 17-year-old Hazara young man who had come to Australia from Pakistan via Indonesia as an asylum seeker two years previously and received permanent residency after nine months in detention. He now lived with two other young men in shared accommodation. He saw little of the other residents who

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2 Dinka people live in clans in South Sudan. Many fled from Sudan to Kenya as refugees from war and persecution and live in the large Kakuma refugee camp in northwestern Kenya. The camp is administered by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Agents of receiving countries like Australia process applications for humanitarian resettlement programs in the camp.

both worked at nights. His parents were still in Pakistan, and three sisters and an aunt and uncle lived in the U.K. He was in high school. [22]

*M4* was a 15-year-old Hazara young man from Afghanistan. He had arrived two years before as an asylum seeker and spent time in detention in Australia. He received permanent residency after five months. He now was living with friends in shared accommodation. He was in high school and highly focused on school and his educational aspirations to graduate from a high school where he could do advanced school studies in math and science subjects. [23]

### **3.2 Procedures**

The CAI introduces participants to a teenager, Aya (girl) or Ali (boy). Aya/Ali and all other story agents are culturally neutral and colored blue to avoid over- or under-identification. In simple English, the CAI uses illustrations and animations to present Aya/Ali's story in a series of situations with questions asking participants to comment on Aya/Ali's experiences and their own. The participant is told that Aya/Ali came to Australia after some bad things happened back in the home country. For example, one situation describes how Aya/Ali is worried about family members left behind in other countries, and another that s/he is worried about people at his/her present home who are sad, then angry. The CAI asks whether or not participants have experienced situations similar to those experienced by Aya/Ali and what they were like. It next tells participants that Aya/Ali's worries disrupt each of five typical adolescent activities (hanging about with friends, making friends, sleeping at night, getting out of bed, talking with adults). It then asks participants to construct personal casts of the people in their lives by clicking on standard figures (adult, adolescent, male and female children), and then giving each person a role (e.g., father, friend) using a pull-down menu. Later participants use this cast to build another diagram of who among their personal cast helps them. Then they are asked to identify what they would like to achieve or change in their lives in the next year and who can help them achieve that and how. [24]

The same woman graduate researcher conducted individual interview sessions presenting the young people with the CAI and offering any assistance with explanations or typing. Three sessions were in participants' homes and one at the agency. Participants controlled management of the CAI, including pace and whether and how they responded to questions. The researcher sat beside them to assist or explain on request. [25]

### **3.3 Data management and representation**

For the textual analysis, we present all questions and tasks with all participant responses in three tables in numbered sequences so that the exegesis of the text is accompanied by keys to the primary data in the tables (e.g., Table 1.1 represents the first question and each participant's individual response to that

question).<sup>3</sup> The content of each question-and-response set is contextualized by other sets within the whole transcript and can be compared with sets from other participants. This textual analysis is similar to keyed exegetical analyses used in LAWRENCE and VALSINER (2003). Table 1 reports all data on participants' perceptions of their current happiness, and sources of worry, Table 2 the extent of their worries, and Table 3 their goals for the next year and patterns of help experienced. Reading across a row reveals similarities and differences in individuals' specific responses. Reading down a column reveals the themes and emphases of an individual participant. The entries in the tables retain the participants' individualized expressions, spelling and style as a mark of respect and authenticity. The textual analysis in the results section describes, exegetes and interprets the text of participants' comments, ratings, and constructions.

Table 1: Happiness and sources of worry expressed by four unaccompanied minors. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file.

Table 2: Extent of worry of four unaccompanied minors. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file.

Table 3: Helps and goals of four unaccompanied minors. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [26]

## 4. Results

We first contrastively examine the four unaccompanied minors' responses to questions and tasks as presented in the three tables within sections of the CAI interview, then analyze their individual perspectives, tracing out the themes and emphases they expressed. [27]

### 4.1 Contrasting perspectives on personal wellbeing

#### 4.1.1 General wellbeing in Australia

The participants express different general perspectives on their wellbeing, with their choices and comments on their happiness in Australia, as shown in Table 1.1. Responses to a related question asked later are shown in Table 2.7 where the participants are asked: "Are things mostly OK or not OK?" and to choose one of three options: "mostly OK," "mostly not OK," or "a bit OK and a bit not OK." [28]

Two (W2, M4) say they are happy living in Australia, and also later choose the "mostly OK" option. W2 likes Australia, and for M4, everything "is cool." M3 is "not sure" if he is happy, explaining, "I miss my family a lot." He later chooses "mostly not OK." W1 revises an initial "yes happy" to "no." Her explanation refers to living with carers who are not her parents and missing her family. She later chooses the "bit OK, bit not OK" option. [29]

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3 Key to reading Tables: 1.4, 1.5 = Table 1.4 and Table 1.5; 2.3-2.6 = Table 2.3 to Table 2.6.

#### *4.1.2 Disrupting worries*

All four worry about the safety of their families, relating their family experiences to those of Aya/Aya shown in Table 1.2, 1.3. The young men do not elaborate but both young women add personal details: W1 that her family also worries about her; and W2 that she has been separated from her family for a long time. [30]

W1 responds to four questions related to worries about people she lives with in Australia (1.4-1.6), by not answering the first general question, but by describing instead her worries about her family overseas, in general and about people being sad at home (1.4, 1.5). She then refers to her current living situation with carers when asked about people being angry at home, commenting that she does not "want to do anything that makes them angry." W2 also is concerned about people's anger. She is not worried about the people at her house except when they are angry, when, she says, "I feel uncomfortable" (1.6). [31]

The two young men do not worry about the people where they live. M3 never sees them (1.4), and can't worry about one who may be angry because "I am more worried about my family than him" (1.6). M4 is not worried about people where he lives, commenting, instead, about being happy, but potentially and actually bored (1.4, 1.7). [32]

The four young people generate different lists when asked for the three things they worry about most at home (1.7). W1 numbers the points she types, reiterating her family's safety, "them worrying about me," and what she calls "splitting family." W2 lists three worries, all related to her own behavior: "getting into trouble," "mistakes," and not sending money for her mother and brother. M3 lists family, studies, and loneliness. M4 identifies only one source of worry: his boredom at weekends. [33]

#### *4.1.3 Extent of worry*

We computed an "extent of worry" score for each participant on their responses to questions about whether or not their worries disrupt their activities in five situations. The rating scores are shown in Table 2.2 with a range from 0 to 10, and Table 2.1 shows how each score is constructed. W1's score of 6 is relatively high, reflecting that her worries disrupt her sleep, but she is not sure about the other four situations. M3 has the maximum score (10), with "yes" disruption for all five situations. Both W2 and M4 have a low score of 2, but they construct them differently. W2 is not sure if her worries keep her from hanging out with friends or sleeping at night; M4's worries disrupt his sleep. [34]

When they are asked to rate Aya/Alī's level of worry (Table 2.3) and their own (2.4), and to explain their ratings, ratings are high (3) for W1 and M3; but low for W2 (2) and M4 (1). Only W2 gives different ratings for Aya's and her own worry (3 for Aya, 2 for herself). They all worry about their families, a theme already in their lists (see 2.5 in relation to 1.2, 1.7). W1 reiterates that she worries a lot about her own family, not the "other family" (her carers). She "can't stop thinking

about" her family's separation. W2's "2, more than a little bit" rating is triggered: "Everytime I hear the news." Her triggered worry is about her mother and other people in Africa. M3's high rating is because of "protection" for his family. M4 worries a little because of his distance from his family, "I'm alone in here." [35]

#### *4.1.4 Things that help*

Responses vary about anybody or anything that helps them not worry (Table 2.6). For W1, family reunion is the "only solution"; W2 has "no idea"; M3 specifies "talk to someone my own age," and M4 school and family. There are differences also in what they need to feel better (Table 3.1). W1 needs her family, but in contrast to the other three participants, she sees help only in herself and "just God" (3.2-3.4). Her strategy for helping herself is to deal with her "moods," release her anger, try to comfort herself, and "I pray." W2 also is unsure of help, "I don't know if anyone can help me," but identifies a young male friend and an aunt who helps with distracting talk. M3 repeats that he needs talk, following-up his earlier comment that talking with someone his own age helps him to not worry (2.6). Now he adds "so it keeps my mind busy." His parents help him to "feel secure." Other sources of help also involve friends. M4 does not specify any needs, but identifies teacher, friends and family as his helpers who listen to his problems and guide him. [36]

#### *4.1.5 Goals to achieve*

W1's goal for the next year is family reunion (Table 3.5), although she sees this as beyond her control (3.7). She lists the people (caseworker, lawyer, immigration) who can help her achieve that goal although she does not answer how, and she is uncertain if there is any other help (3.5-3.10). W2 also hopes for family reunion: to bring her mother "would change in my life" (3.5). She is doing her best, and the social worker is helping with her application. The goals of both young men are focused on their schoolwork. M3 sees his goal of achieving good marks in his final year as achievable by his efforts to "concentrate on my studies involves and stop worreying about my family"; and with good support from friends "in studying" (3.7, 3.10). M4 has specific goals related to his choice of school subjects and changing schools to make that goal more achievable (3.5). He sees these goals are achievable with "just the support" (3.7), adding his case manager to his helpers of teacher and friends who help with his schoolwork, and now leaving out family. [37]

M3 says he gets secure feelings from his family (Table 3.3), and other help from "making new friends" who can help socially and with his educational aspirations (3.4). M4 is helped to solve problems by his "school" and "my family," specifying teachers, friends and family (3.2-3.4). They also help with the schoolwork, and he adds his caseworker to people who give him "just support" (3.6-3.8). [38]

## 4.2 Themes in individualized profiles

The four young people expressed some similar concerns and hopes and some that were personalized. All four focused their expressions of worry on isolation from their families, but gave individualized interpretations of their isolation in relation to their life circumstances. [39]

### 4.2.1 Profile of W1

Reading W1's profile across the three tables reveals her preoccupation and fixed concentration on family separation and her hope for family reunion. She specifically summarizes these concerns in four points when explaining her high rating of worrying (3, a lot, at Table 2.4), and the concerns she lists there can be traced as a theme running through her responses to different questions and tasks. The links of her summary to other parts of the data can be seen in the following exegetical analysis of her expression at 2.5 in relation to other parts of the transcript:

<i>W1's explanation of I worry a lot because ... (at Table 2.5)</i>	<i>Re-occurring mentions</i>
I live with other family while my family is alive.	1.1, 3.1
I feel it is going to be long till I see and live with them.	3.1, 3.5
i really get concerned about their safety	1.2-1.4, 1.7
which I cannot stop thinking about.	1.4-1.5, 3.3-3.7 [40]

W1 mentions, as well, two closely related personal issues that are affecting her life. One involves not having concentrated on her "current activities like studying" (the only mention of her studies) that she attributes to her constant worry about her family (1.4). The other involves dealing with her own emotions: her "mood "anger with my self." [41]

### 4.2.2 Profile of W2

W2 mentions her theme of hope for family reunion throughout, especially the hope of reunion with her mother (1.3, 2.5, 3.5). It is her goal (3.5), and she develops her account of what she needs to achieve it (3.6-3.9). However, earlier when specifying the three things she worries about most, at 1.7, she referred to her own behavior patterns, with a clear list:

<i>W2's three things that worry her most (at Table 1.7)</i>
getting into trouble
making a mistake
if I haven't paid my mum or my brothers school fees [42]

Yet W2 does not refer to these explicit activities elsewhere in the interview. She does express concern about her own inner state, however, saying she is unsure "if anyone can help me," then proceeds to specify how her aunt and friend help by distracting her; "changing the topic make me laugh so I don't think about what just happened" (3.1-3.3). She does not specify the particular worry that requires

distraction. It may be the news about Africa (mentioned at 2.5); or her own behaviors from the 1.7 list; or something else. It would seem that instead of reiterating her personal concerns, W2 responds to the specific questions. She rates her worries as being "2, more than a little bit," with the content most about her mother, the trigger of African news. [43]

#### *4.2.3 Profile of M3*

M3 makes several mentions of the theme of his loneliness: coupling missing his family with his concern about their safety (Table 1.1); and specifying "loneliness" in his 1.7 list. It also re-occurs in his gaining help not to worry from "talking to someone of my age" (2.6), and "it keeps my mind busy" (3.1). A second theme is his need to succeed in his studies (1.7, 3.5-3.7, 3.10); and a third involves how his worries are distracting and disruptive of his personal and social life (e.g., in the extent of his worries [2.1, 2.2]; and being distracted by his worries [1.6, 3.7]). [44]

#### *4.2.4 Profile of M4*

M4's profile points to some different ways that he thinks about his family. He worries "a little bit" about their being in Afghanistan without security (Table 1.3) and also "too far from me" (2.5). Yet he lists family along with teachers and friends as those who currently help him with his problems and goals (2.6, 3.4, 3.7). This suggests he may be in touch with the family and able to draw upon their support for his focus on his education. [45]

M4 has a clear emphasis on his educational pursuits. His goals are specifically focused on a change to math and chemistry subjects and possibly a change of school that will make that possible (3.5). He specifies "just the support" as what he needs to achieve that achievable goal (3.6-3.7), and lists his supporters with repeated lists and some elaboration of their contributions (2.6, 3.4, 3.8, 3.9). He mentions his satisfaction with his current life, setting up that perspective in his initial comments (1.1), along with his boredom (1.4, 1.7), but he does not develop this as he emphasizes his schooling in Table 3 (3.5-3.9). [46]

In summary, the four profiles revealed both similarities and differences in these unaccompanied minors' themes and emphases. All four expressed concern about families still living in danger and about the effects of family separation on their present lives. This is not surprising. The CAI explicitly asked about worries for family left behind, and separation from family was a common feature of their life circumstances. Their expressions of worries, nevertheless, revealed added personalized issues: W1's way of turning questions onto her preoccupation with her own family to the exclusion of her foster family; W2's self-blame about her responsibilities; M3's intrusive loneliness, and M4's focus on his choice of school subjects. [47]

Along with family separation, family reunion figured largely in the young women's goals but not in the young men's. This difference may be related to their immigration status. The women had arrived as part of Australia's humanitarian

program and had entitlements to apply for family reunion that were not available for the young men who had arrived as uninvited asylum seekers. [48]

These differences also cannot be separated from gender. Both young women mentioned not wanting to cause anger in their carers, possibly reflecting their dependent status, but possibly also a sensitivity the men did not display. They denied any worry about the people where they lived. M3 had no capacity to worry about non-family members; M4 simply did not, he was happy with them. Their expressions may reflect either detachment or simply attention to more pressing preoccupations. Young men are often sent ahead with the responsibility of establishing themselves in advance to facilitate family arrivals. If that were the case for these two men, it also would have been part of their strongly expressed need to succeed educationally. [49]

It seems as if the normative transitional academic tasks of adolescence were eclipsed by the young women's exceptional circumstances, but were heightened for both young men. It would be difficult to see how W1 could have paid more attention to her studies, given her preoccupation and distraction by what she called her "splitting family." The young people's comments were contextualized in the specific circumstances of their backgrounds, means of arrival, and current living arrangements. [50]

## **5. Discussion**

Enabling unaccompanied minors to express their concerns and hopes in research provides a basis for understanding the intricacies of their wellbeing, and thus a basis for better informed support and advocacy. The CAI approach allowed these young people to express their individual perspectives in a safe research environment that gave them control over the views they contributed to knowledge and control over the progress of the interview. They were able to make comments in their own terms and with their own emphases in response to questions and tasks that had been theoretically designed to focus attention on the worries and goals that may either disturb or promote a sense of wellbeing in young refugees. The textual analysis was able to make connections across earlier and later comments in the transcripts in exegesis and interpreting their comments in the context and meaning of the young people's individualized concerns, for example, in W1's preoccupation with family reunion. [51]

In addition to noting the impact of the traumatic circumstances of unaccompanied minors' transitions (KAPLAN, 2013), it is important to be aware of the resettlement circumstances, and to be aware of their personalized interpretations and aspirations within those circumstances. The future as well as current wellbeing of these young people was closely tied to their life circumstances as they interpreted them. The hopes and aspirations of other disadvantaged young people similarly helped shaped the present views from which they were emerging (e.g., COFFEY et al., 2010; SEGINER, 2009). Family reunion filled the minds of the young women in this study, eclipsing other concerns for the future and the present. Their wellbeing was tied to family reunion. [52]

The study also extends evidence of unaccompanied minors' perspectives by asking what they thought would help them to feel better. Although this is a question service providers often ask refugee and other disadvantaged clients, it is not a standard inclusion in research on wellbeing (BEN-ARIEH, 2005). The young people's clearly described needs for support and distraction are in line with the gravity of family separation and the experience of worrying about their families and themselves. [53]

While details of young people's perspectives on their resettlement may be revealed using other methods, the CAI method is particularly useful in enabling young participants to express themselves with confidence and agency. It allows young refugees to explore and report their worries without a researcher's probing and without implications of pathology. These participants controlled the flow and the pace of their work on the computer program, although the questions and tasks were predetermined to present particular topics. They were free to construct their own answers and in fact, not to answer if they chose. [54]

Three of these young people took up the opportunity to respond positively to a question asking whether they would recommend the computer program to a friend (W1 did not answer). Reasons again were individualized: "So those young people know what is this program about as well" (W2); "because it will help the[m] to express their feelings" (M3); "[t]his program asks about your head what you are thinking" (M4). They judged the experience to be worthwhile. [55]

Obviously, CAI-based data construction and analysis cannot address all the aspects of young people's resettlement experiences. It is a short and focused research tool, but it yields a complete record of their comments in context, avoiding the reductionism and cherry-picking that can impede the appropriate representation of young people's ideas (MORSE, 2010; SPYROU, 2011). Our interpretations and inference structures are transparent, meeting DÁVILA's (2014) criterion for researching refugee young people. The tabulated data also represent an advance on the LAWRENCE and VALSINER (2003) use of tabulated data, because of the multiple forms of expression this CAI made possible. For example, this CAI has the facility to follow participants' choices with branching sequences, to invite their typed, open-ended responses as well as providing well described choices. Although some of the data points may yield minimal information when considered in isolation, they yield a pattern of emphases and themes when considered as a full interview set. [56]

It may be seen as a limitation of our approach that there were only four participants: a small number even for qualitative analyses. These four were the unaccompanied minors who were current clients of the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture. The provision of their complete profiles allowed these participants to pursue their own lines of reasoning and to generate their own patterns of response in context. We submit that these data and their transparent representation in context is a move towards a particular form of qualitative "thickness" where researcher interpretations are grounded in patterns of response both within and across participants (PONTEROTTO, 2006). The

representation of the complete transcripts in the tables makes researcher exegesis and interpretation transparent, and the keying to the tables allows the reader to inspect the interpretive process. [57]

Nevertheless, the data tables may be said to restrict us to a very small set of cases, but there are analytic procedures that would generate similar patterns for subgroups as a basis for further analyses in large samples (VON EYE, 2010). Profiles, for example, could be used to generate subgroups using techniques such as cluster analysis, and the clusters could then be compared for typical and atypical patterns. MARTINEZ-TORTEYA, BOGART, VON EYE & LEVENDOSKY (2009), for example, were able to represent and analyze typical and atypical patterns of details across people and across time in relation to children's experiences of family violence. The present data were generated at a single occasion and with a single interview. The approach readily lends itself to analyses of tracking changes across time. [58]

## **6. Conclusion**

The dominance of family reunion in the thinking expressed by these four unaccompanied minors is directly in line with the principle of the unity of the family outlined by UNHCR (1983) that stated that unaccompanied minor children should be reunited with their parents or guardians as promptly as possible. The data reveal the significance of that mandate for the young people's resettlement and wellbeing. It also revealed the importance of taking seriously young people's perspectives and supporting their participation in decision processes. Youthful expressions of concern for family members and hopes for reunification should be seen as reasonable contributions to plans and procedures and never as indicators of pathology. There are obvious differences in what is involved in family reunification for individuals in the short-term (as hoped for by these young women) or long-term (as guiding these young men's pursuit of success). The policy implications are clear. Resettlement success is tied to family. The practical support of agencies needs to be geared to working appropriately towards this solution in ways that include isolated young people as participants in decision and advocacy processes. [59]

In conclusion, this study points to the value of constructing a research environment that specifically enables refugee unaccompanied minors to give their own perspectives on their lives in resettlement. Those perspectives are valuable as research information that extends our limited understanding and as a basis for programs that realistically support vulnerable young people to rebuild their lives. [60]

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