

Negotiating Safety and Security

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"I live with the awareness that the daily security [I] feel might very fast be a thing of the past."

(Germany, age 24)

"Well-being is not about money; it is about safety and security."

(Finland, focus group)



"They [the police] say 'go back to Africa' or 'go back to your country.'" (Ireland, age 25)

"It was really sad to see how they [the police] just treated me with little respect and dignity and that they did not believe what I was saying." (UK, age 22)

"The police should be your friend and helper but I don't see them like that... I get paranoid thinking 'what will they say now?' because they are the law they can do whatever they want." (UK, age 18)

Negotiating these encounters becomes a key concern for young male migrants necessitated by a desire to attain or maintain a permanent status in the host country. Many of the men reported undertaking behaviour that was designed to limit and control interactions with authority figures, which formed part of their negotiations to avoid trouble and stay safe. Strategies of minimizing attention and not giving cause for additional police attention were evident. Young male migrants are at all times having to defend their legitimacy to carry out legal day-to-day activities

"If we were just quiet and having [a] good time, there wouldn't be so much attention on us [from the police]". (Ireland, age 18)



Introduction

Feeling safe is a key component of well-being. The experiences of young male migrants, in ensuring their safety and security, are shaped by three key elements:

- the way they are perceived by authority;
- perceptions of those around them and ;
- the way they perceive their own situation and status.

Managing and negotiating each of these elements, young male migrants in this study demonstrate techniques of avoidance and are often resigned to 'lie low' in order to avoid trouble.



Self-Perception - Security through Status

The subjective migrant identity was something that offered security for some but presented challenges to security for others.

For many of the young migrant men, their new host country enabled them to 'sleep at night' removing them from civil war, acute terrorist threats and fears of violence, and so represented a secure environment within which to live. There was a sense amongst many that securing a feeling of safety was one of the most positive aspects of living in the host country.

"In my home country, everybody is afraid of the future." (Finland, focus group)

"Probably the thing I like most here. I used to live in a town where it was not safe. Here you can walk the street at 3am with the headset on and you know nobody is going to smash your head". (CZ, age 22)

However, other respondents felt threatened as a result of their migrant status, experiencing the stigmatizing effects of the label and, for those without permanent status, the perpetual insecurity and fear of detention or deportation.

Policy Implications

Safety and security are important aspects of well-being that elicit a variety of narrative experiences. A common feature of those experiences is the way that encounters with authority, the public and peers are negotiated in different spaces, sometimes on a daily basis. The narratives raise potential policy implications in relation to:

- Police and authority responses to young migrant men
- Media messages about young migrant men
- Processes of asylum and treatment of people seeking asylum
- Support structures (public and third sector) for young migrant men

Interactions with Authorities

Young male migrants negotiated a constant series of, sometimes hostile, encounters with those in authority. The narratives present a complex picture whereby the authorities may serve as both protectors and supporters for some whilst being a source of tension, frustration, cynicism and mistrust for others. Tense encounters were linked in the narratives to stigmatization: the double-bind of the discriminatory migrant construction alongside public perceptions of 'deviant youth'.

Managing Interactions with Others- Staying Safe/Avoiding Trouble

Managing interactions with friends, acquaintances and other members of the public was critical in maintaining a sense of safety and avoiding trouble. Not disclosing phone numbers, avoiding discussing asylum-seeker status, and staying away from drug-using acquaintances and others who were perceived as untrustworthy or a potential threat, were all measures that migrant men employed to ensure that they were not the target of discrimination, victimisation, or the focus of law enforcement activities.

Safety was seen as something that was dependent on the situation at the time and 'the type of people you're dealing with'. Certain places were deemed 'unsafe' and certain groups of people were avoided or ignored.