

The Employment Experiences of Qualified Refugees in the UK and the Impact on Identity, Integration, and Wellbeing: A Qualitative Enquiry

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Abstract : Background: Unemployment levels among refugees in the UK are much higher than voluntary migrants and UK-born citizens. The lack of employment and/or of suitable employment has detrimental consequences on refugees' ability to integrate and become active citizens in the host country. Research indicates that, when individuals are forced to migrate, one of the most significant aspects to building their identity is their previous profession; this particularly applies to qualified refugees. Despite this, there is little support available to them. The current study is set in this context and aims to explore highly qualified refugees' employment-related experiences in the UK as well as their suggestions on how to develop specific interventions that can support them in finding suitable employment. Methods: A qualitative study design was employed. Qualitative methods are in fact well suited to research with refugees, as they allow them to give their direct opinion, rather than this being filtered by stakeholders. Listening to 'the refugee's voice' means developing 'a refugee centered perspective' where the diverse narratives told by participants are organized to tell their direct collective story. A total of 12 refugees, attending a non-profit refugee organization in the south-west of England, took part in the study. The selection criteria were being over 18, having a level of English that allows them to sustain a conversation, and having a University degree and/or professional qualification. All participants were interviewed individually; the data were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Findings: Participants had very little support in finding suitable employment; this often only consisted of a few sessions in their local job centers and English tutorials. They indicated that being unemployed/underemployed negatively affected their sense of identity, their acculturative stress, and their in-group/ out-group relations. They suggested that specific employment interventions for qualified refugees should be delivered to them individually in order to address their specific needs. Furthermore, most participants suggested that these interventions should support them in volunteering in organizations that match their skills/ qualifications. They also indicated that the employment interventions should support them in having their qualifications recognized in the UK as well as building links with universities/ centers where they can receive adequate training on how to understand and adapt to the employments needs in the UK. Conclusions: These findings will provide the basis for the second stage of the research where specific employment interventions will be designed and tested with highly qualified refugees. In addition, these findings shed light refugee integration policy.

Keywords : employment interventions, identity, integration, qualified refugees

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