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# Research among Forced Migrants in Poland from the Methodological Point of View and Ethical Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to identify ethical tensions between the cognitive function of science, humanitarian reasons for undertaking research work and its practical goals in research conducted among forced migrants. Differences between researchers and respondents in the dimensions of social, economic and political status determine the challenges of building ethical relationships, not only as meeting the imperative of "do no harm" by ensuring the safety of the subjects and protecting them from abuse. In a team composed of researchers with an external and internal status towards the studied group, we consider the possibilities of equalizing asymmetrical relationships, creating relationships based on mutual benefits and the involvement of respondents in the research process. The source of reflection is the analysis of research reports and the experience of own research work carried out among forced migrants by co-authors of this text.

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*Classification:* LCC Code: JV7590 .R47 2016

*Language:* English



Great Britain  
Journals Press

LJP Copyright ID: 573356  
Print ISSN: 2515-5786  
Online ISSN: 2515-5792

London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences

Volume 23 | Issue 21 | Compilation 1.0



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# Research among Forced Migrants in Poland from the Methodological Point of View and Ethical Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of the article is to identify ethical tensions between the cognitive function of science, humanitarian reasons for undertaking research work and its practical goals in research conducted among forced migrants. Differences between researchers and respondents in the dimensions of social, economic and political status determine the challenges of building ethical relationships, not only as meeting the imperative of "do no harm" by ensuring the safety of the subjects and protecting them from abuse. In a team composed of researchers with an external and internal status towards the studied group, we consider the possibilities of equalizing asymmetrical relationships, creating relationships based on mutual benefits and the involvement of respondents in the research process. The source of reflection is the analysis of research reports and the experience of own research work carried out among forced migrants by co-authors of this text.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Answers to the questions: who are refugees, how do they behave and what do they need are crucial for various fields of research and practice: law, politics, pedagogy, anthropology and other disciplines that strive to use the power of refugee stories to inform, provide assistance or introduce institutional changes. Research among forced

migrants and refugees is an essential tool for developing effective interventions, assessing practices and ensuring that services provided help rather than harm recipients. It is equally important to ensure that the research itself does not cause harm and, whenever possible, contributes to the benefit of the research subjects (Ellis, 2007). Forced migrants are people who experience war, persecution, torture and violence in various contexts. Social scientists in humanitarian settings often face a dual imperative: research should be both scientifically sound and policy-relevant (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

The political and legal situation of refugees, including complete dependence on international and national refugee regimes, means that they have few rights and are subject to arbitrary actions by state authorities, service institutions and aid organizations. Conducting research among sensitive groups, in unknown cultural contexts, in a relationship of strong asymmetry of agency, control and influence between researchers and research participants, raises questions about the ethical dimension of research.

In this text, we will present specific issues related to conducting research relating to the biographies of refugees, from the perspective of the literature on the subject and on the example of projects in which the authors of this text undertook methodological reflections in order to resolve identified ethical issues.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Refugee life stories provide insight into what forces people to flee, what refugee trajectories look like, and how refugees rebuild their lives in

their country of refuge. The subject of research is the ways of telling stories by forced migrants, analyzing the stories created about them and for them, as well as the narratives of institutions that give shape to migrations (Pawlak, 2013). Refugees' biographical narratives reflect the dynamic interplay between their life experience and its representation, in tightly determined political, social and cultural conditions. Life stories, considered in a broader socio-political and cultural context, provide a source for examining the meanings that forced migrants individually and collectively attach to their experience.

Most of the data collected in studies of forced migrants are based on interviews (Jacobsen, Landau, 2003). Forced migrants and refugees staying in Poland have been examined in numerous studies conducted in various paradigms: legal (Klaus, 2008; Czerniewska, Kości-Ryżko, 2013), sociological (Grzymała-Kazłowska; Łodziński, 2008), anthropological (Ząbek, Łodziński, 2008; Pawlak 2013), pedagogical (Januszewska 2010), psychological (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2000) and cultural (Chrzanowska, 2007). The content of the interviews, conducted in various theoretical trends and models, was analyzed according to the concept of culture shock, reaction to long-term stay in refugee camps as total institutions, learned helplessness, rites of passage, adaptation and identity strategies, and cultural determinants of the integration process. The researcher, representing the regime of academic power/knowledge, comes to the aid of other services appointed to "place" and "manage" refugees in the host society. Researchers claim the right to access a range of information - from institutional data to oral information, opinions and confessions - thus becoming involved in the endless disciplining and reconstruction of the subjectivity of refugees and immigrants (Doná, 2007).

Immigrants and refugees constitute vulnerable groups in all societies (Caulford, Vali, 2006). Refugees, as an extremely sensitive group and exposed to a number of threats from the receiving society (xenophobia, breaking the law by ununiformed services, making sensitive data public, etc.), as well as from other refugees or members of

the origin group, should be examined in a manner consistent with the procedures ensuring ethical research standards and other strategies aimed at protecting both personal data and the image of the origin group, family or local community. Guidelines for conducting research in other cultures require the researcher to follow the ethical standards of both cultures (Birman, 2005). Operationalizing these guidelines in specific research projects requires developing ethical protocols with specific communities because refugee research involves people from many different cultures and no single set of guidelines can be established (Ellis, 2007).

Ethical issues and related methodological choices concern all stages of research: design, implementation, analysis and dissemination. Researchers address issues of accessibility to sensitive, hidden groups, ways of ensuring the safety of research subjects and protecting them against abuse, possibilities of equalizing asymmetrical relationships, creating relationships based on mutual benefits and ensuring the maximum participation of people and communities subject to research (Doná, 2007).

The burden of research among forced migrants on the risk of repeated injury and unnecessary suffering leads to the need to decide on the benefit-cost ratio in specific research projects. On the other hand, radical implementation of the demands of protecting participants from potential harm may simply lead to not conducting research, a situation that is in itself unethical (Kilpatrick 2004).

The proposed ethical guidelines start from the minimum requirement of "do no harm", through the demands of justice (Clark-Kazak, 2017), to the requirement to ensure mutual benefits (Mackenzie, 2000) and the involvement of subjects in the entire research process (Pittaway, Bartolomei, Hugman, 2010) and a commitment to relieve suffering (Turton, 1996).

### III. REPORTS FROM THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

#### 3.1 Research among Refugees from the Caucasus in Poland

The co-authors of this text conducted participatory action research in the years 2015-2018 with the community of asylum seekers and refugees in Poland who have been systematically arriving in Europe since the beginning of the 21st century (Jaworska 2016; Jaworska, Alieva 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). One of the analyzed dimensions were institutional patterns, which, in the analytical categories of Fritz Schutze, "correspond to the principle of an individual's orientation to normative institutional expectations and being subject to control by them" (Rokuszewska-Pawełek, 1996, pp. 44). In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, problems related to the implementation of institutional norms and expectations from reception, service and integration institutions become biographically paramount. In this area, attitudes towards participating in various research practices conducted in centers for refugees were revealed.

When analyzing this area of research, the authors took into account the different goals of researchers and research subjects, different values in the name of which both parties are engaged, various mutual expectations and secondary benefits defining the space for planning, conducting and participating in research projects (Main, 2008).

The analysis of the "refugees' voice" regarding their involvement in the research situation shows the complex reasons for consenting or refusing to participate and the changes in attitudes during the gradual recognition of one's own position as a "refugee", as well as the strategies for managing biographical material while giving interviews.

Researchers use biographical necessity, defined by Gabriele Rosenthal as the readiness to talk about one's own life (Kaźmierska, 1996). It depends on various factors, some of which result from the individual experiences of the person, and partly are conditioned by the perception of one's role as

a group member in the process of constructing collective identification. A person is ready to tell the story of his or her life when he or she is convinced of the meaning of the effort undertaken, both for himself and for the listener.

*From the beginning of my stay in Poland to this day, many people have asked me to participate in their research. First, I agreed to all meetings, just like other women staying in the refugee center. [woman, 43 years old]*

The first reason for involvement is to understand the invitation to participate in the study as an expression of interest in the personal situation of refugees.

*We thought that the students who came to the center and talked to us were interested in our fate. We really needed this. [woman, 49 years old]*

In the initial stage of the refugee trajectory, involvement in research is seen as an opportunity to learn about a new social and cultural environment, and is also an opportunity to break the monotony of life in the refugee camps.

*There was nothing to do at the resort. The visits of designers and researchers were interesting for us, we could talk. I went to all the meetings, sometimes I cried because I didn't understand the language, I wanted to learn and understand how to live in Poland so as not to live in the ghetto. [woman, 49 years old]*

The research situation creates an opportunity to establish contacts with Poles, which is difficult for residents of refugee centers due to the location of these centers in peripheral places, away from larger population centers. Making friends with representatives of the host community is seen as a chance to find a job or get some form of help and gives hope for improving one's life. Minor benefits from research may result from the fact that researchers on their own look for ways to reciprocate and reciprocate for participation in research by providing participants with food, hygiene products or clothing. On the margins of the study, an informal exchange of favors and

small benefits is created. In this situation, consent to participate in the study may reflect expectations, often unrealistic, as to the researchers' ability to influence the shape of the research subjects' reality. Following this interpretation of the research situation, there is hope that participation in the research will contribute to improving the position in the refugee proceedings and will help in obtaining a positive status decision.

*Refugees talked among themselves about taking part in research because it could help us obtain asylum. Later we realized that the refugee procedure and the tests conducted on us had nothing to do with each other.* [woman, 50 years old]

When asylum seekers are thoroughly informed and understand that participation in research will not translate into a change in their individual situation in the refugee procedure, they become motivated by the idea that honestly telling their story to people interested and using academic authority will lead to a change in the system, which will improve the overall situation of refugees.

*I thought that if not me, then maybe others who would come after us would benefit from the fact that something would change for the better. I thought that I would change opinions about refugees, that Poles would know how to help them better.* [woman, 49 years old]

Additionally, the decision to participate in the study is supported by simple kindness, and often also by culturally determined habits of not refusing a request.

*I would feel uncomfortable and ashamed to say no when asked to take a test. This is rude and impolite behavior among us.* [woman, 43 years old]

Over time, an increasingly better recognition of the institutional contexts of being a "refugee" and a rational analysis of benefits and losses lead to the assessment of the research situation as completely alienated from their real life experience.

*I have nothing to lose, so why shouldn't I do someone a favor, especially when it doesn't cost me much. But these are matters that do not concern me.* [woman, 49 years old]

*I have been interviewed many times about my experience as a refugee. Now I refuse. It's not fair that I devote my time and the person who comes doesn't give anything, not even chocolates for the children. No one ever showed me the test results.* [woman, 46 years old]

Significant circumstances surrounding the research situation may raise deep concerns in the subjects. Social research on refugees is dominated by a qualitative approach, which collects mostly sensitive data, which means that the acquisition and publication of this information may lead to research-related or deferred risks. Interviews relating to biographical content dating back to the period of life in the country of origin, situations of escape and displacement, touch on painful content, sometimes breaking the law. This raises fears of disclosing information that may harm both the respondents themselves and the family left behind in the country of origin, due to the principle of collective responsibility often applied there. Strategies to keep yourself and your loved ones safe involve carefully managing information and creating tight filters so that information does not leak to people within your own ethnic or national group or to the place from which you fled.

*My biggest fear is saying something that could hurt my family who stayed at home. Our nation is very small, we are connected by various ties. All it takes is for someone to tell us the area they come from and we can identify their family.* [woman, 49 years old]

*I never gave any interviews to anyone, although I was asked many times, I refused, I didn't see the point.* [man, 57 years old]

There is also a fear of accidentally saying something that will negatively affect the refugee procedure. In addition, there is concern that critical statements about the operation of the refugee service system may result in retaliation

from the center's employees, who are perceived as having the power to control and discipline the lives of residents.

*We did not know whether the translators, students and researchers passed on the information to the employees of the center or the office for foreigners. [woman, 29 years old]*

Phenomena such as cultural taboos, standards of family and community life, unequal rights of women and men to participate in the public sphere or protection of the image of one's own ethnic group in exile have an undeniable impact on the significance and representativeness of the obtained data. One of the communication strategies adopted by the respondents is taking care of the image of their origin group. This phenomenon refers to the "social function of narrative" described by G. Rosenthal, which consists in the fact that the creation of narratives is usually accompanied by the construction of ways of interpreting them, i.e. collective efforts, specific to the group under study, aimed at giving their own biography features understandable to the recipients (Każmierska, 1996).

*We feel like representatives of our nation here. We must show ourselves from the best side so as not to bring shame to the entire nation. [woman, 51 years old]*

*I have a whole notebook of war memories, I want to publish them, but not here [in Poland], no one will understand it here, it would be like a fairy tale for you [Poles]. [man, 53 years old]*

In every community there are culturally taboo topics that will not be revealed in a research situation.

*We never talk to each other about why we left the country. We hide being a victim of sexual violence or torture not only from our own family and friends, but also before representatives of institutions, because it is a great shame and humiliation for us, both for women and men. [woman, 49 years old]*

Paradoxically, fear and shame prevent people from disclosing drastic experiences also in interviews conducted by institutions deciding on granting international protection, which may negatively affect this decision, because the interview is the basic source of evidence in the refugee process.

Another burden associated with participating in research is the psychophysical condition of participants, resulting from experiences that resulted in escaping from their country of origin, uprooting, displacement and the need to find their way in new conditions. Biographical experiences, the background of which is often the subject of interest for researchers, influence the current emotional state, cognitive abilities and mental integrity. The memory of experienced traumas and the inability to cope with their consequences lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which affects up to 84 percent of people seeking protection (Moran, 2013). The frequency and intensity of PTSD varies depending on the type of traumatic exposure. People who were victims or witnesses of violence, rape and murder before escaping relive traumatic situations in intrusive memories and nightmares, and avoid activities and situations that could remind them of the trauma.

*Every time I agreed to such interviews, which was at least ten times, I relived the worst moments of my life. [woman, 49 years old]*

Protection against repeated harm raises questions about the validity and moral rights of obtaining data among people affected by the consequences of traumatic experiences. Research among refugees is also conducted precisely because they experience crisis, mourning and traumatization. There are also reports from the research field documenting the benefits of participating in trauma-related research (Neuman, Kaloupek 2004). Although some participants report strong negative emotions or unexpected distress, most do not regret or evaluate the entire experience negatively. The opportunity to express traumatic experiences in words and reflect on the meaning of the experiences may outweigh the potential risks (Dyregrov, Dyregrov, Raundalen, 2000).

Another area of concern for refugees concerns making the results public. In the process of communicating refugees' experiences to the public, researchers are obliged to ensure the safety of research participants and protect their dignity. Interviews with refugee women from Chechnya, collected in the project of the Society for Crisis Intervention "Wandering Women", could not be included in the publication because their presentation would be too dangerous for them and their families (Lipowska-Teutsch, Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2008). Only their anonymized study was published in the volume *In our name*, so that they would not be forgotten again (Lipowska-Teutsch, 2009). Paweł Hut, who analyzed the life experiences of people applying for refugee status before arriving in Poland, based on the analysis of interviews in the refugee procedure, in the name of research reliability, decided not to disclose certain contents from the interviews for humanitarian reasons, even at the cost of changing the meaning of his own analyses: 'extremely drastic descriptions, by the author's decision, will not be discussed in more detail and made available to readers. Their terrifying content - which is a specific characterization of the perversions of human nature - would certainly change the meaning of this study' (Hut, 2007, pp. 69).

Lack of understanding of research objectives, research procedures, and methods of knowledge transmission raises concerns about how the disclosed information will be used. Based on experiences with researchers not sharing research results back, there is a feeling of being vulnerable to exploitation. It is worth quoting in this context the words of one of the refugees in the research conducted in India:

We are fed up with people coming and stealing our stories, taking photos and giving nothing in return, not even photos or a copy of the report. Nothing changes (Hugman, Bartolomei, Pittaway, 2011).

Similar dilemmas, concerns and hopes related to participation in research are described in reports from research conducted in different parts of the world, among various groups of asylum seekers

and refugees (Birman, 2005; Doná 2007; Jacobsen, Landau, 2003).

The described conditions for conducting interviews with forced migrants lead to questions about the representativeness and value of the data obtained and to consider the proportion between the risk of exposing respondents to the above dilemmas and the potential benefits that the study may bring. These phenomena indicate the need to simultaneously address methodological and ethical issues in research on forced migration to increase its academic and political relevance.

### *3.2 Research with the participation of refugee youth in Gdansk*

The research project *The ways of belonging in narratives of 1.5 generation refugee youth* was carried out by a team of academic researchers from the University of Gdansk, with the participation of a researcher with an internal status towards the studied communities (Boryczko 2017; Jaworska, Alieva 2018b).

We will present our considerations in three emerging areas of ethical and methodological issues: representativeness of the sample, asymmetry of relationships and tensions arising between the cognitive function of science, the humanitarian reasons for undertaking research and its practical goals.

The questions that accompanied the design of the study concerned the specificity of identity work of refugee youth belonging to the 1.5 generation. This term refers to children and young people subjected to migration processes in their adolescence and teenage years, who are situated between the first and second generations of immigrants (Asher 2011). People belonging to this category, having an incompletely formed cultural habitus of their country of origin, are exposed to the influence of a culturally and socially different environment of the country to which they migrate with their parents. In other words, they engage in socialization in the target country, experiencing a number of contradictions and conflicts, both at the psychological level and in functioning in the family and wider society.

The aim of the study was to identify the processes influencing the identity of young people, which is constructed in the conditions of change of place of stay and/or temporary stay. We were interested in the ways in which young people represent themselves visually and descriptively, and how they negotiate and construct their identity, taking into account the specificity of the situation in which they find themselves. The practical aim of the research was to identify the needs and problems of young refugees for planning educational activities and organizing a supportive environment.

In the research project, we focused on visual representations of identity work, based on materials generated by the respondents and narratives relating to these representations. From a further interpretative perspective, we wanted to capture the ways in which dominant discourses are represented and reproduced in the cultural practices and symbolism used by young people.

The approach used can be described as ethnographic field research supplemented with visual ethnography. Visual materials and visual analysis methods were fundamental in the research process. In the next step, the biographical visual narratives created by the youth, treated as representations of identity work, were the context of in-depth individual biographical interviews.

### 3.3 Representativeness

The first ethical and methodological issue we had to consider was related to access to a particularly vulnerable group and the representativeness of the sample we reached. Due to the specificity of research on refugees and forced migrants, conducted in urban conditions, the issue of hidden groups, i.e. the internal differentiation of the groups studied, seems to be of key ethical importance. Hidden populations, as a result of the dynamics of intergroup relations, are very often exposed to various types of social and physical risks, and generally remain more sensitive than others due to the circumstances surrounding their movement and reception in the country of refuge.

From the point of view of research practice, researching hidden groups is a very risky task due to the problem of accessibility, which is associated with distrust towards strangers in general and the ignorance of researchers, which is reinforced by stereotypes that obscure the complexity of the refugees' reality (Szörényi 2006). It turns out that using a very broad category of "refugees" is as convenient for the researcher as it hides the complexity of the reality of the studied group. Representativeness is related to the issue of gatekeepers who reflect the diverse forms of economic, symbolic and social capital of the refugee community under study. The role of gatekeepers in the case of refugee research is to provide expert knowledge to researchers, as well as to enable access to the research field thanks to the knowledge, skills and contacts they have.

The problem of stereotypes of researchers, especially Europeans, is related to the mythologizing of the alleged homogeneity of the entire refugee population. Often, the perception of this group is associated with the unification of the image of refugees into a monolithic entity composed of culturally different people who need "our" help. On the other hand, if a researcher manages to break through the "refugees" category, he usually limits himself to identifying an ethnic or national group, without caring about the nuances of intra-group relations. This is a broader problem related to the perception of difference cultural by Europeans. The awareness of the trap of unauthorized petrification of traditional cultures is a typical example of reification that characterizes cultural anthropology (Eller 2012). Contemporary researchers of refugee and migration, just like anthropologists in the past, need "relics" of traditional cultures in order to be able to build oppositions between us, modernists, and refugees who live traditionally or adapt to "our" modernist world. The problem is that the original society never existed and no one lives as "in the beginning".

We assumed that in order to conduct ethical intercultural research, it is not enough to rely on our own cultural sensitivity and knowledge about the communities we study (Birman 2005). Following the widely accepted view among

researchers that ethical research in different cultures cannot be conducted without the involvement of members of these communities, we secured the participation of a qualified co-researcher who shared various attributes of social and cultural affiliation with the study participants and their families. Russian was the common language spoken by all research participants. Thanks to her knowledge of both Polish and Russian, she ensured effective communication. She shared with adult family members generational experiences of growing up and living in the common political system of the Soviet Union and participating in the process of its collapse. All study participants had in common with the internal researcher the experience of being forced migrants, i.e. being subject to the same reception regimes and procedures for applying for international protection in Poland.

In the described study, due to difficult access to refugee and forced migrant communities in urban agglomerations, the process of selecting the research sample was based on the snowball method. The surveyed people represented three categories of ethnic identities: Chechen, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatars. As a result, the research sample consisted of nine young people aged 14 to 19 who left their country of origin between the ages of 10 and 14, and therefore met the criterion of belonging to the 1.5 generation. The group included 6 boys and 3 girls who had stayed in Poland for at least two years, which was important due to their mastery of the Polish language and involvement in the processes of integrating the complex influences of the culture of origin and the host culture. The participants of the study were also parents and other family members, forming a group of 10 people.

Thanks to the involvement of a co-researcher with refugee experience, we managed to reach all families in the process of applying for refugee status, who lived continuously in the city and its surroundings at the time of the study and consented to the participation of minor children in the study. The value added by the co-researcher was her gatekeeper role in accessing ethnic and refugee social networks. Her cultural and social knowledge made it possible to reach the

researched groups in a way that did not disturb their functioning, which is already difficult due to the situation in which they currently find themselves. Thanks to the expert knowledge, the rest of the research team became aware of the complexity and importance of hidden structures within the studied groups, as well as the diversity of social rules prevailing among members of individual ethnic groups. Thanks to this, we avoided getting caught up in stereotypes of homogeneous groups of refugees, Chechens or Ukrainians. The inclusion of the culturally and religiously distinct group of Crimean Tatars in the group of Ukrainian refugees provided many important theoretical contexts and interpretative nuances. The issue of the specificity of hidden groups also concerned families from Chechnya, in which we discovered the need to include among people experiencing war trauma not only men directly involved in the conflict, but also women and children experiencing the consequences of the political situation in the region. Due to the cultural conditions and experience of researchers of Polish origin, capturing these nuances would not be possible.

#### *3.4 Asymmetry of Relationships in the Research Process*

As researchers collecting data through interviews, we were aware that throughout the entire process of applying for international protection, asylum seekers were called to tell their stories many times: by border officers, employees of institutions deciding on granting status, lawyers handling refugee procedures, and also by employees institutions and organizations providing social services. The families invited to the study had been staying in Poland for two to four years and were still in the procedure of applying for international protection. Due to the traumatic experiences and legal conditions of the situation they were in, they did not have many opportunities to express their socio-economic status and were dependent on the decisions of other people and institutions. They had the experience of staying in a refugee center, where the feeling of lack of control and being subject to external influences is particularly acute. A radical change in material status and functioning in a

social system resembling a total institution is associated with serious limitations on autonomy (Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway, 2007).

As researchers, we had to pay particular attention to our own role in the production of narrative data and the ways in which refugees represented lived experience (Eastmond 2007). The asymmetric position and specific condition of refugees may lead to two extreme attitudes towards the researcher: distrust and unrealistic expectations related to the possibility of granting help or influencing people who decide on the fate of refugees (Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway 2007, pp. 303). We understood how demanding a challenge it is to establish a relationship based on trust, because refugees, who have often experienced breaches of trust, are particularly sensitive to these issues. The issue of equalizing asymmetry also involved an open explanation of the lack of connection between participation in research and any impact on the legal or social situation of respondents. Another key issue was to agree with the respondents on how to ensure confidentiality and create a protocol aimed at protecting personal data, ensuring security, and protecting the image of the group, family and community. A separate consideration should have been the creation of a communication system that would ensure both the maintenance of academic standards and adaptation to the cultural norms of the researched groups. This also concerned typically technical issues related to understanding the language, appropriate translation, and, above all, full awareness of what participation in the research process entails.

One of the most important ethical consequences of the asymmetry of relationships in the research field is the issue of the complexity of informed consent, which is a fundamental standard in social research. In the case of refugees and migrants, this becomes problematic in the context of minimum requirements, such as being fully informed about the research objectives, methods, techniques as well as the risks and consequences of the research. Informed consent is based on the fundamental assumption that both parties to the relationship: the researcher and the researched, have a relatively equal position. Although this

state of affairs is practically very difficult to achieve in the practice of research on refugees and immigrants, although it is possible to imagine a set of strategies and principles organizing the research process and its effects.

In the case of research with refugees, informed consent, traditionally understood as a one-time act, does not make sense due to the complexity of the situation of the subjects, cultural differences and the risk that appears as a result of conducting research. All the above-mentioned factors mean that a key element of the study should be negotiating ethical issues and participation in the study. The concept of repeated consent was developed and widely used in clinical trials and studies of indigenous communities (Facio et al. 2012; National Health and Medical Research Council Of Australia 2003). Repeatable consent is based on the assumption that consciously agreeing to something is dynamic and is a process, not a one-time act after which the respondent loses control over the information obtained by the researcher. It should be assumed that consent may take place over longer time periods and be based on understanding all the information it contains. The researcher's task is to clarify any doubts and concerns that may arise among the respondents.

The most important challenge is the need to comprehensively respect respondents in the context of subjectivity, self-determination, identity creation and strategies for coping with difficult situations. This challenge is summed up in the temptation of paternalism to which researchers are prone, treating good intentions as the main source of legitimacy of ethical judgment (Faerber, Kama, Aboelyazaid, 2016).

## IV. DISCUSSION

### *4.1 Attempts to Overcome the Impasse – the Negotiation Model and the Concept of Relational Autonomy*

During the study, many research intuitions regarding ethical issues crystallized in comparison with the literature on negotiation and participatory research models (Doná, 2007,

Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway, 2007). Despite the difficulties associated with implementing participatory research methods, involving research communities at every stage increases the confidence that refugee research will be consistent with the spirit of ethical standards established to protect participants. We made both consciously and sometimes intuitively a number of choices that were intended to ensure the project's participatory nature at all stages and in various dimensions. In practice, the research process involved accompanying the respondents in various everyday situations, as well as participating in their home life, based on the principles of hospitality and reciprocity.

From the point of view of ethical norms, negotiation implements the postulate of treating other people as an end in themselves, and not as a means to achieve the goals of others. As many testimonies and research practice show, treating another person who finds himself in a difficult situation as a tool to achieve goals, even of a higher order, is a form of exploitation. In other words, the use of repeated and negotiated consent implements the ethical principle that one should respect other people, regardless of the situation in which they find themselves. Moreover, the negotiation model is justified by simple communication pragmatism, which is based on the assumption that misunderstandings can be eliminated by creating a space for communication and the possibility of solving practical problems based on consensus.

Theoretically, adopting a negotiated model establishes a more ethical nature of the relationship between the subject and the researcher, and also increases the subjects' control over the content. The terms of the established relationship, the roles of the parties, the tasks they have to perform, their responsibilities, the scope of control (of data and materials to be made public), interpretations (meaning a deeper interpretation on the part of the respondents) and, to some extent, conclusions (taking care of good name of a group, family or individual).

In practice, implementing the principles of the participatory model required ensuring that, due to the diversity of social positions, the actions were not treated as an affront or were not understood as pressure. In other words, striking a balance between engagement and benefits must be tailored to the individual's situation, which requires a reliable and sensitive assessment of the social and cultural norms of all parties involved, something that would be extremely difficult for an alienated academic researcher.

In the participatory research formula we adopted, the participation of an internal researcher, who was part of the research team and knew the language and culture, enabled access to the community, which could otherwise be extremely difficult to obtain, even by sensitive and experienced outsiders. Additionally, it not only made it possible to negotiate the terms of participation in the study more effectively and consciously, but also to revise the respondents' potential expectations regarding the ability of academic researchers to influence their situation. On the other hand, thanks to the participatory formula, which involved the participation of an internal researcher, respected among the ethnic and immigrant communities studied, we avoided the distrust resulting from the situation they found themselves in and established closer relationships with the parents of the studied children.

An example of the application of the negotiation model during the study was iterative consent, which is the practical implementation of the values that constitute the basis of the negotiation model. Consent was repeated many times both with the parents of the minor study participants and with the adolescents. After obtaining the parents' consent, we conducted a process of obtaining informed consent for the youth so that they could make an autonomous decision, and participation in the study was not the result of decisions made between adults - researchers and parents (Main, 2008).

The examination was carried out in several stages, and each stage was accompanied by an explanation and renewed consent to further steps.

We devoted initial meetings with families to getting to know each other and explaining the goals, methods and course of the study. We understood that a single explanation, even if we took care of the linguistic aspect of the message (the internal researcher spoke Russian and Polish, which ensured efficient communication on a factual level), was insufficient to fully understand the entire research process. We talked to young people separately when it turned out that the obligations resulting from the research process were not obvious. In the next stage, we conducted interviews with parents, which expanded our awareness of the political, social and cultural contexts of migration experienced by the surveyed youth. With.

An initial review of the research project helped study families and researchers more accurately assess the cost-benefit ratio, determine whether the proposed study was feasible, and assess the social value of the project by its participants. If the theoretical constructs and measurement methods actually used are not valid for the group under study, there is a risk of drawing false conclusions (Ellis, 2007).

We could also consider together with the parents whether the proposed research procedure would not violate the well-being of the children, due to the situation of the families. Meetings with families were an opportunity to clarify doubts related to procedures for ensuring the safety of study participants - for example, one of the study participants agreed to quote his words provided that he signed them with a pseudonym of his choice.

We assumed that including photos would deepen and enrich the interview situation. The visual method used allowed for multiple and multi-layered interpretations of the material, while leaving interactive freedom to the participants of this "unnatural" situation. A sensitive issue in our study was the use of visual data containing images of people as illustrative materials when presenting the results in the form of presentations and publications. This topic was discussed with both parents and young people. When the research results were developed, we

turned to parents again and organized two meetings: for young people and for parents, during which we presented our interpretations of the research results. We have adopted the principle of informing parents and young people about how research is used in the form of reports and articles, and we also provide them with copies of published articles.

One way to ensure the inclusion of participants' knowledge was the participation of an internal researcher, who helped to solve a number of dilemmas related to the issue of informed consent, which in our study was of a repeatable nature in accordance with the assumptions of the negotiation model. In practice, the internal researcher was a kind of communication channel between the research team, of which she was an integral part, and the respondents and their parents. By remaining in constant contact with all parties, she was able to clarify the conditions under which the study was carried out. At the stage of preparing the results, the presence of an internal researcher with pedagogical education, embedded both in the group and culture of origin, as well as in Russian culture, knowing the cultural patterns of Russian-speaking people, enriched the interpretive potential of the research team with an understanding of national and religious symbolism, the realities of life of forced migrants and the position of "refugees" constructed by migration regimes. The principles of intercultural team cooperation applied to the entire research process, from the development of research procedures and selection of participants, through translation, to data collection and interpretation of results, we organized so that involvement in the research project was professionally beneficial to all co-researchers (Tapp, 1974).

#### *4.2 Strengthening the Autonomy of Respondents*

We assumed that the tasks of the research team were primarily to get rid of the myth of refugees as completely entangled in structures of oppression and to do everything that could increase the scope of their autonomy. We did this in many ways, for example by introducing the multiple informed consent already described, and by including various mechanisms to increase the scope of

respondents' control over the research process itself.

The study involved regular meetings with young people who met the criteria of belonging to the generation of refugees and immigrants 1.5. In order to enable the respondents to fully participate, control and agency, as well as the maximum unrestricted possibility of self-creation, we used a visual method, which involved each person creating a set of photos illustrating their lives, leaving complete freedom in terms of the photographed content and form of the photos. Building relational autonomy was based on openness to the inventiveness and initiative of the respondents. During the study, it turned out that young people also included photos from their countries of origin in their sets, which was an important identity context for them and opened an extremely important interpretive dimension that, as researchers, we did not take into account at the stage of planning the study. During the analysis, both archival photographs of the respondents and those taken as a result of an agreement with the researchers were used. The distinguished interpretative categories concerned the presentation of oneself, social relations and cultural symbols and images of places. The analysis of the visual material and the complementary verbal narratives included both the image of the presented world and the omitted elements.

At individual stages of the study, participants used resistance strategies such as missing deadlines, forgetting, or taking photos at the last minute - all of these processes could be captured and interpreted in a planned, multi-stage process of negotiating consent and contract terms. Eliminating artifacts resulting from undisclosed games of power and resistance was possible during meetings and conversations that led to the renegotiation of the conditions of informed consent, which gave the youth conscious control over the process in which they participated and the scope of their own involvement. It was important for researchers to appreciate the commitment of time and effort as well as the creative approach to the task of developing their visual representations of identity work.

In the context of the postulate of ethicality of research, there was also the problem of benefits that, according to the assumed principle of symmetry, both the researcher and the researched are to gain as a result of participation in the research process. It seems necessary to be open to a reciprocal relationship, i.e. a return and a return gift, which may turn out to be somewhat problematic in a difficult financial situation. We tried to go beyond the endless doubts related to ethical activities in the research field and asked ourselves whether a relationship with research subjects based on mutual benefits is possible? In our opinion, the benefits of participating in the study for the involved young people and their families were related to the possibility of shared insight into topics that are often not directly discussed in everyday conversations. Activities such as looking at photos together or presenting the research results to young people and their parents initiated conversations about leaving the country, coping with the feeling of loss and finding oneself in a new reality from the children's perspective, expressing emotions and undertaking joint reflection on children's experiences. There was also an idea that young people participating in the study would gain tangible benefits. As a result of the laptop collection campaign, computer equipment was obtained, refreshed and distributed to the study participants.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

*'Stop Stealing Our Stories'*  
(Pittaway, Bartolomei, Hugman 2010)

### 5.1 *Between the Scientific, Humanitarian and Practical Dimensions of Research*

1. One of the solutions to the problem of unequal positions is the negotiation model of the research process (Darling, 2014; Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway, 2007), which allows for a better understanding of what is happening within the research process itself, as well as what resources (information, knowledge, images) will be used after the research process has ended. The negotiation model of the study is based on the assumption that the respondents can become relatively equal

parties to the process, as well as have the ability to control it. It is assumed here that consent is not a single act, but is achieved through continuous negotiations. Informed consent as a process enables not only effective protection of subjects whose situation may change during, and even more so after, the end of the study, in the long period between the analysis of the collected data and the final publication.

Establishing a relationship based on a negotiation model may be problematic in the context of researchers' functioning in the academic field, as it may involve limiting the researcher's autonomy as well as violating the standards of research and scientific publications. As is known, the academic field is based on a broadly understood and assumed autonomy that applies both to relationships inside the field and also outside it (Maton 2005). Loosening the standards and allowing the voices of respondents would, in practice, mean modifying the principles organizing this field and reducing the importance of specialized and abstract knowledge while emphasizing the role of the identity of participants in the processes of academic knowledge production, in this case refugees and migrants. This possibility can be defined as a transition from codes based on knowledge to codes based on those who know, where the position of the subject is more important than the mere criteria of academic knowledge (Maton 2014).

2. Another challenge that is pointed out is the awareness of how forced migration and the often related experience of trauma limit an individual's autonomy (Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway 2007). The literature on the subject assumes that individuals experiencing oppression always retain the ability to make independent decisions (Freire 2014; Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway 2007). Just as it is wrong to assume that a person experiencing refugee can be treated as a completely autonomous entity, it is wrong to treat such a person as completely deprived of

autonomy or the ability to make independent decisions.

The assumptions of the approach called relational autonomy come down to the recognition that people are social and relational beings, which leads to treating self-determination as an important value in human life. Its implementation enables optimal functioning in society (Mackenzie, Stoljar 2000). Another assumption is that relationality is a skill (at the same time a competence) thanks to which an individual develops in relationships with others and self-determines. Communicability of identity is associated with giving shape to social development through specific cultural forms. The last thing to pay attention to is the entanglement of individual autonomy in relational, social and political conditions. Due to the fact that autonomy in this approach is social in nature, various types of conditions limiting it, such as oppressive relationships, institutions and social practices, should be taken into account. Relational autonomy is also viewed as the realization of human rights and is associated with social justice (Buchanan, 2008; Christman, 2004).

3. In our opinion, an important issue, perhaps controversial for some, concerns the imperative of relieving the suffering of the subjects (Turton, 1996). A kind of conflict between academic and methodological neutrality, which is supposed to conceal objectivity, and the field of ethical action, which in turn requires a departure from neutrality in favor of axiological involvement, is very clearly visible here. Tensions arise between the cognitive function of science, the humanitarian reasons for undertaking research and its practical goals. In our opinion, every action, including research practice, is subject to the same moral judgment, this applies to both the need to comply with the law and moral norms. So why shouldn't moral judgments and obligations based on intuition, and therefore somewhat universal, be respected and applied in the field of research? It is about treating a person as an

end in itself, in accordance with Kant's formula of goals: "act in such a way that you use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of everyone else, always as an end, never only as a means" (Kant 1971, pp. 63).

4. Research among forced migrants and refugees is an essential tool for developing effective interventions and, assessing practices and ensuring that the services provided help and do not harm recipients. Taking into account the practical consequences of the study, we can come to the conclusion that the basic ethical obligation for researchers is that research projects should not be solely of a reconstructive or identification nature, but that they should strengthen the autonomy of the individuals subjected to the study and the possibility of self-determination and self-determination. Turton makes it clear that examining another person's suffering is justified when the explicit goal of the study is to reduce that suffering (1996, pp. 96). The possibility of justifying conducting research must be extended not only to providing relief to a specific individual, but also to the entire group or community under study, as well as to potential refugees and forced immigrants. Some researchers express a similar thought about the ethicality of research, saying that "it is unethical to only document the situation of suffering people without the opportunity to offer them something in return that would help them cope with their difficult situation or develop solutions" (Mackenzie, McDowell, Pittaway 2007, p. 310).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Academic research has the potential to improve policy and programming for people in forced migration situations. Like many authors of research conducted among refugees and migrants, we want to disseminate the results to expert and decision-making bodies so that their decisions are based on reliable scientific data. The justification for conducting our research among forced migrants was not only the direct benefit in the form of strengthening the autonomy and self-awareness of the respondents, but also the

possibility of reducing the suffering of forced migrants in the future, either by supporting changes in legislation, influencing local social policy, or influencing changes in attitudes. social issues towards refugees and immigrants. The co-authors of the article participated in the creation and implementation of the Immigrant Integration Model - the first urban social policy program in the area of migration in Poland, implemented in Gdańsk since 2015.

At the stage of disseminating the results, we created a set of recommendations showing the directions of institutional solutions resulting from the study, aimed at the needs of the studied group. At the *macro* level, institutions issuing decisions on granting international protection should pay special attention to children and young people who, due to the prolonged moratorium resulting from lengthy procedures, may potentially have difficulties in crystallising their identity. At the *meso* level, non-governmental organizations such as associations, scout organizations and sports clubs turned out to be a strong factor in anchoring the surveyed youth in the social environment. This means that even in such a difficult situation related to youth migration, informal educational influence can be very effective. At the *micro* level, we identified the need to support young refugees by developing their competences in various spheres of activity, both in the context of cultural differences (intercultural competences) and those related to practical functioning in a wider environment, outside the family home or origin group (social and civic competences).

The conclusions of the study are consistent with the recommendations of the expert opinion of the Migration Research Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences Refugees in Poland. Legal situation, scale of inflow and integration in Polish society and recommendations. The authors of the expert opinion, based on an in-depth analysis of many years of research on forced migrants and refugees in Poland, recommend a number of activities related to the integration of people under international or national protection in Poland and call for "a reliable debate and actions related to ensuring greater effectiveness of the

refugee system, as well as the cessation of practices of violating international law if Poland is to remain one of the European Community countries and a party to the Geneva Convention in its current form” (Górny, Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Klaus, Łodziński, 2018, pp. 102).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the study participants - young people and parents - for their creative involvement in co-creating knowledge about the needs of refugee youth from the 1.5 generation. We trust that the effects of our joint work will influence institutional solutions and development programs addressed to the people who migrate forcibly.

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