

Queering Bodies: Study on Queer Refugees Asylum and Post-Migration
Settlement in Finland and Sweden

Master's Thesis in
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Spring 2023

Abstract

Aim: The aim of the study was to explore the challenges queer forced migrants and asylum seekers face in establishing new lives in Finland and Sweden. Little research exists on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) refugees entering Nordic countries. This study explores SOGI asylum seekers' challenges in navigating the asylum process and asylum interviews in Finland and Sweden.

Method: Through recorded and unrecorded interviews with SOGI asylum seekers and experts working in this field, statements from Finnish and Swedish police and immigration authorities, a thematic analysis was conducted to establish emerging themes SOGI asylum seekers experience in both Sweden and Finland.

Results: The study identified critical issues facing SOGI claimants, primarily the exposure to aggression and violence within the reception centres, psychological stressors and trauma SOGI asylum seekers experience in navigating the asylum process. In addition, the criteria models used by immigration authorities fail to provide SOGI refugees international protection and expose 'legal violence' on those it intends to protect. State institutions such as Migration and Police agencies fail in their obligations to provide information and build trust with SOGI claimants.

Keywords: queer, asylum, refugee, displaced, violence, DSSH, PTSD, SOGI, police, immigration authority, sexual orientation, gender identity

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

This study investigates sexual minority refugees' experience of seeking asylum and settlement in Finland and Sweden. It will attempt to further an understanding of this group's challenges in seeking international protection and their interaction with the Finnish and Swedish state authorities. It will also explore sexual minorities experience of prejudice, isolation and violence from within their co-ethnic communities, the general public and state authorities.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 *Homosexual*

There is no general consensus on a universal term for sexuality or sexual minority groups. Sexuality, in general, is embedded in culture and historical contexts; therefore, human and sexual behaviour is only understood in those culturally specific prisms and does not operate universally throughout all cultures (Sullivan, 2019). Both the concept and term homosexual first entered the English language in 1892; prior to this, the idea of homosexuality, as known today, did not exist; only the term "sexual inversion", which describes all forms of what was regarded as sexual deviations (Halperin, 1990). The introduction of the term homosexuality reconceptualised human behaviour in connection with gender and formulated a social definition and construct (Halperin, 1990). This reconceptualising of human sexual behaviour originates from the 1860s and continued to the early twentieth century when sexology pursued a science of codifying human sexual behaviour and sexual categories using vocabulary to pathologise human desires (Bristow, 2010). While the term homosexual may seem banal in nature, it is heavily embodied with historical baggage, which disrupts an honest comprehension of the sexual life of non-western societies and historical cultures (Bristow, 2010).

1.2.2 *LGBTQI+*

The term lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex plus (LGBTQI+) originates from Anglo-Saxon societies and is regarded as culturally specific to global north regions. While the intention is to be inclusive, it has been criticised for being linguistically rigid in its categorisations of human sexuality (Greatrick, 2019). In addition, it has been argued that people from outside the global north experience the LGBTQI+ term challenging to relate to and regard

the term as reflecting a neo-colonialist project from former colonial powers (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018)

1.2.3 Non-normative Sexual Practices and Gender Performance or Non-normative Individuals

This a term from Middle East and North African countries. It is regarded as a preferred term among some academics as it does not coerce people to label themselves as LGBTQ+, and in doing so, avoids the risk of alienating individuals from their co-communities (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018). For similar reasons, some researchers have used the term Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees (Alessi et al., 2018).

1.2.4 Queer

Queer derives from the Latin term “torquere”, meaning twist and is associated with concepts such as odd, strange or abnormal and is a derogatory term from the nineteenth century to describe sexual and gender deviation (Rumens et al., 2019). However, from the onset of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, the term queer had been reclaimed positively by political groups in the early '90s as part of the politicisation of queer theory (Berlant & Warner, 1995). As a result, queer is used as a broader term to describe sexuality that goes above and beyond the terms gay and lesbian and refers to anyone who stands outside normative sexual practices and gender (Bristow, 2010; Rumens et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2019).

1.2.5 SOGI / SOGIESC

The UNHCR have formulated the term Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) as the administrative term to describe sexual minorities seeking asylum (UNHCR, 2012). In the past decade, however, this term has evolved in inclusivity to Sexual Minorities Gender Identities, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) (UNHCR IOM, 2021).

1.3 SOGI Pre-forced migration

Of the millions of displaced people subjected to forced migration globally, a substantial group are gay men, lesbians, transgender men and women, and non-binary people, as well as heterosexual women escaping persecution for defying socially gendered norms (Kahn, 2015). Sexual orientation, gender identities, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) group are often subjected to a significant amount of hardships, including violence either in their home country, in transit, post-migration, discrimination, prejudices and denial of support

(UNHCR IOM, 2021). In many cases, exposure to extreme stressors pre-migration, in transit, and post-immigration based on sexuality can place SOGI refugees at an increased risk of mental health problems (Alessi & Kahn, 2017; Bird et al., 2022).

Violence against sexual minority persons and heterosexual women who digress gendered norms is not exclusive to one particular region or religion. Across many societies, sexual minorities are subjected to egregious acts of violence, including rape, arranged marriages, honour-related violence, murder, imprisonment, impeded access to assembly, work market, and healthcare, all of which have a profound impact on the mental health of these individuals (Burgess et al., 2021; Kahn, 2015; Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2012). As a result, over the past decade, the rights of SOGI refugees have emerged as a central pivot in the debate surrounding human rights, humanitarian protection and diversity (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018).

It is generally acknowledged that SOGI refugees experience prolonged trauma prior to embarking on forced immigration to safer countries (Burgess et al., 2021). It is often the case that men and women who are non-normative to heterosexuality are confronted with a wide array of violence that goes beyond the norms of war conflicts; however, war can often influence their decision to seek refuge in a safe country (Alessi et al., 2016, 2018; Daigle & Myrntinen, 2018). In most cases, acts of violence inflicted on sexual minority groups are perpetrated by family members or state officials such as the police (Alessi et al., 2016). Little is known of the mental health impact this violence may have on SOGI individuals; however, men, generally, experience homophobic violence in public spaces by state officials such as police, while women tend to be victimised physically in more private spaces, often perpetrated by family members (Cheney et al., 2017; Millbank, 2002). Over the past decades, the increase in LGBTQI+ rights has been met with a backlash from several African countries where homosexuality is still criminalised (Alessi et al., 2016).

1.4 Mental health Pre-Migration

SOGI refugees often suffer from severe and persistent trauma before migrating to safe countries (Hopkinson et al., 2017). While few studies exist on the mental health of SOGI refugees, studies on LGBTQI+ suggest an identifiable higher rate of depression and suicidality among sexual minority youth compared to heterosexual youth (Marshall et al., 2011; Piwowarczyk et al., 2017). However, what may set the SOGI refugee population apart from the general refugee population is the early onset of persecution, homophobia, abuse from family and societal stigma, which enables victimisation to occur and is often coupled with a

lack of support structures to assist SOGI refugees in managing their trauma (Alessi et al., 2016). Other studies have identified that SOGI youth who have experienced sustained child abuse are associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including suicidal thoughts and para-suicide throughout their lives (Burgess et al., 2021). Some studies have indicated that SOGI youth are likely to experience interpersonal violence, aggression, and rejection from peers, family, and adults from within schools, home and community, and have shown that these experiences are connected to poor health outcomes later in life (Alessi et al., 2016; Piwowarczyk et al., 2017).

Research has shown that SOGI youth in pre-immigration suffer from poor psychological development as a result of homophobic, transphobic and honour-related violence from within traditional societies. The stigmatisation of SOGI youth can be viewed as the experience of a hostile environment through victimisation and persecution, which leads to acute stressors and potential mental health issues (Burton et al., 2013). The lack of societal and family support can lead to extreme marginalisation of SOGI youth, leaving them vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse from various sources (Alessi et al., 2016; Cheney et al., 2017). For some SOGI refugees from certain African and Caribbean societies, persistent negative religious teachings on homosexuality may intensify feelings of internalised homophobia, which has long proven to have adverse mental health outcomes, particularly depression and anxiety (Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010).

The immense level of abuse, violence, and rejection in pre-migration lead SOGI individual to experience trauma, which may lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, internalised shame and associated conditions related to PTSD, such as depression and sleep disorders (Piwowarczyk et al., 2017). The high level of adversity in conjunction with poor or non-existent protective measures available to SOGI refugees who have been subjected to childhood adversity are more susceptible to suicidality (Burgess et al., 2021). Additionally, some studies have shown that while the general refugee population score high in PTSD symptomology, SOGI refugees score higher levels in victimisation and PTSD (Bird et al., 2022).

1.5 Transit and Post Migration

SOGI asylum seekers are acknowledged to be a vulnerable sub-group with unique burdens and stressors compared with non-SOGI asylum seekers. Such stressors include legal issues surrounding their asylum process, adjusting to sexual and gender identity to Western norms, and navigating their host country's culture, particularly in relation to racism and homophobia (Piwowarczyk et al., 2017). Additionally, while SOGI refugees may experience victimisation stressors such as homophobia and transphobia, their intersecting identities may also create additional stressors such as racism, islamophobia, and xenophobia from transit or host countries (Alessi et al., 2020; Burgess et al., 2021). Additionally, studies suggest that SOGI refugees are more likely to be sexually assaulted than the general refugee samples (Hopkinson et al., 2017). To exacerbate these difficulties further, many SOGI refugees often arrive in their host country with pre-existing mental health issues such as PTSD or complex PTSD and associated conditions such as depression, anxiety, and their condition may worsen when dealing with stressors such as housing, language training and establishing economic stability (Kahn et al., 2018). Additional stressors may include difficulties for SOGI applicants in gaining asylum, prolonged separation from loved ones, also precarious and dangerous living conditions within refugee centres (Ryan et al., 2008). Moreover, often in transit countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, many SOGI refugees experience a persistent cycle of victimisation by other refugees as a result of their SOGI status and often find themselves in situations where they are unable to flee camps or districts which they find themselves assigned to (Greatrick, 2019).

For non-SOGI refugees seeking asylum on the grounds of race, faith, or ethnic group are often in a position to establish quickly community networks with their co-ethnic community diaspora or religious communities as a means to counteract isolation, anxiety, and enculturation stressors. However, for SOGI refugees, may not have the same privileges and may be excluded or shunned from such social networks and therefore are left suffering from alienation and isolation (Hopkinson et al., 2017; Kahn, 2015; McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Shoeb et al., 2007).

Often SOGI individuals report incidences of homophobia and racism from their host countries both individually and institutionally, including from within host LGBTQI+ communities (Golembe et al., 2021). This form of racism from within white gay communities often manifests itself as sexualised racism, where certain ethnic characteristics are sexualised, or ethnic groups are regarded as being more sexually desirable in contrast to other ethnic groups

who are seen as undesirable (Munro et al., 2013). Many SOGI may attempt to form meaningful friendships and relationships with host LGBTQI+ individuals but may find the intricacies of cultural differences too challenging to navigate (Kahn, 2015). This results in SOGI refugees being excluded from co-ethnic communities and also from their host country LGBTQI+ communities (Golembe et al., 2021). In many cases, SOGI refugees navigating resettlement are confronted also with homophobia from the host society and co-ethnic communities (Alessi et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 2018).

Some studies suggest that SOGI refugees who may have had negative experiences of LGBTQI+ spaces, they may be wary of accessing support from LGBTQI+ organisations for fear of discrimination based on race or ethnic background or are still uncomfortable in being open about their sexuality (Alessi et al., 2016, 2018). This isolation and inaccessibility to source support may worsen SOGI individual's ability to access housing, employment and language training, which are considered core necessities in establishing oneself in a new host environment (Alessi et al., 2018)

In addition to being outcasted by their co-ethnic communities, many SOGI refugees experience pronounced levels of violence from other refugee populations, particularly within refugee centres where SOGI refugees must always be on guard (Alessi et al., 2018; Daigle & Myrntinen, 2018). In addition, many SOGI asylum seekers subjected to isolation, hostilities and violence within the refugee accommodation centres can be further compounded by hostility and racism from the local LGBTQI+ communities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights., 2017). This level of violence within refugee centres not just includes physical assaults but sexual violence perpetrated by other refugees (Alessi et al., 2018). As a result of this danger many SOGI refugees try to hide their SOGI status to survive in reception centres, however, concealment is not always possible for those who are gender non-conforming or transgender and are not able to hide their identity from other refugees (Alessi et al., 2018).

There is a general acknowledgement that homophobia and transphobia are prevalent in refugee accommodation leading to acts of intimidation and violence being perpetrated against SOGI refugees. With such prevalence of violence and aggression in refugee accommodation, it can be considered that these spaces are heterosexual spaces where the victims are often the individuals who are moved while the perpetrators are permitted to remain in the accommodation (Wimark, 2021). Despite the fact that many SOGI refugees are encouraged to report incidents of intimidation and violence, many do not for fear of reprisals or lack of trust in the authorities and in some cases, they are encouraged not to report by the accommodation staff (Alessi et al., 2018; Wimark, 2021). Often SOGI refugees report they feel unprotected by

staff and are often accused by staff of causing the violence inflicted on them by other refugees (Alessi et al., 2018). Ultimately, refugee accommodations are not safe environments for SOGI refugees (Wimark, 2021)

1.6 Mental Health Challenges Post Migration

Given the unique exposure to alienation, victimisation, violence, and aggression SOGI refugees experience in pre-migration and adversities in settling in host societies, SOGI refugees may face exposure to prolonged trauma and may suffer from mental health issues as well as complex post-traumatic disorders (Burgess et al., 2021). Studies suggest that SOGI refugees often experience stressors in their host environment based on their sexuality and gender identity but will often have to deal with additional stressors, such as racism, based on their social class, faith and migrations status, all of which may be even further compounded by trauma events experienced pre-migration (Alessi et al., 2020; Burgess et al., 2021)

SOGI youth who have been exposed to physical and sexual abuse throughout their childhood are more likely to be exposed to intimate partner violence and sexual assault in adulthood and are two times as likely to be subjected to violence than their heterosexual counterparts (Roberts et al., 2010). Additionally, prolonged experiences of familial abuse, stigma, and acts of victimisation often increase the risk of depression and heightened anxiety and PTSD among SOGI refugees, which by its nature distinguishes their experiences from the general refugee population, which is compounded by the lack of structural and informal support in the host country (Alessi et al., 2016). In many cases, SOGI refugees often arrive in host countries presenting severe mental health issues, including PTSD, complex PTSD, depression, and anxiety disorders (Shidlo & Ahola, 2013).

Other studies suggest that SOGI refugees experience heightened levels of isolation stress and may find it challenging to form trusting relationships with others (Bird et al., 2022). In some cases, the pronounced isolation among SOGI refugees places them in even further vulnerable positions including abusive intimate relationships and is often complicated by their mistrust towards the police and authorities and leaves them unwilling to report violence and victimisation (Cheney et al., 2017)

Other studies have suggested that isolation among SOGI Muslim men who have limited access to their host culture and to key members in co-ethnic communities reported an increased sense of isolation. Additionally, they reported experiencing more micro-aggression from their host society, co-ethnic communities and host LGBTQI+ community. This sense of isolation

and dislocation continues even years after being granted asylum (Kahn, 2015). Studies suggest that LGBTQI+ youth from minority backgrounds are at a higher level of suicide than their heterosexual peers (Bostwick et al., 2014; Marshal et al., 2011). In Addition, SOGI refugees, score high on mental health conditions, but also score higher for suicidal ideation and parasuicide (Hopkinson et al., 2017; Piwowarczyk et al., 2017). Other studies have shown that persistent violence towards LGBTQI+ youth and victimisation at school age leave the victims five to six times more likely to attempt suicide than LGBTQI+ youth who have not experienced victimisation (Burton et al., 2013).

Given the level of trauma and physical risk SOGI refugees endure, it is not uncommon for refugees to conceal their sexuality and gender identity post-migration to ensure they avoid victimisation similar to what they had escaped from. This need to conceal their identity to escape discrimination and prejudices often compounds their isolation, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation (Alessi et al., 2018; Burgess et al., 2021). Concealing gender identity or orientation may be necessary, particularly in reception centres to avoid physical violence and victimisation (Alessi et al., 2018; Fox et al., 2020).

However, concealment may negatively impact SOGI refugees' mental well-being. While serving as a shielding function for SOGI refugees to be able to survive in host countries, it can often leave some further isolated from the broader LGBTQI+ community (Fox et al., 2020). Similarly, other research suggests that while SOGI identity concealment may serve as a protective action from stigmatisation from both the co-ethnic community and the host society, it may ultimately take a psychological toll on the individual (Pachankis et al., 2015).

Self-disclosure can be viewed as a lifelong continuum where many may feel the need to conceal their identity and is often influenced by deciding factors such as stigma and discrimination from the individual's society or family dynamics. Often in host societies, migrant communities may continue to hold similar attitudes toward sexual minorities which existed in their country of origin. This may place SOGI refugees in a precarious position whereby they feel the need to conceal their identity from their co-ethnic community, while simultaneously are required to prove their SOGI status to immigration authorities (Piwowarczyk et al., 2017). This creates a unique tension for SOGI refugees who choose to conceal their identity from co-ethnic communities. To further complicate the issue, many refugees report their hesitation in contacting LGBTQI+ organisations for fear of being discovered or outed to their co-ethnic communities (Kahn, 2015).

1.7 Asylum Process on SOGI Grounds

UNHCR guidelines on sexual minority states that people can seek refugee if they claim to have a genuine “fear of being persecuted” and are a member of “a particular social group” (UNHCR, 2012). However, confirming an individual’s membership to a SOGI group is highly challenging and fraught with difficulties (Greatrick, 2019). While for the majority of refugees, their asylum applications are based on religion, political association or nationality and can be, and often is, independently verified. However, this is not the case for SOGI applicants, where the onus of verification is solely placed on the applicant ability to present and verify their affiliation to an oppressed group through personal narratives (Berg & Millbank, 2009). Much literature has highlighted the process of state officials’ assessment of SOGI asylum applications in the asylum process. The evaluation of the applicant’s narrative is central to the decision to grant asylum to the applicant or not (Prearo, 2021). One of the unique challenges SOGI asylum seekers face is the requirement to prove the legitimacy of their sexual and gender minority status. Many studies have pointed to the challenge SOGI asylum seekers face, particularly the pressure to convince state officials of their sexuality (Akin, 2017; Munro et al., 2013; Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018; Prearo, 2021)

Ensuring the protection of SOGI applicants under refugee law has presented challenges for both the legal profession and NGOs (Akin, 2017). While the protection of SOGI applicants is internationally recognised and accepted, there is no agreed method to accurately identify SOGI applicants in the asylum process (Akin, 2017; Berg & Millbank, 2009). For many SOGI asylum seekers, proving one’s sexuality is challenging as they are required to manage a heterosexist attitude to how gay men, lesbians and transgender should be and behave and many SOGI asylum seekers are uncertain about how to exact those stereotypes for officials in the asylum process (Munro et al., 2013).

Much research has argued that SOGI asylum seekers must emulate Western ideals of what it must be to be LGBTQI+ (Millbank, 2002). Such constructs of LGBTQI+ identity are built upon male white upper-middle-class conceptions of sexuality and gender identity and therefore exclude cultural, religious socioeconomic and moral values of SOGI claimants (Kahn & Alessi, 2018; Ryan et al., 2008). For SOGI claimants, this is an essentialist and ahistorical view of socio-sexual identity and is deeply embedded in Euro-Anglo formulations of sexual identity (Dhoest, 2019)

These Western concepts of sexual identity are fixed and institutionalised and are harmful when projected onto SOGI applicants (Hartal, 2017). The Western ideal of LGBTQI+ are not

commonly used by non-western peoples as they do not reflect their lived realities, or they view their sexuality as a sexual practice, not as social identity construct (Daigle & Myrntinen, 2018). This tension is reflected in other studies where concepts of sexuality between the global north and global south and where the global north regard their definition of sexuality as subjectively universal across all cultures and societies. In doing so, they exclude the lived experiences of sexual minority groups in the global south (Greatrick, 2019).

These rigorous definitions of the Western world's understanding of sexual minorities and its categorisation leave SOGI claimants in situations where they describe themselves in asylum interviews "incorrectly" due to the unfamiliarity with Western world LGBTQI+ definitions (Greatrick, 2019).

In transit countries, SOGI claimants who wish to apply for refugee asylum are coerced to identify with the global North's definition of LGBTQI+ identities, which SOGI applicants may not identify with, and in doing so, placing themselves in circumstances where they face alienation from their own co-ethnic communities. This may create hostilities towards SOGI claimants who are seen by the refugee population as having accelerated and preferential transit by western countries (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018). Some have argued that the imposition of LGBTQI+ refugee asylum policies has helped create a backlash of anti-LGBTQI+ in Global South who claim that LGBTQI+ refugee policies are systemic of a neo-colonialist agenda from the global North. This neo-colonialism embodies the assumption that a colonialist north brings sexual civilization or sexual democracy to the colonised and of patrolling and regulating global south, while claiming their thinking is superior and ideal (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015; Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018).

Western societies' understanding and definitions of sexuality and identity are based on their history from the 19th century in the development of sexology in particular in its approach to sexual perversions, pathologising specific sex and types of peoples (Downham Moore, 2021). Sexology is a relic of the past, yet is persistent in our present; an archaic pseudoscience which underscores its historic violence and racialisation that continues to exert its presence (Lubin & Vaccaro, 2021). From its origins in the 19th century, it has morphed and become institutionalised into human behaviour social sciences, criminology and gender diagnosis, a subject for explanation, regulation and cure of the human body and a science of colonialism (Lubin & Vaccaro, 2021). The science of sexuality was symptomatic of European colonisation, which objectifies non-Europeans' exotic fantasies as promiscuous, hypersexualised, perverse barbarians (Downham Moore, 2021). In addition, Christian missionaries used sexology to enforce monogamous marriages on colonised societies. At the same time, the colonisers

regulated the sexual behaviour of their colonised people and imposed a sexual boundary between the white colonisers and the colonised (Schrader, 2020). In the global north, sexology has been an instrument of state control in public hygiene, eugenics, reproductive control and, ultimately, an instrument of state violence. (Lubin & Vaccaro, 2021)

A century later the LGBTQI+ definition and categorisation has generated a global north-south tension and accusation of neo-colonialist discourse are often referred to as “homonationalism”; a term coined to describe Western countries’ tendency to regard themselves as enlightened concerning LGBTQ policy and politics (Wimark, 2021). The term originated by Jaspir Puar (Puar & Ochieng’ Nyongó, 2017); it outlines Western States as liberal tolerance of sexual minorities, a superiority of Anglo-European states openness and progress, while creating a fixed procedure of inclusion and exclusion between the “correct” belonging and the “perverse”, in doing so, creating a symbolic frontier between the enlighten west and the homophobic other (Hiller, 2022; Mepschen et al., 2010). The homonationalism discourse pits the global North as a progressive against the global south as backward in its understanding of sexuality (Hiller, 2022). Global North alleged sexual enlightenment or ‘sexual democracy’ has become a weapon for racism and islamophobia, as a means to draw a frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’; a line of ‘us’ who dwell in sexual modernity and they in antediluvian sexual and gender roles (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015). This results in the Global North’s use of language on LGBTQI+ and being of universal truth, and its imposition of this language as being “sexual imperialism” is relevant in the context of SOGI refugees in the asylum process (Hiller, 2022).

In the interface between SOGI refugees and Western state officials in the asylum process, SOGI refugees are expected to convey a narrative shaped by Western ideals and replicate post-colonial and homonationalism hierarchies and dependencies (Hiller, 2019). In the asylum narration, SOGI claimants must prove their claim of belonging to an identified social group in a means which reflects the concepts of sexual orientation and identities (Burgess et al., 2021; Camminga, 2017). Their credibility is assessed from a typecast of LGBTQI+ and in this process reproduces a colonialist logic of backwardness where the SOGI claimant is the victim of their own culture and requires rescuing and where the claimant must narrate in social norms of sexuality and gender perceived and set by those in power. (Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). Their narratives of expected Western notions of gender, notions and victimhood will be assessed in terms of deservedness, and those who are successful in their narration will be assimilated, while those who fail to conform will be deported (Hiller, 2022).

The demand to fit into LGBTQ identities requires those in authority to probe claimants’ credibility carefully to ensure fictitious claimants do not exploit the asylum process.

Unfortunately, this credibility and scrutinisation is so rigorous it often places SOGI applicants at a real risk of failing to meet the required fit. As a result, many NGOs are required to coach SOGI applicants on how to perform and present their narration into the desired fit set by State authorities (Greatrick, 2019) In truth, to become a ‘sexual refugee’ in Global North, SOGI refugees must fit into categories which make sense to the administrative authorities, not what makes sense to themselves. The issue is that they are not lying to the authorities about their ‘true selves’ but are denied the possibility to define who they are in their own terms to comply with the State definition of queerness (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015).

1.8 DSSH Model in the Asylum Adjudication Process

In resolving the credibility and genuineness SOGI applicants, a new model for assessment was developed. Difference, Stigma, Shame and Harm (DSSH) was introduced as the go-to method to identify a SOGI claimant’s adherence to a particular group rather than on a sexual orientation (Vanto, 2022). The model originating from the UK was welcomed as it proved useful in applying a non-intrusive means of questioning SOGI claimants without requiring intimate details on sexual behaviour and was quickly adopted by the UNHCR and European Union Agency for Asylum, in order to prevent infringement of Article 8 on the rights to private life. This method gained support from receiving countries and was adopted by the UK, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland and Cyprus (Dawson & Gerber, 2017; Vanto, 2022).

At its core is the principle that DSSH attempts to explore a narrative of difference that is based on the notion that feelings of difference for LGBTQI+ are a universal phenomenon (Dawson & Gerber, 2017). However, it assumes gender identity as a linear formation where SOGI claimants develop a sexual identity in incremental stages and are universal for all men and women (Dawson & Gerber, 2017). Additionally, it demands a narrative of sexual linear identity with a beginning of an awakening or discovery which progresses to shame and stigma. This narrative is also embedded in a heteronormative worldview where romantic love and monogamous relationships are required for adjudication (Vanto, 2022). The model also requires the SOGI claimant to produce a highly articulated narrative of self-expression displaying highly evolved features of self-understanding in a means which is in agreement with the adjudicator’s understanding of sexual identity (Dawson & Gerber, 2017)

However, the interaction between the claimant and the adjudicator whereby the DSSH model of enquiry acts as a “filtering device” and operates as a protection and control of certain immigrants (Giametta, 2020; Vanto, 2022). A core challenge in this interface between the

SOGI claimant and the adjudicator is the onus is on the claimant to narrate their sexual characteristics as immutable and reflect the stereotypes of queer persons who possess through appearance and mannerisms and, within that narrative, demonstrate real harm and danger they may face (Greatrick, 2019). However, the nature of persecution can often occur within a domestic setting, which means it may not be possible to prove in the asylum process (Greatrick, 2019). One fundamental criticism of DSSH model is it fails to consider the intersectionalism of sexuality and gender accurately and has an intrinsic lack of detail on how harm may manifest if self towards Lesbians as acts for harm and punishment may occur outside the realms of state law but may occur behind closed doors (Dawson & Gerber, 2017; Kahn, 2015; Vanto, 2022)

This also alludes to the inherent issue of private and public persecution. In the adjudication process, women's narration of persecution is often positioned with the category of domestic spaces and may be regarded as a mere family issue rather than a state-organised persecution (Millbank, 2002; Raj, 2017; Vanto, 2022). This reflects what many have argued as a critical failure of the DSSH model is the assumption that the experience of SOGI refugees is based on stereotypes of white middle-class gay men that is universal for all and, in doing so, excludes the particular harms that are experienced by women (Dawson & Gerber, 2017).

One challenge noted in studies is the challenges SOGI applicants have in articulating and narrating their experiences and identity. This is particularly true for those who are required to openly discuss to asylum adjudicators' experiences of torture, trauma, sexual assault or recount incidents of persecution (Berg & Millbank, 2009). For SOGI refugees who have experienced severe episodes of abuse or violence, the asylum interview places them in vulnerable positions whereby they are required to discuss past events of violence or discuss intimate personal aspects of their sexuality when they are not psychologically prepared to do so (Alessi et al., 2016; Berg & Millbank, 2009; Kahn & Alessi, 2018). Those who have experienced prolonged and sustained violence or may have symptomologies of post-traumatic stress disorder may be susceptible to re-traumatisation when forced to recount violent events in an interview setting (Cloitre et al., 2009; Kahn & Alessi, 2018). In such cases, it may prove impossible for the claimant to maintain the capacity to convey a coherent narration of the harm experienced, which may lead to failed asylum applications (Kahn & Alessi, 2018; Ryan et al., 2009).

Additionally, for SOGI claimants from countries where the persecution of non-normative sexual practices is State-sanctioned, their ability to talk openly regarding intimate aspects of their sexuality may be occluded by their fear of being open to an official representing a state authority (Berg & Millbank, 2009). This may be further compounded by SOGI claimants who originate from regimes or societies where openly discussing sexuality and gender identity may

be too threatening as they have suppressed their sexual and gender identities (Chung & Katayama, 1998).

In many cases, SOGI claimants who have concealed their identity as a means of surviving discrimination or violence are also faced with a paradox where they suddenly are required to openly convey their most inner sexual desires, intimate sexual relationships, scared body parts of which were up until that point of the asylum interview were concealed and imbued with shame and stigma (Kahn, 2015). It is often the case that SOGI claimants may have only discussed or verbalised their true sexuality to only a handful of individuals prior to the asylum interview. This will impact the dynamics in the interview and how the adjudicator perceives the claimant's ability to formulate an articulate narrative, particularly if the claimant is still uneasy discussing openly with a state official and a translator (Berg & Millbank, 2009). Research has also found that SOGI men who herald from traditional non-western societies may experience a tension between their traditional values and sexuality, and therefore, may face significant challenges in revealing their inner sexuality to someone of their own culture. This will impact the dynamics of the interview with the interactions between the claimant and the appointed translator (Millbank, 2009)

In addition, the ability to openly discuss belonging to an identified social group may be challenging as gender and sexuality may be compartmentalised as a strategy for managing conflicting multiple group identities (Coyle & Rafalin, 2001; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Compartmentalisation as part of Social Identity Theory suggests that an individual may hold two conflicting group identities. They may be active in one identity in one context, but will suppress the other identity in the other group context. This conflict of norms and values may be problematic to integrate (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). In such a conflicted dilemma, many SOGI refugees may, in order to resolve their dissonance between their faith identity from their sexuality by eschewing any reference to sexual identity and conceptualise their sexuality exclusively in terms of sexual behaviour, and in doing so, safeguards their coherence between faith and sexual behaviour (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). This narration, however, may be highly problematic when applying the DSSH model in an asylum interview, as the model criteria for assessment emphasises sexual identity over sexual orientation and sexual behaviour (Vanto, 2022).

The requirement to convey a well-rounded and narrated description of a sexual identity represents a challenge for SOGI claimants who often feel the need to represent themselves as truly out-to-the-world regarding their sexuality, are actively involved with LGBTQ+ organisations and have an active sex life (Akin, 2017). The pressure to "fit" into an identity in

ways which ignores that in many cases SOGI claimants applicants may not possess any visible or identifiable “characteristics” of a LGBTQ+ group but are nonetheless persecuted for non-normative sexual practices (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018). Further, SOGI claimants must display identity markers in speech, fashion, and mannerisms which support a sexual identity which must be legible to the adjudicator (Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018). Akins (2017) refers to this as “rainbow splashing”, where a claimant must visualise an identity in order to be believed. Failing to adhere to an identity fit may complicate the credibility requirement further in relations to gender expectations; for example, masculine refugee men claiming to be gay are more often than not met with disbelief (Lee & Brotman, 2011). To exemplify this further, as mentioned earlier, concealment necessitates SOGI refugees’ survival in their pre-migration society, where male sex and effeminacy are unacceptable, and many men often conceal their sexuality by assuming hyper-masculine personas (Bhana et al., 2007).

Additional criticism of the asylum process and DSSH model often originates from the legal profession (Akin, 2017; Danisi & Ferreira, 2022; Dawson & Gerber, 2017; Vanto, 2022). Particularly the heteronormative and homonormative perspectives applied to SOGI claimants concerning family relations, intimate relations and chosen families (Danisi & Ferreira, 2022). While heteronormativity is regarded as a heterosexual perspective as being the norm, homonormativity in an asylum perspective is the assumption by state officials of how SOGI claimants should think, behave and say and impose those ideas upon SOGI claimants in the asylum process (Danisi et al., 2021; Danisi & Ferreira, 2022). This homonormative viewpoint is especially problematic for bisexual claimants, who are often disbelieved as it brings into question the immutable identity criteria required for asylum. This is also particularly challenging for women who have been married and have children where their credibility criteria are questioned, yet the fact that they may have been subject to arranged marriage and childbearing is often ignored or overlooked in the asylum process (Danisi & Ferreira, 2022). Ultimately, the homonormative perspective assumes that SOGI claimants are gay men arriving alone, without partners and are childless (Danisi & Ferreira, 2022). Ignoring the realities of SOGIs lived experiences is what Dasisi (2022) referred to as ‘legal violence’ the State inflicts upon them (Danisi & Ferreira, 2022).

1.10 Research Questions

Based on the analysis and review of the current literature concerning the challenges faced by SOGI refugees in Anglo-European Countries.

Research question 1: Are there identifiable themes from the experience of SOGI refugees in Finland and Sweden which mirror the experience of SOGI refugees globally?

Research question 2: Are there any unique or contributing factors that make the experience of SOGI refugees in Finland or Sweden different from other European Countries?

2. Method

The study was conducted over a five-month period where refugees, asylum seekers and those who self-identified as exiled in Finland and Sweden were asked to participate in semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were based on Derrick Silove's ADAPT model (Silove, 2013). The model is based on a psychosocial framework for post-conflict settings and the questions concern five areas: safety and security, bonds and networks, justice, roles and identities, and existential meaning. All these areas are seen as critical elements for restoring psychosocial and mental health recovery (Silove, 2013). Additionally, four expert interviews were conducted in Finland and Sweden with individuals who work in the LGBTQI+ asylum and refugee field. In order to gain a holistic overview of the issues facing SOGI asylum seekers, state authorities were invited to participate in the research. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis was conducted.

2.1 Sample

Advertisements were placed on Instagram in English, Russian, Finnish, Arabic, Turkish and Swedish inviting individuals to take part in the study. Four respondents took contact offering to participate in interviews. Of the four individuals, two agreed to be voice recorded and the remaining requested not to be recorded. Three individuals also responded but then declined to participate in the interview and study. A presentation was arranged for a closed group in Helsinki Pride. However, none of the participants wished to volunteer for interviews. The four individuals who responded identified as LGBTQI+, and all were in different stages in the asylum process or had varying residency statuses in Finland. All self-identified as cis men who arrived in Finland from Russia, Latin America, and the Middle East and self-identified as either gay men or belonging to a sexual minority. All individuals were given pseudo-names for this study.

State authorities were asked for interviews, including Migri, the Finnish immigration authority, where they opted to provide written responses to pre-written questions. Immigrationsverket, the Swedish immigration authority, opted for an unrecorded telephone discussion responding to pre-written questions. As part of the study involves the interviewees safety/security and justice, police authorities were also asked to participate. The European Union Agency for Asylum were also asked but they declined to participate, citing they only collaborate with researchers working on doctorate degrees. The Finnish Police authority initially agreed to take part in the research but then withdrew cooperation. No explanation was

given. The Swedish police authority participated by responding in writing to pre-written questions. The Norwegian Police Authority similarly took part in the research by responding in writing to pre-written questions.

The four experts interviewed were Hassen Hnini, project worker in Barhar Soppu organisation dealing with honour-related conflicts for communities in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and Yasmin Yusuf expert on social and youth services in Helsinki Pride, an LGBTQI+ organisation in the Helsinki metropolitan area. In Sweden Aino Gröndahl lawyer in asylum migration with RFSL, and Yasmin Asteroth, expert advisor on asylum migration and antiracism in RFSL participated in the study.

Table 1

Description of Expert Interviews and Interviewees (N=4)

Interview	Interviewee	Organisation	Interview date	Interview duration
I	Hassen Hnini	Barhar Soppu	02.09.2022	2:28 min
II	Yasmin Yusuf	Helsinki Pride	25.10.2022	1:28 min
III	Aino Gröndahl	RFSL	10.11.2022	1:20 min
IV	Yasmin Asteroth	RFSL	19.12.2022	44:49 mins

Table 2

Description of Interviews and Interviewee (N = 4)

Interview	Interviewee	Country/Region	Interview Date	Interview recorded
I	Dimitri	Russia	24.08.2022	57:06 mins
II	Orestes	Latin America	16.09.2022	1:09 mins
III	Amer	Middle East	08.12.2022	unrecorded
IV	Zaad	Middle East	20.01.2023	unrecorded

Table 3

Description of Respondants and Organisation (N = 4)

I	Immigrationsverket	Sweden	Telephone response (unrecorded)
II	Migri	Finland	Written response
III	Polisen	Sweden	Written response
IV	Politiet	Norway	Written response

2.2 Interview Scheme

The interview scheme was formulated based on the ADAPT model: Adaptation, and Development after Persecution and Trauma (Silove, 2013). From this model, five themes were applied in the interview questions. These included the safety and security of the individual residing in Finland and around their living conditions. The ability of an individual to establish bonds and networks among their co-ethnic community or co-national diaspora and with Finnish LGBTQI+ communities. Sense of justice and whether individuals trust the authorities will treat them fairly and respectfully. Roles and identities, how the individual feels as an immigrant in Finland. Finally, existential meaning and if they had a sense of hope for the future. The interviews were semi-structured, and the direction of the discussion was largely based on the individual's willingness to discuss sensitive subjects. Additionally, topics that were not included in the interview questions were also explored during the interview, particularly if the interviewee introduced these topics. Similarly, the same topics were also included in the expert interviews, where the focus was placed on their insights and expertise on issues facing SOGI refugees.

The general fixed questions were:

- (a) How safe do you feel about being open about who you are to people in your community?
- (b) Do you have a good place to live here in Finland?
- (c) Has it been easy for you to make good friends with people in your community?
- (d) Has it been easy for you to make friends in Finland?
- (e) Do you feel who you are is fully accepted here in Finland as a foreigner and as a gay/lesbian?
- (f) Are you angry at what happened to you in your home country?
- (g) Have the authorities in Finland treated you fairly?
- (h) What do you hope for you in the future?

2.3 Procedure

Once the advertisements were completed and the interviewees were contacted, it was agreed that the interviews being voice recorded would be arranged via video link. One expert interview was held in person at the interviewee’s place of work. Those interviews which were not voice recorded were conducted in person and notes were taken during the interview, which was later typed. All voice-recorded interviews were transcribed both manually and partially transcribed using Microsoft dictation. One interview was held in Swedish and was transcribed and translated by the author. All transcribed interviews and interview notes were then returned to the interviewees, where they had the opportunity to delete any passages which they regarded as sensitive or wished to have excluded from the transcript. All town, city and village names and passages which may have revealed the identity of the interviewee were removed. The identities of the expert interviewees were not changed.

Once the transcripts, interview notes, and written responses were completed, a thematic analysis was conducted using six distinctive stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Table 4

Stages in Thematic Analysis

Stage	Process	
I	Familiarise with Data Corpus	Transcribing reading, and reflecting on the text
II	Creating codes	Creating codes across the data sets
III	Searching for themes	Merging the codes to create themes
IV	Reviewing themes	Generating a thematic map related to the codes
V	Defining and names of the themes	Defining and creating clear definition for each theme
VI	Producing the report	Creating an output of the themes which emerged and related to the research questions

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

When all the themes were identified, they were then grouped under heading of the ADAPT model: bonds and networks, safety/security, Justice, Roles and identities and existential meaning. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews the themes were not suitable for the existential meaning heading.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study is in compliance with compliance the human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki and The Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (*World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki, 2001*).

3. Results

3.1 SOGI Refugees in Finland and Sweden

Similar to what much of the literature has discussed on SOGI refugees, the following themes have emerged from this study. Additionally, the following topics were identified across most of the data.

3.1.1 Bonds and Networks

Concealment and Post-Migration Concealment.

To a degree, all those interviewed remained distant or concealed their sexual orientation from their co-national diaspora or co-ethnic communities. However, many who had decided not to reveal their sexuality did so for several reasons: firstly, as a means to ensure they avoid physical violence in refugee reception centres, and secondly, concealment acts as a mechanism of rejection expectation and can be seen as a coping mechanism for SOGI refugees (Golembe et al., 2021). The purpose is ultimately to maintain the risk of violence and aggression on a personal and community level (Alessi et al., 2017).

This is exemplified by Amer when he reported ‘‘I would like to have contact with other Arab men but it’s a little difficult’’. I was hurt when I noticed that the Arab group in this town had not invited me to an evening meal and it upset me’’.

While Amer maintained a partial distance from his co-ethnic community, Dimitri kept a closer contact with his co-national community and reported his concealment as such:

I’m not showing off, I’m not telling. If people ask, then I’m not tell. Because also probably it’s a small town. The specific of the Russian community here is age. There are mostly people who are older than 45 older than 50, so I definitely don’t want to be blamed and no one to the rumours about Ahh he’s gay blah blah blah.

Orestes had spent 7-8 months in a refugee centre in a remote area of Finland, reported the following:

No no no no. In there, no because there were many Muslim people in there, and in there many Russian people. I had also these Nicaraguan friends who were very heterosexual, so I decided that, no I’m not going to say to anyone about my gay life. I don’t want to have problem with anyone and especially when you live with so many people in one room in a building with so many refugees.

This was also mirrored by Yasmin in Finland who explained what her clients report to her:

‘‘If you ask later, they might say ‘‘I feel unsafe! I’m in a reception centre where I still have to hide myself, hide my identity. I have a lot of fear from the people who might be from the same ethnic background, from the same country’’. Yasmin further explained the need of her clients to conceal as a means to function in migrant communities in Finland by stating ‘‘just getting the knowledge from people who have been here longer, or even generations having access to spaces like a mosque or the barber shop or the restaurant. You need that! You need those spaces.’’

It is worth noting that, while much literature suggest identity concealment may have a negative impact on an individual’s mental health, it also functions as a protective benefit as it provides protection from stigma and victimization where there is a need to maintain co-national identifications and cultural connectedness. (Beals et al., 2009; Vuckovic Juros, 2022) This is supported by Yasmin in Finland who stated:

But then there’s lots of people who decide to stay in the closet because they have been uprooted from everything. From all the networks they know and for their own sanity, it’s better to have friends who are from the same cultural, language, religious background and not to come out because to come out would mean to lose even that opportunity.

3.1.2 Safety and Security

Violence, Aggression, and Victimization in Refugee Centres: Finland and Sweden

Of the individuals interviewed, only one had been resident in a refugee centre, and none had directly experienced violence or victimisation due to the fact they had concealed their sexual orientation. The violence and aggression in reception centres were, however, a strong topic for the majority of the expert interviewees. Since 2015 across the EU, there has been a steady increase in the ‘‘campaisation’’ of refugee accommodation in Europe, where the living standards have lowered, and the accommodation has become increasingly enclosed in nature (Kreichauf, 2018). Research has shown that refugee accommodation can have violent outcomes for many SOGI asylum seekers who have been subjected to homophobia and transphobia; while Sweden has arranged temporary solutions to mitigate the violence, it has not ultimately changed its policy of placing SOGI asylum seekers in general refugee accommodation (Wimark, 2021).

Hassen reported from the Finnish context the challenges regarding accommodation:

Iraqi transwomen or transmen living in reception centre with hundreds of Iraqi people who probably know from where, know their family, relatives. So you run from your country and you find yourself living probably two years- three years with the same building same

people same physical violence probably will happen, rape and I'm not telling you anything that really happened to many of my clients, rape inside reception centres

Aino discussed the violence from the Swedish context:

Two of my clients at the time were both from Iran they were brutally beaten up. It had been totally planned, were beaten with chairs and forks, and it was horrific, and the police came to the place...obviously in that case we had a police report, we had immigrations own staff describing what happened. Another of my clients was from Uganda also a young person who had come as unaccompanied minor when he was 15. He had his arms broken...

Yasmin from Helsinki Pride:

Even though things have gotten better, we still encounter monthly basis or every second month experiences of physical violence, sexual violence, discrimination. Most of the time it's not as awful as physical violence or sexual violence, but that unfortunately occurs. But it's more comments. It's people talking about you or shunning you if they figure out who you are, and both are horrible... then we have horrible experiences before of underage clients of ours are being harassed in the reception centres and the support in our point of view is not enough, and even if they're not underage, sometimes the medicine offered to the person who's being harassed who's being emotionally, physically or sexually harassed is usually 'we transfer you to another reception centre' which again doesn't seem fair if you have already started living your life and build relationships in some city.

In many cases, victims in both Finland and Sweden are afraid to report the violence to the authorities. Aino stated the following: 'I would say the majority, they are terrified of reporting. They think it will affect their asylum application negatively'. This is mirrored by Hassen who reported. 'And the problem is most of them when they are in the process, they are still waiting for the decision from Migri [immigration authority]. They feel they don't want to make the crime report.' Yasmin from Helsinki Pride discusses the fear of informing the police of crimes which happen outside reception centres in the following:

...there are some situations where people experience sexual abuse, sexual violence in Finland where they are in vulnerable situations, they don't want to inform the police and it's very hard for us... well not hard but it's impossible for us to force anybody who don't want to inform the police. So it might be someone from the same community who is considered to have more status, more power more status, whatever, it's hard to speak against them or it could be that you are undocumented and you are afraid of the police in general. Or you just don't trust the police and you don't have any hope that they actually will investigate the case for you, or in the worst case you believe that the police will actually turn it around and make you the villain

and not the victim... Of course, we tried to talk and explain that in Finland, this is how it's supposed to go. I can promise you that these are your rights and I recommend you go, we could go together to do criminal reports if you want to... but a lot of the times people decide not to''.

Isolated Refugee Centres and Mental Health of SOGI Applicants

Mental health implications of isolating SOGI applicants have been a theme impacting many of those who were interviewed. Generally those who are placed in reception centres suffer from anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Keller et al., 2003). The "campaisation" of refugee centres in Europe and the domopolitics of asylum centres has detrimental impact on the well-being of SOGI applicants (Kreichauf, 2018; Wimark, 2021).

Hassen reported it as the following:

I feel the life in reception centre very near to the life in prison you have the same dynamic of the prison. How it works, you have those people control and you have those who follow... the difference is that prison is closed, the reception centre is an open prison... Usually, they are out of the city centres with a limited amount of money, if you get food at the receptions centre. You will not get the money to buy a bus ticket to go a little further, so your way is like probably three to five kilometer around the reception centre. For me it's like an open prison, it's just you can go out but you cannot go far.

This is supported by Yasmin in Helsinki Pride who stated the following:

The biggest feeling of unsafety in the beginning is in the reception centre living and even with those who feel that 'OK I can deal with reception centre'', then there is the fear that they would be transferred. For example, in the Greater Helsinki Area, after a certain period of time, people would be transferred outside the Greater Helsinki Area. And that creates again feeling of unsafeness. They may be a client of ours. In the bigger cities easier to hide then if you are transferred to a small city where you are 'the only gay in the village''. It can be hard so that also adds to the feeling of unsafety.

In many cases this can be traumatic for individuals as Yasmin explains:

A lot of our clients who have come to the Greater Helsinki Area they have found us [Helsinki Pirde] they have found peers, they have started to work with psychologists, psychiatrists may be they have been taking those human trafficking health system and getting support from them, they are building connections with social workers, social advisors. So, they have this support network and after the immigration interviews are over, they haven't found work, or study place or private accommodation they're kind of uprooted from this network that they have and they have to start all over again in a new reception centre...so that affects

people mentally. If you are already in a very vulnerable situation and then you are again uprooted”

The isolation from networks that many experience can be psychologically immense as Orestes reported: ‘probably if I had been living in Helsinki, maybe I haven’t been faced in loneliness...Turku or Tampere, I don’t know which there are more men and more people and more gay stuff whatever. But yeah I’ve been a little angry because of the loneliness only’.

Yasmin from Sweden reported the following in table 5

Table 5

Translation of Interview with Yasmin RFSL

<i>Precis det är också en av utmaningen att man placeras långt bort... och då är de ju helt isolerad någonstans långt bort där du inte kan ta kontakt med någon och det är också en av bristerna som Migrationsverket har men inte riktigt ha tagit tag i...</i>	<i>Exactly that is also one of the challenges that one is placed far away... and then they are of course completely isolated somewhere far away you can't come in contact with anyone and it's also one of the failings for the Migration authority, that they haven't properly addressed.</i>
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While little research has been conducted on the mental health impact of isolated refugee centres may have on SOGI refugees, notable research suggests that sustained periods in refugees centres remotely located have a detrimental impact on individuals and family’s mental health (Steel et al., 2004, 2011).

3.1.3 Roles and identities

The Adjudication Process and Interviews

The most significant subject discussed by all the experts was the issues of the asylum process for SOGI claimants. In all cases, they expressed frustration at the criteria used by the immigration authorities use to determine SOGI asylum cases and the mental health impact this has on individuals mental health. The introduction of DSSH and the Gender Identity Assessment Model by the European Union Agency for Asylum has profoundly impacted how SOGI claimants are adjudicated for international protection. The introduction of these models are exemplified by Aino who stated:

10 years ago, when I started working, 100% of my clients got asylum. They would sit in my office, they would tell me their story, I listened. I would say ‘let’s go to the migration agency and tell them this exact story what happened and why you can’t return’. But ten years later I would say that about 90% are rejected because of the credibility assessments.

The core difficulty in the asylum process in assessing sexual orientation is when guidance models such as DSSH are introduced; as it often carries an inherent risk of becoming congealed by migration agencies into an interviewing schemata (Dawson & Gerber, 2017). Aino explained further the nature of the problem is that the model only intended to act as guidelines for agencies, however:

the migration agency has started to use it as like ... a questionnaire where they require that all LGBTQI+ people have universally common experiences and that they are able to talk about them in a certain way and if you don't have those experiences, you are denied because you are not credible.

This method of assessing credibility of SOGI claimants from the Finnish perspective is referred to as the 'go to narrative' where the focus is on identity rather than on orientation (Vanto, 2022). Yasmin from Helsinki Pride referred to this as follows:

The level of proof that they are supposed to have and what I mean proof; I don't mean physical documentation or pictures, it's just the way they explain is too high. Because most of the negative decisions are argued because the story is not detailed enough, it doesn't seem too personal, and the people haven't been able to describe their feelings, their emotions, their inner dialogue, and identity process in such a level of detail that is expected of them.

Yasmin further explains the challenge of the immigration authority demanding SOGI applicants explain their identity versus their orientation by explaining the following:

So when you're asked about your identity you're talking about the sexual encounters the sexual aspects of your identity you haven't been able to state. You haven't been able to you know, go out for dates, or do couple things, or living together, or express your identity in any other way they're having secretly hidden sex. But then you talk about the sexual encounters that you explain about your sexuality that you explain your sexual partners and then the immigration often says that you concentrated too much on the sex act in having sex... but no you need to take into consideration having sex in an abandoned building is their only way of living their identity because there hasn't been any other way. There is no grindr [gay dating app] in Bagdad.

However, the Finnish migration authority explains their requirement in their statement as follows:

We want them to tell us how they came to understand their difference from the heterosexual norm, what sort of feelings and thoughts that aroused in them and how it affected their lives at the home country. What did they think of laws, customs, or religious talk against LGBTI

persons and how that made them feel. Romantic relationships are also interesting, but one can have a homosexual identity without any relationships or sexual encounters, the important part of identity is inside the applicant.

The impact of revealing ones gender and sexuality is challenging for most. In addition to presenting a coherent linear narrative, applicants must overcome their fear of revealing they belong to the stigmatized group, release their lifelong concealment, and openly discuss the taboo of sexuality, free from shame, depression and memory loss (Berg & Millbank, 2009; Dhoest, 2019). This is confirmed by what Hassen reported:

This is not my term; many clients are using this term, they say that they feel naked in front of these persons. Really like they feel it like that... in certain culture to be naked from someone is a huge thing. Yeah they need to tell a lot thing that they feel is a lot of privacy, ‘‘I need to expose myself in front of someone that I don’t know’’ and it’s not easy.

Yasmin from Helsinki Pride explains further these challenges:

So you have quite traumatized people who may be have PTSD, who maybe don’t have enough mental health services that are needed, who have never been in a safe space to discuss and process their identity, put into an interview where they are expected to explain in very Western lingo their story linearly.

This is supported by Hassen who highlighted the issue of articulating highly evolved feelings in the asylum interview.

Especially the clients I work with from Iraq and Middle East, they have a lot of difficulties to explain emotions and they never talk about feelings you know. They are people were born and raised to not talk about feelings but they explain things by actions and acts.

This was also echoed by Amer when he reported ‘‘I didn’t even have name to describe what I was feeling, I didn’t have words to describe what I was experiencing, so I compartmentalized it. I would watch a [porn] movie for 5 minutes and then I would move on with my normal life.’’

Hassen pointed out another challenge which impacts on the asylum process, and what Yasmin referred to as the almost ‘‘academic requirements’’ placed on SOGI claimants to convince adjudicators of their sexuality. Hassen reports this as such:

you need to be in a certain education level connected with certain people to have those terms which are Western terms. But if you are really coming from those kinds of villages, or like small countryside place and basic education level, even like being in the school only four to five years only. What are you expecting? ... Their level of talking is, I will not say is childish but basic. And I think ‘‘Oh god, this person in Migri [migrations authority] will not pass at all’’ and they [migration authority] will not give him mercy. They [migration authority] will

not say he has mental thing or education thing. They will say ‘‘Oh he tried to lie or he doesn’t have a [credible] story’’.

Yasmin from Helsinki pride who points out the need for SOGI claimants to discuss at a philosophical and theological level during the asylum interview.

They want to hear from you an almost scholarly view on ‘‘how does it make you feel that your religion may be doesn’t accept gay people?’’ and that you have processed it, and thought about it, and if you haven’t, then they say it’s not believable that you come from a country were being gay and religion... even if you have thought about it, they [clients] don’t understand what they [migration authority interviewer] mean , they [clients] say ‘‘ Oh yeah religion says it haram and of course I feel bad’’. There is more but they can’t answer the question.

Such abstract requirements from the DSSH and gender identity model risks of operating as a filtering mechanism which excludes SOGI applicants who are unable to grasp culturally sensitive abstracts and just cannot express expected emotions (Vanto, 2022). Despite the criticism of the requirement to articulate a comprehensive internal dialogue in the adjudication process, the following statement from the Finnish migration agency outlines the State’s expectation from the interviewees.

They are not expected to use the western LGBTQ vocabulary, they should use their own words and explain what that means. Even an illiterate person should be able to tell about their own life with their own words, how it was to live there, how they felt about the law/tradition/religion/customs against LGBTI persons.

However, one of the presumptions in Gender Identity models and DSSH models is the idea of shame. The models assume that the interviewee should be sensitive to societal disapproval via law, tradition, culture and customs, and this should lead to a sense of difference and shame, which should be changed or hidden (Vanto, 2022). Aino has raised this point from RFSL, who suggests that shame has become a requirement to be granted international protection, and when the applicant fails to convince the State of their shame, asylum is denied. She reports the following:

And then we have the requirement of negative emotions, people are required today [and are] expected to feel like crap, like shit about themselves, and of course many people have you know, many of us have that experience but you can’t use it as a requirement...we don’t require that from Swedish citizens, but it’s like we are as a State , the State authorities they require from refugees who are entitled to asylum and protection and residency that you have to... you have to feel self-hatred to be granted [asylum]. ‘‘It doesn’t matter if you always

felt proud of yourself, you can't say that in the interview, you will not be believed'' so you have to tell them you're expected to talk about negative feelings.

Aino went further to discuss that this process is in many ways a filtering process where the state agency acts as an interpretative body for the State. She reported the following:

Interpretative authority, that they have a right or they take the right to interpretate and define what sexual orientation gender identity is and even gender expression and define it as something emotional, feelings and deep reflections and emotions and all of that. Whereas so many people who I meet for example from different countries in West Africa, they define their sexuality as physical acts or behaviour and you know there is no wrong or right because it is up to us to define as the individual. We own the right to describe and define ourselves however we want. UNHCR guidelines and also Swedish immigration legal policy, so its Swedish law, international law that clearly states that it is not required that the applicant uses or is aware of certain terminology to describe and define themselves. But this is not followed. So, a person who describes themselves saying I feel same sex attraction, they are going to be denied because it is the wrong way to describe their sexual orientation.

In practice, the applicant must have the ability and capacity to conceptualise psychologically and cognitively highly complex social constructs and verbalise those ideations (Vanto, 2022). The emphasis on the inner emotional world takes precedence over orientation and gender identity. Yasmin from Helsinki Pride highlights the inanity of this approach and reported the following '' we have ridiculous cases... we have people who have been married with their partner for years and they're [migration agency] like ''we still don't believe that you are gay''. ''So me and my husband having been lying for x years?'' This was further highlighted by Aino who reported the following:

It was a person from Nigeria who submitted several doctors letters... statements where they had described that this person has a ... the physical body had not developed as one would expect for a man. A biological man and described that the testicals had not developed and the person had breast development. It was clear that this person had intersexed condition. This was an intersexed person and both the migration agency and migration court said; ''we don't question the doctors statement, we can read them and there is no reason to question them, however, the person has not recounted for feelings or deep emotions about an inner process. So we are denying them asylum... It's ridiculous especially in these situations where the need for protection is connected to someone physical, like someone's appearance. It's not relevant to have feelings and emotions.

Re-traumatisation

Many of those interviewed discuss how the asylum process interviews often negatively impact the mental health of those who claim asylum in Sweden and Finland. This reflects on what some literature suggests that the asylum process, itself, can cause re-traumatisation for applicants (Cloitre et al., 2009; Kahn & Alessi, 2018). Aino reports this of a young claimant who had been subjected to imprisonment and rape in his journey from Somalia to Sweden. She recounts the following:

...we had asked for a female interpreter because like I said the person had been raped and was scared to death of Somalian men... But we sat in that room and then the interperter comes in who is a Somalian man and my clients breaks down, has a panic attack and tries to say "I asked for a female and they're scared already of the interpreter and saying that they wanted a female interpreter. So, I have to step in and say but we asked for a female interpreter, that's his legal right, but instead of saying "oops sorry there must have been a mistake, let's try to rearrange the interview and reschedule it or get a female interpreter ... the case officer says "No! Let's try! Try! Let's try anyway!" and the person is sitting there shaking in a panic attack. I mean I would call that abuse.

Aino reported another case:

and the person was so traumatised and couldn't sit in small rooms and then I understood that the person was gay.... And as never talked about why they actually had to leave [name of country]. But it was because the person had been kidnapped and tortured by three men and raped and was just horrible situation so the person was in a state where he could barely talk and could barely walk, so sitting in that interview room where the person is already starting to shake at the beginning of the interview and then started to have hallucinations of the three men standing behind the case officer and I said I don't think we can continue with this but this was almost 10 years ago... if that would have happened today, that would never have worked. That person would have been denied 100%

The experience of SOGI refugees going through the asylum process is reflected in what Yasim from Helsinki Pride reports: "... a lot of my clients have very very traumatic backgrounds and they have been tortured, or raped, or human trafficking, or there is horrible experience either in their home country, or while traveling to Europe". Aino in RFSL reflects on this further:

It's subjecting them [to] a second trauma... I often refer my clients and others to psychologists and because they need to, you know, very often need to talk to someone to get them to process, to even to survive the asylum process... I often think "how do you like

counsel someone who is constantly living under death threat? Because that is what they are going through. You are going through the asylum process but you're constantly risking a negative decision and being deported.

Aino summarized what clients experience in the asylum interview in the following: ‘‘ I’ve been in so many asylum interviews where it’s really, it’s really painful because you feel like your client whose case you are responsible for, not entirely, but very much you feel like what is happening in the room is abuse’’. The inherent weaknesses in the asylum adjudication process based on the European and State level legal systems entrap SOGI claimants in a prolonged and nightmarish process impacting SOGI claimants in such a way that what they experience is acknowledged as 'legal violence' (Danisi & Ferreira, 2022). The term legal violence is a social theory developed to refer to the negative consequences of laws which originally are intended for good but, in effect, leave the claimant with psychological outcomes of shame, fear, stigmatisation, humiliation, exclusion, imprisonment, trauma and have a profoundly negative impact on the individual (Jackman, 2002; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012). This is particularly relevant in adjudication interviews, where the investigator holds power and produces symbolic violence over the interviewee in their questioning, rendering the interviewee vulnerable (Prearo, 2021).

Access to Mental Health

The ability of Sogi applicants to access health care was a topic all interviewed had discussed, particularly in Finland. This issue was reflected in much of the international literature, which discusses the unique nature of the mental health challenges of SOGI refugees (Alessi et al., 2016, 2018; Kahn et al., 2018). Yasmin from Helsinki Pride discussed the following.

Health care is the biggest issue that when you are an asylum seeker you are only entitled to a certain level of health care which is necessary, which doesn't cover much. And a lot of the times it's kind of a fight. There is a bit of a too much threshold to get to these services. So mental service is not enough. Well its not enough for anybody in Finland, but especially for asylum seekers... and then a lot of my clients feel that the mental health support, because it's in the level of necessary that they get is only medical like meaning pills which a lot of them is not enough, they want long term psychotherapy which they are not able to access... nowadays what the reception centres are doing because they are knowing of this, they are giving people the contact to a social crisis centre which is a NGO.

Access to medical and therapeutic recourses for SOGI refugees is critical for feeling safe and secure while dealing with trauma and associated mental issues (Pelters et al., 2022). Civil

societies such as RFSL in Sweden have responded to this need by organising groups around Sweden. Yasmin from RFSL discussed her organisation's action to address the mental health issues of their client in the translation below:

Table 6

Interview with Yasmin RFSL

... kan vi stötta med sociala stöd att det finns sociala mötesplatser för personer som vill komma och bara träffa andra i samma situation och prata om sina svårigheter eller bara hänga med andra för att känna att de inte är ensamma, så att den här sociala psykosociala delen är ju otroligt viktig för att de ska känna sig trygga också i ett nytt land som inte som de inte kanske kan språket i eller vet hur de ska navigera i samhället och så vidare. Och sen så har vi stödmöjligheter där om de behöver någon form av stöd mentalt eller praktiskt eller annat så finns det både volontärer och ibland även kuratorer på plats som kan bistå med den hjälpen och som jag nämnde också så finns städerna tagning som vi kan hjälpa till med att de här avser dit och få direktstöd med den frågan som de har.

... can we support with social support that there are social meeting places for people who want to come and just meet others in the same situation and talk about their difficulties or just hang out with others to feel that they are not alone, so that this social psychosocial part is incredibly important for them to feel safe even in a new country when they perhaps don't know the language, or know how they should navigate society and so on. And then we have support opportunities where if they need some kind of support mentally or practically or otherwise, there are both volunteers and sometimes even counselors on site who can assist with that help and as I mentioned as well, there are reception points where we can help with, so they can go there and get direct support with the issues they have.

Hassen from Bazra reported the importance of having a group support in the short and long term in the following statement:

They feel on their own and they most need to be part of a community or part of group, or they want to be telling how they suffer in the reception centres; what's happened with Migri [migration agency] so they need this... Because when they are in the process time, some people they try to stay strong you know. To stay strong to hid what they feel just to fight to get the residence and start their life and then when they get the residents and they think they're safe, they collapse... they need specialists, they need therapists, they need many them think therapist, unfortunately they don't get it.

In Finland, Yasmin from Helsinki Pride highlighted the lack of access to specialised mental health treatment as such:

Then we have a unit in Finland, it's also an NGO, it's by the Helsinki Diakonissalaitos, it's called ... Sotatraumatisoituneiden Koutoutus and used to be the health centre of people who've been tortured. So, we have the expertise, but the issue is that they only take people

who are already have the asylum status. So, they either came here at the quota refugee or they have finally gotten the refugee status. So, while there are asylum seekers, just because of the number of people who need this very specialised service, they have pushed out asylum seekers or [the] undocumented.

3.1.4 Justice

Information, Agency and Institutional Trust

This topic was not discussed in the literature on SOGI refugees but was a salient theme in all the interviews. The trauma refugees may have experienced, and exposure to interpersonal and institutional aggression and violence will likely impact an individual's capability to hold any interpersonal and institutional trust in their host society (Hall & Werner, 2022). Additionally, exposure to interpersonal violence and PTSD will negatively impact an individual's ability to form institutional trust in host countries (Hall & Werner, 2022). Hassen from Basra reported the impact of a lack of information and it's influence on trust among SOGI claimants.

Many people in their country especially Iraqi Syria and North Africa we have trust issue between citizens and police... They feel really like traumatised from them, scared they can forget everything, so when they go to police station and usually what's happening in 2016 many people have either first interview where they should tell the reason why you ask asylum, it happened in police station when you have police officer with uniform in front of you. So, for them they cannot talk, you know. For me like it's not about safety its about trust.

This challenge in trust has been acknowledged by the Swedish police in their statement:

The relationship with migrant groups is often based on the previous experiences that migrant groups have from encounters with the police in their own home countries. Some migrant groups have bad experiences and think that the Swedish police act and behave in the same way... It's all about trust and be clear about the mission and tasks for the Swedish police. If the police can do that the outcome is often good.

This is critical for many SOGI claimants, but also for the general asylum seekers where the lack of information impacts the level of trust in Police and judicial systems. The understanding of justice and the mistrust in the legal system means very few will seek justice through official channels and may use informal channels of justice (Alim et al., 2021).

Hassen further reported the challenges of trust also extends to the asylum process and how this impacts on asylum interviews.

I met people asking ‘Like OK! I tell what I tell, but I had so many things because honestly, I don’t know where those papers will go? All that I tell will be registered will be distributed’ So many information is missing to the people [that] they don’t have proper kind of, how I say? Like info time to explain for them how it goes this [asylum] process and when you give an interview, this interview goes where? For how many years [records kept] who have access to this data etc. Otherwise, people are thinking about that, who will see it? And probably if I’m coming with a member of my family, can my member of family see my interview? They don’t know! So many questions and they are afraid to tell everything because they don’t know how it [information] will go and I think here it’s a big responsibility for the system and immigration service because they should explain they really should have.

Hassen continued to explain that while the migration authorities offer information sessions in the reception centres, they usually only touch on basic legal issues which fail to go into detail on the asylum process. He reported the challenges as such:

That doesn’t go really in deep what is the process of the asylum. [For example] what does the interview mean, who’s those translators? So, all those details for the people are the obstacle to tell the reality [of] who they are. And this is why many people only start now telling after many many many negative decision... but they have reason why they didn’t tell them, they have reason. We cannot blame them honestly. If you live for four years in reception centre with people from your own country where everybody know who you are, from where you come, know your parents everything about your life, it’s very hard to say like ‘OK’. ‘Now I will come out and say who I am and then you know, OK who will save you from the bullying inside the reception center?’

Yasmin from Helsinki Pride also highlights the issue of information and trust when she reported: ‘the main struggle from most of them is the asylum process. Like so how prepare for the interviews...’what does it mean the different stages?’, and ‘ what if I get a negative answer?’, ‘What if I end up undocumented? And these are issues so the asylum would be like, let’s say the header of the biggest issue for most of our clients.’

Yasmin from RFSL describes the lack of information as having a more profound impact on SOGI claimants, being more comprehensive, and going beyond the asylum process.

Table 7

Interview with Yasmin RFSL

Jag skulle nog säga att den svåraste utmaningen är jo	I would probably say that the most difficult challenges
varit att de kanske inte får tillräcklig med information	are that they may not get enough information

gällande asyl processen från första början, omkring sina rättigheter och vart ska de användas seg, kring hälsa sjukvård till exempelvis och vilket typ stöd de kan få, gällande det mentala hälsan och sedan också vad och hur de kan tillgodose sina rättigheter under asylprocessen exempelvis om de bor på asylboende att de har möjlighet att söka arbete och vad vart de kan söka arbete både också vara med som information är .. at alltså det jag menar är att det finns väldigt stora kunskapsbrister gällande informationsspridningen gentemot asylsökande.

regarding the asylum process from the very beginning, about their rights and where should they be used, surrounding health care etc, for example, and what kind of support they can receive, regarding the mental health they can get, and then also what and how they can they exercise their rights during the asylum process, for example if they live in an asylum accommodation, that they have the opportunity to look for work and what or where they can look for work both also be included as information is .. So what I mean is that there are very large knowledge gaps regarding the dissemination of information towards asylum seekers.

Related to this issue is how SOGI refugees are able to navigate the work market and how a lack of information of their rights leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. This was exemplified by Yasmin from Helsinki Pride who reported the following:

Unfortunately, the work that people tend to find is usually very physically heavy, cleaning, construction work and I'm not saying that all of this work is exploitative but it's damn near to it, so it might be that the work that people find would be the ... for example they need to clean a huge whole [space] with a given amount of time, which is just not possible and then the extra time that they work is just out of their own pocket... For example, or they find work where there hours are not altogether, so that you might have you get up at 05:00 in the morning you work a couple of hours, get lunch, go somewhere else for a couple of hours, in the evening go clean for that couple of hours. So you're working the whole day but you're not really because you have their breaks of moving from one place to another, so these are some of the difficulties.

A study on refugees' relationship to well-being, psychological agency and injustice is affected by asylum seekers' perceptions of state authorities which can hinder building trust. In order to rebuild agency and a sense of control among refugees, requires State authorities to implement a concerted process to inform and educate refugees on their rights, legal procedures in the asylum process, education and employment rights (Alim et al., 2021). These findings from Finland and Sweden suggests State agencies have not provided full psychological agency to SOGI refugees by not allowing access to detailed information on their asylum process.

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary of Findings

Since the 19th century, the Anglo-European societies have, through sexology categorised sexual behaviours and link them to identity. This led to new terms, such as the words homosexuality and homosexuals, entering into European languages in the 1890s (Downham Moore, 2021). The development of this categorisation and its accompanying terminology led the way to pathologise, regulate and cure people's sexual behaviour (Lubin & Vaccaro, 2021). Sins became sinners, and sexual behaviour became identities, all of which were codified into science and medicalised into psychiatry, eugenics and hygienics (Downham Moore, 2021). This categorisation imposed a moral code on populations and was a tool to control societies and became a weapon of colonisation (Downham Moore, 2021; Lubin & Vaccaro, 2021). It was a means to civilise the uncivilised in the European colonies in Africa, Asia and the Americas (Schrader, 2020). A century later Global North's understanding of sexuality is a reflection of this historical backdrop and is culturally specific to the Global North (Sullivan, 2019). The progress of LGBTQI+ rights and the subsequent rise of homonationalism from the conservative right perpetuates the belief that Western societies hold the ultimate truth on sexuality and gender identity. This notion has resulted in many in the Middle East and African countries accusing Global North of neo-colonialism (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015; Greatrick, 2019b; Nasser-Eddin et al., 2018).

This study has shown that the development of the Sexual and Gender Identity Models and, in particular, the DSSH model, does not deviate from 19th-century Anglo-European ideology on sexuality and its attempt to categorise human sexual behaviour into immutable identities. The unduly strict criteria requirements set on SOGI claimants place a boundary between the global north and global south; whereby SOGI claimants must narrate who they are in a language that depicts worldviews defined by white European bureaucrats (Hiller, 2019). This narration requires the claimant to narrate their victimhood from the culture, their shame, and, critically, their vulnerability and deservedness, which reproduces a colonist logic (Hiller, 2022; Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). The model sets identity and feelings over orientation and biology. This is underscored in the study when Sweden's migration and court refused to provide a biologically intersexed person international protection based on the individual's failure to adequately discuss their feelings according to DSSH model requirements. Ultimately, the models are used as a filtering tool only to permit those who can speak in Western frames (Fassin & Salcedo, 2015). Akins (2017) referred to this as 'rainbow splashing' whereby those who can

frame their storytelling in compliance with white Anglo-European sensibilities are permitted to stay; however, those who lack the language, education, enculturation or attempt to define their sexuality on their own terms are rejected, criminalised and deported (Hiller, 2022). Additionally, the study highlights power structures within the asylum process and the traumatisation many SOGI claimants experience during the asylum process and the interviews. This study highlighted how the legislation intended to protect SOGI claimants leaves what many described in the study as "naked" and psychologically traumatised, a phenomenon which (Prearo, 2021) referred to as 'legal violence' inflicted in the asylum process on claimants.

The study highlighted the gravity of unsafe environments many SOGI claimants faced in reception centres while living under constant fear of aggression and violence. The inability of authorities to ensure safe spaces for SOGI refugees was highlighted in the study. This was compounded with the constant psychological fear of being transferred to remote regions where many SOGI claimants are cut off from social networks and LGBTQI+ support organisations. More alarming was the mental health impact this had on individuals when removed from NGO support networks and specialised healthcare, and it can best be described as solitary-confinement by geography.

Concealment and isolation was also a core theme by all who were interviewed. The need to maintain close contact with co-ethnic communities was an important feature in order to survive in Finland and Sweden. Those interviewed feared being rejected by their co-ethnic communities and regarded that social connectedness perhaps as psychologically beneficial to them. While much literature discusses the negative psychological impact of identity concealment on SOGI refugees, some literature does suggest that concealment provides protective benefits for SOGI individuals (Beals et al., 2009; Vuckovic Juros, 2022).

The lack of mental health was highlighted in the interviews, and many in the study discussed the need for mental services to be made available, particularly in Finland. Despite the wealth of literature on the unique mental health challenges SOGI refugees experience including PTSD and suicidality, the study showed that neither Finnish or Swedish authorities have in place any mechanism to address the mental health needs of SOGI claimants.

The balance and relationship between information, trust and psychological agency was a topic which was not discussed in the literature, but was a key issue in both Finland and Sweden. The study highlighted the inability of State agencies to implement a comprehensive communications strategy directly impacted SOGI claimants trust in migration agencies and State institutions, including the Police authorities. This lack of information and trust directly affects SOGI's asylum process, where they feel unable to reveal their sexual orientation to

migration agencies, or seek police help when becoming a victim of violence. On a wider level, the lack of information and trust among SOGI refugees creates vulnerable situations, leading to many becoming exploited in the work market as they cannot exert their agency in navigating Finnish and Swedish societies. Institutions are aware that some refugee groups, particularly SOGI refugees, require targeted interventions to build institutional trust through information and dialogue (Hall & Werner, 2022). Without such efforts, refugees and SOGI refugees will be unable to regain psychological agency.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

There were a number of noteworthy limitations regarding this study. First, while many SOGI claimants enquired about participating in the study, the majority later declined as they feared their identity may be discovered. Those who did volunteer were university-educated males, and all understood how university studies function. The small sample of non-expert interviewees limited the diversity of the SOGI group. This meant that the study did not include the experiences of cis women, trans-gendered people, bisexual and intersex individuals. Secondly, all those interviewed were resident Finland; therefore, study did not include the experiences of SOGI claimants in Sweden and their experience of interaction with Swedish institutions.

4.3 Implications of the Study and for Further Research

Given the limited amount of research in this area and particularly from a Nordic perspective, there are areas which may be researched further. Regarding mental health it may be beneficial to further study the level of PTSD and associated mental health issues among SOGI claimants in Finland and Sweden, particularly the impact the asylum process, living in reception centres and asylum interviews may have on mental health.

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