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Influence of family hosting on refugee integration and its implication on social work practice: the French case

Influence de l'accueil familial sur l'intégration de réfugiés et implications pour la pratique du travail social : le cas français

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ABSTRACT

In addition to existing institutional barriers in European societies, refugee settlement and integration also faces numerous social challenges, such as discrimination and stigmatisation towards refugee groups. Family hosting is a bold refugee accommodation solution promoted by social workers across the European continent, which draws attention to the complexities of refugee support. This study examines family hosting in France to assess its influences on refugee integration in the host society. Through in-depth interviews with 34 multi-stakeholders (20 refugees, 10 hosting family members and 4 social workers) from different family hosting projects, family hosting has been proven to bring comprehensive influences to refugee integration, such as accumulation of social connection and cultivation of the sense of belonging. Nonetheless, it has also revealed potential limitations alongside the cohabitation process, for instance, the risk of negatively impacting refugees' privacy and experience of independence. In terms of the implication for future social work practice, the evidence showed that family hosting is not a once-and-for-all solution; it depends on the refugee's situation and requirements. In addition, for those refugees who are ready to be hosted, the research shows that different hosting schedules, either long-term or short-term, impact on how each case functions, with pros and cons.

RÉSUMÉ

En plus des obstacles institutionnels existants dans les sociétés européennes, l'installation et l'intégration de réfugiés se heurtent également à de nombreux défis sociaux, tels que la discrimination et la stigmatisation à l'égard des groupes de réfugiés. L'accueil familial, audacieuse solution pour l'hébergement de réfugiés proposée par des travailleurs sociaux sur l'ensemble du continent européen, attire l'attention sur la complexité du soutien aux réfugiés. Cette étude examine l'accueil familial tel qu'il se pratique en France, afin d'évaluer son influence sur l'intégration des réfugiés dans la société d'accueil. Grâce à des entretiens approfondis avec 34 personnes concernées à divers égards (20 réfugiés, 10 membres de familles d'accueil et quatre travailleurs sociaux) impliqués dans des programmes distincts d'accueil familial, il a été prouvé que ce type d'hébergement contribuait de façon prépondérante à l'intégration de réfugiés selon diverses dimensions, notamment le développement de liens sociaux et du sentiment

KEYWORDS

Family hosting; refugee accommodation; refugee integration; European social work; French social work

MOTS-CLÉS

accueil familial; hébergement de réfugiés; intégration de réfugiés; travail social en Europe; travail social en France

d'appartenance. Néanmoins, l'étude a également révélé des limites potentielles de la cohabitation, par exemple, le risque de porter atteinte à la vie privée des réfugiés et à leur indépendance. En termes d'implication pour le travail social, cette étude a démontré que l'hébergement familial n'est pas toujours une solution parfaite ; cela dépend de la situation et des besoins du réfugié. En outre, pour les réfugiés prêts à être hébergés, cette recherche montre que différents calendriers d'accueil, à court ou long terme, ont une incidence sur chaque cas, avec leurs avantages et leurs inconvénients.

Introduction

In the face of the rapid influx of refugees, the current responses of European governments have been broadly regarded as insufficient due to the lack of humanitarian consideration under their international obligation (UNHCR, 2016). For instance, in France, the demolition of the Calais camp has led a large number of asylum seekers, who try to transmigrate through the French border to reach England, sleeping rough on the street (Merriman, 2016). In Greece, the failure of the refugee camp winterisation programme left thousands of refugees sleeping in temporary camps without heating systems in the middle of freezing winters (Kingsley, 2016). In response to this humanitarian plight, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched a presentation to the European Union (EU) asking for a far-reaching reform on its engagement with worldwide refugee phenomenon, as well as its internal asylum systems. This initiative called for a major investment to integrate the refugee population into the EU local communities, which includes providing refugees with decent housing conditions, employment opportunities and language training (UNHCR, 2016).

Under such circumstances, family hosting – also referred to as home-sharing (Bassoli & Campomori, 2018) or domestic hospitality (Bassoli & Oggioni, 2017) – comes to attention as an emerging refugee accommodation solution in Europe. Differentiated from government-led refugee accommodations such as refugee camps, by encouraging local households to host refugees in their spare family rooms, family hosting aims to achieve better integration from the very beginning of the settlement process. It seeks to provide space and opportunity to facilitate contact and mutual understanding between refugees and the local population. Under this refugee accommodation arrangement, hosting families are expected to not only provide a safe and stable living space to the hosted refugees, but also help them approach local culture and customs, improve language skills and get access to job market, etc. By doing so, refugees living with local families are expected to integrate into the host society more effectively (Estrin, 2016).

Along with a few successful pilot projects conducted across European countries, such as the family hosting schedule under the *Refugees Welcome* movements in the UK (Wiles, 2016) and Italy (Refugees Welcome Italia, 2018), family hosting has been increasingly favoured by both civil societies and government agencies owing to its flexibility and efficiency. Although it has already been promoted by mass media worldwide (Estrin, 2016; Wiles, 2016), to date, the impact of family hosting on refugees' integration has been poorly investigated in academia. In order to inform broader social work practices on refugee accommodation issues, this research was designed to examine the actual influences of family hosting on refugee integration by using the case of France, who faces vital challenges of refugee reception and settlement. The refugee population we investigated in this study does not include unaccompanied minors, this is because in the EU context unaccompanied minors are normally supported by the children's services with distinctive supporting systems.

Setting up the scene: from refugee issues to family hosting in France

France is one of the major EU members confronting challenges on refugee issues. For 2016, the UNHCR counted 368,687 refugees, from which 62,771 were asylum seekers, living on the French

territory (UNHCR, 2017). The French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless registered 63,935 new requests for asylum seeking in 2016 and 92,338 in 2018 (OFPRA, 2019). This compares to 1,268,845 refugees living in Germany and 34,360 in Spain in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017). While debate rages about whether French policy should be more open-minded or more restrictive toward refugees, the precarious living condition of the asylum-seeking and refugee groups living within its territory, especially in its northern coast (Calais and Dunkirk), continues to draw attention (Bulman, 2018).

In 2016, following a spontaneous movement of citizens (Gourdeau, 2019), the French government launched a programme called *'hébergement citoyen'* (*Citizen Accommodation*), which aimed to improve refugee accommodation under the cooperation between the French government and civil society (DIHAL, 2019; McGuinness, 2016). More particularly, this programme encourages local families to help addressing refugee accommodation challenges by hosting refugees at their own residences. Eleven organisations were funded by the government to provide systematic guidance and supervision alongside the entire hosting process, such as recruiting hosting families and refugees, providing hosting training, support and evaluation. In 2017 and 2018, totally 650 refugees had been hosted from 3 to 12 months under this programme, and in 2019, 21 organisations were selected by the government in order to expand this practice (DIHAL, 2019).

'Welcome' run by Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) France, 'ELAN' by Samu Social de Paris and 'CALM' by Singa are the few examples of the family hosting programmes in France. In 2018, 1945 families were involved in the 'Welcome' programme, hosting 860 refugees and asylum seekers for 83,670 nights all over France (JRS France, 2019). Samu Social doesn't give numbers of families involved, but a publication from 2018 stated that 57 people had been hosted since 2016 (Samu Social, 2018). In their 2017 report, Singa announced that 172 people had been hosted by 136 families (Singa France, 2019).

Apart from being run by agencies with different social, political and religious backgrounds, family hosting programmes in France also differ from each other in terms of working mechanism, such as the length of hosting (stretching from a few weeks to more than one year for each hosting) and the degree of hosting support (some provide only basic training for participants about cohabitation principles and minimal supervision alongside the hosting, some provide more comprehensive services including psychosocial counselling and ongoing supervision).

Within those hosting programmes, social workers normally play major roles in programme management, which includes but is not limited to developing hosting schedules and integrating supplementary resources, as well as providing direct frontline services to hosting families and refugees, such as hosting training, supervision and evaluation.

Refugee accommodation and integration

Existing literature on refugee integration has unanimously pointed out the crucial role that refugee accommodation plays in shaping the outcome of refugee integration in the host society (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Phillips, 2006).

From a macro and system perspective, research has successfully built up a paradigm which suggests that the more effectively the refugee accommodation arrangement can bridge between refugee and local population, the better the refugee integration outcome will be. Phillips (2006) argued that when a refugee accommodation plan bears a holistic and community-centred approach, it appears more likely to work toward a successful refugee integration. UNHCR (2010) claims that the capacity of the refugee accommodation linking between refugee population and host communities determines the settlement quality and integration outcomes, while Valenta and Bunar (2010) revealed that a segregated arrangement in refugee accommodation could lead to higher stigmatisation and vulnerability for refugee groups.

From a micro and interactive perspective, researchers have explored the nuanced mechanism behind different refugee accommodation arrangements and attempted to explain how they result

in distinct refugee integration outcomes. Thus, the physical size, quality and facility of the accommodation arrangement have been proven to bring direct impact on shaping refugees' overall physical and emotional well-being, which ultimately leads to distinct integration outcomes, for instance, a sense of safety and stability (Bernier, 1992; Dutch Refugee Council/ECRE, 2001). Secondly, since refugee integration requests efforts to be made from both refugee and host populations (Strang & Ager, 2010), if the accommodation arrangement can provide sufficient space and opportunity to accelerate conversation and mutual understanding between refugee and host populations, the integration outcome will be enhanced (Masso, 2009; Valtonen, 2008). This could build up upon social capital which functions as a stimulator for refugee's emotional well-being against stress and isolation, as well as an opportunity provider for employment and education in the host society (Anabtawi & Al Amad, 2017).

In general, refugee accommodation has been proven to shape refugee integration outcomes either in a progressive or inhibited way. As a vital implication, Strang and Ager (2010) also indicate that the refugee integration outcomes are largely influenced by whether the accommodation planning could address the intrinsic demands of refugee integration as a long-term and two-way social process.

Existing literature on family hosting as an alternative solution for refugee settlement and integration issues is extremely limited. The scarce of availed English-language literature mainly focuses on how this initiative situates in the current social, cultural and political landscapes. Bassoli and Oggioni (2017) revealed how an Information Technology (IT) based approach could benefit the organisation of such projects to overcome geographic and administrative restraints. Bassoli and Campomori (2018) discussed how the home-sharing practices are constructed as a co-production involving multi-stakeholders from public to private sectors under the Italian refugee policies. The study we are presenting here focusses on the impact of family hosting on refugee integration outcomes.

Methodology

In order to determine the influence of family hosting on refugee integration from a comprehensive perspective, in-depth interviews were conducted with multiple stakeholders (i.e. refugees, hosting family members and social workers involved with hosting programmes).

Prior to individual interviews, a focus group comprising three hosted refugees, two social workers and two hosting family members was conducted in February 2017, where participants' perceptions and experiences on refugee integration issues were discussed and recorded under consent. Based on the information drawn from this group, the individual interview schedules were developed. These interview schedules cover a wide range of open-ended questions to probe the relation between refugee integration and family hosting, such as the changes in health condition, social connection, language and cultural competence, education and employment opportunities by participating in family hosting.

Aiming to build up a trustful relationship with the participants, purposive sampling was applied at the beginning, based on the researcher's social networks gained from volunteering at refugee service organisations. Later on, the snowballing method was carried out to reach a wider range of participants. Paris and Marseille were selected as locations for conducting data collection due to the high presence of refugee population and hosting families.

In total, 34 interviews were conducted in English from February to June 2017, including 20 refugees, 10 hosting family members and 4 social work practitioners. It is helpful to understand the demographic information of the participants. In terms of the 20 refugees: 6 of them self-identified as Buddhists, 6 as Muslims, 5 as Atheists and three as Christians; 7 of them are from Syria, 6 of them are from Tibet, 4 from Bangladesh and 3 from Zimbabwe; 17 are male and 3 are female; 19 of them are between 20 and 30 years old, with only one over 30 years old. In terms of the hosting families, Table 1 summarises the information of the interviewed household members and their

Table 1. Information of interviewed household members and their households.

| Name | Region | Gender | Religion | Age | Occupation | Accommodation type | Household composition |
|---------|-----------|--------|----------|-----|---------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Thomas | Paris | M | Atheist | 42 | Engineer | House | 2 parents, 2 children |
| Lai | Paris | F | Atheist | 37 | Civil servant | House | 2 parents, 1 child |
| Tom | Paris | M | Catholic | 56 | Doctor | House | 1 couple |
| Emma | Paris | F | Catholic | 64 | Retired | Boat | 1 retiree |
| Mich | Paris | F | Atheist | 34 | Company staff | Apartment | Single female |
| Steph | Paris | F | Atheist | 28 | Company staff | Apartment | 1 couple |
| Michael | Paris | M | Catholic | 63 | Retired | House | 2 retirees |
| Hanna | Marseille | F | Atheist | 38 | Social worker | House | 2 parents, 1 child |
| Cecile | Marseille | F | Catholic | 47 | Civil Servant | House | 2 parents, 4 children |
| Allo | Marseille | M | Catholic | 69 | Retired | House | 2 retirees |

households. All names are pseudonyms. The four social work practitioners are all working in family hosting programmes from different social organisations in France.

Findings: an all-around influence

According to the empirical data, participating in family hosting brings various influences towards refugees' integration in the host society, which shapes not only refugees' individual capacity to deal with integration challenges, but also external factors facilitating their integration progresses.

Towards individual capacity to deal with integration challenges

Language skill stimulation

In the host society, being able to speak the major language has been constantly identified as a key capacity for the migrant groups to achieve social interaction, economic integration and full participation (Home Office, 2004), which is equally applicable to refugees. During the research interviews, the respondents frequently mentioned how partaking in family hosting can influence the hosted refugees' language skills. For instance, Jean from Zimbabwe explained:

My host family knows how to speak English, but they insist to talk with me in French to improve mine ... Sometimes I am very shy to speak French, but they always encourage me.

Meanwhile, a social work practitioner in Marseille also shared her observation:

One of the major improvements for refugees to stay with local families is their French language skill ... I remember one refugee who used to speak nothing in French. But after he lived with a local family for a few months, he can even use French to ask me questions!

Being able to immerse in the language environment is significant for language learning progress. As the above interviews revealed, by living with the local families, refugees are exposed to all-around opportunities and learning resources, as well as given encouragement from the hosts to enhance their capacity and confidence for improving their language skills. The interviews also gave evidence of how families adopted diverse methods to help the hosted refugees to learn the language. Tina, who is hosting a refugee from Syria, gave an example:

I think watching movies and TV programmes is very helpful ... Alongside the process, we explained him the words and phrases that he could not understand.

Eric's host uses radio to help him learn French:

Every day, as long as I am at home, they always leave the radio on until I sleep to help me practice my listening.

Stephen's host uses pictures drawn by herself to teach him French:

My host lady decided to draw pictures and use them to explain me what they are in French. She has drawn literally every evening for me and that helps me a lot!

Mitigating cultural knowledge gap

Ager and Strang (2008) proposed that a broader cultural knowledge including 'both refugees' knowledge of national and local procedures, customs and facilities and, though to a lesser extent, non-refugees' knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees' (p. 182), enables better refugee integration. This research showed that family hosting can also effectively bridge the cultural gaps between the hosted refugee and hosting family members, thereby to some extent, facilitating mutual understandings between them to reach better integration outcomes. For example, from the perspective of refugees, Rebecca from Bangladesh explained how she understood the family hosting can contribute to this aspect:

When you are looking at their life, living together with them, that's how you are learning the French culture and lifestyle. Better than any class!

Jessica, who is hosting a refugee mum with two children, provided two more detailed examples. The first one is about gender equality:

We talked a lot about culture differences, especially when it comes to the education for children. She thought girls should just stay at home doing housework, but boys should not ... since we are living together, she and her children can see and experience the differences from our life. For example, she always saw my husband doing laundry at home ... And I think now she knows what we mean by boys and girls are equal here.

The second one is about religious bias:

She told me she used to think the Western countries are a little bit like monsters. But after she lived together with us, she was surprised that my family is just a normal family like anyone else. Also, about Christianity, she is Muslim, and she used to think Christianity is not good. But in the end, she realised that our values are very close, so she changed her ideas about us.

In addition to helping refugees learn about local culture, Claire's hosting experience illustrated how local families strengthened their understanding of the refugee's culture and religion through the hosting process:

When my children started to talk about racist jokes heard from the media and schools, we were worried. I mean, they never meet any Muslim, they probably don't know who they are or why they do things differently ... After we open our door to a Muslim refugee, my children started to have the opportunity to know them, about their culture and religion ... they are good friends now, and I realised that my children stopped talking about racist jokes ever since then.

Being situated in a common living space, distinct life experiences based on different culture and religions are brought together with the opportunities to deepen their mutual understanding, or possibly reconcile their previous misunderstandings against each other. Once again, this finding reaffirmed that family hosting can be in conformity with the intrinsic characteristic of refugee integration as a two-way process where family hosting can facilitate the mutual understanding and respect between refugee and the local population.

Health improvement

Health condition has been long recognised as a vital resource for a refugee's active engagement in the new society, and it is closely affected by a refugee's living environment (e.g. Bernier, 1992). This research confirmed that family hosting also can contribute to refugee's health improvement, both physically and mentally. Jasmine is from Bangladesh and her experience is testament to this kind of impact:

I was living in a hospital waiting room. During that time, I got serious backache since I was sleeping on the bench. After I came to this family, I can sleep well in a proper bed, so my back recovered!

Alex from Zimbabwe also shared his experience about his health improvement by living with the local family in Paris.

When I slept outside on the street, I used to get cold or headache every day. But now I am all good.

Jason, a host in Marseille mentioned a similar situation based on his hosting experience:

When he (the hosted refugee) first time came to our house, he didn't look very well and got sick very often ... We provide him better living environment, fine food, also health suggestion and assistance if he needs, now he is much better.

Refugees reported suffering from poor health caused by living arrangements prior to the hosting, such as sleeping rough or in a poorly equipped shelter. Following their welcome into local family homes, the decent and well-equipped accommodations improved their health condition. In addition, the cohabitation process also allows hosting families to provide extra health advice and assistance when needed.

Family hosting's influence on refugee's mental health has also been testified. Carlos, a refugee from Syria explained:

I was living with my relatives. We were with his wife and two children in a 35-square meter room. I could not stay at home all the time and it was depressing ... After I lived together with this (hosting) family, I have my own space and I feel happier and belonged. This change enables me to do more things to improve my life.

Although he was living with his own relatives, the confined living situation brought enormous stress, which further affected his personal life. In order to achieve positive change, Carl chose to join a local family hosting project and experienced drastic changes to his mental health. This change not only eased his growing lethargy, but also promoted a stress-free mentality that enables him to 'do more things' to ameliorate his life in the host society.

Towards external factors facilitating refugee integration progresses

Employment support

Employment is a well-researched area for integration issues, due to its crucial influence on refugee's day-to-day life and overall well-being, such as promoting their economic independence, restoring self-esteem and encouraging self-reliance (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). Across the interviews, while the respondents unanimously expressed their concern about the challenge to integrate refugees into the local labour market, this research found that hosting families quite often play active roles in assisting hosted refugees to find job opportunities. For example, a hosted refugee from Syria stated:

When I was looking for jobs, they (hosting family) explained to me what kind of job was needed here. Also, they helped me make my CV, wrote it in French, and posted it on the Internet.

A social worker in Paris region also observed:

I noticed that our hosting families always play important roles in helping refugees to reach local employment, sometime they even introduce jobs to refugees directly.

The two major ways for hosting families to facilitate refugee employment were career advice and direct job-seeking support. Refugees expressed they always face overwhelming challenges in finding job opportunities, for instance, the lack of job market information and confronting huge language and cultural barriers (Griffiths & Loy, 2018). Practices, like writing a CV in the local language and looking for vocational training, are more difficult for them than for local jobseekers. Opportunities for refugees to mitigate employment challenges could be created by hosting families.

An interview with a family member from Marseille revealed another important aspect: acting like a 'guard' to ensure refugee's employment safety, which effectively resolved the risk for refugee to step into the illegal labour market and breach local labour legislations:

She used to work illegally ... We were afraid that she would be exploited or possibly break the law, so later we helped her find another job, which is legal and much more stable.

Lifting educational opportunity

Educational opportunity for refugees in the host society is a means to provide them skills and competences in support of subsequent employment and further enable them to become more constructive and active members of the society (Ager & Strang, 2008). The research interviews also brought to light the influence of family hosting on promoting refugee's educational opportunities. For instance, a hosted refugee in a Paris suburb said:

My (hosting) family helped me to contact and build up the relationship with the university. Also, they helped me make my application, because when I arrived here, I didn't speak French.

Jessica, the mother from a French family in Paris who is hosting a refugee mum with two children said:

We contacted a group of friends to support her (the hosted refugee) children. With the help, the two children are both going to schools.

The hosting families provide help to hosted refugees to reach local educational opportunities. In order to do so, they not only act like an agency to bridge refugees to the local educational institutions with solid assistance, such as contacting schools or preparing documents, but they also utilise their social networks when needed. Those actions, on the one hand, directly alleviate the institutional and cultural challenges for refugees to approach educational opportunities in the new society; on the other hand, it could also ease the stress of refugees by being a recipient of local hospitality. However, the hosting experience of a Tibetan refugee in Paris revealed that not all the hosting families are able to provide this kind of help, which rather depends on the circumstances of the hosting family, for example, the financial capacity and social networks owned by the family members.

I really want to go to university, but my host family cannot help me. It is not their fault, just because they know nobody and nothing about it.

Moreover, besides providing the help for refugees to approach formal education, this research also found that living with local families could give hosted refugees the chance to receive useful informal education, which can further stimulate their integration outcomes, for instance, life skills needed to live in the society. Maria, a hosting lady in Marseille explained:

One of the people that we hosted almost set my house on fire because she didn't know how to use the gas ... There are many things we taught her, like how to cook with our tools, how to use the washing machine.

Carl is a Tibetan refugee living with a local family in Paris, he said:

My (hosting) family taught me a lot, like how to use different community services. Those are the things you only can learn by living with locals.

Apparently, the differences between refugees' original and host societies, such as lifestyle and living condition, could make their integration process tougher in the host community. However, evidence shows that being hosted by the local families enables new life skills and knowledge to be easily delivered to refugees through their daily interactions with the locals. Therefore, family hosting also becomes an effective informal educational channel to enhance refugee integration in the host society.

Social connection enhancement

The interviews confirm that family hosting is a platform to accelerate refugees' social connections in various ways. Jimmy's family is hosting a refugee from Tibet:

When our families and friends come to our house, we always introduce him (the hosted refugee) to them.

From the refugee perspective, Victor from Syria shared his experience about how his hosting family helps him to build up his own social connections in the new society:

They took me out and introduced me to their friends so we can share our different life experiences and culture ... I am friends with many of their friends now, and they often give me advice or help, for example, one of them even introduced me a job.

By living together with local families, refugees often are gifted with social connections from their hosts, either deliberately or not. As time goes by, those connections strengthen and ultimately turn into social capital that could help them better navigate the social, cultural and political structures of the host society. It eliminates barriers for refugees' social engagement in the host society and further facilitates the interactions between refugees and host populations. More importantly, it also stimulates refugees' sense of safety and being accepted. This social capital echoes Ager and Strang's (2008) idea of 'social bridge' and 'social link'. The former implies the connections between the refugees and other social groups/communities in the host society, and the latter indicates the connection between refugees and the structures of the host state (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Nevertheless, similar to the capacity to support refugee's educational needs discussed previously, a small number of interviews also disclosed that not every hosting family could provide sufficient social connections to support the refugee. In fact, it largely depends on the social connections owned by the hosting family itself.

This research also uncovered another kind of improved social connection during the hosting process: a 'bonding' relation between refugees and their own ethnic groups and separated families. For example, Kelvin from Tibet stated:

My host encourage me to contact with other Tibetans living in this area, sometimes even allow me to invite them home. This makes me feel very comfortable, because when I meet them, I can speak my own language, also I can practice my own religion.

Carolina, who is hosting a female refugee from Bangladesh, confirmed this:

I think family is very important to her ... We provided her a phone so that she could call her mum who is still living in Bangladesh.

The support from the hosting families has been effective in facilitating connections between the hosted refugees and their own ethnic groups and separated family members. This kind of social connection has often been identified as an important bonding relation (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hale, 1993; Strang & Ager, 2010). According to numerous empirical studies, including this one, this kind of relationship has been proven to be able to offer refugees the chance to maintain their own cultural and religious practices, use their own language, celebrate their traditions or exchange news from their home country (Duke, Sales, & Gregory, 1999; Hale, 1993). As a result, the refugees feel more well-settled in the new society due to their promoted sense of being accepted, in a safe and stable environment, whereas the lack of this connection might cause refugees higher risk of depression compared with their source-available counterparts (Beiser, 1993).

Another side: issues identified from family hosting

Apart from positive influences on refugees' integration, a small number of interviews also unveiled two critical issues that refugees might encounter while partaking in family hosting, namely the risk of negatively impacting refugees' privacy and experience of independence.

About independence

Ben is from Syria and he had already been hosted by a family in Paris for more than one year by the time he took part in this study. He observed:

I think if I need help, I will ask them, but not like they always ask me to do anything, like urging me to look for a new job ... I am an engineer. I can manage myself ... I don't want to rely on them, I want to be independent!

Jack has had similar experiences with his hosting family:

There was one time she cleaned my room without my permission. I was actually planning to clean it in the weekend after I finish my work! I can clean it by myself, I don't need they to do everything for me! I am not a child.

When the concern or help from the hosting family became overwhelming, the hosted refugee experienced a sense of direct stress, their capacity of independence declined. Over time, if this situation did not improve, it could hinder the refugee's integration process due to the impact on their mental health, limiting opportunities for being independent in the host society.

About privacy

Privacy issues during the cohabitation were also raised from the interviews. For example, Lily from Syria said:

I don't like people entering my room, it is my private space. But sometimes, my hosts came into my room without my permission, that makes me feel unsafe and not respected.

Not the same as Lily, Ben's concern is more about the privacy of his personal life:

My (hosting) family asked me everything, such as, the detailed information of my current job contract, who are my friends I am hanging out with. But I don't really want to tell them everything, it is my privacy.

Either for personal living space or life outside the home, being able to seclude oneself or present oneself selectively is a crucial part of individual's right to privacy. Being able to hold this right, people are given the space to be oneself without judgment and allowed to think freely without discrimination, which further heightens one's sense of safety (Manu, 2007). Nonetheless, the above interviews revealed that, either intentionally or not, some behaviours of the hosting family members actually infringed the hosted refugees' rights to privacy and further triggered their sense of unsafety and disrespect during the cohabitation process. Given the significant function of being able to hold the rights to privacy, if this issue is not handled with care, the anticipated refugee integration outcome would also be crippled.

The issues of independence and privacy somehow indicate a potential unbalanced power relation between the host and hosted, which could contribute to tensions or even conflicts in the hosting relation. If this tension could not be eased, it would further sabotage the hosting experiences of both refugees and hosting families, which could further jeopardise the outcomes of refugee integration in the host society.

Discussion: the implications for social work practice

Based on the findings, this section offers further discussions on how social work practice could apply family hosting to lift refugee reception to better integration outcomes.

First of all, social work practitioners who are selecting participants for hosting projects must consider the criteria of a suitable refugee participant, and this rationale lies in the reality that family hosting is not a one-for-all solution (Asokan, 2015). In fact, many factors could determine the suitability of refugees to join the hosting project. For example, refugees' existing social capitals, cultural competence and language skills. Across the refugee participants from this study, most of whom were eager to participate in family hosting were newly arrived refugees who had been in France less than one year with very limited social capital and language skill to survive on their own. In contrast, those refugees who can speak better French and bear more social capitals, for instance, having a fulltime job with sufficient income, have started to look beyond the participation in family hosting projects to search for independence in the host society. Otherwise, just like some interviews stated, living with the local family might hinder their self-reliance and independence, which eventually jeopardises their successful integration.

The timing to provide family hosting for the refugees relates to several aspects. Firstly, however long the refugee has already been in the host society, a stable living environment is a paramount factor to establish their overall physical and emotional well-being, as well as their ability to feel at home (Ager & Strang, 2008). Secondly, the early settlement experiences of the refugees, to a great extent, shape their integrations outcomes (Castles, Miller, & Ammendola, 2005). Moreover, as noticed from the previous discussion, due to insufficient local life skills and social capitals, most of the newly arrived refugees are living in a relatively fragile situation. Taking these factors into consideration, the best time for family hosting should be as early as possible once refugees arrive in the hosting society.

The evidence from this study suggests that, to ensure a successful hosting process, systematic training for the participants prior to the hosting and ongoing supervision alongside the hosting are needed. Except setting up the principles for multi-stakeholders participating in the hosting, the training should also address major issues identified from previous hosting practices, such as training the hosting family members about how to take care of the hosted refugee's privacy and respect their independence during the cohabitation. The supervision ought to monitor the ongoing hosting projects in order to support both the hosted refugees and hosting families.

A critical aspect raised from this research lies in the time duration for hosting refugees. In one of the programmes involved in this research, long-term hosting could be stretched to more than one year, but in another, short-term hosting only takes four to six weeks. Some social workers think long-term hosting is better for refugees because it provides a stable living environment to promote their sense of safety and stability. Existing research confirms that long-term stable accommodation facilitates refugees' sense of belonging and security and access to social connection and public services, thence contributing to their independence for future integration (Phillips, 2006). However, some social workers involved in this research suggested that participating in long-term hosting can be a stressful process for both refugees and hosting families therefore short-term hosting might benefit refugees more. They explained that staying dynamic by regularly changing hosting families could improve refugees' independence and autonomy to face upcoming challenges. In addition, being hosted by different families is also a good way for refugees to achieve broader social networks. Short-term hosting could decrease the stress for both parties during the cohabitation. Relief of such stress might accelerate refugees' integration by offering them a relatively easy-going environment. Simultaneously, hosting families are freed from the rigid hosting schedules and provided with more alternatives: they know when to start and end the host; also, they can choose freely whether to keep hosting another refugee or not after the previous hosting. To some extent, this short-term commitment can actually sustain such hosting projects by lowering the participation threshold for local families. Without doubt, it is also easier for families and refugees to deal with their parting emotions when the cohabitation ends, compared with long-term hosting. Therefore, we posit that neither short-term nor long-term hosting is perfect. Social work practitioners need to know the pros and cons of both hosting patterns and how to apply them in practice. One can take inspiration from lessons learnt in childcare arrangements in foster families: since long-term and short-term foster care solve childcare issues differently, social work practitioners in this field often keep both arrangements to deal with different cases according to the situation of each child. In order to benefit the fostered children most, both long-term and short-term placements are guided by a long-term view beyond time-scale, aiming to provide a high-quality experience of upbringing throughout the child's stay (Boddy, 2013). Similarly, the family hosting might be designed into both long-term and short-term styles to serve different refugees in accordance with their individual needs. Social work practitioners need to think beyond the hosting duration and treat refugee integration as a long-term process.

When it comes to the end of each hosting, social work practitioners should also pay significant attention to the well-being of refugees. The evaluation of whether the refugee should exit the hosting or not is critical, and it should comprise both feedback from refugees about their willingness

and experiences and professional assessment from social workers. After this evaluation, some refugees might continue to be hosted by local families so that they could earn more time to prepare for their future independency; others might exit right away from the hosting to continue their lives more autonomously. Somehow, particularly to those who exit hosting projects, social services, such as employment and educational support, as well as regular visiting by social workers to re-evaluate their daily life demands, should be continuously provided to fulfil refugee integration in the host society.

Conclusion

Family hosting arose as a refugee accommodation solution within a worldwide tendency of socialisation of refugee care. By looking at the example of France, this study revealed multifaceted influences that family hosting can bring to refugee integration, such as promoting overall well-being and accumulation of social capital. Notwithstanding, it also uncovered limitations of the hosting projects, for instance, the risk of negatively impacting refugees' privacy and experience of independence. To cope with such limitations, this research suggested that comprehensive training to the participants and ongoing supervision alongside the entire hosting process are needed. Evidence also concludes that family hosting is not a once-and-for-all solution to deal with refugee accommodation issues. The suitability of refugees to join the family hosting largely depends on the situation and requirement of each refugee. In addition, even for those refugees who are ready to be hosted, different hosting schedules, long-term or short-term, have been shown to function differently in individual cases, each with pros and cons.

This research provided a heuristic exploration on an emerging refugee accommodation solution. It will hopefully offer a launching pad for further investigations and critical reflections on social work practices led by the growing trend of socialisation of refugee care.

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