

Refugee Families' Experience of Research Participation

Kari Dyregrov,^{1,2} Atle Dyregrov,¹ and Magne Raundalen¹

Because refugees can experience crisis, bereavement, and traumatization, there has been a rapid increase of research carried out with refugees. This study investigated how refugee families respond to participation in research. A previous study explored how adults and children had communicated about the difficult question of repatriation after arriving in a new country. Did the in-depth interviews harm or benefit them? Are there any ethical risks in research on traumatized refugees? From an original sample of 74 Bosnian refugees (5–73 years), 30 family members from 9 families including 14 children aged 6 to 19, were re-interviewed. The refugees rated participation as positive. A few parents lacked information that could have enabled them to inform the children better before the interviews. The study shows that studies on traumatized/bereaved populations can have beneficial effects.

KEY WORDS: research participation; research on refugees; bereavement research; interview effects.

There have been many assumptions made about the potential risk of letting traumatized people participate in research. Will the research make life even harder to cope with because sad memories and thoughts are revived? Is the researcher exploiting persons in a vulnerable position? Will the traumatized person be capable of giving informed consent to participate in the research?

Some researchers have warned about potential harmful effects from interviewing individuals in crisis (Hundeide, 1995; Knudsen, 1992). Macklin (1978) raised the question of whether consent given under trying circumstances meets the test of being freely and rationally given. Dickens (1981) identified the risk to participants in bereavement research of suffering human indignity, being deceived or being used as objects. These and other ethical issues have been raised in connection with conducting research on bereaved populations (Cook, 1995). Researchers

¹Center for Crisis Psychology, Fabrikkg. 5, 5059 Bergen, Norway; e-mail: kdyregro@online.no.

²To whom correspondence should be addressed.

who have wanted to do research in socially sensitive fields have been twice as likely to be rejected with proposals to Institutional Review Boards (Ceci, Peters, & Plotkin, 1985). The foremost reason given for nonapproval was the protection of human subjects. However, Ceci et al. (1985) found that a major reason seemed to be the possible sociopolitical consequences of the research of sensitive topics. Although many authors have identified the risks of participating in bereavement research, fewer have investigated whether there could be potential advantages from participation. Balk (1983) states that much more information is needed to enlighten the interrelationships between the expressions of emotions during interviews with grieving persons and the perceived stress experienced. The expressed emotions are not necessarily caused *by* the interview, as the interview might be seen as a possibility of expression (Balk, 1983).

To our knowledge, research on these issues stems primarily from follow-up studies of individuals in grief after a death in the family. In general, the bereavement studies reveal a positive effect of being the focus of interest and concern. Researchers, clinicians, and interviewers report that the client "felt good" when taken seriously and being the focus of caring attention (Beskow, Runeson, & Åsgård, 1991; Cook & Bosley, 1995; Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 1999; Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986). A follow-up study of suicidal bereavement by Runeson and Beskow (1991) showed that initiating talk about the suicide facilitated future family communication. They also found a therapeutic effect of the interviews, as have others (Barthels, 1987; Brent, 1989; Beskow & Runeson, 1990; McNiel, Hatcher, & Reubin, 1988). Being given an opportunity to relate thoughts and feelings about a loss or a traumatic event, even in written form, has been shown to have beneficial effects (Nader & Pynoos, 1991; Pennebaker, 1990, 1993, 1997). Interestingly, although participants in these research studies report a transient increase in subjective distress, the long-term objective indicators of health show a positive impact. Few have studied such issues in populations who have experienced crisis and trauma situations other than death. Therefore, this issue was explored in a follow-up study of a refugee group that had experienced multiple losses and other traumatic events. Many such refugees are suffering from PTSD and depression even after resettlement (Favaro, Maiorani, Colobo, & Santonaastaso, 1999; Fuller, 1993; Thulesius & Håkansson, 1999; Weine et al., 1998; Young, 1995).

Our main purpose for the follow-up study was to study "the effect" of the first contact with the families. First, did they experience that our "intrusion" into their lives as refugees in a new country harmed or benefitted them in any way? Second, can the research process harm the refugees by reviving traumatic memories or provoking flooding by other emotions or depression as some authors claim (Hundeide, 1995), or can it be therapeutic, as some studies (Barthels, 1987; Beskow et al., 1991; Brent, 1989; McNiel, Hatcher, & Reubin, 1988) have indicated? Third, we also wished to broaden our knowledge about the ethical dimensions of conducting research on traumatized/bereaved populations. As a background for the second study, a short description of the first study is given.

Background

The intention of this original study (Dyregrov & Raundalen, 1997) was to find out how parents and children had communicated about their decision to stay in Norway or return to Bosnia. What role did the children play, directly or indirectly, in the decisions made by the parents? The sample consisted of 20 families, which included 74 members aged 5 to 73 years. Apart from having lost their country, social networks, belongings and status, some had lost also family members or friends.

The study consisted of a background survey of the Bosnian parents, some analogue scales aiming at different age groups, and an in-depth interview of each member of the family. A child psychologist interviewed the children below 12 years of age, while a sociologist met the rest of the family-members. In 17 of the 20 families, the adults needed an interpreter.

The length of time spent with each family ranged from 3.5 to 6 hours. All members of the family were asked about their thoughts and reasons for their wanting either to stay in Norway or return to Bosnia. They were also asked about their previous life in Bosnia, connection to relatives and friends in Bosnia, and so forth. Parents were asked about their flight from their homeland, but this supposedly traumatic theme was avoided in the interviews with the children. During the in-depth interviews, some family members cried or were emotionally upset as a result of talking and thinking of the sad and traumatic memories from the war. This was especially the case with some mothers. When this happened, the researcher let them cry or stopped talking for a while, and then continued the interview, letting them change the topic or go on if they wished. All of them wished either to continue talking about the painful theme, or they returned to this later in the interview.

The last question asked participants, "How has it been to talk about all this to me now?" The answers were interesting and surprising, and led to the decision to do a more detailed study at a later stage. The overall impression from the answers was that "it hurts to talk, but it also feels good and we need to talk." This supported the belief that it was ethically feasible to re-contact participants to ask them about their experiences and sentiments before, during and after the first encounter with the researchers.

Method

Participants

In 1997, half of the families were re-contacted to take part in a follow-up study. For the second study, the families with the youngest children were chosen. This sample consisted of nine families, comprising 11 women (age 27–73), 5 men (age 30–47), and 14 children (age 6–19). The average time they had lived in

Norway was approximately 45 months (range = 29–60 months). In Bosnia, half of the participants had resided in cities, and half in rural districts. Three adults had a university education; the rest had from 7 to 15 years of schooling. Five of the adults had jobs in the new country, which represents a slightly higher employment rate than in the original sample. Two of the families had decided never to return to Bosnia, while the others either disagreed within the family or were presently unable to make a decision. All the parents and teenagers missed their homeland and would chose to return to Bosnia if “everything could be as before.” The younger children who did not remember Bosnia wanted to stay in Norway, that they now called their “homeland.”

Instruments

A small questionnaire previously used by Cook and Bosley (1995) was modified and presented as forms on one page (two questions with a visual-analogue scale). Participants were asked to evaluate the effect of the first, as well as the second interview on a positive-negative scale. Every family member was interviewed through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. These aimed at illuminating and describing the refugees’ experiences of the research process based on three time-related themes: gaining access, the interview-situation, and the time following the interview. The themes were elaborated into 32 questions used as a guide for the interviews. As far as possible the researchers let the interviewees direct the sequence of the questions according to their own associations (Briggs, 1986). Additionally, being aware of the interview as a significant way for individuals to give meaning to their understandings of their experiences, the researchers listened for new ways of seeing the issue other than that reflected in the guide (Mishler, 1986).

Procedure

Families were contacted by the interpreter used in the first study and asked if they wanted to participate in a new study. This interpreter was highly trusted among Bosnian refugees. They were informed about the overall purpose and the main features of the research design and the possible risks and benefits from the participation. They were told that the new study was going to evaluate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding their previous research participation. The refugees were told that: “We have nearly no knowledge as to how refugees experience research. This we will try to explore by talking to you about our first meeting. Such answers are of interest for research in general and because future research in relation to people in difficult situations needs to improve.” While obtaining the written consent, the refugees were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. All the contacted families agreed to participate.

Although aware of the possible bias caused by having the same researchers conduct these second interviews we decided to do so for several reasons. First, the

second interview explored reactions about having told the researchers about traumatic events from the first interview, which only the first researchers knew of. These details and their reactions had to be re-addressed both with the adults and the children. Additionally, we were afraid that especially the children would not be as likely to open up to new researchers, as they might be for the ones they already knew. Although it is impossible to control for this possible bias, precautions were taken to try to counteract this. The purpose of the research was clearly spelled out as not being an evaluation of the researchers, but of the refugees' experiences in a research project. The importance of them being as honest and open as possible was also stated. In introducing the second interview to the children, a great effort was made at getting them to understand this. Children were told that they probably wanted to be kind and polite to the researchers, but that the only thing that mattered to the researchers was the *truth*.

The interviews were recorded, and then transcribed by the interviewers. The meaning in the transcriptions were condensed after an empirical phenomenological mode of analysis (Kvale, 1996). The method involved a condensation of the expressed meanings into more and more essential meanings of the structure and style of the refugees' experience of the research. The condensed material was categorized on dimensions in line with the quantification tradition of facts in the social sciences (Kvale, 1996). Simple frequency distributions were used to analyze the short questionnaire form.

Results

A General Evaluation of the Research Experience

Table 1 shows the results from the questionnaire. The parents evaluated the participation as very positive. All the men and women rated their experience 4 or 5 on a scale varying between 1 ("negative") and 5 ("positive"). The mean for women was 4.5 and 4.4 for men. The oldest children rated their experience

Table 1. A General Evaluation of the Research Experience

	Scale					<i>M (SD)</i>
	Negative		Positive			
	1	2	3	4	5	
Women (<i>n</i> = 11)	0	0	0	6	5	4.5 (4.9)
Men (<i>n</i> = 5)	0	0	0	3	2	4.4 (5.0)
Adolescents 13–19 years (<i>n</i> = 5)	0	1	0	2	2	4.0 (4.8)
Younger children 8–12 years (<i>n</i> = 9)	0	0	3	4	2	3.9 (4.4)

Note. The results from participating in the first project are shown outside the parenthesis and inside parenthesis from the second study.

by a mean of 4.0, while the children from 8 to 12 years of age had a mean of 3.9. Three of the nine children used the midpoint of the positive-negative scale to describe their experience of participating in the study. No one in the sample experienced the research situation as solely negative. When asked to indicate what the researchers had done or said during the original interview that they found most helpful, the adults pointed to “empathy, warmth, kindness, humanity, knowledge, understanding, and a nonjudgmental and interested attitude.”

Reasons for Agreeing to be Interviewed

An important issue before the start of the first study was contacting the refugee families about the research by someone they had confidence in, either a social worker or an appreciated interpreter they knew beforehand. This was described as important by the parents, who also appreciated the detailed information when contacted for participation. Only two parents said they had any doubts about their willingness to participate when asked. One mother said: “We said yes at once. It was no dilemma.” Being asked by a person that they knew was not felt as a pressure to participate. They really wanted to talk to us for several reasons and had different motives for and expectations from participating in the original study.

The adults were, first of all, interested in the research topic and therefore wanted to provide information about the Bosnians in Norway. They were really glad that researchers would come and talk to them and appreciated strongly the interest shown in them as a people and the problems they experienced in Norway.

All the refugees expressed their gratitude toward the help they received from Norway, but two-thirds felt an absence of interest in their situation among common people, and hoped that the study would lead to improvement. Refugees said they strongly wanted Norwegians to learn more about their situation and life as refugees in the country. They wanted to give *their* version of why they had to come and the difficulties of returning; “We did not want to come here; we had a beautiful and rich life in Bosnia before the war.” The informational aspect also encompassed a strong wish to help future generations of refugees. This was reflected by this mother: “I thought that if I can help with my information, I am willing to do so although it is painful to talk about all the bad memories which I knew would come up.” She, as well as others, expressed a very strong solidarity with all refugees around the world and felt responsible for helping others.

Before the first interview, only two, highly educated, women had thought of the possibility that the interview could help them to rethink and analyze their situation and that it could benefit them to talk and be part of a study. This, however, turned out to be one of the most positive aspects of being interviewed for the whole group, and it was often mentioned as something positive in relation to the question on how they had experienced the research situation.

Only two men stated that they considered the possibility that their interview data could be misunderstood or misused, but relied on the researchers ethical and confidential precautions. For the rest of the refugees, the research topic and the fact that the government sponsored the research did not cause problems of distrust. On the contrary, several parents reasoned that as the government had granted the research money, this ensured that the results would be published and not "rest in a drawer." They did not fear providing any information, and stated "we only tell it like it is." The parent's confidence also paved the researchers' way to the children's participation.

Parents were very pragmatic about our wish to talk to the children. All of them thought that it was "quite normal" that the children's version was invited and nobody else could provide that besides the children themselves. They did not fear that the children might experience problems in the wake of the interview or that the researchers in any way might frighten them. They felt quite safe about their children, relying on the professional backgrounds of the researchers and the information they had about the work of the Center for Crisis Psychology. Two women stated that what made them feel safe was that they had lived so long in Norway as to see that children had another status and role here. A mother said: "I know that children are taken good care of here. This is something else and cannot be compared with Former-Yugoslavia. Here (in Norway) they look at children as small individuals, as human beings. They care for them in all ways." However, the parents in three families, said that they would have wanted more information before the entrance of the researchers, especially on how to prepare the children.

Four children had been asked if they wanted to participate by their parents, the rest had agreed on behalf of their children. One father expressed why: "If she thinks that it is important for us, she will accept it at once." When the children were asked how they would have preferred to be approached, they all said, "It was ok." When gently pressured to be *quite* honest, two-thirds of the children stated, though a little hesitantly, that it would have been okay if we had asked them directly in a separate letter. However, then they quickly added that they would have said yes anyhow because the parents considered it very important to participate.

All the children, except two 18- and 19-year-old adolescents, said that they were worried and concerned about the foreigner coming to visit the family and talking to them. In many ways, they reported that they prepared for "an exam" without really knowing how to prepare. Those who conveyed their worry, reported that they were "so relieved" afterward because they had the clear feeling they had "passed" with success.

Experiences of the Interview Situation

The refugees told their stories in a surprisingly frank and confident way, although emotionally involved from time to time. When asked if they had felt the

questions to be too personal or too importunate (intrusive), the adults laughingly reassured that where they came from everybody could ask everyone very personal questions without offense. A father explained it in this way: "There is really a difference in what Norwegians think is private and the way we look at it. For *me* it is not private if someone asks me how much I earn. I can tell him at once. Norwegians would say: Why do you want to know that?" They presumed that as researchers the right to ask personal questions was even stronger than usual.

All the adults said it was hard to talk about their situation and memories for such a long period of time. They felt "depressed, sad, angry, nervous and upset." Even so, they often talked far beyond our "guiding themes" in the first interview. Especially when they talked about the start of the war, and of people being killed or lost track of, several of the adults admitted they had to cry or had tears in their eyes. Many explained how it grieved them to remember leaving their homes in a hurry without the opportunity to take clothes, diapers, or even food for the children with them. A father said, "When I rewind the film in my head, I am feeling nervous and angry towards everybody who did this to us." His wife added, "I try to stay calm, but inside my heart is beating strongly."

When the refugees were asked if they would have liked to talk more about something, all the men and two women answered, for example, "Yes, the worst things, the war and everything." Four of the mothers felt that it was easier to talk to us about their experiences than with their husbands or friends, especially those who had experienced worse things than their partner (i.e., being left with the children in the war while the partner had escaped). During the interviews the importance of listening to the story of both spouses was stressed. Thus, through the interviews, several stories loaded with feelings and emotions came to the spouses' knowledge for the first time.

The children expressed fewer emotional problems in talking during the interviews, possibly reflecting our avoidance of some traumatic themes in these interviews and the fact that they were interviewed alone. All the children (5–12 years) were asked the following questions:

1. "After our interview with you where we asked questions about sad memories of the past, reminding you of all you have lost, you may have felt bad or you may have felt a little relieved. How was it for you?" Even though a few gave some nuances in their replies, they clearly stated that they felt relieved. When asked how they explained that, the children clearly conveyed the message: "It was good to talk."
2. "We talked to you about questions discussed in the family concerning staying in Norway or going back to your home country. We know that this has been a difficult question for your parents, and when we talked to you about this, it may have led to more chaos in your thoughts or it may have led to less chaos afterwards. How was it for you?" All the children conveyed that the interview made things clearer to them, not at all more

chaotic. During the conversation they were reminded to tell the truth, and all of them confirmed their initial statements.

Four out of nine of the oldest children pinpointed the importance of talking about family matters to someone outside the family. As discussions between parents and themselves often ended in quarrels and personal feelings of guilt and frustration, the interview situation was a new and useful experience for them. They could express their own meanings about the question of repatriation to a "neutral and professional person" without having to pay respect to the opinions of their parents and without being contradicted, misunderstood, or corrected. Six of the adolescents reported that participation in the research influenced their relationship with the outer world, such as their decision to travel to Bosnia to get more information or to get further education in Norway, and so forth.

Experiences After the Interview Situation

The feeling of relief after the interviews was mentioned by nearly all the parents and all the adolescents: "It was a bit difficult to talk about the situation we had been through, but then I felt relieved for several days afterwards." Four women felt sad and depressed after the interview, being reminded of a problem that would impact the rest of their life. However, some days afterwards they reported to be "back to normal." All the adults and children stated that they would have joined a similar study again.

In spite of questions from very curious parents, most of the children did not tell their parents what they had been talking about. However, the parents understood from their behavior. One mother said, "I think the children knew a lot more after the interviews. They asked much more, had their own opinions and we also talk more with them now." A few parents were a little annoyed because they were not informed about what the children said during the interviews, but most of them respected the privacy of the children. Concerning the after-effects of the communication style between parents and children after the first interview, the effect for the smallest children was short-lived. The parents asked questions, and the youngest children answered more or less reluctantly, while some of the adolescents had started posing more questions to the parents.

Whatever positive impact of the participation in the study, none of the adults or the adolescents felt that it had changed their opinion about repatriation. They said, "We are thinking more and perhaps in a little different way, but the decision is the same." A change in their decision is evidently based on changes in important push and pull factors that make it possible or impossible "to go back." Two-thirds of the adolescents had, however, a strong wish to go back to Bosnia, but had to reconcile with the fact that it would be impossible to go back in the nearest future. In connection with these new thoughts, they had also started planning for an education in Norway.

Two-thirds of the adults emphasized the positive effect of the open, unstructured interview, which gave them the opportunity to associate and go beyond a strictly defined topic of interest. A few pointed to the great value of a good interpreter to be able to express thoughts or feelings. As the married couples were interviewed together, they were asked the “pros and cons” of doing this. None came up with a negative viewpoint; on the contrary they felt comfortable with it. Most of them saw it as “the only natural thing to do, because we are always open and don’t conceal anything from each other.” Four adults mentioned that being interviewed together gave them the opportunity to associate and follow up thoughts first brought up by their partner. In that way, they were able to reflect in a much broader sense than if they had been on their own.

Discussion

Positive Effects of Research Participation

There are many similarities between the perceived experience of participating in research by families who have lost a close relative, and refugees. Both groups are grieving, and both groups report a positive attitude toward participating in research about their experiences. When comparing the present results on the positive-negative scale with Cook and Bosley’s study (1995), the women and men in both studies evaluated their research experience very much the same. In Cook and Bosley’s study, the mean was 4.7 for women and 4.6 for men, while the means in our study with refugees were 4.5 and 4.4 for women and men, respectively. The parallel results are also striking when comparing the perceived benefits expressed during the interviews. Cook and Bosley’s group strongly stressed the positive experience of expressing their feelings regarding their loss. They also hoped that others could learn from their stories, both professionals and other people in general. They stressed the importance of contributing to a more open discussion on death, of helping others to understand their grieving process, and giving hope to others who are bereaved. As presented above, the refugees’ motivation was similar (see Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Several studies have pointed to the possibility that being able to tell the story of pain and distress to a researcher might have a healing effect for a grieving person (Cook & Bosley, 1995; Parkes, 1988; Pennebaker, 1990, 1993, 1997; Worden, 1982). This seemed also to be the case for the refugees in this study. An important part of the positive effect was no doubt from being able to organize their story into a coherent one and by giving meaning to their experiences from being able to help future generations of refugees. To what extent this effect might be a “therapeutic” effect is impossible to state, because the term refers to *stable* changes in attitudes, emotions, and behavior.

Their willingness and eagerness to give personal information signaled a need to talk about much more than both the first and the second research project was meant to cover. The in-depth interviews probably facilitated this. Riches and Dawson (1996) found that an ethnographic approach in researching intimate and painful experiences could yield large quantities of information in areas that were not initially anticipated.

Our findings were consistent with suggestions that if researchers are able to design a forum with the children that encourage communication about serious issues, it might turn out very positive for child participants (Pynoos & Nader, 1993). Sensitivity and concern is very important when approaching grieving or traumatized families with questionnaires, rating scales, or penetrating interviews. It should be an ethical demand to ensure that the "subjects" are not left alone with the painful feeling of being "exploitable objects." On the other hand, screening, assessment, and in-depth understanding of suffering individuals and families are at the very basis for describing their plights and advocating their rights, thus paving the way for appropriate help. To secure the possibility of beneficial effects of participating in such studies and minimizing the risk, researchers should have the appropriate human skills and training to conduct interviews with bereaved or traumatized populations in a sensitive and professional manner. This seemed to be important factors behind the participants' positive evaluation of taking part in the project. In-depth interviews proved especially important both therapeutically for the family members as well as enabling the researchers to reflect on the roles, conventions, and rules in the interfaces between the cultures. One must also secure that the informed consent is a real and not a trapped one, as could easily be the case of refugees often feeling in debt to the host country.

Methodological Discussion

Intercultural Informed Consent as a Challenge

The refugees wanted to participate in the study for several reasons. However, while the adults had been able to give an informed consent, most of the smallest children had not been given this opportunity. As the study also had a methodological scope, much energy was spent to spell out the purpose clearly. In advance, the written text about the project was mailed to the parents in their own language and was additionally explained by the interpreter when the researchers and refugees met. Although the parents understood the project themselves, it was difficult to explain to the children. The first study (Dyregrov & Raundalen, 1997) documented that the adults did not have a strong tradition of communicating directly with the children on difficult matters. The usual standards of informing children through parents by asking them to get the consent of their children was insufficient, because

many parents consented without asking or informing the children. The parent's strong wish to talk to informed and interested researchers might have prevented the children from giving a fully informed consent. The children, however, stated that it was "OK" that the parents gave the consent on behalf of them, even without informing them. After listening, we interpreted that, on the one hand, these children stayed loyal to their culture and the right of their parents to decide for the whole family, whereas, on the other hand, the Norwegian culture seemed already to influence them. In their new country, children are more expected to be able to accept or refuse quite independently of their parents whether they want to be interviewed or not, and more so by increasing age.

The children's message of uncertainty before and relief after being interviewed may have several implications. First, it shows the importance of informing the parents in a manner to enable and motivate them to prepare their children for the expected task. Second, it raises the possibility that the children's relief may color the whole event as positive, thus masking or reducing the painful part of the interview.

Although the first study had shown that the parents decided important matters on behalf of the children to a greater extent than in Norway, the children wanted to be informed separately. Around two-thirds would have preferred to be asked directly through a letter. This, and a few parents' wishes for the same, might be seen as an ongoing process of acculturation. This reminded us of the social, historical, and cultural situatedness of research in general (Briggs, 1986; Mishler, 1986) and showed that our considerations and ethical research standards are not necessarily always "right" or "wrong," but must strive to be culturally sensitive (Dyregrov, Gupta, Gjestad, & Raundalen, 1996).

It would have been understandable if the refugees had been distrusting the motives and skeptical to the research, especially in regard to the theoretical focus of the second study. However, the refugees evidenced a great openness in the interviews. Being more outspoken than Norwegians in general, reflects this group's cultural rules and conventions on what and how to inform researchers whom they trust (Denzin, 1989). This, and their belief and confidence in the seriousness of the Norwegian authorities (and authorities in general), is to be understood in a social and cultural context.

It is necessary to discuss possible limitations to the work. First, it is possible that the data might be biased, resulting from the same researchers going back to re-interview the sample. The respect for authorities shown by Bosnians might prevent them from being totally honest with the researchers. However, the previously mentioned precautions may minimize this risk. The refugees' confidence in the researchers, together with the trust in the interpreter, and the amount of time spent in every family, also increase the possibility of getting more of the "private" and less of the "official" version of their stories. Their fairly honest and not always "popular" answers together with the consistency between different answers throughout the in-depth interview strengthen the reliability.

Secondly, as the study is mainly a qualitative one with few participators, it places limitations on the possibilities and the intentions of generalizing the findings. The study might, however, act as describing qualitative aspects concerning research on traumatized and bereaved populations.

It appeared that Bosnian refugees, both parents and children, experienced the participation in the research project as positive. It seemed that the interviews benefited the refugees in several ways. However, the study also showed the difficulties of obtaining intercultural consent in refugee research.

The study reminds researchers of the vital ethical issue of informed consent and that it must be based on *real* understanding of each participator. A few parents posed critical remarks to the research project, related to the lack of information that could have enabled them to inform their children better before the interviews. The importance of being clear in the message, as well as taking the social-cultural pattern of family communication into consideration when addressing refugee children, was demonstrated.

The results of this study suggest that, carried out sensitively and appropriately, research on refugee populations can have some beneficial effects. It is misguided to argue that such studies should not be conducted because of potential harm to the subjects. Not doing such research could even be considered unethical, because it leaves us without deepened knowledge about this ever-growing group.

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