

School Nurses' Experiences Working with Unaccompanied Refugee Children and Adolescents: A Qualitative Study

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Implications for school nursing

This study highlights that many school nurses called for improved co-operation and communication as well as clear guidelines for the care of unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents. The school healthcare mission is to work according to the child's best interests, needs, and rights. Thus, an organized interaction between different authorities and staff working with these refugees is required, and it is important to remember that a lack of adequate support potentially puts the student's well-being at risk. Building non-person-based collaboration requires time, and the question "Who does what?" should be asked to reflect on their own and others' responsibilities and roles. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Swedish government implement a high-level mechanism with a clear mandate to ensure equal access to all rights at both the regional and municipal level, and that the necessary resources be made available. This aligns well with the outcome of our qualitative study on the need for improved collaboration when dealing with unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents.

Background

Children and adolescents below 18 years who seek asylum in Sweden without their parents or other legal guardians are referred to as unaccompanied refugee children (SFS 1994:137).

Aim

School nurses are one of the first health care professionals to meet unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents and therefore have an important impact on health outcomes. The aim of this study was to describe school nurses' experiences working with unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school nurses (n = 14) who worked with unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents. The interviews were analyzed via qualitative content analysis.

Results

Three themes were identified through the analysis:

- 1) Knowledge of trauma-informed care;**
- 2) Knowledge of intercultural nursing;**
- 3) Importance of self-awareness.**

The overall message from these interviews was a critical need for broader knowledge of cultural differences and appropriate care measures for trauma victims that could be achieved by increased access to continuing education as well as opportunities for school nurses for personal and professional development.

Quotes

"The more you hold on, the more you are linked to them as individuals because the unaccompanied refugee youths are incredibly generous with themselves. I feel that I get more back from these young people, and I learn a lot about intercultural nursing."

"... and things happen to yourself when you start work. If I compare myself from before I started working with unaccompanied refugee youths and how I am today, I developed myself in my view of my work. I do not exactly do the same things I did when I started."



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