

# **BARRIERS FOR UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS IN ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH CARE: IS IT THE THERAPY OR THE THERAPIST?**

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**Introduction** – Refugee children, particularly Unaccompanied Refugee Minors, present with disproportionately high prevalence of mental health and emotional difficulties. However, the mental health service access and treatment engagement of this vulnerable group has been consistently shown to be poorer than the general population. Despite of this, so far there hasn't been much research to explore the possible underlying reasons or barriers for these young people to access mental health service in their host countries.

**Aims & Objectives** – This research aims to understand unaccompanied refugee children's barriers to access and utilize mental health services. To explore any potential characteristics in the service provision that can be linked with the observed poor treatment engagement and service access is also an objective of this study.

**Methods** – The study was conducted by using semi-structured interviews with fifteen unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and their carers to elicit their views, perceptions and beliefs based on their experience of receiving treatment from a specialist mental health service in the UK.

**Results** – The interview transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis. The main findings were categorised into two broad themes, the participants' perceptions of the intervention received, and perception of the professionals involved. The different elements and pertinent issues within these two broad areas were discussed.

**Conclusions** – Findings will help stimulate further exploratory research gaining better understanding of the barriers for these young people to access treatment, and contribute in developing innovative services that are more efficient in engaging this vulnerable group and suitable to meet their specific needs.

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