

**A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF POLICING
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION IN THE WEST MIDLAND
REGION: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT
AGENCIES**

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Abstract

The issues of small boats crossing the English Channel, immigration detention centres, and the asylum system are highly discussed topics in the United Kingdom (UK) due to undocumented migration. Despite the efforts of the UK government and the Home Office to tighten its borders by strict and stringent immigration policies, these measures have not effectively achieved their objectives. In fact, these measures have negatively impacted the immigration pattern, which was exploited by migrant smugglers and increased the number of undocumented migrants in the UK. Based on detailed qualitative interviews with fifteen undocumented migrants and nine law enforcement officers in the West Midlands region, this thesis provides a unique understanding of the lived experience of undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers' experience policing undocumented migrants. This thesis employed zemiological (social harm approach) and border criminology to understand the range of harms experienced by undocumented migrants and the impact of immigration policies on their lives.

The findings of the study highlight that undocumented migrants experience a spectrum of harm whilst navigating the informal job market, health and social care, education, and criminal justice system, including the police. The findings also demonstrate that vulnerability and harm produced by the UK's immigration policies are fundamentally deliberate rather than an unintended consequence. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the harm experienced by these vulnerable people, and the government has little knowledge of the true number of undocumented migrants' deaths due to COVID-19. Despite these issues, government functionaries like the Home Office and Immigration Authority

continue to defend their position on current immigration policies, which contribute to a range of harm, including physical, financial, psychological, and cultural harm

Furthermore, undocumented migrants often find themselves in highly vulnerable and exploitative situations, unable to access the criminal justice system due to their lack of legal status, which is frequently exploited by criminals and opportunists. Interactions with law enforcement officers (both police and immigration officers) found that their priorities are often aligned with policymakers and senior management within law enforcement agencies. Whilst some police officers are willing to support these undocumented migrants, the paradoxical nature of immigration policies forces them to focus on enforcement. This thesis questions the ethical responsibilities and effectiveness of current immigration policies and their implementation, highlighting the special liberties taken by policymakers at the expense of these vulnerable undocumented migrants.

The thesis concludes that current immigration policies are ethically indefensible and practically ineffective. The evidence reveals that restrictive policies fail to prevent migration whilst pushing vulnerable people into exploitative situations that criminals actively exploit. Key recommendations include implementing firewall protections between essential services and immigration enforcement, establishing safe crime reporting mechanisms, and developing regularisation pathways that prioritise human rights over deterrence.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“In August 2014, ISIS came to our area it's called Sinjar. They destroyed everything in our area. They destroyed and burned our homes, and even schools in our area. They separated all men and women, then killed a lot of men and enslaved women and children as their servants. Most of the families were destroyed and killed. My father was also killed during the attack, and I don't know whether my mom is alive. I don't know where and what happened to my sister. I ran from my village with others when my village was under attack, and I went to Turkey with other people. It was a difficult journey because we had to walk and travel in the overcrowded lorry. Around two days we travel without food and water to reach Turkey. At that time, I was just 21 years old, I didn't know what to do. I wanted to go back to search my mother and sister, but I was scared. It was too much for me at the time and I couldn't do anything to save my family. When I reached Turkey, I was lucky that I found my uncle who was already in Turkey. He had some connection with smugglers, and he said he will send me to the UK. I was very scared to go anywhere but he wanted me to be safe and said it was not good for me to stay in Turkey. He asked me to go with a man probably a smuggler and asked me to do whatever he asking to do. I was in different transports during the travel. I was changing from one lorry to another, sometimes small lorry and sometimes a big container truck. Sometimes walking and sometimes on a bus. It was a horrible journey for me. It was a long journey, and it took me around one month to reach the UK. At that time, I had no money, so I had to rely on whatever smuggler gave me to eat and drink. I did not get to eat enough food during that time and some days I only had one meal a day. Also, I was scared to ask the smugglers because they had guns and knives, I didn't want to get hurt.... After all these struggles I went through to come to the UK, the Home Office didn't believe my struggle and rejected my asylum claim” (Farhad).

This narrative highlights the serious challenges that undocumented migrants experience in their journey to the United Kingdom (UK), which often involve life-threatening events and situations. Their struggle does not end upon reaching the

destination country; the actual struggle starts at the destination. Upon arrival, they are forced to live in precarious conditions and face systemic issues, including discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion from fundamental rights and services. In recent years, reducing the number of regular and irregular migrants in the UK has become a key policy for the Home Office. Still, the Home Office did not estimate the number of undocumented migrants living in the UK until 2005 (Wright, 2020). The Pew Research Centre estimated that there may have been 800,000 to 1.2 million undocumented migrants living in the UK in 2017 (Casciani, 2019). However, the exact number of undocumented migrants currently in the UK is unknown (ibid).

Undocumented migrants are sometimes described as 'illegal migrants', and increasingly, as this study argues, the framing around issues of migration has become centred around criminal justice as a means of managing migration policy. Sometimes, terms such as irregular or economic migrants are used (Walsh, 2020). At the centre is often the issue of whether people have entered the country legally. Still increasingly, in recent years, there has been a curtailing of opportunities for people to migrate, coupled with a conflation of asylum and migration as issues. It is now common to see migration as a political issue used to describe all manner of complex circumstances around individual lives, from the employment needs of the economy to visa overstaying and those who have failed to leave the country when they were required to do so; people seeking asylum whose claims the Home Office has rejected but who are fearful of returning to their home countries; and temporary workers whose visas have expired, as well as those entering the country without permission, such as being trafficked or smuggled on a lorry or boat to seek refuge or for economic reasons (Casciani, 2019; Walsh, 2020). Essentially, undocumented migrants are far from a

homogeneous group. Still, those who do not meet the complex requirements of what are often perplexingly confusing bureaucratic systems and processes may be at high risk of detention and enforcement action from the authorities. Further, while frequently cast as a problem to law and order, many may be victims of it and are paradoxically at risk of exploitation, victimisation, and destitution.

People enter the UK and settle as undocumented migrants for many reasons by living in hidden communities (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011; Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020). These hidden communities bring significant uncertainty, and often their inhabitants are placed in a position that leads to exploitation and victimisation and have limited access to the criminal justice system due to their status (Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020; Spencer, 2017).

This research study has explored the lived experience of undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region, which includes their day-to-day life, challenges in navigating the job market, discrimination, exploitation, and limitations in access to essential services, and their places when it comes to debates around criminal justice. The study also highlighted the experience of law enforcement agencies, both police and immigration officers, and their interaction with undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region. A zemiological (social harm inspired) informed approach¹ has been employed to understand different harms experienced by undocumented migrants in navigating their day-to-day lives. The

¹ The social harm or zemiological approach is a theoretical framework that challenges the narrow definition of crime as it often excludes many forms of preventable harm such as social, economic, physical, psychological, and environmental damage that impact human flourishing and societal well-being (Hillyard and Tombs, 2007; Pemberton, 2015). This approach enables criminology to move beyond legal definitions of 'crime' and acknowledge a wide range of immoral, wrongful and injurious acts that may or may not be deemed illegal but are arguably more profoundly damaging (Hillyard et al., 2004; Hillyard and Tombs, 2007).

work also draws on qualitative traditions of criminology and social inquiry, specifically ethnography, and the use of in-depth interviews and observation methods to gather data from both undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers. These have been thematically analysed and organised to give the reader a clear understanding of the lived experiences of undocumented migrants and their struggles in one community of the UK today, in light of the prevailing socio-economic, political, and cultural context that has become an increasingly hostile environment.

This introduction chapter will provide an overview of the status of undocumented migrants, followed by the aims and objectives of the research project. Further, the chapter discusses the significance of this research project and its unique contribution to the field of criminology. Finally, it will provide an overview of the chapters in this thesis and the ordering of it. The aim is to show the complexities and nuances of the realities in many people's lived experiences. These experiences often confound the simplistic one-dimensional takes of a highly charged and divisive national debate about the benefits and disadvantages of mass migration in the contemporary world.

Undocumented Migrants in the UK

In recent years, the UK, like much of Europe, has implemented ever more stringent measures to prevent undocumented entry into the country. Despite these efforts, migrants continue to attempt to enter the country and often have mixed motives, for their migration and choice of destination (Castles and Miller, 2009). Due to the immigration restrictions and availability of fewer regular routes, it influences people to make more dangerous and expensive journeys with the help of agents, smugglers, or traffickers who organise their journeys (Bloch,

Sigona and Zetter, 2011). The ability to organise funds for the journey determines the level of difficulties and challenges they will face during the migration (Zijlstra and Liempt, 2017). Upon arrival, undocumented migrants often experience fear and uncertainty as they must depend on others (Sigona, 2012). Social networking plays an important role in the lives of undocumented migrants and in navigating day-to-day issues. The migrants without connections in the UK often experience significant challenges in finding safe accommodation and employment.

Undocumented migrants play an important role in the informal sector in many countries including the UK (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Readiness to work and low cost make undocumented migrants a flexible source and they are often employed in sectors like the food and catering industry, construction, domestic work, and agriculture (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Despite their contribution to the country's economy, they often experience exploitation at work and remain in a vulnerable position (Bloch and McKay, 2014). Often the work undertaken by these migrants is typically characterised by temporary, low-paid, limited range of job opportunities, long and unsocial working hours (Alberti, 2014; Bloch, 2013; Nabil Ahmad, 2008). Due to the nature of employment, along with language barrier and fear of detection, the migrants often limit themselves to engaging in social life (Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013). Further, they also make active decisions in terms of whom to interact with and whom not to (Sigona, 2012).

Undocumented migrants also face difficulties in accessing healthcare and medical services (Poduval et al., 2015; Winters et al., 2018). Due to their lack of legal status, they are restricted from accessing NHS healthcare and forced to use unaffordable private clinics or depend on self-medication or illicit sources of medication which can be a serious and life-threatening act (Biswas, Kristiansen, Krasnik and Norredam, 2011; Grit, den Otter and Spreij, 2011; Poduval et al.,

2015). Lack of healthcare services makes female undocumented migrants even more vulnerable, as they are often prone to various sexual and reproductive complications (Sebo et al., 2010; Wolff et al., 2008). Even during serious health emergencies, undocumented migrants may and do avoid accessing NHS services, due to the fear of detention as the Home Office has access to the NHS patient's records (Nellums et al., 2021). Many migrants and their families suffered due to the COVID-19 lockdown between March 2020 to March 2021 and its restrictions; however, they did not receive any support and continued to live in more precarious conditions (Brannen and O'Connell, 2022).

Due to the lack of legal status, undocumented migrants are doubtlessly more susceptible to becoming victims of crime. It is worth suggesting at this juncture; however, the recognition of this fact pales into insignificance when contrasted with the vast and continual representation of migration as a threat to social cohesion, the rule of law and societal stability. Migrants are often presented simply as an arriving crime problem and a challenge to law and order. However, undocumented migrants are undeniably vulnerable to victimisation. They are targeted by many, including people who are close to them, like employers, as they are aware that these migrants have no formal access to the justice system to report crimes or exploitation (Madsen, 2004). In their day-to-day lives, undocumented migrants experience assaults, abuse, robbery, and theft; however, due to the fear of detection and deportation, they decide not to report crimes and to avoid the authorities. Scott's (2022) research on young migrants excluded from protection demonstrates that this pattern of non-reporting represents a choice of 'survival over safety' where migrants prioritise avoiding detection over seeking justice for crimes committed against them. This phenomenon extends beyond any single national context, as evidenced by

Scott's work in Sweden, highlighting that the vulnerability of undocumented migrants to unreported victimisation is a broader international issue. While, of course, some undocumented migrants do become embroiled in illegal activities for a complex array of reasons, this is not how the situation is primarily framed or understood at any level of the social strata. There is often a rather simplistic liberal or authoritarian (and quite binary) division that casts lawbreaking merely as instrumental and self-interested and unrestrained want or unavoidable and forgivable need, where survival and necessity mean obtaining forged documents to work in the formal sector or even joining a local criminal gang for their safety and survival (Khosravi, 2010; Madsen, 2004; Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Reality is likely much more complex.

A detailed account of existing literature on the lived experience of undocumented migrants is discussed in Chapter 2 – literature review, which is more geographically concentrated in London and Southeast England. This research project focuses on undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region and their challenges in navigating their lives without a legal status.

Purpose and Originality of the Study

With the growing controversies around migration to the UK, including issues related to small boat crossings, the former Conservative government's Rwanda policy, the new Labour government led by Sir Keir Starmer announced in 2024 that it was seeking lessons from Italy, and seemingly growing demands for strong immigration enforcement, it is crucial to understand the migrants who live in the UK, particularly undocumented migrants who often live hidden within the society under precarious and vulnerable conditions. Although there is a growing body of literature on undocumented migrants in the UK (and across the world), there is

still a gap in the academic understanding of the lived experience of undocumented migrants outside London and the Southeast of England. This research project seeks to address this gap by focusing on the West Midlands, a region that has been a hub for migrants (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006; Myers and Grosvenor, 2011) but has received very limited academic attention in the context of undocumented migration. The West Midlands region with its unique socio-economic and cultural setting, provides a valuable case for understanding undocumented migrants outside of London.

As has been noted and further discussed, undocumented migrants without a legal status, often experience discrimination, and exploitation and are highly vulnerable to crime (De La Maza Díaz and Leerkes, 2024; Madsen, 2004; Sung, Delgado, Peña and Paladino, 2016). There may be significant barriers to reporting crimes due to fear of deportation and lack of trust in law enforcement (Madsen, 2004; Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022), and a wider range of issues that are frequently not considered. To address this issue the study focuses on understanding the experience of migrants through qualitative research and inquiry, and much of that focus centres on circumstances of crime victimisation and reporting as a challenge they face in accessing justice systems and supports. The study also focuses on the experience of law enforcement officers in policing and understanding migrants and their interaction with them. It also considers how immigration policies shape the way law enforcement officers interact with undocumented migrants and provide justice to them if they are victims of crime.

The study challenges the notion that undocumented migrants migrated to the UK for economic benefits, were extensively involved in serious criminal activities (beyond often those created by virtue of their undocumented status) or were unworthy of protection. Instead, the study analysed their experience from a

zemiological or social harm perspective to provide an in-depth understanding of the range of harms experienced by them. The study also highlights the various harms experienced by undocumented migrants and the human cost of stringent policies, as well as critically exploring the legal and social structures that perpetuate the marginalisation. This research makes it clear that there is a narrow and often one-dimensional representation of issues, which also frequently obscures the human stories and experiences that, through 'thick description' and interviewing, I have attempted to place front and centre of this work.

In doing this, the research contributes to the ongoing development of the social harm approach, but in a new and hitherto little-considered arena of high victimisation and high precariousness, undocumented migration. The study also contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive policing and the moral, ethical, legal, and human rights issues, focuses on the UK context while considering applications to other democratic systems, recognising that democratic practices vary across different countries. Through this in-depth exploration, the study provides a unique contribution to the field of criminology, criminal justice and migration studies.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research project is to explore the lived experience of undocumented migrants and explore the way in which undocumented migrants are policed by law enforcement agencies in the West Midlands region.

The following research objectives were formulated to achieve the above-mentioned aim:

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of the undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region.
2. To explore undocumented migrants' experience navigating the job market, working conditions and exploitation faced by them in the workplace.
3. To explore the challenges and difficulties faced by undocumented migrants in their day-to-day lives.
4. To explore the challenges faced by undocumented migrants in accessing healthcare and other basic services in the West Midlands region.
5. To examine the impact of lack of legal status on their mental health and overall well-being.
6. To critically analyse various harms experienced by the undocumented migrants navigating their day-to-day life in the West Midlands region.
7. To explore the interaction between undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers both police and immigration officers within the West Midlands region.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on the lived experience of undocumented migrants, with a core focus on migration, the motives, housing-related issues, employment-seeking techniques, labour exploitation and other issues related to lived life. This chapter specifically considers literature and debates on undocumented migrants' difficulties in accessing basic necessities such as healthcare, education and the justice system. The chapter also traced evidence related to the interaction of law enforcement both police and immigration officers with undocumented migrants.

Chapter 3 sets out the methodology of this PhD research project. This chapter will provide an understanding to the reader about the empirical data collection process employed in this project including geographical location, type of sampling and sample size, and process of participant recruitment. The chapter also provides details on data processing and data coding for the thematic analysis employed. Further, it also provides an understanding of the ethical concerns presented in this research project due to the nature of participants and their vulnerabilities. Finally, the chapter provides an account of various limitations and practical difficulties faced by me in conducting this research project.

Chapter 4 onwards are data chapters. The first deals with undocumented migrants' motivation for migration, their journey, arrival, and housing-related issues. It covers key themes from in-depth interviews, including migration motives, reasons for choosing the UK, travel routes and their experience, and the dual emotions of safety and uncertainty. This chapter describes the difficulties and challenges experienced by migrants in their journey, migration decisions, and their experience of availing services from agents or migrant smugglers². This chapter explains the need and practical experiences of undocumented migrants upon their arrival to the UK, focusing on their adaptation during the initial stages. This chapter also explores the role of social capital such as family, friends, and co-nationals in providing early support and accommodation. This chapter also answers why undocumented migrants relocate to smaller cities within the West Midlands region leaving London. This chapter further explored narratives from

² According to Article 3(a) of the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, "smuggling of migrants" is defined as "the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident (UN General Assembly, 2000).

the in-depth interviews of undocumented migrants and critically analysed the range of harms experienced by the migrants in each theme.

Chapter 5 explains the complex realities of undocumented migrants in the UK, particularly in the informal job market, exploitation faced in the workplace, and social isolation due to their lack of legal status. This chapter critically analysed the impact of the lack of legal status and the policy of making the UK a 'Hostile Environment' (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; Taylor, 2018), which affects undocumented migrants' ability to access the formal job market and forces them to seek employment in the unregulated, informal sectors such as construction jobs, household work, restaurants, warehouses and co-ethnic businesses. This chapter also highlights challenges faced by undocumented migrants in the informal job market and unfair work conditions such as long hours, under paid, and unsafe work environments (Bloch & McKay, 2014). The chapter also explores undocumented migrants' ability to obtain forged documents in order to escape exploitative employment in the informal job market. The chapter also sheds light on Language barriers and how they limit their job opportunities and social interactions, this leads to over-dependency on co-ethnic networks which marginalise them and isolate them from the wider society (Bloch, 2013; Bloch & McKay, 2014). It discussed undocumented migrants' social life and mental well-being. Due to the fear of detention and deportation, the migrants often limit their interaction and socialisation which results in social isolation and mental health issues. Finally, this chapter critically analysed the undocumented migrant's employment and social life using the social harm approach to understand the harm generated in their work and social lives.

Chapter 6 analyse the undocumented migrant's access to basic necessities such as healthcare and education which are generally recognised as fundamental

human rights but migrants in the UK often find it difficult to access. The UK's amended regulations of hostile environment policies in 2015 have made it extremely difficult for undocumented migrants to access both primary and secondary healthcare services (Asif & Kienzler, 2022; Worthing et al., 2021). Likewise, education is a legal right for children irrespective of immigration status; unfortunately, undocumented migrant families often avoid sending their children to schools due to the fear of detection and deportation of the family (Walsh, 2013). Further, the chapter investigates the methods adopted by migrants when they fall sick, such as self-medication or alternative medicines. This study analysed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on undocumented migrants in terms of access to healthcare particularly COVID-19 vaccination, limited access to jobs and overall mental health. In addition, this chapter highlights another essential issue for undocumented migrant, which is the lack of access to education and its impact on their aspirations.

Chapter 7 considers the interactions between undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers, both police and immigration officers. Policing undocumented migrants presents multiple challenges for the officers as the migrants' lack of legal status makes them more vulnerable and often prone to exploitation, on the other hand, they have limited access to the justice system. This chapter highlights the undocumented migrant's experience of being a victim of crime and accessing the criminal justice system. This chapter examines the experience of law enforcement officers in the West Midlands region in policing interactions with undocumented migrants and highlights the difficulties faced by them while dealing with undocumented migrants. Further, the chapter explores how law enforcement officers handle cases where undocumented migrants are victims of crime and have violated immigration law, and the perception of law

enforcement officers towards undocumented migrants to further discuss how immigration policies impact law enforcement officers' decisions in dealing with undocumented migrants. It also highlights how the needs of undocumented migrants and the operational constraints of law enforcement illustrate the complex interplay of legal and humanitarian concerns.

Chapter 8 concludes the study and outlines the key findings of this research project and provides a brief understanding of its implications. It considers the value and merits of considering the complexities of the lived experience of undocumented migrants, and the value of such considerations for the purpose of creating more considered, legitimate and reasonable narratives that support migrants like Farhad, who are often victims and who often should be supported and aided in recovery with genuine empathy and helped to recognise their desire and willingness to make a better life for themselves and the societies they reside in. Finally, this chapter discusses the contribution made by this research project and presents recommendations for potential future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Migration across borders has always been a feature of human history and countries have always tried to control it in various ways, either to welcome certain groups or exclude others. State efforts to control and restrict this movement have deep historical roots, evident in exclusionary policies such as Australia's White Australia Policy (1901-1973), the United States' Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the barriers that prevented Jewish refugees from escaping Nazi persecution in the 1930s (Calavita, 2000; FitzGerald, 2019; Tavan, 2004) to name but a few. In today's globalised world, migration controls have become tighter and stricter with many countries introducing hostile policies to manage both regular and irregular movement (Bendixsen and Näre, 2024; Riedner and Hess, 2024). These restrictions often push people to find alternative ways to migrate to other countries and in some cases resulting in undocumented migration, which this research focuses on. Currently, the issues and concerns of undocumented migration has become a global issue and is highly controversial and is debated in various arena including the media, political sphere and by academics. The receiving country of these undocumented migrants are worried about their own citizens, economy and national security (Düvell, 2004). On the other hand, these undocumented migrants are at high risk of detention and enforcement action from the authorities, and paradoxically at risk of exploitation, victimisation and destitution (De La Maza Díaz and Leerkes, 2024; Madsen, 2004; Sung, Delgado, Peña and Paladino, 2016). In 2012, the former Home Secretary Theresa May introduced what she termed the 'hostile environment' policy that latterly the Conservative government referred to as the 'compliant environment' policy (Griffiths and Yeo, 2021; Taylor, 2018) to stop undocumented migrants from accessing any kind of basic services

including health and social care provisions. Through measures within legislation such as the Immigration Acts 2014 and 2016 the UK's immigration policy became progressively more restrictive and decidedly increased the vulnerability and risk of destitution among undocumented migrants (Triandafyllidou, 2009).

In the year of 2012 the UK government announced this approach, to form strict norms against the illegal resident in the UK and the aim of this policy to make the UK an unattractive place for undocumented migrants by restricting access to essential services such as work, housing, healthcare, and banking. The police and immigration authorities are collaborating under this "Hostile environment policy" with the Home Office to identify undocumented migrants, who face a range of social exclusions.

1. Public Service access: The core impact of this hostile environment policy is restricting access to healthcare and housing. The study (Legido-Quigley et al., 2019) found that undocumented migrants often avoid seeking medical treatment due to fear of deportation or being reported to the immigration authorities. Many migrants avoided hospital or GP services, even when gravely ill, because healthcare providers are required to check immigration status and report patients to the Home Office if they cannot pay for care (Worthing et al., 2022)
2. "Right to Rent" is the worst barrier for undocumented migrants under the hostile environment policy to secure accommodation. This system compels landlords to check tenants' immigration status, which has led to racial profiling and discrimination practice. It also affects the ethnic minority backgrounds, making it more difficult for them to rent homes (Patel and Peel, 2017).

3. These restrictive policies on employment make it illegal for employers to hire undocumented migrants (Reed and Latorre, 2009). However, the policy has had the unintended consequence of pushing many into exploitative working conditions such as below minimum-wage jobs, unsafe working environments and zero job security. The Home Office acknowledged that undocumented migrants are often at greater risk of forced labour due to their precarious status (Alzoubi, Locatelli and Sainati, 2023).
4. Undocumented migrants undergo a serious mental health burden as a result of the hostile environment policy as this stringent policy make migrants live in constant fear of deportation, which causes depression and trauma (Jeffery et al., 2024). The worst part is that the fear carries forward to the next generation of migrants (Written Evidence from Amnesty International UK (AET0034), 2018). Children of migrants who were born and raised in the UK often face barriers to accessing education. Though schools do not legally report immigration status, many parents fear sending their children to school due to possible exposure to authorities.
5. The hostile environment policy has led to a growing mistrust between migrant communities and law enforcement. Often undocumented migrant communities are less likely to report crimes including domestic violence or cooperate with the police due to fear of being reported to immigration authorities (Sedacca, 2024). The migrant women are particularly vulnerable as they are hesitant to seek help from police or public service due to the risk of deportation (Sedacca, 2024).

The Windrush scandal 2018 revealed the deep flaws in the implementation of the immigration policy regarding detention, deportation and loss of civil rights. This scandal involved long-term residents, primarily from the Caribbean, who were wrongfully detained, denied healthcare, or threatened with deportation despite having legal residency (Slaven, 2021). This scandal led to a 2018 report by the Home Affairs Committee that found many individuals had been treated unfairly due to administrative errors (ibdi).

However, people still enter the UK for various reason without legal status and become undocumented migrants by living in the hidden communities (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011; Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020). These hidden communities bring significant uncertainty, and often, they are placed in a position that leads to their exploitation and victimisation, as they have limited access to the criminal justice system due to their status (Spencer, 2017; Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020).

This chapter reviews the existing literature on undocumented migrants in the UK as well as other countries where issues and concerns of undocumented migration exist. The literature was collected from various multi-disciplinary areas to understand the lived experiences of the undocumented migrants and their experiences of law enforcement agencies (both police and immigration enforcement). Based on the literature review, it is thematically presented in this chapter, which includes Undocumented Migrants and their Decision to Migrate, Undocumented Migrants: Arrival and Housing, Employment and Access to the Job Market, Social Network and Social Life of Undocumented Migrants, Access to Health Care and Undocumented Migrants, Navigating Day to Day Life and Issues. COVID-19 and Undocumented migrants, Education and Undocumented Migrants, and Law enforcement and Undocumented migrants.

Definition of Undocumented Migrant

As per the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory, there is no legally accepted definition for irregular migrant, although the phrase ‘irregular migrant’ is most frequently used to describe those living in the UK without a legal status to stay (Walsh, 2022). The Migration Observatory categories irregular migrants into following four ways:

1. Enter the UK regularly and breach the conditions upon which entry or stay was granted, such as by visa overstaying, doing work that is not permitted, or due to a criminal conviction.
2. Enter the UK irregularly or through deception, such as using forged documents or lying about the purpose of entry.
3. Do not leave the country after an application for asylum has been rejected and all rights of appeal exhausted.
4. Be born in the UK to parents who are irregular migrants, because the UK does not have birthright citizenship (Some of these children can acquire citizenship directly. This category is included here because they are often included in estimates of the UK’s irregular population) (Walsh, 2022).

However, while it is possible to attempt to add some clarity to the use of definitions, it is essential from the outset that we recognise the contested and varied terminology that frames the entirety of debate around migration, and then often casts it as legal or illegal, which is far from settled and fixed. Migrant, national, people seeking asylum, foreign national, illegal immigrant, refugee, displaced person, the terminology is often various and imprecise, and pages could be given over to discussing the definitional issues when for the purpose of clarity, it is easier to suggest that terms are variously and inconsistently used and

applied making the sphere a much contested one. For the purposes of this study, the term undocumented migrant has been used, this is for convenience and does not mean that those focused on are necessarily easily grouped together, beyond the fact that their presence in the UK is precarious.

Douglas, Cetron and Spiegel (2019, p.2) define an irregular migrant as

“a person who, owing to unauthorized entry, breach of a condition of entry or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country”. The definition covers inter alia those persons who have entered a “transit or host country lawfully but have stayed for a longer period than authorized or subsequently taken up unauthorized employment”.

In simple terms, Reed (2018) defines undocumented migration as

“any migration that is not regulated or documented by the nation-state and may include anyone residing in a nation without legal status or with tenuous legal status”.

With some further addition to irregular migrant case, Spencer and Triandafyllidou (2022, p.192) define that the

“Patterns of irregularity are diverse and can include people who crossed a border unlawfully as well as visa over-stayers, children born to undocumented parents, migrants who lost their regular status because of unemployment or non-compliance with certain requirements and rejected asylum seekers”

Despite the fact that these people are often referred to by various names and idioms like ‘undocumented migrant’, ‘illegal migrant’, ‘unauthorised migrant’, and ‘non-registered migrant’ (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009; Casciani, 2019; Vasta, 2011; Walsh, 2022) all these terms are refers to the same, however, each term has a slightly different focus or emphasis with respect to its meaning, utilisation, and context as well as some advantages and associated problems.

According to Nicholas De Genova, the selection and use of different terms to refer to them often has a deep meaning, and it is not politically neutral; as such, it should not be taken at face value (De Genova, 2002). Echeverría (2020, p.12) argues that research has

“to deal not only with classic epistemological problems of definition and perspective but also with the social meaning and connotations that the different terms have in specific contexts”.

The problem with use of different terms and definitions has received attention in public debate and media, after unfavourable social beliefs and stereotypes, often connected to crime, have been frequently linked to migration, but particularly irregular forms of it (Coutin, 2005; Koser, 2010; Van Meeteren, 2010). However, the most critical and sensitive argument in academic, media and political arena is around the use of the term “illegal migrant”. On the one hand, some academics have argued that the term “illegal” gives a negative social effect among the public and gives a criminalising effect (Düvell, 2006; Koser, 2010; Schrover, Van Der Leun, Lucassen and Quispel, 2009). In contrast Douglas, Cetron and Spiegel (2019) suggest that the term “irregular” should be preferred over “illegal” because the term illegal carries a criminal connotation which affects their overall living conditions and sometimes, dehumanise them in the eyes of the mainstream community. Similarly, other academic researchers have observed that it is inappropriate to call someone “illegal” as a person cannot be “illegal”, only an act/action by someone can be considered as “illegal” (Castles, 2010; Engbersen and Broeders, 2009). Echeverría (2020) argue that the gap between what is deemed legitimate by the state (“legal”) and what is deemed legitimate for people (“licit”) is an intriguing one that the term “illegal” is unable to represent. Many cross-border movements of individuals are against the law, yet they are seen as

absolutely normal by the individuals who involve in the migration and hence it is "licit" (Echeverría, 2020). People who bypass or disregard the state control by entering a country without proper documentation are somewhere challenging and bringing a new stream of discussion about the legitimacy of the state and its capacity to control its territory since the state regulates those who occupy, use, or cross its territory of any purpose (Echeverría, 2020). Moreover, it is also important to consider that, every nation has its own dynamics in terms of legality, political and economic condition, ideas of nationalism, identity and perceptions of migration which shapes the adoption of specific terminology and definition of irregular migration (Düvell, 2011). Of course, differing definitions of 'illegality' poses a significant challenge to the comparability of the data, difficulties of estimating the number of people living in the UK without authorisation, and law enforcement's ability to police people effectively.

Many academics have highlighted and discussed how using the phrase "illegal migration" implies adopting the state's perspective, which is often connected to a political agenda, which is likely to portray the illegal migration as a problematic and difficult phenomenon (Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). The state describes "illegality" as an issue that can be resolved by enforcing immigration and residence restrictions strictly, strengthening internal and external borders, and, increasingly, cooperating with civil society (Düvell, 2006; Anderson and Ruhs, 2010). Echeverría (2020, p.14) described that

"The uncritical adoption of a terminology developed within a statist paradigm, it is argued, leads to distorted representations and to the misperception of a "constructed reality" as if it were the natural one. In this regard, it is important not to forget that much of the terminology used to address issues relating to migration has been developed by state administrations in order to deal with these very issues".

From this understanding, it is evident that the concept of 'illegality' is a process of social and political construction that must be seen through different lenses. However, while we may become preoccupied with stigma, the stigma here is not merely a label, because the implications and material consequences of being considered an illegal migrant, perhaps rather than or as opposed to someone in genuine need of political asylum or refuge are real and can be particularly dire. With respect to this research study, the researcher will use the term 'undocumented migrant' or 'irregular migrant' and will avoid using the term 'illegal migrant'. This is because the researcher understands that the term 'illegal migrant' carries a criminal connotation and stigma which affects these people's lives significantly.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of social harm has been developed over years of discussion among the critical criminologists who want an alternative to the concept of crime (Hillyard and Tombs, 2007; Pemberton, 2007). One of core arguments among these scholars is that the concept of crime does not cover all the incidences of harm that amount to crime (Hillyard and Tombs, 2007; Pemberton, 2007). Canning and Tombs (2021) argue that there is need for perhaps differentiating harm from the crime and separate the notion that the harm is necessarily always intrinsically connected with crime. It is very much essential to understand that the crime is socially constructed which is developed mostly through a state-centric and historically elitist approach to the social control of deviant practices or actions which sometimes includes harmful practices or actions as well (Canning and Tombs, 2021). Social harm originated from the scholar's strong desire to go beyond criminal harm and include various forms of harms which are sometimes not publicly acknowledged as wrongdoing through formal processes of

criminalisation but have serious negative effects on people's lives. The roots of the concept of social harm in social science are contested and can certainly be traced back to the expansive writing on white collar-crime by Edwin Hardin Sutherland. However, the term 'social harm' has been explicitly named, has undergone substantial theoretical development in recent decades, and has increasingly become the focus of criminology (Canning and Tombs, 2021).

As the social harm approach is still in a developing phase and there is no one single formalised definition, however, different authors have reviewed and contributed to the concept of social harm from research and understanding. The lack of a definition and broader understanding of the concept of social harm is a primary critique of the social harm approach. Hillyard and Tombs (2004, p.19) define social harm as,

“A social harm approach would first encompass physical harms. These would include premature death or serious injury through clinical iatrogenesis, violence such as car ‘accidents’, some activities at work (whether paid or unpaid), exposures to various environmental pollutants, assaults, illness and disease, lack of adequate food, shelter, or death, torture and brutality by state officials”.

Apart from the physical harm, they also included financial or economic harm e.g., various forms of poverty; psychological or emotional harm e.g., various forms of mental illness or anxiety; and cultural harm or threat to cultural safety, e.g., racism and discrimination (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004). The authors accept that the definition provided by them is not complete and there is a need for more conceptual developments to define social harm (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004). Further, they point out two significant challenges in social harm that has to be overcome to develop the concept of social harm: the first is to identify a range of harms that could be classified as social harm, and the second is to develop a

valid range of methods or approaches to measure these harms (Hillyard and Tombs, 2004). Pemberton (2007) supports the attempt made by Hillyard and Tombs in categorising harm as important; however, Pemberton argues that it does not stipulate on what specific social events these harms are categories (ibid). Further, Pemberton (2007) claims social harm means socially mediated harm, and it is contextual in nature, so it is very important to that while defining social harm is to "identify the determining contexts that produce harms".

Yar (2012) defines social harm based on Honneth's theory of recognition. He argues that the theory of recognition "seeks to establish at a fundamental anthropological level the basic needs that comprise of human integrity and well-being" (Yar, 2012). These basic needs are categorised as love, esteem, and rights. Yar (2012) proposed that when these basic needs of recognition are not met due to the structural factors and processes, that can produce harm. Yar's definition of social harm was criticised as his theory was borrowed from Honneth's theory of recognition which itself has western European ethnocentric tendency that may not apply when other national/cultural groups are involved. The three basic needs of human recognition are highly subjective in nature and his approach is less satisfying as it fails to identify what exactly the harm is (Copson 2018; Pemberton, 2015).

Pemberton's (2015) definition of social harm is proposed based on three dimensions, namely physical/mental harm, autonomy harm and relational harm. Physical/mental harm is related to quality of life, which includes physical health and access to healthcare, access to a healthy diet, housing, and feeling mentally healthy. If these needs are difficult to meet due to societal factors such as laws, policies, and economic conditions, physical or mental harm may arise (ibid). Autonomy harms result from situations where people experience fundamental

disablement in relation to their attempts to flourish. Relational harms essentially comprise harms caused due to exclusion from social relationships and harms of misrecognition (Pemberton, 2015). In simple terms, Pemberton claims that in order for human beings to flourish, these basic needs have to be fulfilled, and if these basic needs are denied due to factors like political, economic, ideological or socio-cultural factors, then those people are socially harmed. However, Raymen (2019), noting that the term 'social harm' is imprecise, argues that Pemberton fails to provide more information on what constitutes human flourishing and what are prerequisites for flourishing.

From the above discussion of various scholars' understanding and conceptualisation of social harm, it is evident that there are many harms produced by various factors like laws, policies, economic conditions, and socio-cultural factors that have not been covered historically by criminology or the definition of crime. However, although crime has come about through a series of social and legal constructions (including the criminalising of the undocumented), the harms that emanate from labels certainly have at least one foot in reality. If one is an irregular migrant living in sub-standard accommodation having hate graffiti daubed on one's walls, then they wouldn't see this as a social construction. So, too, while illegal migrants are those labelled, the extent to which citizens can live in a society without borders is questionable, and there are understandable reasons for states to control migration through justice mechanisms.

Further, it is also very true that mainstream criminologists are not always critical of the state or government-defined concept of crime (Hillyard and Tombs, 2007; Pemberton, 2007). This lack of criticality is perhaps unsurprising, as criminology's

historical dependence on funding, access to official data, and collaboration with criminal justice agencies has created structural constraints that may limit genuine critique of state power and definitions. However, the concept of social harm facilitates criminology to move beyond the legal definition of crime to include wrongful, immoral and injurious acts that are not necessarily illegal. The social harm or zemiological lens is essential in order to understand the plight of undocumented migrants because it fundamentally reframes how we conceptualise the relationship between migration, law, and harm. Traditional criminological approaches tend to position undocumented migrants primarily as lawbreakers whose irregular status justifies state intervention, thereby obscuring the structural violence embedded within immigration systems themselves. Zemiology, by contrast, shifts analytical focus from individual legal transgressions to the systemic harms produced by policies and practices of immigration control.

The practical implications of this framework are significant. Where traditional approaches might recommend enhanced enforcement or deterrent measures to address "illegal" migration, zemiological analysis reveals how such policies actually amplify harm to vulnerable populations. This study demonstrates how current immigration policies push undocumented migrants into exploitative labour relationships, exclude them from healthcare and social services, and create conditions where they cannot report crimes or seek protection. A zemiological perspective thus generates fundamentally different policy recommendations - focusing on harm reduction rather than enforcement, examining how legal frameworks themselves produce victimisation, and challenging the assumption that immigration control measures are inherently justified simply because they enforce law.

As rightly pointed out by Soliman (2019), with respect to migration control and measures, it is necessary to separate migration from crime by moving from immigration towards a harm-based approach. While zemiological scholars call for an urgent need for policy reform to address the systematic harms experienced by undocumented migrants, the current international political climate presents significant obstacles to implementing such changes as it is increasingly characterised by restrictive immigration policies and rising anti-immigrant sentiment. With the return of Donald Trump as the US president with promises of mass deportations, the electoral success of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) with explicitly anti-immigration platforms, the growth of Reform UK with similar messaging, and Giorgia Meloni's restrictive policies in Italy, all demonstrate the political dominance of approaches that prioritise enforcement over harm reduction.

This political reality does not diminish the value of zemiological analysis, but rather underscores its importance. Documenting and understanding these harms become crucial precisely because dominant political discourse systematically ignores or minimises them. While immediate policy transformation may seem unlikely given current political trends, research demonstrating the human costs of restrictive immigration policies contributes to longer-term advocacy efforts and provides evidence for future policy debates when political opportunities arise.

The current research study has been approached from a social harm perspective to understand the harm produced by immigration policies towards undocumented migrants. People living in the UK without any legal status have created vulnerabilities while trying to access the labour market, housing, healthcare services, and justice system. The vulnerability is increasing day by day due to the 'hostile environment' policy implemented by the British government to discourage

undocumented migrants from entering the country as well as those who are already living in the country. Canning (2019) describes that the United Kingdom's policies and legislation with respect to asylum are negatively affecting people in their day-to-day activities. Further, detention and deportation under the existing hostile environment policies are seen as deliberate infliction of pain on individuals and families (Canning, 2019). Overall, the asylum system and its policies are inflicting harm deliberately on people seeking asylum. Canning (2019) states that "the harms of detention are known; the impacts of dispersal are known; the consequences of destitution when seeking asylum are known".

Undocumented Migrants and their Decision to Migrate

People decide to migrate from one country to another for various reasons and often have mixed motives, both for their migration and for their migration destination (Castles and Miller, 2009). Understanding the motivation for migration is very complex, as different people have different reasons to migrate and their country of origin plays an important role in their migration decision (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2009). Though people might have mixed motives to migrate to a country, the primary motivation always depends upon the country of origin and their country's social, economic and political conditions, which force them to migrate (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2009). There are various factors that force people to migrate, which include civil war, conflict, oppression, global inequality, a lack of sustainable livelihoods, an economic crisis and uneven development. On the other hand, some people migrate just to join their family, friends, or loved ones, and, in some cases, just to experience a new culture, learn a new language, or have an adventure (Castles 2000; Mai 2007).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the ability to migrate for 'adventure,' cultural experience, or even family reunion is fundamentally shaped by structural privileges. Economic privilege determines access to legal migration pathways, while passport privilege largely reflecting historical colonial power relations which creates vastly different mobility opportunities for citizens of different nations (Shachar, 2009; Mau et al., 2015). Those with 'strong' passports and financial resources can choose from multiple legal routes and destinations. On the other hand, those lacking such privileges often left with irregular migration only as an option, regardless of their motivations. This unequal access to mobility reflects broader global inequalities that make some people's movement a 'choice' and others' movement a survival strategy shaped by structural constraints beyond their personal control (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

Havinga and Bocker (1999) state that the reason why people choose a particular country to enter and apply for asylum is due to former colonial-imperial links. However, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) argue that a former colonial-imperial link is not always the case; there are instances where people choose to enter a country without any former colonial-imperial link. In addition, the perception of asylum systems and human rights, economic factors, strong smuggling routes and links, and social networks are major aspects that influence people to choose a country as a destination (Robinson and Segrott, 2002; Gilbert and Koser, 2006). Some studies have found that the migrant's decision to migrate to a specific country of destination depends on the country's welfare schemes and asylum support systems. However, some studies have found that these factors are not essential to migrant's initial decision to migrate, and simply put, a further reality is that the 'hostile environment' policy is not putting off people coming to the UK. Further, it was found that the policies around asylum and other welfare schemes

may influence migrant's later decision, whether to stay in the country or move to another where the migrants have opportunities for better lives (Triandafyllidou, 2009; Kuschminder, de Bresser, and Siegel, 2015). People can and do migrate due to extreme factors beyond their control. People migrating due to an extreme economic crisis from one country to another can be a collective decision of a family or part of a family for their livelihood survival strategy. Although migrating can be a difficult and complex decision, the impact of structural barriers, including immigration control, not only affects this decision-making but also affects how to enter the country through a regularised route or clandestinely (Bloch, 2010).

Research conducted by Bloch, Sigona, and Zette (2011) regarding young undocumented migrants found that the decision to migrate was often taken by their parents or family; however, the reason for migration varies for different nationalities. The authors found the young migrants from Zimbabwe, China, and Turkey (Kurdistan) were forced to migrate due to the unfavourable situation in their country politically and/or economically, and perceptions that the UK could be the best place to live were a strong motivator to migrate and to choose the UK as a destination country (ibid).

Often the politicians and political parties cite migration (both regular and irregular migration) as a threat to the country in terms of an increase in crimes, unemployment, and economic issues and negatively portray migrants. These political agendas can lead to changes in the migration policies, like decreasing the number of regular routes or making the process harder and increasing strong enforcement activities like frequent arrest and deportation, cutting welfare schemes, and tightening border security (Triandafyllidou, 2009). A good example in the UK has been the hostile environment policy introduced by the then-Home

Secretary Theresa May in 2013, which targeted undocumented migrants from accessing any public services, including health care. The policymakers are in the thought process that these kinds of policies, including strong enforcement activities and tightening border security, will control the increasing irregular migration; however, the evidence shows that these measures often have less impact on people's decisions to migrate and merely force migrants to take more dangerous routes to reach the intended country of destination (Czaika and Hobolth, 2014; de Haas, 2011; Duvell, 2009).

Due to these kinds of highly restrictive migration control adopted by countries, migrants seek help from agents, smugglers, or traffickers to organise their journey by forged documents or some other means, like entering the country through risky and illegal boats or ferry (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011). As Khosravi (2016) demonstrates, stricter border controls directly increase the danger and cost of migration, as smuggling operations move to more dangerous, remote areas when governments tighten security at main crossing points.

Although it is often less considered and rarely present in mainstream Western media reporting, migrants must put themselves in great danger by doing this, which provides a great opportunity for smugglers or traffickers to extract money from them or exploit them. However, Parsa's (2022) research reveals that the primary violence against migrants comes from state authorities rather than smugglers. In the case of Chinese migrants who enter the UK using smugglers and illegal routes, it can take up to a year to reach the UK through the route decided by smugglers, using different transports such as Lorries, boats and foot travel (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011).

The cost of the journey plays an important role in the decision to choose a country as a destination. Due to economic reasons, some undocumented migrants choose to live temporarily in a transit country to work and save money to cover the high expenses of travelling to a final intended destination country. In some cases, agents or smugglers are the ones who decide the destination country, when the migrants are desperate to migrate to another country and completely dependent on the agents or smugglers for their journey (Zijlstra and Liempt, 2017). However, in other cases, migrants don't have enough money to pay; the agents or smugglers often try to exploit them by offering their services as loans, which often is a considerable amount, but they convince migrants by showing the economic benefit of the destination country. Clearly, some migrants who choose not to avail the agent's or smugglers' services for a loan end up in a random country based on their affordability. Again, the picture and reasons for migration are multifaceted, yet narrow and one-dimensional media accounts do not portray such complexities.

Academics have found that the agent or smugglers are very crucial in determining the country of destination as they often influence migrant's choice (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). There are three ways in which the agent provides their services to the migrants. First, when the migrants have enough information of the destination and decided their choice of destination, in this, the agent acts as facilitator, providing only travel documents like passport and air ticket (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Second, when the migrants do not have enough information to make choice as a country of destination, the agent becomes an active-decision maker and makes a choice on behalf of the migrants (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Third, in this case, the agent provides a single destination country to migrants unlike multiple destination to choose (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). This

often happens when an agent has already planned a journey to send a group of migrants to a destination country, and they offer the same to other migrants when any inquiry comes. From this, it could be suggested that the agents play an essential role in the migrant's decision in determining the country of destination, and often, the role changes according to the needs of the migrants.

Migrants who are not seeking help from the agents or smugglers often seek help from friends, family, or anyone from their social network who already migrated to a country of destination. Such assistance can include travel information, travel routes, any safety concerns, financial requirements, and arrival information. Zijlstra and Liempt (2017) state that the migrants who use land routes to migrate to a country of their choice use mobile phones to navigate them using Google Maps to walk, drive, or take a train or bus to reach their destination. Hence, the development of technology in the area of maps and GPS navigation has benefitted irregular migrants, who use these technologies to cross borders without seeking the services of agents or smugglers, which are often expensive (Zijlstra and Liempt, 2017).

However, not all migrants take this kind of risk to migrate on their own due to the fear of getting caught and lack of knowledge of using maps or GPS navigation. Further, some migrants, even though they have access to smartphones and knowledge to use maps, still choose not to migrate on their own by using maps or GPS navigation because of lack of land connectivity, long distance to travel and time-consuming. The migrants who are successful in organising their travel using technological tools like GPS navigation, strategic information on the internet and other sources might influence people in their social network to use the same and might charge a small amount in exchange for information. This kind of income source might influence them to become a smuggler. Zijlstra and Liempt

(2017) for example have noted that the rise in the number of migrants entering Turkey and Greece in 2015 might be evidence that experienced migrants themselves are then actively involved in the smuggling trade.

Bloch (2010) state that a reason that undocumented migrants are excluded from gaining protection or realising their rights is a combination of structure, policy, law and, for some individual their choice not to seek asylum. Some undocumented migrants with mixed motives for migration, may not fall under the 1951 Geneva Convention refugee status. On the other hand, undocumented migrant who fall under the convention, might be unaware of the asylum and refugee system, might not seek asylum or unable to seek asylum due to the structural barriers. A research study conducted on Zimbabwean undocumented migrants has suggested that earning and sending money to their family is more important than seeking asylum which restrict them to return to their country (Bloch, 2010). Further, the author argues that whatever maybe the case the human rights framework should safeguard and protect people from any kind of victimization and exploitation regardless of their immigration status and their motive or motives for migration (Bloch, 2010).

The push-pull theory is a framework that explains the motivation or reasons behind migration. It explains that migration is driven by a combination of push factors, which forces people to move out of their home countries, and pull factors, which attract them to relocate to a new country (Parkins, 2010; Urbański, 2022). Push factors include political instability, war or persecution, natural or environmental disasters and economic instability like poverty and unemployment (Parkins, 2010; Urbański, 2022). Pull factors includes economic opportunities, safety and security, higher standards of living, social network and cultural connections (Parkins, 2010; Urbański, 2022).

Though, both push and pull factors are crucial for understanding the migration process and patterns, with respect to undocumented migration, push factors tend to have more significance as they create an immediate and compelling need to migrate, influencing migration decisions even when legal means are unavailable (Datta, 2015; Kari, Malasowe and Collins, 2019). Further, some scholars have argued that the push-pull theory fails to fully capture the complexities of undocumented migration and patterns (Datta, 2015; Jayathry Gunaratne, 2024; Pânzaru and Reisz, 2013). Stanojoska and Petrevski (2012) argued that the push pull theory oversimplifies the complex migration process and fails to capture the role of intermediate actors in migrations like traffickers, smugglers and other actors who facilitate migration. Van Hear, Bakewell and Long (2017) further argued that migration is a complex and dynamic process that can be difficult to fit into a simple and straightforward list of factors, thus failing to capture the unique and dynamic nature of migration.

The idea that the discomfort and hostility in the immigration policies can reduce new migrants entering the UK or encourage those who are already in the country to leave can be considered deterrence policies that focus on irregular migrants (Lewis, Waite and Hodkinson, 2017). Aims of dispersal, detention, deportation, and destitution are included in these deterrence policies, which Webber (2004) termed a 'four Ds of deterrence' model. Though these policies were aimed at reducing and controlling the irregular migrants in the UK, some academics argue that the restrictions on housing, financial resources (banking), healthcare, and legal assistance can make people seeking asylum, People whose asylum claim have been refused and undocumented migrants more vulnerable and prone to exploitation in the labour market (Lewis, Waite and Hodkinson, 2017).

These authors also argue that hostile environment policies primarily target the irregular migrants rather than the traffickers or smugglers who facilitate migration and, in some cases, help undocumented migrants access informal job market, thereby enabling employers, traffickers, and smugglers to benefit from irregular migrant's labour work (Lewis, Waite and Hodkinson, 2017). While the current policies do include penalties such as fines and imprisonment for employers who hire undocumented migrants, these measures are insufficient in addressing the root causes of exploitation. In practice, these policies create conditions that increase migrants' vulnerability to exploitation, as their irregular status forces them into precarious employment situations where they are less likely to report abuse or demand fair treatment. Environmental catastrophe and the impact of global warming also drives mass migration. Sub-Saharan Africa is a case in point - e.g., those who have relied on farming and agriculture to make a living are finding they are no longer able to grow on or irrigate the land they own. Christian Parenti's *Tropic of Chaos*, informed as it is by an ethnographic and journalistic sensibility, is one such example of a text that summarises this aspect of migration well (Parenti, 2011).

Along with social harm and zemiology, this research study is also grounded in border criminology, which examines how immigration control policies and practices shape the experiences of migrants, including undocumented migrants. Border criminology as a body of work has a shared theoretical framework that provides critical insights into the nature of state control, the impacts of immigration policies on migrants, and the harms experienced by them, subjects that are often limited within the traditional criminological approaches (Canning 2018). They also emphasise that the conventional framework of criminology is often limited in capturing the intersectional and structural nature of harm

experienced by undocumented migrants due to immigration enforcement. Further, border criminology tends to highlight the importance of empirical research that focuses on the voices and experiences of marginalised communities, particularly people seeking asylum and undocumented migrants (Canning 2018). By giving voice to the voiceless, such approaches can help us to reveal the unseen realities of these migrants and border-related harms, which highlights how immigration policies and exclusion affect these individuals on a personal level (ibid). Fili's research on immigration detention in Greece demonstrates how these facilities operate as sites of systematic violence, documenting the human impact of policies implemented in response to transnational pressures while revealing patterns of resistance among detained women (Fili, 2018). Iliadou's ethnographic work on border violence reveals how EU deterrence policies transform spaces like Lesbos into "prison islands," where border crossers experience a continuum of violence that extends from sea crossings to prolonged detention in refugee camps (Iliadou, 2023). Further, a zemiological framework advocates for more participatory and activist research methods, suggesting the researchers should not remain bystanders to harm but actively engage in addressing these social injustices (Canning and Tombs, 2021).

Combining border criminology with a zemiological perspective provides a comprehensive framework to study and understand the lived experience of undocumented migrants. As argued by Soliman (2019), this integrated approach critiques the concept of crimmigration and claims that it fails to capture the full spectrum of harms experienced by migrants, proposing instead a zemiological methodology that moves beyond crime-based categories to examine how migration control transcends state territory and sovereignty. It can also be said

that border criminology and zemiological complement each other and widens the analysis to include both direct and indirect harms, such as fear of detention & deportation, social isolation, and the loss of dignity.

In the context of Nancy Fraser's concept of social justice (Fraser, 1998), the framework focuses on the need for a holistic understanding of harm that goes beyond individual level to address larger structural inequalities (Soliman 2019). This perspective is well aligned with critical realism which aims to understand the underlying mechanism that shape social realities. Further, it foregrounds as subjects of analysis the root causes of social harm like neoliberal border policies which prioritise border security over human rights.

Undocumented Migrants: Arrival and Housing

Increase in immigration and border control policies in the UK and the EU have resulted in stricter migration processes and fewer routes to enter Western social democratic countries legally (Castles, 2004). Consequently, migrants who want to enter these countries for whatever reason, including refugee status and legitimate needs for asylum, have been forced to take more difficult, dangerous, and expensive journeys, which result in greater benefits to smugglers (Koser, 2005). Upon arrival, undocumented migrants often remain hidden by depending on other experienced undocumented migrants and live in extremely vulnerable positions (Sigona, 2012). Most undocumented migrants have some point of contact before migrating to the UK, like a family member, friend, or the same ethnic group (Düvell, 2004; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011). In some cases, however, they have migrated without any connection in Britain, but during the process of migration, they have made some connections through which they entered Britain and started to explore these connections (Düvell, 2004; Collyer,

2005; Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2011). In other cases, people claimed that their own ethnic group or people from their own country did not help them upon arrival (Düvell, 2004).

Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter (2009) assert that young people who migrate to the UK often have very little information about the UK before arrival, and most often, the information known is not complete. Most of the young people had many dreams and expectations before coming to the UK, which usually excited them by hearing other people's experiences (ibid). However, when they arrive, their dreams and expectations do not match the reality due to their means of journey, irregular entry into the UK, and immediate living conditions (ibid).

Finding a place for accommodation or renting a house is equally stressful and difficult task as compared to obtaining a job for any undocumented migrant. (Bloch, 2013); Dwyer and Brown (2008) state that they have observed that most undocumented migrants, upon arrival, rely on other experienced undocumented migrants from their own country or ethnicity for accommodation and support. On the other hand, some undocumented migrants seek help from faith-based organisations for housing and food support, but this can be very limited, and only a minority may access this type of support (Bloch, 2013). From the available literature, it is evident the authors only focused on housing-related issues faced by the undocumented migrants on arrival and support provided by faith-based organisations; however, other housing-related issues, such as house/flat searches, strategies used to rent a house, and affordability of rent, are not explored at length. Again, here, there is a likely intersection with a range of issues related to legality and practice in housing markets, such as property sub-letting, safe accommodation provision, and accommodation security and safety.

Employment and Access to the Job Market

In many countries, including the United Kingdom, the informal economy or unorganised sector has been sustained by employing undocumented labour, who are desperate to get a job for their livelihood (Vilog and Pioscos, 2021). Irregularity is deeply ingrained in the dynamics of the labour market that somewhere facilitates and supports irregular stays and irregular work (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Further, the authors state that the irregularity is functional to labour market conditions, especially informal, in specific sectors such as domestic work, construction, food or catering industry, and agricultural farm work as the irregular migrant readiness to work and cheap availability of their sources (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Ruhs and Anderson (2010) have suggested immigration can be turned on and off like a tap depending on labour shortages and/or work that the UK-born workforce is reluctant to do. This situation has arguably become worse since Brexit, can no longer rely on EU citizens coming across to do these jobs at the base of the service industry. As such, jobs in agriculture, construction, or the need for live-in carers serve as an attraction for migrant workers, who may then choose to enter a nation illegally, overstay their visa, or otherwise violate its terms due to the abundance of employment opportunities in the informal sector (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Though they are part of any country's economy, they still do not have employment protections and other benefits which protect them from exploitation in the job market (Bloch and McKay, 2014).

Being an undocumented migrant, getting a full-time regular job is not an easy task, unlike regular migrants (Bloch, 2013; McKay, Markova and Paraskevopoulou, 2009; Nobil Ahmad, 2008). Often, they go through various

channels to get a job which includes certain terms and conditions which are more exploitative (Bloch, 2013; Jauhiainen and Tedeschi, 2021; Nobil Ahmad, 2008; Sigona, 2012). Past research studies have shown that undocumented migrants look for jobs within businesses that are run by their own ethnic group or people from their own countries, often such as supermarkets, off-licences, restaurants, construction, and other labour works (Sigona, 2012, Bloch, 2013; Nobil Ahmad, 2008). On the other hand, Engbersen and Broeders (2009) state that the intermediary organisations and sub-contractors are becoming important entities in the labour market dynamics as they serve both the employers and irregular migrants in terms of assisting to match the gap between demand and supply of workers.

The nature of the work carried out by these undocumented migrants is mostly temporary, low-paid, limited range of jobs, and long and unsocial working hours (Bloch, 2013; Alberti, 2014; Nobil Ahmad, 2008). Often, these jobs were achieved through word of mouth and within the social networks using other undocumented migrants (Bloch, 2013; Düvell, 2004). On the other hand, some undocumented migrants also secure well-paid, full-time jobs through faith-based and community-based organisations, but not everyone goes through these organisations due to fear of their status being revealed and possible subsequent detention (Sigona, 2012).

Often, young undocumented migrants face a lot of difficulties in finding a job because of a lack of experience and readiness to take up any kind of available employment (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2009; 2011; Düvell, 2004). In some instances, unemployed undocumented migrants who heavily depend on their friends and acquaintances for their food and accommodation provide unpaid domestic help like cleaning, cooking, childcare, and other household activities

(Bloch, 2013; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011). These researchers claim that this unpaid domestic help is more exploitative than any cash-in-hand job because of the lack of legal status. They have no choice but please and fulfil their friend's and acquaintances' demands, which can lead to physical and mental trauma (Bloch, 2013; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011). Further, there may be gender distinction with respect to employment roles for irregular migrant female workers are preferred over males in the care, domestic and cleaning sectors. On the other hand, male irregular migrants may be more represented in construction, factory and delivery roles (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022).

It is also claimed that the characteristics of the work carried out by the undocumented migrants and no access to statutory welfare supports make them more vulnerable and prone to victimisation or may heighten the impact of hardship or exploitation (Bloch, 2013; Khosravi, 2010). However, this vulnerability must be understood not just as a byproduct of immigration status, but as what Tombs & Whyte (2015) identifies as systematic state-corporate crime, where immigration controls and enforcement purposefully create categories of super-exploitable workers in order to maximise corporate profit.

Some employers take advantage of vulnerabilities and lack of regulation by paying migrants pitifully low wages, forcing them to work overlong hours, and ignoring health and safety provisions at work (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011; Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013). This reflects what Tombs and Whyte (2007) conceptualise as 'safety crimes', systematic corporate law-breaking in which corporates prioritise profit maximisation over workers safety and welfare. However, many undocumented migrants have expressed that some work is better than no work because they have no other way to earn money to take care of themselves and their families, and of course, they may be unaware of

exploitation (Nobil Ahmad, 2008). However, as Lloyd (2018) demonstrates, this apparent 'choice' represents structural workplace violence through economic coercion. When survival depends on accepting exploitative conditions, the notion of free consent becomes meaningless as workers are subjected to systemic pressures embedded within labour market relations, constituting a form of structural violence that makes harm inevitable rather than accidental.

The Global Commission on International Migration stated in its final report that sectors, including agriculture "... have come to rely to a significant extent on migrants with irregular status, who are prepared to work in difficult, dangerous and dirty jobs with little security and low wages" (GCIM, 2005, p.36). As Tombs (1999) argues, this systematic exposure to harm represents 'social harm' embedded within economic structures rather than isolated workplace incidents. To avoid these kinds of differential treatment and to improve their working life, some undocumented migrants also explore other illegal means like producing constructed documents or using paid agencies for finding full-time work (Bloch, 2013; Khosravi, 2010). However, not all undocumented migrants seek the help of paid agencies or produce a constructed document as these services are very expensive which they can't afford, lack of English language skills to navigate into the job market and risk involved in the process (Bloch, 2013; Khosravi, 2010). Some may also have a moral objection to committing further crimes like providing falsified documentation, though again here, we cannot necessarily assume migrants have a strong knowledge of laws. Some authors argue that the stringent government policies concerning providing asylum and fear of detention together with their vulnerabilities have influenced and forced them to look for other illegal means to obtain the job (Sigona, 2012, Bloch, 2013; Khosravi, 2010). Other government policies authorising raids on business entities and placing

responsibility on organisations for finding these undocumented migrants has created an additional layer of fear, anxiety and uncertainty at workplaces among them (Bloch, 2013; Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay, 2014). Here we see the complexity of mitigating harms for migrants, the systems that are in place to detect and protect them from exploitation (in this case labour related exploitation) also open them up to the risk of deportation and other structural harms.

Research studies on undocumented migrants and informal economy has found that often the businesses run by ethnic minorities are exploitative towards undocumented migrants in terms of long working hours and paid less than the minimum wages. However, the undocumented migrants decide to stay with their ethnic minority business setup, even after they knew that the owner was exploiting them because of safety reasons. A research study conducted by Jones, Ram and Edwards (2006) on ethnic minority businesses and undocumented migrants found that the migrants chose to stay with the ethnic minority businesses as they provide employment, safe accommodation, and food. Even if working with the ethnic minority business is less rewarding in terms of pay, the undocumented migrants get safe accommodation to stay in, which helps them not to worry about searching for a house and rent payments. Of course, there is also a range of conflicts between ethnic groups in the labour market, which may mean that the more established diasporas can impose a regime of control over labour and the more vulnerable or atomised, more recent arrival groups end up in social/economic peril, and the undocumented are not necessarily a homogenous entity where intragroup exploitation is absent.

Even though there are strict rules and regulations with respect to employers concerning prohibitions on hiring undocumented migrants or people without right to work documents, practices may be widespread, especially in the UK, where

enforcement around employment practices may be lax. Employers and business organisations employ these people for economic, cultural, ethnic, reliability, and ready availability of labour. A study on South Asian co-ethnic employers in the West Midlands clothing and catering industries found that they are forced to use the undocumented migrants because the very survival of the business in the hyper-competitive sectors depends on these practices (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). Most of the ethnic minority business setups are involved in offering their ethnic and cultural products in terms of authentic foods, ethnic clothing, and accessories. Some of these ethnic minority businesses need people from their ethnicity to maintain and offer quality products to their customers, especially with respect to restaurants and takeaways.

However, the employers showed concern with respect to the lack of availability of labourers, as most of the legal migrants do not want to work in their restaurants and takeaways, as well as they are hard to find, which forces employers to look for alternative workers like undocumented migrants (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). Further, the employers also registered that they are forced to use these undocumented migrants as a last resort to save their business setups (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). On the other hand, some of the ethnic business setups prefer undocumented migrants over other legal workers because undocumented workers are regarded as more reliable and trustworthy than other legal workers (ibid), and yet here, there may be deep exploitation using assumed stereotypes about migrant work ethic to profit from them. Some of the ethnic businesses operate differently than other business organisations, especially concerning restaurants and takeaways; working hours are long and late-night workers are required. However, often only a few legal workers agree to work for long hours and work late-night; due to this nature of the business, the employers prefer to

employ undocumented migrants who are ready to work long hours and late-night works.

Engbersen and Broeders (2009) state that when enforcement actions limit irregular migrants' ability to support themselves lawfully and participate in mainstream institutions of society, irregular migrants may turn to alternative means of survival, such as switching from formal to informal employment based on the availability or shifting from lawful behaviour to criminal activity (such as property theft). In attempting to avoid detection by using false documents, concealing their identity, and destroying original identification documents to avoid deportation, migrants may face further criminalisation. Further, irregular migrants shifting from legal economic activities (work) to criminal behaviour may be due to the influence of stricter and restrictive policies adopted by the state to discourage the irregular migration (Engbersen and Broeders, 2009).

Empirical evidence exists that implies that there is an interrelation between irregular migration and crime. Studies conducted in the Netherlands concerning irregular migration and crime have found that the apprehension rate of irregular immigrants for criminal offences has increased over time (Engbersen et al., 2002; Engbersen and Broeders, 2009). The apprehension rate of irregular immigrants for criminal offences in the Netherlands was 31 per cent in 1997, which increased to 45 per cent by 2003, and 49 per cent by the end of 2004 (ibid). These studies show the effect of marginalisation, which Engbersen and Broeders (2009) describe as,

“The marginalisation thesis builds on the premise that the exclusion of irregular immigrants from formal employment and public services has a criminalising effect on those who are excluded”.

With respect to asylum-seeking, most young undocumented migrants' asylum claims are rejected by the Home Office due to the lack of knowledge about the asylum system, poor paperwork, poor legal advice and a lack of appropriate assistance. (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011), and recent years have seen a considerable backlog of asylum claims. Looking at the past experiences of others' rejected claims can cause young migrants to decide often not to apply for asylum due to the fear of detention and deportation. In some cases, migrants choose not to apply for asylum as they fear going back to their country as it might risk their life if their asylum claim gets rejected and they decide to be undocumented (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011). Alternatively, some people might have entered a country in a legitimate way under a temporary arrangement, which includes people seeking asylum under the process and a short-term visa holder (work, education, or tourist visas), but then they are unable to renew or extend their status and become an irregular migrant (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). This is often seen as an advantage to employers who are operating in the informal sectors, as the employers view these new irregular migrants as a cheap labour force that does not need any additional costs or payment in terms of the employee's welfare or other employment benefits (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Social Network and Social Life of Undocumented Migrants

This section explores the social networks and Social Life of Undocumented Migrants in the UK, highlighting how limited time, social isolation, and fear of social interaction contribute to relational harms, which comprise forms of harm caused by exclusion from social relationships and harms of misrecognition (Pemberton, 2015). Many undocumented migrants rely upon their small co-ethnic social networks who may be more experienced undocumented migrants, for advice and information about jobs

(Bloch, 2013; Bloch and McKay, 2014). This dependency on co-ethnic social networks particularly high among those who lack English language skills and newly migrated people (Bloch, 2013; Bloch and McKay, 2014). **This** represents a relational harm of exclusion, as migrants are systematically cut off from broader social relationships.

On the other hand, people with good English language skills choose not to expand their social networks because of fear of disclosure of their status and possible detention (Bloch, 2013), constituting another form of relational harm through forced self-exclusion. It is evident that the status of migrants decides their social networks and social life, creating what Pemberton (2015) identifies as systematic exclusion from social relationships. The author observes that the lack of legal status and documentation shapes the interactions of undocumented migrants with others, and they are forced to choose whom to interact with and whom not to (Sigona, 2012).

Generally, it seems migrants are confined within their co-ethnic social networks and have no social life or limited social life (Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013), a clear manifestation of relational harm through social exclusion. Further, socialisation with mainstream British communities often does not happen because of the lack of English language skills and lack of self-confidence (Bloch, 2013), representing both exclusion and misrecognition as they are left out of social life and not fully recognised as part of society.

For many undocumented migrants who are working and living within co-ethnic businesses and due to long working hours, there is a very limited time and opportunity to have a social life (Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013). This creates a cycle of relational harm: the limited social interaction restricts the opportunity to learn English and widen their social network, perpetuating their exclusion from broader social relationships. The authors also recognised that every ethnic community and nationals has different gender dynamics with respect to social life and socialisation. Though it is common to see that men have more social life and socialising activities than women, (which may be because of fear and anxiety of getting caught, exposure of their status, or stricter

social expectations in some ethnic groups) there may also be cultural factors where for example women are not allowed to have a social life outside their family (Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay, 2014). This gendered dimension represents an intensified relational harm for women, who face both the exclusions created by undocumented status and additional gender-based restrictions on social relationship formation.

Access to Health Care and Undocumented Migrants

The challenges faced by the undocumented migrants in accessing healthcare and medical services depend on which country they are living in (Winters *et al.*, 2018). Access to health care is not easy for any undocumented migrants living in the UK, which requires documentation or an NHS number (Poduval *et al.*, 2015). Due to the lack of legal status, the undocumented migrants' only way to access health care may be via private clinics and health care, which are often extremely expensive, hence, many are not able to afford access. The result can be relying upon self-diagnosis and medication, which might lead to serious side effects or even put them in a life-threatening situation (Poduval *et al.*, 2015; Biswas, Kristiansen, Krasnik and Norredam, 2011; Grit, den Otter and Spreij, 2011). It has been documented that undocumented migrants may wait until they become severely ill to access health care through accident and emergency services (Poduval *et al.*, 2015; Keith and Van Ginneken, 2015).

Women and girls are most likely to be more acutely impacted by the lack of access to health care services among undocumented migrants. Nellums *et al.* (2021) found that undocumented migrant women often experience difficulties during and after pregnancy including lack of access to health services. Undocumented migrant women and girls are at risk of various sexual and reproductive complications which might lead to life-threatening problems and the

lack of access to health services worsens their situation (Wolff et al., 2008; Sebo et al., 2010). During pregnancy, most are less likely to receive a recommended level of maternity care, which results in poor health of the child and mother, especially post-delivery (Nellums et al., 2021; Wolff et al., 2008). Some undocumented migrant women narrated that they had a lot of stress and anxiety during pregnancy because of uncertainty about the future for both the child and mother (Nellums et al., 2021). Nellums et al. (2021) classify these difficulties as a 'triple jeopardy', which are poor housing and living conditions, expensive paid health services and care, and inability to pay for their bills or improve their financial condition (Nellums *et al.*, 2021). It is evident from the finding that women choose not to access the health care services not only because of the charges but it is also because of the data sharing between the NHS and the Home Office, which might lead to detention and deportation (Nellums *et al.*, 2021).

Doctors of the World (DOTW) caseworkers stated that the undocumented migrant's failure to provide any documentation led to not being able to register for medical general practitioner (GP) services or delay in health care services, which affected their pre-existing health conditions (Asif and Kienzler, 2022). DOTW caseworkers advocate for vulnerable people to make them understand their rights and help them to access and register for essential healthcare services where they either lack documentation or are afraid to show the documents they have with them (Asif and Kienzler, 2022). However, they have expressed a deep concern that the process of negotiating healthcare access often leads to delays in appointments and services, which worsen the health conditions of undocumented migrants who need urgent care, like pregnant women and elderly people with chronic diseases.

Another concern among DOTW caseworkers has been the charging regulations for accessing and receiving secondary healthcare services. Based on the freedom of information request to NHS England Trusts, it was confirmed that charge will be determined based on type of treatment (immediately necessary/urgent or non-urgent), and if the treatment is immediately necessary, no upfront payment is required. Trusts confirmed that the charges are regulated per the Department of Health guidance on 'Implementing the Overseas Visitors Charging Regulations'. Further, an interview will be conducted with the patient to get other relevant information, including whether the patient falls under a vulnerable category (for example, victims of human trafficking) who are exempted from charges.

However, some academics have found that the assessments to determine charges are not performed as per the guidelines mentioned above, more often leading to higher payments. A study conducted by Nellums et al. (2022) found that the process of assessing and determining the charges are different across the health care trusts, along with inconsistencies in staff knowledge on charging policies leading to inappropriate and higher charges that are not affordable by the undocumented. Research conducted among DOTW caseworkers found that undocumented migrants usually call the DOTW advice helpline instead of calling an ambulance service, even in emergency situations like accidents or severe bone fractures (Asif and Kienzler, 2022). Further researchers also found that the undocumented migrants decide not to approach NHS trust for treatment, including not giving proper information before the treatment, language barriers, discrimination against being undocumented, and in some cases, discrimination because of race and ethnicity (Asif and Kienzler, 2022). Nellums et al. (2022) found that undocumented migrant women seeking maternity health services from

different ethnic minority and racial migrant groups are more likely to experience delays in service compared to white and UK-born women.

Navigating Day to Day Life and Issues

Over time, some undocumented migrants learn various strategies to navigate day-to-day life and issues around them. It is also evident that the irregular migrants who are already settled in a country and have experience dealing with their day-to-day life have more bargaining power than those who recently arrived. This is because the experienced migrants have specific information and might speak the local language, which is essential for their everyday activities (Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). The strategies the undocumented use to keep their status hidden is by avoiding or having selected social interaction, non-disclosure of their status and lying when interacting with a member of the mainstream community (Bloch, 2013, Jauhiainen and Tedeschi, 2021). However, in being forced into dishonesty, some migrants can develop a sense of guilt and distrust towards their friends/colleagues (Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013). Bloch (2013) compares the forced isolation by the undocumented migrants due to the lack of legal status as trapped or prison-like life without doing anything and making any progression. Though the undocumented may have to maintain a degree of isolation and remain invisible within the mainstream community, but also frequently have to navigate public space for their day to day lives (Madsen, 2004). A study conducted among Mozambican undocumented migrants living in South Africa found that they often hide their foreign identity by adopting and acting like native residents (South African) in the manner of dress, argot (adopting the accent), hairstyle and body language (Madsen, 2004).

From the narratives of the undocumented migrants, it is evident that even well-educated people are not able to get a good job and live a peaceful life due to their status which gives them a feeling of stagnant life, full of disappointments (Bloch, 2013). However, some undocumented migrants are very optimistic about their freedom of expression, language, religion, and cultural activities, which they did not have in their own country because of various political, religious, and ethnic conflicts (Bloch, 2013; Goodman, Burke, Liebling and Zasada, 2014).

Due to their lack of legal status, many undocumented migrants avoid going to social gatherings and crowded places like football matches, music festivals or any large gatherings because of fear of police who will be there for any protection or crowd management (Bloch, 2013). Of course, undocumented migrants often avoid challenging situations with people because their legal status can lead to the involvement of police officers (Bloch, 2013) and arrest and detention if their status is illegal. As the author of this research will come to argue, and which is corroborated by other scholars (Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020; Bloch, 2013). Basok, Ilcan and Noonan (2006), the fear of police among undocumented migrants results in them being unable to report a crime, lacking access to justice when victimised, and being at risk of criminalisation even when they are victims of crime. Such scholars claim that the rights of migrants are present only in theory, whereas in practice, they are rarely truly recognised (ibid). The constant level of anxiety and fear of being caught by police or law enforcement has led to many psychological issues among these undocumented migrants (Bloch, 2013).

Policing Minority Communities

The history of policing in England has been marked by problematic relationships with ethnic minority communities, particularly regarding racial and systemic

discrimination. The tragic death of David Oluwale in 1969 serves as a landmark case which exposed the existence of systemic racism within the British police force. Oluwale, a Nigerian immigrant, faced harassment and humiliation repeatedly by the members of the Leeds City Police. Eventually, his body was found in the River Aire, and his death was ruled as drowning. However, it was later found that prior to his death he was deliberately targeted and mistreated due to his race by the two police officers of the Leeds City Police. Oluwale's death highlights racial profiling and systemic discrimination in policing practices (Chan, 2011).

The 1981 Brixton unrest was a landmark event in the history of policing in England, which highlights the issues of institutional racism and police abuse of power (Jackson, 2015). However, Lord Scarman (1981) the author of the Scarman Report into the unrest, rejected the term 'institutional racism' preferring to use the 'rotten apples' metaphor to describe the level of racism that existed within the police service.

The unrest was triggered by the controversial "sus" law, which allowed police officers to stop and search any person based on suspicion alone (Jackson, 2015; Delsol, 2011). Over policing and disproportionate use of stop and search against black youth sparked the unrest. The impact of unrest extended beyond Brixton and caused similar disturbances in other cities (Williams, 1982; Bunyan, 1981). This event led to Lord Scarman inquiry which found that there is a need to address not only policing issues, but also broader social and economic factors that contributed to the unrest (Williams, 1982). Around a decade after 1981 Brixton unrest, in the 1993 murder of Lawrence in a racial motivated hate crime (Hall, 2009; Bridges, 1999) and the police failure in responding to it particularly due to the failure of the Metropolitan Police to conduct a fair investigation of the

case, led to the 1999 Macpherson inquiry which revealed that the Metropolitan Police is "institutionally racist" (Foster et al., 2005, McLaughlin & Murji, 1999). The inquiry recommended for extensive police reforms including the establishment of independent oversight and enhanced training to address issues with racism (Foster et al., 2005).

Historically the police forces have failed to address institutional racism and systemic discrimination from the foundational roots has led to lack of trust among minority communities (Rowe, 2004). To improve police-minority relations and trust, many police forces increased ethnic minority recruitment into the police and even established Black Police Associations (Henry, 2017). However, the impact of these measures is limited and did not change the way in which minorities are policed and overpoliced, with sustained evidence of disparity and racial disparity in all manner of aspects of criminal justice, particularly targeting some racial groups. Yesberg (et al., 2021) suggest radical stereotyping is very much the approach of the England's police toward minority communities. A stereotype often associating "blackness" with "criminality" with no prior investigation is evident, as is the fact that police use of force against minority people. The Home Office (2020) have highlighted that by the end of March 2020, England and Wales police were more likely to use force against individuals identified as "black or black British". This included the use of firearms and non-lethal weapons like batons or Tasers (HMICFRS, 2023). The study emphasised clearly that police have not done enough to understand how their actions lead to racial differences in the criminal justice system. For instance, Black (ethnic minority) individuals are three times more likely to be arrested than White individuals, showing a serious problem that law enforcement has not adequately trained and addressed.

During the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (see also below) the police disproportionately targeted BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) community people (Harris et al., 2022). This empirical study emphasised the practical difficulties of minorities living in the UK. In it the authors document how one of the respondents, 'Kalifa', recounted an incident during the 2020 lockdown where a relative was arrested while carrying food to elderly family members. The police response escalated into physical violence, affecting both Kalifa and her son, with other community members also arrested and pepper sprayed. It is evident that a broader pattern of racially motivated aggression is rooted in a long history of systemic racism in policing.

Respondents essentially reported that racist over-policing intensified during the pandemic, as strict lockdowns limited public movement, leaving police with fewer duties (Amnesty International UK, 2020). As a result, individuals engaged in ordinary activities were seriously targeted, with some officers appearing "bored" (ibid) and more likely to enforce restrictions selectively. Pandemic policing intersected with pre-existing racial biases, worsening personal and community-level impacts of law enforcement during lockdowns. Yet this is a sustained and not nearly new phenomenon. Keith (2023) examined the unrest in England caused by the biased approach of police. For instance, the 1981 Toxteth Unrest, a civil disturbance in Liverpool, reflected the deep-rooted struggles of marginalised urban communities. It was primarily caused by the police's discriminating behaviour against black residents. Particularly, the arrest of Leroy Cooper acted as a trigger for the unrest; further, some social causes, such as unemployment, poor housing, and labour disputes, worsened situations. However, these discriminatory policing practices occurred within a wider context of socio-economic deprivation intensified by Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal

policies since her 1979 election, which increased unemployment and housing problems in marginalised communities, creating conditions that amplified social tensions and grievances.

The 1981 Handsworth Unrest in Birmingham were fuelled by deep-rooted discontent within black communities over police treatment and social inequalities. This unrest erupted on July 10, 1981, following an attack on a police superintendent. The unrest lasted two nights, resulting in 121 arrests, 40 injuries to police officers, and extensive property damage. Unemployment is one of the causes for this tension, minority communities felt increasingly alienated from law enforcement due to perceived neglect and discrimination. Biased racial profiling and aggressive practices led to anger against police.

The Moss Side Unrest in Manchester in July 1981 was similar and resulted from deep-rooted racial tension and socio-economic distress among black communities. It was fuelled by allegations of police racial abuse and excessive force; the incident erupted after black youths faced hostility while leaving a local nightclub, which is similar to the present "Stop and Search Rule". The economic disparity with unemployment surged to 80% in Moss Side during the recession, causing feelings of marginalisation. Hirsch and Swanson's (2020) analysis of contemporary media coverage reveals how this economic desperation was systematically excluded from official narratives, which instead portrayed the unrest as mindless disorder while obscuring the legitimate grievances of poverty and oppressive policing.

Aliverti, (2020), has explored the increasing use of vulnerability as a central framework in UK criminal justice policies. While originally intended to address inequalities, feminist scholars argue that such legal measures can reinforce

gender, racial, and sexual stereotypes by strict protection on predefined social roles (Gilson, 2016). Notably, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was framed as a "humanitarian" measure in contrast to the Immigration Act 2014, which targeted illegal migrants, showing how vulnerability can hinder exclusionary policies. Policymakers have also invested £1.9 million in the College of Policing to train police leaders to improve support for vulnerable people.

Wicks (2025) explores the systemic racism that occurred within England and Wales criminal justice institutions, focusing on the persistence of discriminatory practices, distrust in law enforcement, and the underreporting of crimes. Even though the justice system is advised to mandate the promotion of equality and fairness, studies reveal that institutional racism permeates police culture, decision-making, and outcomes for minority groups, disproportionately affecting Black and ethnic communities (Wicks, 2025). Macpherson's inquiry (1999) into the Stephen Lawrence murder underscored the institutional failures in addressing racist crimes, citing incompetence, discriminatory behaviours, and local racist stereotypes among police officers. These findings empathised how racism is not limited to individual prejudice but is combined in the processes, attitudes, and practices of the police.

In March 2000, 19-year-old Zahid Mubarek, a British Pakistani serving a 90-day sentence for shop lifting £6 worth of goods, was brutally murdered by his racist cellmate Robert Stewart at Feltham Young Offenders Institution just hours before his scheduled release (Keith, 2006). The murder of Zahid Mubarek in 2000 further showcased these failures and how they extend beyond mainstream policing into criminal justice more generally, in this case exposing how inadequate risk assessments in the prison service allowed racist violence to occur within custodial institutions. The criminal justice system's inability to address these

inequalities effectively has normalised racism and sexism within police culture despite repeated efforts at reform. The Macpherson report recommended cultural change within police forces, including redefining how racist crimes are recorded and addressed. Still, progress has been limited, and it is now commonly argued in critical criminology that deeper structural reforms are needed to combat the pervasive institutional racism that continues to disadvantage ethnic minorities and undermine the legitimacy of law enforcement in the UK (Bucerus and Tonry, 2014: 336–360).

COVID-19 and Undocumented Migrants

Due to government policies, undocumented migrants were already in a vulnerable position; amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they were forced into a situation where they were worried about their lives and livelihoods (Vilog and Piocos, 2021). Though the COVID-19 restriction and lockdown were in place, the undocumented migrants continued to work in the hidden environment to support themselves and their families (Vilog and Piocos, 2021). The BBC News reporter Danny Vincent (2020) states that these workers are an "invisible risk to the public" because they tend to hide in closed spaces and are afraid to go to public facilities for health checks. Brannen and O'Connell (2022) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing problem of social and economic inequality in the UK, making many undocumented migrant families and individuals' lives more precarious.

While countries around the world worried about the pandemic, and started imposing lockdowns, quarantine regulations, mobility and border controls which made people unemployed, decreased income and created a state of uncertainty, the impact on undocumented migrants has been too little considered. Many

governments across the world gave health and financial benefits to their native citizen to support them during this uncertain time. However, undocumented migrants living in the UK were ineligible for such benefits and were at heightened vulnerability. The legacy may well be that they still continue to suffer (Vilog and Piocos, 2021). Further, some authors argue that undocumented migrants working as essential workers during the pandemic were not only vulnerable to state sanctions due to their lack of legal status to work, but also far more exposed to ill health issues due to their greater exposure to high-risk environments and roles.

Due to the lockdown, extensive layoffs and closure of many businesses in sectors like construction, hospitality, and manufacturing, where the undocumented migrants work more frequently, there was an even greater vulnerability for the undocumented during the COVID-19 pandemic (Vilog and Piocos, 2021). In response, a petition was raised that sought to grant amnesty to undocumented migrants living in the UK. The governmental response was to issue a statement claiming:

"The Government remains committed to its immigration policy which welcomes and celebrates people here legally but deters illegal immigration as to do otherwise would be unfair on the vast majority who comply with all processes, and this would encourage further illegal immigration, which can be dangerous for all involved. We must prevent the abuse of benefits and services, remove immigration offenders and foreign national offenders from the UK and disrupt the organised crime groups that prey on the vulnerable" (UK Government and Parliament's Response to Amnesty Petition, 30 June 2020).

Although the UK government allowed the National Health Services (NHS) to provide free COVID-19 testing and treatment to all residents, including irregular migrants, it may well have been that many were not ready to avail of these

services until and unless they were extremely sick, due to the risk of detection arising from data sharing between the NHS and the Home Office (Vilog and Pocos, 2021). According to a report by Kanlungan Filipino Consortium, which is advocating for the human rights of Filipinos and other Asian minorities in the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic may well have increased risk for the undocumented. While doubtlessly a small sample, of the 13 participants they surveyed who reported having COVID-19 symptoms, only one approached NHS for treatment. Some 26% of the participants they surveyed stated that they would never approach the NHS if they had a COVID-19 infection, which is due to their lack of legal status in the UK. It might well be that the UK's 'hostile environment' policies, which restricted undocumented migrants from accessing basic needs such as housing, education, health, employment, and other services, made the undocumented more anxious and susceptible to COVID-19 infections. It is likely that for many undocumented migrants, being forced to live in shared accommodation (such as apartments shared between multiple individuals), the risks of COVID-19 were also increased. In such conditions, often with people in extreme proximity, infection spread is much more likely. Despite a growing body of academic literature in and around criminology focusing on the harms of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been little consideration of how policies may have put undocumented migrants at risk and due to their status (Vilog and Pocos, 2021). The known number of recorded deaths during the pandemic was far higher for ethnic minorities and those who occupied the lower socio-economic strata of society. Still, there has been little discussion of the residential status of those who died during the pandemic. It may well be that here again we encounter a significant place of vulnerability for migrant communities.

Education and Undocumented Migrants

In the United States, education through to high school is available to all including documented and undocumented migrants. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Plyler vs. Doe*, ruled that undocumented children are entitled to the school education from kindergarten till high school, the same status as that provided to US citizens or legal residents in public schools (Abrego, 2006). In a study conducted among Latin American migrants in the USA, both documented and undocumented, it was found that the school education and living conditions were similar due to the general and shared low socioeconomic status of both groups, which is a commonality between them (Abrego, 2006).

Further, Abrego (2006) found that undocumented children were unable to go beyond high school education because both public and private universities in the United States classify these undocumented migrants as international students whose fees are three to seven times that of US citizens or legal residents. The researchers found that even though migrant students performed exceptionally well in high school, they were unable to apply for scholarships or financial aid due to the lack of formal legal status (Abrego, 2006). A comparative study conducted by Brannen and O'Connell (2022) on the experiences of food poverty among undocumented parents with children in the UK, Portugal, and Norway found that the undocumented migrants in the UK are more affected by the food poverty than those in other geographical locations largely due to the UK government's restrictive policies, which served to limit access to basic needs.

In the UK, a lack of access to school and thus free school meals contributes to wider food poverty, and it is safe to assume that this may be another way in which undocumented migrants may face disadvantage. What seems to be in tension

here though is that statutory concern should be there for children irrespective of parental status. Brannen and O'Connell (2022) highlight, for example, a case study of a single mother with four children living in London local authority area where due to the lack of legal status, The Local Authority Social Services denied responsibility to provide any help despite having children who were in need and hence, the children were excluded from free school meals (FSMs) provided by the school (Brannen and O'Connell, 2022). Further, the case study described that both the mother and children often went hungry and unfed, even in a rich and well-developed economy. Despite its wealth, recent UNICEF data shows the UK shows that child poverty has increased in the UK by almost 20%, with more children living in poverty in 2021 (UNICEF UK, 2024). Though, the family were receiving some support from the local charity and food banks, that was limited and precarious and those in authority knew that there were no statutory state provision for children who should be safeguarded and protected (Brannen and O'Connell, 2022). In comparison to the UK, undocumented migrants in Portugal and Norway are in much better position as both the states were providing some sort of supports in terms of food for children attending school and frequent food support from local authority/social security agency (Brannen and O'Connell, 2022).

Law Enforcement and Undocumented Migrants

One of the most difficult law enforcement tasks is maintaining equity, integrity, and accountability when it comes to policing undocumented immigrants (Sung, Delgado, Peña, and Paladino, 2016). Lahman et al. (2011) argue that due to low visibility of undocumented migrants and reluctance to be revealed, the undocumented population's voices have been absent from much of the literature on crime, victimisation, and experiences of policing. Certainly, academic

accounts documenting their encounters with the police are largely absent from a broad body of literature on policing. Of course, undocumented migrants are not only targeted by the law enforcement agencies but also by people close to them (including inter community victimisation) and even criminals, as they are aware of the fact that the undocumented migrants have very little or no access to justice system (especially police) in order to report about the crimes (Madsen, 2004).

Further, along with the harassment at the hands of law enforcement, undocumented migrants also lack public safety, primary concerns in their day to day life include assaults, robbery and theft but they cannot report anything to the police, as the majority of them fear of detection, detention and deportation (Madsen, 2004; Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). A study conducted among Mozambican undocumented migrants living in Johannesburg, South Africa, found that property offences are frequent and serious concern to undocumented migrants. It is found that they tend to lose their electronic devices (like phones and radios), any investment item or even weekly pay which make their and their dependents' condition worse (Madsen, 2004).

A further study conducted in an American suburb on policing undocumented migrant workers found that thieves and robbers often took advantage of the vulnerability of the undocumented (Sung, Delgado, Peña, and Paladino, 2016). As most undocumented migrants lack access to bank accounts and get paid in cash, they are frequently in possession of cash and may be more often robbed. The authors concerningly describe some criminals tendency to regard undocumented migrant workers as what they term “walking ATMs [cash dispenser machines] for thugs” (Sung, Delgado, Peña and Paladino, 2016). Further, the authors found that though they are unlikely to report the crime incident, undocumented migrants may be willing to get in touch with the police to

ask for information and support in non-legal contexts (Sung, Delgado, Peña and Paladino, 2016). Hence, crimes against undocumented migrants may be significant in number and yet will unlikely ever be recorded in official documentation or official crime victimisation surveys. The inability to report, however, is likely to impact significantly, whether it is financial or interpersonal, because the precarious position that undocumented migrants are in physical harm is exacerbated because of a lack of health support and access to medical services, economic, and personal hardship only increase the precariousness and relative poverty that they often exist in.

It is for this reason then that Madsen (2004) describes such a situation as constituting a situation where,

“it is this dual pressure of crime, against which undocumented migrants have no protection, and the fear of the police that generates highly unstable and fearful migrant lives”.

Some studies have found that police irregularities which includes abuse, humiliation, infringement of human rights and destruction of identifying documents has affected undocumented migrants both mentally and physically (Klotz 2000; Klaaren and Ramji 2001; Madsen, 2004), and yet what generally is emerging is a continual state of precariousness where undocumented migrants are, or can be just as much victim as perpetrator, and yet, as we have argued the discourse around the legality of migration has not framed a discussion with any such recognition.

In order to protect themselves from abusive police, crime, detention and deportation, it has been documented that Mozambican undocumented migrants police themselves and their own group. It has been found that policing by

Mozambican undocumented migrants is based on mutual obligation and responsibility as essential prerequisites for surviving in a hostile environment (Madsen, 2004). When migrants believe that inappropriate or immoral behaviour threatens the community's ability to survive, obligations may be terminated. The author described a case study of a Mozambican undocumented migrant who failed to comply with the rules of the community and repeatedly violated the accepted rules, and was expelled from the group (Madsen, 2004). The author also critically analysed whether social exclusion is considered as policing. To answer this the author described that "any act carried out by, or on behalf of, a community in order to inhibit immoral or criminal behaviour can be considered a form of policing" (Madsen, 2004). However, I disagree with Madsen's explanation of social exclusion as policing. Further, the social exclusion can not only create more hostility amongst the community members, but it may also give rise to situations that may lead to most extreme circumstances undocumented migrants experience, such as street homelessness. The Mozambican case highlights a critical paradox in undocumented migrant communities, how self-policing mechanisms emerge when formal protection systems are inaccessible, but these same mechanisms can become sources of additional harm. This dual nature of community self-regulation could be protective and potentially punitive. This reveals how hostile immigration environments could shape internal community dynamics. While such self-policing provides essential protection from external threats, it can also reproduce exclusionary practices that generate new vulnerabilities for individual members, demonstrating the complex ways survival strategies under precarious conditions create their own forms of social control.

The ambiguous nature of the asylum process can often leave those seeking refuge in limbo, opening them up to a world of precarious housing and thus

increased risk. In the latter months of 2023 alone, over 5,000 refugee households were classified as homeless (BBC,2024). This was largely fuelled by a faulty asylum system in which those who sought asylum and were successful had their Home Office provided accommodation withdrawn due to no longer being eligible.

Here the systematic violence embedded within the lives of those seeking asylum is clear, with the structural approaches to their journey pushing them towards unstable, precarious, and highly risky lifestyles. Homelessness in Britain, as well as elsewhere (Ellsworth, 2019) is dangerous. Whilst criminology has largely ignored the risks faced by those who are rough sleeping, sofa surfing, or in temporary accommodation (much like the plight of those seeking asylum), some conclusions can be drawn from the scant existing literature.

As Newburn and Rock (2006) noted in the only available study on the UK and homelessness conducted by British criminologists, the rates of violence and criminal victimisation are much higher than that of the housed population. Those who engaged with the survey conducted by Newburn and Rock (2006) noted being attacked by members of the public whilst sleeping and violent robberies. Looking beyond the confines of British scholarship, the work of Briggs and Monge Gamero (2017) demonstrates the risks faced by foreign nationals abandoned by the state, marginalised and left to survive on the streets, with drug use, prostitution and exploitation from organised crime groups being a small part of the litany of adverse life experiences facing those in their Spanish study. Such exploitation, though largely ignored by mainstream British criminology, is readily apparent in the United Kingdom. Reports of women and children being trafficked into the United Kingdom to partake in highly organised shoplifting rings (Euronews, 2023), abducted from outside home office accommodation to be exploited by groups involved in the supply of counterfeit goods and drugs

(Townsend, 2023), and partaking in organised begging (Anti-Slavery International, 2014) and the sex trade (Philby, 2013).

From the above studies, which describe crimes against undocumented migrants, it is very clear that they suffer high levels of disadvantage and vulnerability, both created by and exacerbated due to the crimes they cannot report due to their lack of legal status. However, it is also important that alternative reporting methods are considered so that they and their community members can protect themselves from crimes and the impacts of victimisation. Duvel (2004) found that the immigration enforcement authorities know a lot about the various tactics used by undocumented migrants to conceal their presence and avoid discovery, but the immigrants have also demonstrated an understanding of enforcement tactics and developed appropriate countermeasures to safeguard themselves from any potential adverse legal or enforcement activities.

In recent years, many western countries have intensified their internal surveillance on undocumented migrants to identify and expel those from their country. Surveillance of undocumented migrants can be deployed using both formal and informal social institutions such as the labour market, the housing market, and even from their fellow citizens of the country (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). Another strategy that is more positive in terms of implementation is the selective regularisation of particular categories of irregular migrants (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). The author believes that this selective regularisation can bring undocumented migrants to the limelight, and this in turn may be very useful for the government to understand their characteristics and numbers, something which hitherto is only estimated (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). Some other strategies that also seem to be effective are penalising the employers who are employing undocumented migrants (both penalties and

imprisonment) and digitalisation of the Borders and immigration information (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). Currently, the UK also seems to have again embarked on a debate about the potential efficacy of a national identification card.

National identity cards have been a subject of debate in the UK for the last two decades with respect to migration management and surveillance. National identity cards in the UK were introduced to manage personal identity, which aimed at tackling issues like terrorism, illegal immigration, and identity fraud (Beynon-Davies, 2011). However, national identity card proposals under New Labour in the 1990s and 2000s were withdrawn after strong opposition from civil liberty groups and social organisations, which argued it can cause significant risks to privacy, data protection, and civil liberties (Beynon-Davies, 2011).

The UK government cancelled national identity cards for citizens, however, for the immigrants still subject to Biometric Residence Permits (BRPs), which serve as a means of control and surveillance (Warren & Mavroudi, 2011) they remain. The national identity card system can be a significant concern to the society as it can lead to social sorting and discrimination (Lyon, Rule and Combet, 2004). As this system use various criteria to categorise people including ethnicity and religion, which may not be favourable to migrants as it increases the risk of differential treatment based on their background or origin (Lyon, Rule and Combet, 2004). Further, identity card linked to extensive database enables more advanced methods of managing and controlling populations. This can have both positive and negative implications on migrants and larger society. It may simplify the process of proving their legal status and accessing services, however, it could lead to increased surveillance and monitoring of migrants (Lyon, Rule and Combet, 2004). Experience from EU countries suggests tha ethnic minorities are

disproportionately targeted during identity checks by the police, which often negatively impacts police-public relations (Beck & Broadhurst, 1998). Understanding this is also important when we consider whether migrants have identification or not and whether they can prove identity and nationality.

Spencer and Triandafyllidou (2022) state that “some irregular migrants are known to the immigration authorities but for legal, humanitarian, or practical reasons have not been removed”. The researcher agrees with Spencer and Triandafyllidou, as clearly undocumented migrants contribute to economic productivity, often serving as ready and cheap labour available to informal industry and contributing to the economy indirectly. This is also one of the reasons why some European countries are reluctant to take any strict action against undocumented migrants.

Some undocumented migrants live hiding in communities for their safety and work hard to support their family. In contrast, some undocumented migrants may travel with, associate with and already be involved in criminality and will associate with criminals. A study conducted by the Netherlands police, found that the registered crime among undocumented migrant rose between 1997 and 2003 based on the analysis of the police and administrative data (Leerkes et al., 2012). Further, based on the data analysis, they identify five possible explanations of the rise in crime with respect to undocumented migration are; marginalisation thesis, reclassification and redefinition of undocumented migrants, policing, criminal migration & cross-border crime, and demographic changes.

The marginalisation thesis is a good explanation of the rise in crime among undocumented migrant which describes migrants choose illegal or informal means to meet their basic needs when there is no formal or legal means available

(Leerkes et al., 2012). I agree with Leerker et al. explanation of the marginalisation thesis and its association with undocumented migrants, which seems to have strong correlations with a range of Mertonian Strain Theory that suggest that crime occurs when the legitimate or legal opportunities are limited for people to achieve their goals in life. With respect to the undocumented migrants who do not have legal status to live or work are left with very limited legitimate means, might incline towards crime or illegal activities to fulfil their needs which can also be seen as how state policies pushes someone to choose an illegitimate path. Further, Leerkes et al. (2012) claims improved crime detection and recording of the crime by the police, is a possible explanation how migration is being linked with a rise in crime. The authors argue that the rise in crime over the period of time, may be due to the expansion of the Dutch police forces and increase in the recording of crimes more actively by the police (Leerkes et al., 2012). Further, the authors claim that the selective apprehension of irregular migrants may become of more attention on immigration and crime, whereby when illicit migration are the focus and attention of policing, crime rates will likely rise.

There is limited evidence that migration is strongly correlated with crime because, as Bell notes, a dearth of:

“Data is collected on individuals who are arrested and/or convicted, but will not include all crimes committed. Therefore, just comparing foreign-born and UK-born populations can be misleading. A series of factors might lead to foreign-born individuals having higher or lower arrest/conviction rates than the UK-born even if they commit crimes at the same rates. For instance, migrants may commit crimes that are easier (or harder) to detect or police could allocate more (or less) resources to catching migrant offenders or courts could be more (or less) likely to convict migrants” (Bell, 2013).

There does, however seem to be agreement that, against the absence of reliable data on migrant crime rates, mainstream media in Western European countries is dominated by a narrative that frames and depicts migrants as problematic or as a burden. Moreover, negative frames (both those portraying migrants as a burden and those identifying them as a threat, and often a threat to law, order, and security) have grown significantly in Western European countries in recent years. This has happened with little consideration of the nuances within migration practices, so refugees and people seeking asylum are cast in with economic and illegal migrants as a single group.

Definitions of course also matter, and tracking migrant involvement in crime in the UK, and in England and Wales may be difficult precisely because of problems concerning these definitions and representations. Migrants in official documentation in the UK commonly means anyone born outside the UK. Of course alternative definitions exist and are employed, in various official statistics and policy debates (the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford has usefully summarised some of these definitional complexities in a briefing document, ('Who counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their consequences', Anderson and Blinder, 2024). They note there may be greater clarity concerning the experiences of 'victims of crimes' because foreign nationals are identified in data on crime victimisation tracks nationality rather than birthplace.

Conclusion

Overall, the literature review has revealed that the undocumented migrants live in a vulnerable environment and always at risk of exploitation in various forms. Sometimes, they become completely destitute due to the immigration policy, fear, exploitation, and social exclusion by their host community, and often also by their

own community members. From the literature, researchers have explored the various experiences of undocumented migrants like their arrival and networking covering a range of topics from securing or renting an accommodation, job-seeking strategies and social networking skills to find employment, access to health care, interacting with community organisations and religious organisations and survive in the new country of residence (Düvell, 2004; Koser, 2005; Collyer, 2005; Nobil Ahmad, 2008; Dwyer and Brown, 2008; Wolff et al., 2008; Sebo et al., 2010; Khosravi, 2010; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011; Biswas, Kristiansen, Krasnik and Norredam, 2011; Grit, den Otter and Spreij, 2011; Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013; Alberti, 2014; Poduval et al., 2015; Keith and Van Ginneken, 2015; Nellums et al., 2021; Jauhiainen and Tedeschi, 2021). To some extent, researchers have also additionally explored undocumented migrants overall experience of living in hidden communities, socialisation, and a range of social activities, connecting with black marketing organisations for work (Sigona, 2012; Bloch, 2013; Kumarappan and McKay, 2014; Goodman, Burke, Liebling and Zasada, 2014; Bloch and McKay, 2014; Comino, Mastrobuoni and Nicolò, 2020). However, only few research studies have explored undocumented migrants' experiences in terms of crime, criminality, fear of police, fear of the mainstream 'host' community, undocumented migrants being crime victims, individual perceptions of police or local authorities, dispute mechanisms among undocumented migrants, and the place of being largely outside of justice (Klaaren and Ramji 2001; Klotz 2000; Lahman et al., 2011; Leerkes et al., 2012; Madsen, 2004; Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022). Likewise, there is very limited understanding of various perspectives of policing and dealing with undocumented migrants by law enforcement agencies like police and immigration authorities (Duvel , 2004; Leerkes et al., 2012; Madsen, 2004). This research study has

explored the lived experience of undocumented migrants and explored the experiences of law enforcement agencies (both police and immigration enforcement) in policing undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region, and from within the community of undocumented migrants in the UK. This is a significant and important task given that estimations (and it can only ever be estimated) are currently that there are likely to be in the region of some 800,000 to 1.2 million unauthorised undocumented immigrants living in the United Kingdom in 2017 (Pew Research Center, 2019). This is a sphere of crime and victimisation that has been for too long overlooked in academic criminology and the social sciences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodology used to conduct this PhD research project. I will discuss the methodological and ethical issues encountered during my research in the field. The beginning of the chapter outlines the aim of the research project, its contribution to the field of knowledge, and the research questions. The later phase of the chapter covers the methodology of the research study which includes the scope of the research study, research paradigm, design, sampling and sample, procedure and analysis of data. This section will provide a detailed account of how the participants were identified for this research project, the data collection methods, and the challenges I faced during the data collection. In the final phase, I will discuss the ethical considerations and challenges faced in the execution of this project. This section will provide an understanding of the steps taken protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and their data. However, before moving to these specifics, it is important to explain how the subject and the thesis are bound to my own journey as an academic criminologist, researcher, and individual. For this journey is not simply a metaphorical journey of discovery through research but also the physical journeys and travels during and for my career, which help facilitate and enrich my research study.

Background

I am originally from India and moved to the UK to pursue my PhD course at the University of Staffordshire. I would not be doing my PhD course if I was not offered a fully funded course as I cannot afford to study in the UK. Moving to the UK to pursue PhD was a crucial decision in my life. Initially, I experienced a lot of

challenges adjusting to the UK academics in terms of culture and language. English is not my first language, however, being a multilingual scholar was an advantage for my PhD research project, as I could interview some migrants using their 'mother' language.

The motivation and interest for this research project developed from my previous research experience. During my MPhil, I conducted qualitative research on the plight of Rohingya refugees who were forced flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh. This experience of conducting ethnographic research by living with the Rohingya refugees inside the refugee camps helped significantly to understand their plight and challenging lives. This experience shaped me as an ethnographic researcher. It would seem apparent, therefore, that my own experience and background are in some ways inexorably connected with the topic of the study.

The overall aim of the research is to explore the various problems or difficulties faced by undocumented migrants and explore the way in which undocumented migrants are policed by law enforcement agencies in the West Midlands region. Interest in the experiences of the Undocumented, I commenced the study with broad aims, perhaps informed more by the question 'what is going on' and an ethnographic sensibility than a clearly defined aim. However, it is clear that the overarching framing is that the study primarily focuses on two major areas: the lived experiences of being an undocumented migrant and the experiences of police or immigration officers who are dealing with them.

Contribution to the Field of Knowledge

The major contribution of this research study is updating the knowledge of the migration study with respect to the West Midlands region. I believe that updating the existing knowledge with respect to different geographical locations on a

specific research area or problem helps the academic community, practitioners, and policymakers, giving them a deeper and clearer understanding of the problem. Specifically, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region and the experiences of police or immigration authorities dealing with them. By focusing on these two areas, the project seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and issues faced by undocumented migrants as well as policies and policing practices implemented by law enforcement, both police forces and immigration enforcement authorities. Further, within these two areas, I concentrated on understanding undocumented migrants' intersection with local police and members of the mainstream community, individual perceptions of police or immigration enforcement officers, and various perspectives of policing and dealing with the undocumented migrants by the police department and immigration enforcement authorities. Further, I was already aware of social harm perspectives as a theoretical framework to analyse the lived experiences of undocumented migrants. while I recognise that this means that I am not theoretically or, indeed, in research terms value neutral, I did feel that my standpoint was a significant attempt to contribute something of a rebalancing of the existing debates surrounding borders, legality, migration and crime that was knowledgeable about theoretical criminology and specifically, the nexus between migration, victimisation and social harm. These contributions will be very significant in better framing recognition of the complexities and challenges that come with a complex topic such as mass migration and can serve to better understand undocumented migrants as well as the implementation and best practices among police/immigration authorities who deal with them.

Research Questions

As suggested, undocumented migrants are not necessarily people seeking asylum or eligible for refugee status, but the framing of them hitherto has been far more commonly seen as crime problem to be controlled that it is of potential victims in need of recognition. In seeking to be more considered about the various problems or difficulties faced by undocumented migrants and how are they policed by law enforcement agencies in the West Midlands region, I simply wanted to not assume that the problem was necessarily that of offenders, rather than victims. I sought to be person centred and consider the complexities of migrant experiences with crime, asking questions often not considered such as:

1. What are the socio-economic conditions of undocumented migrants living within the West Midlands region?
2. How undocumented migrants navigate the job market in the West Midlands and strategies used to secure jobs?
3. What are the ways in which undocumented migrants are exploited and victimised?
4. What are the most significant day-to-day difficulties undocumented migrants face living in the West Midlands?
5. What are challenges they encounter when accessing essential services like healthcare, education and police?
6. How do law enforcement agencies deal with undocumented migrants living in the West Midlands region?

Scope of the Research Study

This study was conducted in the West Midlands region, UK. This area has been selected due to the high concentration of residents who were born outside the

UK (Krausova and Vargas-Silva, 2013). Based on literature reviews, I found that most of the studies related to undocumented migrants are primarily conducted in and around the London and Southeast England, specifically with respect to their living conditions, employment, health, and housing-related issues. This provided an opportunity for me to explore the gap in the existing knowledge and I focused on filling the gap by conducting this research project in the West Midlands region, UK.

The main purpose of this research is divided into two parts. Part one is to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region with a significant focus on the exploitation and victimisation faced at different stages of their lives, and their access to the justice system. Part two is to explore the experiences of police or immigration authorities who are dealing with them and how are they policed in the West Midlands region. This research project was intended to study key stakeholder experiences in handling undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region, UK.

Research Paradigm

This research study is in some ways, based on the interpretive paradigm and its traditions as it deals with understanding the qualitative experiences of undocumented migrants and law enforcement agencies. Ryan (2018) states, interpretivism is subjective knowledge of people's experiences and their understanding of their own people and social process. Willis (2007) asserts that interpretivism often aims to comprehend a certain situation and that the fundamental belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is socially constructed. The interpretive paradigm enables researchers to gain in-depth knowledge of people's experiences and perceptions of a particular social context

(Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020; Goldkuhl, 2012; Ryan, 2018). Further, Pham (2018) describes that with the use of an interpretive perspective, the researchers aim to achieve a deeper understanding of any social phenomenon and its complexity in its unique environment rather than attempting to establish a generalised understanding that applies to the whole population. This research study explored the lived experiences of undocumented migrants and understood that they have their own way to construct and understand their social reality with respect to their lack of legal status and being undocumented as well as the issues and challenges associated with that. What is of course in tension with this approach, because it conflicts with the ontology of the social harm approach is the framing of the study in zemiology, which seeks to move beyond social constructionism and some of the restrictions that impose, particularly that such perspectives overestimate the autonomy individuals have to act to change the depth structures of our current reality. Hence zemiological or 'harm' perspectives belong more in the paradigm of critical realism as it points to these underlying structures - the state, neoliberal ideology and the dominant media discourse and so on, as influencing the conditions under which we live and over which we have fairly limited capacity to change. Perhaps it is inescapable then that as a researcher both had an influence on me.

To achieve the aims of the study, a qualitative research approach was used to gather an in-depth understanding of the research questions and to understand the discourse of experiences of data (Alase, 2017). The qualitative research approach was used as the study is more subjective in nature and this approach facilitates the participants to share their experiences, emotions, perceptions and opinions without any restrictions (Mack et al., 2005; Labuschagne, 2015).

Further, the application of interpretive paradigm supports the qualitative research approach as the interpretive paradigm helps

"researchers seek methods that enable them to understand in depth the relationship of human beings to their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part" (McQueen, 2002).

It is evident from the description that the study was designed to capture specific experiences of the undocumented migrants and law enforcement like their lived experiences, emotions, perceptions and opinions which are not possible to quantify. This is the reason for not using a quantitative approach in this research study.

Research Design

The research design is a process through which the researcher selects specific methods of data collection and analysis for their study. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) state that "for research to be persuasive, the choices of the method need to be consistent, logically, with the methodology—the presuppositions about the reality status (ontology) of what is being studied and its knowability (epistemology)". While research approaches in textbooks are neatly categorisable into unique fields, in reality I was aware that there exist contradictions between social constructionism and critical realism, and I attempted to navigate a path that owes regard and recognition to both. I had a research design that I have articulate above and outlined its process and approach. However, the research evolved during the process, influenced by my experience and general interest in the lived experience of undocumented migrants and the experiences of law enforcement agencies in handling undocumented migrants. My focus shifted towards an approach the recognised

the precarious lives of undocumented migrants and the lack of recognition of this that was frequently found in wider debate.

Sampling and Sample Size

The study involved data collection with two different sets of participants, those who were undocumented migrants and those who were law enforcement officers. As this research project involved collecting data from two different sets of participants, I used two different sampling techniques. While planning for conducting this research, I used a snowball sampling method (more detail follows) to identify and select the undocumented migrants, and the purposive sampling method for law enforcement officers. Both snowball sampling and purposive sampling techniques belong to a non-probability sampling tradition in which the selection of a participant is based on the subjective judgement of the researcher and non-random manner (Campbell et al., 2020; Parker, Scott, and Geddes, 2019), but as I have already suggested I cannot claim that the research presented here was ever the product of value neutrality and pure objectivity, but rather is framed by a spirit of ethnographic curiosity and attempts to understand some of the realities of the harms that the most vulnerable and socially marginalised may suffer.

Given the risk involved in data collection with undocumented migrants and as they are mostly hidden within the society due to the lack of legal status, I planned to use snowball sampling for undocumented migrants as it is considered most appropriate when the target sample participants are not easily accessible (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017; Sadler, Lee, Lim and Fullerton, 2010). On the other hand, for law enforcement officers, I planned to use purposive sampling as it will help me to identify the participants with certain specific characteristics

which are suitable for my research purpose (Campbell et al., 2020). However, in reality, when I started collecting data, I understood that I had to use a combination of snowball and purposive sampling methods to identify and recruit both undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers as participants in my research study.

In the proposal stage, aim was to gain a sample of 25 undocumented migrants and 25 law enforcement officers (immigration enforcement and police officers) within the West Midland region. The size of the sample is dependent upon the research paradigm, and it is a difficult task to determine a sample while using an interpretive paradigm (Boddy, 2016; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield and Kingstone, 2018). As this research project is based on the interpretive and critical realist paradigms, it is often stressed that it is important to achieve data saturation, a term which is used to describe the point at which no additional data are being found whereby the researcher can develop properties of the [theoretical] category confidently, by sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that data represents reality (Boddy, 2016). This may be more notional than realistic, however, and I was limited by a range of challenges in accessing and speaking to a wide range of participants. Due to time constraints and other practical difficulties, I could only manage to extensively interview 15 undocumented migrants and 9 law enforcement officers (immigration enforcement and police officers), a far less significant number than I had aspired to. However, I do not feel that this meant that my findings were not valid, rather it reflected the complexity of documenting groups which are often reticent to be documented empirically. That participants on both sides were hard to interview might imply something of the general climate of secrecy that unites both communities of participants.

Participant Recruitment

As I have just alluded to, one of the central challenges of my PhD project was the identification and recruitment of participants for my research. The study includes two different sets of participants that I was to find seemed slightly resistant to participation in social research. Within the undocumented migrant community, it could be suggested that there are five different additional categories that individuals can fall into, which are; (a) migrants who entered the country illegally or using irregular ways, living undocumented migrants from the day of entry, (b) people seeking asylum whose application has been rejected by the Home Office and become undocumented migrant (c) a child born to undocumented migrants (but now he/she should be an adult), (d) visa overstayers and (e) victims of human trafficking, who are trafficked and do not have status to live in this country. On the other side, the law enforcement offices include immigration enforcement officers and local police officers. The eligibility criteria for the participants in this study were determined based on the geographical area which is the West Midlands region. Undocumented migrants were currently living within the West Midland region and law enforcement officers were currently working within the West Midland region in any police force or immigration enforcement department. When this project started, I had a few ideas to identify and recruit participants, especially those in the former 'migrant' category, however these notions ultimately failed in reality due to the nature of the participants. Following there will be discussion on how I managed to recruit participants for this research in this section. Further, this section will also provide an overview of various issues and challenges faced in the process of identification and recruitment of participants for my PhD Project.

Undocumented migrants

The initial plan was to access undocumented migrants through charity organisations which help refugees, people seeking asylum, and ethnic migrants, as I had a fair idea of which organisations might regularly have contact with the migrants I wished to speak to. Initially I also hoped that my own biography and background would aid me to find and obtain interviewees, but I had little expected how hard it was to convince willing participants. However, over a period of time, therefore, I had to explore other available options and seek out the likes of community groups, Christian churches and ethnic minority business entities that would assist me to gain access to and recruit participants. Simply put, I may well have overestimated my ability to access people who were undocumented because those who are seem little willing to reveal themselves identified or avail themselves to researchers.

When my direct attempts to convince participants to be interviewed failed, I therefore moved to contact more than 25 charity organisations around the West Midlands region to explore the chance of collaboration to identify and recruit undocumented migrants for my research study. I emailed some of the charity organisations in Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford, Walsall, Coventry and Birmingham, that I knew were working with the undocumented, and where and when possible, I personally visited them to discuss my research project. Through this process, I also offered to be a volunteer with their organisation to support their mission. However, most of them refused to help me by saying that “we don’t have capacity to help you in the research project” or “we don’t deal with undocumented migrants”. On the other hand, one organisation (in Stoke-on-Trent) offered me extensive support and accommodated me as a volunteer to work with them. Further, they informed me that their organisation mostly dealt with “people

seeking asylum” and “refugees” only in terms of basic education, providing support to live in the UK, food and provide legal assistance. However, they also said that they offer help to anyone who comes to their charity organisation regardless of their status and this tacit acknowledgement that undocumented migrants did indeed sometimes visit the organisation for some support was the best admission and access I would receive. After discussing with a director of that organisation, I understood that I had a chance to find my participants, but I need to build trust with the organisation and service users to seek help from them to identify my participants.

I started volunteering with that organisation in October 2022 and 3 days a week – Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Initially, for a couple of weeks, it was hard for me as everyone looked at me like an alien as I was new to the organisation and some people refused to talk in front of me when I scheduled meetings with them to shadow the staff. This mirrored my early findings that secrecy and a degree of anxiety seemed to be commonplace amongst people I wanted as participants, and also explains why ultimately, the number of migrant participants was far lower than that I initially intended.

After a couple of weeks, I met Isaac, who was the youth well-being and safety coordinator of that organisation that I had explained about my research project (and problems with building trust) to, he said:

“Brother, the way in which you are doing will not work for you because they won’t come to you, if you don’t go to them. Asylum seekers [he did not use the term undocumented, although by now I was aware that indeed some were] went through a lot and going through a lot. If you want to build trust, make them feel comfortable. Go and introduce yourself, say good morning or good afternoon, and ask them, how are you? Or ask them, if they want to drink tea or coffee. What you are doing is really good, but you need to

make them understand that it is good, and their stories can make a lot of difference” (Isaac)

Isaac's input was invaluable in shaping my early practice and better informing me in terms of the work to build trust with the people I wished to interview. After that, I started to work quite actively with the service users by offering them hot drinks, talking to them, helping them with learning English, and talking to youth who were vulnerable to drugs or anti-social behaviour. Isaac received his refugee status, but admitted to me that he had been an undocumented migrant for several years and that had included a spell when he was held in a detention centre for not having legal status to live in the UK. Due to suffering and struggle, he started working with the organisation to help people seeking asylum. Though he received leave to remain in the UK having received political asylum, his past experience of being an undocumented migrant, proved useful for me in two ways. It meant that he would be valuable for my research as an informant, but additionally it helped me to reformulate and make sense of the way that narrow categorisations that cast people as either people seeking asylum or migrant may be simplistic. After having a thoughtful discussion with my supervisory team, I decided to include people who were previously undocumented migrants and lived within the West Midland region. Isaac matched these criteria, and I recruited him as my first participant. The very act had taken months, and indeed Isaac might have been as unwilling as others had he not received his leave to remain.

As already mentioned, I was using both snowball and purposive sampling methods to identify and recruit undocumented migrant participants. I used the purposive sampling method to pick and choose the participants for my research by talking to them and listening to their stories of service users. As already informed by the director, most of them came to the UK and immediately filed

asylum claims at the port of entry. Eventually, I found some people seeking asylum who were previously undocumented, and I recruited them to participate in my research project. Snowballing with undocumented migrant participants was very difficult due to a lack of trust and language barriers:

“He is not comfortable to talk to you, and he is very afraid to talk to you. He has a family, and he is said he can’t risk. I am sorry brother; I will try and find someone else” (Mohammad).

“He just doesn’t want to talk about his past. He struggled a lot without papers, and he don’t want to remember his past” (Ali).

“Bro, it’s not going to happen. I myself was afraid to talk to you and I gathered all my courage to share my story because you approached me again and again. Even If I ask my friends to participate, they will straightway refuse it because nobody wants to get into any trouble” (Peter).

“I asked him a couple of times, but he is not ready to participate because of Language issues. I even requested him, that I will be there to translate from Iranian to English, still he refused” (Yash),

When I started working with the charity organisation, I used the snowball sampling method to identify like-minded organisations that might be ready to help me. Through them, I found a community support group which helps people from African countries especially people from Sudan, Libya and Eritrea. The community support group was started by a group of African people to support their own people to overcome social isolation, mental health support, racism and hate as well as provide language support career guidance and asylum claims support. Charitable (often religious) community groups provide support to all kinds of people which include people seeking asylum, refugees, undocumented migrants and the homeless people living in this country. There are similar small

charitable outreach groups across the UK, and often these are not framed around concern with the individual's nationality or immigration status but their current experiences, particularly of financial hardship. I found several community groups of this sort, one of which operated in Birmingham, and this also became a backdrop to my study and attempts to recruit participants. With the help of both the community support group, I have managed to identify and recruit two people seeking asylum who were previously living as undocumented migrants and one failed people seeking asylum who was currently living as an undocumented migrant in a precarious state.

The original plan did not include accessing undocumented migrants at a Christian Church (in Stoke-on-Trent) because I am not a Christian and I have never attended a prayer service or mass in my life. However, when I started working with the charity organisation as a volunteer, I heard from the service users that they would go to the churches to collect food. They also mentioned that the church helps different people including people seeking asylum and the homeless. When I heard these things, I understood that I could also attend church, and doing this might help me to identify some participants for my research. Through one of the people seeking asylum I knew, who was volunteering at the church, I was introduced to the people at the church who were managing the charity work there. Claire, one of the programme coordinators informed me that they don't keep any record of people and who they are. She said that it will be difficult for me to identify a particular participant group for my research, but she said I can come to church every Wednesday and Friday when food distribution was happening. By helping people in the church, I managed to identify and recruit participant for my research. This example I feel, aptly shows how the undocumented can rightly be regarded

as a hard-to-reach group and suggests at the level of effort required to gain participants.

In my research proposal, I planned to identify and recruit participants using ethnic migrant business entities predominantly Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani business entities [given that these were the closest to me in terms of commonality]. Around the West Midlands region especially in the cities like Stoke-on-Trent, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, there are a lot of Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan owned business entities which operate in various sectors like restaurants, takeaways, groceries and convenience stores, ethnic clothing businesses and the like. My thought was simply because I was fluent in Hindi, a language that is similar to the Urdu language spoken by Pakistani and northern Indians as well as the Tamil language spoken in some parts of southern parts of India and northern parts of Sri Lanka. I would be able to trade off my non-English status, and use my previous experience and ethnographic skills to build trust and confidence among business owners who often employ undocumented migrants to recruit them for my research. However, it did not go well as I planned because the business owners were themselves afraid to talk to me when I explain about my research project. Particularly one Pakistani takeaway owner whom I knew for more than one year as I often buy my meal from them and he used to be very friendly with me and even offered other help when I was new to the UK, when I revealed that I need his help in identifying undocumented migrants said:

“Brother, I trusted you because we share things in our language, and I helped you because you are a regular customer in my takeaway, but I would have never spoken to you if you had this intention. I can't risk anyone's life for your research, and we don't know what you're going to do with this data. So, don't contact me anymore for this purpose” (Takeaway owner).

A Sri Lankan grocery store owner from where I usually buy my groceries agreed to help me in identifying undocumented migrants. I was sure that he might have many contacts because he himself was an people seeking asylum previously and came to this country during the civil war in Sri Lanka. however, he could only manage to convince one undocumented migrant who used to work in his grocery store. He said:

“Mani, I tried to contact seven people with whom I use to work, and they were asylum seekers or undocumented migrants. Out of seven, four of them have been deported back to India or Sri Lanka and I don’t have their contact details. Two out of three people who are still in the UK, don’t want to talk about this and I tried to convince them, but they don’t want to participate. Mani, you know these people are very hard to convince, I myself don’t want to talk about my experience fleeing from Sri Lanka during the Civil War” (Grocery store owner).

There are several factors here. Firstly, is that the very precarious nature of life for the undocumented migrant means that there is often deep mistrust and suspicion and a reluctance to talk openly, even sometimes even after a long period has been spent by the researcher in cultivating friendly relationships. This also explains how and why when it comes to the challenging nature of access, large participant numbers are unlikely. Working as a researcher within such settings as allows you to recognise that rather than the headline number, the very investment of time and effort shows far more value and currency to the data that you do manage to collect. Secondly, while it is possible to understand reluctance to participate as being about secrecy, it is not that alone. It is also that the experience of being undocumented is rarely regarded favourably, and often is connected with all manner of negativity, negativity that in some instances is added to the trauma that led to an individual being undocumented, fleeing from

persecution, threat, war or hardship. It simply was something that many of those I sought simply did not want to revisit.

Police Officers

As per the proposed plan, I thought identifying and recruiting the police officer would be the easiest part of my research project, but this was not the case. Being a PhD researcher, I thought that my Staffordshire University affiliation would make access easy for me, At the time of writing the university had strong partnerships with law enforcement groups within the Midlands region. Immediately after getting ethical approval for my research project, I contacted a senior police officer who visited Staffordshire University for a conference where I presented my initial thoughts on my PhD research. I did not get any response from them at first but after I contacted him for 2nd time to identify and recruit participants for my research, he responded back to me but just to receive a response from them took more than 4 weeks. After that, he asked me to submit a research proposal to seek official permission from the Staffordshire Police force. After the submission, it took more than 6 weeks to get a response from them and asked me to submit additional or supporting documentation which is my ethical approval from the university. In total, it took me around 8 weeks to get official permission from Staffordshire Police to gain the official approval to conduct my research project. Through this way, I identified and recruited 5 police officers who had previous experience handling or being involved in the case of undocumented migrants. After completing data collection with 5 police officers, I contacted them to see if they could identify further willing officers who would be involved in my research but there was no response from their side. I sent many reminder emails to them, but I did not get a response.

As I needed to recruit police officers from other police forces around the West Midlands region, I tried different ways to contact the police forces, but the success rate was low. For West Midlands force, I directly contacted them using their public enquiry email, but their response was negative, they said they cannot help me with my research project and asked me to contact the Chief Constable. However, when I asked them to provide me with an email address or contact number, I did not get any response from them. I used to work with the University of East London in 2021, who work with the Metropolitan Police force and West Midland Police force. So, I contact the director of the policing course. The director immediately introduced me to a Police officer of Inspector rank through an email to help me. He said he never encountered any undocumented migrants in his career [something that I found a little surprising given the numbers likely to be in the UK] but he said he would ask his colleagues if they had. Finally, he came up with one of his colleagues who was involved in an undocumented migrant case. Further, to find more police officers, I tried to do snowballing the police officer who participated. I found that there were other police officers in his team who has experience in handling undocumented migrants, but they don't want to take part in my PhD project. To extend my reach, I wrote a summary of my research project with my requirements and contact academic staff at Staffordshire University and the University of East London whom I know and asked them to circulate in their professional circle. Initially, I thought this method would be unlikely to work but actually, it helped me to identify and recruit a single additional police officer from the West Midland Police force.

Immigration enforcement officers

The group of participants it was hardest for me to find and invite to participate in my research project was immigration enforcement officers. When the project was

proposed at the time, one of my supervisors had good contact with a Chief Immigration officer working within the West Midlands region. However, by the time when the research project got ethical approval and I was ready to get my data collection, my supervisor's contact was no longer working for Immigration Enforcement. This made me and my supervisory team look for other available options to identify and recruit Immigration enforcement officers. Supervisors who had contacts often tried with serving officers (who were ex colleagues, students and trusted contacts) but there was a general unwillingness to participate which may say much of how the organisation feel about external researchers, perhaps as individual practitioners, perhaps more generally as a working culture.

After having a discussion with my supervisory team, I contacted the Home Office through the public enquiries email address. After two weeks, I received an email saying that the email address is for service users, and they told me that they could not help with my research project. After this attempt, I sent a physical letter to the Home Office requesting them to help me with my research project, however, this attempt also failed, and I did not receive any return mail. On the other hand, when I was collecting data with Staffordshire Police forces, they mentioned that they work with Immigration enforcement officers and most of the cases from police involving undocumented migrants are transferred to the Immigration Enforcement. With this understanding, I tried to snowball with the police officers to introduce me to the immigration enforcement officers, whom they work with. Initially, they showed a positive response to my request, however, it did not go as well as it should have. Again, I encountered the routine unwillingness to engage, and all came to nothing. Over the period, my supervisory team also tried their best to connect with a few immigration enforcement officers around the West Midlands region using their professional

network. Using their professional network, I was finally able to recruit two immigration enforcement officers to interview. Further, I tried to snowball with them to recruit more participants, however, most of their colleagues working or used to work with them, expressed that they were simply not willing to participate in my research project, and again, I can only speculate as to why this might be.

List of Participants

List of Participants includes 15 undocumented migrants and 9 law enforcement officers, both police and immigration officers. The undocumented migrants' names were changed for anonymity and confidentiality. These are pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves at the end of their interview

Undocumented Migrant Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Country of Origin
Ali	Male	46	Pakistan
Farhad	Male	30	Iraq
Isaac	Male	39	Nigeria
Steven	Male	26	Ivory Coast
Peter	Male	32	Nigeria
Sam	Male	31	South Sudan
Ahmad	Male	36	Egypt
Chen	Female	38	China
Raju	Male	44	India
Abu	Male	32	South Sudan
Jamal	Male	29	Sudan
Zoran	Male	48	Iran
Charles	Male	41	Ivory Coast
Kumar	Male	45	Sri Lanka
Aran	Male	42	Iraq

Law Enforcement Officer Participants

Description	Gender	Work Experience
Police officer 1	Female	15 Years
Police officer 2	Female	10 Years
Police officer 3	Male	25 Years

Police officer 4	Female	15 Years
Police officer 5	Male	13 Years
Police officer 6	Female	16 Years
Police officer 7	Male	21 Years
Immigration Officer 1	Male	15 Years
Immigration Officer 2	Male	17 Years

Procedure

I planned to adopt ethnographic research methods in this project which is used widely in anthropological research to study a particular culture in a natural setting (Morgan-Trimmer and Wood, 2016). Ethnographic research is defined as a strategy of inquiry of a cultural group in a natural setting for a period by eliciting and collecting data using observation, unstructured interviews, documentary analysis, and field notes (Creswell, 2007; Morgan-Trimmer and Wood, 2016; Treadwell, 2019). However, when I started my data collection, it was difficult for me to convince everyone to be observed or get involved with them by doing participant observation. Some undocumented migrants who were very friendly invited me to their homes and workplace, which enabled me to do some participant observation. However, other undocumented migrants who agreed to participate in the interview were not comfortable allowing me to observe their home or workplace environment. On the other hand, participant observation was not possible with the police officers and immigration enforcement officers, due to their nature of work and legal issues. Due to these reasons, I cannot refer my research project as ethnographic in its totality, but it is an ethnographically informed research study. As explained by Treadwell (2019) there is no definite answer to ‘what constitutes criminological ethnography?’ and even hard to answer, ‘what constitutes ethnography?’ as there is no universally agreed definition. However, traditional ethnographic research involves interaction and

understanding the participant's life in a natural and real-world setting (Treadwell, 2019). With this understanding, I call my research as ethnographically informed rather than ethnographic research as my research project involved interaction and understanding the participants' lives in their home and work settings, but I had limited access.

I used ethnographically informed research as ethnography helps in understanding people's lives and their culture in a natural setting. With respect to the undocumented migrants in this research project, who often live hidden within the community and interact with the informal economy for their livelihood, this is often considered as a subculture. Therefore, to understand the undocumented migrant's life, their ways of navigating life and their understanding of being an undocumented migrant can be explored through ethnographic research. On the other hand, the project also aimed at exploring the experiences of police and immigration authorities in policing undocumented migrants which have different social and political dynamics, for them I only used only extensive qualitative interviews to understand their experiences and views. Therefore, this research study used some element of participant observation, and in-depth interviews were conducted with undocumented migrants, local police and immigration authorities to collect data. Before conducting the field visit for the data collection, I submitted a full ethical approval form to the ethics committee of Staffordshire University and started data collection only following successful ethical approval.

To conduct this research study, two types of data collection instruments were used: the interview schedule and an observational sheet. The interview schedule was designed with semi-structured questions and a predetermined set of questions that I had developed based on reading around the topic, which was then used to guide and frame the interviews and ensure a degree of consistency

in conversational coverage of topics. I used a semi-structured interview schedule as this allowed me to ask new questions based on what the participants described about an event or incident, and to elaborate and go off pursuing new and emergent areas as they arose. Prompting helped this research study to inquire into a particular area to gain an in-depth understanding of the research questions (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson and Kangasniemi, 2016). Further, I decided not to use a structured interview schedule as it does not have a scope for prompting, on the other hand, I did not use an unstructured interview schedule as it might have affected the focus of the interview and might have ended up in collecting irrelevant data. Most of the interviews were conducted in the undocumented migrants' places (like their workplace or social gathering places or homes), due to their fear of being exposed or getting caught by law enforcement and also, most of them felt safe being within their community. Police and immigration enforcement officers' interviews were mostly conducted in their office and the cafeteria in their office building as per their choice. Some of the Police and immigration enforcement officers' interviews was conducted online, due to their preference and their busy work schedule.

Before starting the interviews, I always provided a copy of the information sheet and consent form to the participants as well as explained to them my research project and their voluntary involvement in this study. After obtaining written/voice consent from the participants, I conducted in-depth interviews with them which were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription and analysis. With some undocumented migrants' participants, I did participant observation and for this purpose, I used an unstructured observation method as this allowed me to focus on what is happening rather than expecting something to happen. Participant observation is used as a strategy in ethnographic fieldwork in which the

researcher is immersed in the day-to-day activities of the participants to witness and get first-hand experience of their behaviours, norms, customs and rituals in a natural setting (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011; Treadwell, 2019). As defined above, I was involved as participant observer in a range of settings to build trust and access, and this access to the day-to-day activities of the undocumented migrant participants, such as visiting their workplace to understand their working conditions, hanging out place or social gathering place and their home, which helped the researcher to understand the depth of their vulnerability, victimization and trauma living without a formal legal status in what might be regarded as a precarious hidden world. However, as previously discussed, I was unable to conduct participant observation with police and immigration enforcement officers due to the confidentiality of their job role and the demanding role of their policing or law enforcement duties. The participant observations were recorded in the observation sheet and sometimes in the field notes. Further, the researcher was maintaining a reflective diary (both a notepad and audio recording) to record the day-to-day activities of field visits which helped the researcher to revisit certain important observations and recorded that in an elaborated way.

Analysis of data

I adopted qualitative data analysis technique (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014) which helped me to understand and extract the essence from the data and construct different themes. The qualitative data analysis technique is a kind of thematic analysis which follows a systematic six-step process to analyse the data thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Before starting the analysis, I transcribed all the in-depth interviews by carefully listening to the audio records. I transcribed most of the in-depth interviews

immediately after the interview on the same day so that to maintain the richness and accuracy of the data. Further, participant observations and field notes (reflective diary) data were processed in a way that I was able to analyse along with the interviews. During this process, I also took special care to anonymise all the personalised data and all the participants were given with pseudonyms (pseudonyms were chosen by the participants themselves at the end of the each interviews) to make the analysis process easy instead of using the participants' numbers.

The six steps of Braun and Clarke's (2026) thematic analysis:

Familiarization with data:

This step is all about reading through the data to understand what the participants are saying, and the in-depth meaning of different ideas they have shared. In this step, I read all the transcribed interviews, participant observations and field notes (reflective diary) to get familiarised with the data. During the process, I was using MS word application to highlight the important points and recording my thoughts for further analysis.

Generating Initial Codes:

The second step is generating the initial codes which can be done manually or using data analysis software. Initially, I planned to use the NVivo qualitative analytical software to code all the data and I took some online training courses at beginning of my PhD course. However, when I started using the NVivo qualitative analytical software, I was struggling as I was new to the software and found that, for me, it was not that user-friendly. Due to this reason, I moved back to analysing my data manually coding by hand. Usually, researchers talk of adhering to either

inductive or deductive coding of data, but perhaps the contrasts and delineation of difference here are too stark. Normally inductive coding is the blank sheet where knowledge is built from the ground up anew based on what themes emerge from the data. In contrast, deductive coding starts from the point of existing knowledge and is geared specifically hypothesis testing. However, I cannot claim to have uniquely followed either approach, but rather created a form that was somewhere between the two based on my own subjective standpoint and growing understanding of the field. I coded based on frequent recurring themes and my understanding of the issues informed by my growing understanding of the field, and my participants frequent concerns.

Coding is an analytical process by which the researcher labels and organises the data into different codes which are later categorised into different themes (Creswell, 2014; Elliott, 2018). As per my understanding, step 1 and step 2 are more interrelated and can be done together or one after the other.

Generating Initial themes:

In this step, prominent themes or descriptions from the coding step were identified by categorising different codes. I used to excel sheet to put the coding in different columns and later I categorised it into one group. This process helped to understand the codes which communicate participants' feelings and emotions as well. Finally, I generated themes/descriptions and given initial names to them according to coding to give me the recurrent themes that set the frame of my focus and analysis.

Reviewing themes:

The fourth step is about how the themes and descriptions are represented in the qualitative narrative for this step, I printed all the highlighted and coded word files as well as excel sheets to view them together as a whole picture to interrelate the themes or descriptions which are similar in nature. During this step, I also ensured that the names of the themes are defined accurately which represents the data.

Defining and naming themes:

Based on the last four steps, I named the themes which represent the data as a whole. In this step, I also refined themes which can represent the data accurately and combined a few themes which are closely related to each other.

Reporting of findings.

In this step, I presented different themes developed from the data analysis as research findings and they were discussed and interpreted using the available literature. In the research findings, I presented narratives of the participants to communicate stories of the participants along with research arguments, and basing my work in the qualitative tradition and the use of qualitative data that I am familiar with I gave significant time over to allowing my participants' thick description to become part of the presentation of the thesis and to give voice to participants' lived experiences as they were articulated to me.

Ethical Consideration

The issues of balancing ethical considerations and knowledge gathering for extending our understanding of social phenomena are well documented, particularly when conducting research on sensitive and vulnerable populations like undocumented migrants. The legal and social marginalisation of

undocumented migrants requires researchers to adopt a careful approach to a maintain the safety and integrity of both participants and the researcher. These ethical considerations are an important part of the ongoing discussion on morality and knowledge, which has always been a key focus and a subject of interest among researchers as it is essential for credibility of research.

As the project has very specific ethical considerations, e.g. working with vulnerable population who lived in a precarious position and status, ethical concerns were at the forefront of my considerations throughout. While research methods literature provides extensive commentary on issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, and the management of risks of harm to both research participants and to the researcher, I had considered these from the outset, but also realised that the true ethics of undertaking research come in the form of praxis rather than what a researcher says they will do.

Considering the sensitivity of the participant's immigration status and the nature of the research topic, I sought and obtained full ethical approval from the ethics committee of University of Staffordshire's Research Ethics Committee in 2022. This approval process involved meeting the list of ethical standards mentioned in University's Ethical Review Policy and the British Society of Criminology's (BSC) statement on ethical guidelines. Data collection with undocumented migrants required extra care and protection as they lack legal status to live in the UK which is in violation of Immigration law. It was unavoidable then that I would acquire guilty knowledge, and so had to recognise this as an inherent challenge throughout the project. Recognition of that vulnerability of one cohort of my participants (undocumented migrants), I took reasonable steps to ensure that they did not suffer any harm or negatively impact their lives as a result of their involvement in the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The research project was designed to collect data from both undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers which required precautions to protect the identities of both participants and mitigate potential risks from their participation. Especially, undocumented migrants due to their vulnerable status, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality was significant to safeguard them from any potential legal and social repercussions.

To ensure participant safety, data was anonymised immediately after the field visits. It was ensured that no identifying or personal data were recorded in the transcripts. After the interviews were transcribed, the original interview recording was deleted. Interview identifier codes were generated to distinguish the participants from each other. Further, participant observation was recorded on the observation sheet and field notes which were converted into digital form using MS Word for further analysis and the physical copies were securely destroyed in university confidential waste. All data will be securely stored in Staffordshire University's OneDrive, protected with strong passwords for enhanced security and confidentiality. A special care was taken to manage digital data, as highlighted Fischer and Jørgensen (2021) the use of online communication tools and digital practices may jeopardize the participants and can expose them to additional risk.

As a researcher, I have a duty to protect participants from both physical and mental harm while undertaking empirical work. I ensured that research experience shall not be in any way disturbing to those who participate in the research and all attempts to minimize such disturbance was taken during the data collection. As research participants should not be taken through painful

experiences or left with “painful baggage from the research experience” (Linkogle & Lee-Treweek, 2000, p.15). A special care was taken during in-depth interviews, especially with undocumented migrants who were already traumatised in many ways. Throughout, the project it was essential to maintain an independent and neutral stance as this project involved interviewing undocumented migrants and law enforcement who had many opposite viewpoints about the life, illegality and laws.

Informed Consent

Getting an informed consent is essential for any research project and can present significant ethical issues, especially, dealing with vulnerable participants like undocumented migrants. All the participants were provided with a research information sheet and consent form before the data collection, so that participants can make informed decision on their involvement. Further, I explained them about the research project and their voluntary participation, which were already mentioned in the research information sheet and consent form. This was essential for particularly while recruiting participants who cannot read and write English Language. However, it worth noting that it was difficult to make sure that the participant fully understands the scope of the research study and as a researcher, I tried my best to answer all their queries and doubts regarding the research, so that their consent is based on informed decision.

It is important to note that recruiting participants (especially undocumented migrants) was challenging along with adhering to ethical principles like written consent. A formal written consent form with a signature of the participant is a standard protocol to follow. However, in criminological research, participants are more reluctant provide a written consent due to various factors including their

vulnerable status like undocumented migrants (Israel & Hay, 2012). This is reason I provided a flexibility to the participants to provide either written or verbal consent. Based on the choice of the participants, formal written or verbal consent was obtained from all the participants for their involvement in the research project.

Personal Safety

In addition to protecting participants from any harm or distress due to their involvement in this research study, it is equally important to consider the researcher's own safety during fieldwork. Due to the nature of study and data collection involving undocumented migrants who are often rely on informal labour market and other forms of illegal means to survive. Due to this situation, conducting research can be challenging and the field visits may require to researcher to explore unpredictable and uncertain environment. The unpredictability of social interaction and uncertain environments required the researcher to take extra care and precautions for their personal safety.

A thorough risk assessment was conducted once the specific location for meeting the undocumented migrants was confirmed. Further, the researcher took extra care to familiarise with all available exits to escape from particular area in unforeseen and emergency circumstances. Further, I also prioritised to conduct field visits in the public spaces where other members of the public also have access to reduce the potential risk. However, this was not possible in all case, as sometimes undocumented migrants were reluctant to meet in public places due to their legal status and fear. Further, the researcher maintained a proper communication with the supervisory team providing them with time-to-time updates regarding the time, location and details of field activity. This was to take any action if required by the supervisory team in any unforeseen circumstances.

My previous experience in conducting interviews/observation with migrant and refugee population further supported my ability to manage any unforeseen circumstances and complexities of the fieldwork. In 2018, I conducted an empirical study with Rohingya refugees during a crisis situation in Bangladesh. This shows the capacity to navigate any challenging situations and environments while ensuring safety of both participants and me. This background was invaluable in risk management during the fieldwork.

Emotional and Psychological Wellbeing

Beyond physical safety, conducting research with undocumented migrants to understand their lived experience presents significant emotional and psychological challenges. It has been already recognised by researchers that conducting research on topics involving marginalisation, exploitation, and trauma can result in vicarious trauma and emotional burden for researchers (Kelly, 1988; Behar, 1996). The process of listening to participants' accounts of harm, vulnerability, and injustice while being unable to immediately address their situations created moral distress and emotional weight. My own background as a migrant researcher, while methodologically advantageous, also meant that participants' experiences often resonated personally, requiring careful emotional boundary management.

To support my wellbeing throughout the research process, I established several strategies including regular debriefing sessions with supervisors that focused not only on methodological aspects but also provided space for processing emotional responses to fieldwork. I maintained a reflective research diary to process emotional responses and accessed university counselling services when needed. Recognising that the emotional labour of researching sensitive topics is

an inherent part of the methodology rather than a weakness, I documented how my emotional responses informed my understanding of participants' experiences while maintaining analytical rigour. This approach aligns with methodological traditions that acknowledge the researcher as a whole person whose emotional and intellectual responses are both valid and valuable sources of insight (Wolf, 1996; Lather, 2007).

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the methodological foundation of the research, offering a detailed account of how the data was collected, processed and analysed and the rationale behind key decisions that shaped the research design. The overall aim has been to explore the lived experiences of undocumented migrants and examine how law enforcement agencies police this population in the West Midlands region. In doing so, I have positioned this research within a complex theoretical and epistemological framework that draws on both interpretive and critical realist paradigms, creating a methodological approach that acknowledges both subjective experiences and structural constraints.

The research is primarily grounded in the interpretive paradigm, recognising that undocumented migrants construct and understand their social reality in unique ways shaped by their lack of legal status and the challenges associated with being undocumented. This paradigmatic positioning enabled the exploration of subjective experiences, emotions, perceptions, and opinions that characterise the daily lives of this marginalised population. However, in tension with this interpretive approach, the study is also framed by zemiological perspectives and critical realism, which point to underlying structural forces such as the state, neoliberal ideology, and dominant media discourse that shape the conditions under which undocumented migrants live and over which they have limited capacity to change.

The chapter has justified the adoption of ethnographically informed research methods, acknowledging that while I initially planned to conduct full ethnographic research, practical and ethical constraints necessitated a more flexible approach. The hidden nature of undocumented migration and the sensitive work environments of law enforcement officers meant that traditional participant observation was only partially possible. This methodological adaptation resulted in what I have termed "ethnographically informed research" maintaining the ethnographic commitment to understanding participants' lives in their home and work environment while acknowledging limited access to their environments.

The process of access and recruitment has been outlined, with justification given for including fifteen undocumented migrants and nine law enforcement officers. My multilingual capabilities proved particularly valuable in facilitating communication, building rapport and in understanding participants' day-to-day life being undocumented in the UK. This dual perspective was essential for understanding both the subjective experiences of being undocumented and the structural forces of police and immigration enforcement. The diversity within the migrant sample was necessary to capture different nationals' lived experience and understanding how they navigate their lives being undocumented in the UK. The decision to use thematic analysis has been explained, emphasising its compatibility with both interpretive understanding and critical analysis of structural harms. This method allowed for flexible interpretation of subjective experiences while remaining attentive to the structural forces and social harms identified through zemiological analysis.

Conducting research with undocumented migrants raised critical ethical questions that shaped this research study. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality of the participants was essential as I was conducting interviews with undocumented migrants who are vulnerable

and as I was also interviewing policing and immigration enforcement officers, I took extra care about how I processed the data regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

This research approach has created knowledge that directly challenges dominant narratives about undocumented migration, providing strong evidence of harms experienced by this vulnerable population. By focusing on the voices of undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers' perspectives, this research offers a complete understanding of a range of harms experienced by the undocumented migrants due to current immigration policies. The upcoming chapters will present the findings of this research, analysed thematically, examining the range of harms experienced by undocumented migrants and the perspectives of immigration enforcement officers towards undocumented migrants.

Chapter 4: Undocumented Migrants – Journey, Arrival and Housing

Introduction

This chapter explores the lived experiences of undocumented migrants when they arrive in the UK and the initial stages of adapting to a new environment. The chapter focuses on key themes that emerged from the in-depth interview of participants initial stages of their life in the UK, which include reasons for migration, for choosing the UK, their travel experience, and charting recollections of initial days of arrival, moving to the West Midlands region, including finding accommodation, etc.

The reasons for migration and the reasons for choosing the UK to migrate to frequently were very similar; however, the researcher will discuss the reasons under two separate themes and show the distinction between these two. The researcher will further explore the importance of social capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) which includes family, friends and co-ethnic or co-national migrants in the process of migration, and the vital role of this social capital in seeking and receiving help in the early days of arrival and as part of the process of securing accommodation. Further, specifically explored the issues and challenges faced by undocumented migrants in the early days of their arrival in the UK, as these are often the phases of heightened vulnerability and uncertainty, where themes the like of exploitation, mental health issues, fear of uncertainty, and trust issues are common, will be discussed. Additionally, this chapter discusses the themes mentioned above along with the narratives of the participants to provide an ethnographic understanding of the ontological insecurity (Young, 1999, 2001) that undocumented migrants faced, even when

and if the choice of the UK as a destination is a blend of both necessity and choice.

Reasons for Migration

From the literature reviews, it was found that people migrate due to various reasons and often have mixed motives, which are often very complex to understand (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2009; Castles 2000; Castles and Miller, 2009; Mai 2007). The reasons for migration include conflict and oppression, civil war, life threats, economic crises, global inequality, and uneven development. In other cases, people migrate to join their family members or loved ones, and in some cases, to gain a new cultural experience or for an adventure, although the latter two motives are likely very much limited to migrants with significant social and economic capital, the touring gap year student or the affluent visitor, as few arrive as do people seeking asylum risking a potentially dangerous journey for an adventure (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2009; Castles 2000; Castles and Miller, 2009; Mai 2007). In many ways, these competing features are often drawn on to create a picture and representation where migrants are either deserving (asylum seeking) or undeserving (economically driven 'illegal' economic migrants). There is an acknowledged need for well-qualified legitimate migrants, but not shadowy economic ones motivated by self-interest.

The in-depth interviews conducted in this study revealed that the participants migrated from their country due to both sets of factors that were often interwoven, as political persecution, life threats, and a desire to join their family members already in the UK and to earn money were often inexorably interwoven. Two participants faced a similar kind of issue that forced them to migrate, however,

both participants had been through different situations, which are discussed below:

“Back in my country, I was involved in politics, and I used to work closely with the political party (which I don’t like to name). Everything was fine until there was some problem within the political party due to my growth in the party. On one occasion, I came to the UK along with some officials to represent my country in a meeting. During that time, there were some issues with the leader who came with me, which escalated into a verbal argument, and he threatened to kill me after my return” (Isaac).

“I used to work with a political party in Pakistan for campaigning and other office work. Things went bad in a campaign, and they suspected that I was corrupt and working with the opposition party. If I had not left my country, I would not be here sitting with you to tell my story” (Ali).

Sam, a 31-year-old migrant from South Sudan migrated from his country due to his love relationship which escalated further into a life-threatening situation for him, which also sheds some light on the sheer diversity of motives that frequently do not come to the fore in what is a narrow, binary and divisive political commentary on the costs and benefits to United Kingdom of migration:

“I was in love with a girl, but their parents were against our marriage. Her parents were in a good position in the government and using the power they attacked me and my family. Further, me and my girl planned to go somewhere and live peacefully, they somehow came to know this matter and they put me in jail by making a false allegation against me using their political power. You know in Sudan if you don’t have good economic status, even if you are a good person, people won’t allow you to marry. Then somehow, I escaped from the jail and migrated to Egypt” (Sam).

Further, Sam described what might have happened to him, if he had not escaped from the prison and migrated to another country:

"I know that if I had stayed there, I would have been in jail for more than 10 or 15 years without doing any crime" (Sam).

Clearly, and yet often not highlighted through conversation with Sam was the fact that the UK was adjudged and considered against the standard he encountered in Sudan, where corruption and wealth could circumvent fairness and the rule of law. Another participant, named Ahmad, a 36-year-old migrant from Egypt, revealed that he escaped from his home due to child abuse and violence from his uncle. Eventually, he decided to migrate to another country in search of a better life along with his friend.

"I am originally from Syria I was born in Syria, but I was small my father took me to Egypt after my mother's death. When I was 15 years my father died because of health issues, and I used to live with my uncle. He is a very crazy person; I don't know why he doesn't like me at all. He used to hit me a lot and when he drinks alcohol he used to treat me badly. He used to heat the knife till it became red hot and then he used to press it against my body (showed the burn marks and scars on the hands and shoulder). I always wanted to escape these abuses, but I was very young, and I didn't know where to go and whom to ask for help. One of my friends, who was older than me, helped me to run away from my city and then we moved to another city. We both started working in the fishing harbour. After 1 year or so, someone told us that, we could go to Italy and have a good life and make more money" (Ahmad).

In the case of Steven (26 years old, Male, Ivory Coast), he came to the UK to meet his mother, who was separated from his father. He came all the way alone from Ivory Coast when he was just 12 years old, filled with happiness and excitement, but it did not last long. Upon arrival, he found that his mother was married to another man, which affected his relationship with her, and eventually, he was separated from his mother. He was under social care, however, after he turned 18 years, he stopped receiving care and benefits. Eventually his asylum

application was rejected, and he became an undocumented migrant which profoundly affected his whole life:

“When I was 12 years old, I came to England from Ivory Coast to meet my mom. My dad and mom were separated, and she moved to England and remarried to another person. My dad put me on a plane to England, and I came all the way alone to meet my mom. I was excited about my trip but didn’t know at that time that this journey was going to ruin my life” (Steven)

Most of the developing and least-developed countries around the world have consistently discriminated against and discouraged people belonging to sexual minorities in various ways. They are often left with limited access to socio-economic and cultural resources such as education, social acceptance, wealth, social networks, or cultural capital (Usta & Ozbilgin, 2023). In an in-depth interview, a participant named Peter, a 32-year-old male from Nigeria, revealed that he is bisexual and discussed how his sexuality become an issue for him in Nigeria:

“Actually, I came to this country because.... Due to some kind of... I was scared of some kinds of people back home where I was coming from because of the kind of people I was dealing with in my country. My....what do you call it? My sex type is not something that has been acceptable from where I'm coming from. I'm bisexual. So, you know, something whereby it's very difficult to be that kind of person back home where I'm coming from. So, I have been through so many assaults, intimidation, and the rest” (Peter).

During the conversation, it was found that the primary reason for his migration was his sexuality, which was not acceptable in his country, both socially and legally. Although there were also some economic reasons he also revealed, much like him across all the participants, the motivations for migration were not

purely economic, although much of the presentation in the UK media of the motivator for migration is just that.

“Yeah, you know what I'm trying to say when I talk about the economy, The 100% economy is not good in my country. Because if the economy had been good, I think some of us, some people out here, would not be here in this country today. You know what I'm trying to say. So, for me particularly, my parents were okay. You know what I'm trying to say? Like in a financial way. Well, I will not say we are rich, but we are okay. You know what I'm trying to say? Because my dad was doing well. So, at the end of the day. I was okay and my family was okay. But people out there weren't. So, I will not say. I am here because of financial reasons. I am here because of my sexuality because they don't allow me to practice what I want” (Peter).

Usta & Ozbilgin (2023) have classified migrants based on their experiences of sexuality and gender identity and access to resources, including socio-economic and cultural resources. The classifications are dreamers, climbers, escapists, and seekers. From the interview, Peter (32 years old, Male, Nigeria) falls under both escapists and seekers who are classed as sexually marginalised individuals. Usta & Ozbilgin (2023) state that escapists' motivation for migration is driven by socio-economic goals along with their sexuality, which is their sexual orientation, and their feeling of being a minority or being left out in their community. On the other hand, seekers' motivation for migration is for a safe and secure space to express their sexuality, which is the freedom to express and identify themselves as their sexual identity (Usta & Ozbilgin, 2023). While this classification provides some useful insights for understanding LGBTI+ migration and could help support services better helping migrants, Peter's story demonstrates both the benefits and limitations of such categories. Unlike the one-dimensional representations often found in media narratives, Usta & Ozbilgin's work is based on actual migrant

experiences drawn from empirical research. However, Peter's experiences show how individual stories often contain complex elements that do not fit neatly within any single category. This suggests that such classifications work best as starting points for understanding migration rather than fixed labels. For instance, Peter described that people started ignoring him when they knew his sexuality, which illustrates the social rejection that drives both the 'escapist' and 'seeker' motivations identified in Usta & Ozbilgin's framework.

“My family was okay with my business and work, but they never accepted me for who I am. You know what I am saying. People just ignore you if you tell them or they identify that you are gay or bisexual. My friends ignored me, you know, it wasn't my fault” (Peter)

Peter decided to leave Nigeria after he found out he was about to be arrested due to his sexual orientation, as sexual minorities are not protected, and same-sex marriage is criminalised under the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013 (Arimoro, 2019).

“My purpose for coming here was to run away from the country authorities because I was already, almost arrested because of my sexuality. They don't allow me to practice what I want because it's my right to do whatever I want to do. We all have the right. It's a criminal offence... it's a big offence to be gay, bisexual, or lesbian in Nigeria” (Peter)

Sexual minorities around the world face serious issues such as the criminalization of their sexual orientation, which is not their fault and whose feelings are beyond their control. Furthermore, it is not only legal consequences that they face due to their sexuality, but they also encounter shaming, violence, and threats from society (Arimoro, 2019). During the fieldwork, it was also found that people who are migrating to the UK for various reasons bring with them their culture, faith, beliefs, and other social practices, which may not always be beneficial for

everyone. It was revealed during a conversation with another individual seeking asylum that there is a perception (it is difficult to know how true it is in actuality) that the UK Home Office favours sexual minorities, and she said:

“In this country, if you want to seek asylum fast, you have to be gay or lesbian. I've been waiting for an answer from the Home Office for over 5 years now... but if you are gay or lesbian, they give you status immediately. I know people who lie about their sexuality to get status..... but the government never questions them.... Or asks for more evidence. I am a proud Christian.... You know homosexuality and lesbianism are sins in Christianity, but they are still favoured by many, including the Home Office”
(Field notes).

This raises important questions. How believable then are accounts that migration may be for avoidance of persecution for prohibited sexuality rather than economic motives once the perception of favourable treatment becomes widespread? It would be naïve to believe that those heading to the UK for economic reasons might not falsely claim a minority or persecuted status, though how widespread such practices actually are or may be, it is hard to say. Certainly, Peter rebutted that assertion, claiming his background was not such that he needed to migrate for economic reasons, but it is hard to tell. What was common though is that almost all of the undocumented migrants encountered and interviewed suggested that the economic drivers for migration were but a part of their story, and these were never the sole or only reason for their decision to migrate. The economic migrant, it seems, was more a mediated construction by the media than a reality encountered in person.

Yet scholars and policymakers are always fascinated to understand the various reasons behind migration, both regular and irregular routes, to facilitate immigration policy. However, the reasons for migration are always complex.

Research shows that British political and media discourse often reduces these complexities into oversimplified categories (Philo, Briant & Donald, 2013; Goodfellow, 2023). The Glasgow Media Group has identified persistent patterns of hostile coverage of refugees and people seeking asylum, often characterised by confusion between different categories of migrants and agenda-driven reporting rather than balanced journalism (Philo, Briant & Donald, 2013). Similarly, Goodfellow (2023) highlights that the label 'economic migrant' is widely used in British political discourse, often presuming that migration is economic rather than driven by other factors that underplay other reasons for movement. However, from the interviews undertaken, it became clear that while there is an element of economic motivation in migration decisions, the primary reasons for migration articulated by participants are often completely different and more complex than these dominant political and media representations suggest.

From the interviews, it is evident that push factors play a more significant role than pull factors in undocumented migration. The primary reason for undocumented migrants to leaving their home countries is always due to urgent and pressing needs such as political instability, conflict or war, persecution, or natural or environmental disasters (Datta, 2015; Kari, Malasowe and Collins, 2019). These situations create a sense of urgency and necessity to leave their home countries; otherwise, it can be life-threatening for them. Consequently, even when legal or regular migration routes are unavailable, migrants are willing to put their lives at risk to travel without proper documentation (Datta, 2015; Kari, Malasowe and Collins, 2019). While pull factors like economic opportunities, safety and security, higher standards of living, social networks, and cultural connections are important, they only influence the selection of destination country rather than the migration decision itself. Furthermore, it is clear that the push-pull

theory fails to adequately explain the undocumented migrations, as it does not address why migrants choose a particular country when the government imposes stringent immigration policies and makes it very difficult to live there. This implies that the pull factor is not always a deciding factor in the context of undocumented migration.

Reasons for Choosing the UK

From the data analysis, it was found that in some cases, the migrants deliberately chose the UK as their destination country, and in others, it was chosen by someone else on their behalf or it was not their choice, but they ended up in the UK because of their situation. Peter (32 years old, Male, Nigeria), whom I have already described, wanted to have a safe place as he decided to leave his country due to his sexuality, which is criminalised by the state, and there is no protection for sexual minorities in his country. He chose the UK rather than another country because he already visited the UK a few times in the past. Furthermore, he has already experienced the independent culture in the UK, which provides protection to sexual minorities and the discrimination is minimal:

“Obviously, you know, I chose the UK. Why Because the UK is the first European country that I've been to, and I have experience here. And you know, the way they treat people here, like, you know, everything was so different. So, I can only go to places where I have experience before. You know what I'm trying to say. It's just like when you are running for your life, you have to run somewhere or someone that you know can protect you. Not somewhere that you want to run to that the person will be someone to kill you. Because I've been here, I've seen so many people with different sexualities. But they move freely.... they are independent. So, it's something I feel like you know. So, I felt like this place was safe for me and others as well” (Peter).

In the case of Isaac (39 years old, Male, Nigeria), Abu (32 years old, male, South Sudan) and Ali (46 years old, Male, Pakistan) did not choose to come to the UK, but due to their situation, they ended up in the UK. In all three cases, the primary motivation was to save their own lives from the threat.

“I didn't choose the UK, okay because if it was just to stay in Europe..... then before I came to the UK, we passed through a lot of countries. We went to Belgium, which is a good country for me to stay in. I could have gone to any European country, especially France, as I speak French, but at that time there was no reason or requirement. It was when I came to London that things escalated. I came to this country with my people, with the delegation. So that's where everything started. So, this thing is a long story..... which started back home. So, I just.... I was afraid to go back because of the life threat. I decided to stay in the UK rather than go back. I had no other option” (Isaac).

“I was in France for 2 years and 8 months. I applied for asylum in France, but I got rejected and my case went to court it got rejected again. After that I become homeless, and I don't know what to do. I was not getting any job and it was very bad condition for me. Someone told me that the UK is best for asylum application. Then I join with a few people who also planning to go, and I travelled with them in a lorry” (Abu).

“I came to the UK through an agent. My family and friends helped me to organise money for my travel. It wasn't my decision to come to the UK, but I heard a lot about the London city. It was decided by the agent, and he mentioned that the UK is a safe place for me and also mentioned there are a lot of Pakistani people who might be helpful when I reach. I accepted his suggestion because I just wanted to escape from the issues and threats from the political party” (Ali).

As described by Robinson and Segrott (2002), agents or smugglers can play a crucial role in determining the country of destination by influencing the migrant's choice or making the choice for the migrants based on their knowledge and

resources, or indeed purely for the much more instrumental reason (we can question if smugglers and agents really have their consumers best interests at heart or simply promote where they have the established routes and processes). In the case of Ali, the agents provided end-to-end services, including choosing a country of destination, organising the travel documents, and arranging for someone to travel with him to support him. While Ali seemed to regard this as a service, it is hard to know if this is the reality.

Seeking the help of agents or smugglers can be beneficial for some migrants, but for others it can be a stressful and unpleasant experience. Migrant smuggling is often viewed as a profit-making business for smugglers or agents, who often focus more on the economic gains rather than the well-being of the migrants (Brockhoff and Smith, 1998; Koser, 2008).

In the case of Farhad (30, Male, Iraq), when he was 21 years old, fled his village during the attack by ISIS and made a challenging journey to the UK. In his case, the destination country was decided by his uncle. He reached Turkey after escaping from his village, where his uncle facilitated his travel to the UK with the help of migrant smugglers. During his journey, Farhad experienced significant fear and anxiety, as the smugglers were armed and dangerous:

“When I reached Turkey, I was lucky that I found my uncle who was already in Turkey. He had some connection with smugglers, and he said he will send me to the UK. I was very scared to go anywhere but he wanted me to be safe and said it was not good for me to stay in Turkey. He asked me to go with a man probably a smuggler and asked me to do whatever he asking to do. I was in different transports during the travel. I was changing from one lorry to another, sometimes small lorry and sometimes a big container truck. Sometimes walking and sometimes on a bus. It was a horrible journey for me. It was a long journey, and it took me around one

month to reach the UK. At that time, I had no money, so I had to rely on whatever smuggler gave me to eat and drink. I did not get to eat enough food during that time and some days I only had one meal a day. Also, I was scared to ask the smugglers because they had guns and knives, I didn't want to get hurt" (Farhad)

Migrants utilising the service of migrant smugglers face significant safety and security concerns throughout their journey (Koser, 2008). The above narratives highlight the vulnerability of the smuggling journey, which often includes dangerous travel conditions and a lack of access to basic needs for migrants. In some cases, the migrants experience physical abuse and in extreme cases, even death during their travel (Koser, 2008). The journey of an undocumented migrant often includes fear and anxiety due to the inherent uncertainties, and availing the service of smugglers can further exaggerate mental health issues due to the challenging journey, which can impact the emotional and psychological well-being of migrants for a long time (Wilson, Stimpson and Ortega, 2023). Upon arrival, these migrants often lack access to mental health and well-being services, which further aggravate their existing mental health issues.

In some cases, like that of Chen (38, Female, China), due to the limited availability of funds for her journey, she sought the help of a migrant smuggler (whom she referred it as a "Snakehead"), who offered to fund her journey as a loan, which she agreed to repay upon reaching the destination country along with the interest. Many migrant smugglers operate on a debt-financed migration model, wherein a migrant enters into a kind of servitude contract to repay the costs of their journey (Friebel and Guriev, 2006). This often pushes migrants into financial exploitation and a situation where they get trapped into cycles of debt (Friebel and Guriev, 2006). In the case of Ali, who managed to organise the funds for his travel and paid the full amount before his travel, it ensured that he safely

reached the destination and less chance of exploitation. By comparing both Ali and Chen cases, it is evident that the availability of enough funds for the travel determines the level of difficulties and exploitation experienced by the migrants (Sanchez, 2017; Soundararajan et al., 2024).

The Double feeling: Safety and Uncertainty

Migrating from one country to another can be a significant decision for anyone, however, it is a more challenging decision if someone decides to cross the border through irregular routes without any official travel documents. Most people, who come to the UK without legal status typically experience immediate anxiety and fear as they must confront a reality that is unfamiliar and unknown to them (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2014). In the case of Ali, he went through a fearful journey as he was travelling with a fake passport. On arrival, he felt very safe as he had escaped from his country and the threat he was facing, however, he felt uncertain as he was new to the UK.

“I was very afraid and fearful of travelling with a fake passport, but I had to take that risk to save my life. Further, I had an injury while travelling, which was because of the attack by a gang from the political party. Though I was fearful during the journey, when I came out of the airport, I felt very safe. However, one question that was running through my mind was – What is next?” (Ali).

Given Ali’s account above, we need to consider the ways in which the insecurity of his status and deception on arrival may create a perpetual sense of anxiety that can impact mental wellbeing (especially given the absence of support services, which means that the undocumented, such as people seeking asylum and individual asylum has been refused, struggle to access them consistently). If absence is a powerful generator of harm and can often serve to exacerbate an

already challenging situation for the subject having a probabilistic causal influence on life. Ali was arguably safe but insecure. This is, we could suggest a strange dynamic.

Like Ali, Kumar's narrative also suggests that he felt safe after escaping the post-civil war discrimination and atrocities by the Sri Lankan government. However, he was also going through a introspective phase about his future.

"When I reached the UK, I was really happy. I felt very safe and secure in the UK. It was not just because I am in the UK. It was also because I had a few of my friends and relatives, who were already here in the UK. They come to the UK three years before me. But also, I didn't know whether I would survive here. At that time, I didn't know English properly and I didn't know much about culture, people and many things. At that time, I was mostly thinking what job I would be doing or whether I could get any job or not. Many things were going around my mind" (Kumar).

On the other hand, when Peter came to this country, he had a visa as he was frequently visiting the UK for business purposes. However, he still felt that fear and anxiety when he decided to stay beyond the terms of his visa (an act that constitutes an offence that could result in his detention and deportation), as he wasn't completely sure about the decision which he saw as something of a bind.

"I took a big decision...Yeah, I made the decision because I was running for my life. When I took the decision, it was something like I wasn't 100% sure.....But I was still scared. Why? Because this was my life and death. One thing that I know, in the back of my mind, is that, oh, the UK is the best for me. Why? Because I've been there. I know people and I know how to work out my things. Because it's a country that knows what the law is. They know the law and they know people's rights" (Peter).

In both instances, participants exhibited mixed emotions upon their arrival or decision to stay in the UK. On one hand, they experienced happiness and a sense

of safety as they escaped their home country's situation. On the other hand, they felt fear and uncertainty with respect to the question of 'what's next', the uncertainty of their now illegal and undocumented status. The experience of being an undocumented migrant, it would seem, is ever one to exist in this bind and the position that exists somewhat between safety and insecurity, victim and offender.

Migration Route and Journey

It is important to understand the migration route and journey as it provides insights into the challenges and victimisation they faced during their journey. Based on the data analysis, it was found that the cost of the journey plays an important role in the whole migration process, which is inversely proportional to the victimisation and difficulties they face during their journey. If the migrants can organise money for the journey, they can easily navigate with the help of the agents or smugglers, who can take care of everything. Robinson and Segrott (2002) found that agents or smugglers can play a vital role in the selection of the destination country on behalf of the migrants, which is evident from this study as well. However, how they do this and the specifics of how they determine the destination for their consumer is far from clear and have hitherto been little researched. What is clear is that the implementation of stricter immigration policies by many countries has increased the number of people searching for alternative routes, such as seeking assistance from travel agents or migrant smugglers. This shift has created a new opportunity, leading to an increase in travel agents and migrant smugglers (Soundararajan et al, 2024).

Ali (46 years old, Male, Pakistan) approached an agent or smuggler through his family reference and organised his travel from Pakistan to the UK. In the case of

Ali, he agreed to pay for the agent's services, wherein the agent organised his whole journey, which included fake travel documents and a flight ticket, accompanied by a person to help him during his journey and drop in the final destination point. In this case, Ali seemed to trust this person implicitly. This suggests trust is an important mediating feature of irregular migration and can bring varying levels of security to their passage. Ali suggested that he did not have to worry about anything as an agent was one who organised everything, including the selection of the destination country on behalf of Ali. This way, it is ensured that the migrants do not have to go through a challenging journey that might be life-threatening and the long travel times of insecure routes. However, many would not have the social and financial capital to avail themselves of this sort of highly sophisticated agent arrangement.

When the migrants are already poor and unable to organise money for their travels, they are more likely to end up in a random country based on their affordability and live temporarily in a transit country to save money to reach the destination country. Though it sounds very simple, it is not, the migrants have to go through a lot of challenging situations, and some were very serious and life-threatening. In the case of Sam, a 31-year-old migrant from South Sudan, who escaped from his country to save his life, he had managed to reach Egypt. However, he described that his enemy group somehow found his whereabouts in Egypt, and for this reason he decided to go to Libya, a country by this point mired in crisis with open slave markets and the Islamic State in power in several areas:

“Then from Egypt, I went to Libya. That was a long journey, I walked for 12 hours through the mountains to reach Libya. At that time, there was a lot of conflict going on in Libya because there was no government, and it

was controlled by armed militants. I had some money when I reached Libya, but they took all my money, and they treated me very badly. I didn't know about this issue until I was there. I will not say they all are bad but most of them are bad" (Sam).

Sam's story is illustrative of the fact that there aren't always established start and end points in the transnational migration journey - these can turn into multiple transit nodes depending on the migrant's experiences on the ground. Sam reflected that he made a mistake migrating to Libya as there were a lot of problems because of armed militant groups. He decided to work in Libya to organise money for his journey to Italy:

"Started to work in Libya to collect money for my travel to Italy. I know that I made the wrong choice of coming to Libya because it was very scary and not a good place to live. I lived in Libya for around 6 to 7 months and when I had enough money to travel, I started my plan to leave Libya" (Sam).

Ahmad, a 36-year-old migrant from Egypt, also went to a similar situation in which he travelled from Egypt to Libya, from there to Tunisia, and finally to Italy. Interesting here is that the routeways themselves are places of conflict and instability, particularly Libya, which since the Arab spring and the death of Gaddafi has become both a migration hub, and a place of some significant risk, and yet clearly it was not simply political instability and the risk and threat in that country that caused migrants to wish to escape them, as the following illustrates again giving more support to the complex interplay of factors underpinning migration movements:

"After 1 year or so, someone told us that, we could go to Italy and have a good life and make more money. They told us they would charge 15000 Egyptian pounds (£380 Approx. now) to help us to go to Italy. I had some money and with the help of other friends, we arranged money for our travel. We travelled from Egypt to Libya and then to Tunisia. Most of the

travel was by truck and sometimes we are also walking. It took around one week to complete the journey” (Ahmad).

Sam, Ahmad and Abu made a challenging decision to migrate to Italy through an illegal sea route which could have ended up as a serious threat to their lives [the route has been a site of mass casualties and deaths in the ocean as part of a process of high levels of irregular migration at the time that both are describing, and indeed remain so to today], but they made this decision because they suggested that it was the opportunity to live a safe and secure life. While lengthy, I feel the detail of these accounts is worth reproducing the words fully as spoken:

“I reached a coastal city called Tripoli, from where people usually travel to Italy. I stayed there for a few days and searched for people who might help me with my travel. Finally, I found 2 people who were ready to help me to travel to Italy for which they asked me to pay 3500 Libyan dinars. I paid the money and was ready to travel but I found that it was not what I expected after paying so much money. When try to confront them they said that if I wanted to go in a big boat then I have to pay more than 5000 Libyan dinars. They also said that they don't provide that service and I need to find some other people who are doing such a thing. I didn't have any option but to travel in this small boat, but I was really afraid as the boat was just a bag filled with air. there were around 11 people with me to go to Italy in a small boat and after trying three times, we reached Italy. The first time when we were on the boat after 2 hours of travel we found that there was some leak in the boat, and we came back. The second time we lost in the sea for 18 hours, the person who was guiding us had some problem with the compass and somehow, we came back to the shore. The third time when we travelled, again we Lost in the sea and we were in the sea for around 48 hours, but we were close to Italy. We saw a ship passing our way, it was a Denmark ship which helped us and rescued us from the sea. After the rescue, they asked us a lot of questions regarding migrating from Libya to Italy, but they were helpful and looked after us for five days” (Sam).

“We stayed in Tunisia for around a month. The person who helped us said that the weather was not good, and it would be risky if we went inside the sea. Once we started our travel but then due to bad weather, we got lost in the sea and after 2 to 3 hours we luckily return from where we started. Then a week later, the weather was good, and we were lucky enough that we travelled. We are very scared because we heard stories that people got lost in the sea for weeks and died in the sea due to the bad weather. Initially, we travelled in a small boat and when were close to Italy, we got into a big ship and from there we reached the coast” (Ahmad).

“I was with my younger brother during the travel, but we got separated when we reached France. We travelled through Sudan, Egypt and Libya to reach the seashore from where we travelled to Italy and travelled to France. I can't think about doing the same journey again. I will never forget the travel through the sea. It was very dangerous and risky. It was very scary to hear many stories about death during the travel. But we didn't have any option then make that journey because it was even risky to stay in Libya” (Abu).

The above narratives clearly describe the difficulties and sufferings faced by undocumented migrants during their journey. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Sam, Ahmad and Abu were lucky to be alive to be interviewed by me. All of them had undertaken a perilous journey. The Mediterranean Sea is the world's deadliest route for migrants, with the highest number of deaths and disappearances. In 2023, an estimated [because the true number is not known and is unlikely ever to be] 3129 migrants died that year while crossing the Mediterranean (International Organization for Migration, 2024), and 2,452 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean in 2024 (International Organization for Migration, 2025). The number of deaths and disappearances has been rising significantly in the early years of the 2020s. Unlike Ali, none of them had the option to travel by plane with fake documents but had to follow precarious routes where their deaths were quite possible outcomes. This also clearly shows that

the migrants are ready to face dangerous situations, exploitation, and risk which produce significant physical and mental harm which shows their extreme desperation to reach the destination country. Sam, Ahmad and Abu escaped from situations involving a series of abuses in their country and further, they faced violence and exploitation during their journey as they migrants go through different phases of victimization. Increased migration control and border policing are also directly or indirectly contributing to long and uncertain journeys as well as exploitation and victimisation faced by undocumented migrants (Mainwaring and Brigden, 2016).

Sam, Ahmad and Abu cases can be contrasted with that of an undocumented migrant named Chen, a 38-year-old female from China who came to the UK with the help of a middleman or agent whom she refers to as 'Snakehead'. This terminology here is worthy of comment, as it potentially highlights the involvement of Organised Crime Groups (OCG) and individuals as snakehead gangs frequently operate people trafficking in Asia for profit (Whittle, 2022). They come from the Fujian region of China and organise the illegal migration of their customers into wealthier Western countries, including Western Europe, North America, Australia, and nearby regions like Taiwan and Japan, and while they can charge significant amounts for their services, they have also been linked with a variety of methods to move people across borders, including stolen or altered passports, improperly obtained visas, bribes, and fake business delegations or tour groups, while the people they smuggle may end up in the sex trade, drug cultivation, or forced labour in destination countries (Zhang, 2008). On the evening of 5 February 2004, at least 21 Chinese undocumented migrants drowned in an incoming tide at Morecambe Bay in Northwest England while harvesting cockles on the coast. Fifteen other labourers from the same group

managed to return safely to shore. During the investigation and trial, it emerged that the labourers were inexperienced, spoke little or no English and were unfamiliar with the area. The Chinese gangmaster who organised the trip and two associates of his were found guilty of Manslaughter, of breaking immigration laws and other crimes, and were sentenced to several years in prison (Meadowcroft and Blundell, 2004).

Chen came to the UK due to her family's financial issues and she took end-to-end services from the migrant smuggler on a debt-based scheme:

“When I decided to come to the UK, I already knew that it was going to cost me a lot of money, but I was confident because there were people from my village who went there who were sending good money back to their families. Through my uncle’s friend, I met a snakehead. He said that he could help me with my travel and even find me a job and a place to stay. For all these services, he said he would charge 90,000 yuan (currently valued at £10,000 approx.). Initially, I thought it was going to be easy, but it wasn’t because getting a loan for the travel was very hard. I almost cancelled my plan because 90,000 yuan is a lot of money in China. After a month, the snakehead approached me and offered to provide the service on loan, but with 2% interest every month. I couldn’t say no because I needed to support my family” (Chen).

In the case of Chen, though the middleman or agent seems to be helping her actually he trapped her and exploited her situation by providing the service on a loan with 2% interest per month which extremely high rate of interest. This is £200 a month interest, and it clearly highlights the realities of exploitative practices and the extortionate exploitation that does exist out there in the world for some of the most vulnerable. Indeed, the hostile environment rhetoric and policy may be having the unintended consequence of heightening the vulnerability and long-term exploitation of individuals in situations such as Chens who have migrated

with support illegally, but then find themselves exploited and victimised. However again the bind here is that the trap of victimisation in the UK is contrasted with the security that can be offered to the family left at home who are dependent upon the overseas undocumented migrant as a support and source of stability.

Initial Days of Arrival

The immediate impact of arriving in the UK has created anxiety and fear among the migrants about their current situation and their uncertain future (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2014). The migrants often face issues upon arrival with respect to finding suitable and safe accommodation for their stay. Often, migrants come to the UK with some sort of contact to get initial support like family, friends, or the same ethnic group (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2011; Düvell, 2004). In some cases, the migrants came without any contact but eventually made contact through their national or ethnic identity (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2011; Düvell, 2004). The in-depth interview revealed that though the migrants came to the UK without any contacts or connections, they somehow made contacts using their national or ethnic identity, but it was not easy for them. Ali, who fled his country to save his life after a conflict within the political organisation in which he worked and migrated to the UK with the help of an agent. While this reduced the risk of his flight from Pakistan, he suggested that despite promises to the contrary and high payments, the agent was of little help to him after he had arrived in the UK.

“I don't know the agent personally. I met him through one of my cousin's brothers. I gave him money, and he arranged everything for my travel. He gave me a Pakistan passport with my photo, but other personal information, including name, was from someone else. The agent's man travelled with me. Once we reached London, he took my passport and dropped me in the Southhall, near a big mosque. He told me this area is

full of Pakistani and Muslim communities, so I can seek help through mosques who might help me” (Ali).

Ali revealed that his initial days of life in the UK were difficult as he did not have any contacts at all in the UK when he arrived. Ali’s narrative highlights his feelings of fear and helplessness to access his basic needs and his hesitation to seek help from others due to his lack of status. For Ali, a man with some status and social capital in Pakistan, the UK offered no advantages. Although he was safely removed from the turbulent situation that had forced his flight, his experience in the UK was similarly one of uncertainty and insecurity:

“In the initial few days, I used to sleep outside the mosque and had some money from back home, through which I was eating some food. I didn’t speak to anyone about my situation, as I was afraid to talk, and I didn’t know how they would react. One morning, as usual, I went for Namaz (prayers). It was around 5 am and only a few people were there to do Namaz. After I completed the Namaz, I was sitting outside and thinking about my situation. Imam (priest), himself came to me and asked me, Am I new to this place? I said yes.... After that, I thought, about whether to ask for his help or not. Finally, I explained my situation, and he agreed to help me” (Ali).

The above narrative highlights the role of religion in providing informal support to undocumented migrants like Ali, who described his experience temporarily living in a mosque and seeking the help of the priest when other formal support systems are unavailable. Ali’s interaction with the priest illustrates how religious institutions can act as sources of practical support, a sense of community, and emotional support, which are often unavailable in the case of undocumented migrants. This individual care exists within a broader tradition of religious sanctuary that can develop into organised resistance. This is shown by the case of Viraj Mendis, who claimed sanctuary at the Church of the Ascension in Manchester for two years in the 1980s,

with the church becoming the centre of a major deportation resistance campaign that led to parliamentary questions and large demonstrations when police finally raided the church in 1989 (Shepherd, 2024). The Mendis case shows how religious sanctuary can change from individual care into a centre for broader political action and community organising around migrants' rights. The broad context of neoliberalism, which promotes individualism and emphasises individual responsibility, has resulted in limited welfare support and social security provided by the state. Within this framework, the religious institution often fills the gaps left by the state; this dynamic emphasises how religious institutions can play a proxy role in bringing security and stability, particularly for marginalised groups like undocumented migrants. On the other hand, it is crucial to raise questions on the religious institutions and whether their intentions are purely altruistic.

During the fieldwork, I found a church working closely with other charity organisations and particularly offering support to people seeking asylum, individuals whose asylum claims have been refused, and undocumented migrants in many ways, including food, shelter if needed, emotional support, legal support etc. It was an interesting organisation for me particularly as I sought to recruit some participants for my research. I engaged myself into the church doing some volunteering work. During this time, I found that the church was actively involved in religious conversion and registering (particularly migrants) as members of congregation. During the conversation with some migrants, I found that change in the religious identity indeed, helped migrants in some way and as members of congregation, they receive support for their asylum application from the church. Though this process can be helpful for migrants in desperate need for support, the act of religious conversion by church in this context is more ethically questionable.

With respect to Peter, who had entered the UK with a valid visa, the situational uncertainty of becoming illegal was perhaps different. He simply eventually became undocumented due to the expiry of that visa, and he suggested that he regretted the fact that he did not have the right people to help him when he finally decided to stay in the UK. A social network, which often includes both regular and irregular migrants in the form of some relations, a co-ethnic group, or a co-national group, can clearly play an important role in the initial settlement process and acts as a continuous support system in terms of advice, information and other resources and supports. When participants suggested that they lacked the required social capital to navigate the initial phase of life in the UK, they also suggested that they were more likely to end up in the hands of an exploiter, a situation which Peter recognised:

“Oh, when I finally decided to come back, I still had my two-year visa because I had my visa then so when I came here I was doing some jobs and you know one thing I swear is like when I came in here I did not have the rightful sources as I mean... what is meant by the rightful source of advice, I didn't get the right people there to tell me what to do because when I came in then if you still have your visa I can still apply for something that can give you an extended stay..... It depends, they will charge you, or maybe something like... But I couldn't get someone then, as of that time, like someone to give me that rightful source. Though the person I got was someone who was trying to use me... You know, if come to this country without any support or someone to help you, then definitely people will try to use you” (Peter).

Chen (38-year-old, female, China) who entered the UK with the help of criminal middlemen, who provided their services as a loan when she was on a visitor visa. As promised by the middlemen, in the initial days she stayed in a shared accommodation provided by the middlemen which she described thus:

“In the beginning, I was provided with a shared accommodation by the snakehead as part of the service he promised to provide. However, he told me that this is temporary accommodation and I need to find my own accommodation when I have my job. I was sharing the room with another Chinese girl, she was also like me. The accommodation was not good, and it was poorly maintained. Moreover, I was afraid to stay there as it was shared accommodation and the other two rooms were occupied by men. I was very uncomfortable around those men and even I heard they were commenting on us. I requested the snakehead to find a job so that I can be able to find my own place to stay” (Chen).

The Snakehead, which Chen mentioned in their narrative, are similar to migrant smugglers. While migrant smugglers typically assist migrants to reach a destination clandestinely, the Snakehead described by Chen are more than migrant smugglers, as they also facilitate various needs of migrants in the destination country, like accommodation, offering job opportunities, providing financial services (including sending money to their family), and sometimes providing essential information to navigate their life as undocumented migrants (Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay, 2015; Zhang, 2008). It seems like they are facilitators; however, they play a dual role of both a support mechanism and a source of harm (Zhang, 2008). Further, Chen's narrative denotes Hall's (2012) concept of the "criminal undertaker," operating as an entrepreneurial criminal with large networks and contacts who exploits vulnerable migrants for profit.

Similarly, Isaac, who entered the country with a visa and decided to stay due to the fear that he would be killed if he returned to his country, revealed that he was accommodated in a rough sleeper's hostel in the initial couple months with the help of a person from an African community organisation. However, such settings were for the transient, and placed him in close proximity to people who were street homeless, drug using, recently released from prison custody and can be

places characterised and defined by a general climate of insecurity, but is more secure than finding yourself street homeless with no accommodation:

“When I decided to stay back, I was still having my visa, but it was about to expire. Initially, I had some money in my hand because I was living in a B&B accommodation, but my bank account was locked because of the problem back in my country. I know that London is safe, but not completely, and it was hard for me to trust anyone in this situation. I am lucky that god has always helped me by sending good people into my life whenever I struggle. When I approached this African centre, some people were afraid to help me with my situation, but suddenly one guy contacted me and helped me connect with another charity organisation. They finally agreed to provide me with temporary accommodation, which is like a homeless people hostel, where 3 to 4 people share a room. It was not okay, but it was better than nothing” (Isaac).

Some people enter the country with regular means but eventually become undocumented migrants due to the expiration of their travel documents. Some enter the country with or without any regular means and claim asylum but become undocumented when their asylum claim is rejected (Bloch, Sigona and Zetter, 2011; Düvell, 2004). On the other hand, some enter the country with fake documents or without any documents and become undocumented migrants (Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2011; Düvell, 2004). What unites all of the undocumented, however, is that they are also at risk of ending up in detention accommodation due to their lack of legal status, and that can include prisons, immigration detention, immigration removal, and police cells. However, those risks can be avoided if they can fly under the radar and be unseen, which is one of the reasons that the participants tended to place an extremely high value on accommodation.

Accommodation

For undocumented migrants, getting permanent and safe accommodation to live has always been a challenging and stressful task. Based on the in-depth interview, it was found that most of the migrants faced difficulties in finding suitable accommodation. Due to their lack of status, they are often forced to live in temporary accommodations like a shared house with migrants of the same ethnicity or nationality or live with a friend or in a distant family relationship (Bloch, 2013; Dwyer and Brown, 2008) or at worse, as some participants had, and as described in the literature review, there was the risk of street and rough sleeping in an unfamiliar country where they had little protection. In this situation, where accommodation is at such a high value and regarded as such a vital imperative and need, the migrants often go through various difficulties, which include exploitation, unhealthy living conditions, and privacy issues. It was also found that the migrants often move from one place to another to escape exploitation or the fear of law enforcement, and hence, even when accommodation can be secured, it is rarely secure in the conventional sense for the undocumented, as Ali suggested:

“Initially, I stayed in the Mosque for more than a month. I was helping the Imam and was doing some cleaning work within the Mosque. It was unpaid but it was a safe place for me, they also gave me accommodation and food. After a month or so, Imam told me, the mosque was not safe for me, and he mentioned that some people were asking him who am I. So, he introduced me to a family, who were also without any documents, and he asked me to live with them for some time...It was uncomfortable for me to live with them, but they were really helpful to me. I was with them for two months and after that, I moved out because I wasn't comfortable with them. It's not like I am not comfortable, but I don't want to be a burden to them. But during those two months, they took care of me, they gave me food, accommodation and other essential things. They also helped me to

find a job in a restaurant. After I found a job, I moved to shared accommodation near the restaurant where all the other workers stay. In this shared accommodation, I met people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and even one person from the Middle East. The accommodation was free because we work in the restaurant, and we also get food. The accommodation was not that great, and it was very crowded. We were nine people living in three bed terraced house. Even though it was not comfortable, however, I was happy with what I got at that time, and I couldn't complain anything because at least I was not homeless, and I had something to eat and live" (Ali).

In criminology, it is recognised that such transient states and conditions are far from stable and tend to be associated with both far higher levels of crime and victimisation generally. It therefore follows that what Ali is describing the effects and implications of living in substandard and possibly dangerous living predicaments with strangers and constantly moving from place to place are not dissimilar to those that are experienced at the lowest social strata by poor single parents, released prisoners, and those with mental health and substance abuse issues. Again, here the artificial binary between offender and victim is a useful one, as undocumented migrants exist in a precarious no-mans land where their limited status creates a continual anxiety, but it is one that has to be understood often against the trauma and heightened vulnerabilities that often sit behind migration decisions. They have little in the way of possessions or money yet are often placed into situations where they are vulnerable to theft, robbery, and assault. However, despite this, they have little recourse to formal mechanisms of criminal justice and are almost entirely reliant upon their own wit, guile and ability to mitigate any risks.

Though migrants like Ali, may be able to navigate and build their social networks to find accommodation, jobs and other resources, they are and were often

essentially forced into a situation where he lived with an unknown family and moved to a shared accommodation that was very crowded. Alternative options are limited, and also may involve illegality and exploitation, such as squatting or finding accommodation through the illegal subletting of local authority or housing association properties; again, there can be relatively few rights. Similarly, Isaac described being cast into a similar situation where he lived in shared accommodation and moved from place to place.

“As I already told you, initially I was in a travel hostel, and when my money was over, I moved to a charity house for homeless people..... Come on brother, who likes those kinds of places? The charity organisations and people working there are good, and I still remember them and thank them for their help, but you know, homeless people who come there are not good.... They smoke weed, drink alcohol, and even some are drug addicts. But I had no option and lived there for around 2 months. It was a fearful experience for me to live like that, and I pray nobody should end up like me in that place. After that, I left London because, as you know, I didn't feel safe there. Then, with the help of one of my friends, I moved to Birmingham. I never met him, but he is my friend's friend and agreed to help me. Even though he knows about my situation of being paperless, I lived with him for 7 to 8 months. Though he was very helpful and supported me, but You know I felt uncomfortable as I was not paying any rent to him. Often, I felt like I was living at his mercy and not doing anything to make my life better” (Isaac).

Issacs, comments above are interesting, as the positive experience of help from a benefactor can in itself be a psychologically problematic experience of causing the individual to feel worthless, helpless, and as taking undue advantage. Though some migrants received some sort of help from their ethnic community or nationals, other migrants were or could be exploited by people from their own country, and this in and of itself might explain why Isaac was resistant to

charitable assistance, even when seemingly it came with no expectation of any form of reciprocation or repayment. As Peter notes:

“When I came to the UK, I was on my own, living in a shared house. Then I meet one of my old-time friends from back home. I saw him online, and I tried to contact him on Facebook. After a few weeks we made an arrangement and, I went and met him. He was like, oh he's so happy to see me. I explained my situation to him. That was it. I didn't know. I was just pouring, just trying to make everything worse. So, when I explained everything to him, I was like, oh, don't worry, I will find a solution. That's it. We left that day, and I think he went and did his own calculation to exploit me. After a few days, he called me and said that I could move in [with him]. He told me that we can live together, so I will guide you. I'll show you what to do. This and that... I moved with him, and I trusted him as we are from the same city back home. When I moved, he said we would share the rent, and I paid my half to him. But actually, I was the only one paying the rent because I did not have access to communicate with the landlord” (Peter).

The homeowners in the UK are required to conduct mandatory checks on the immigration status (right to live and right to rent) of any individual before renting. The aim of this policy is to restrict undocumented migrants from renting through regular channels, but this often forces undocumented migrants into unregulated rental market that disproportionately impact their lives and create more precarious living situations. The above narratives highlight that undocumented migrants' inability to secure stable accommodation often fosters feelings of helplessness and dependency, which further impacts their self-esteem and agency. Further, the dependency on others for accommodation often facilitates vulnerable environments prone to significant exploitation and abuses, as highlighted by Peter.

While Ali managed to make meaningful connections and a social network, which somewhat acted as a support system for him, there are migrants like Peter who

suffered a lot because of his relationship and dependency on his friend, who was exploiting him. This denotes relational harms where people are unable to sustain relationships or make meaningful connections, which makes them socially isolated and negatively impacts individual well-being. Overall, living in substandard and potentially dangerous conditions, particularly among strangers, significantly impacts undocumented migrants' mental health and overall wellbeing, which contribute to broader social harm.

Moving to the West Midlands region

Most of the undocumented migrants who come to the UK often stay in and around London. The primary reason to stay around London is for better job opportunities compared to other cities, which include more hours of work and better pay (Düvell, 2004). Other reasons to stay around London are that it is known for its diversity and multicultural character, which make it easy for migrants to build their social capital and navigate their lives easily (Bloch, 2013; Bloch and McKay, 2014; Bloch, Sigona, and Zetter, 2014; Düvell, 2004). Though the available literature explored the advantages of undocumented migrants staying in and around London, however, it did, not explore much with respect to the disadvantages of living and working around London, which include extensive immigration enforcement operations, frequent sanctions on ethnic business entities, and made the business owners not to employ undocumented migrants (Bloch, Kumarappan, and McKay, 2014) and increases in the cost of living which mean that accommodation is at a high premium and increasingly, it is becoming unaffordable to many as gentrification spreads and the lower social strata can find themselves priced out as the city is 'captured by the super-rich' (Atkinson, 2020).

Interviews with the participants in this study revealed that they moved from London to other small towns due to safety issues like frequent law enforcement intervention as well as London getting significantly more expensive to live in.

“Finally, through my friend's reference, I got an offer to work as a taxi driver, but it was in Birmingham. I agreed to shift to Birmingham because London was getting more and more expensive. Moreover, it was dangerous for people like us because the Police and immigration dept were conducting raids on restaurants and houses in Southall (where I was living) to find illegal migrants. One of my roommates who used to work in the restaurant has witnessed a raid. He was late for his shift and when reached the restaurant at 11 pm, the police were outside, and he saw two were arrested by the police. It was unusual that the police conducted the raid in the night. Immediately after that, my friend moved from my accommodation on the night itself to my friend's place which is outside London. I was scared and panicked that night. Because of all these issues, I moved to Birmingham and started working as a Taxi driver” (Ali).

Ali's fear of detention and increased immigration enforcement action in London pushed him to move out and look for other options to live, which landed him in Birmingham. However, there are other aspects here that are revealed. In Birmingham, Ali managed to procure an occupational role that should be protected. Taxi Driving is heavily regulated and licensed and is generally a reasonably well-paid role for those who meet the requirements. There is no way of course that an undocumented migrant without a UK driving license ever should, but seemingly this did not prevent 'Ali's from moving into that sector and the possibility of profiting through what can be well paying cash in hand work. Ali simply could not have met the requirements as an undocumented migrant and was putting passengers at risk and working without any valid insurance, and this is an important consideration that should not be swept over when we consider

that the undocumented lives can be precarious and involve their experience of marginalisation and victimisation.

As a function of being undocumented (and illegal), *Isaac* suggested that he decided to move out of London because his visa had expired, and he was afraid of deportation. For him, the risk of detection and apprehension was far reduced outside of London, where he perceived that he could likely be far safer and live peacefully with far less chance of detection and apprehension by the authorities.

“When my visa expired, the people who were helping me moved away from me. They just started ignoring me like that. At that time, you know, I was very afraid to stay in London. I felt like someone was following me, and people were looking for me. I was like... I was going mad. I felt that fear inside me whenever I went out, like just walking on the street. Then I decided to go out of London to somewhere safer and more peaceful. But I wasn’t sure where to go. I started calling people whom I know in the UK and back home to seek some help. Through one of my family friends, I got in contact with a person in Birmingham who agreed to help me. Finally, I moved to Birmingham” (Isaac).

On the other hand, Peter moved out of London due to an increase in the cost of living as well as his experience of exploitation by people from his own country. These factors made him think more about his situation and had a significant negative impact on his mental health.

“I was living in London with a friend from my country, I trusted him, but he was using me for his own good. When I noticed that he was using me for money, and he sensed that I’m no longer on a good term with him. he tried to push me out of the accommodation. He was like, Oh, you know what? Now you need to go and look for a house, and blah blah.... I was like, wow, where is this coming from? But in the back of my mind, I don’t know what to do or where to go... You know, sometimes people push you, thinking maybe they are pushing you into a problem, but they don’t know

they are pushing you for your good. So, then he was like, you need to go outside London because London is expensive and you can't survive here, etc.... he was like, you need to go outside London so that you can find a cheap house and start doing something. You can pay your rent. So, by then, I was very mad. You know, I wasn't okay mentally. So, as time went on, I planned to go to Nottingham with the help of one more friend, but when I reached there. I was not feeling well as I didn't get any job or proper accommodation. I was there for only 2 or 3 weeks after that I moved to Dudley, near Birmingham, and started doing some work” (Peter).

People migrated from London to small towns in and around the West Midlands for various reasons, like the high cost of living, the risk of immigration enforcement, and the fear of deportation. However, some migrants were in a position where they directly migrated to the West Midlands region from their country due to the strong connection in the region or immediate economic opportunity.

“As I told you already, I had a few friends in Birmingham, so I directly came to Birmingham. So, I spoke to them before coming, and they guided me to reach their place. It is difficult to live in this country without community support... I Probably won't be here today if I didn't get support from my Kurdish community” (Zoran).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the experiences of undocumented migrants in the early days of their lives in the UK have been examined. The chapter explored the migrant's motivation to come to the UK, and most of them had a mixed motivation; however, few were forced to migrate or stay in the UK. Being undocumented brings vulnerability, which increases the degree of exploitation; however, this increases the degree of resilience and alertness among migrants to escape such situations. It was evident from the discussion that most of the migrants arrived, lived

temporarily around London, and finally migrated to the West Midlands region to escape from law enforcement agencies and hoped for a better life.

Chapter 5: Undocumented Labour, Access to the Job Market and Social Life

Introduction

Undocumented migrants play an important role in the informal job market in many countries including the UK. This is because the informal or unorganised sector has to rely on undocumented migrants to fill jobs which otherwise are not occupied by documented or legal job seekers. This dependency on undocumented migrants is functional to the informal labour market, in specific sectors such as domestic work, construction, food or catering industry and agricultural farm work as the irregular migrant readiness to work and cheap availability. Further, these migrants often face exploitation and working conditions that are below legal standards due to their undocumented status, which makes them vulnerable to abuse and unfair treatment by their employers. Even though their contributions are vital to the functioning of the informal economy, they do not have employment protection and other benefits which might protect them from exploitation at work. This chapter will explore the undocumented migrants' experiences with accessing the job market and work. This includes stories of job-seeking strategies, using co-ethnic individuals or social networks to find a job, nature of the work, payment and exploitation at work.

Of course, it is worth noting here at the outset that everyone in the UK must prove their right to work before assuming or taking up any position of paid employment, with duties falling increasingly on employers to prevent illegal working practices. How individuals do this depends on their nationality and what kind of permission you have to work in the UK. The undocumented clearly have no rights, and hence should not be in any form of paid employment. Employers can be fined up to

£20,000 per undocumented worker or face a prison sentence of up to 5 years or both should they be found to be in contravention of the law (UK Visas and Immigration, 2024). While there has been a continual toughening of Immigration powers and now officials have powers to take away property or earnings, or close businesses, the reality is that working by illegal and undocumented workers is widespread and commonplace.

Informal Job Market and Undocumented Labourers

Undocumented migrants face a lot of issues and challenges in accessing job market due to their legal status. In 2012, the introduction of the first hostile environment policy by the Home Office aimed to stop undocumented migrants from accessing basic services (Triandafyllidou, 2009). However, it has now been nearly 15 years since this hostile environment idea entered the discussion, and could generally question just how hostile the environment actually is given that the unchanging reality seems to be that there is a mass of illegal working by people who should have no right to do so, sustaining many aspects of the everyday and service sector economy and it goes on spectacularly untroubled by law enforcement whose practices barely seem to scratch the surface in terms of prohibiting or limiting illegal working. Policies which have supposedly made employers conduct mandatory checks to verify any individual's right to stay and work to ensure that they are not hiring undocumented migrants might be arduously followed in places where such responsibilities are taken seriously, in more respectable businesses perhaps. But in many they seem to barely be known of or exist at all. From an administrative and political point of view, many believe that the hostile environment policy may create positive change by discouraging the economic migrants and migrant smugglers, however, it is pushing people to take more challenging routes which are life-threatening and

facilitate migrant smugglers to exploit the desperate migrants and then deliver them to be Deliveroo employees and cleaners. The hostile environment policy which notionally should prevents undocumented migrants from accessing employment may produce harm and vulnerability simply by bolstering and most benefitting illegal working practices, those who break labour laws, exploiting the vulnerable and suppressing wages for legitimate workers. It is because without having the legal status to live and work, undocumented migrants are forced to seek employment in the informal sectors, where they are more vulnerable to exploitation and unfair working conditions (Bloch and McKay, 2014). This has been reflected by the research participants during the data collection period of this project. It was found from the in-depth interviews that undocumented migrants are forced to work in the informal job market such as construction, domestic work, restaurants and takeaways, as delivery drivers and in warehouses to fulfil their basic need to earn wages that were far lower than those that would be minimum paid to legitimate workers with the right to work:

“I started working in the restaurant in the kitchen, it is just washing dishes and cleaning the kitchen. I worked in different jobs like restaurant, construction and food processing, vegetable picking and packing” (Ali).

“I usually do a cash-in-hand job which is easy for me, and they pay me on a daily basis. I worked in different jobs like takeaways, grocery stores, and car wash and now I am working in a warehouse. when I was desperately looking for a Job, at that time I was ready to do any job, because I couldn't choose any” (Peter).

“I have worked in different jobs like groceries store, restaurant and cleaning houses.... I moved from one job to another because people don't want to give job to people like us” (Kumar).

“Currently, I work in a car wash, before that I used to work on an agricultural farm where I used to pick vegetables and pack them for the warehouse” (Jamal).

The narratives shows that the participants worked in different employment roles within the informal sectors and often jobs are physically demanding, manual and strenuous. From the narrative, we can also understand that undocumented migrants often move from one job to another for their survival purposes and based on job availability and requirements. Further, it reflects on undocumented migrants' desperation for jobs, that they are prone to work for low or no pay, often forced to do any job at any payment, work unpaid trial periods or accept conditions that others would simply reject, merely to begin earning wages below survival. Put simply, exploitation here in such sectors is endemic, and it is often done by those who have businesses, money and means to heighten the profits that they can reap. Sam reflected on his desperation for jobs after he moved out of the council house, due to his asylum application being rejected. While he should really have been in no position to secure work, the reality was that he was quickly able to obtain a role in a sector that is synonymous with exploitative and illegal working practices:

“I used to work in the car wash and I'm still working in another car wash. When I started with them, I used to get £40 a day and the boss knew that I was an illegal immigrant, so he decreased the wages. You know at that time I was very desperate to get a job because I didn't have any source of income to support myself. During that time, I moved out of the council house and started living with one of my friends. So, I was ready to work for any money and any job because I didn't have many options to choose from” (Sam).

Ahmad described his experience working in a takeaway restaurant, wherein, his role was to clean the place after operating hours and he worked during unsocial

hours for his survival. Similarly, Ali also suggested that he had experienced working during unsocial hours, working throughout the night till early morning. In both cases, they had long work hours, during the night which contributed to their poor health:

“I found a job in a takeaway, my work is to clean everything after the takeaway closes, usually after 1 o'clock at night. I start at 11 or 12 in the night and finish by 5 or 6 in the morning. I used to get £150 per week if I worked for the whole week and if I took a leave, they cut £30” (Ahmad).

“The shifts are usually 8 to 10 hours [at night] which include dishwashing, cleaning the kitchen and dining area and chopping vegetables or preparing food for the next day” (Ali)

In Kumar's case, he started as an unpaid intern at a grocery store which was owned by people of his own community. Even after proving his ability to work and manage the store well, he was paid very low wages, which demonstrate the reality of undocumented migrants working in the informal job market:

“When I started working in a grocery store [Indian or Sri Lankan food and Groceries], they didn't pay me for the first 2 to 3 weeks saying that it was training, and they would see how I work and based on that they would decide whether to employ me or not. But when they confirmed to give the job, they paid £4 an hour only.....Usually my shifts were in the afternoon because the owner takes the morning shift. I usually start at 3 pm and I close the shop at 11 pm or sometimes 11:30 pm. After that I used work for 2 to 3 more hours to restock groceries and another items, if there was a delivery on that day or else clean and tidy up the store for next day” (Kumar)

In the case of Chen (38, female, China), she managed to find a job with the help of the Snakehead in Chinese takeaway which was appealing to her but later she

realised that it is a difficult job which involves long working hours and very low pay:

“Snakehead helped me to find a job in a Chinese takeaway. I agreed to work in a Chinese takeaway because it was managed by a lady, and they also agreed to provide me accommodation as well. My job was to wash dishes and clean the kitchen area wherever required. It was really a tough job for me, I just had to wash and clean for 9 to 10 hours, sometimes longer. The boss lady was not as good as I thought, she always wanted to me see working only, if I took some rest, and she used to give me more work. Even after doing all this tough job, I was just paid £210 a week” (Chen).

The role of agents like snakeheads or migrant smugglers in the lives of undocumented migrants are very complex and they play a dual role. They operate through a larger network that are not necessarily part of organised criminal network but are more akin to entrepreneurial ventures (Whittle, 2022). They can be both a support mechanism and a source of harm as well (Zhang, 2008). They provide essential services that enable migrants to reach their destinations as well as they facilitate accessing labour market and accommodation at the destination, as seen in Chen’s case. Despite their role as facilitators, they can play a significant role in perpetuating exploitation, expose the migrants to vulnerable working condition and precarious living arrangements (Bloch, Kumarappan and McKay, 2015; Zhang, 2008). There are instances where these smugglers use intimidation and violence, when clients unable to make a payment for their services and sometimes, they extort additional fees like Chen described above. The nature of migrant smuggling work and profit motivation often make them to overlook migrants’ welfare, which can place migrants in a vulnerable position (Zhang, 2008).

In the case of Jamal who had migrated from Sudan, he described his perception about his current job that his employer is more concerned about their business rather than the people working for him. His previous job working on a farm, which had offered routinely dangerous work, as agricultural work in the United Kingdom is amongst the highest risk for death and personal injury (Solomon et al., 2007), but more positively offered a safe place to live. However, the pay was less and highlighted issues of seasonal work, and the issues of safety and real risk seemed entirely lost to him, as the following illustrates:

“Working in a car wash is okay. I don't feel anything, whether it is good or bad. The boss doesn't care whether I am legal or illegal, he just wants people like me to work harder so that he can run his business. It is okay for me because I can earn some money for my food and accommodation. The agricultural farm is very difficult and very hard work, but it is very safe for people like me as nobody from the police or immigration officer comes to the farm. They provide accommodation and food within the farm but pay is very low. Moreover, agricultural farm work is seasonal, and they don't provide work continuously” (Jamal).

Jamal's account exemplifies how structural violence operates through what Canning identifies as the systematic elimination of genuine choice. His perception that agricultural work is "safe" only because of reduced state surveillance demonstrates how structural violence creates conditions where migrants become grateful for any form of exploitation that offers temporary security. This represents what Canning describes as autonomy harms that "affect a person's self-worth or esteem and can result from role deprivation and the absence of available opportunities to engage in productive activities" (Canning, 2017: 69).

Undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region face numerous challenges while accessing labour market. They are often forced to work in precarious

conditions such low pay, long hours, physically demanding and no safety or employment protection for their survival. This situation is a significant source of autonomy harms which affects an individual's ability to make independent decisions or control their own life (Pemberton, 2016). As Canning argues, these challenges represent the systematic operation of structural violence where "people seeking asylum are structurally limited on what they can do with their lives for the period of time in which they seek asylum" (Canning, 2017: 76). The absence of formal protections is not an oversight but represents what she identifies as deliberate policies designed to create vulnerability, where harms are "deliberate or avoidable outcomes of policies developed to control the lives of asylum seekers" (Canning, 2017: 86). This negatively impacts undocumented migrants' ability to make decisions which affects their freedom to choose what is best for them. This can also be the case of capitalist economic model that prioritises profit over individual autonomy and welfare. Following Canning's analysis, the structural conditions set for undocumented migrants create what she terms a "harmful environment" where the outcomes of certain policies are both "foreseeable and foreseen" rather than accidental consequences (Canning, 2017: 48). Further, the narratives also express that migrant working in informal job market experiences loss of temporal autonomy as they are often forced to work long and unsocial hours to earn a basic income for their survival (Bushell, 2022). From interviews, it is apparent that the desperation for survival force undocumented migrants to work under exploitative and vulnerable conditions. It can be argued that the absence of formal protections like minimum wage, health and safety regulations, social security and trade unions increases their susceptibility to exploitation. Lloyd (2018) argued that the absence of formal protections is a strong generator of harm.

Exploitation and Vulnerability at Work

The experiences documented below demonstrate how structural violence manifests through what Canning terms deliberate and systematic harm creation. As she argues, where there is "capacity for people to live free from suffering, but no political will exists to implement change to alleviate such suffering, structural violence is present" (Canning, 2017: 48). The workplace exploitation faced by undocumented migrants represents not accidental byproducts of policy but what Canning identifies as "avoidable scenarios" that are deliberately maintained to serve broader control objectives.

As I have suggested, exploitation and vulnerability at workplaces among undocumented migrants are very common, and one of the major issues faced by them. Due to the lack of legal status, undocumented migrants are often exposed to an exploitative and dangerous workplace environment, and their personal experience frequently include unfair and exploitative (or withheld) wages, long working hours, extensive physical labour, dangerous working conditions and sometimes they also face issues like racism, harassment, unfair treatment by their employers or co-workers and violence (Sigona, 2012, Bloch, 2013; Jauhiainen and Tedeschi, 2021; Nobil Ahmad, 2008). As the lack of legal protection makes undocumented migrant easy targets for exploitation by their employers, who take advantage of their vulnerability and fear of deportation you can hear a range of terrible stories about those who have been held against their will, threatened, put at risk, violently assaulted and worse. Of course, the undocumented migrants position as largely falling outside of the protection of the law means that while these stories may be shared, they frequently do not feature in crime reports or statistics and merely become the never happened of

criminology. However, the lack of an official record does not negate the realities of victimisation.

Research studies (Bloch, 2013; Alberti, 2014; Nobil Ahmad, 2008) have indicated that undocumented migrants are often paid below national minimum wages, forced to work longer and exposed to hazardous working conditions. The lack of employment protection and benefits increases their vulnerability, leaving them with no means to address workplace exploitation (Bloch 2010; Bloch, 2013; Bloch and McKay, 2014; Spencer and Triandafyllidou, 2022).

Ali describes his experience working as a kitchen assistant in a restaurant, where he must work longer and be paid less. It is evident from his narrative that people easily take advantage of his undocumented status intentionally, without considering the struggles and challenges that he faces of the impact that such exploitation has on him:

"Working as an illegal migrant without any documents is very hard. People simply take advantage of us I don't know whether they understand our struggle or not, but most people just take some kind of advantage knowingly or unknowingly. Like the restaurant where I used to work the owner was good, treated me well and provided food and accommodation but when it comes to salary, he's very stingy. In the beginning, my salary was £20 for a shift and after six months he increased my salary to £25 a shift" (Ali).

Chen reflected on her experience working as a live-in nanny cum domestic helper job, wherein, she was more or less working twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Her work here was more a form of exploitative and total slavery, a form of domestic servitude. Perhaps this is one of the most hidden forms of labour exploitation, as takes place mainly in middle-class private sphere and well behind closed doors. Workers may be working alone so additional pressures around isolation also feature as such workers are shut away doing hidden dirty work.

From her narrative, it is clear that while the job was not just physically demanding, but long hours meant that it was as psychologically exhausting for her, she was caring for a six-month-old baby and doing all the domestic work. Her sleepless nights and stressful working conditions contributed to mental health issues:

"I thought this job (live-in nanny cum domestic helper) would be a bit easier and less exhaustive for me, but it wasn't. I was taking care of two children and had to do all the domestic work like cleaning, cooking laundry etc. It was like a 24-hour job as I was also taking care of a six-month-old baby. I never had sleep during the night due to the baby I was caring for. It was a more stressful job than I thought. Initially, I was paid £280 per week and when I planning to leave the job, they agreed to increase pay to £330" (Chen).

Chen's experience illustrates what Canning identifies as both physical and emotional harms that "can be the outcome or product of structural violence," including the impacts of sleep deprivation and isolation on mental wellbeing (Canning, 2017: 69). Her confinement to domestic work represents what Canning terms "role deprivation" where migrants are systematically excluded from broader social participation and reduced to exploitable labour (Canning, 2017: 76-77).

Ali reflected on his experience working in the construction industry, where it paid more than the restaurant job. However, the shifts were much longer than the average work hours and the work was physically demanding, due to which he started to have various physical health issues.

"After a year, I started working as a construction labourer because they pay good money, and they offer regular work as well. Most of the illegal immigrants work in the construction industry because they pay good wages. For a day I used to get £40 for a shift and sometimes even more if there is more demand. So, most of the shifts last for 10 to 12 hours and sometimes more than 12 hours. Working in the construction industry is

very hard. Most of the time after finishing my shift when I go back home, I felt like I was about to die. Many times, I skipped my dinner because I was very tired and just slept without eating anything. While working in the construction industry, I started to have many health problems like back pain, rashes in my body, started to feel stiffness in my hands and knee joints" (Ali).

Ali's deteriorating health conditions represent what Canning identifies as physical harms that are predictable outcomes of structural violence. His experience of working to the point of near collapse whilst developing chronic health issues demonstrates how structural violence operates through the deliberate creation of conditions where "illness from inadequate housing, death due to corporate negligence in the workplace, or malnutrition due to inadequate welfare allowance" become inevitable consequences (Canning, 2017: 69).

Ali reflected on the co-worker accident and the reason for his decision to leave the construction. He highlights the extreme vulnerability that exists in the construction industry, especially when a person is undocumented. It also describes a lack of sympathy and empathy from the contractors and middlemen, who often try to exploit and push these people into harm and vulnerability:

"After 10 months I left the construction industry not because of my health issue but because of the safety issue. I was working in a multi-story building and one of my co-workers had an accident while working and he had severe injuries. He had his leg fractured and many other injuries. The contractor just took the person to the nearest NHS emergency, and he got some treatment for there. As he was an illegal immigrant, he was scared to get treatment from the NHS hospital, so he escaped from the ward without telling anyone after a few days. We came to know that a contractor was not ready to pay any money for treatment or even some money for his survival" (Ali).

This account exemplifies what Canning describes as the state's "facilitation of suffering" where the combination of workplace danger and healthcare exclusion creates multiple layers of harm (Canning, 2017: 48). The injured worker's fear of NHS treatment and subsequent abandonment represents what she identifies as systematic "Othering" that renders certain lives disposable within the structural violence framework.

Though Ali described the co-worker accident and an unsupportive middleman or agent, who often tries to exploit the vulnerable situation, Chen faced a similar situation, where the middleman or agent exploited her fear of detention and encashed it by providing her a job in Birmingham, during the continuous immigration raids in the London on the co-ethnic businesses:

"After working at the Chinese takeaway for nearly one and a half years, I decided to find some other work as I was hearing stories about immigration raids in Chinese takeaways. I requested Snakehead to help me find some other job soon somewhere outside London, but he said he would charge to find another job. I had no other choice than to agree with the payment and I paid £300 extra to find a live-in nanny cum domestic helper for a Chinese family in Birmingham" (Chen).

Chen's forced relocation and additional payment to escape immigration raids demonstrates what Canning analyses as "enforced exclusion from social relationships" and the systematic destruction of support networks (Canning, 2017: 69). Her experience illustrates how structural violence operates through what Canning identifies as "relational harms" that compound individual vulnerability whilst serving broader control objectives.

The fact that Chen was she is seemingly trapped in this role for a family of the same ethnicity exposes the class dimensions of labour exploitation here, and the

extent to which the unscrupulous and exploitative may not simply be those external to the migrants community, but often that a form of intra-community exploitation was commonplace in the businesses and trades willing to take advantage of people and break employment laws for profit. However, we should not be lulled into thinking that it is only in the private and domestic sphere or in personal contact contracting around the informal economy that such work was negotiated. A number of the participants had worked for large national and multinational businesses that had shown little hesitation in hiring the undocumented migrants that I interviewed to work illegally in roles which they should not have been undertaking and via employment practices that they would know are expressly prohibited in law and could notionally at least bring about serious sanction. That they seemed so little concerned is perhaps indicative again of just how hostile they feel the hostile environment policies are to their violations.

Ali and Ahmad had similar kinds of physical harm and health issues which eventually made them stop working. Ali described the negative effect on his health working in the night shifts cleaning and washing vegetables with cold water, whereas Ahmad described an unfortunate accident during his work that caused physical injuries and when eventually made him homeless. Further, Ali in his narrative also questioned the police and immigration department with respect to the company he used to work for, which is a farm food processing company. He doubts that the company might have some kind of mutual understanding because during his employment, he found that most of the employees were undocumented on the night shift and believed that this was also common knowledge amongst the authorities who simply seemed to continually turn a blind eye:

"Then I started working in a food processing company. I think this company is still in operation in London. This company is known for illegal immigrants because they have night shifts in which you will find most of the workers are illegal immigrants. Sometimes I used to think that the police or the immigration department might know about the fact that this company employs illegal immigrants at night. I think the company must have some kind of understanding with the police or immigration department regarding this. So, in this company, we wash and clean the vegetable which comes directly from the farm, and we pack the vegetable for the supermarket. The hardest part of this job was washing and cleaning the vegetables using cold water. After working in this job for more than a year, my health started to get worse day by day. My back pain increased and most of the time I used to take painkillers before my work. Sometimes, I couldn't feel my hand and my hands started to crack. Once during my shift, I blacked out and fell down from my workstation which caused some injuries to my back and head" (Ali).

"Currently, I am living on the street and I don't have a job. Everything was going fine with me and I was doing the takeaway job. Even they increased my salary from £150 to £200 per week. One day I was doing my work in the takeaway as usual, I was instructed to clean the lights which were greasy, and I slipped from the chair and fell on the gas cooker. It was very painful, and I got some injuries. I thought I would be okay but the next day, my left arm was swollen very big and my skin became blackish in that area and was very painful to lift the arm. The takeaway supervisor asked me to go to NHS A&E for my treatment. In the A&E, they asked me about my NHS number, I told them that I didn't have one and to help me if they could. They asked for my name and address to start the treatment. They took an X-ray and confirmed that I have had two fractures in my arm. After some time, someone from the admin team informed me as I am not registered with NHS, I need to pay for the treatment. I called my takeaway supervisor to get help to pay for treatment and they asked me to come back as it might create a problem for them. However, they took me to a private clinic from where I got my plaster and some medicine. It took me around 4 months to get back to normal but still, I wasn't able to use my left hand

fully. Later, I was kicked out of my accommodation as I was unable to pay for rent" (Ahmad).

Ali's observation about police and immigration authorities turning a blind eye to systematic exploitation reveals what Canning identifies as institutional complicity in structural violence. His suggestion of "some kind of understanding" between authorities and exploitative companies demonstrates how structural violence operates through what she describes as the deliberate "non-alleviation of avoidable harms" (Canning, 2017: 48). Ahmad's exclusion from NHS treatment followed by homelessness exemplifies what Canning terms the "structural conditions set for people seeking asylum" that create compounding harms across multiple life domains (Canning, 2017: 68).

From the interview, it was found that the undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region, especially those who are living in small towns face issues with finding a job. This is because the demand for labour and willingness to employ undocumented migrants is far less when compared to large metropolitan cities like London, Manchester and Birmingham. The latter create a condition of anonymity and have a scale and size that make for anonymity, whereas smaller conurbations tend to be more exposed to scrutiny and oversight. Sam suggested something along these lines when he shared his experiences in search of a job in a small town in the West Midlands region:

"It's very hard to get a job when you are an illegal immigrant because most people don't trust us without providing any documents. The place where I am living right now is a small town and it's not like a big city where you can get a job easily. So, I have to put a lot of effort and hard work into searching for a suitable job in and around the city where I'm currently living" (Sam).

For Asian undocumented migrants, getting a job was perceived to be easier due to the existence of a lot of co-ethnic businesses in the region. The West Midlands, and particularly Birmingham has long been a migration hub from Pakistan, Bangladesh and particularly Kashmir and Sikhs from Jalandhar in India. However, people from other parts of the world, who do not have their community or co-ethnic migrants' presence in the UK, often find it difficult to get a job and hence may tend to look further afield or drift away from cities to places where they have fewer connections. Moreover, due to their lack of status, making new friends is difficult for them and this can also add to the difficulties in drawing on a network to secure accommodation or employment. Sam's experience illustrates what Canning identifies as "enforced exclusion from social relationships" where geographic dispersal compounds the relational harms inherent in undocumented status (Canning, 2017: 69). The differential access to employment based on ethnic networks demonstrates how structural violence operates through what she terms systematic "misrecognition" that renders certain groups more vulnerable than others within the same exploitative system. Sam, when reflecting on his job searching strategies suggested that after extensive searches that has resulted in nothing tangible in the way of work, he finally found that having a reference from someone respected in the community was the only way to get a job:

"I randomly approached a few places where I could get like grocery stores, kebab shops and petrol stations for cleaning or any suitable job. However, most of them said that they didn't have any jobs right now and a few who had job openings, they asked me to bring my documents. It took me some weeks to understand that I need documents to work or a good reference from a person. So, I started approaching people whom I know around my area to get a job and through one of my friend's references, I got the job" (Sam).

The way in which undocumented migrants are depends on nationals from their own country or co-ethnic businesses to find a job for their survival. Similarly, these co-ethnic businesses and individuals are also dependent on the undocumented migrants for their business survival and services which are otherwise difficult to receive from others, due to the special nature, trust and cheap availability of labour (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). This dependency among both undocumented migrant and co-ethnic businesses/ individuals can often be most obviously observed among migrants from Asian and Middle Eastern countries (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). This dynamic of the informal economy exists often in specialised service providers like Asian restaurants/takeaways, domestic help, Craft/fashion materials, specialised grocery stores and other businesses managed by co-ethnic individuals. Zoran, 48-year-old male who had fled from Iran, describes dependency among undocumented migrant and co-ethnic businesses/ individuals, and that such process and trust may exist before there is any decision to migrate, with the links and connections already established:

"I come to this country with the help of my friend's family. They promised to support me until I get a status and in turn, they asked me to work in their kebab shop, as I was doing the same job back home. I know that the pay might be less, but I can live safely with this family, and I don't have to worry about my job. They want someone like me to work in their kebab shop as they trust me" (Zoran).

For undocumented migrants, due to their lack of status, working in the informal job market poses significant challenges in their workplace which makes them more vulnerable and pushed into exploitative environments. Further, it was found from the interviews that undocumented migrants are often exploited more by their co-ethnic nationals or co-ethnic businesses where they work. Vulnerability and exploitation exist in every layer of undocumented migrant's life including the

workplace. Further, some researchers suggest, in a manner that is in keeping with Freud's concept of the 'narcissism of minor differences' [where those with close ethnic identities often seem to undermine their compatriots rather than seek out unity and cohesion] that vulnerability and exploitation are comparatively more when they work with their co-ethnic nationals or co-ethnic businesses compared to other places (Jones, Ram and Edwards, 2006). Raju and Aran both expressed their view on exploitative co-ethnic nationals or co-ethnic business entities:

"I decided to stop working with people from my home country because I felt like they were taking advantage of me. Just because they employed me even though they knew I was undocumented, sometimes I had to do personal tasks for them such as cleaning or repairing their house, and I had to be available to them whenever they needed me. This was really disappointing, so I made the decision not to work with them" (Raju).

"Some people think they are doing a favour but in reality, they end up taking advantage of people like me for their own benefit. My first boss who employed me in his kebab shop, I had a lot of respect for him. Through a reference, I contacted him for a job opportunity and when I first met him, he spoke to me very nicely and I cried because I was going through a lot. However, later I found that my roommate was getting better pay in another shop and when I asked about the same, he challenged me to find another job. When I found another job, he refused to pay my last 2-week salary and even threatened to reveal my status to the police" (Aran).

The experiences of Raju and Aran demonstrate how structural violence operates through what Canning identifies as the systematic creation of "avoidable scenarios" where migrants are forced into dependence on potentially exploitative networks (Canning, 2017: 74). Aran's experience of wage theft and threats of exposure illustrates how structural violence enables what Canning describes as compounding harms where "violence is structural, intentional and deliberate" rather than incidental to the asylum system (Canning, 2017: 48).

Here of course above we also encounter yet another form of leverage and exploitation in the form of the threatening to report undocumented migrants to police or immigration authorities. As often, undocumented migrants to escape from exploitative working conditions and differential treatment by their employers, they may look for or seek alternative means like forged documents (Bloch, 2013; Khosravi, 2010). However, exploring alternative means such as forged documents can result in risks and opportunities. Here the undocumented migrants have to contact criminal organisations or networks, who can provide them services. There are instances, where undocumented migrants have ended up victims of fraud, while trying to get forged documents and lost their hard-earned money. Moreover, relying on forged documents perpetuates a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty, as they fear getting caught by authorities which further increases their stress and anxiety levels. However, this can also be a gateway into forms of fraud and exploitation too, and we should not shy away from the fact that there are additionally opportunities that some migrants will exploit in such circumstances, and they are or can be involved in the theft of identity documents and their counterfeiting.

Ali shared his experience of exploring the forge documents options through his friend which ultimately helped him get him legal employment. He also reflects on his feeling of relief after getting a legal employment, although there is a great deal of irony that the pathway to such legal status was, in and of itself, wholly criminal and fraudulent. It was crime that allowed him to drop his illegal status and obtain a degree of settled security:

"I met an agent who promised me to get a European passport followed by a driving licence. he said I could become a taxi driver and he would help me with the process. So, he charged me £1200 for the passport and it took

2 months to get the passport. I was not sure whether this would work or not. But I just wanted to try and see if it would work for me because I just want to come out of the situation. Moreover, my friend said that I can trust the agent because he is good at his work. As promised by the agent he delivered the passport within two months. It was a Spanish passport with my photo, but the name and the other details were someone else.....Again, based on my friend's advice, I applied for an SIA security guard licence, and I completed a private security course using my fake documents. After I finished my course, I received an SIA security guard licence within a month. And through some references, I got a security guard job in a private company. It was a big relief for me because I never thought I would be able to get a real job with a good salary" (Ali).

Ali's resort to forged documents exemplifies what Canning describes as the creation of conditions where all available choices involve harm. His willingness to engage with criminal networks represents what she identifies as the systematic elimination of legitimate pathways, forcing migrants into what she terms scenarios where "outcomes of certain policies are foreseeable and foreseen" rather than unintended consequences (Canning, 2017: 48). The fact that criminality became his pathway to economic security demonstrates how structural violence operates through the deliberate restriction of legal alternatives.

The experiences of undocumented migrant working in the informal job market revealed a disturbing pattern of exploitation and harmful consequences. These patterns represent what Canning identifies as the systematic "infliction of social harm" through policies that create predictable vulnerabilities (Canning, 2017: 68). The concept of social liberty allows individuals like co-ethnic business owners and bosses to justify harmful actions and practices against their workers, often prioritising personal gain and profit over ethical responsibilities. The experiences of Chen, Ali, Aran, Raju reflected their employer lack of ethical responsibilities. Like, Chen, a live-in nanny and domestic helpers has to available to work 24/7

with very limited time to rest and sleep has adversely impacted her mental health and overall wellbeing, shows the lack ethical responsibilities of her employer. As Bushell (2022) notes that the cumulative effects of lack of rest and sleep deprivation can perpetuate social harm, pushing people like Chen even more vulnerable. Further Co-ethnic businesses, often tend to take advantage of vulnerable undocumented migrants by assigning more work beyond agreed-upon work, shows how absence of formal protection results in further harms. The fear of exposure and threats from employers to disclose their undocumented status to authorities create a constant fear and anxiety. As Ali described above, this kind of experience drive migrants to seek help from criminal network or a middleman to buy forged documents, which further exposes them risks and increase the fear of apprehension.

Language Barriers

Language barriers operate as what Canning identifies as instruments of "relational harm" that create systematic exclusion extending far beyond communication difficulties. As she argues, these barriers represent "enforced exclusion from social relationships, and harms of misrecognition" that serve to maintain migrants in exploitable positions (Canning, 2017: 69). The deliberate reduction in language support demonstrates how structural violence operates through the systematic removal of integration pathways.

Undocumented migrants often face significant challenges due to language barriers which contribute to further vulnerability and marginalisation. However, as Canning's analysis reveals, these barriers are not simply individual deficits but represent what she identifies as "relational deprivation" - the systematic severing of opportunities for broader social engagement (Canning, 2017: 77). Their

incapability to effectively communicate in the prominent and commonly spoken language of the host country affects their ability to have more job opportunities, socialise more widely and seeking help from others. Lack of English language skills has left undocumented migrants susceptible to exploitation as they must be over-dependent on their co-ethnic social network or their experienced undocumented friends (Bloch, 2013; Bloch and McKay, 2014). Ali (46, Male, Pakistan) shares his experience with not having a good English language skill and how it affected him from getting a job:

"In the beginning, when I was working as a labour I never had an issue with the language because there was no need for me to talk in English as I was only working as a labour, moreover, if I had to talk it was just my co-workers who are from my own country.....However, when I got my security guard license and started applying for jobs, that's when I started feeling I should have learnt English. I still remember my first interview for the security guard post in which the security manager asked many questions to be honest I couldn't understand what he was saying to me. Even though I was eligible for that job they rejected me because I couldn't speak in English. After that, I approached some of my references through whom I got my first job and, in that job, my friend was the first one who asked me to learn a few English sentences which will always help me in my job as well as in my life" (Ali).

Chen had never had a chance to learn English as she predominately worked around Chinese people and served mostly the Chinese community. Jamal on the other hand, suggested that English language skills were of no use until someone gains legal status. He further described that working as a labour, there is no requirement for English language skills and that's the reason he never tried to learn. In contrast Chen suggested it was not a lack of will, but rather the difficulty and complexity that prevented her from learning English:

"The English Language is not a problem for me because I am not an officer, I just work as a labour and it was not needed in labour work. Moreover, what is the use of learning English when I don't have a legal status to get a good Job? I never had a chance and I never tried to learn as well" (Jamal).

"Being a Chinese, English language is always a difficult thing for me. In China, we hardly even learn English. All my work only involved talking to Chinese people in the UK, so I never had a chance to learn English. After all these years, I can understand what other people are saying but I still can't speak well" (Chen).

Peter had a similar option as Jamal, he states that English language skill has no relevance, until they get legal status to live and work:

"I speak somewhat good English as I am from Nigeria and my first language is English. Even though, I speak good English, it doesn't mean I will get a good job with good pay. Until someone gets legal status, the ability to speak English is basically useless" (Peter).

Peter's observation that English skills are "useless" without legal status exposes the fundamental structural violence at work - the system renders integration impossible whilst simultaneously blaming migrants for their exclusion. This represents what Canning identifies as the systematic creation of "avoidable scenarios" where investment in integration becomes futile, serving the broader agenda of maintaining a controllable, exploitable population (Canning, 2017: 74).

The narratives illustrate how undocumented migrants' language barriers and lack of legal status are closely linked to economic opportunities. Language barrier impacts undocumented migrants' ability to access better employment opportunities which impact their economic aspiration and personal growth. Further, the language barriers contribute to social isolation and exclusion, as it limits their ability to communicate outside their closed network. These limitations

represent what Canning terms "relational harms" that systematically exclude migrants from broader social participation whilst confining them to potentially exploitative ethnic enclaves. The language barrier thus functions as part of what she describes as the deliberate creation of conditions that serve "policies developed to control the lives of asylum seekers" where such exclusion represents "deliberate or avoidable outcomes" rather than unintended consequences (Canning, 2017: 86). Some expressed that English language skills can enhance their job prospects and for others language skills are incompetent without a legal status.

Social Life and Social Network

The lack of legal status affects undocumented migrants' social lives significantly. This also impacts the way in which they interact with other people and make decisions about whom to interact with (Sigona, 2012). Most of the time, undocumented migrants limit themselves within their co-ethnic social network and friend's circle. Due to fear of detention and deportation, undocumented migrants limit their interaction and social life within this close network. Often this limited interaction and social life can lead to social isolation which may contribute to mental health issues and further vulnerabilities. As they are reluctant to seek mental health support and healthcare services, this often aggravates their mental health issues.

Ahmad reflecting on his social life suggested that people ignore him because he is homeless and many misinterpret that he is a drug addict or lazy, and that is why he is homeless. It is very common for people to judge quickly; however, his vulnerable status and lack of accommodation was largely because of lack of status and other restrictions which added to his vulnerabilities:

"I don't have many friends, moreover, when someone comes to know that I am homeless and living on the street, they stop talking to me. Most of the people think that I am druggy and lazy, but they don't know the true what happened to me. Even, I have stopped asking for help from people because they might help me for 1 or 2 days after that I have to be on my own" (Ahmad).

Ali, when asked about his social life, mentioned that being undocumented means no social life and long hours working for their survival make it harder for them to find time for socialisation and other social activities. Further, he reflects that social spaces like pubs and bars are unaffordable places for them and moreover, chances of getting caught by police are high. He mentioned:

"As an illegal immigrant, we don't have any social life. It's been 19 years since I've been living in the UK and to be honest, I never went to a pub or a bar to drink. When I started working as a labourer, my shifts were mostly 10 to 12 hours long. By the time I finished my shift, my body felt exhausted, and my only priority was to go back home to sleep. There were times when I didn't even think about having dinner. So, working for 10 to 12 hours every day as a labourer do you think will have time for a social life? Moreover, pubs and bars are risky places for us because we never know anytime anyone can get into a fight which might end up in the involvement of the police. Moreover, pubs and bars are very expensive for people like us, so I mostly avoid going to pubs and bars. After marriage, my life was mostly around my wife" (Ali).

Similarly, to Ali, Chen was also afraid of having some time outside the working for her social life, due to the fear of detention. She also mentioned her long work hours and low wages, stopped her from having any real form of social life and she had few real connections with others:

"I have a few friends in Birmingham and London, all are Chinese. To be honest, I never had a British friend, and I never tried to make one. Usually, I do not go out because of fear of police and immigration officers.

Moreover, my work never allowed me to have free time to go out somewhere to spend time. Now, I have some money as I am running my business with my friends but initial days, even when I think of going out, I couldn't as I was paid less" (Chen).

Ali also reflected on his life after getting fake documents and getting a formal job, that he started to have more social life and started to make more friends at work. His narrative proves that people, when have access to official status seem to see the positive impacts fairly quickly for their overall self-esteem and confidence:

"After getting my Fake documents and when I started working as a security guard that's where I started having more social life and interaction with other people. I used to meet a lot of people as a security guard and the team was very big where I was working. I had an opportunity to become friends with people who care about their friends. My supervisor his name was Morris, he was a nice person and invited me many times to his home for lunch. I would say his family was nice and he treated me like his own family when I was with his family during Christmas" (Ali).

When Ahmad was asked if he as any British friends or anyone who is good to him, his response was:

"I have one British friend who is also homeless. He is good to me and sometimes he offers food or drink when I needed. But there are many other homeless both men and women, most of them are bullies and many times they steal food and clothes from me. Once they have stolen my phone and some money as well. Some are so crazy that, sometimes, they ripped my clothes and even my sleeping bag. It is really difficult to fight them back because I am weak. If a person like me tries to fight them back, they will all gang up against you and say that to go back to your country, abuse you verbally and sometimes, physically as well" (Ahmad).

Being an undocumented migrant can be challenging and affects the overall life of an individual. However, being undocumented and homeless can lead to an

increase in vulnerabilities and exploitation, as individuals are forced into precarious and unsafe living conditions due to their limited options. Ahmad's narrative clearly expresses the level of difficulties he faced and might face more in the future. Farhad a thirty year old undocumented migrant from Iraq, who was temporarily homeless after his asylum application was rejected and he was removed from the council house, faced a similar issues like Ahmad, from the other homeless people:

“When I was homeless and living on the streets in Derby, I faced a lot of issues, especially from other homeless people. Because they knew I was not from the UK, they always bullied and harassed me. They even went as far as stealing my letters from the Home Office and my ARC card, along with all of my clothes. They never allowed me to sleep peacefully and I was very frustrated with them and their lack of understanding about what I was going through” (Farhad).

Being an undocumented migrant is not easy, people go through various difficulties and face the risk of various forms of exploitation in all manner of situations. Often, the mainstream community and media, question undocumented migrants' motives, values and character and suggest that the undocumented are simply deploying a disingenuous smokescreen to disguise the realities of the pull of economic migration. Yet undocumented migrants (including economic migrants), make the tough decision of leaving their home country may be because there something seriously affecting them and their family and often share a universal aspiration for safety and the desire for betterment. Living as an undocumented migrant not only exposes an individual to vulnerabilities and exploitation but also changes their feelings about life. The migrants often push themselves into self-isolation, self-harm, disappointment and lack of sense of

belongingness to their current life. Ahmad reflected thus on his experience living in the UK for the last 10 years as an undocumented and homeless migrant:

“Initially, I used to feel very bad and think too much about my life. I have cried many times about my situation, but I don't cry because I have cried a lot and I don't have any tears left in my eyes anymore. Moreover, nobody really cares about me so, why should I care about my status? After 10 years spent in this country, I am not afraid of anyone, because I am not a criminal, or I cause any issues to people. I am homeless because of my situation” (Ahmad).

Jamal describes his experience of being an undocumented migrant that no one cares about undocumented migrants and even when someone undocumented migrant dies in the UK, the only people who will care about this would be their family and friends.

“Nobody cares about us, the boss just treats me as a labour that's it, not even a human because there are a lot of people out there who are desperate for jobs. I am saying, even if someone kills me tomorrow, there won't be anyone to feel about my death, apart from my friends and family” (Jamal).

As narrated by undocumented migrants, the lack of social life significantly impacts their mental health and wellbeing which further contribute to their vulnerability and marginalisation. The narrative highlights that migrant's inability to make meaningful social connections contributes to their marginalisation and exploitation. The lack of legal status affects their social interactions and social life, however, legal status along with homelessness increases the chances of social exclusion and make them more vulnerable. Abuse and violence experienced by Ahmad and Farhad from the fellow homeless individuals, highlights that social harm not only exist in systemic oppression but also exist in the marginalised groups. Overall, the lack of a social life not only affect their

quality of life, however, it also reinforces a cycle of structural harm and marginalisation.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the complex and often precarious situation of undocumented migrants within the informal job market and their social lives in the UK. Building on the suggestion that the undocumented experience is one that sees them caught in a paradox between new found safety and security, and the status of insecurity and at risk in a new community, we have attempted to show some of the nuances and complexities of a labour market in the UK that is both notionally hostile, while also being often totally defendant, where again for the undocumented, their limbo status and liminal positioning mean that they are trapped between being offender and victim in a world of contradictions and inconsistencies. By examining the lived experiences of undocumented migrants in the UK's informal job market, I have shown and uncovered some of these often unseen and unspoken harms inflicted on this most marginalised group. It is evident from the narratives that undocumented migrants play a critical role in sustaining different sectors within the informal job market, however, they are pushed into vulnerable and exploitative working conditions that make them incredibly vulnerable and little able to deal with exploitation, abuse and manipulation when it arises. It is not simply that undocumented migrants are subject to below-minimum wages, exploitation, hazardous working conditions and a lack of legal recourse against abuses, primarily due to their lack of legal status to live and work. It is that this also happens in a context where a lack of social life, fear of detention and deportation, and social isolation are common issues among these undocumented migrants which significantly impact their

mental well-being and physical health and likely creates all manner of harms that have to date barely been considered as such.

Chapter 6: Healthcare, Education and Dreams of Undocumented Migrants

Introduction

Access to healthcare services and education are fundamental human rights and should be available to everyone regardless of their immigration status. However, in the UK, undocumented migrants encounter formidable challenges when trying to access these services. Limited access to healthcare has contributed to numerous issues, including poor health conditions, undetected major health issues, and mental health concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, leaving undocumented migrants without access to essential healthcare services and vaccinations (Briggs et al., 2020; Briggs et al., 2021; Lloyd et al., 2023). Regarding access to education, similar challenges persist. Despite mandatory statutory provisions to provide education to children regardless of their immigration status, many families face obstacles in obtaining schooling due to fear of detection by their parents or family members. These challenges in accessing many essential services likely significantly impacted undocumented migrants both physically and mentally in health terms. This chapter will explore the difficulties undocumented migrants faced in accessing healthcare services and education. Furthermore, this chapter will explore the dreams and aspirations of undocumented immigrants, their perceptions of being caught in this liminal position, and speculate on some likely consequences.

Challenges in Accessing Health Care

Accessing healthcare is considered a fundamental human right, yet undocumented migrants face numerous challenges and barriers while

accessing healthcare services when they are in the United Kingdom. In the UK, the hostile environment policies introduced in 2012 and subsequently tightened successively by a range of prime ministers have been integrated into the National Health Service (NHS) through regulations like the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations of 2015 and its 2017 amendment, which have made it extremely difficult for undocumented migrants to access both primary and secondary healthcare services (Asif and Kienzler, 2022; Worthing et al., 2021).

Specifically, these regulations targeted undocumented migrants seeking secondary healthcare services by requiring upfront payment at 150% of actual costs and refusing treatment to those patients who cannot afford this payment (Asif and Kienzler, 2022; Worthing et al., 2021). While the NHS states that primary care and emergency health services are accessible to all regardless of immigration status, in reality, the situation is very different. During the fieldwork for this project, the researcher observed and recorded testimonies of undocumented migrants who had either directly experienced or heard accounts of these healthcare barriers affecting undocumented migrants.

Despite clear guidelines from the NHS instructing GP practices not to request proof of address or immigration status for registration purposes, staff members continue to do so in many instances (Asif and Kienzler, 2022; Poduval et al., 2015; Worthing et al., 2021). This practice has discouraged undocumented migrants from seeking primary healthcare due to the fear of detention and possible deportation by the Home Office. This has resulted in the exclusion of undocumented migrants from essential health services, which forced them to look for alternative ways, including self-medication and alternative medicine; however, these options are often inadequate and unsafe and potentially put

their lives at risk (Asif and Kienzler, 2022; Biswas et al., 2011; Grit, den Otter and Spreij, 2011; Poduval et al., 2015). These dangerous practices represent 'Pharma-harms', a distinct category within zemiology defined as the range of social, health, and structural harms that arise from people's unequal or restricted access to safe, affordable, and regulated healthcare or medical practices. Unlike general health harms, pharma-harms captures the specific harms and risks that arise when structural barriers force people to use alternative healthcare options like self-medication or alternative medicines etc. Whilst Baker (2017) has examined pharmaceutical harms within the context of gendered state-corporate violence against women, this study extends the pharma-harms concept to examine how immigration policies and enforcement creates similar patterns of pharmaceutical exclusion, forcing undocumented migrants to engage in dangerous self-medication or to seek care from unregulated alternative healthcare providers. These structural barriers that have been experienced by the participants who participated in this research study also overlap, for example, with other exclusions and compound and exacerbate migrants' experiences of isolation, victimisation, and precariousness.

In this research study, it was found that the participants encounter difficulties in accessing healthcare services in the UK due to their lack of legal status to live. They have experienced challenges in accessing public healthcare through the NHS due to documentation and payment requirements and also faced difficulties in accessing private healthcare due to high costs. In response to a question about GP practice registration, Ahmad expressed that he does not use either NHS or private health services as both require payment, which he cannot afford. Due to this, he always depends on self-medication when he is ill or injured, but this, superficially, at least, did not seem to be a significant challenge for him.

Undocumented migrants are often young and relatively physically healthy, and hence, for the most part, many may initially at least have a similar philosophy to Ahmed:

“I usually don’t go to NHS or private clinic because both the place, I have pay for my treatment and I don’t have money for that. Luckily, I never had any serious health issues or condition. I have already mentioned about my fractures in my arm, apart from that I never had any health issues. Sometimes, if I get fever or any pain, I get some paracetamol or painkiller from the shop, it always works for me” (Ahmad).

This reveals a novel theoretical insight, how individual coping narratives can systematically obscure structural pharma-harms. When migrants describe self-medication as effective (Ahmad's 'it always works for me'), this narrative mask accumulating pharmaceutical risks, creating what I term 'pharma-harm invisibility' where successful coping conceal the underlying risks of unsupervised medication or unregulated medical practices. Indeed, whilst relatively inexpensive medication such as paracetamol may work adequately for minor injuries, aches, and pains. However, young people can and do experience severe health conditions, and it is generally known that early GP or medical practitioner contact is vital in some of the conditions physically fit young people can suffer, such as cancer. Ahmad's narrative of self-medication success ('it always works for me') therefore demonstrates pharma-harm invisibility, where apparent effectiveness with minor ailments creates false confidence and reassurance while concealing significant health risks.

Due to the lack of legal status, accessing public healthcare services becomes a significant challenge for undocumented migrants. Accessing private healthcare is even more difficult for them due to financial constraints. As a result, some migrants resort to self-medication as a means of managing their health concerns

(Poduval et al., 2015; Biswas, Kristiansen, Krasnik and Norredam, 2011; Grit, den Otter and Spreij, 2011), and others look for alternative medicines which are cost-effective. This also opens the potential for them to be exploited by charlatans, faith healers, or indeed backstreet and unregistered medical providers in some instances. It is also worth noting that the undocumented exist in employment, often in occupations (agriculture, construction, delivery driving) that can be a pretty high risk of physical harm, and hence wider structural barriers to healthcare are in and of themselves worthy of the zemiologist's focus.

In the interviews conducted for this research, it was found that it was common for male participants like Ahmad, Jamal, and Ali to have to rely on self-medication, even though it might be risky. Ali reflected on his health issues, which worsened day to day due to his hard-laborious job, and how he managed his pain without seeking any medical treatment during that time:

“This is where I stopped working, I was very sick and had to be at home for two months. I was having severe back pain that I couldn't bear and sometimes I just cried in the pain. Even though I was having severe pain and was really sick I didn't go to the hospital because I was really scared as I was an illegal immigrant. I was just taking painkiller medicine from the pharmacy which I could afford. I was feeling very low, even I thought I might die do you do this pain. There were some friends who came to help me, they gave me some food and even some money but still, I felt very lonely and helpless. Those days were very painful and miserable” (Ali).

Alis's words also illustrate how the lack of options when a debilitating health problem occurs can lead to further (mental) health issues such as low mood. It is perhaps useful here to recognise the connections between physical and mental distress, as the failure to be able to extend to Ali any real option in terms of health care clearly was driving his mental health down. In the case of Raju and Chen,

both migrants have opted for alternative medicine as their primary method of treating and managing their health issues. Although alternative medicine may offer some relief, it often lacks scientific evidence; in the long run, it may be less effective and could potentially exacerbate existing health issues. It also potentially opens avenues for exploitation by those offering alternative medicines in an unregulated market, and it is worth noting that there does seem to be evidence of this happening in settings where the research was conducted in the West Midlands. Local newspapers or shop windows could, for example, carry advertisements publicising a range of 'experts' services, where the expertise of those involved was likely far less established than the blind trials and clinical tests required in modern medicine. Although the concept of faith and spiritual healing may seem ridiculous, in a Western setting, to many people, some practitioners of such approaches claim they can cure illnesses, solve problems, or rid people of "bad spirits" when scientific treatments fail using touch, traditional prayers, or shrines. At the same time, rituals such as beating people around the head or placing hot objects on the body are common in some African sub-cultures, as are processes such as exorcisms and driving out demons. If fake healers prey on the vulnerable who feel they have nowhere else to turn and no one else to talk to and exploit through fraud veiled in spiritualism and superstition, there is the potential that current exclusions of the undocumented from formal healthcare may exacerbate the offending of such individuals, where in particular, the undocumented feel they have little alternative.

"From that time have been using Ayurvedic medicine (an Alternative medicine) to control my sugar and blood pressure. I don't know how effective it is, but I guess it helps somewhat and I really don't have any other choice" (Raju).

"It's been 8-9 years I've never visited any doctor or NHS for my health issues. With the God's grace I never had any major or serious health issues in this past 8 to 9 years. Yes, I had some common health issues like cold, fever and pain in the past but I usually use some herbs to treat myself or have some special food to manage my condition. I never go for medicines from the pharmacy because I never used those things in the past and I always prefer Chinese natural medicines. I know a Chinese medicine doctor who is a good doctor and known for his best treatments. I usually visit him when I cannot manage my condition on my own. He helps many people within our Chinese community who are without status or can't afford pay for the treatments. He usually charges me half of the price which is £30 for consultation and sometimes provide medicines without any charges" (Chen).

While Chen may feel she is getting good value, she will not be registered for cervical smear tests or summoned for cancer screening in the manner that UK citizens will be. Migrants seeking asylum and having asylum applications under consideration by the Home Office are provided with NHS healthcare services until a decision is made. However, if the asylum application is rejected by the Home Office, their access to healthcare services is discontinued until and unless they request a review of the decision they received or submit a fresh asylum claim if that is possible. Raja and Jamal, who at the time of the fieldwork were classified as failed asylum seekers, were previously registered with a GP. However, after their asylum application is rejected, they stop using the GP services due to fear of detention and deportation. Despite both of them having had some major health issues that could potentially become serious life-threatening left untreated, both selected not to approach the NHS for medical assistance due to the concerns of disclosing their identities and fears of any repercussions that might come from having to give details and contact addresses:

"I was registered to GP when I was in the system (asylum application with Home Office). I visited my GP for 2 or 3 times for some common health issues. But after my application got rejected, I never went to GP. it's simply because I know that it's risky for me to go there and they might ask more about me. I don't want to get caught by police or immigration officer, so it's simply avoided even though I had some health issues, but it wasn't something major. I had some common health issues from time to time like fever, cold and even I had COVID once I guess, I didn't do a test. I also have some digestion issue and sometimes I used to have pain in my stomach. I just manage with some medicines from the pharmacy" (Jamal).

"When I was in the system (Asylum application with Home Office) I had access to GP practice, and they gave me NHS number. I was in the system for two years I guess and its long back. we never used during that time because never had any health issues at that time. from last four to five years, I'm having a lot of health issues. Right now, I have diabetes and high blood pressure. I'm struggling a lot with this health issues, but nobody cares about what I'm going through. I never go to NHS and I don't know how to approach them for these health issues" (Raju).

Similarly, Farhad, whose asylum application was likewise rejected by the Home Office, eventually lost all benefits, including accommodation, which made him homeless for more than four years. Even after facing numerous challenges, Farhad submitted a fresh asylum claim to the Home Office, enabling him to regain access to benefits, including accommodation and healthcare. However, the four years of homelessness have resulted in significant health issues, and due to these, he is now awaiting a major spinal surgery. Farhad also reflects that his current health issues are directly related to his past experience of homelessness, which had a profound impact on his health and wellbeing. He also attributes his present condition to the actions of the Home Office. He also mentioned that his present condition is because of the Home Office's action, which made him homeless:

“Now, I have access to healthcare because I have made fresh asylum application. Actually, I have some major issue in my spine, and I am going to have a surgery soon. It was recommended by the doctor, but I don’t know when I am in the waiting list. When my last asylum application rejected, they took everything from me, they kicked me out of the accommodation, they took all the benefits and then I become homeless. I was homeless for more than four years and it all started from there. My health condition got worse because of the weather, Not having enough sleep, not having proper food, and stress all affected my health. Now I cannot do my daily activities without having pain killers and other medicines. Even if I miss medicines for one day my pain level increases like anything. if Home Office considered not to kick me off from accommodation and supported me in some way, I would have been a different man today. Whatever health issues and the pain I’m going through today is only because of Home Office and their immigration department. I would definitely blame them (Home Office) for my health condition” (Farhad).

The inability to access healthcare services prevents undocumented migrants from undergoing regular health check-ups and receiving diagnoses to identify any underlying health issues. These undetected health issues could potentially escalate into serious health problems in the future and could jeopardise their lives. In the case of Raju, his underlying health issues were discovered when he required emergency treatment from the NHS, and even after knowing his condition, he chose not to get further treatment.

“In 2018 while taking a bus I fell down because of dizziness, and I became unconscious. at that time someone called the ambulance, and the ambulance took me to nearest NHS emergency. I was admitted for a few hours, and they put me some drips in hand. During that time only I got to know that I have diabetics and high blood pressure. When I got my consciousness back, they asked me about my name, NHS number and my address but I acted like I’m still unconscious. After some time, I just left the hospital without informing anyone” (Raju).

What we see here in Raju's description is in effect the sort of loaded choice that migrants often had, and in adopting desperate coping mechanisms to avoid threat of deportation. This is almost a case of migrants visiting various forms of harm on themselves to avoid more significant harms at the hands of the state resultant from a kind of internal bartering process. This was not simply due to minor troubles though. In the case of Ahmad, his life has been significantly changed after an accident that caused two fractures in his left arm. Due to his lack of legal status, the NHS requested payment for his treatment which resulted in delaying his treatment. Eventually he was treated in a private clinic, however, his arm and hand did not completely recover and prevented him from doing his job which made him homeless. This is clear a case of structural barrier which affected Ahmad to get timely healthcare treatment. Moreover, his story aptly demonstrates the nexus between low wage unregulated employment, risk harm and inaccessibility of healthcare which has been already discussed in chapter 5.

The experiences of Ahmad, Ali, Raju, Chen, and Farhad reveal how healthcare exclusion produces distinct but interconnected categories of pharma-harm. This research reveals a tripartite typology of pharma-harms: Primary pharma-harms involve immediate risks from inappropriate self-medication and absences of professional guidance, as seen in Ahmad's reliance on paracetamol for serious injuries; Secondary pharma-harms involve cascading effects such as permanent disability and mental health deterioration, illustrated by Ali's untreated back pain leading to depression and Ahmad's delayed fracture treatment resulting in permanent disability; Tertiary pharma-harms include exploitation by unregulated providers and dangerous misconceptions about alternative medicines are effective, as seen in the cases of Raju and Chen.

Interview with undocumented migrants reveals that undocumented migrants experience systematic exclusion from healthcare provision in the UK. Undocumented migrants are restricted from accessing healthcare, largely due to the hostile environment policy and NHS data-sharing with immigration authorities, which is a systemic compromising of human flourishing, which produces a range of harms (Pemberton, 2015). As a result, many undocumented migrants are forced to rely on self-medication or alternative medicine as they are unable to access private healthcare due to financial constraints. Further, hard physical Labour undertaken by undocumented migrants can exacerbate existing medical conditions, leading to prolonged illnesses or even permanent disabilities like Ahmad's. Lack of access to health care further impacts undocumented migrant's mental health and overall well-being, which adds another layer of vulnerability. These healthcare exclusions reflect broader policy priorities that position immigration control as serving the larger public interest. Baker's (2017) analysis reveals how pharmaceutical harms are justified through utilitarian calculus that prioritises 'the common good' over 'collateral' harm to vulnerable populations. In the context of undocumented migrants, anti-immigration policies including healthcare exclusion deploy similar utilitarian logic, positioning immigration deterrence as serving the 'common good' whilst obscuring the pharma-harms produced. This utilitarian framework has historically legitimised and justified harmful policies toward vulnerable populations, prioritising perceived larger public interest over individual suffering.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Undocumented Migrants

The COVID-19 pandemic was a global health crisis that had a profound impact worldwide. In the UK, approximately 227,000 people died with COVID-19 listed as one of the causes on their death certificate according to the BBC (2023). The

highest number of deaths recorded in a single day occurred on 19 January 2021, when 1,490 people were registered as having died from COVID-19. At this point in the pandemic, the first variant of the virus seen in the UK (subsequently named the 'Alpha' variant by the WHO) and the UK was also only a month into the first stages of its vaccine rollout, which started to reduce the risk of death and serious illness from the virus, particularly at first to the elderly and vulnerable. Currently, no conclusive data exist concerning the total number of COVID-19 cases and deaths among refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants worldwide. Data from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) between April 2020, and February 2021, indicate a gradual rise in reports of COVID-19 cases among displaced populations. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), refugees, people seeking asylum, and migrants were among 272 million people worldwide who were more vulnerable than others to contracting SARS-CoV-2 because of personal, social, infrastructural, and health factors. Migrants have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis and too often left out of the pandemic response mechanisms (Balakrishnan, 2021) deeply affecting many people's lives. It has led to millions of deaths, widespread job losses, educational disruptions, and aggravate mental health issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented migrants were significantly affected and the hostile environment policy of the UK, contributed further vulnerability (Boswell, 2022). Throughout, the COVID-19 restriction and lockdown, many undocumented migrants were forced to work for their survival and even many of lost their jobs who were employed in services, hospitality and construction industries severely impacted due to the COVID-19 restriction and lockdown which further added to their economic instability (Boswell, 2022). Due to the lack of status and the fear of detention made it difficult for them to get any support from government during

this crisis situation. Without access to government aid and support, they struggled even to fulfil essential needs and they faced high level of health risk as they forced to work during the desperate circumstances.

Whilst some governments implemented comprehensive health care strategies and free vaccine distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic, responses varied dramatically across countries. Well-developed nations like Germany and the UK rapidly procured vaccines and provided extensive health care funding. Germany was particularly successful at obtaining and distributing vaccine doses despite early global supply challenges (Desson et al., 2021), whilst the UK became the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine (Abbas and Babar, 2021). In contrast, other countries faced resource constraints or political resistance to public health measures. For example, Brazil under President Bolsonaro initially downplayed the virus and delayed vaccine procurement (Razafindrakoto et al., 2024) and several US states prioritised economic reopening over health restrictions (Dave, Sabia and Safford, 2022). Even in countries with strong health care systems, undocumented migrants faced additional barriers beyond general policy limitations. Undocumented migrants in the UK context faced significant challenges in accessing essential health care facilities, including obtaining COVID-19 vaccinations. These barriers existed even within the UK's universal health care system, highlighting how legal status creates exclusions regardless of national health policy. During the interview, Undocumented shared their experiences regarding COVID-19 vaccination:

“I didn’t receive any COVID vaccination. Did not try to reach out to the NHS to get a vaccination because I don’t want any trouble or get caught by the police. Luckily, I did not get COVID-19 infection during the Pandemic” (Raju).

“I didn't receive any COVID-19 vaccination because at that time I was homeless, and I didn't have my NHS number. I approached my nearest COVID vaccination centre for getting vaccination and I explained them about my situation. they said they are really sorry for what happened to me and about my condition, but they cannot provide vaccination to me because I don't have any documentation or NHS number” (Farhad).

From the narrative, we understand that Raju (44, male, India) did not seek vaccination from the NHS due to fear of detention. However, Farhad (30, Male, Iraq) approached the COVID vaccination centre but was unable to receive the vaccine because of a lack of documentation or an NHS number. The UK government announced that COVID vaccinations would be provided to everyone, regardless of their immigration status. It was also made clear that even undocumented migrants will be given the COVID vaccination (Armocida et al., 2021; Deal et al., 2021). However, on the ground reality was completely different, and the migrants still experienced difficulties in getting vaccinations (Armocida et al., 2021; Deal et al., 2021)

Chen (38, female, China) also encountered challenges similar to Farhad and was unable to receive the COVID vaccination. While her friends managed to get the vaccination from a private clinic, Chen could not do so because of the financial constraints:

“I just didn't receive any COVID-19 vaccination. I tried to receive COVID vaccination from a nearest COVID vaccination center, but I couldn't get COVID vaccination because they asked me for my NHS number. My friends and a few other got COVID vaccination from a private clinic for £90 because they were afraid of COVID-19 but I couldn't afford to pay that money at the time because I was not working” (Chen).

In the case of Jamal (29, Male, Sudan), he received his first dose of COVID vaccination. Still, he failed to receive his second dose of COVID vaccination because his asylum application was rejected by the Home Office.

“I received my first dose of COVID vaccination, but I didn't receive my second dose. I got to know from the charity organization that everyone is allowed to take both COVID vaccination. When I called my GP to ask about my second dose, they said I cannot have my second dose as my Asylum application was rejected. When I told them what the charity organization informed me about vaccination, they said I can have the COVID vaccination only when I make a new asylum application. I cannot argue with them or ask further as she started to ask about where I'm staying right now, and she started to ask my address and other details. So, I just disconnected the call. I think I had COVID infection but I'm not sure because I was not sick like other people. I had some mild symptoms like fever headache, and I lost smell, but I was okay that time. It didn't affect me much it was like usual cold and fever. I just took some paracetamol from the pharmacy and after 4-5 days I was completely fine” (Jamal).

Even though Jamal (29, Male, Sudan) was aware that everyone, including undocumented migrants, was entitled to receive COVID vaccination regardless of their immigration status, the GP practice where he was previously registered failed to assist him. Instead, he was provided with incorrect information, stating that he needed to submit a fresh asylum application to receive healthcare services, including COVID vaccination. It seems possible to suggest that, yet another significant issue faced by undocumented migrants is that of misinformation due to a lack of understanding about the rules around treating migrants and which health services they are entitled to. It was certainly the case that during the pandemic, few received any real formal health care without a point of access into the system.

The impact of COVID-19 on the undocumented population likely cut across a range of social impacts including a rise in discrimination and stigmatising of migrants as disease spreaders, more lengthy lockdowns that severely restrict their movement for work, border closures that discouraged those who were otherwise willing to reunite with their families or return to other countries when safe to do so and slowed asylum processes. Health impacts that I have highlighted include the underlying health, social and work conditions that render these populations more susceptible and a lack of accessible information concerning the pandemic. Finally, medical and health impacts likely include lack of access to health-care services and fear of deportation among undocumented migrants, mental health issues, uncertainties around inclusion in vaccination programmes, and rising vaccine hesitancy in the population, and perhaps it is not known as it has not been studied or analysed but raised mortality levels. Farhad, who submitted a fresh asylum application to the Home Office, was invited by his GP practice to receive the COVID vaccination. However, he refused to get vaccinated because he was not provided the vaccination when his previous asylum claim was rejected by the Home Office and was homeless.

“Yes, I can have vaccination now after my new asylum application, but I don't want to have the vaccination now. this is because when I was struggling to get vaccination, they didn't provide one but now they want to provide me a vaccination and I don't want to have it now” (Farhad).

Ahmad, who was a homeless undocumented migrant, describes his situation during the COVID-19 restriction and lockdown, which involved a combination of fear and lack of food. He states that an animal has better protection and safeguarding compared to a human, and the legal status is the only way in which humans are treated as humans. His words highlight the plight of the undocumented well, where because of their minimal legal protections and the

dominance of ‘negative liberty’ (see Raymen, 2023) in supposedly progressive and wealthy liberal capitalist social democratic societies like the UK, there is a relative absence of ethical commitment enshrined in praxis for the undocumented (irrespective of what the notion of human rights promotes) and hence as usual, the more vulnerable tend to suffer the most. Ahmed was certainly one of the most vulnerable encountered and had suffered in a multitude of ways, as a victim of social exclusion, as a victim of crime, as a victim of poverty, but much of his victimisation was simply due to his precarious situation. However, even that intensified during the pandemic period:

‘It was really horrible because everyone was afraid. During that time, everything was closed I was struggling to get food. When I tried to get help from some friends, they did not even allow me inside their house window, they said sorry and asked me to leave. Few of them, was very much afraid, that they did not even see me and kept some food packet on the door and asked me to take the food and leave. Government gave so much money to people but did not give anything to people like me who were struggling without food and basic needs. At that time, I felt like in this country, if you are a dog you will be treated well and taken care well, but human doesn’t have value until you get a status to live’ (Ahmad).

The challenges faced by the undocumented migrants not only affected them but also affected their families back home, who were dependent on them for financial assistance. *Raju (44, male, India) and Chen (38, female, China)* both lost their employment when the COVID-19 pandemic started, which affected their own survival and their family back home as they stopped sending money for their maintenance.

“When COVID-19 pandemic started many people were happy because they didn’t have to go to work and many people doing their job from home. But people like us we’re not happy because we cannot do work from home.

I lost my job during COVID-19 pandemic and I suffered because I did not have enough money for my survival. Moreover, my family back in India, also suffered because they didn't have any other source of income apart from the money which I send to them. I don't know how I survived during COVID-19 pandemic but somehow, I managed. During that time, I was so desperate for the job that I was ready to do any job at any pay. The government announced many schemes to support the people during COVID-19 pandemic and gave money to many people who are struggling. But government completely forgot us during those hard times when people around the world were praying for each other. Government definitely knows that people like me who are illegal in this country might suffer during COVID but after knowing everything they let us suffer. It was clear from there point that they don't care about humanity and they only care about their political agenda and their benefits” (Raju).

“Life during COVID-19 was very difficult for me. I lost my job because most of the takeaways were closed, and I couldn't find any other job at that time immediately. I was scared of COVID-19 infection because I was sharing a house with 6 other Chinese women. We all are good friends but still there was some kind of fear within everyone after hearing news about death and serious health condition due to the COVID-19. More than the health and safety issues, we were worried about food and other expenses because nobody was working at that time. Few other women along with me were extremely in a difficult situation and worried a lot because we're not able to send any money back to our home. My family was completely dependent on my income and during that tough time I couldn't send any money to my family. Somehow, I managed six months and from November 2020 I started to work again but at a very low pay than what I was getting before COVID-19. I started to work in a grocery store as a cleaner which is a part time job for four hours every day and I was paid just £20 per day” (Chen).

The above account highlights the challenges experienced by Raju and Chen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they managed to survive in a similar way to how they usually went about life: low paid exploitation and lack of formal access

to support. Both were desperate to find a job for their survival and were willing to accept any payment offered at that time. Raju observed that many people generally were receiving support from the government, and yet, for the undocumented, the period of the pandemic was particularly precarious. Further, this raised the question of why undocumented migrants like him were ignored and did not receive any support from the government, even in an extremely difficult situation and in the face of an unknown virus that was said to be extremely dangerous and potentially lethal. Raju further expressed that the government's actions were driven more by political agendas than a genuine sense of humanity, particularly in failing to provide support to undocumented migrants who were more vulnerable during that time.

In the cases of Jamal and Farhad, they both shared a similar story as their asylum applications were rejected by the Home Office, and they faced extreme difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic for their survival. Farhad was homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic, and he faced food poverty during that time. Jamal's asylum application was rejected when the COVID-19 pandemic started, and he, like many others, also faced multiple examples that were illustrative of where and how migrants have been disproportionately affected by social, epidemiological, and health impacts during the pandemic. Jamal was forced to move out of the council accommodation due to the fear of detention and deportation, which would likely have heightened his risk of exposure to Covid:

“They [Home Office] rejected my asylum application when COVID-19 pandemic started. I didn't know what to do at that time and I was in so much fear about deportation than COVID-19. I know that when people get rejected Home Office put them in the detention centre and deport them back to their country. I never wanted to end up like that. So, I just moved out of the accommodation provided by the Home Office to a friend house.

From that time, I have been moving from one accommodation to another. My friend he's really a nice person and he helped me a lot and still he's helping me. He took care of my food and accommodation for more than a year because I couldn't find any job during the COVID-19 lockdown. It was really hard for me because I was completely dependent on my friend, I never wanted to be like that. It was a very stressful situation. I was worried about my situation more than the COVID-19 pandemic" (Jamal).

"During COVID-19 pandemic I was homeless, and it was extremely difficult during that time. I hope you can imagine what I might have gone through. it's difficult to explain. It was very difficult during the initial time because everything was closed, and everyone was afraid of COVID-19. I have literally lived for many days by having just biscuits and water. There are days when I didn't have anything to eat, I was just lived by having water. In the normal time at least, I can go to any takeaway and ask for food, many times they have given me food. but during COVID-19 lockdown because everything was closed, I didn't have that option as well. I used to do cleaning job in a takeaway but due to the COVID-19 lockdown, I lost that, and I was in so much stress at that time because I didn't know what to do. At times I had thoughts of taking my life, but I couldn't do that as well. I pray to God that nobody should go through what I went through, it was extremely difficult" (Farhad).

A small positive thread that runs through many of these narratives is the fact that for undocumented migrants, there can be instances of community and solidarity that stand against wider claims that perhaps social exclusion is the routine experience for all (see Winlow and Hall, 2013). Friends and associates' step in to assist when the state does not. Does this speak to some interpersonal solidarity within these social groups?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, undocumented migrants faced numerous challenges, including food poverty, limited access to healthcare services, unemployment, and, in some cases, homelessness. These challenges not only

impacted them physically but also had a significant impact on their mental health and well-being. The narratives above shed light on the immense mental pressure and stress experienced by undocumented migrants during the pandemic. It is evident from the above narrative that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already tough circumstances faced by undocumented migrants in the UK.

Education and Undocumented Migrants

Undocumented immigrants in the United Kingdom encounter numerous difficulties as they navigate their lives within a society where their lack of legal status often leads to marginalisation and vulnerability. While challenges such as limited access to healthcare services and exclusion from formal employment sectors are widely documented, accessing the education system presents another substantial obstacle for undocumented migrants. Around the world, undocumented migrants, including children and adults, encounter significant challenges in getting an education because of legal restrictions, financial constraints, and language barriers.

Charles (41, Male, Ivory Coast) came to the UK with his wife and two children on a visitor visa. However, they did not return to their home country and eventually became undocumented. He expressed deep concern for their children's education and future because neither of them is attending a formal school due to their lack of legal status and fear of detection. This situation puts tremendous stress on their family, and they are concerned about their uncertain future.

“It is not easy to live in this country without status (legal status). Wherever you go, the first thing people ask about is the visa documents and address proof. Before my family's asylum application was rejected by the Home Office, everything was fine as I was having some kind of temporary documents. However, everything changed when our application was

rejected. Now we have to live hiding from the police and immigration department. For the last two years, I stopped my children from going to school because it is risky for the whole family if anything happens. My wife and I try to teach them as much as possible, and we also take them to charity organizations where they teach students, but it is not like usual school. I know that it is not good for them and their future, but we don't have any other option, and we don't want to take any risk by sending them to school. Sometimes I feel like both of my daughters understand our family situation even though they are very small” (Charles).

Education is a basic right, and, in the UK, school education is provided to all children regardless of their immigration status. However, undocumented children face difficulties in accessing schools due to the strict immigration enforcement, which might jeopardise their whole family and put them into a more vulnerable position. Walsh (2013) highlights that the Local Education Authorities in the UK have a duty to provide education to all children, however many undocumented children face obstacles in accessing school education due to their immigration status.

Peter's experience with the education system in the United Kingdom was quite challenging for him, as he couldn't pursue his aspirations due to his immigration status. He aspires to become a cybersecurity professional, but his asylum claim application is currently pending with the Home Office for a decision, due to this, he has limited access to the education system, including student finance and other forms of support. Apart from his aspirations, he is also interested in providing support and helping people like him who are undocumented or seeking asylum:

“I want to become a cybersecurity professional and that's why I'm taking different courses which are offered for free by colleges to improve my knowledge. But I have to wait till I get a positive decision from the Home

Office, so I can join a degree program at a good university. I could join a degree program now, but I can't afford the course fees, and I can't apply for student financing until I receive a decision. You know the situation is difficult, but I don't have any other option then to wait. I've started volunteering with a charity organization to help asylum seekers and failed asylum seekers in my free time because it makes me happy, and I've always wanted to help because I know how stressful the situation is" (Peter).

Farhad, who finished his college education in Iraq, was interested in going to university to continue his education. Like Peter, he also experienced limited access to the education system due to his immigration status, which affects his ability to secure student finance. Consequently, he was only offered the opportunity to pursue Level 1 and Level 2 courses at the nearest college, which are insignificant for his career aspirations:

"Before coming to the UK, I finished my college and studied economics and commerce. I was very much interested in going to university to do a degree course in accounting and management. But I couldn't join the course because people who are in the asylum system waiting for a decision from the Home Office cannot get student finance. Also, I would have to pay £18,000 per year for my course as they classify me as an international student. With the help of a charity organization, I could only manage to get admission to pursue level 1 and level 2 courses, which are very basic and not useful for my career" (Farhad).

Jamal was interested in learning the English language for both his survival and employment purposes. He was offered the opportunity to study Level 1 and Level 2 English language courses at his nearest college. He successfully completed his Level 1 course. However, before he could start his Level 2 course, his asylum application was rejected by the Home Office, which significantly impacted his education:

“I was really happy with my life when I was waiting for my asylum application decision from Home Office. some people complain about their life and the benefits they're getting from the Home Office during this wait time, but I was happy for what I was getting. The best thing which happened to me after coming to UK was going to the school again. I really enjoyed learning English language from both the charity organization and the college. I also passed my level 1 course and when I was about to start my level 2, my asylum application was rejected. after that I stopped going to the college. I thought I will complete this course and join the carpentry course. But now I am just doing car wash every day” (Jamal).

The data highlights that undocumented migrant (both children and adults) experience significant barriers to accessing education due to their lack of legal status. Although, in the UK, the education authorities provide education to children regardless of their immigration status, the constant fear and threat of detection and detention discourages undocumented families from accessing education. This hesitation continues to higher education as well, where the lack of legal status affects undocumented migrants from accessing colleges and universities, which limits their personal growth. In the case of Jamal, the rejection of his asylum application directly impacted his education, and he was withdrawn from the course by the institution. These barriers significantly impact the migrant's personal growth and compromise the human flourishing that generates harm (Pemberton, 2015). The challenges and restrictions faced by the undocumented migrants in accessing education demonstrate a form of structural harm where their aspirations and dreams are compromised, which force them into cycles of marginalisation and social exclusion.

Dreams Deferred: The Aspirations of Undocumented Migrant

Undocumented migrants face numerous challenges while navigating their life in the UK, along with their aspirations and dreams of a better life in the future.

However, often their dreams are deferred due to legal, social, and economic barriers. Despite many challenges, the undocumented migrants continue to hold onto their dreams and aspirations, striving for a brighter future for themselves and their families. In this section, we will explore their dreams, aspirations, and future plans with their narratives.

From the recorded testimonies, it was found that a few undocumented migrants and failed people seeking asylum are looking to regularise their immigration status by making asylum applications. On the other hand, the migrants who already have fresh asylum claims are just waiting to receive their decision from the Home Office. The narratives clearly show that their future dreams and aspirations just depend on the positive decision of the asylum application. The reality seems to be the absence of freedom to pursue dreams and aspirations and the systemic compromising of routes to 'human flourishing' that neoliberal states³ impose. Essentially, undocumented migrants seem to have the most minimal of negative liberties - the right to life and the freedom from torture but little else in actuality. This is where the notion of Western liberalism and its freedoms seem hollow and most transparent. Farhad (30, Male, Iraq) who is waiting for decision on his asylum application, expressed his desperation starting a family life which ultimately depends on the decision he receive.

"I pray to Allah that my asylum application gets accepted by the Home Office this time because I cannot go back to my country as there is so much risk, and even I could be killed. If again my asylum application gets rejected, I have only two options that is live in this country illegally or move to another country like France or Germany. All I want is a simple life like

³ Neoliberal states prioritise market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action' and emphasise deregulation, privatisation, and reduced public spending (Harvey, 2005). However, the relationship between neoliberal economic policies and immigration restrictions requires fuller analysis than possible here.

other people, I want to get married and have children, because right now, I don't have anyone whom I can call family" (Farhad).

In the case of Charles (41, Male, Ivory Coast) and Jamal (29, Male, Sudan), both are failed people seeking asylum looking to make a fresh asylum application with the Home Office. Charles has already planned to get help from a private solicitor for his family's fresh asylum application and expressed his confidence. On the other hand, Jamal is very doubtful and uncertain about his application, as he was rejected before, and also expressed concerns about his future life:

"I don't know what our future is going to be, and I thought we would somehow manage to get asylum in the UK, but now the situation looks very difficult here. I just want to try and make a fresh asylum application for my family. I understand that everything depends on the solicitor who prepares the application and other documents for the asylum claim. Recently, through one of my friends, I met a private solicitor who said that he could help me and my family get status easily. He also mentioned that he will manage all the documentation and other required processes on his own, but he mentioned that he will charge me £10,000 for my whole family to get the status. This is the only chance my family has right now, and I don't want to go with the solicitor provided by the Home Office, as I feel like they are not good enough and sometimes it's difficult to contact them to explain my situation. I just really hope that my family gets the status so that we can live peacefully" (Charles).

"I never thought about my future because I don't know where to go and what to do in this situation. I just stopped talking to people about my situation because I don't know who to trust. I just speak to only one person from the charity organisation, and he knows everything about me, but he said he cannot help me unless I make fresh asylum claim. and I don't know whether it would work for me or not because my last asylum application was rejected as I don't have enough evidence to give it to Home Office or court. sometimes I feel like I don't have a future and my life will end just working here there illegally" (Jamal).

Chen (38, female, China) is determined not to get married and start a family until she and her boyfriend manage to regularise their immigration status. The challenges and hardships faced by her as an undocumented migrant have influenced her decision not to marry or have children until they get their immigration status. She also wants to protect her future children from these difficulties due to her lack of legal status.

“I have my family back home and I'm happy for them because I'm sending enough money to them every month. they don't know what I'm doing here and my struggles but I'm happy that my family members are happy back home. I'm not married, and, in this situation, I will never marry anyone. I have a boyfriend who is also a Chinese illegal migrant. He said he is going to apply for status. Many times, we had discussion about marriage, children and family but it's difficult for people like us. I don't want my children to be illegal like me and struggle to live their life. I don't want my children to suffer like me to get basic needs like education, health and other benefits. So, I'm waiting for my boyfriend to get his legal status so that I can apply for my status through him and only after that we'll get married” (Chen).

Ahmad, who is currently a homeless undocumented migrant, expressed disappointment with his current life and feels that he has no prospects for the future. From his narrative, it is evident that his homelessness, along with the lack of legal status, has significantly impacted his mental health and overall well-being and that he was thinking of committing suicide.

“I don't know what to say, I don't even have a life then what is the point of thinking about the future? Sometimes, even I think about committing suicide, but I am afraid to do that. I just pray God that it would be good if I die soon peacefully because I don't have any hope left in anyone” (Ahmad).

Conclusion

The accounts presented in this study have provided a deep understanding of the profound challenges faced by undocumented migrants in the United Kingdom, particularly in accessing essential services such as healthcare and education. The COVID-19 pandemic further exaggerated the difficulties faced by the undocumented migrants in accessing critical health services, including getting COVID-19 vaccinations. The stories of undocumented migrants have shown the immense challenges faced by them in pursuing their educational aspirations and career goals due to their legal status. These narratives also illustrate the dreams and aspirations of undocumented immigrants for a better future; however, these aspirations are often dependent on regularising their immigration status.

In recent years, the UK's asylum backlog has been at the heart of the debate over immigration. Since the 2019 general election, it has increased substantially, reaching the highest levels ever recorded in June 2022. In December 2022, the then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak set out his plans to "abolish the backlog of initial asylum decisions" in 2023 as part of his five-point plan to reduce illegal immigration. Since his defeat in the 2024 general election, the Labour Party and their new government under Sir Keir Starmer have confirmed Labour would resume processing asylum applications for people who have previously arrived in the UK illegally. Under previous legislation, tens of thousands of such people, including those who arrived on small boats, had been effectively blocked from gaining refugee status. As of September end, 27,500 people had crossed the Channel in 2024 in small boats (BBC News, 2020). That is more than in the same period in the previous year, but fewer than in 2022. In 2023, 29,437 people came to the UK in small boats and in the 2022 total of 45,755 (BBC News, 2020). However, the number arriving is significant, and figures have only been collected

since 2018. Yet while the mainstream discussion is one of being swamped or overwhelmed, the number of annual applications for asylum, including dependents, peaked at about 103,000 in 2002, as people fled conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq. Making slight reforms around the edges with practices around asylum processes only works to simply retain the status quo. Arguably, there is a need for a complete shift in societal structure to stop Western capitalist incursions driving forced migration. However, such large-scale changes face serious political challenges due to established interests and electoral concerns. The causes of migration are more complex than commonly understood and connect to the historical actions of Western countries. Whilst the UK government now clearly focuses on border control policies, this moves away from the humanitarian values found in international refugee agreements that the UK helped create. Given these political realities and the fact that national policies cannot easily address root causes of undocumented migration, this study argues for practical reforms to improve conditions for undocumented migrants in the UK. Rather than expecting complete system change, the emphasis should be on realistic improvements within current limitations, ensuring basic rights for those already in the UK. This approach recognises that whilst governments cannot fix centuries of historical harm, they still have a duty to protect vulnerable people within their borders.

Chapter 7: Intersection of Undocumented Migrants and Law Enforcement

Introduction

Having captured a range of important themes around the precarious position that undocumented migrants occupy in the UK at present, framed particularly around the often 'liminal' position that they occupy, reveals the complex dynamics shaping their everyday lives. Their exploitation, victimisation, and experiences of social exclusion, particularly those arising from this liminal status, demonstrate the multidimensional nature of their vulnerability and harms experienced. Migration is one of the most divisive issues in global politics today, and the media play a crucial role in how communities understand and respond. As a group, migrants (and especially the undocumented) have become latter-day 'folk devils' (Cohen, 1972). They are now frequently attacked and demonised by political elites and mainstream media, and increasingly by the growing online and often unchecked media 'influencer culture' that exists on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram (Abidin, 2018), as a means to build their popularity and advance a populist political agenda, and this is common as a global problem.

People seeking asylum (and particularly migrants entering the UK by lorry and then latterly by what has commonly become known as 'small boats') were one of the most salient issues during the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, when the British public narrowly voted to leave the European Union. During the campaign, the 'Vote Leave' side frequently portrayed these migrants as both economic and security threats, future problems, a burden that cost too much, and a dangerous challenge to the future community cohesion of the United Kingdom. Post Brexit, this political climate has hardly abated, and borders, immigration, and

policing of migration are rapidly becoming the centre ground of criminal justice policy. For this reason, the discussion will now move on to the issues of law enforcement. Policing undocumented migrants is a complex and challenging responsibility for law enforcement agencies, for both the UK Police and Border Agency, and yet these issues have been largely under-researched (Duvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). Undocumented migrants often end up in extremely vulnerable and exploitative environments, as they do not have access to the criminal justice system due to their lack of legal status, which is exploited by criminals and opportunists. This chapter will explore the experiences of law enforcement officers' interactions with undocumented migrants within the West Midlands region of the UK. Furthermore, this chapter will explore the difficulties and challenges faced by law enforcement agencies in policing undocumented migrants.

Crime Against Undocumented Migrants

Having already suggested extensively, drawing on empirical information gained from my 15 in-depth interviews, that the very lack of legal status to live and work in the UK, undocumented migrants are pushed to live and work in very vulnerable and exploitative conditions. It is not a stretch to suggest that almost all had experienced different forms of exploitation that are often typical of the sort that the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the very framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support, is supposed to highlight. Due to their undocumented status and precarious position, they as victims may not have been aware that they are being trafficked or exploited (Home Office, 2025). Indeed, they may have consented to elements of their exploitation or accepted their situation as a part, and it is possible to aver that many had entered into something of a pact of

complicit guilt that was knowingly expecting some form of exploitation because their working practices were strictly speaking, illegal (ibid). Yet the lack of legal status was also a barrier to their protection by the mechanisms of criminal justice, especially if they experienced crime and victimisation, whether more conventionally understood or otherwise.

Uncertain living conditions make them fearful of their situation and restrict their interaction with others. Things get worse when they become victims of crime or exploited by someone. There are instances where undocumented migrants are targeted by criminals and sometimes individuals close to them who know about their situation (Lahman et al., 2011; Madsen, 2004). Even then, they choose not to report to law enforcement due to the fear of detention and deportation. This is one of the biggest barriers between undocumented migrants and law enforcement. Media reporting about the unfair treatment of undocumented migrants by law enforcement further adds to the situation. So, it is very crucial to understand both undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers' perspectives on crime against and reporting by undocumented migrants.

Interviews with undocumented migrants revealed that some of them have experienced theft, robbery, and physical and verbal abuse. Studies conducted by Madsen (2004) and (Sung et al. 2016) also made similar observations, like property crimes, robbery, and theft are very prevalent among undocumented migrants. This would, in some ways, be unsurprising, as undocumented tend to be young and male, a group that disproportionately features in crimes, especially in. Finally, we know that crime, as conventionally understood, tends to impact most on the poorest and those at the lower end of the socio-economic strata. It is, therefore, perhaps no shock that many of those I spoke to could recount multiple and frequent experiences of victimisation, something that contrasts quite

starkly with the often political and media representation of them as offenders and threats. On the very day writing this, the Daily Telegraph newspaper leads with the headline “Britain has ‘Most illegal migrants in Europe’ (Hymas, 2024). There is almost never a consideration of any of the ways migrants might be victims.

It was also the researchers’ understanding that across this range of experiences, not a single one of the migrant participants had ever reported a crime. This, it can be speculated, is again for a range of reasons such as fear of deportation, fear of police, language barriers, lack of knowledge about reporting procedures, concerns about retaliation, and cultural norms around handling disputes within communities rather than involving authorities (Gutierrez and Kirk, 2015). Still, it has to be a factor that most stated that their reticence to engage with law enforcement agencies was due to the fear of detention. There was a wider expression of concern that any undocumented migrants who tried to make a report of the crime were not given the right support and information to make the report from the police. Ali, a man who himself had experienced a fair amount of hardship and stress, was indicative of a general attitude amongst the research participants when he said:

“No, I didn’t report about the incident. I hope you very well know the situation. I was really afraid to go to the police because I was illegal. However, I made a report to the restaurant owner for whom we all were working. He also couldn’t do anything because the other people were working for him longer than me, and there were no issues before. So, I had to let it go” (Ali).

Ahmed was another who expressed deep concern about the frequent experiences of abuse, humiliation and victimisation. His account illustrates the comprehensive vulnerability experienced by undocumented migrants, which is corroborated by the research of Gutierrez & Kirk (2017) into the relationship

between immigration and the underreporting of crime. Ahmed's testimony reveals how undocumented individuals become easy targets for various forms of harm, particularly physical violence and mental harm from acquaintances, strangers, and other marginalised groups, whilst lacking any meaningful recourse to protection or justice:

"Many times, I was victim of crime. Initially, when I was staying with my friends and moving from one place to another. Many times, they hit me without any reason because they were drunk. Many times, they have verbally abused me for no reason and insulted me very badly. Same happened when I was homeless and other homeless people abused me both verbally and physically. Even, they have stolen my phone and some money. What to report, when they don't even consider as a human. I know that they are not going to help me or believe me" (Ahmad).

Some of my participants, such as Raju suggested that the only form of power that was held in such a position was to leave employment, but also began to highlight the greater problem that comes because of the liminal position that the undocumented occupy in regards to the absence of rights and protections in the UK, where for the most part it simply impacts on the day-to-day management strategies the undocumented employ. However, as we see, if there is the more serious experience of victimisation, contact with law enforcement can in itself be challenging and fraught with complexities.

"I was victim of crime many times. When I used to work in the food packing company, it was mostly cash in hand job. Many people knew about this, and I was weak, so some people took advantage and robbed me twice. After that, I left my job because of this issue. Many times, people verbally abuse people like us, and we can't do anything. So we just leave that place and that's what I always do. Once I was in a similar situation and another person was drunk, he started to hit me. I tried to defend myself, but I couldn't, and I lost completely when he hit on my face I started to bleed.

Then he took his car and left that place immediately. I noted down his car registration number. I didn't want to go to the police station, so I called them to make a report. But they were not helpful, the lady police officer with whom I spoke was asking for more details about the person [who assaulted me] and other details, which I didn't have, and then she started to ask about me. When I refused to give more details about me, she said I couldn't make a report over the phone" (Raju).

It is interesting that Raju did not avoid all contact with law enforcement having been quite seriously assaulted, indeed his initial instinct was to seek to report and to seek assistance. It would seem that it was only in the context of this reporting and too many awkward questions about himself that he failed to meet the appropriate threshold of engagement.

Based on undocumented migrants' interviews, political and legal policies mentioned previously that have made for a hostile environment sit somewhere behind the individual's reluctance to report because of their status. It may not be so simple as immigration policies in the UK directly discourage undocumented migrants not to report crimes, but it is worth again highlighting the widespread unwillingness to report that I encountered amongst participants as standard. These crimes add further to the dark figure of crime (unreported crimes), which is often ignored by the police. This non-reporting of crime further increases the vulnerability of undocumented migrants and the confidence of criminals or exploiters. Over the period, the vulnerability increases to a level that creates fear of crime and mental health issues among undocumented migrants.

From the above narrative, it is evident that undocumented migrants choose not to report crimes due to fear of detention and deportation. However, the police officers described that if someone comes forward to report a crime, they provide maximum support to help them regardless of their legal status (NPCC, 2018).

Further, police officers mentioned they might be victims of crime, but they also violated the immigration law. Accordingly, they follow their process, which includes reporting the crime, and they pass on the information about the undocumented migrants to immigration enforcement:

“Most police officers in my team or who are working with me on this, have the mindset that they are in this job because they want to help people. Regardless of where you've come from or what your nationality is, if you're here because you need help, police officers want to help you. So, yes, there are things we would have to do differently in the case of undocumented migrants, but that wouldn't change our fundamental approach to helping those in need” (Police Officer 1).

“Of course, anyone who reports a crime that needs investigation should be treated separately from their immigration status. Regardless of someone's status in the UK, they deserve the same treatment under the law. If someone reveals they are undocumented while reporting a crime, that's a separate issue from the crime itself. It's essential to address both aspects appropriately. Reporting a crime shouldn't be hindered by concerns about immigration status. We need to ensure that individuals feel safe to come forward, especially if they are victims of exploitation. Ultimately, our focus should be on stopping criminals and protecting those who may be vulnerable to exploitation” (Police Officer 3).

What seemingly is missing from the recognition of the law enforcement officers above is that there is really a very direct conflict here for the undocumented migrants precisely because, as individuals, they can't feel safe by coming forward if the policy is to address both the crime (their victimisation) and their immigration status because such a policy does not treat them as victims but as both offender and victim. The former reduces the perceived ability to engage and report the experience as the latter.

Parmar (2021) illustrates from their research into the policing of migration that the police discretion was commonly “used as a compensatory tool to racialise certain individuals and not others” when their processes, procedures and authorised practices restricted their autonomy. Some of the police officers questioned suggested at least that their own practice would be to put the status as ‘victim’ first, such as the like:

“If someone is reporting a crime to me, my main priority would be to address the crime they're reporting and take appropriate action. From a police perspective, we would treat them as victims of crime. If they are undocumented migrants, that aspect would be secondary, and at a later stage, we might inform the immigration department. Furthermore, we don't have handheld fingerprint machines like immigration might use to check for legal status” (Police Officer 4).

The above narratives of police officers suggest that the police officers' stated aim was generally to help the undocumented migrant in some way. However, they believed that they had to follow a different process, as undocumented migrants, while vulnerable, have also violated immigration laws and do not occupy an unquestionable victim status. The officers' words highlight that due to the complex situation with their immigration status, it is not as simple as just dealing with the undocumented purely as a victim, the police would be obliged to report to immigration, although the migrant's vulnerabilities and victim status, some such as the officer above suggests, would always come first. An interesting aside to this, however, is the almost rueful reflection which comes with the lack of access to immigration data that would make detecting and taking enforcement action against the undocumented more expedient, effective and efficient.

This tension and the sort of dual role between safeguarding and law enforcement were a central theme of all of the interviews that I conducted with law enforcement

officers and suggested at least that there was something of a tension in the way that they came to regard their role. At least notionally, many did give accounts that were fully attuned to and aware of the need for safeguarding processes and that recognised the complex and precarious position that undocumented often existed in. When I asked law enforcement officers individually about the engagement with migrants and their reporting of crime they suggested that there were no issues and that they could report:

“Generally speaking, yes. But I can't give you a specific example because I can't think of one. Undocumented migrants are unlikely to report things to the police because they are too scared of the consequences related to their situation. However, we do deal with a lot of cases involving sexual exploitation and labour exploitation. These are the cases we know about, but there are probably many more involving undocumented individuals that go unreported. Forced labour and sexual exploitation are common issues. For instance, workers in nail bars are often found in these situations, both forced labour and sometimes, sexual exploitation. We frequently visit these types of locations with immigration authorities to take enforcement action, but we also focus on safeguarding. While undocumented migrants might not actively report their situations, such details often come out once they enter the National Referral Mechanism” (Police Officer 6).

By analysing both law enforcement and undocumented migrants' narratives, it is evident that undocumented migrants do not report victimisation and experiences of crime to the police or law enforcement. It is also fair to say that the interviews highlighted some of the disconnect between the migrant's non-reporting due to fear of not being believed or taken seriously due to their immigration status and the risk that reporting might result in sanction, and the expressed compassion of police officers to deal with them as a victim and support the vulnerable person. However, the migrants' fears of their immigration status being discovered is a reality, with police having to report to immigration. The law enforcement officers

suggested that they were more concerned about human trafficking, labour exploitation, or modern slavery. These crimes are often more harmful and involve the most vulnerable in society being exploited and harmed, and this concern likely fits in with vulnerability agendas in policing that have come to dominate in England and Wales in recent years. In such cases, the authorities suggested that they would treat the migrants as victims and provide maximum support to them. However, the participants show that the transfer of policy into practice may be much more complex.

However, if crimes should be treated as serious and safeguarding the victims is vital, there remains a valid criticism more generally concerning how the police can identify wider crimes and their victims, encouraging those who are victims to come forward and report, breaking down barriers to reporting, and a perception that they will act as an unsympathetic and inconsistent form of enforcement around immigration issues. Particularly from the migrant side, the handing over of a victim's information to immigration enforcement and the perception that this routinely occurs is likely a barrier to making the more vulnerable (including real victims of offences and those who do fall under the NRM protections) lose confidence in law enforcement agencies and attempt to avoid contact with them. This situation is extremely difficult, and perhaps we need a more evidence-based approach to safeguarding migrant victims. It is certainly worth policymakers considering promoting an amnesty, perhaps on some form of low-level self-implication around immigration offences and the passing and transfer of information between police and immigration enforcement, if we want an effective way to encourage undocumented migrants to be involved in a more effective and graduated reporting mechanism for all that seeks to target the high-end harms

and exploitation of the vulnerable that do seem to happen relatively routinely yet get little reported from direct victims (Keith, 2018).

Law Enforcement Officer's Experience Dealing with Undocumented Migrants

There has been a lot of negative media coverage with respect to law enforcement's handling and treatment of undocumented migrants, including BBC Panorama's 2017 exposé 'Britain's Immigration Secrets' which revealed systematic abuse at Brook House detention centre (Panorama, 2017), Guardian coverage of the Windrush scandal that won journalist Amelia Gentleman the 2018 Paul Foot Award for exposing wrongful deportations (The Guardian, 2018), and academic analysis showing a 137% surge in negative migration coverage after 2012 (Runnymede Trust, 2014). This has significantly affected the perception of law enforcement among the public and undocumented migrants as well as shaped their interaction with law enforcement. Considering this, it is crucial to explore and understand the experiences of law enforcement officers in dealing with undocumented migrants. This section will cover the experiences of police and immigration enforcement officers in the West Midlands region of the UK.

During the interviews with the police officers, when asked about their interaction with the undocumented migrants, it was found that the police officers' interaction with undocumented migrants is very limited. This limited interaction is primarily because undocumented migrants often remain hidden within the community and avoid any interaction with police officers even when they become victims of crime (Lahman et al., 2011). Further, it was found that police officers are not directly involved in the enforcement of immigration laws. However, there are instances where police officers accompany immigration enforcement officers to assist in

conducting immigration enforcement raids and hence the perception is that law enforcement is one and the same, a universal.

“Often on request we accompany immigration enforcement officers to conduct raids, such as visiting a nail bar, regular visits to car washes and places where we have intelligence of cannabis grow operation, or brothels. During our encounters, if someone needs help and if they are exploited by someone or under forced labour, we would handle them similarly as any other victims. We would focus on treating them as a victim and providing immediate support and accommodation, then proceed with the necessary legal and immigration processes” (Police officer 1).

Similarly, police officer 2 and police officer 3, described their roles while assisting the immigration enforcement officers in conducting raids and shared their experience dealing with undocumented migrants:

“When it comes to undocumented migrants, it’s usually immigration enforcement comes first. Even when we arrest them for immigration-related offences, we have to formally inform immigration enforcement and from there they take over. If something is brought to our attention during the day, it’s usually because there’s a concern of exploitation or forced labour or trafficking. We treat them as victims first and foremost, with the immigration aspect being a secondary consideration” (Police Officer).

“I’ve accompanied immigration officers to visit organisations such as takeaways, car washes and other potential areas to conduct checks whether people are working legally and in compliant premises. We recently did one involving takeaways, so we went along with them just in case if any issues related to slavery or exploitation. If it’s an immigration-led job, then that would be the primary purpose. Our focus would be on investigating any concerns related to slavery if we were visiting those premises. Often, we work jointly because other issues may also be identified during these visits” (Police Officer 3).

Police Officer 2, who was working along with immigration enforcement to identify and investigate cases related to human trafficking and exploitation, described that there is a significant change in their approach. Currently, if undocumented migrants are found to be exploited by someone or have been forced into the country through human trafficking, they are identified and treated as victims. She compared this approach with her experience as a uniformed officer, where if an undocumented migrant is found, they would be likely to arrest them immediately:

“I would say that since we've been in this team, the way we deal with undocumented migrants has changed significantly. When we come across someone who has entered the country under such circumstances, they are generally identified as victims of exploitation. We primarily deal with them as victims. In the past, when I was in uniformed police officer and encountered such individuals, perhaps from a lorry drop or similar situations 10 years ago, they would have been treated as suspects, detained immediately, and taken into custody. So, there's been a complete shift in our approach in this role because of the nature of our investigations” (Police Officer 2).

Of course, we cannot know how frequently other much more routinely tasked response and community officers who are not in officer 2s specialist role might knowingly come across an undocumented migrant, and if they were to, what the circumstances would be, and hence how this impacts on perceptions. It is of course, unlikely with the plethora of crime, public order and wider tasks they are charged with performing, and with the limited powers to arrest and detain that police routinely see detection and apprehension of the undocumented as a useful purpose, but we can speculate that it would largely not be, and this seemed to be the common view in the content of my interviews with law enforcement staff. If undocumented migrants were not breaking the law in a significant way, the path with the police was unlikely to routinely cross. On the other hand, the immigration

officer shared their experience dealing with undocumented migrants. Their primary function was to the enforcement of immigration law and if they identify anyone in violation of immigration law, they arrest them:

“I’ve come across undocumented migrants throughout my life in various roles. I was part of many immigration raids and interviewed undocumented migrants. We conduct raids based on intelligence we receive, sometimes from our own channel and sometimes it is from local police. We conducted raids to identify if anyone is in violation of the immigration laws. If we find someone undocumented migrant, we arrest them, and an initial interview will be conducted. Then they will be transferred to the nearest detention centre and there they will have legal aid and legal advice. Most of them usually claim asylum but it totally depends on their situation” (Immigration Officer 1).

Further, police officer 2 and police officer 3 described the procedure they follow to process undocumented migrants as victims, if they have found any concerns of human trafficking or forced labour. This includes referring the individual to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and seeking support from other organisations to safeguard the victim:

“Our primary focus is safeguarding the victim. We would visit them, try to find accommodation, and involve the National Referral Mechanism and the Salvation Army, which has a duty to provide accommodation. However, there are significant gaps in this system. Often, we have to find temporary accommodation so we can speak to them properly, see if they’ll give statements, build rapport, and determine the next steps” (Police Officer 2).

“Usually, if an undocumented migrant is caught in connection with any illegal activities like selling drugs or growing cannabis. If they subsequently disclose that they were brought into the country against their will and forced to work, they would likely be referred to the National Referral Mechanism. Once in the NRM, they would receive accommodation and

support. It's less common for them to be immediately deported; that might happen later in the process, depending on the outcome of their NRM assessment. However, the NRM process itself can be lengthy, often taking 2-3 years to determine the final outcome" (Police Officer 3).

It is important to understand the police officer's role when it comes to dealing with undocumented migrants. It seems from the data that the priorities from a policing perspective are far from clear-cut and somewhat subjective to the individual officer, migrant or incident they attended. In contrast, it would seem that while immigration enforcement is an authority that directly deals with undocumented migrants and the police officers' role is more secondary in nature, this perception did not exist amongst the undocumented migrant participants that I interviewed who simply tended to regard any state authority as a site of risk that was best avoided. It was found that if police officers encountered undocumented migrants, they have to formally inform the immigration enforcement and seek their guidance to process them accordingly.

"Our policy is straightaway that whenever officers encounter undocumented migrants, they should immediately contact the control room for immigration guidance. The control room provides a set of instructions and questions for the officers to follow. However, there have been instances where we've arrived in the morning to find that these procedures weren't followed, and the migrants had already been detained by roadside patrols or taken into custody at police stations or other locations. In such cases, attempts are made to conduct the necessary checks later. The protocol is clear upon encountering migrants, officers are to contact the control room, which then determines whether they should be detained and what further actions are required" (Police officer 2).

"In my experience, the police encounter undocumented migrants in several ways, and I have handled these situations in various forms. Unaccompanied minors sometimes present themselves at police stations

or are found at train stations. We also find undocumented migrants in lorries, either reported by others or during routine stops. Additionally, individuals arrested for other offences may turn out to be undocumented. In each case, we follow specific procedures, including contacting Immigration Command and Control for guidance. Our goal is to ensure the migrants' safety, verify their identities, and consider the potential involvement of human trafficking networks in their transport” (Police Officer 7)

From the narratives, it was found that immigration raids are led by immigration enforcement officers, and the police officers accompany them to support and assist them from a police perspective. The police officers' role and function are notionally formed by the task of identifying and safeguarding the victims of human trafficking and victims of exploitation like forced labour or sexual exploitation. Police and immigration had seemingly internalised and recognised these differences. However, the undocumented migrants that were interviewed saw none of this. This disconnect highlights a fundamental issue that identification as a “victim” does not eliminate the threat of immigration enforcement but merely deferred. The institutional framework still positions them within an enforcement system where recognition as a "victim" provides little to no protection from eventual immigration consequences. Therefore, migrants' reluctance to engage with police is entirely rational, as they understand that the separation between victim support and immigration enforcement is procedural rather than protective, and that cooperation with police may still ultimately result in detention or deportation despite initial victim-focused approaches.

Analysis of police officers' narratives indicates that their perception of victimhood was primarily based on selected crimes like human trafficking or exploitation, forced labour or sexual exploitation. This approach creates a moral binary that distinguishes between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' migrants. Where trafficking

victims are constructed as 'good migrants' worthy of protection, while those migrating for any other reasons such as war, persecution or economic reasons are positioned as 'bad migrants' who have supposedly chosen to bypass formal channels. This discourse has deep historical roots in Victorian philanthropy and the concept of the 'deserving poor', where charitable aid and support was reserved for those deemed victims of circumstance (such as widows, orphans, the disabled) while excluding those seen as responsible for their own misfortune. Such frameworks have historically served to limit solidarity and maintain structural inequalities by allowing selective compassion that does not challenge underlying systems of exclusion.

However, for the undocumented migrants interviewed, many of whom had or were perhaps at some point deserving of this very label and who were, in this way, victims of crime, the experiences, perceptions, and framing of their experiences were not under the broad area of human trafficking or modern slavery. While many had experienced forms and abuses that absolutely could and would fit under such categories: low wages, long hours, poor conditions, illegal practices, denial of wages, sometimes violence, threats and beatings, this was just life. This was the undocumented migrant's lot in a low-wage service sector economy that largely treated them as disposable, expendable, largely anonymous, and mostly meaningless. These official categories obscure how structural violence, global inequality, and historical relationships between countries shape migration patterns, instead individualising systemic problems into questions of personal victimhood. That experience might be different, for example, a white, male, wealthy tourist visa overstayer from Canada or New Zealand, but such individuals do not tend to feature on the lowest rungs of the social strata. This contrast reveals how these moral categories are fundamentally

racialised and classed, with race, nationality, and economic status determining who is constructed as deserving of sympathy versus suspicion. The 15 individuals who were interviewed largely did.

Indeed, the general framing of migration, undocumented migrants and illegal status, along with the policy of creating a hostile environment, seems replete with discrimination. These approaches fail to consider the reality and complexities of migration, asylum, and refugee status. There is a troubling contradiction: while the UK criticises people for arriving through "illegal" routes, it does not provide safe or legal alternatives for those seeking protection.

At the time of writing this thesis (October 2024), there were no visa routes available for people to claim asylum in the UK from overseas (Home Office, 2023), and it was not possible to apply for asylum in the UK without being physically present here (Lenegan, 2023). The UK's existing "safe and legal routes" were not routes to claim asylum and did not allow anyone to apply out-of-country for asylum in the UK (Home Office, 2023). However, limited routes exist which are fundamentally discriminatory as these are nationality-specific schemes such as Hong Kong BN(O) and Ukraine visas which account for over 80% of all humanitarian visas offered between 2015 and 2022 (Benson et al., 2024). This contradiction is especially concerning given the global humanitarian crises and instability across multiple regions that are driving displacement. Benson et al. (2024) also identify that these schemes are driven by "foreign policy priorities" rather than humanitarian need with protection offered based on political calculations rather than vulnerability. Consequently, this selective approach to bespoke routes for politically favoured nationals leaves other migrants with no choice but to undertake dangerous journeys to reach safety in the UK (Lenegan, 2023). In the heated climate of political division around migration, this basic legal

reality has received little attention, even though it shapes how people seeking asylum are forced to reach the UK.

Further to this, it should be acknowledged that although not directly involving migration matters, such reports as the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report, 1999) and the more recent Casey Review (2023), highlight the widespread existence of institutional intolerance towards people of colour, plus other discriminatory factors and calls into question the ability of the police to be genuinely impartial and act “without fear or favour” in many instances. Given that the Border Agency, a quasi-police agency, and other immigration services have not been subject to the same level of scrutiny as the British police, yet are interconnected at many levels, it is likely that these organisations suffer from ‘Institutional Racism’ to at least an equal extent (Macpherson Report, 1999).

During my interviews with Law enforcement officers, I asked them whether they would treat undocumented migrants fairly, even if the migrants were not the victims of human trafficking or exploitation. Most of the law enforcement officers responded that they have the standard protocols to follow and are trained to treat everyone fairly which applies to undocumented migrants as well. However, I must be acknowledged that the term ‘fair’ is somewhat ambiguous, for what may appear as ‘fair’ to the officer may feel as unjust to the undocumented migrant. Both Macpherson (1999) and Casey (2023) highlight the ‘unfairness’ that exists within the police and broader criminal justice system that can and does lead to overt discrimination.

“I think so, yes. We deal with everyone fairly and in the same manner. Human rights are upheld in the UK. You often hear about incidents on the news where some police officers do things they shouldn't, there are bad eggs everywhere. But personally, I've never witnessed any misconduct or

known of it happening where I work. I'm not denying that inconsistencies exist, but those reports must have some basis" (Police Officer 3).

"If they are taken into custody in this country, we deal with them properly and fairly. We have to follow rules and regulations, and everything is recorded on video. I've been in the police service for 29 years now, and maybe things were different before I joined, but I understand that police in other countries are not as straightforward as in the UK. Just because they have been encountered by us and may be arrested, which I would imagine is pretty horrific for them, doesn't mean things will go badly for them here. They might think things will go badly because of their encounters with police in their own country" (Police Officer 4, female).

It is perhaps unsurprising that Law enforcement officers would evoke the rule of law and suggest at the inherent fairness of the system, but as I have suggested, the realities of how England and Wales fulfils its international obligations to refugees is questionable, and none of those in law enforcement seemed to recognise that this was a bind that was perhaps being created because of the very illegitimacy of how the law was currently being deployed.

Instead, like police officer's they recognised the more standard and routine failures to properly comply with the law. Police officer 1 for example suggested that they had dealt with undocumented migrants who are forced to work in cannabis farms. She mentioned that some people grow cannabis to pay back their debts and identify themselves as a victim when they are not:

"Some undocumented migrants where they are living, in their own houses and they are growing cannabis. But sometimes in interviews, they will say that they were forced to do this work because they owed a debt for coming to the UK. They paid money to get into the country illegally and now have to work on the cannabis farm to repay that debt. It's quite common - every week, probably every few days, there is somebody in custody who's undocumented and found in a cannabis farm" (Police Officer 1).

Police Officer 1 stated that they are getting more cases where undocumented migrants are growing cannabis to pay back the loans for the services they took from migrant smugglers or even trafficking gangs. The narrative shows the very complexities at the heart of the exploitative practices being forced downwards and determining individual migrants' complicity in *victimisation*. For the police, it seems like they are not victims; however, it is very evident that they are trapped in some sort of debt bondage arrangement with migrant smugglers or even trafficking gangs. It could be a case where they are under duress and probably in a dangerous situation? As well as they are not in a right state to reveal everything to the police? Further, if the number of cases of these natures is increasing in a police jurisdiction, then the police need to pay more attention to the causes as to why they are getting more of these cases. Probably, the area is more prone to organised criminal networks, which are directly linked to smugglers or traffickers.

Always on the Run....

When asked about the law enforcement experience in the immigration raids, it was found that immigration raids are led by immigration enforcement and often supported by police officers. During the raids, immigration enforcement focuses on finding violations of immigration laws, whereas the police focus on finding if there are any victims of human trafficking or modern slavery:

"I encountered them (undocumented migrants) during the visit to different places along with the Immigration department. Recently I've been involved in car wash visits with immigration. I go from a police perspective to check for victims of modern slavery, while immigration checks for illegal workers. During these visits, people have sometimes run when immigration shows up, even if they're not necessarily doing anything wrong. This has happened on a few occasions. In these joint operations, I focus on identifying potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring their working conditions are good. I haven't directly dealt with individuals' immigration status because that's primarily handled by immigration services. We've also conducted similar visits to nail bars, where immigration has detained

or issued fixed penalty notices to undocumented individuals” (Police Officer 4).

“Usually, they run away if they notice police officers. If they are already caught by us, they sometimes provide false information. Verifying this false information is challenging for the police as they don't have access to immigration records. However, if they provide false information to immigration enforcement officers, they can easily get into trouble. I recall a specific incident where someone provided false details, and immigration officers were present. The person was arrested immediately because immigration officers could verify the information promptly and were taken in for further inquiry” (Police Officer 5).

“The most straightforward scenario is migrants run away upon police arrival, which frequently happens in cannabis farms or houses. From recent experiences, many people simply flee when they see us, leaving behind equipment and evidence. However, there are instances, like yesterday, where someone was found hiding behind a fake wall on the property. If they don't run away immediately, sometimes they'll speak to us and claim to be victims, requesting help. In such cases, we place them in a hotel for their safety with the intention of visiting them later to take statements. However, they sometimes leave before we return. It's unclear whether they leave because they've been instructed by their exploiters, or afraid to talk to us, or never truly wanted help in the first place. Unfortunately, once we place someone in a place of safety, we can't monitor them continuously. Therefore, if they choose to leave, it's difficult to find them again. There are occasions when exploiters may come to fetch them, adding to the complexity of the situation” (Police Officer 6).

“So, people run away. Sometimes you can catch them, sometimes you can't. And the ones that we catch, we interview them to know better about them. But generally speaking, a lot of the time they'll say that they're victims of slavery. I'm not saying that they're not, by the way, that's what we usually hear from them, oh, I was a victim in my home country. So, then we have to enter them into the national referral mechanism and further investigation will be started” (Police Officer 1).

From the above testimonies, it is evident that during the raid the most immediate response of undocumented migrants is to run away from the law enforcement officers or provide false information. Police Officer 6 further added that they once found a migrant hiding behind the fake wall to escape from the raid, however, in taking this very action, the individual had put themselves in what was and extremely harmful and potentially life-threatening situation.

Law enforcement agents suggested that this was not uncommon. Now this may seem like it is merely descriptive detail from fieldwork, but some things strike me here. The researcher spent time in Hawkins Bazaar in Bangladesh, where Rohingya fleeing the horrors of the military in Myanmar took flight, and spent a great deal of time talking to undocumented migrants, victims, and people who have faced persecution and so have honed my knowledge and skills as a qualitative and ethnographic researcher. In many cases, while law enforcement officers are suspicious of those who run, the undocumented migrant understands that the very act of survival is one of moving. This is not to be simplistic, but law enforcement officers seemed to have difficulty in relating to and envisaging the schema and thinking of people who had often sought refuge in the UK precisely because they were fleeing persecution and experiencing persecution from state and authority figures, those in uniform and those with power.

During the interview, another important aspect that police officers pointed out was undocumented migrants claiming to be victims of human trafficking or slavery when they were caught during the raid. Police Officer 6 described that sometimes the migrants who claim to be the victims leave the safe accommodation before the police officers return for further investigation and processing. The reasons are unknown whether it was instructed by their exploiters, or they were afraid to talk, or they never wanted the help of the police. It seems like the migrants or their

bosses who might be their exploiter are aware of the process followed by the law enforcement officers. This adds a further dynamic and layer of complexity to claims that are being made of vulnerability and exploitation under the NRM, for example, but here I also feel it is useful to return to my interviews and how I have attempted to present those who I interviewed. The undocumented are hard to reach; they are reluctant when it comes to collaboration and cooperation with social researchers. They are, for the most part, well-versed in avoiding prying and questioning them. They are, highly reluctant to engage with law enforcement, almost regardless of how bad their experience is until that situation becomes one that is inescapable. Most of my participants had experienced significant trauma, difficulties, or hardships before they decided to migrate from their homelands.

In the UK, and often in transit, they faced additional struggles, trauma, and hardship. The experience of being undocumented was one of constant and continual movement and being, for want of a better term, permanently unsettled. The experience of being unsettled would, as they perceived, only be exacerbated again should they find themselves in contact with law enforcement, even if their status was that of victim, so they tended to be permanently on the run. However, I would argue that law enforcement officers had largely not come to see the problem in this way; for all the talk of vulnerabilities and safeguarding, they could not see that their very existence as authority figures impacted profoundly on the actuality of real safeguarding.

Law Enforcement Perception of Undocumented Migrants

Undocumented migrants have become the 'folk devil' of contemporary society (Cohen, 1972) and certain media outlets, politicians and media influencers have created a 'moral panic' about immigration. The Police, Border Agency and

Immigration Enforcement in the UK are influenced by these narratives and the overall unfavourable zeitgeist that exists. As a result, both police and immigration enforcement authority in the UK perhaps at best seems to have a somewhat paradoxical perception of undocumented migrants. These perceptions are often shaped by broader societal attitudes, government policies, policies around migration issues, media and public attitudes of course, as well as individual subjective experiences that come with roles in law enforcement and the experiences of the job. Senior law enforcement officers and policymakers typically emphasise the need to maintain stricter border security and uphold immigration laws which often involve harsher treatment of undocumented migrants. This perspective focuses on criminalising undocumented migrants for the immigration offence and prioritising identification, detention, and deportation of undocumented migrants. However, the grounded reality is something different and the individual law enforcement officers, both police and immigration enforcement officers, have different perspectives towards undocumented migrants. The law enforcement officers interviewed in this research, who are directly involved in policing undocumented migrants often witness extreme hardships and vulnerabilities experienced by the undocumented migrants, including exploitation at the workplace, forced labour, and lack of access to necessities. However, they equally did not express great empathy for undocumented migrants suffering.

From interviews conducted with police officers and immigration enforcement officers, it is evident that undocumented migrants' living conditions and circumstances were well known to and well recognised by law enforcement agencies. Some officers were more empathetic about the undocumented migrants' situation and some of them articulated a strong sentiment that they

recognised them as far more victim than perpetrator, much more a group deserving of help than of social sanction and stigma. Yet it was clear that the law enforcement agencies dual functions of safeguarding and protecting while also serving as a form of law enforcement where undocumented migrants were concerned could and did lead to conflicts.

Police Officer 1 and Police Officer 2, who are working along with the immigration enforcement have explained that they are empathetic about the undocumented migrant's situation and the hardships faced by them:

"Most of the time, empathy plays a significant role. I wouldn't want to grow up in the environment that some of these people have experienced. Some of the undocumented migrants whom I dealt with in the past faced severe hardships. Some boys had shrapnel wounds from Taliban conflicts. If I were in their situation, I would be empathetic and understand why they would want to come here for a better life" (Police Officer 1).

"It's difficult because there's no specific person that comes to mind. Normally, you might think of a particular case, but there isn't one. I wouldn't say we sympathize because we don't know them personally, but we do empathize. We can understand why people are in such positions. So, it's more about empathy than sympathy" (Police Officer 3.).

Similarly, Police Officer 5 expressed his empathy towards undocumented migrants and further explained how vulnerable they are in the UK. The narrative also shows that as a police officer, he tries to help these people as much as possible, but he also expresses his concerns that he cannot do much about the situation due to his low rank. Doubtless, to an uninformed observer, this display of compassion from police officers is genuine, and it is important as it relates back to positive interactions and the effects that this can have on confidence, reporting in the future, building trust, potential intelligence, and strong relationships is

arguably at the core of effective policing. However, while much of the sentiment and language being used by the law enforcement agents interviewed was positive, this contrasted spectacularly with the language and sentiments being expressed by those in the upper strata of society in the UK, who have continually endorsed a narrative around immigration that almost exclusively is hard, intolerant, and presents migration as a challenge to be overcome. Policymakers, unlike the law enforcement officers on duty at the frontline and facing the challenges in practice every day are seemingly not considering on the ground reality in the same way, and the latter are vastly more attuned to the vulnerabilities and hardships faced by undocumented migrants:

"I understand why they come here. There are lots of different reasons, and I feel a lot of empathy for people who have been in difficult situations and need to leave their homes for whatever reason. I feel quite concerned for them because I know they are in a very vulnerable position. I also feel a bit frustrated because my hands are tied. I can't really help them if they're not going to tell me how I can help. Through, my job I make every effort to help these people, especially those who are victims of human trafficking or have been exploited by someone. I try to build a relationship with them so that they can provide more information to help the investigation, however, sometimes they don't speak up and it's a really hard situation. I just wish we could do more" (Police Officer 5, Male).

Police officer 3 showed empathy towards undocumented migrants, however, he also expressed that people should follow rules and one cannot simply eliminate the rules. It is evident from his words however that his experience in role have given him perhaps a more considered position overall on the complexities of undocumented migrants and the individual differences in the circumstances between them:

"I'm a rule follower, so I believe in following the rules. Unfortunately, that means consequences for actions. For example, someone might be criminalised for hitting someone else, if they were put in a difficult position. Ultimately, they shouldn't have hit anyone, but they might be able to justify or mitigate their actions. Similarly, undocumented migrants might break the rules to come to the UK, fleeing violence and exploitation in their country but they mitigate by applying for asylum and give justification for breaking the rule to come into the UK. As they can explain their actions, I don't think we should eliminate the rules. Rules need to be in place to maintain order" (Police Officer 3).

As the above suggests, law enforcement officers are perhaps caught up in a form of double bind, attempting to find ways to balance the way that migration today is regarded as good or bad, threat or requirement that they adopt empathic approaches, but at the same time, retaining an objective application of the law. This tension reflects what Newman et al. (2014) identifies as a fundamental conflict between humanitarian concern and institutional demands for consistent enforcement. Balancing these two seemingly incompatible approaches is probably hard to maintain and exerts significant pressure on officers, creating what Hall (2010) describes as emotional dispositions that both sustain and challenge institutional hierarchies. The emotional and ethical complexities involved in the law enforcement role are perhaps inescapable in many contexts, but they are certainly ones that were prominently described by law enforcement officers that I interviewed.

"I believe this empathy is part of my personality. However, if they are involved in illegal activities not just being undocumented, but growing cannabis, dealing drugs, or committing other crimes I find it more challenging to reconcile. I understand there might be reasons behind their actions, such as financial struggles, but it's still difficult mentally. Despite this, I would treat them the same, as individuals deserving respect and empathy. However, there's a bit of frustration when faced with these

situations. I don't know if that's entirely fair, but it's how I feel" (Police Officer 1).

However, while of course, some law enforcement officers were very empathetic towards the undocumented migrants and expressed their concerns about exploitation and vulnerabilities they faced in the UK, some were also close to the language of policymakers and expressed sentiments that are commonly being drawn out in mediated debates and in a climate where the narrative surrounding migration has quite frequently reinforced negative depictions of refugees people seeking asylum, immigrants and migrants. For example, Police Officer 4 was concerned about the growing migrant population and overloading the public services. She also questioned the migrant's intention to come to the UK and raised the question of 'why the UK?'.

"I do actually think the UK needs to be more switched on about who we have in our country, and that's not just about undocumented migrants. We all complete a census, and I think it's important to know who's here so we can put the right services in place. At the moment, our public sector services are overwhelmed because there aren't enough workers, and there are a lot of people needing services. This isn't just due to undocumented migrants; it's also due to population growth and other factors. So, I do think the UK needs to know who's here. For example, if I go to France on holiday, they know I'm there because I use my passport, and they know when I leave because I show my passport again. People entering the UK illegally need to be dealt with. We hear on the news all the time about local hotels being filled with migrants, which can't be nice for them either. This is because we don't have enough housing. Our education system, nurses, doctors everyone is working at capacity. So, my personal opinion is: why the UK? If someone is genuinely fleeing their country due to difficulties, why pass through many other countries to get here? We can't take everybody. That's my personal opinion, but I don't think it's necessarily the fault of the migrants. As a country, we need to know who's

here so we can provide the necessary facilities, so everyone can live well rather than having certain areas overwhelmed” (Police Officer 4).

“Certainly, there needs to be a policy in place to regulate immigration and ensure the safety of the country. We can't turn a blind eye and allow unrestricted entry because it poses risks, particularly if there are individuals with criminal intentions. In the case of individuals seeking a better life, like the current situation with Albanians, where there's no war and the country is not significantly poorer than others in the region, it's essential to assess their reasons for coming here. If they're fleeing from genuine persecution or seeking asylum, then it is acceptable. While it's understandable that someone might resort to illegal means to save their family, engaging in criminal activities isn't justified. There are legal avenues for seeking asylum and assistance and resorting to criminal behaviour isn't acceptable. However, the issue is often complex and filled with grey areas, making it challenging to navigate” (Police Officer 2).

Both police officer 2 and police officer 4 expressed deep concerns about national security with respect to the people coming to the UK undocumented, and this is understandable to a certain extent. While there is a need not to simply repeat the more exclusionary rhetoric that casts the problem of migration as only a threat (it is far more complex than that), there should be awareness at least of the current perception of mass migration, and it is being suggested in parts of the media that it is perhaps highly likely Russia is taking advantage of a directed migration crisis into Europe that is much of its making (Scutaru & Pavel, 2024). So, too, whilst racist processes of bordering are inextricably built into immigration detention and, indeed, migration controls more broadly, the idea that migration can be uncontrolled, and we can simply exist in a borderless world is simply a utopian fantasy. From the interviews conducted with the undocumented migrants, it is evident that some of them do not know the existence of the asylum system, and further fear of deportation plays a significant role in not applying for asylum. This

then does raise the question of why they chose the UK, and there are likely several answers which include, language, perceptions of opportunity (which also may be realities, the UK's position as a fairly liberal and safe consumer society with few controls on labour and the job market in reality is doubtlessly a factor).

The immigration policy in the UK has changed significantly in the last decade and it has become strict in terms of people entering the country on both regular and irregular routes. Under section 24 (B1) of the Immigration Act 1971, anyone who enters the UK illegally can be sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine, or both in England and Wales. In 2023, the UK government enacted the Illegal Migration Act which ensures that anyone who enters the UK illegally will not be allowed to stay in the UK, and they will be detained immediately and deported back to their home country or third country (Home Office, 2023; UK Immigration Facts, 2023). Under this law, entering the UK illegally is a criminal offence and the migrant could face up to 4 years in prison and deportation. Further, it is also the case that this Act has been said to be incompatible with the UN Refugee Convention to which the UK is one of the original signatories (UN News, 2023). This breach is therefore undermining human rights and the rule of law. However, some of the police officers are not aware of these developments and seemed little alert to the rise in the punitiveness of the system and the lack of legitimate routes open to those who may well have perfectly legitimate claims.

“Do we criminalize it? People don't go to prison just for coming here without papers. If they came over without the papers and that was for a good cause for them to do so, and they still broke the law, didn't they? There's nothing in the law that says it's acceptable if there's a good cause. If we were criminalizing people, we would just send them to prison for being here without papers. But we don't do that. Instead, we have a

process to determine what can be done to help them and to understand why they broke the law. So, I don't think we necessarily criminalise it. The typical "punishment" is being sent back home. If it's safe for them to return home, what is wrong with that? Is that harsh? I don't see it as a harsh punishment as long as the process to determine safety has been done effectively. If you're telling me the process isn't being done effectively and people are being sent home to dangerous situations, that's a completely different matter, and I would not support that at all" (Police Officer 5).

"I believe that if you go to another country, you should do so legally because it's against the law to enter undocumented. I wouldn't break the law myself, as I believe rules are meant to be followed. While I understand the terrible situations that drive people to come to the UK, there still have to be consequences for breaking the law. If there are no consequences, it sets a precedent that could lead to a free-for-all. It's essential for everyone to be documented. So, yes, I think enforcing these rules is the right thing to do" (Police Officer 1).

"It's a difficult one to say 'criminalize' because being a criminal for entering a country illegally is different from being a criminal for committing serious crimes like rape or murder. There are different levels of criminality. If they've broken the law, then technically, they are criminals, and they should be prepared to face the consequences. However, it's very political too, why have they done that and why the UK? Not everyone fleeing war or other dangers comes to the UK as their first safe place. Many come here seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Should they be criminalised for that? If I wanted to move to Australia for its sunny weather and better standard of life, I would have to go through the proper process. If I went there illegally, I would expect to be criminalised. So, yes, I think they should be prepared to be criminalised. But it's a lot more complicated than a simple yes or no answer" (Police Officer 4, female).

From the above narratives, it is very much evident that both the police officer and immigration officer are reflecting what is a complexity in the system of migration that means that there will always be a place for consideration, nuance and

balance. Some law enforcement officers have claimed that the UK government is not criminalising undocumented migrants, and they are not sent to prison. However, the detained migrants are sent to detention centres and some of them are maintained by a private security organisation where it is not uncommon to see brutality, corruption and intolerance as the harms of immigration detention are indeed, well documented (Bosworth and Turnbull, 2017). And yet a general tendency to regard the challenge as one that can be ended with the ending of borders and the abolition of immigration detention was not one that was sold on law enforcement officers who on occasion did express sentiments of deterrence and enforcement that are likely well-reflected and popular among the general public. It might be worth because these sorts of 'populist' sentiments do carry at least some legitimacy:

"In my opinion, everyone has to follow the laws and we simply can't ignore the laws. If we don't restrict them, and more people will come to this country illegally which is not fair to other people who come through proper channels. I think criminalizing them is like prevention. If word gets out about the consequences of illegal entry, it might discourage people from attempting it, which could help manage our expanding population and prevent individuals from putting themselves in vulnerable situations by coming to the UK illegally. It could deter others from putting themselves in that situation by coming to the UK illegally. If they hear that coming here could lead to arrest and imprisonment, it might discourage them from putting themselves in a vulnerable position in the first place" (Immigration Officer 2).

This debate, though, is one that is commonly encountered in criminology, which tends to be quite generally supportive of exposing the harms created by borders and seeking the abolition of immigration detention as a part of the zemiological project. The reasons for this are understandable. For example, Canning (2014) found that female detainees often experience sexual violence, trauma, and

sometimes deaths in detention centres in the UK, which are neglected by the government. Further, in the work of Kaufman and Bosworth (2013), Bosworth (2014), Canning (2014), Kaufman (2015), Puthoopparambil, Ahlberg and Bjerneld (2015), and Peterie (2018), it is argued that immigration detention centres are no less than actual prisons in terms of their physical conditions, psychological impacts, and punitive effects on detainees. Therefore, this argument that immigration detention centres function as de facto prisons, inflicting comparable harm while operating under the legal fiction of administrative procedure which raises serious questions about the legitimacy of current immigration detention practices.

When Police Officer 4 attempts to compare herself with an undocumented migrant in terms of travelling to another country for a leisure purpose, this comparison overlooks the way debates on undocumented migration are typically framed. The undocumented migrant is rarely the affluent student visa or travel overstay but more often to be the poor ethnic minority. Of course, not all undocumented migrants are victims, and similarly, not all undocumented migrants coming to the UK are fraudulent. Some individuals seek asylum for legitimate reasons, while others may claim asylum with criminal intent. At the time of writing, UK news media were starting to report on the first analyses of migrant crime rates in England and Wales, suggesting that the overall imprisonment rate for foreign nationals was 27% higher than for British citizens (Hymas, 2024). Data indicated the imprisonment rate is 18.2 inmates per 10,000 migrants compared with 14 per 10,000 for the general UK population (Hymas, 2024). Further it was being suggested that German, Italian, Indian, Greek, US, Sri Lankan, French and Chinese nationals are the least likely to be jailed, whereas the number of Albanians, Vietnamese and Somalis appeared disproportionately high (Hymas,

2024). However, it is important to note that these data are still under analysis and scrutiny, and their interpretation is limited by numerous complex factors. Overall, the reality is more complex and nuanced than a simple narrative of criminalising undocumented migrants, highlighting the importance of contextual analysis in understanding these patterns. This complexity highlights why the UK needs a humanitarian, fair and informed approach as to how it manages migration and deals with undocumented migrants, particularly due to their vulnerabilities. This balanced perspective that is perhaps best captured by one participant:

“As a police officer, I have to abide by the law and uphold the law accordingly. However, as human being, I don't believe criminalising them is an option. There are instances where we have dealt with cases involving young people who don't know English and are desperate to live. This sometimes makes me feel bad. However, we can't completely ignore the law which will create more chaos. I think we need a humanitarian approach in this case” (Police Officer 7).

Yet the sentiments expressed can be heard; what would it look like in practice? Without further context, it simply comes across as an empty statement. However, it is not presented in this way. Rather, it seems to recognise that the current system, which channels almost all migration for asylum to the UK, is not functioning effectively. Similarly, the state response to victimisation or harms faced by undocumented migrants is inadequate, that leading many to avoid reporting or engaging with law enforcement.

When the police officers were asked about their perspectives on forced labour exploitation of undocumented migrants and its consequence on undocumented migrants to involve in illegal or criminal activities. It was found that some police officers believe that the government's legislative restriction on legal routes in terms of claiming asylum did not have any consequences on undocumented

migrants being involved in illegal activities. However, they claim that just because migrants have entered the UK illegally, they wrongly assume that the likelihood of involvement in subsequent crime is increased. In effect, a hostile climate overall without any legal routes, then a wholesale prohibition on work makes illegality something of an inevitability.

“I don't think it's pushing them into illegal activity; rather, their decision to enter the country illegally is what pushes them into it. By coming in illegally, they can't work legally or claim any benefits or entitlements. This puts them in a situation where they have to earn money illegally. If they had come in legitimately and legally, they would have access to various services and wouldn't necessarily have to resort to illegal activities. So, I still believe it's down to their initial decision (Police Officer 1).”

“I know that the options are very limited and that's what makes me worried for people in that situation. They have very limited options in what they can do. Although they've chosen to come to this country, if we're not talking about people being trafficked, they have come here knowing they won't have the same options as others. It's very difficult for us to take responsibility for that and manage it because they have put themselves in that position if they haven't been trafficked. When options are reduced, they are likely to take the only ones available to them, which might lead them to criminal activities” (Police Officer 5).

Police Officer 1 and police officer 5 believe that their decision to come to the UK illegally is causing individuals to work illegally which further pushes them to criminal activities like working in cannabis farms. While Police Officer 5 acknowledges that undocumented migrants have limited options, and he shows concerns they are vulnerable. He continues to attribute the blame universally to the migrants who have chosen the [only and illegal] option to come to the UK. However, the lack of legal routes is as much the challenge and the issue and the long-broken asylum system in the UK seems merely to be pushed to the back of

all considerations. There seems to be little appetite for considering how real legislative changes and policies might be able to establish mechanisms that enhance legal and illegal migration. A key here seems to be the control of the employment sector, control of legal working, as one participant suggested:

“Absolutely, when individuals don't have the right to work legally and are in desperate situations where they need to feed themselves or their families, they become extremely vulnerable. In such circumstances, they may feel compelled to resort to illegal activities like begging or theft as they perceive these as their only options. If someone offers them what seems like legitimate work, even if it involves activities like growing cannabis or working in exploitative conditions, they may feel they have no choice but to accept it. The lack of viable alternatives pushes them towards these risky and often illegal paths because, in their eyes, they have no other options for survival” (Police Officer 2, Female).

Some of the law enforcement officers interviewed agreed that the lack of legal status can push undocumented migrants towards criminal activities as they often have limited options and must find a way to survive in the UK. This observation is well aligned with the marginalisation thesis explained by Leerkes et al. (2012) that the migrants choose illegal or informal means to meet their necessities when they have no formal or legal means. This really is at the crux of most of what has been suggested, and the hidden lives of undocumented migrants are shaped by both experiences of breaking laws often rather unwillingly as the means of survival and ignoring crime perpetrated against them. What appeared to make everyone complicit in this flawed and dishonest process was the lack of viable alternative, and this was mirrored at the policy level by an immigration and asylum policy that was in disarray and simply not fit for any stated purpose. This fact was not entirely lost on Law enforcement personnel that I interviewed:

“In my experience working as an immigration officer, I often find that the strict enforcement of immigration laws in the UK pushes undocumented migrants to live hidden behind the community and get exploited by many. This eventually becomes too much resulting in crime or criminal activities for their survival. I do understand it is difficult for them, but I can’t think of a solution for this” (Immigration Officer 1).

The undocumented migrant’s lack of legal status to live or work acts as a significant barrier to achieving their goals through lawful means which is survival. As a result, they may become involve in crime or illegal activities to fulfil their needs. This further explains how state policies on immigration can push migrants to get involved in criminal activities. Exploitation of labour is not only prevalent among undocumented migrants, but it is also very common among people seeking asylum. Although the UK government supports people seeking asylum by providing them with accommodation, living expenses, health care access, and other basic support. The living expenses provided are significantly insufficient, which forces people seeking asylum to work illegally or get involved in illegal activities. Additionally, people seeking asylum in the UK can apply for work permits if they are waiting for more than 12 months for the processing of their claim; however, only some people seeking asylum are granted work permits based on a shortage occupation list (Collinson, 2023; Kirkwood et al., 2016; Waite, 2017)

After Brexit, the UK has been facing major labour shortages across a range of sectors, including seasonal economic migrants as well as long-stay migrants who were involved in agriculture and hospitality (Jafari and Britz, 2018; Portes and Springford, 2023; Zhu, 2024). This is because of the change in immigration policy, which limited migrants, especially from the European Union. As a result, it negatively impacted supply chains and increased the operational cost, which

contributed to inflation (Jafari and Britz, 2018; Lang and McKee, 2018; Portes and Springford, 2023; Zhu, 2024). To tackle both issues, the labour market could engage people seeking asylum already in the country, which could benefit both the UK government and its citizens. When asked to provide their perspectives on the rights of migrants to work, most law enforcement officers refused to answer or engage with the question. However, a few police and immigration officers who did respond were broadly favourable but expressed concerns that this might encourage more people to come to the UK:

“Yeah, I think there should be a proposal allowing people to work if they want to. I don't understand why we're stopping that from happening. If people are in the country anyway, isn't it better for them to be able to work? But then again, wouldn't that encourage more people to come over? If we say you need a visa to enter, but if you're here anyway, you can probably get a job, we might be encouraging more people to come. It's a very fine line, and it requires a clever policy to manage that balance. I think If people want to work, there should be a way to make that happen (Police Officer 5).

“Yes, it could be a good idea, but I imagine it would have to be decided on a case-by-case basis. We already have work permits for the asylum seekers, but I know that it is not functioning properly, and it depends on the asylum worker. I think the Home Office should consider this proposal to allow asylum seekers to work which might decrease the burden of the taxpayer. I think it would probably be better for their mental health as well because living in this country without any engagement or work is not good, especially if they're here on their own. But giving them this option could help increase the number of asylum seekers” (Immigration officer 2).

The perceptions of law enforcement officers towards undocumented migrants reflects a complex and often paradoxical landscape. The far-right media and politicians have amplified the issues of migration and portrayed undocumented migrants as a threat to British Nationals, which influence a negative sentiment

among citizens and shape the perceptions of law enforcement officers. However, the data highlighted that these sentiments are not uniformly shared among law enforcement officers. Though some officers are empathic towards undocumented migrants and their situation, other views are closely aligned with the narrative that undocumented migration is a choice and highlighted the national security concerns. However, the discussion surrounding national security concerns often overlooks the broader harms that undocumented migrants experience, such as the trauma of detention, marginalisation, and exclusion from social services. It can also be urged that in the name of national security concerns, prioritising state interest over the well-being of undocumented migrants can be considered as a form of special liberty (Hall, 2015; Kotzé, 2024).

Challenges in Policing Undocumented Immigrants

Policing undocumented migrants presents significant challenges to law enforcement agencies in the UK. One of the primary difficulties is balancing the enforcement of immigration laws and safeguarding the human rights of undocumented migrants. Law enforcement agencies must carefully manage their responsibility to uphold the law and ensure that they respect the rights and dignity of undocumented migrants. This becomes further complex due to the need to maintain public trust and cooperation, particularly in communities with high numbers of immigrants.

Police Officer 2 described a major challenge with respect to undocumented migrants as making a meaningful connection and rapport to understand their situation. She also stated that this situation makes it hard for law enforcement to empathise with them as they do not share any meaningful information about their situation:

“Typically, it is challenging to build any sort of rapport or understanding with the undocumented migrant. Even when an interpreter is present, it's difficult to establish a meaningful connection or gain a proper understanding of their situation. In these situations, it's hard to empathise or form a bond with the individuals we encounter. The encounters are brief, and we often don't receive much information to empathise with. It's a challenging aspect of the job, but we do our best to navigate these encounters with professionalism and sensitivity” (Police Officer 2)

From the individual migrant's perspective, (and likely shaped by previous experiences of authority and victimisation, making mistrust common) it is likely hard to express their vulnerabilities to someone who is a complete stranger to them, and they might use the information against them. What we can see frequently highlighted through my work and data is that there is a mistrust of authorities, particularly from the most vulnerable migrants whose experiences of marginalisation and victimisation are not in any way uncommon. While law enforcement expressed a desire to build empathy and to police sensitively with regard to this, the reality is that undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers exist in separate worlds well removed from each other where the former are hugely mistrustful of the latter. This is likely at root the biggest challenge for the police force is the non-reporting of crimes and victimisation faced by undocumented migrants. Both migrants and law enforcement state that it is very obvious that undocumented migrants would rarely come forward on their own to report any crime, due to their lack of legal status and fear of detention. However, this is the biggest challenge for the police force as a lot of crimes are unreported and this can make the situation worse for the undocumented:

“As police officers, we understand the importance of prioritising laws and rules. However, laws should not hinder our ability to carry out our duties effectively. There needs to be a balance, a common-sense approach, in

how strictly we adhere to certain laws. We recognize that undocumented individuals are often vulnerable and at risk of becoming victims of crime. Ideally, we would intervene to prevent this, but it's challenging when they don't make a report due to their immigration status. If there is no reporting, then it would be difficult for us to make random checks which we usually do from time to time. We are aware that neglecting undocumented individuals may aggravate issues in the future and for us, it is a difficult situation" (Police Officer 5).

Due to their lack of legal status, undocumented migrants face significant barriers in accessing the police and the criminal justice system which exposes them to risk and harms that others do not experience (Parmar, 2021). Law enforcement agencies should have a special reporting mechanism for undocumented migrants so that they report a crime to the police without worrying much about their legal status (Duvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). From the interviews conducted with the police officer, it is found that if an undocumented migrant reports a crime, they will definitely treat them as a victim and proceed with further investigation. However, they also expressed that if in the later phase, they find that the complainant is an undocumented migrant, they report it to the immigration enforcement officer and seek further advice on processing them.

Conclusion

Undocumented migrants in the UK face a lot of barriers in accessing the justice system due to the fear of detention and deportation. Even when they become victims of crime due to their lack of legal status, they refrain from reporting to the police officers. The interviews with the undocumented migrants revealed that they avoid seeking help from law enforcement due to the fear of detention and this serves as an advantage to the exploiter or criminal. On the other hand, the police officers are morally and legally committed to helping these undocumented

migrants of their immigration status. However, they are bound by immigration laws that require information sharing with immigration enforcement, which makes the situation replete with complexity and likely compounds mistrust and avoidance from the migrant side. As the police are bound to report to immigration, this supports migrants' fears about being detected and perpetuates the lack of reporting. This means that despite the claims of empathy and dedication to safeguarding victims of crime and recognising their vulnerability, law enforcement, and particularly the police, are always in a position of struggle to get migrants engagement as victims.

Further, the police officers' focus on protecting victims of human trafficking and forced labour has become a heightened concern. In contrast, lower-level migrant victimisation is rarely reported or recorded as crime at all, largely due to migrants' low position in the social strata. This is significant because if true that there may be up to a million undocumented migrants in the UK, potentially has a significant impact on reported and recorded crime rates. Migrants receive low prioritisation when routinely victimised in less extreme ways, but the impacts of such victimisation are significant. Of course, this low prioritisation of low-level crime is not just for migrants but is also commonly replicated in the wider public, where for example a rape or murder understandably attracts more resources and attention than a theft or burglary. Volume crime often does not get reported, and even when it does, only a total of 5.7% of all crimes were cleared up in 2023 by police forces in England and Wales (Home Office, 2023). But with greater numbers of migrants arriving in the UK and with larger numbers of the undocumented not accounted for as victims, even when they have significant experiences of crime and victimisation, it again creates broader questions that we should be asking about reported crime rates and the criticisms in criminology

aimed at those who would question or deny the dominant and prevailing crime drop narrative.

Why this is significant is what the undocumented migrant voices I have recorded here are saying. These are a group that are hard to pin down, they mistrust readily and speak infrequently, occupying a position in the shadows. Their voices are not commonly heard. However, when they are they give rise to frequent experiences of marginalisation and social exclusion, of lives lived in difficult circumstances, poverty, instability, victimisation, manipulation, violence, being both offender and victim, and existing largely away from and outside the formal protections of the state, criminal justice and social welfare. They experience quite frequent victimisation and frequently are those that should be in the front if real concerns are safeguarding and vulnerability, and yet the paradoxical function of law enforcement is forced to play because of their dual offender and victim identity and the restrictive policies binding law enforcement arguably creates further discrimination and marginalise these undocumented migrants, often only further denying and failing to recognise their victimisation. Overall, the immigration policy and inability to access the justice system produce harm among these undocumented migrants, which includes various physical, emotional, and financial harms.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

The main objective of this research project was to explore the lived experience of undocumented migrants and how they were policed by the law enforcement agencies within the West Midlands region of the United Kingdom (UK). The project employed a social harm perspective to understand the various formal and informal negative experiences of undocumented migrants and how the immigration policies are affecting their lives. The final chapter will present a brief overview of the key findings and their implications for the project. There will also be a discussion of the contribution made by this PhD research project to learning, policy development, and further research opportunities. I will finish the conclusion chapter with my final thoughts on this research project.

Key findings and their Implication

This research project has provided an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of undocumented migrants, including their vulnerability, exploitation, and victimisation. It also provides an understanding of undocumented migrants' interaction with law enforcement, practical difficulties in accessing the justice system by undocumented migrants, and challenges faced by law enforcement in policing such matters. Further, the analysis and discussion of the empirical data from the social harm theoretical framework has provided a unique understanding of the range of harms experienced by the undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region, which is the subject of discussion in chapters 4 to 7 of this dissertation. I have argued throughout the project that the lack of legal status to live and work has systematically produced harms in the various aspects of undocumented migrants' lives. The findings demonstrate that UK immigration

policies systematically create and maintain vulnerability across every aspect of undocumented migrants' lives. These policies generate conditions of precarity that serve broader political and economic interests, rather than simply failing to protect this population. An alternative interpretation suggests that the legal framework dividing migrants into "legal" and "illegal" categories may be deliberately designed to make life difficult for the latter group as a form of deterrence. From this, it is clear that vulnerability is a deliberate and determined system function rather than an unintended consequence. Regardless of intent, the system reduces human flourishing and produces harm, raising important ethical questions about contemporary immigration governance.

Multiple motives drive undocumented migrant's decisions to leave their homeland and seek security elsewhere, and it is evident that the motives are not just economic aspirations. The decisions to migrate can be influenced and shaped by the interplay of predisposing, proximate, precipitating, and mediating drivers, as outlined by Hear (2017). These drivers offer a combination of factors that create a complex environment under which people make their migration decisions. I have argued that the migration decisions of undocumented migrants are beyond economic aspirations. This is the reason why people decide to migrate to the destination country even if they have to go through a dangerous travel route and may experience fewer economic opportunities upon their eventual arrival. For example, Peter (Nigeria) migrated to the UK because he was of his sexuality, as it conflicted with the legal and moral laws in his birth country. The approach adopted by the policymakers who are against migration and often believe that migrants are motivated by the economic opportunities available in Western countries is ineffective because migration is driven by multiple factors and individual circumstances vary widely.

Most of the media houses, politicians, and even the general public persistently debate and seek answers to the question 'why people migrate to the UK when there are other countries?'. It is a challenging question to answer as it involves a multitude of factors and complexities, and few of the undocumented migrants were the same. The majority of the migrants do not choose to come to the UK straightforwardly. Often the collective decision of their family influences their decision, or it is decided by the agent or smuggler assisting them to reach their destination. The migration route and type of the journey mostly depend on the ability to organise the financing of the journey. Often, the cost of the journey is the deciding factor and heavily influences the degree of victimisation and difficulties the migrants encounter during their journey. I have argued in Chapter 4 that the cost of the journey plays a significant role in their journey and the challenges faced. Stringent immigration controls and decreasing legitimate migration routes have also contributed to migrants' vulnerabilities and exploitation (Czaika and Hobolth, 2014; de Haas, 2011; Duvell, 2009). While these restrictive policies are often designed deliberately as deterrents, they paradoxically create conditions in which smuggling networks/agent can thrive and exploit vulnerable migrants. More often these policies fail to prevent migration and frequently push migrants into clandestine channels, increasing the likelihood and severity of exploitation. Although it is understandable to blame migrant smugglers and associated agents, focusing only on punishing them while ignoring the structural factors that shape the environment in which they operate is insufficient. Without addressing these broader policy conditions, the harms undocumented migration and the exploitation it creates will continue, as new smuggling networks emerge to meet the demand created by restrictive migration policies.

During the initial days of their arrival, the undocumented migrants reaching British shores experience a range of emotions. Foremost in these is often fear and deep anxiety around their immediate position and a highly uncertain future. They also face a lot of challenges in finding safe accommodation and employment to ensure for their survival. I have discussed in chapter 4 that finding accommodation and employment is largely depends on social capital, which acts as a facilitator for them. However, this varies by the individual and is highly dependent on their familial or social ties. Some migrants have little to no knowledge. Due to this, migrants without strong social capital experience additional challenges when seeking accommodation, including heightened exploitation, unhealthy living conditions, and privacy issues, coupled with stress, anxiety, and fear. Drawing upon the critical realist perspective (Hall & Winlow, 2015), this can be understood that the absence of support services and community support can increase the desperation and generate harms by exacerbating an already challenging situation.

The majority of migrants aim to live in the economic hubs of the United Kingdom, such as London, due to the increased demand for labour in informal sectors. Increased detection efforts by immigration enforcement however have led to many seeking employment and housing in smaller urban areas in efforts to avoid detection. This has again indicates that the migrants are more worried about their safety than the economic aspiration and opportunities. Moving from major metropolitan cities to smaller cities has both advantages and disadvantages; however, in the case of undocumented migrants, which are discussed further in Chapter 4. The immigration enforcement raids are more reactive and never solved the issues of undocumented migration; however, they often just worsen the situation. In short, the immigration enforcement raids have generated more

psychological harm to the migrants in the form of anxiety, fear, and creating an uncertain future.

This study found that there is an interdependency between undocumented migrants and informal job markets such as domestic work, construction, food or catering industry and agricultural farm work. The informal job market provides jobs to the migrants without any requirement for legal status and migrants serve as cheap and flexible labour well suited to the needs of late capitalist markets⁴. However, as the informal job market is unregulated by government or labour unions which often leads to vulnerable and exploitative working practices including unfair and low wages, long working hours, extensive physical labour, dangerous working conditions and sometimes they also face issues like racism, sexual exploitation, and unfair treatment by their employers or co-workers, etc (Sigona, 2012, Bloch, 2013; Jauhiainen and Tedeschi, 2021; Nabil Ahmad, 2008). It is evident that working in the informal job market, undocumented migrants experience various harms which are largely inevitable when excluded from employment in the formal sector. Due to the lack of legal status to live and work, the migrants are forced to live a substandard life, which includes a lack of social and romantic life, fear of detention and deportation, social isolation, anxiety, and uncertainty about their future. This impacts their overall well-being and mental health but forces many to question their existence as human beings, for they cannot share the rights that mainstream society takes for granted.

Vulnerability and exploitation have been normalised in the life of the undocumented migrants, and from the interviews, it was found that some of them

⁴ A capitalist market is an economic system characterised by private ownership of the means of production, market-based allocation of resources, wage labour, and production for profit, in which prices and distribution are determined largely through the mechanisms of competition and supply and demand (Harvey, 2010).

already know that they are exploited. The acceptance of exploitation can act in two different ways: it can act as a coping mechanism, or it can act as agitation, which pushes them to look for alternative ways to escape the exploitation. For example, undocumented migrants experiencing exploitation in the workplace often look for alternative ways to end the exploitation, such as by forging documents to work in formal sectors. A detailed discussion on this issue has been made in Chapter 5.

Even though access to healthcare is recognised as a fundamental human right under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the WHO Constitution (World Health Organization, 2023), undocumented migrants living in the UK encounter challenges in accessing healthcare services. This contributes to poor health conditions, undetected major health issues, self-medication, and mental health concerns that act against their physical and psychological enrichment, which further generates harm. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, which not only affected their health but also overall wellbeing. It is simply unknown how many undocumented migrants could have survived, as most of them depended on the informal job market, which was not operational due to the lockdowns, and they did not receive any support or welfare from the government. This indicates, as one interviewee highlighted, that their immigration status was more important than a human being for the UK government. Further, other research participants also raised the question that there is no value for humans until one gets a legal status to live in the UK.

Another major issue with the current immigration policy of the UK is with regards to the education of the children. The education policies of the UK promise compulsory education (ages 5-16) is available to all children in the UK regardless of their immigration status. However, there is a hesitation in

accessing the education of undocumented migrant's children, as it might jeopardise the whole family. Furthermore, adult education is very restrictive, and it is mandatory to prove the immigration status to enrol. Though the people seeking asylum have access to adult education, there are restrictions. Although there are courses available to them, their immigration status affects their ability to secure student finance. In summary, the immigration status affects individuals' ability to educate and pursue their future aspirations. Here we see the utility of Pemberton's (2015) definition of social harm as the systemic compromising of human flourishing, which produces range of harms.

A few participants who had been refused asylum in the UK shared their experiences and highlighted the limitations of the UK asylum system and its reliance on documentary evidence to seek asylum. However, their critique reveals deeper questions about the fundamental justice of a system that requires traumatised people fleeing violence to "prove" their persecution. Rather than questioning whether the system is competent at identifying "genuine" people seeking asylum, their experiences exposes that the idea of "genuineness" itself is built on an adversarial model that begins from a position of disbelief. The system's overreliance on documentary evidence, regardless of whether it can be forged or not, creates a broader injustice by treating people seeking asylum as inherently suspect rather than as individuals in need of protection. This model fundamentally misunderstands the nature of displacement, where those fleeing persecution often cannot carry documentation of their suffering. The findings also provided further insight into the asylum process, which includes a long waiting period, a stagnant lifestyle, fear and anxiety, and uncertain future. Though the UK asylum system provides basic support, it is not enough to address their needs. The system's focuses on

proving "deservingness" rather than providing protection reflects deeper assumptions about who is worthy of help and reinforces discourse that categorises people seeking asylum as either "genuine" or "bogus." It is evident the asylum system has produced harm in different ways to both current and those whose claims have been refused.

This research project has provided some valuable insights into the interaction between undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers, an under-researched area. In the UK, anyone can report a crime regardless of their immigration status, and the police department has a duty to investigate the crime without any discrimination. However, in practice, most undocumented migrants hesitate to report crime due to fear of detention and deportation. This situation increases the vulnerabilities of undocumented migrants and likewise increases the confidence of criminals and those seeking to exploit. This underreporting of crime affects not only the undocumented migrants but also the over safety of the community and adds further gaps in the official crime statistics. This study emphasises policy change by introducing effective and robust mechanisms for crime reporting, such as safe reporting, which is implemented in the Netherlands (Timmerman, Leerkes & Staring, 2019).

Further measures may be required to establish a 'firewall' between the police and immigration services, ensuring the police do not face conflicts in their role. There should also be increased involvement of non-governmental support agencies in setting up 'third-party' reporting of crimes and incidents, in line with existing police practice (College of Policing, 2020). It should further be highlighted that under Articles 2, 3, 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), regardless of the immigration status, positive duties to

protect an individual's life, prevent inhuman treatment, avoid discrimination and safeguard their dignity must be taken (Human Rights Act, 1998).

The findings indicate that some law enforcement officers find themselves in problematic situations while dealing with undocumented migrants. While they may have empathy and compassion for the undocumented migrant's situation, they also have a duty to uphold the law. Many feel that the latter supersedes the need for kindness and compassion. Balancing these two responsibilities is challenging, as they often seem incompatible approaches, which makes the law enforcement role very difficult and places significant pressure on them. I argued that the police service should work independently and not in conjunction with the immigration services' commitments, which might help in better reporting of crime. This will ensure the police will have an independent hand to support the victims and investigate the crime effectively. This will ultimately result in enhancing public confidence and promoting the overall safety of the community (Hermansson et al., 2020).

Overall, this research project argued that the UK's immigration policy has a significant impact on shaping the phenomenon of undocumented migration and how they are projected in the political and media discourse. However, this relationship is not unidirectional; political and media discourse also actively shapes immigration policy, often pushing for an increasingly restrictive policies through public pressure and political rhetoric. This creates a cycle where policy influences migration patterns and discourse, which in turn influences future policy decisions. Immigration policy contributes to the issues of migrant smuggling, exploitation of undocumented migrants and their involvement in crimes as both victims and offenders, while also shaping the way in which the police and immigration officers interact with undocumented migrants. The immigration policy

defines what illegal migration is and dictates how the policy will be enforced. However, it goes beyond the definition and enforcement as these undocumented migrants are functional and part of the informal sector which indirectly contributes to the country's economy, and the state very well understands that completely removing undocumented migrants would affect the informal sector and economy. While this research focuses primarily on how policy shapes migration and discourse, it acknowledges that these relationships exist within a complex system of migration governance involving multiple actors and bidirectional influences.

Contributions of this PhD Research Project

This research study provides valuable insights and makes significant contributions to academic knowledge on the lived experience of undocumented migrants and the experience of law enforcement officers within the West Midlands region. I have divided the contributions of this PhD research project under three sub-headings, which are empirical contributions, theoretical contributions, and social implications.

The study makes significant empirical contributions by providing rich primary data collected from in-depth interviews with the undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers. The nature of the participants and data make this study more valuable, as the undocumented migrants are hard to access as they are well hidden within society. This study is important from a geographical perspective as the participants are from the West Midlands region, and most previous studies were from the south and southeast of the UK, especially London and its suburban areas which are discussed in the literature review chapter.

Before starting this research project, I had a question in my mind: whether I could find enough participants for research. Generally, undocumented migrants live

around big cities like London or Manchester due to the size of the informal economy. This question was well answered, as I managed to meet enough undocumented migrants across the West Midlands region, who moved to small towns avoid increased immigration raids and actions taken by immigration authorities in these larger metropolitan areas.

As such, this research contribution is significant in understanding the lived experience of undocumented migrants who are living in the West Midlands region and how this differs from the experiences of those in London and other major economic hubs. I conducted intensive fieldwork for 18 months within the West Midlands region to identify undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers who are willing to take part in this study. Another significant contribution of this study is understanding the experience of the law enforcement officers, both police and immigration officers, in dealing with undocumented migrations. This also includes challenges faced by law enforcement officers and their perception of undocumented migrants. I believe this empirical evidence can be used to shape the development of relevant policy and practices around policing undocumented migrants effectively. These empirical contributions are significant as the intersection of undocumented migrants and law enforcement is a highly under researched area with little existing work that combines narratives to offer qualitative understandings of interactions between undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers.

This study also made theoretical contributions that were derived from the narratives of both undocumented migrants and law enforcement officers. A social harm theoretical framework was employed to identify and understand the range of harms experienced by undocumented migrants. A zemiological approach was taken to understand different harms faced by the undocumented migrants is a

significant contribution as it provides valuable insights on immigration policies which are negatively impacting and producing harms.

Apart from the academic contributions, this study has provided a platform for undocumented migrants to share these life stories and be a voice for these voiceless people. Due to their lack of legal status, social exclusion and economic marginalisation in the UK, these undocumented migrants struggle to voice out their vulnerabilities and exploitations. They struggle to challenge the strong political and media narratives which often depict them as opportunists, threats to British society, potential offenders who increase crime rates, and abusers of the welfare system rather than a hard-working human being who contributes to the economy by providing goods and services at affordable prices. During the interviews with undocumented migrants, a few of them volunteered to participate in this study as they wanted to share their lived experiences and stories, which are hardly heard. From data analysis, it is evident that undocumented migrants are vulnerable and often go through significant victimisation and exploitation living in the UK. Their lack of legal status affects their day-to-day life and at a fundamental level, their status restricts their fundamental human rights including (though not limited to) implicating of their access to healthcare, education, and the justice system. Through this research project, I sought to amplify the voices of these voiceless and marginalised people who were often unheard.

Recommendations for Future Research

Using a social harm theoretical framework, this study has provided a nuanced understanding of harms experienced by undocumented migrants and critically analysed the experience of law enforcement in policing these migrants. However,

there is significant scope to expand this research further for better understanding the experiences of undocumented migrants from various perspectives.

Future research would benefit from a considerable representation of female participants in the study. One limitation of this study is the smaller number of female participants, which was largely because they are harder to reach, and female undocumented migrants are very sensitive to engage. This would help us to understand the lived experience of women undocumented migrants, particularly on social isolation, access to healthcare, aspirations, and issues, specifically on crime against women like domestic violence, and other physical and sexual abuse.

Geographically, this research study was conducted with undocumented migrants who are living within the West Midland regions of the UK. It would be interesting to perform a comparative analysis of the lived experience of undocumented migrants from different areas of the UK to understand differences and similarities in terms of various aspects of their lives. It would also be interesting to conduct a comparative analysis between the UK and other countries to understand how different countries handle undocumented migrants, which could benefit the UK by bringing best practices and policy implications.

This research study explored crime against undocumented migrants and their interaction with law enforcement. Though the study provided valuable and in-depth insights on these issues by analysis qualitative interviews, but it does not provide insights of prevalence of crime against undocumented migrants. The future research would benefit from conducting a quantitative survey to understand the prevalence of crime against undocumented migrants which can be compared with the official crimes to estimate the actual crimes. This would

help police force to understand level of under reporting of crime among undocumented migrants and can bring policy changes to create a robust and safe reporting environment for them.

Another avenue to consider for future research would be to explore and critically evaluate various good practices and policies followed by different police forces in policing undocumented migrants. The current study had a limited scope to evaluate and compare such good practices due to limited time and a limited number of participants from law enforcement agencies. Future research can focus on evaluating the existing policies and practices with respect to undocumented migrants, which would help us to understand how these policies and practices are applied at the community level. Further, I am confident that focusing solely on experience of law enforcement officers to understand policing undocumented migrants would benefit to gain more knowledge and understanding.

Final Thoughts

I would like to end this dissertation with an undocumented migrant's narrative from the interviews which I have conducted for this research:

"I don't know what to say, I don't even have a life, then what is the point of thinking about the future? Sometimes, even I think about committing suicide, but I am afraid to do that. I just pray God that it would be good if I die soon peacefully because I don't have any hope left in anyone (Ahmad)."

The above quote highlights the actual and difficult reality of undocumented migrants in the UK. Ahmad fled his country due to his experiences of child abuse and eventually moved to the UK after a long and challenging journey that was stressful and not without personal risk. While working in the informal sector

without any protection and benefits, he sustained a severe injury to his arm, and due to the lack of access to health, he lost his arm's functionality. As a result, he was and remains unable to continue working in unregulated aspects of the labour market, which often involved hard, labourious, and physically demanding tasks for little pay, and this eventually made him homeless. For the last five years, he has been living on the street, facing constant risks and where levels of crime victimisation run significantly higher. The above narrative illuminates a strong sense of distress, hopelessness, and isolation. Like for Ahmad, for many undocumented migrants, life is characterised by a lack of direction and stability, which sometimes drives them to extremes, including self-harm and suicide. The overwhelming sense of stagnation, lack of opportunities, and uncertain life contributes further to their vulnerability.

In short, politicians, media, and individuals who are against migration, especially undocumented and 'economic' migration, frequently emphasise the issues of security, economic impact and abuse of welfare and often overlook the human dimensions of undocumented migration. The individual struggles and challenges of the undocumented are not available in the public discourse due to the overwhelming political propaganda and hostile media coverage. The feelings of hopelessness and distress about not having a future or life, lack of aspirations, and even considering suicide are strong messages that there is a need for addressing undocumented migrants' issues not just from a political aspect but also from a human aspect. Health care, social support, mental health support, and policies that prioritise human rights, dignity, and well-being are very critical in reshaping the migration approach. It is essential that any comprehensive solution to migration must balance the national interests along with the human rights and dignity of the migrants. Yet the reality experienced by undocumented migrants

reveals how far current policies fall short of recognising their humanity. As Ahmad powerfully expressed *“At that time, I felt like in this country, if you are a dog you will be treated well and taken care well, but human doesn't have value until you get a status to live”*.

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Appendix i: Ethics Approval

School of Justice, Security and Sustainability



ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK


Researcher name:	Manikandan Soundararajan
Title of Study:	SU_21_154 'A Qualitative Examination of Policing Undocumented Migration in the West Midland Region: Understanding the Experiences of Undocumented Migrants and Law Enforcement Agencies'.
Award Pathway:	PGR
Status of approval:	Approved

Your project ***proposal has been approved*** by the Ethics Panel and you may commence the implementation phase of your study. You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

You should arrange to meet with your supervisor for support during the process of completing your study and writing your dissertation.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site.

The Ethics Committee wish you well with your research.

Signed: 	Date: 18/07/2022
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Dr. Kirsty Squires
Ethics Co-ordinator (SCE)

Appendix ii: Information Sheet: Undocumented Migrants

ID: #



A Qualitative Examination of policing undocumented Migration in the West Midland Region: Understanding the Experiences of police and immigration officers.

Purpose of the study:

The researcher is a PhD research student at Staffordshire University, and, for their research project, they are conducting research into the lived experiences of undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region.

Why you have been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this research to understand the lived experiences of undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region. The interview/observation aim to explore the various problems or difficulties faced by undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region.

What does participation entail?

Participation in this research will involve a semi- structured interview regarding your life as an undocumented migrant starting from entering the UK and include aspects of employment, socialisation, housing, access to health and other related issues. The participation will also include observation of your frequently visited places to better understand your lived experiences and living conditions. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes and will be recorded using a Dictaphone and transcribed by the researcher post interview for data analysis purpose. The observation will be recorded in the observation sheet.

What are the risks associated with taking part in the research?

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study. Any information collected within the study remains confidential and anonymous.

What are the benefits of taking part in the research?

There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. You are being asked to help in order to better understand your lived experiences. As reiterated previously, you will not be mentioned in any reports as the data collected is anonymous.

Are there any reasons why I might not be eligible to take part in the research?

We require participants over the age of 18 years and outside the West Midlands region.

How will any personal information used during the research be kept confidential?

Your interview will be recorded via a Dictaphone with this then transcribed and the recording then deleted. It is recommended that in the interview you avoid using names of any individuals (including your own) or specific sensitive details about on-going operations to help ensure the anonymity. In the event of any sensitive information being obtained not deemed suitable for dissemination, this will be omitted from the transcripts and replaced by codes. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

All information collected from the interview and observation will be kept strictly confidential. No personally identifiable information will be needed to complete the interview, and your answers will be anonymous. You will be asked for basic demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity to allow us to fully analyse the data. All data collected, as part of this study, will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for 10 years, and will then be destroyed.

Right to decline or withdraw

You are reminded that you are not under any obligation to take part in this study and hold the right to decline participation. You also hold the right to withdraw at any point during the interview/observation and you will also be able to request the removal of all or part of your data from the research with two weeks from the data collection. To withdraw your data, you need to contact the researcher with the participant code issued after the completion of interview/observation. Please be aware it will not be possible to withdraw your data after the completion of three weeks of time from the data collection.

Contact

If any questions or concerns should arise from this research, if you wish to raise a concern about the study, and in particular about the conduct of the study or the individuals involved or you require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact **Manikandan Soundararajan** (Email: manikandan.soundararajan@research.staffs.ac.uk or Contact No : 07586719047).

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact **Manikandan**, you may contact the researcher's supervisor, **Dr Lauren Metcalfe** on Lauren.Metcalfe@staffs.ac.uk.

Complaints:

We hope you take part and find our study interesting. However, we realise problems may arise. If you have any concerns, please contact the supervisor listed above. We will do our best to answer any problems.

Appendix iii: Information Sheet: Law Enforcement Officers

ID: #



A Qualitative Examination of policing undocumented Migration in the West Midland Region: Understanding the Experiences of police and immigration officers.

Purpose of the study:

The researcher is a PhD research student at Staffordshire University, and for their research project, they are conducting research on the experiences of police and immigration officers in policing the undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region.

Why you have been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this research to understand the experiences of police and immigration officers in policing the undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region. The interview/observation aim to explore the way in which undocumented migrants are policed and understand the challenges faced by police and immigration officers in the process of handling the undocumented migrants in the West Midlands region.

What does participation entail?

Participation in this research will involve a semi- structured interview regarding your experience handling undocumented migrants and challenged faced. The participation will also include a participant observation of your jurisdiction along with you to better understand your experience and challenges faced. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes and will be recorded using a Dictaphone and transcribed by the researcher post interview for data analysis purpose. The observation will be recorded in the observation sheet.

What are the risks associated with taking part in the research?

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study. Any information collected within the study remains confidential and anonymous.

What are the benefits of taking part in the research?

There are no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. You are being asked to help in order to better understand your experiences as police or immigration officer. As reiterated previously, you will not be mentioned in any reports as the data collected is anonymous.

Are there any reasons why I might not be eligible to take part in the research?

We require participants over the age of 18 years.

How will any personal information used during the research be kept confidential?

Your interview will be recorded via a Dictaphone with this then transcribed and the recording then deleted. It is recommended that in the interview you avoid using names of any individuals (including your own) or specific sensitive details about on-going operations to help ensure the anonymity. In the event of any sensitive information being obtained not deemed suitable for dissemination, this will be omitted from the transcripts and replaced by codes. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

All information collected from the interview and observation will be kept strictly confidential. No personally identifiable information will be needed to complete the interview, and your answers will be anonymous. You will be asked for basic demographic information such as age, gender and ethnicity to allow us to fully analyse the data. All data collected, as part of this study, will be kept securely in paper or electronic form for 10 years, and will then be destroyed.

Right to decline or withdraw

You are reminded that you are not under any obligation to take part in this study and hold the right to decline participation. You also hold the right to withdraw at any point during the interview/observation and you will also be able to request the removal of all or part of your data from the research with two weeks from the data collection. To withdraw your data, you need to contact the researcher with the participant code issued after the completion of interview/observation. Please be aware it will not be possible to withdraw your data after the completion of three weeks of time from the data collection.

Contact

If any questions or concerns should arise from this research, if you wish to raise a concern about the study, and in particular about the conduct of the study or the

individuals involved or you require further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact **Manikandan Soundararajan** (Email: manikandan.soundararajan@research.staffs.ac.uk or Contact No : 07586719047).

Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact **Manikandan**, you may contact the researcher's supervisor, **Dr Lauren Metcalfe** on Lauren.Metcalfe@staffs.ac.uk.

Complaints:

We hope you take part and find our study interesting. However, we realise problems may arise. If you have any concerns, please contact the supervisor listed above. We will do our best to answer any problems.

Appendix iV: Consent Form

ID: #

Participant copy

Consent Form

By taking part in the study, you are agreeing that you understand the information provided and agree to the following:

	I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
	I understand that my involvement in the study will remain anonymous and once my responses have been submitted any identifiable information will be replaced with a code. If you wish to remove your data at any point you would need to reference this unique code.
	I understand that my participation will be anonymous and any details that might identify me will not be included in any reports or publications produced from the study.
	I understand that I am free to not answer any questions and may stop the interview/ observation at any point.
	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
	I agree to anonymised quotes being used within reports/other publications produced from the study.
	I understand that any data I provide will be used to provide an overview of purpose of study.

By taking part in the interview/observation after reading this information you are agreeing that you understand the information provided and agree to us analysing the answers you give.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Participant Sign:	Researcher Sign:
Date:	Date:

ID:

Researcher copy

Consent Form

By taking part in the study, you are agreeing that you understand the information provided and agree to the following:

	I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
	I understand that my involvement in the study will remain anonymous and once my responses have been submitted any identifiable information will be replaced with a code. If you wish to remove your data at any point you would need to reference this unique code.
	I understand that my participation will be anonymous and any details that might identify me will not be included in any reports or publications produced from the study.
	I understand that I am free to not answer any questions and may stop the interview/ observation at any point.
	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.
	I agree to anonymised quotes being used within reports/other publications produced from the study.
	I understand that any data I provide will be used to provide an overview of purpose of study.

By taking part in the interview/observation after reading this information you are agreeing that you understand the information provided and agree to us analysing the answers you give.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Participant Sign:	Researcher Sign:
Date:	Date:

Appendix v: Semi-Structured Interview: Undocumented Migrant

Date:

Participant No:

Demographic data

1. Gender:
2. Age:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Nationality or C/o origin:
5. Education Status:
6. First arrived in the UK:
7. Family Status (with family/alone)
8. Immigration history:
9. What job you were doing in your country:
10. Economic status in your country:

Migration history:

11. Why you left your country and when?
12. What made you to take this decision?
13. Why you choose UK to live?
14. How you travelled from your country to UK?
15. What challenges your faced during the migration?
16. What happened on arrival to UK?
17. Where did you stayed on arrival to UK?

Housing

18. What is your current living/housing situation?
19. How did you find this place? / who helped you to arrange it?
20. Usually, what are strategies people use to rent a house?
21. How much do you pay for your accommodation? Do you think your rent is higher than actual?
22. How long you been living in this house/flat?
23. What kind of proof you gave to secure the accommodation?
24. Do you live with friends/relatives/family members? What it is like to live with friends/relatives/family members?

25. Can describe the community where you live?
26. Does your neighbour know that you don't have paper?
27. If no, what happens if your neighbours comes to know that you don't have paper?

Employment

28. Currently, where do you work and please describe your role?
29. How much you get paid for your work in hours?
30. How long your shift lasts for?
31. Do you get break/s during your shifts? How long is your break/s?
32. How did you find this job? How difficult was it? Did anyone helped you to find this job?
33. Are you satisfied with this job? / Looking for something else?
34. What is your educational qualification? Is your job related to your educational qualification?
35. Does your job involve laborious work? If yes, can you describe the difficult level of your work?
36. Is your employer aware of your current status? If yes, how does your employer treat you being undocumented?
37. Does your status influence your working conditions / salary / job security?
38. Do you have a bank account? If yes, how difficult was it to open an account?
39. Is English Language a barrier to seek work or to involve in your day-to-day work?
40. Share you experience Covid-19 pandemic in terms of employment and income?

Access to Health Care

41. Are you registered with a GP? If no, why not registered?
42. If you are not registered with GP, do you visit private hospitals for any health issues?
43. When was the last time you went to the hospital / see a doctor?
44. How do you get treatment for serious health issues?
45. Do you rely upon self-medicine? So, how do you get medicines from pharmacy without prescription?
46. Have you ever used NHS emergency services? If yes, can you share your experiences?
47. Have you received your Covid-19 vaccination? How many doses you have received?
48. How difficult it was for you to receive Covid-19 vaccination?
49. How did you manage during Covid-19 pandemic with respect to health services – testing, treatment, medicines etc?

Social life and social network

50. Do you have many friends or family in and around west midland region?

- a. How did you get to know them?
 - b. Where do you usually meet them?
 - c. How many people know about your legal status? Does your family know?
 - d. Do you feel that your legal status affects your relationship with friends/work colleagues/family back home/other people? Can you explain how does it affect?
 - e. Does it affect your use of the internet? the way you connect with friends any social media FB, Instagram etc.
51. Do you have any British friends/colleagues? Do they know about your status? How you feel working with them?
52. Do you think English language a barrier for social networking with mainstream community?
53. How do you spend your free time?
- a. Do you involve in any sports or leisure activities?
 - b. Have you been to the local community centre/ church or any regions centre / migrant organisations etc.?
 - c. Where do you feel 'safe' or 'unsafe'?

Navigating Day to Day Life

54. What does it mean (for you) to live in this country 'undocumented or without legal status'?
- a. What impact does this have on your daily life?
 - b. How often do you think about not having papers? In what situations you think?
 - c. What kind of situations do you try to avoid because of not having legal status?
 - d. Do you think you should have the legal status to live and work in the UK?
55. When did you move to this city?
56. Before coming to the current city where did you lived? Why you left that city?
57. Why did you choose this city? What you like and don't like about this city?
58. Did you ever experience racism or discrimination while living in the UK? If, yes can please explain what happened.
59. How do you usually move around the city for your day to day work?
60. Do you own a Car?
61. Do you have driving license? If yes, how did you managed to get one? If no, then how do you drive your car (if he/she has one)?
62. Did/do you ever need any kind of support like social, financial, legal etc?
- a. If yes, where do you go to seek these kinds of support?

- b. Have you ever been to your city council? What was the purpose and did you get the support?
- c. Are you aware of organisations/community group in your area where you can get some support?

Interaction with Police/immigration authority/Criminal Justice system

- 63. Have you ever come in contact with the police/immigration authority?
- 64. What do you think or feel about police/immigration authority?
- 65. How do feel or what do you do if you see police standing on the street?
 - a. What do you think would happen to you if the police stop you?
 - b. Have you ever stopped by the police? How did you managed to escape from that situation?
 - c. What kind of strategies you usually stop to avoid those situations?
- 66. Do you know of anybody who has been/will be deported? How did it come to that?
- 67. Have you ever been victim of any form crime?
- 68. Did you report it to police?
- 69. If No, where do you seek any kind of support in these kinds of situation?
- 70. If there are any disputes or fight (both verbal or physical) between two people within your group of undocumented migrants, how do you settle it down or dispute mechanisms like a senior or elderly undocumented migrant, who helps you with this? If you have anything like that please share your experience.

Thinking about future

- 71. Do you ever think about or are you planning to leave this country?
- 72. If yes, what is the reason? Where you are thinking go?
- 73. What would you tell a friend back home who wants to come to the UK same as you did?
- 74. What 'plan' do you have for your future?
- 75. Where do you think you will be in 5 years?
- 76. Do have any dreams? How are you thinking to achieve it ?

Appendix vi: Semi-Structured Interview: Law Enforcement

Officer

Date:

Participant No:

Demographic data

1. Gender:
2. Rank/Current position:
3. Years of experience:

Interaction with undocumented migrants (police)

4. In your career, how many times (approx.) you have come in contact with undocumented migrants? Can you share your experience?
5. What action did you take during those contact? What standard procedure you follow in that situation?
6. Is there any mechanism/scanning technique you follow to identify the undocumented migrants? If yes, can you share how you do that?
7. Which areas around the city, you often find the movement of undocumented migrants and why?
8. What kind of techniques do they use to escape from police when they are caught?
9. Have you ever encountered a situation in which undocumented migrants approached police to report about crime against them?
10. When undocumented migrants approach police to report about crime against them, do think police listen to them and take action the crime? Share you view on the same.
11. Have you ever come in contact with victims of trafficking (like trafficked for sex work, forced labour etc) in your career? Are they still be considered as an undocumented migrant or victim?

Interaction with undocumented migrants (Immigration enforcement)

12. Being an immigration enforcement office, can you please describe your job and role?
13. Where and how often you come in contact with undocumented migrants? Can you share your experience working with undocumented migrants?
14. What action did you take during those contact? What standard procedure you follow in that situation?

15. Is there any mechanism/scanning technique you follow to identify the undocumented migrants? If yes, can you share how you do that?
16. Have you ever conducted any raid on houses, businesses and organisations in search of undocumented migrants? please share your experience.
17. What happens after the raid if undocumented migrants are found? What standard procedure you follow in that situation?
18. What happens to the undocumented migrants after the raid?
19. How often the raids are conducted and on what basis? Can share your experience?
20. What do you think about people seeking asylum, work status in the UK?
21. Currently, the UK government has financial support policy to refugees and people seeking asylum, do you think is it enough?
22. Do you think strict immigration policy of the UK, is somewhere encouraging illegal smuggling of person and increasing the income of smuggling agents in some way?
23. If an undocumented migrant's asylum claim is rejected and he feels there is a hidden threat to him and his family in own country, what happens in that situation?
24. Can share your experience and view on detention centre for undocumented migrants?
25. Have you ever rescued victims of trafficking (like trafficked for sex work, forced labour etc) in your career? Are they still be considered as an undocumented migrant or victim?

Perception of law enforcement (police and immigration enforcement) on undocumented migrants

26. What do you feel about undocumented migrants?
27. In your career, have you ever sympathised on undocumented migrants and their life? If yes, why?
28. Do you think, criminalization for not having status to live and work in the UK is not fair on them? If yes or no, please share your view?
29. Do you think, criminalization for not having status to live and work in the UK, is forcing them to involve in illegal activities or produce forged documents for their livelihood?
30. Currently, the UK government has financial support policy to refugees and people seeking asylum, do you think is it enough?
31. Do you think undocumented migrants should be given some sort temporary status to live and work, rather than financial support?