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Managing conflicting professionalisms: social assistants work with unaccompanied minors within the Swedish municipal social services

Abstract

Title: Managing conflicting professionalisms: social assistants work with unaccompanied minors within the Swedish municipal social services

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Keywords: Social Assistants, unaccompanied minors, street-level bureaucrats, discretion, professionalism

This Masters thesis aimed to explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. They have worked in an ethically complex situation, of attempting to fulfil the needs of the unaccompanied minors, as this period has seen a restriction of the humanitarian ethos of Swedish migration policies, but also a movement towards new public management policies. As such, the research questions that guided the aim are: What challenges have social assistants encountered in their role as a social worker working with unaccompanied minors? What impacts has the interim Aliens Act had on UAMs that the social assistants have observed? How have these challenges impacted upon the discretion social assistants have? The thesis gives new insights into how unaccompanied minors needs have been conceptualised by social assistants and the organisational factors that have impacted upon the work that the social assistants do, as most studies conducted within this field were conducted before the changes implemented in 2016.

Informed by a critical realist stance, where both structures and agents impact each other, the concept of the street-level bureaucrat has been employed to explore their work, in which conflicting policy goals and laws flourish. The concept of discretion has been used to explore both the structural factors impacting the social assistants, but how they have reasoned around the best course of action according to the needs that the unaccompanied minors have. Finally, the concept of professionalism has been used to analyse the justifications of the actions taken by the social assistants to fulfil the needs of the unaccompanied minors. The thesis has focused on the experiences of seven social assistants, collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed through thematic analysis. The analysis found that the social assistants questioned the Migration Agency's ability to determine the scope of their work with unaccompanied minors and that the needs of the unaccompanied minors were placed in relation to the cost of fulfilling them. Within the social services, the social assistants had a hard time fulfilling their needs, as they felt they were not equipped to deal with them within that organisational framework. This was coupled with the impacts of new public management on the working methods within the social services. The social assistants were found to have little discretion to challenge the prevailing institutional rules that guide the treatment of unaccompanied minors within the Swedish welfare state, however employed various strategies to try and challenge them. Finally, the social assistants noted the rise of voluntary individuals and organisations that stepped in to fulfil the needs of the unaccompanied minors, where the scope of the social services ended.

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Contents

List of abbreviations and definitions

BBIC – barns behov i centrum, which translates to childrens' needs in the center. A standardised assessment tool used by social assistants working with children in the social services

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

HVB – hem för barn. An acronym for the residential homes that care for unaccompanied minors

Needs – it is important to establish that the concept needs in this thesis derives from the primarily from point of view of the social assistants. Taking the insights from Jani and Reisch (2011), these are influenced by internal factors, such as bio-psyho-social-spiritual factors and how these are defined in accordance with their needs. External factors, such as culture, institutional factors, time and individual and collective (family, groups) impact upon the internal factors. As such, the needs throughout this thesis could either refer to concrete needs, such as housing, but psycho-social ones as well.

NPM – New Public Management

Social assistants – social workers that work within the municipal social services.

UAMs – unaccompanied minors. This refers to all unaccompanied minors, from ones still in their asylum process to ones that have gotten residency permits

1 Introduction and problem formulation

Since 2015, the struggles that unaccompanied minors have faced, both on their perilous journey to Sweden, but also their treatment within it has been at the forefront of political debates and media reports. In the flurry of this, the laws governing migration have been changed, challenging the popular belief of Sweden being a humanitarian nation, where refugees and asylum seekers have been received at higher rates than many EU countries. Although this may be true when compared to other nations, there has been research illuminating a darker history of migration policies that have been informed by anti-Roma, anti-Semitic and ethnic ideals (Sager, Holgersson, and Öberg, 2016). Sweden has also been known for extensive welfare state, however, it has been heavily influenced by these ideas underpinning the migration policies, contrasting to the notions of universality and equality that Sweden is revered for. The recent migration patterns in 2015 have highlighted these undertones and have seen anti-immigrant sentiments flourish within the political sphere, resulting in restricted asylum laws and limited support for refugees and asylum seekers. In Sweden and across Europe, the discussion has been watered down and polarised to the point that "migration and mobility became central to the debate about Europe's future" (Geddes & Scholten, 2016:2). In addition to these changes, the Swedish welfare state has also seen a change over several years, from its social democratic roots to one that embraces new public management (NPM) measures within its public sector (Hood, 1995; Green-Pedersen, 2002; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer., 2015). It has meant that logics within private sector have been implemented, underpinned by market driven ideas and competition, in order to manage resources and the professionals working within these organisations and to increase predictability of methods and outputs (Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). This polarising discussion has not only had particular implication for migrants within the welfare state but also for the social workers that work with them.

Overarchingly, it can be noted that social workers work within organisations that inherently hold contrasting, and at times, conflicting goals and policies, often with resources outspanning the demand (Hasenfeld, 2010). As such, Hasenfeld (2010) noted that the work they perform is to judge whom is worthy of receiving support and who is not, denoting the inherent moral work that the social worker does. Thus, the term for these organisations becoming popularised as human service organisations (HSOs) (Hasenfeld, 2010). Furthermore, social workers have also been viewed as street-level bureaucrats, the individuals that put social policy into practice. As such, they have the freedom to manage these various conflicts according to what they feel is most appropriate course of action (Lipsky, 1980; 2010). In the micro-level meetings between the client and the street-level bureaucrat is thus where both the social worker and the organisation, makes its choice upon whom is deemed morally worthy (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). The change that has influenced the work that the social workers do rests upon the authority and trust that they have both within the organisation, but also outside of it. This has been evident with the shift to NPM, and has affected the social workers professional status, moving from resting upon the knowledge and professional ethics they have of their client group, to one defined by set protocols, measurement tools and managerial control (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Dellgran, 2015; Sjögren, 2018).

It is within this area of conflicting ideas and discourses that social assistants whom work with unaccompanied minors find themselves. The studies conducted on unaccompanied minors highlight both the discourse on their vulnerability as well as on their resourcefulness (Stretmo, 2014), and at the same time there exists research findings on the needs of this

group and ways of fulfilling those needs (Herz and Lalander, 2017; Wadensjö and Celikaksoy, 2017). On an organisational level, studies have been conducted on various public authority figures, such as teachers (Svensson, 2017), police (Sunqvist et al., 2017) and social asssistants (Backlund et al., 2014; Stretmo and Melander, 2013) and the challenges they have faced working with this group. As the UAMs are not citizens of the welfare state or are in the process of becoming citizens, the identified challenges have been rather unique (Aracena, 2015; Nordling, 2017). In light of the implementation of the interim Aliens Act, protests have intensified regarding the treatment of UAMs by the various HSOs that have them as a target group, prominently by the lobby group We Cannot Stand It, But We Keep On Fighting[1] (Vi Står Inte Ut, 2018). These actions point to the question of social workers' ability to engage and challenge perceived unjust social policies within the social services and interim Aliens Act, which has been noted to be limited in the Swedish context (Thorén & Salonen, 2014; Nordling, 2017).

What also becomes evident is that there is a tension between the welfare state that has been created from a national vision of universalism and equality when it meets the new social challenges created by globalisation and in this thesis, migration. In the middle of this tension are social workers, whom have arguably not been equipped to work within these tensions (Nordling, 2017). As social assistants are one of the most important public servants the UAMs meet, due to the fact that they investigate their needs and try to fulfil them according to the Social Services Act (Backlund et al., 2014; Stretmo and Melander, 2013). Working to ensure these needs is not straightforward however, as being a social worker holds inherent contradictions, as previously noted (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010; Liljegren, 2012; Aracena, 2015; Nordling, 2017; Sjögren, 2018). This is even more prominent when working with UAMs, as on the one hand, from the Social Services Act, is the notion of caring for them and ensuring that their best interests are considered in every decision made. Conversely however, they are also bound to follow the decisions by the Migration Agency, which at times could run contrary to the Social Services Act. This potential conflict could challenge the social work mandate according to the International Federation of Social Work definition to not only support individuals in need, but also challenge unjust structures that create the needs in the first place (IFSW, 2018).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how social assistants who work with this vulnerable group are subsequently placed within a nexus of conflict of human rights, professional ethics and relationships with UAMs and how they explore these contradictions. Furthermore, following the notion of street level bureaucrat, it is imperative to critically explore the responses that social workers have elicited in this complex situation for several reasons (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010). Firstly, although there is a growing field of research on UAMs and social assistants whom work with them, most have been published before the implementation of the interim Aliens Act and the colloquially named, 'migration crisis', which thus, necessitates a new exploration into how social assistants perceive their work under the new law. In addition to this, how social assistants have faced the organisational constraints placed on their work will be further developed, particularly inquiring whether they have and if so, how they have attempted to challenge the consequences of the changed conditions that UAMs live under. This is particularly important as it has been noted that even though the aims of the Social Services Act were to change constraining societal structures holistically, whilst adopting a less

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[1] Translation from Swedish. Vi Står Inte Ut, Men Vi Fortsätter Kämpa

hierarchical structure and innovative approach. However, it has been noted that social services in Sweden have been adversely affected by NPM measures and bureaucracy (Green-pedersen, 2002; Ponnert & Svensson, 2017), in which social workers are less inclined to challenge perceived unjust social policies (Thorén & Salonen, 2014).

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. The research questions are:

1. What challenges have social assistants encountered in their role as a social worker working with unaccompanied minors?
2. What impacts have the Aliens Act had on UAMs that the social assistants have observed?
3. How have these challenges impacted upon the discretion social assistants have?

1.2 Relevance for social work and human rights

The relevance of this thesis for social work and human rights has many different aspects, intimately connected with one another, as social work is based upon human rights principles. One major part of this study is to understand how UAMs needs have been conceptualised by the social assistants since the changes enforced in 2016. The other major part is how the social assistants have been affected by this in their daily work, particularly relating to the organisational opportunities and constraints that they have faced. To expand, not only is there an aspiration to explore how the changes impact upon social assistants who work with this group, but also how these changes challenge the balance that social workers are placed in in their daily work with individuals and groups. The challenge is on the one hand is to work with an adherence to social justice based upon human rights, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also the Social Services Act. On the other hand, there is the need, as well, to ensure that the work is performed according to the rules and regulations set by the municipal social services by whom they are employed. As such, this thesis will explore social work practice and hopefully add a fruitful insight into the growing literature on both of these two groups and the challenges they face in the Swedish welfare state (Stretmo and Melander, 2013; Stretmo, 2018; Nordling, 2017; Backlund et al., 2014; Aracena, 2015; Wernesjö, 2011; Wernesjö, 2014; Celikaksoy and Wadensjö, 2017).

2 Background

This chapter will cover the three areas of focus for the thesis, which are the Swedish welfare state, Swedish migration policies and UAMs because, as previously stated, social assistants work within these boundaries. It is pertinent to briefly explore the history of both the creation of the welfare state and migration policies in Sweden, in order to highlight the excluding mechanisms that underpin it, in relation to migrants. Furthermore, the current laws and policies will be explored, as it has incremental impact upon the discretion that social assistants have in their daily work with UAMs. Finally, a brief overview of research on UAMs, focusing on their needs but also the structural factors, such as the social services, in which they live will be explored.

2.1 The Swedish welfare state

The Swedish welfare state, as with many other states, was developed from particular social, demographic and political developments such as industrialisation, urbanisation and nation building (Kautto, 2010). With the rise of the social democrats (SAP) from the 1930s onwards, in combination with the rise of the working class and social movements advocating for better living standards, the Swedish 'Folkhem' was created. This entailed the fact that not only are political and civil rights, pertaining to voting rights and equality before the law, but also social rights, such as the right to healthcare, education and social security, as noted by T.H. Marshall (Hasenfeld, 2015). As such, the Swedish welfare state was conceived on the notions of universalism of social rights, with a guarantee that the state shall provide these rights (Geddes & Scholten, 2016).

The role of municipalities became central to providing these key features, as the state was found to be lacking in terms of enforcing them (Kautto, 2010), thus moving towards a framework legislation model (Bergmark and Lundström, 2007; Ottosson, Eastmond, Schierenbeck, 2012). This model entails that the central government enacts guidelines and policies that are then interpreted and added to by the municipalities, to ensure that the social care is consistent to the needs of the local population (Bergmark and Lundström, 2007). To this day, municipalities hold a strong role in providing social care and management of welfare policies, in consultation with the central state and as such, the public sector in Sweden is a large one. However, NPM policies have made their way into the social services, cementing itself through privatisation of social care services, both for profit and non-profit organisations; and specialisation of professionals, challenging the social democratic core of the Swedish welfare state (Bergmark and Lundström, 2007; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015).

It would be impossible to speak of the Swedish welfare state and its social democratic roots, without exploring the territorialisation of the Swedish nation state in relation to immigration as "these boundaries shape how we 'see' and understand immigration (as a challenge, threat, opportunity, benefit, cost etc.)" (Geddes and Scholten, 2016:4). How immigration policies have been shaped is inextricably linked to the welfare state, with a polarisation taking place between welfare state protectionism and the humanitarian ideals that have developed since the 1970s (Geddes and Scholten, 2016).

2.2 Sweden's migration policies

The relationship between Sweden and migration started with the trend of the border controls in the early years of the 20th century (Goldin, Balajaran Cameron 2010), of which has become a

long history of border drawing and categorisation of individuals and groups, both within and outside their borders (Sager, Holgersson, and Öberg, 2016). It is imperative to explore the creation of borders and the nation state, as the resulting immigration not only has policy implications for example labour or irregular migration, but also the discursive practices that follow along these categorisations (Geddes and Scholten, 2016). As has been historically identified, these categorisations can have severe consequences, resulting for example, in the severe prosecution of the Jewish population in Europe and Sweden's closed border stance towards them, based on anti-Semitic beliefs (Sager, Holgersson, and Öberg, 2016). However, the early manifestations of border controls were based upon essentialist notions of ethnicity, gender, age, religion etc. in order to exclude individuals from immigrating into Sweden, which was seen from the first Aliens Act adopted in 1914. This primarily targeted Roma and Jewish populations based upon anti-Semitic and anti-Roma sentiments. Post-world war two, migration has flourished, primarily consisting of economic migration, to foster the industrialisation of the time and as such, support the growing welfare state, from the 1950s till the early 1970s. From this point onwards, the demographic changed to more irregular migration, due to rise in various conflicts around the world, and which, Sweden, as a social democratic nation, had a humanitarian obligation to protect (Ålund & Schierup, 1991; Sager, Holgersson, and Öberg, 2016). The overarching development and shaping of migration policies across time in Sweden has been a tension between protecting the revered Folkhem vis-à-vis welfare state and humanitarian aspirations.

This period saw concurrently, the rise of multiculturalism aspirations of the Swedish state took form, which aimed to extend notions of social and political rights to migrants and explicitly attempted to marry "extended rights of citizenship with a political framework free from essentialist conceptions of national belonging, through institutions geared towards this" (Schierup & Ålund, 2011:47). However, as Geddes and Scholten (2016) have noted, Sweden has been successful at identifying and creating equality laws but achieving outcomes from them have been less so. The period after the 1970s was also a period of change of the Swedish welfare state, with the beginning of the dismantling of it through NPM measures, economic pressures, individualisation and Europeanisation (Geddes and Scholten, 2016). This period also saw the rise of right-wing sentiments through the New Democracy party, which explicitly challenged the multicultural aspirations of the state and held a restrictive stance upon immigration, shining a light on the underlying essentialist notions of the nation state and who belongs in it. Irrespective of their radical stance, restriction on immigration was and continues to be advocated for, even by the Social Democrats (SAP), on grounds of protecting the welfare state and the citizens within it (Geddes and Scholten, 2016). This stance highlights the fact that the welfare state is the point of reference for debating about and developing immigration politics and laws, and consequently, as can be seen today, leads to many being excluded if the it is believed to be threatened.

The period from the millennium shift has seen substantial changes across not only Sweden, but even internationally. Neoliberalism has significantly increased, in connection with increased border management, through better technology, heavily influenced by the events of 9/11, 2001. Securitization and anti-Muslim sentiments can describe the years since this, which has manifested itself in Sweden, through the rise of the Swedish Democrats, but also the introduction of Dublin Agreement and various border management initiatives such as FRONTEX, overwhelmingly "excluding, letting in and spitting out people in a balance act

between nationalism, racism and labour market interests"[2] (Sager, 2015:107). As Schierup and Ålund noted (2011), "the Swedish exceptionalism, and continues to be, substantially eroded" (2011:45), enforcing the notion that Mann argued as early as 1995, that "there was a 'dark side' to the foundation of many European states based on ethno-cultural nationalism and racism rather than liberal universalism" (Geddes & Scholten, 2016:12).

2.3 Laws governing the care of unaccompanied minors in Sweden

Although the focus of this thesis is not on the laws, but how they impact upon UAMs in Sweden and consequently, the work that social assistants do. It is thus pertinent to go through the current laws that unaccompanied minors are affected by. Although the UNCRC is adhered to by Sweden, the Article 1 and 3 are particularly relevant for this thesis, in which unaccompanied minors are by legal definition, as stipulated by Article 1 of the CRC, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years". Article 3 pertains to the principle of the best interest of the child, which should be a primary consideration in all matters concerning the child. Furthermore, this is not an exhaustive list over all the laws that govern the treatment of UAMs in Sweden, but an overview of the most relevant for this thesis. Ones that are not explored more in depth are the laws governing the right to a legal guardian, education and health, of which legal guardianship ends at the age of 18 and health care is restricted to health issues that cannot withhold treatment, if the UAM is deemed to be 18 and gets the claim to asylum denied (SKL, 2017).

§1994:137 Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Act

This law directs the obligations that the various public organisations have to provide housing and compensation for asylum seekers and refugees in Sweden. It includes right for refugees and individuals with subsidiary protection to decide where they want to live across the country. Changes were instilled on 1st June, 2016, which revoked the right to housing and daily allowance for asylum seekers without children who have had their claim denied by the Migration Agency (Röda Korset, 2016). This has a particular impact for UAMs that are deemed to be over 18 by the medical age assessments, whom from one day to another be deemed an adult and thus lose the right to a social assistant, legal guardian and housing by the municipal social services.

§2001:453 Social Services Act

The Social Services Act (SoL) guides the work within the social care services, based on the guiding principles of: holistic view, continuity, flexibility, freedom of choice, equality of treatment, voluntariness, self-determination, and subsidiarity. These have developed over time, since the first Act was enacted in 1982, which particularly highlighted the guiding role that the National Board of Health and Welfare should now have, in line with the framework legislation model. It was envisioned that this new Act would be a force of change in society, as opposed to the bureaucratic working methods that had defined Swedish social work until then (Lundström and Sallnäs, 2014). Furthermore, out of these principles, the equality of treatment was particularly important to combat differential and possibly discriminatory treatment (Pettersson, 2014). It also stipulates that municipalities have the responsibility of care of children and youth within their jurisdiction, particularly ones at-risk (Lundström and Sallnäs, 2014).

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[2] Free translation from Swedish. Original quote "stänger ute, släpper in och spottar ut människor i en balansakt mellan nationalism, rasism och arbetsmarknadsintressen" (Sager, 2015:107)

§2016:746 The Aliens Act
The temporary Aliens Act entered into force on the 20th July, 2016 and entailed the introduction of temporary refugee and subsidiary protection statuses, for any UAM that had applied for asylum after the 24th November, 2015. This meant that any individual that gained refugee status would be given protective status for three years, whilst ones given subsidiary status was limited to thirteen months. Furthermore, individuals whom gain subsidiary protection status are not granted the right to family reunification (§2016:756). The time limit for this interim law is set to end on 19th July, 2019. The standards are in line with the *Convention on the Status of Refugees Article 1(A)* and the *Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU*. It is pertinent to note relating especially to unaccompanied minors, the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 1 and Article 3 pertaining to who qualifies as an unaccompanied minor and the principle of the best interest of the child are adhered to. Furthermore, if the age of the UAM is disputed, and they don't have any form of identification, a medical age assessment will be offered to corroborate the stated age. These, however, are not the sole determinant of the age, as documents from the social services can be given upon request, as well the perceived age by the personnel at the Migration Agency (SKL, 2017). In addition to this, if an unaccompanied minor has been denied asylum, there must be a dignified repatriation process (Sundqvist, Ghazinour, Padyab, 2017). This includes having a legal guardian or public authority that receives the child upon repatriation.

§1990:52 The Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act
This law complements the Social Services Act and directs itself towards children whom are deemed to be in need of care by the social services, on grounds that they are either in risk of endangering themselves or others, as well as if the family has been deemed inadequate in fulfilling the needs of the child. Article 2 and 3 of this Act are the two most important articles, as they stipulate who is included under this act, with Article two highlighting a decision to be taken into care shall be based upon either physical or psychological abuse, unduly exploitation, inadequate care or any other situation in the home where there is a tangible risk that the child's health or development will be harmed. Article three focuses on that taken into care shall also be considered when there is a tangible risk of harm through abuse of addictive substances, criminal acts or any other socially adverse behaviour. The Act has particular importance when it comes to asylum seeking UAMs due to the fact that the current praxis by the Migration Agency is that once they turn 18 or are medically deemed to be 18, they are only allowed to stay within their current municipality if they fulfil article 3 (Migrationsverket, 2019).

2.4 The municipal social services care for unaccompanied minors
The framework legislation model that Sweden adheres to has several implications for the distribution of responsibilities between the state and municipalities across Sweden. Prior to 2006, the care of unaccompanied minors was in the hands of the Migration Agency, however, was found to be lacking and thus from 2006, the primary care of unaccompanied minors was delegated to municipalities across Sweden (SKL, 2017; *Proposition 2005/06:46*). Due to this, municipalities have relative autonomy to form their work with unaccompanied minors (Ottosson, Eastmond, Schierenbeck, 2012). It allows them to develop the local directives according to the needs within their municipality, which in turn gives street-level bureaucrats, such as the social assistants, greater discretion within their profession (Ottosson, Eastmond, Schierenbeck, 2012). When combining this with Backlund et al.'s (2014) observation that the social assistants in the municipalities are simultaneously experts and the pioneers of the care of

unaccompanied minors, challenges in providing adequate care has been exacerbated due to the number of UAMs that came to Sweden in 2015. There were several HVB homes built across the country, which have rapidly been decreasing again (IVO, 2019), as UAMs have been getting their decisions from the Migration Agency. There are now three main forms of housing available to UAMs, foster care, with either relatives or individuals/families that have been deemed capable to fulfil this role. Secondly, HVB homes, which translates to residential homes for care of children and youths, and finally the recently introduced supported living homes, primarily directed at 18 - 20 year olds, but in certain cases, 16 year olds can be placed there (SKL, 2017). Social assistants are responsible to ensure that the needs of the unaccompanied minors are met, which practically means ensuring that the housing, school and contact with the legal guardian runs smoothly. Their role is colloquially referred to as the 'spider in the web' (Stretmo and Melander, 2013), applying the Social Services Act and ensuring that their needs are fulfilled.

To ensure that the needs of the UAMs are assessed holistically and according to the obligations set forth by the Social Services Act, a documenting system called BBIC[3], translating to the children's needs in the centre, is used by social assistants, that guides their work (Nordling, 2017). The figure below from Socialstryelsen (2019) highlights the BBIC triangle.
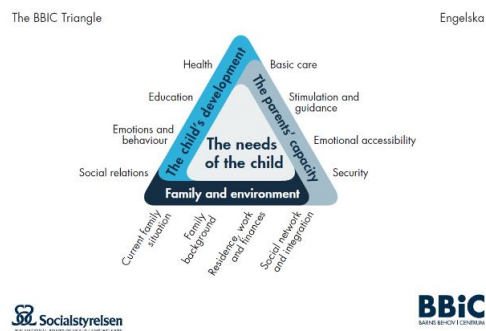
Figure 1: The BBIC triangle, Socialstyrelsen, 2019

However, some have noted that this system does not adequately address the needs and skills of unaccompanied minors, as it "was developed for children living in Sweden now and in the future" (Sundqvist, Ghazinour, Padyab, 2017:103), which is not the reality for these children (Sundqvist, Ghazinour, Padyab, 2017; Aracena, 2015). The element of uncertainty of the minors' future, whilst still working from the BBIC system illuminates the tension that exists within the social services care, on the one hand, encouraging integration. Conversely however, social assistants also have to work with the potential inevitability of (forced) repatriation, which does "little to alleviate the emotional tensions and anxieties created by the circumstances that led the asylum seekers to leave their country of origin in the first place" (Björnberg, 2014:217). These tensions will be further explored in the literature review.

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[3] BBIC, barns behov i centrum. It is built upon the LACS system (Sundqvist, Ghazinour, Padyab, 2017)

3 Literature review

As this thesis has a focus on UAMs and their needs and how the social assistants use their discretion to fulfil these needs, this chapter will deal with research that covers both areas accordingly. Furthermore, it will give an overview of primarily Swedish studies, as the reception systems vary across Europe and as such, are less relevant as this study focuses upon social assistants within the Swedish welfare state. However, in terms of unaccompanied minors needs, relevant studies conducted within other welfare states have been reviewed, where deemed relevant for this thesis.

3.1 Conceptualisations of unaccompanied minors needs

Unaccompanied minors, although not in large numbers, have been coming to Sweden for many years, with many Finnish children arriving during WW2 (Wadensjö and Celikaksoy, 2017). Since then, there has been a rise in unaccompanied minors from across the world. The largest applications of asylum was reached in 2015, with over 35,000 applications being registered with the Migration Agency, with Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Eritrea and Syria being the most common sending countries (Wadensjö and Celikaksoy, 2017). Along with the increase of unaccompanied minors, research on their well-being, needs and reception in Sweden and across Europe has increased in the recent years (Humphries, 2006; Stretmo and Melander, 2013; Stretmo, 2014; Stretmo, 2018; Wernesjö, 2011; Wernesjö, 2014; Söderqvist, Sjöblom, Bülow, 2014; Herz and Lalander, 2017). This emerging field of study has both illuminated the resilience but also the vulnerability that unaccompanied minors possess, and the structural factors that both hamper and improve their well-being, spanning from the asylum process, reception and integration of UAMs (Wadensjö and Çelikaksoy, 2017). Importantly, Stretmo (2014) highlighted how UAMs have been conceptualised between being vulnerable versus resourceful, impacted upon the policies that guided their reception in Sweden. This has ingrained a form of 'culture of disbelief' (Humphries, 2006) in practice, highlighting the notion of the strategic migrant versus the vulnerable minor. Furthermore, the research is defined into two groups that are interviewed, either the various municipal and state employed individuals or the growing field of interviewing the UAMs about their experiences.

The credibility of the asylum process has been criticised, on grounds of ignoring the principle of the best interest of the child and the questionable use of medical age assessments (Hjern Hjern, Brendler-Lindqvist, Norredam, 2011; Lundberg, 2011; Hjern and Ascher, 2015; Hedlund, 2016). Arriving to the country and learning the new language, rules, agencies adds to the pressure that UAMs are under (Herz and Lalander, 2017), on top of the stress that the asylum process has upon them (Björnberg, 2014; Stretmo, 2018). Another factor that contributes to this stress is the fact that these children are often under pressure from their families to succeed, having accumulated debts with traffickers or smugglers, or extorted on the journey and have often suffered sometimes severe human rights abuses along the journey to Sweden (Monsutti, Donini, Scalettaris, 2016). Herz and Lalander (2017) illuminated the fact that UAMs are in need of creating trusting relationships with social workers, amongst others, in order to combat the loneliness that they face in this process. However, as the UAMs themselves stated was that many had had several different social assistants and legal guardians since arriving to Sweden (Herz and Lalander, 2017). Although it is important to highlight the mental health issues that face UAMs, Wernesjö (2011) noted the potential risk of pathologizing them into a group who face identical struggles, rather than assessing the individual and the needs that they have or don't have. Once having gained protection, there are two main areas that are important to foster

the integration and well-being of unaccompanied minors, the introduction phase and education (Wadensjö and Celikaksoy, 2017).

Social workers, particularly social assistants are an incremental part of UAMs lives, not only during the asylum process, but arguably even more so, if or when they gain protection by the Swedish state. As noted, they are the 'spider in the web' (Stretmo and Melander, 2013), and have been found to take upon themselves more responsibility for the minors, if other key figures falter (Stretmo and Melander, 2013). Furthermore, their role often becomes confused with the role of the Migration Agency employees. This has led social assistants to observe that a sense of distrust against the social assistants and consequently, confiding in for example, that the conditions in their housing take a longer time to be divulged (Stretmo and Melander, 2013). This becomes problematic when noting that many UAMs get several different social assistants during their time in care (Herz and Lalander, 2017).

3.2 Social assistants work with unaccompanied minors in Sweden

The work that social assistants are mandated to do through their role within an organisational context has not been explored as extensively as that of the experiences of working with UAMs on a micro level. Being situated within a human service organisation comes with various opportunities and constraints, which were identified across the three studies. However, there are differences pointed out, partly due to the focus and scope of each study, but also due to the theoretical perspectives adopted.

A larger study was conducted by Backlund et al. in Stockholm's county, with focus group interviews conducted from 2009-2013. The focus was on the organisational factors that the social assistants worked within, which can be summed up by economic factors, co-operation with other important public servants (teachers), discrimination and support from the section boss. Overwhelmingly, theories of human service organisations, primarily as ones that have human beings as 'raw material' and viewed social assistants as street-level bureaucrats, whose professionalism and discretion are influenced and can influence the HSO were employed to analyse the interviews.

Firstly, economic factors were pointed out as incremental for the social care of unaccompanied minors, due to the policy that municipalities only have responsibility for them until they turn 18 or are reunited with their family, particularly highlighting that the municipalities are positive to giving care as long as there is a monetary remuneration (Backlund et al., 2014). This led some social assistants to employ their discretion and provide support without the knowledge of their managers, resisting what they perceived as an unjust treatment. Secondly, co-operation with other important actors, such as teachers, were highlighted as an area for improvement, but also a worry for how unaccompanied minors were received and taught was voiced. Thirdly, the balance between treating unaccompanied minors as other children in care versus having special needs was an area that was a challenge for many social assistants. Many brought up the dissonance between the aspirations of the 2006 policy change, where municipalities were given responsibility for unaccompanied minors. They questioned the principle of normalisation, upon which this was founded (*Proposition 2005/06:46*), as these children are affected by special conditions, however, are inevitably discriminated against as they are not treated the same under the policies and norms that other children in care are. However, Backlund et al. notes that this is hard to evaluate in relation to prior studies into structural discrimination, as the research is

based upon subjective opinions from the social assistants which hinders comparison to a certain extent.

Finally, although some of the social assistants were positive to their managers, there was a consensus that this group was often under prioritised, with the management (by extension, politicians) having a lack of knowledge and interest in them. This led to many participants acknowledging that this lack of will and engagement affects the development, and arguably, the improvement of the services that can be provided to unaccompanied minors. Backlund et al.'s research is particularly useful as it highlights some of the inherent issues that unaccompanied minors face within the social services in Sweden, stemming from the contrast with them both being identified as resourceful and resilient, but equally so, in need of great care (Monsutti, Donini, Scalettaris, 2016; May, 2018; Wadensjö and Çelikaksoy, 2017). As a theoretical departure for this thesis is also social workers as street-level bureaucrats, the insights gathered from this study is particularly fruitful, as it gave an insight to how social workers interacted with the policies but also management at that time.

There is another study by Paula Aracena (2015), that has provided further insights into the daily work of social assistants. She contributed to the anthology on anti-racist movements within Sweden and provided a reflective insight into her time as a social secretary working with UAMs. She raised many of the aforementioned issues that impact the daily work of social assistants, noting the impacts of NPM measures, the fallacy of the Swedish BBIC in providing support for UAMs, but also the institutional racism that the welfare state contributes to. Regarding the implementation of BBIC, another study showed that social workers whom have experienced forced repatriations, 60% stated that the BBIC was not appropriate or useful in for their work (Sundqvist, Ghazinour, Padyab, 2017). In addition to these present tensions, as was evidenced within the migration policies, the nation state and it's right to control immigration overwhelmingly supersedes the principle of the best interest of the child, which according to the CRC, the state has a duty to adhere to (Ottosson, Eastmond, Schierenbeck, 2012). However, UAMs are primarily seen as asylum seekers first, not children, which can have questionable outcomes during the asylum process (Wadensjö and Çelikaksoy, 2017). Overwhelmingly, Aracena critiqued the standardised work methods, which contributed to reinforcing a social work that hinders a reflexive approach, concerning ex. their own values. Overwhelmingly, a rational-legal approach has been adopted, that the laws and policies are "objective, neutral and adhering to the rule of law"[4] (Aracena, 2015:185), which in turn could be argued to hinder a reflexive approach. The mental health of the social workers was a big burden that were carried by her and her colleagues, highlighting the tensions between the what the profession mandates vs what the state mandates social workers should be. Despite this dire picture, resistance was present, with support given to UAMs that have been denied asylum, however, under the constant pressure of being 'found out' and accused of breaking their professionalism.

One of the most important aspects that Aracena pointed out was the fact that irrespective of all these issues, social assistants are relatively powerless to challenge this reality due to the fact that the Social Services Act is subordinate to the Aliens Act. This highlights one of the fundamental issues that this thesis is based upon, which is the conditionality upon when rights and care are given, being dependent upon citizenship, which in turn, is given on the basis of a 'legitimate' claim to seek asylum, in which the process that the Migration Agency has adopted

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[4] Free translation from Swedish. Original quote, "objektiva, neutrala och rättsäkra" (Aracena, 2015:185)

since 2016, has been critiqued on several points. As Aracena aptly notes, "national borders become more important to uphold than humans' rights"[5] (Aracena, 2015:187). What must be stated however, is that this chapter is based on a subjective, single account and interpretation of social assistants' work with unaccompanied minors. Arguments could be made to the credibility, generalisability and the potential bias of this account, however, it must be stated that this account reflects what other research has identified (Nordling, 2017; Stretmo, 2018). Furthermore, as the premise of this thesis is to explore how social assistants have been affected by the new laws, this chapter provides an invaluable insight into the issues that they face.

Another study that is of relevance is the doctoral thesis by Vanna Nordling (2017). Although it has an explicit focus upon the interaction of public servants such as social assistants, with undocumented or ones that were at risk of becoming undocumented UAMs, the theories applied are fruitful as critical citizenship theories and social rights are employed. The importance of this for this thesis is since the focus is upon UAMs whom are still in the process of seeking asylum to ones that have been given protection by the Swedish state, which necessitates a perspective that allows the analysis of the differentiation of treatment according to non-citizenship/citizenship. Nordling explores in part how social rights are often conditional on the status of citizenship and develops upon the notion of citizenship as enacted coming from Isin's understanding of enacted citizenship. As such, it holds that citizenship is contested, impacted by politics, time and place, and something that is practiced by individuals, groups and states. This is explored in relation to how social work both stabilizes and de-stabilizes the inevitable hierarchies of deservingness that is created within nation-states (Nordling, 2017). Social workers, in various positions including social assistants, were interviewed on basis of the acts that "often went beyond what they perceived to be their formal mandate, but sometimes they also saw their acts of support as parts of what they actually *should* do as social workers although they did not have the organisational conditions" (Nordling, 2017:205). The results of this study highlighted three different acts, professionalism, compassion and activism, which at times overlapped with one another.

As Nordling notes, the social assistants were the closest to what resembles a street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 1980/2010), further which confirms the use of this theory as a basis for this thesis. In addition to this, questions surrounding the social assistants' professionalism have been noted, which is a useful observation, as this is something that social workers grapple with, in their profession (Liljegren, 2012; Evans, 2013; Banks, 2003). As Nordling's study was conducted during the years 2010-2014, it is imperative to explore and potentially expand on the findings from this study. Since this thesis has been conducted after the implementation of the interim Aliens Act, the dilemmas faced by the social assistants provide a good introduction into the potential struggles that the respondents in this study have faced.

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[5] Free translation from Swedish. Original quote, "nationsgränser blir viktigare att upprätthålla än människors rättigheter" (Aracena, 2015:187)

4 Theoretical framework

The aim of this thesis is to explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. As such, this following chapter will describe the theories and concepts that have been found useful in analysing the data collected during the interviews. They are as follows: critical realism, street-level bureaucracy, discretion and professionalism.

4.1 Critical realism

Critical realism is a relatively new positioning, that originated within the philosophy of science and was borne out of the questioning of the dichotomy placed between structure and agency and theories that promote one over the other (Houston, 2001; Pease, 2010; Edwards, O'Mahoney, Vincent, 2010; Kjörstad and Solem, 2018). Its founder, Roy Bhaskar rather opted for a positioning that acknowledges that "knowledge is socially and culturally situated" (Pease, 2010:106) whilst still asserting that "that social structure exists" (Pease, 2010:106). Summed up simply, critical realism contains "three basic premises: that a reality exists outside of human perception, that our ability to comprehend that reality requires subjective understanding and that reality cannot be understood without critical and reflexive thinking that goes beyond the positivist notion of scientific detachment." (Pease, 2010: 106). However, a further illumination of critical realism is necessary, in order to highlight the choice of position for this thesis. In Bhaskar's observation of the existence of a reality outside of the human mind, which is split into three different levels, first the empirical level, which encompasses experienced events, second, the actual level, which encompasses all events, whether experienced or not and finally the real level. This level is instrumental to critical realism as it is the one which consists of the "'mechanisms'" (Houston, 2001:850) that enable events to happen or not, however, one which is not directly perceivable (Houston, 2001). To exemplify, take gravity, it is the causal mechanism which makes the apple fall from the tree. However, it is not discernible to the human eye, but that does not take away from the fact that it is what makes the apple fall from the tree. To exemplify this, the figure below from Fletcher (2017) and her metaphor of an iceberg illuminates these three levels, highlighting how even though not all the levels are seen, they still impact and interact with one another.
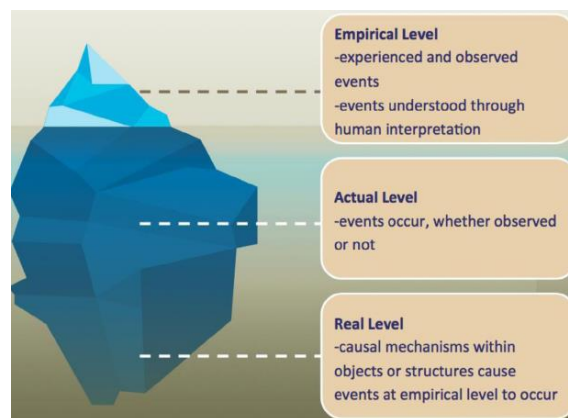

Figure 2: *An iceberg analogy for CR ontology*, (Fletcher, 2017:183)

Another key concept to critical realism is the notion of open systems, which refers to organisations or societies, and is where the causal mechanisms operate. Open systems are

inherently complex and multi-faceted, where mechanisms can and do work in juxtaposition to each other (Edwards, O'Mahoney, Vincent, 2010: Houston, 2001). This is reflected in this thesis as it aims to explore how social assistants manoeuvre contradicting rationalities when working with UAMs and how they explain their actions within them. The reasoning for this aim follows Bhaskar's reasoning that "people's actions will be *influenced* by innate psychological mechanisms as well as wider social mechanisms" (Houston, 2001:852). The acknowledgement here of human agency, akin to constructivists belief in the individual being able to reject and change the social structures that are present within societies. Due to this, how social beings describe their positions and beliefs are indispensable to understanding society, however, this does not mean that all accounts hold equal value and truth. This is due to the core belief that human beings are incapable of understanding reality outside themselves, as it is understood is through lenses such as "language, culture and experience" (Houston, 2001:851). Within critical realism, this is referred to as the transitive view of the world, one which is constricted by the aforementioned lenses and the "innate constraints or disabling effects of ideology" (Houston, 2001:851), whilst "the true reality of things" (Houston, 2001:851) is the intransitive one. The importance of these two concepts and its impact upon this thesis will be explored further in the methodology.

From this brief overview of critical realism, it is imperative to connect the ideas presented to this thesis. Remembering that the aim of this thesis is to explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors, both structure and agency are important to acknowledge in the face of this. Although the agency of the social assistants is the focal aspect, they act and react within the structures that are set forth not only by the Aliens Act, but the organisations that they work within. As such, to gain a fruitful and holistic overview of the data collected from them, acknowledgement of the positioning set forth by critical realism becomes instrumental in being able to analyse the data appropriately.

4.2 Concepts

It cannot be understated how instrumental concepts are to social research (Bryman, 2012). "What concepts do I need to understand and explore more fully the social mechanisms under investigation?" (Edwards, O'Mahoney, Vincent, 2010:21) has guided this process, because it is not only important in the analysis of the data found, but also the process of identifying the problem area and research that has been relevant for the thesis. They are, as acknowledged by Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent (2012), not static and have developed upon during the process of researching and collecting the data for this thesis, to ensure that the social mechanisms studied are relevantly answered and explained by the concepts that have been chosen. As this thesis focuses upon the experiences of social assistants within the social services, the concepts chosen must reflect not only the individual experiences, but also the organisational factors that have impacted their work. Noting that,

"identity helps to bridge analyses between levels of social life such as the personal, the group, the team and the organisation. This makes it a powerful device for connecting recursive links and understanding dynamic networks of association" (Webb, 2017:1)

The concepts of the street-level bureaucrat, discretion and professionalism have been chosen to help analyse how the social assistants discuss their experiences of working with unaccompanied minors. These concepts have been identified and explored in relation to Hasenfelds (2010)

identification of the attributes of the human service organisation (HSO). As Johansson, Dellgran, and Höjer (2015) also note, due to the broad spectrum of organisations that could be identified as HSOs, it is hard to give a definitive definition of them (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). The focus of HSOs are working with humans as their raw material, and in this case, as with Sjögren (2018), the focus lies on the people-processing aspect, as the social services defines and identifies the needs of the clients within their jurisdiction. This entails the inherent moral work that HSOs perform, as the employees within them make judgements upon their clients' needs according to their moral worth, and "set the structure and processes of how resources would be allocated and to what categories of clients" (Hasenfeld, 2010:29). These are informed by the current institutional rules (read cultural symbols and belief systems), set forth by legislative bodies, government bureaucracies and other human service organisations, amongst others (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015; Sjögren, 2018). As Hasenfeld noted, it means that "at the intersection between the organization and its environment, the organisation seeks legitimacy through appeals to institutional rules that are inherently moral prescriptions about the "good" society and the social rights of its various citizens" (Hasenfeld, 2010:29). These aspects denote that there is a potential of HSOs to change their methods of caring for their clients and as Hasenfeld (2010) noted, the HSOs become "an arena in which different moral values compete for dominance" (Hasenfeld, 2010:29) due to the "culturally pluralistic institutional environment" they work within (Hasenfeld, 2010:29).

Within the organisation, the core work lies between the client and worker relation, which imbues a power relation that is skewed in favour of the worker (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). Noting that the social assistants primary work is to assess the needs of the UAMs and whether they can fulfil those according to the Social Services Act, through using the BBIC system, the attributes of the HSO suits the work they do. As such, it gives a deeper insight into the daily work of the social assistants and as such, a greater insight to the concepts of street-level bureaucrat, discretion and professionalism.

4.2.1 The street-level bureaucrat

"Much of the competition among different moral values is reflected in the relationship between workers and clients. It is here that the organization reveals its actual moral choices. The encounters between workers and clients represent the concrete manifestations of such choices. Most important, the content of the encounters is the *litmus test* of the validity of the rhetoric of the organization. It distils what the organization actually does from what it claims it does" (Hasenfeld, 2010:29)

The concept street-level bureaucracy, or the street-level bureaucrat, pertains to the centrality of client-worker relations and is the "*primary vehicle* through which workers carry out their work" (Hasenfeld, 2010:21). As Lipsky (1980; 2010) noted, the organisations are faced with various and at times, conflicting objectives and often face a lack of resources, in form of time and economical ones, but also information needed to cover the needs of the individual in front of them (Lipsky, 1980; 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). In Lipsky's (1980) seminal work on street-level bureaucrats, he challenged the then prevailing top-down perspective on social policy, adopting to define and describe the work of the front-line public organisation employees, such as social workers. As such, he explores the opportunities that these workers have to control their work, but also the challenges and contradictions that are present (Lipsky, 1980: 2010; Evans, 2011). Street-level bureaucrats are the individuals that meet between the citizens and the state, simultaneously being "the furthest from the centers of power and the

closest to the citizens" (Maynard-Mooney and Musheno, 2000:333). This positioning could give rise to a potential underlying tension of fulfilling the work according to what the state mandates, contra what the clients they meet need (Lipsky, 1980; 2010). As such, the street-level bureaucrat strives "to do a good job *in some way*" (Lipsky, 2010:81).

As this thesis takes its departure on the experiences that social assistants have had since the changes enforced in 2016 that affect unaccompanied minors, in combination with the fact that Sweden adopts a framework legislation model, it opens up for social assistants to interpret the policies and laws relating to unaccompanied minors. Following the description set forth of who a street-level bureaucrat is, it is argued that this is a befitting concept to describe the social assistants' role within the social services.

4.2.2 Discretion

An important aspect that Lipsky identified that street-level bureaucrats employ in their daily work is discretion, which is commonly agreed upon to be defined as "the freedom to exercise one's work role" (Evans, 2010:12) within policy implementation work, such as the municipal social services. There are several pre-conditions that allow discretion to flourish, but that also enforce the need of it within HSOs. Firstly, the laws, goals, and guidelines that the street-level bureaucrats are mandated to work from are inconsistent and vague. A second aspect stems from the human interaction that forms the basis of their work, the situations the people they encounter are in are "unique, unpredictable and specific" (Dunér and Nordström, 2006:429). Thus, as previously mentioned, this complexity cannot be guided by extensive regulations. From this, based upon the information gathered from the client and the organisations resources, the street-level bureaucrat has relative autonomy in their decision about what resources shall be allocated the client (Sjögren, 2018).

Although the concept of discretion is essential for this thesis, there are several inflections that must be noted on Lipsky's observations of it. First, his first book was concluded prior to the rise of NPM, managerialism, and standardisation which has led to critique to the significance he lends to discretion (Evans and Harris, 2004; Dunér and Nordström, 2006; Evans, 2011; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Dellgran, 2015). It has been argued that due to the rise of NPM, not only has reaching goals become an explicit focus, but also the influence of the managers in maintaining become more central to work within human service organisations. This is usually based on the premise of resource management. As a result, the discretion that street-level bureaucrats have has become more heavily regulated (Evans and Harris, 2004; Dunér and Nordström, 2006; Evans, 2011; Dellgran, 2015). However, as Evans (2011) notes, Lipsky's analysis of the role of the manager in human service organisations highlighted this, and hailed managers as the "key regulators of discretion" (Evans, 2011:371), with the mindset of what is best for the organisation. This as such does not discount the discretionary powers that the street-level bureaucrat has, but that the manager regulates their discretion through either restraining or enabling it (Evans, 2011).

The broadening of what discretion encompasses has also been highlighted by Wallander and Molander (2014), whom identified both the structural aspect of discretion, known as discretionary space, in which the professional has the space to employ their discretion. The second aspect focuses upon the epistemic aspect, the discretionary reasoning, which focuses upon the internal reasoning that the professional employs when adopting what is the best way of helping the individual in their care (Wallander and Molander, 2014). This opens the aspect

that Evans (2013) raises, that the trust in the professionals' discretion heavily relies upon the perceived professionalism that they possess. This has been echoed by Dellgren's (2015) observation that discretion's use within HSOs are contingent upon the trust in the professions' knowledge and ethics, and furthermore, the professional's ability to make knowledge-based assessments and objective decisions, without the impact of personal values or beliefs about what is wrong or right. One final point that is important to highlight is "the essentially ethical and political nature of discretion" (Evans, 2013:744), within which, in this case, the social assistants act. From this observation, the professionalism of the street-level bureaucrats become an incremental aspect of performing the work, which will be further explored in the following section.

Having given an overview of discretion, it becomes evident of its use for this thesis as a tool to analyse the information gathered from the social assistants, as noted in the previous section, the social assistants interpret the Social Services Act in relation to the needs of the UAMs.

4.2.3 Professionalism

Considering the changes that have impacted HSOs and street-level bureaucrats, it is important to note before delving into professionalism that "what it means to be professional will be somewhat different in different periods of time" (Dent, 2017:21). When discussing the professional and their use of discretion, it is important to note that they are built upon notions of authority and trust (Liljegren, 2012). There are two modes that professionalism achieves authority and trust, which was explored by Evetts (2003), whom through a sociological lens coined the terms organisational professionalism and occupational professionalism. Organisational professionalism has arguably flourished in the past years, alongside the rise of NPM and is "governed by rational-legal authority, a discourse of control, standardised procedures, hierarchical structures, managerialism and accountability" (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017:593). Conversely, occupational professionalism is based upon "collegial authority, a discourse formed within the professional group, discretion and occupational control, professional ethics and practitioners trusted by both employers and clients" (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017:593).

These two professionalisms highlight the inherent difficulties that present themselves within social work practice, that the professional work conducted by, in this case, social assistants, are plagued by the competition between a professional and bureaucratic rationality. Furthermore, it has often been argued that the occupational professionalism is the base of the ideal professional work (Dellgran, 2015). It thus raises the fact that a choice must be made by the social assistants as to which professionalism to adhere to, which links to the notion of discretionary reasoning previously explored. Another important aspect that must be raised apart from the authority and trust that is gained through either professionalism, is the role that accountability is placed within this. It is argued that although the organisational professionalism relies heavily upon accountability, occupational professionalism also relies upon this, but that it manifests itself differently within it (Liljegren, 2012). Within organisational professionalism, accountability is "achieved through the trust that is engendered through measurable means" (Liljegren, 2012:298), but also adherence to rules and regulations set forth by the organisation the professional works within (Dellgran, 2015). Within occupational professionalism, accountability "entails entrusting professionals to deliver and justify that which is best for their clients on the basis of their academic and practical training and professional code of ethics" (Liljegren, 2012:298).

Professional accountability has arguably always been important within social work as "in so far as social work is a profession (that is, it is a publically recognised occupation with a socially mandated purpose and recognised standards of education and expertise), then accountability of its practitioners is a key element of professionalism" (Banks, 2013:593). As has been noted, both forms of professionalism hold certain standards and values, outputs and outcomes, processes and justifications for the chosen actions (Banks, 2013). As this thesis focuses upon the social assistant's experiences since the changes enforced in 2016, how they have justified their actions within this work becomes of paramount importance to understand how they have employed their discretion and interpreted their professionalism within this context. As Banks noted, "justification involves giving reasons for action. This may be in terms of the ethical values and standards of the profession or employing agency" (Banks, 2013:594) whilst it "may also be given in terms of acting according to agreed protocols, procedures or guidelines" (Banks, 2013:594). It is important to note this action aspect, in the light of the fact that Dellgren (2015) raises that the split between occupational and organisational professionalism seems to have raised feelings of ambivalence and emotional, cognitive or ethical conflicts for professionals. Since this thesis takes its departure within the Swedish social services, it is necessary to highlight what ethical social work entails, which Akademikerförbundet SSR (2016) emphasised in the Social Services Act preamble,

"Government social services shall, on the grounds of democratic values and solidarity, promote the people's economic and social security, equality of living conditions and active participation in the life of the society. Taking into account people's personal responsibility for their own and others' social situation, the social services shall work to free and help develop the personal resources of individuals and groups. Procedures and measures shall build on respect for people's right of self-determination and the protection of integrity. In all decisions concerning children particular attention shall be paid to the best interests of the child."

Professionalism is a relevant concept for investigating how the social assistants have related to the discretion they have in their work. When noting from previous chapters the changes through the interim Aliens Act and the challenges already present before these changes noted in the literature review, professionalism will give a fruitful insight in how the social assistants talk about their work and the justifications that they give for how they have worked.

4.3 Summary

To summarise, this thesis aim is to explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. This necessitates both a perspective which gives insight into the structural factors that impact upon them, but also an agency perspective. To help foster this, the ontological perspective critical realism was identified, as it incorporates both these aspects, rather than the dichotomy debate usually placed between structure and agency. From this, I chose the concepts of the street-level bureaucrat, discretion and professionalism, which were identified with the attributes of the HSO in mind, as that is the open system in which the social assistants operate. They were chosen as they will give an insight from a micro-level agents perspective, whilst still giving an insight on the structural forces that impact the social assistants work with unaccompanied minors.

5 Methodology

The methodology of any thesis is a foundation for the whole process of creating, investigating and writing up the results of it and lends not only structure for what is arguably a messy process, but also validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn from the data. As such, the following chapter will describe the research approach, methods and ethical issues that have permeated throughout this research.

5.2 Qualitative approach

As Braun and Clarke (2013) have noted, qualitative research in its basic definition is a research approach concerned with collecting data that is based on words. In line with this thought, I have explored how social workers give accounts on how they have been affected by the changes implemented since 2016, such as the interim Aliens Act. This is in particular reference on how it affects the discretion they have, which is a key aspect of the street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 1980; 2010; Dunér and Malmstöm, 2006). As such, a qualitative approach is a befitting one, as it aims to study "reality from the inside" (Humphries, 2008:7) from the point of view of the individual(s) in question (Sandelowski, 2004). Furthermore, this is an approach that acknowledges the significance and influence of the historical and cultural aspects and the subjectivity of the data found (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Humphries, 2008; Sandelowski, 2004). The aim of the research is to produce idiographic knowledge to gain understanding of the how social workers view and talk about their discretion in the daily work with unaccompanied minors (Sandelowski, 2004). Throughout this process, as is highly indicative of qualitative research, the recognition and acceptance of the subjective nature of knowledge and knowledge creation, being influenced by personal views, politics and passions into the research (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Humphries, 2008). Humphries summarises this last point succinctly that with a point "which sees social research not solely as a range of neutral approaches to the examination of social problems, but as itself a profoundly political exercise, and as having potential "to contribute to social change for good or ill" (Humphries, 2008:1)

As imperative as it is to place this study within the qualitative realm of research, it is just as important to discuss the metatheoretical discussions on ontology and epistemology, as they have heavily influenced the way social science research has been conducted (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobson, 2002; Houston, 2001). These refer to questioning of what reality is (ontology) and how one can gain knowledge about it (epistemology). The two dominating paradigms are within realist or constructivist conceptions of reality, of which the former's ontology being the existence of one independent and ordered reality and the epistemology thus is that knowledge reflects this one reality and dissects the causal law objectively (Humphries, 2008). Constructivist ontology highlights a belief in the existence of multiple perceptions of reality and thus following, the epistemology is subjective and plural, with knowledge being constructed in relation to this and thus subject to change (Humphries, 2008). There are many debates that speak for and against both of these paradigms, however, as was explored in the theoretical framework, critical realism offers an alternative standpoint which acknowledges the impact of both within society.

Borrowing from critical studies, critical realism also contains the conviction that the social sciences are not value-free, and thus, that research should not only seek to understand psychological and structural factors that manifest themselves within society, but also to do so in the pursuit of emancipating individuals and groups from structures which produce human

oppression (Houston, 2001; Kjörstad and Solem, 2017). On this point, both the realist and constructivist accounts fall short, as the former does not acknowledge the impacts of socially constructed realities, whilst the latter relies heavily upon them. Pease noted although constructivist's standpoint is important, he questioned "if there is no objective reality, how can we develop the foundations for emancipatory projects?" (Pease, 2010:103), which highlights the importance of critical realism in tackling this. The emancipatory projects are highly relevant for social work, at its core, is an emancipatory project. It not only attempts to understand social ills that befall individuals and groups of all ages, genders, ethnicities and able-ness, but provide tools that challenge and ameliorate the effect of the structures that enable this (Houston, 2001; Kjörstad and Solem, 2017), as shown by the IFSW definition of social work (IFSW, 2018).

Although there are clear benefits of employing a critical realist stance for the aim of this thesis, this does not automatically point to the fact that the conclusions drawn from the analysis are to be taken at face value. As was presented in the theoretical framework, critical realism highlights within open systems, such as society, there are two views within this, the transitive one, which refers to how people, in this case, me as a researcher, attempts to understand the intransitive one, which encompasses the real world in its completeness (the empirical, actual and causal level combined). The importance of this is that I have identified what I felt were the most relevant theoretical concepts to analyse the data collected from the social assistants, partly based upon prior research, but also interaction with the data collected. However, it must be stated that the results of presented must be observed with scepticism and also to potential fallibility, as they are inevitably skewed, due to the nature of the social world in its essence (Houston, 2001). From this, it becomes evident that my own positioning within this research project must be explored, to enforce the transparency and consequently, reliability of this thesis.

5.3 Situating myself

It is widely acknowledged within qualitative research that the researcher is often intimately involved in the creation of the knowledge in the research, from the conception of the topic and questions, throughout the data collection and analysis parts and finally to the discussion of the results (Humphries, 2008). It is not enough to just acknowledge this, but to ensure transparency of the research process and heighten the reliability of the results and conclusions drawn, the ways in which the researcher has impacted upon this process must be discussed. Within qualitative research, this is commonly addressed as reflexivity, and is "the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome" (Berger, 2015:220). This is in part, two-fold, one referring to my own personal views upon the current practices within the research topic, and the other referring to the interaction with the social assistants interviewed for this thesis.

Firstly, my positioning within the topic that I have chosen is one that is critical of the current practices that the Swedish state has enforced since 2016. Following from Goldin, Balajaran and Cameron (2013) and other researchers within migration studies, I believe strongly that migration is a natural aspect of humanity and that the language used to describe this phenomenon creates hierarchisations of individuals and groups, based upon a sense of superiority over them (Anderson, 2017; Castles, 2017). This belief has been strengthened in recent years, as I have both worked professionally within HVB homes and helped support UAMs as a private citizen as well. These experiences have highlighted the how debilitating migration policies are on individuals and as a result, as a social worker, made my belief in the

emancipatory core of social work stronger. Secondly, perhaps rather idealistically, I hold a strong conviction in the emancipatory practices that social work ideally should hold itself to, which, as observed, in practice is a complex endeavour. When noting the context of this thesis, as a private individual, as well as a researcher, my interest in the subject is partly with how the social assistants grapple with complexities that arise from working in HSOs and their reactions and actions to it. I could potentially run the risk of judging the actions of the social assistants harshly, if they do not adhere to the emancipatory aspect of social work.

A second aspect that must be addressed is how I was perceived in the eyes of my respondents, for several reasons. To begin, I am a white, young woman, studying a Master' in Social Work and Human Rights, with no experience of working as a social assistant with UAMs. Following along the logic from Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), that interviews are a meeting point between the interviewee and interviewer, creating a common space to develop and exchange ideas. Thus, how they perceive me as an individual could impact upon this co-construction (Berger, 2015). Secondly, even though it has been a structured conversation between me and the respondents, it is "characterized by an asymmetry of power in which the researcher is in charge of questioning a more or less voluntary and sometimes naive interviewee" (Qu and Dumay, 2011:239). To counteract this, an emphasis was placed upon the fact that I was interested in their experiences and expressed my gratitude for their time by giving a small gift of chocolate to each respondent after the interviews were conducted. Another issue that arises connects with how I view the world, as was explored previously, because even though I have conducted the interviews in my native language, Swedish with the respondents, "their words may have completely different cultural meanings" (Qu and Dumay, 2011:239) to how I interpret the use of their words. Finally, it must also be pointed out that reflexivity is a process that follows along the whole research process, from "the formulation of a research question, collection and analysis of data, and drawing conclusions" (Berger, 2015:221). As such, the following sections will be discussed with this point in mind.

5.4 Data collection
This section will discuss the methods used in the data collection part of this thesis and the challenges that were presented through employing the chosen methods.

5.4.1 Semi-structured interviews
As I am interested in how the social assistants have worked with UAMs since the 'migration crisis', adopting the approach that view "people not as objects, mechanically controlled by casual laws, but rather as persons, i.e., as subjects who act and are actively engaged in meaning making" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015:3). As such, it is a study of the "forms and beliefs, not events" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2000:336) that present themselves throughout the interviews. This thus entails direct questions on established themes, with the point of departure being how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. Concurrently, I wish to give the interviewees "leeway in how to reply" (Bryman, 2016:468) and interact with the responses that the interviewees give through follow up and probing questions (Bryman, 2016). This is a key feature of semi-structured interviews, as it provided me "the means to draw out more complete narratives from the interviewees, drilling down a particular topic" (Qu and Dumay, 2011:247). However, this is not a risk-free approach, as it carries with it the potential that I pick up on parts of questions which fit in with my inescapable pre-conceived ideas about the topic. However, as has been discussed, my stance is that this is an inevitable aspect of any research, to which transparency

and discussions counteracts the pre-conceived ideas. Irrespective of this, as the focus is on how the social workers have responded to these changes, I felt a flexible approach to interviewing was appropriate to ensure that their opinion is the focus, with a certain degree of guidance to ensure that I fulfil my search of relevant data (Bernard and Ryan, 2010: Bryman, 2016).

5.4.2 Sampling

It must be established that due to not only time constraints, but also the scope of this master's thesis, the sampling group was restricted to a maximum of eight respondents, with the final number being seven. Purposive sampling (Bryman, 2016) has been employed in order to fulfil the research purpose of this thesis. My initial idea was to find between 3-4 respondents from both social workers that solely work within the municipal social services and a further 3-4 who had engaged in two of the civil society organisations that have blossomed since 2015 in support of unaccompanied minors. However, early on, both civil society organisations declined in participating, due to time constraints. This meant recalibrating the purpose of the thesis, now instead focusing on social workers employed in the social services. Even this has been many times, an arduous process, with emails and calls not being returned, declined due to time constraints or forwarded to colleagues. To overcome this, employing the method of approaching gate keepers, in this case, through using friends, family and lecturer networks, as well as reaching out to researchers whom have written within the field has been employed, but also posting in two Facebook groups, one specifically directed towards social workers that work with UAMs, and another directed solely at social workers. Overwhelmingly. what has been the most successful approach is through informal channels, which I believe is due to that is easier to ignore emails from unknown individuals. In addition to that social workers, particularly ones working with UAMs, are very busy with their work and is work that is mentally draining as well, which was corroborated by one of the interviewees that took part in this study. Upon reflection of this process, it must be stated that through using primarily informal channels could have potentially limited the organisational gatekeeper bias that might've impacted upon the answers that the interviewees gave (Herz and Lalander, 2017).

The seven respondents that took part in the study worked in three different counties across southern Sweden. Three of them were from different social services, and two pairs from two different social services, however, each interview was conducted one to one. Due to this, the questions and answers that came forth in the interview differed slightly, due to the framework legislation model adopted in Sweden. This meant that decisions on a municipal level could differ between municipalities, as long as they fulfil the reasonable standard of living set forth by the Social Services Act. This made it important for me to gather relevant background knowledge from each municipality before conducting the interviews, to ensure that I asked relevant and direct questions, gathered from various sources, such as the municipal websites and media outlets (Qu and Dumay, 2011).

5.4.3 Interview process

The interview process spanned across three months, due to the complication of reaching interview. Upon contact, the document explaining the research topic was sent to each respondent and time and place of the interviews were decided by them, to accommodate for their schedules and ensure that they felt as comfortable as possible throughout the interview. Following along Kvale and Brinkmann's (2015) recommendations for conducting interviews, I started each interview by defining the situation to the respondents, such as the purpose of the interview and going through the consent form and answering any questions that the respondent

might have had. Furthermore, I asked each respondent whether I was allowed to record and take notes during the interview as well (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). I then proceeded to ask the questions set forth in my interview guide, however, made sure to round off each interview by asking if they had anything to add that wasn't covered throughout the interview that they felt were important to address. Finally, the interviews overwhelmingly ended with a short debriefing session where the respondents and I discussed this thesis further, my interest in the topic and so on (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

5.5 Data analysis

This section discusses the methods chosen that were employed to analyse the data collected and the various challenges, but also opportunities presented through employing them in this thesis.

5.5.1 Transcription and translation

Reflection on the type of transcription that is employed is imperative as it has great impacts upon what is inferred from the data, which has been seen to be overlooked in many studies (Davidson, 2009). It is a process in which the researcher reflexively types up the recording, making choices upon the type of transcription to fit the theoretical foundations of their study (Davidson, 2009; Oliver, Serovich, Mason, 2005). Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) have noted that without careful consideration of the transcription method, the data collected may not end up reflecting the aims of the study. As such, it entails being selective to what is believed to be relevant for their research purposes. In the light of this, the choice of verbatim transcription was employed to show the importance of certain passages through non-verbal cues or repetition of words. However, there are several issues that must be explored during the transcription process. Firstly, the act of putting spoken words into written ones changes the format from one to another and when noting the fact that the representation of the analysis and its themes is through the use of quotes, "participants might feel that they are not fairly represented, when they see their spoken words in written form" (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, 2010:316). To counteract this, I have offered to send the transcripts to each participant, to which one requested a copy.

Secondly, an issue an issue that raises several questions is that I have conducted the interviews in Swedish. First, when noting the aforementioned issue of the spoken/written word, it can be argued that "translating the quotes to another language enlarges this problem, because in the translation the words are literally not their own anymore" (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, 2010:316), and necessitates the importance of being particularly meticulous when translating the quotes that have been used to exemplify the data. Second, language in and of itself is a complex interaction between expressing meaning and influencing meaning, whilst simultaneously being influenced by the social and cultural phenomena within a country. What I have noted then is that not only have I grappled with interpreting and representing the meaning of the social assistants, but it's "been more complicated when cultural contexts differ and interlingual translation is required" (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, 2010:314). Van Nes, Abma and Jonsson (2010) recommend the use of a translator to aid this process, however, due to not only time constraints but also monetary ones, this has not been employed. This could then potentially jeopardise the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn, but to counteract this, the quotes that have been used have both the quote in Swedish and English in the appendix.

5.5.2 Thematic analysis

The method of analysing the transcripts, as with the transcribing process, has particular implications on what is derived from the data and for what purpose. Thematic analysis has been employed for this thesis, as it is "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79), with the purpose being to identify the ones that are relevant to the research questions. Despite its rising popularity (Bryman, 2016), thematic analysis has been identified by several researchers as a method that has been hard to define, due to its widespread use and relatively undefined process of analysis (Bryman, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013). This is particularly worrying on several points, as Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, it not only jeopardises the credibility and validity of the research conducted, as evaluation and comparison is hampered, which in turn can impede further similar projects. This notwithstanding, Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed and given great insight into the use of thematic analysis within qualitative research (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Within thematic analysis, there are two different ways it can be conducted, either inductively or deductively, with the former approach being focusing on what comes up from the data and the latter being analysed with topics, ideas or concepts guiding the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

I have opted for an inductive approach, however, in accordance with what I have argued in other parts of the methodology, it cannot be guaranteed that I have not used concepts or theories throughout the coding and thematising process. Throughout this process, I have followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) "six phases of analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:86), I have familiarised myself with the data through re-reading the transcripts twice, and then begun the coding process, with guidance of my research questions to ensure relevancy. In addition to this, another important aspect to note is the semantic (also referred to as manifest) and latent themes, of which the prior focuses more upon what is directly observable from the transcripts, such as talk about discretion being reduced to the current laws in Sweden, whilst latent refers more to what can be inferred from what is not said (Braun and Clarke, 2006). From this, initial themes were created and reviewed until I ended up with four themes and seven sub-themes (see section 6 for an overview of them). The themes and the corresponding codes are provided in appendix 5.

5.6 Validity and reliability

Although the aspects of validity and reliability are more heavily associated with the quantitative realm of research, it still is important to discuss these aspects in relation to how they are applied within qualitative studies (Bryman, 2016; Hernon and Schwartz, 2009). They both have external and internal factors that affect the study in question. Firstly, the internal validity relates to how the methods chosen for this thesis are accurate in relation to fulfilling the research purpose, which is applicable to qualitative research. External validity on the other hand, relates to the generalisability of the study to the wider population, which does not correlate well within qualitative research, as it is not interested in this stance to the same extent as quantitative research (Bryman, 2016; Hernon and Schwartz, 2009). Reliability relates to which extent the data collected is consistent if the same study were to be conducted again (Hernon and Schwartz, 2009). This here relates to what was discussed in the previous section 8.2, surrounding positioning within the research itself and the perceptions of me by the respondents in the study. As Bryman (2016) notes, the concepts of validity and reliability place themselves within the realist epistemology, which has not been adopted in this study. However, this does not mean that validity and reliability cannot be discussed within qualitative research, and instead have different criteria for achieving this (Bryman, 2016). It lies in ensuring that this thesis is

trustworthy and credible (Bryman, 2016), of which transparency is an important aspect of creating this. As such, I have tried to make the research process as transparent as possible, this has been done through reflecting upon my own stance in this research, as was seen in section 5.3. Furthermore, as I have conducted the interviews in Swedish, all data and documents that were used throughout the research process are attached both in Swedish and English in the appendixes.

5.7 Ethical considerations

Undertaking any form of social research, whether it be of a quantitative or, as in this case, a qualitative one, ethical considerations must be mapped out and situate how this has been tackled within this thesis (Bryman, 2016). There are four broad ethical principles that will be discussed in this section, pertaining to harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy and finally deception (Bryman, 2016). These principles arguably could be conflated into the principle of doing no harm to the participants and as this study relies heavily upon participants, this has been a big concern throughout this process. Humphries (2008) notes one aspect of the do no harm being the social impact that the questions could have upon the participants, which in this case has been a viable cause for concern due to that this topic is a politically and ethically charged one. However, yet again as Humphries (2008) argues, firstly, this is hard to guarantee as only once the questions are asked, can it be noticed if this negatively impacts the respondents. Secondly, when following along the logic of emancipatory practices argued previously in the methodology, reflection on their actions/inactions within their line of work and if this reflection impacts them in whatever form, is to be desired in order to bring forth change (Humphries, 2008).

As much as I believe in the emancipatory practices and critical reflection, I was confronted with the negative consequences that social impact can have upon the respondents as many noted feelings of despair and an overwhelming sense of moral distress at the situation they faced within their line of work. One interview particularly comes to mind, in which the respondent was visibly upset and cried when recounting the experiences working with UAMs. This spurred me to reiterate that this is completely voluntary and that the interview could be terminated immediately if the respondent wished to, however, the respondent wished to finish the interview. Here, I was challenged with my presumptions about the principle of doing no harm, as inevitably, through my questioning, I had caused just that, even though it was stated the respondent had been critically reflected on the questions brought up prior to this. At the end of this particular interview, during the debriefing period, the respondent noted the importance of having participated in this study, as it was of utmost importance to make their voices heard about the issues that face them. This brings up the aspect that Humphries (2008), noted of hopefully contributing to, at minimum, critical reflection of how the current praxis regarding UAMs are debilitating for them and the social assistants that work with them and working towards "doing good" (Israel and Hay, 2006:99) for individuals who are affected by this. This reflects one of the core values of undertaking social work research, as it is not only to build upon or create new theories, but also to find ways how "this might inform changes in practices, institutions, policies and laws, however directly or indirectly" (Hugman, 2010:149), although the extent to which this thesis will produce that is unknown.

Another important aspect that must be further explored is the issue of informed consent. As previously stated, the document containing information about the study had been shared with the participants before the interviews and at the start of each interview the consent sheet was

given to them However, as was discussed in the transcription part, how I have employed their words in the thesis may not reflect upon their intention, which has been further complicated by the fact that they have been translated from Swedish to English. This raises the point of deception (Bryman, 2016) which has been attempted to be countered by offering to send the transcripts to the respondents after the interviews. Only one of the participants accepted this but had no critiques upon the transcription. The third important aspect that must be explored is the confidentiality of the respondents, which considering that I am interviewing respondents about "their work life, where the interviewer should enter into an agreement with the interviewee not to disclose anything to the employer" (Qu and Durmay, 2011:254). This becomes even more pertinent when the interviews revealed a questioning of the prevailing beliefs and practices of the organisation, which could have severe consequences for the individuals that agree to be interviewed. Due to this, confidentiality is of utmost importance and must be strictly adhered to, especially as there are political implications within the study (Nordling, 2017).

To ensure confidentiality, I have chosen to name the interviewees respondents one through seven, however, I must raise the aspect that full confidentiality has not been achieved, as four of the respondents knew one another and worked in the same office. Throughout these four interviews, references were made to their colleagues, and in some instances, I was indirectly asked about how the others had responded, of which I declined to answer. Furthermore, it could be speculated that these respondents altered their answers, due to the fact that they had colleagues whom also took part in this study however, this cannot be corroborated. Finally, in the consent form it was detailed that data obtained from the interviewees would be destroyed upon completion of this thesis.

5.8 Limitations

As Bryman (2016) in order to produce trustworthy and transparent research, it is important to discuss the limitations that presented themselves throughout the production of this thesis. Although there has been a reflection throughout the methodology of the choice of methods and the drawbacks of them, there are still some issues that could have impacted upon the production of this thesis. The limitations of this study spring primarily from the fact that I have limited experience in producing an academic study that is based upon qualitative interviews. This is a limitation due to the fact that as yet again Bryman (2016) notes, it is not simply enough to be aware of the different methods of conducting research. It is just as important, if not more so, to understand the different ontological positionings and the methodology that follows from them. Thus, considering that this is my first time conducting a study like this one, how I have employed the methods and furthermore, theoretical concepts chosen may be have negatively impacted this paper. However, as has been discussed previously, transparency of the research methods chosen has been employed to combat this limitation. Other important aspects to raise are the limited time frame in which to produce this thesis, which, as previously discussed, became evident during the process of finding respondents.

5.8.1 Obtaining participants

As discussed, it was a struggle to gather participants to partake in this study. In hindsight, I did not reflect upon this fact enough, even after my supervisor mentioned the struggles that it would be to gain access to this particular group. As I had such a hard time finding participants, most of the participants had limited experience working with this particular group, one of the participants having nearly worked a year with this group. This was a particular worry, as arguably they could potentially be seen as still getting used to the work, however, on the other

hand, they could possibly have observed details that other social assistants whom had longer experience would not have.

6 Findings and analysis

 This section will present the findings and the analysis of the data collected through the interviews, which has been informed by the theoretical framework and the previous research review from the previous sections. What is pertinent to point out here is that the concepts that were chosen has been informed by a critical realist stance (Houston, 2001; Pease, 2010). Following this, I have interpreted that these concepts helped guide the aim explore how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. There were variations in how the interviews proceeded, some strictly adhered to the interview guide, however, as interviews is based on an interaction between two individuals, the interview guide flowed between different questions, not strictly following the order. In one particular case, as is the risk with interviews, the participant veered off topic from the questions asked. They rather answered what they found to be the issues within the social services in general, rather than specifically to UAMs, however, this still brought an insightful overview of how she/he had seen the development of the social services across the nearly twenty years. Below are the themes and sub-themes that were identified:

1. **Theme one: the challenges of an uneven playing field**
   a. The Migration Agency's power to determine the scope of the social services care
   b. The elongating of the UAMs indeterminacy in Sweden
   c. Resources as a point of departure for the care of UAMs
2. **Theme two: managing the uneven playing field**
   a. Needs beyond what the respondents felt they could fulfil
   b. Bureaucratic boundaries and questionable standardisation
3. **Theme three: challenging the uneven playing field**
   a. Giving that little extra to the UAMs
   b. Being heard but not listened to
4. **Theme four: The emergence of voluntary individuals and organisations**

6.1 Theme one: the challenges of an uneven playing field

From analysing the interviews, it became clear that the 'playing field' which the UAMs found themselves in were not skewed in their favour. The analogy of the playing field has been used to highlight the open system, in this case the Swedish welfare state, in which the care of UAMs is placed (Houston, 2001; Edwards, O'Mahoney, Vincent, 2010). This theme refers to the challenges, particularly structural ones that the respondents felt were present in their work with UAMs and reflects the first part of the interview guide (see section 14). From the analysis, it became clear that the respondents talked about various ways in which these struggles were particularly present for this group and as such, highlighted how there was a sense of uneven treatment of the UAMs. There were several challenges that the respondents noted that were grouped under this theme. First, the power that the Migration Agency had to determine the care of the UAMs within the social services. Secondly, relating to the Migration Agency, was the elongating of the indeterminacy that the UAMs faced through the implementation of the interim

Aliens Act. Finally, resources were identified to be the point of departure of the care of UAMs. The theme connects on several points to the issues that street-level bureaucrats face in their daily work within HSOs. This theme focuses upon the discretionary reasoning employed by the respondents, which pertains to the internal reasoning they have used in order to discuss the best way of providing care for the UAMs (Wallander and Molander, 2014). As will be elucidated further on, the respondents largely used their discretionary reasoning that adhered to occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Dellgran, 2015). To refresh, occupational professionalism pertains to "collegial authority, a discourse formed within the professional group, discretion and occupational control, professional ethics and practitioners trusted by both employers and clients" (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017:593), of which the aspect of professional ethics was particularly important.

6.1.1 Sub-theme one: the Migration Agency's power to determine the scope of the social services care

The analysis showed that the challenges the respondents experienced varied depending on in which stage the asylum claim processes of the UAMs were in. The commonality was the fact that the social services and Migration Agency both work with UAMs, however, beyond that the social assistants noted that their approaches to working with them to be different, with respondent two stating that

"I have never felt really that I have such a great relation to the Migration Agency, but that is also because they work, we work towards to completely different things" **(1)**

The respondents were sceptical to whether the Migration Agency had the expertise to be able to determine the scope that the social services have when it came to providing services for UAMs, specifically ones whom were still in the asylum process. As mentioned, the Migration Agency only reimburses UAMs still in their asylum process if they have been deemed to have conditions which equate to care under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. This Act, however, does not cover instances of psychological illness, which respondent six noted was questionable because

"there are those that one is more worried about and seen that they have greater needs and the only opportunity we have had, well it's from the economical rules that the Migration Agency has changed to being equal to the Care of Young Persons (special Provisions) Act" **(2)**

However, as mental health is not covered in article two or three in the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act, these UAMs were released from care. To develop further, the impact that this decision may induce tangible risks of harm according to Article 3 of this Act, however, this is not taken into consideration. Furthermore, respondent six developed their reasoning and stated that,

"I think that everyone would feel better being supported by the social services, the majority at least" **(3)**

This positioning was echoed by the other respondents, with respondent one rhetorically asking,

"why is it a requirement to have extensive need of care?" **(4)**

and hinted towards them questioning the capabilities of the Migration Agency to determine the social services responsibility to care for UAMs in the asylum process. As the Migration Agency works with a different aim than the social services, respondent five highlighted the scepticism held towards them having the authority to determine the scope in relation to the Care of the Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act, as respondent five noted,

"I think about this whole Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act grounds, that is very unclear, as they don't have any knowledge about the Social Services Act and the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act" **(5)**

The analysis identified that there was a general lack of trust in the Migration Agency's working methods and that their power to determine the scope of the work that the social assistants had with asylum seeking UAMs. One particular area was the employment of medical age assessments in determining the age of UAMs, where no other identification was supplied. The practice within the social services is that UAMs whom have had their claims denied and are 18 will have to move to Migration Agency living quarters. The data identified that there were contentions based upon several factors, which were challenging to the respondents. Firstly, overwhelmingly there were questions on whether the medical age assessments were a reliable method to determining one's age, with respondent five stating,

"but I think rather that they get x-rayed, now, I am critical to that whole part overall but if one has to use something, rather an x-ray than the arbitrary interrogation that was used before" **(6)**

Respondent six followed a similar reasoning, highlighting that similar to the social services, the Migration Agency works with exercising public authority and that it needs to then be based upon legal and scientific certainties, of which medical age assessments are not (Hjern and Ascher, 2015). As such, respondent six states

"it is strange that they base their whole decision upon this. But that is also what I personally think" **(7)**

in relation to using medical age assessments as the core for determining UAMs age. Even though the Migration Agency is supposed to take other factors into consideration, such as documents provided by the social services (SKL, 2017). However, from the fact that this is a personal opinion, it highlights that the respondent adheres to an organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). As it rests upon a rational-legal principle, the respondent is implored to state that this does not highlight their professional opinion. The analysis revealed that there was a consensus was that the Migration Agency did not take these into consideration[6]. The questioning of the assessments of the Migration Agency was also echoed even more severely by respondent three, who felt that it was like

"they had sat and had a meeting at the Migration Agency and saying that now deport 100 more" **(8)**

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[6] Respondent two, four, five, six, seven

This respondent held a strong cynical point of view of the Migration Agency's handling of the UAMs asylum claims. Furthermore, if and when a UAM had had their age deemed to be 18 and older and had their claim to asylum denied, the respondents questioned how this was handled. This was due to the fact that the UAMs had developed strong social networks and a sense of security, usually over more than a year, with friends, their schools, but also the respondents. It was deemed to be questionable to remove these UAMs from a social network that gave them a sense of coherence in their vulnerable position, as highlighted by respondent two,

"and then the Migration Agency takes over. And it doesn't really matter what it means for the youth to move, to a completely different city, a completely somewhere else, and a completely different accommodation, and everyone disappears at the same time" **(9)**

This praxis raised the question of whether the Migration Agency worked with the best interest of the child in mind, which was a struggle for the respondents. When the discretionary reasoning of the respondents was examined in relation to the concept of professionalism, it becomes apparent that they are adhering to the principles of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Wallander and Molander, 2014). As discretionary reasoning pertains to the internal reasoning that the respondents employ, in regard to the best way of giving care to the UAMs, the aforementioned quote highlights a questioning of the Migration Agency's institutional rules (Hasenfeld, 2010). The respondents do not accept these actions, on grounds of knowing what is best for their clients, which occupational professionalism also entails, as it also entails justifying what "is best for their clients on the basis of their academic and practical training and professional code of ethics" (Liljegren, 2012:298). Moreover, the medical age assessments also complicated how the respondents worked with the principle of the best interest of the child as respondent two observed,

"a government body such as the social services that works from the best interest of the child and all that that entails and then from one day to another we don't have the best interest of the child because all of a sudden we're working with an adult. It's really hard to work in this environment" **(10)**

It can be thus seen here again that the discretionary reasoning has led to an occupational professionalism being adopted, as it rests upon the ethical standards and values set by the profession (Banks, 2013). As these standards are set by the preamble in the Social Services Act, of which the principle of the best interest of the child is key, the respondent's reason and adhere to occupational professionalism. Furthermore, respondent two divulged an instance where a UAM who was underage had gotten their asylum claim denied. According to interim Aliens Act, a minor may only be repatriated, if there is a legal guardian or public authority that receive them. However, as respondent two noted,

"and then there is supposed to be an arranged reception and then there was an aunt that maybe was alive somewhere in Afghanistan. That was the arranged reception but there wasn't anything to arrange because we didn't even know if the aunt existed" **(11)**

This ambivalence to the repatriation process echoes the findings from Sundqvist, Ghazinour, and Padyab (2017) study on this process. Although that study involved cases of forced repatriation, the overwhelming ambivalence to this process was evident. The majority of the

respondents found it difficult to deliver the news of that they were going to be released from care due to turning 18 and being denied protection as an,

> "*incredibly hard decision to deliver for me as a caseworker to give a youth*" (**12**)

which respondent two stated. This connects to the role that professionalism plays within the work that the respondents as street-level bureaucrats do. From this, it could be observed that their discretionary reasoning pertains more to the concept of occupational professionalism, rather than organisational professionalism. It was noted that this was a result of the contrasting working methods, as respondent four noted,

> "*we make the youth dependent upon us and then we let them go. To stand completely on their own two feet, it's that part that is difficult*" (**13**)

This denotes a challenge of working within an HSO, whereby inevitably the moral prescriptions of the organisation at times does not match up with what the workers feel their clients should be ascribed to (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). Another factor in the Migration Agency's power over the social services was the fact that the asylum claims took a very long time to process. This led to a sense of indeterminacy that affected the UAMs, with respondent 3 stating

> "*there isn't any logic in that they are supposed to sit here so long in Sweden and wait, in my world, like it's, it's inhumane*" (**14**)

and questioned as well by respondent two, stating rhetorically

> "*it can take up to two years before they even get their first decision, it says also where they have, where is the best interest of the child in that?*" (**15**)

These two statements highlight the inherent moral work that is present within the social services, and the ethical aspects that are coupled with this. The respondents highlight the occupational professional stance through employing a discretionary reasoning that notes the treatment of the UAMs to be inhumane and that the best interest of the child is felt not to be present. This conclusion is drawn due to the fact that good ethical practice within the social services should adhere to the best interest of the child, as stipulated by the preamble of the Social Services Act (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2016). As such, this stance reflects an adherence to the occupational professionalism, which as previously discussed, is based upon the ethical standards set within the profession (Banks, 2013).

To expand, it could be argued that the respondents as street-level bureaucrats do not agree with the current institutional rules that the social services have adopted in order to retain legitimacy (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). It becomes clear from the analysis that the social assistants do not accept the institutional logics and rules of the Migration Agency as legitimate. This has led to them to question the power that the Migration Agency has to determine the scope of the care that the respondents are mandated to provide through their institutional logics and values. Through the lens of professionalism, the questioning of the Migration Agency's authority over the social services led the social assistants to question this on the grounds of occupational professionalism. It was observed that they felt their authority

on the knowledge that they have both on the needs of the UAMs, but also the Social Services Act was disregarded. This echoes what Aracena (2015) argued was a dilemma, as the interim Aliens Act was placed above the Social Services Act, no matter what the consequences it had for the UAMs nor the social assistants. Furthermore, on the empirical level, which within critical realism pertains to the experienced and observed events (Fletcher, 2017), the respondents have understood the Migration Agency's implementation of the interim Aliens Act as detrimental to their work. This became evident through the concept of professionalism, which was chosen as one of the concepts to explore the social mechanisms that impact the challenges that the social assistants have faced since the changes implemented in 2016.

6.1.2 Sub-theme two: The elongating of the UAMs indeterminacy in Sweden

A second factor in the uneven playing field that the UAMs found themselves in was the elongation of the indeterminacy of their future through the implementation of temporary residency permits that was implemented through the interim Aliens Act. Respondent seven noted,

"and there are several of those guys that have now gotten temporary residency permits, some barely get happy over that fact because there is still this indeterminacy, what happens after?"
(16)

This highlights that there was a sense of ambivalence that the UAMs had towards gaining temporary residency permits. The primary challenge and concern for the respondents was on how to ensure that the needs of the child can be upheld within this indeterminacy, similarly to what has been discussed in the earlier parts of the findings and analysis. Firstly, it challenges the respondents in their work to foster the integration of the UAMs into Swedish society and to give them the tools to prosper within it, as is highlighted by the BBIC. It was observed that this indeterminacy did little to alleviate the worries that the UAMs had, as has been noted by Björnberg (2014) and Stretmo (2018). Although these two studies discussed the sense of indeterminacy in relation to the asylum process, the link between these two studies and this one could still be relevant due to the time limit on the UAMs residency permits. This is since the indeterminacy had not been removed, rather, it had just been pushed further into the future, either for a year or three. When noting the study by Celikaksoy and Wadensjö (2017) that identified that the introduction phase and education as two of the most important aspects to foster the integration and well-being of the UAMs, this becomes particularly worrying. The social assistants had to continue to work with motivating the UAMs to continuing to attend school and uphold social relations, as these were identified as beneficial to the UAMs health and integration.

Yet again, the lack of trust in the Migration Agency's working methods were highlighted when discussing the temporary residency permits, as respondent two noted,

"I don't think that the Migration Agency has really noticed the effect of giving out so many temporary residency permits" **(17)**

Connecting this to the concept of professionalism, these worries and questioning of the Migration Agency's implementation of the interim Aliens Act are interpreted through the social assistants' adoption of occupational professionalism. Although the respondents noted that they had no authority to formally question the interim Aliens Act, they questioned its

implementation on grounds of them being the experts on the UAMs needs. In addition to this, in their professional role as a social assistant, they employ the standards and ethics set forth by the Social Services Act preamble, as noted in the theoretical framework chapter. The respondents could be seen as having a harder time to fulfil those standards due to the interim Aliens Act. This became clear when respondent one questioned the fact that this Act made it significantly harder to apply for family reunification,

"what is the thought process when the opportunity to reunite with the youths' families is not possible. I don't get that, it like, it differs from what human rights are supposed to entail" **(18)**

As has been established before, the competing institutional rules between the Migration Agency and the social services become evident in this case. However, due to the fact that the Migration Agency dictates who is seen as being deemed in need of protection by the Swedish state, the social assistants had little authority to challenge the prevailing institutional rules. These objections to the handling of UAMs under the new Aliens Act are similar to the ones identified by Nordling (2017) and Aracena (2015). As Swedish law stipulates, the principle of the best interest of the child should be considered in every contact with public organisations, whether it be the social services or the Migration Agency (Herz and Lalander, 2017: Lundberg, 2011; Hedlund, 2016). But as Hedlund noted, that in the UNCRC "article 3 positions the principle as *a primary* consideration and not *the primary*" (Hedlund, 2016:34), which has led to the conclusion that were drawn by many social assistants that the principle of best of the child being forgone. Although it is hard to determine the exact reason on behalf of the Migration Agency as to why this has been forgone, as it's out of scope for this thesis. However, it could be hypothesized that the "best interests of the child is subject to contradictory pressures such as migration control versus human rights for all irrespective of their nationality" (Lundberg, 2011:50).

6.1.3 Sub-theme three: Resources as a point of departure for the care of UAMs

A third challenge that became apparent through the analysis of the interviews was that resources were observed to be the point of departure for the care of UAMS.

"I have never worked in an organisation that has so much to do with economics and the reimbursement of money, upon which one is deemed to belong to the target group only if it's possible to apply for money for just that child or youth" **(19)**

This quote from respondent seven echoes throughout this theme and describes the factor that was a challenge due to several reasons. Resources does not only specifically refer to UAMs in their asylum process, but this group was mostly in focus, since the reimbursement of the care of UAMs within social services is contingent upon them fulfilling the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act if they have turned 18 and had their asylum claim denied. The respondents noted this, with respondent six saying,

"it is unfortunately economics that steers. When it concerns asylum seekers, that's who we are talking about then. When they have gotten PUT[7] or a residency permit then they are just like any other citizen" **(20)**

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[7] PUT – permanent uppehållstillstånd. This is an acronym for a permanent residency permit

This is reminiscent of the struggles that social assistants faced in the study by Backlund et al. (2014), where it was highlighted that the municipality were positive to giving care to UAMs, only if there was monetary renumeration involved. Furthermore, it could be understood in light of Nordling's (2017) study into UAMs and contested citizenship and the differentiation that is made between the citizen and non-citizen within the municipal social services. Furthermore, through the analysis, cost efficient mentality became evident[8] and complicated the daily work that the respondents had. For example, respondent four noted in one case that s/he had to put in an extra amount of work to ensure that one of the UAMs she worked with got their needs fulfilled. The UAM in question needed an HVB that had an accreditation to work with youths who were deemed in need of extra care, however, the social assistant's manager denied this request on grounds that this was too expensive. Respondent four was then forced to go through all other HVB home options that were cheaper, however, did not match the care that the UAM was in need of. Finally, after having put in all this extra work to show that the UAM did in fact need the support provided by the first option they found, was this accepted by the manager. Here the role of the manager as a regulator of the social assistants' discretion (Evans, 2011) becomes clear, with the manager arguing against the first option on due to the limited resources that the social services has. However, the social assistant adhered to their occupational professionalism, based upon the professional ethics to highlight that there was no other option but the first one that matched the UAMs needs. Overwhelmingly, the social assistants had to work much harder to prove that the UAMs were deserving of the care in the eyes of the managers in the social services. The analysis showed that there were also other resource issues, such as accommodation, that was primarily felt by the respondents in municipalities that had not received many UAMs prior to 2015. This they felt impacted on the quality of care, as they couldn't fulfil their needs appropriately, in relation to the resources they had, as respondent two noted,

"*and we don't have enough resources either to match like everyone*" (**21**)

this reflects yet again the struggles that street-level bureaucrats face within HSOs, as the social assistants worked within the social services that faced a lack of resources on a daily basis (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). Respondent one noted this in relation to fulfilling the UAMs needs in relation to the Social Services Act and how hard it was to uphold this due to what they observed was

"*because everything is about money, resources, resources, resources*" (**22**)

To conclude, as has been stated, the struggles that street-level bureaucrats face in their daily work within HSOs, such as this case, is heavily impacted by the lack of resources that face them (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). A clear differentiation has been made over who is deemed morally worthy of care within the social services, where the UAMs still in their asylum process or ones that do not fit the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act; if they were assessed as 18 and had their asylum claim denied. The moral work that the respondents vis-à-vis street-level bureaucrats perform has been questioned by them. The respondents see the UAMs, regardless of immigration status, as worthy of care according to the Social Services Act opting for an occupational professionalism. However, the institutional rules that are implemented around the social services, by the Migration Agency, supersedes the

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[8] Respondents one, three, four, five

authority of the social services, they do not have the power to challenge this. This was noted by Aracena (2015), but even noted in the history of how Sweden has handled migration issues overall and the access to the welfare state (Geddes and Scholten, 2016; Sager, Holgersson, and Öberg, 2016), bringing in the importance that politics also plays when it comes to the care of UAMs. From these larger structures that impinge on the care of UAMs in the social services, challenges also arose within the social services, pertaining largely to what needs they were perceived to have.

6.2 Theme two: managing the uneven playing field

Through analysing the interviews, it became apparent that there were several challenges that presented themselves within the social services when working the UAMs when they tried to manage the different aspects of the uneven playing field. The analogy of managing the team was employed to highlight both the micro-level aspect of the respondents identifying the needs of the UAMs and as such, how they managed that within the organisational structures of the social services. As such, the first sub-theme was identified as the respondents overwhelmingly feeling that they had needs beyond what could be provided by them. Secondly, managing the team also involves the aspect of having a working method, which highlights the second sub-theme, the bureaucratic boundaries that manifested themselves when the respondents attempted to fulfil the needs of the UAMs. The concept of the street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010), but also interpretations of discretion within the social services (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017) become clear in these themes.

6.2.1 Sub-theme one: needs beyond what the respondents can fulfil

What became evident from analysing the interviews, was the importance of the relationship between the UAMs and the respondents were. This reflects the fact that HSOs are inherently reliant upon the employees within the organisation to not only identify the needs that they have, but also to deliver the services to fulfil those needs (Hasenfeld, 2010). As was noted under theme one, the Migration Agency's power over the social services led to the UAMs future being undetermined, either through the long asylum process or through the implementation of the interim Aliens Act. As such, what was noted by respondent one was that the UAMs,

"*slowly start losing hope*" **(23)**

Which challenges the respondents in that they must work extra hard to motivate the UAMs to keep on going to school and learn the Swedish language. This reflects itself in previous literature by Celikaksoy and Wadensjö (2017), whom noted an important aspect that fosters the integration of the UAMs is through education. The needs as such was to be able to create a sense of security for the UAMs, which was not possible due to the institutional rules that placed the Migration Agency's authority above the respondents. It also reflects the conflict between what the street-level bureaucrats have noted to be a need that cannot be provided through the current social policies that guide the work they perform (Lipsky, 1980: Lipsky, 2010). Due to this indeterminacy, many of the respondents also noted that the UAMs struggled with mental health issues. As such, the respondents noted that to achieve a reasonable standard of living, according to the Social Services Act, the Children and Adolescent Psychiatric unit should be contacted. In the light of this, respondent six noted that there within the municipality that they worked, the Children and Adolescent Psychiatric unit stated that they couldn't provide care, on the grounds that they were in the asylum process. Instead, they were relegated to either the local health centre or the school counsellor, of which the latter felt it was too big of a task for them

to handle. When noting that all UAMs, irrespective of immigration status are entitled to health care on the same grounds as individuals with residency permits, this was not upheld. Even though they were relegated to other professionals whom were licensed to treat such conditions, the equality of service was not upheld. Here again, the differentiation made between citizens and non-citizens became an issue for the UAMs, as Nordling (2017) and Aracena (2015) noted.

Furthermore, in another municipality, two of the respondents noted similar complications with the Children and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit, with respondent three observing that,

"*someone cuts themselves, so the A&E have to be contacted and go to the Children and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit and then you sit there and then they mumble a bit and get sent home… and then go into the same trauma again*" **(24)**

Respondent two noted that due to the amount of mental health issues, such as anxiety and suicidal thoughts, that their role changed from being the 'spider in the web', to picking up the work that other public authorities are mandated to do. This is similar to the results of Stretmo and Melander's (2013) study on social assistants work with unaccompanied minors in the Gothenburg region.

A final observation on the needs of the UAMs was made by respondent two, whom noted that,

"*they have an empty space that we can't fill either. They have needs that are so much bigger than we can give, with the background that they have and the absence of family.*" **(25)**

From the analysis, it became clear that the working methods within the social services were not equipped with dealing with the needs that the UAMs had. This was partly as a consequence of the Migration Agency's power to over the social services, in terms of that their asylum process took a very long time, which differs from the analysis in sub-theme in section 7.2. As such, the respondents in their role as a street-level bureaucrat, it could be observed that they attempted to do some good in the face of the needs that the UAMs had (Lipsky, 1980: Lipsky, 2010). What clearly shines through as well is that the UAMs are conceptualised as particularly vulnerable in the face of these needs, which Stretmo (2014) identified as being a core attribute assigned to UAMs. The impact of having no family further complicated the work that the respondents had in their role as a street-level bureaucrat, however, will be explored further in the following sub-theme.

6.2.2 Sub-theme two: bureaucratic boundaries and questionable standardisation
"*you get hit with how bound it is to the laws and to the bureaucracy and you hope that you'll be some hero that's going to go out and save everyone from something but then you notice how incredibly ruled it is by everything else*" **(26)**

Respondent two noted this when discussing how they felt it was to work within the social services with UAMs. Through analysing the interviews, it became evident that the respondents as street-level bureaucrats were impacted by NPM measures (Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Dellgran, 2015). Although Evans (2011) noted that this gave rise to opportunities for social workers to choose which directive they could employ, from the analysis, it became evident that the respondents felt bound by the regulations set in place. The quote also highlighted the tension that the respondents felt between occupational and

organisational professionalism. As organisational professionalism is based upon a rational-legal authority, in which standardised procedures are at the forefront, respondent two reflects this mentality. However, a tension is evident, pertaining to the occupational professionalism, whereby it is based upon the core ethical principles that Swedish social workers should adhere to, as stipulated by the preamble in the Social Services Act (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2016). In addition to this struggle, respondent two, among other respondents, reflected on their work with UAMs,

"and then you sit here and try and just, think individually for each youth in an organisation that thinks pretty… that tends to generalise a lot… that the UAMs become a group, rather than an individual"
(27)

This echoes the risk that Wernesjö (2011) noted concerning pathologizing the UAMs into a group, rather than treating each one individually. Several other respondents were keen to highlight this as well[9], particularly relating to UAMs whom weren't encompassed by the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act and consequently were released from care; if they had had their asylum claim denied and either through natural progression turned eighteen or were deemed to be so through medical age assessments. In addition to this, through analysing the data, it was found that the respondents noted several points on the suitability of the working methods within the social services. As previously noted in section 5.4, the work is guided by the BBIC assessment tool, which is used to identify holistically the needs of the child and guide the work in ensuring that their needs are fulfilled. There was an ambivalence over the suitability of this, for several reasons. One of the major questions raised was its dependence upon the capabilities of the parents and the difficulty in gaining knowledge about their family situation. There were some UAMs that were placed within distant family relations, where this was not seen as a big of a challenge. However, in those cases where they had no familial relations in Sweden, overwhelmingly, it was observed that gaining access to talk to their family was a challenge. This was particularly worrying, as respondent four noted,

"in our group, we have noticed that we wait longer with deeming someone in need of care under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act compared to traditional cases, if you understand what I mean, non-UAMs. There they are deemed in need of care under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act quicker than we do with our UAMs" **(28)**

This lack of information has unfortunately been identified as an inherent aspect of working as a street-level bureaucrat within HSOs (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010). In this case it becomes particularly worrying when noting that the grounds for keeping the UAMs within the social services care is contingent upon being deemed in need of care under this Act. Although this sub-theme focuses upon describing the challenges that were faced within the social services working with UAMs, the case still must be made that the BBIC was found to be useful as in identifying the spectrum of needs that the UAMs had and helped ensure that the work the respondents[10] were doing was conducted within the legal frameworks set forth by the Social Services Act. Through discretionary reasoning (Wallander and Molander, 2014), the respondents[11] took actions (Banks, 2013) and adjusted the BBIC to other important individuals,

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[9] Respondents three, six, seven
[10] Respondents one, two, four, five, six, seven
[11] Respondents four, five, six, seven

such as the social workers at the HVB homes and foster families. Within their role as a social assistant, they had the discretionary space to do this, on the basis of the trust and authority that the respondents possess.

However, despite this, the analysis showed that the respondents[12] struggled with fostering the client-worker relationship (Hasenfeld, 2010), in the way which they felt they should. This was since, there were, as noted by respondent three, administrative tasks that clouded this so

"that one doesn't even have time to do that should be done, purely administrative here, so one doesn't have, there isn't space to be engaged"
(29)

When connecting this with the use of BBIC, in light of standardisation explored by Ponnert and Svensson (2017), it becomes clear that the respondents want to hold onto authority and trust in that they are the experts on the needs of the UAMs. Although the respondents had discretionary space to include other important individuals that care for UAMs into the BBIC, it still highlights that this standardisation, such as the BBIC does not help solve "the complexity of the situations, but alters the way the work has to be done" (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017:593). However, as the last quote highlighted, a consequence of providing this type of accountability, which falls under the organisational one, comes at the cost of the client-worker relationship (Hasenfeld, 2010). To conclude, the analysis shows that the respondents have faced the inherent challenges of a street-level bureaucrat within an HSO (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010; Hasenfeld, 2010). They overwhelmingly identified with the discourse of UAMs as being a particularly vulnerable, similarly to Stretmo's study (2014). Furthermore, the standardisation tools such as the BBIC, had both opportunities and risks with employing it in the daily work. These issues, connected with the challenges presented under theme one, have not gone unchallenged, as will be explored under theme three.

6.3 Theme three: challenging the uneven playing field

This theme is intimately connected with social assistants as a street-level bureaucrat within the social services and how they have employed their discretion to provide services to the UAMs (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010). The challenges presented overwhelmingly highlighted that the tension between adopting organisational or occupational professionalism, which were both adopted by the social assistants. However, they manifested themselves in different ways, but overwhelmingly, organisational professionalism was preferred, which echoes the observations by Aracena (2015), but also fits into the influence of NPM within HSOs in recent years (Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). Under this question, it was found that the social assistants did have discretionary space to raise their concerns about the treatment of UAMs within the social services, however, that they overwhelmingly felt that they listened to but that it did not have any impact[13]. As previously observed, social assistants work had been heavily impacted by the Migration Agency's working methods. It became evident through the critical realist stance that there was an acknowledgement that the social structures in place were found to be detrimental to the UAMs. The respondents attempted in various ways to challenge these structures, which reflects the emancipatory aspect of social work, as argued by Houston (2001), as well as Kjörstad and Solem (2017). Furthermore, it reflects the notion within critical realism

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[12] Respondents two, three, five
[13] Respondent 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7

that "reality cannot be understood without critical and reflexive thinking" (Pease, 2010:106), of which the respondents arguably engaged in, in their work as a street-level bureaucrat within the social services.

6.3.1 Sub-theme one: Giving that little extra to the UAMs

This sub-theme deals explicitly how the respondents dealt with the needs of the UAMs within their client-worker relationship. Firstly, in relation to responding to the challenge of the mental health of the UAMs, social assistants noted that although their discretionary space was limited, some of the social assistants gave a little extra care than was formally mandated by the social services. Two of the social assistants met with them more often than was the requirement in their role, as respondent 2 noted,

> *"one atleast is here anyways and one listens to them and tries to understand and tries to do the best"* **(30)**

This has been found to potentially help the UAMs as it "may increase the feeling of agency and motivation" (Herz and Lalander, 2017:1071). The extra time taken to listen to the issues that the UAMs face becomes important when noting the fact that the UAMs motivation is key to fostering their integration, through for example, continuing to go to school. Knowing that there is a grown up whom one can trust can help alleviate the issues that they face and combat the loneliness that many of them felt, as Herz and Lalander (2017) noted. However, due to the time constraints present within the social services, the respondents still felt that this was not enough to support them fully. Other small extra actions that the respondents took included respondent five said that they approved a larger amount of leisure allowance[14], than was allowed. This was one of the strategies that was discovered in Backlund et al.'s (2014) study. Respondent three after returning from BUP[15], the children and youth psychiatric unit with one UAM, bought a hamburger and said that this made them feel happier for a moment. Overwhelmingly, these actions could be interpreted as the social assistants acting on the basis of occupational professionalism, in order to give that little extra that may help the UAMs in the stressful situation they were in. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that two of the respondents also gave their numbers to UAMs that had had their care terminated. This yet again, highlights the occupational professional stance, but also echoes the findings in Nordling's (2017) and Aracena's (2015), which showed that social assistants at times go above and beyond what is mandated by the social services vis-à-vis the state. These were not the only actions that the respondents took, they also employed various strategies within the social services, which will be discussed in the following sub-theme.

6.3.2 Sub-theme two: Being heard but not listened to

> *"I work from my tasks then I think that the other tasks are something that one chooses to do on their free time otherwise it becomes very unsustainable to work because somewhere we do have the framework to relate to. Then we can affect and make our voices heard, but when it relates to the youths we have, then I have to do my job as well as I can from the conditions that I have when they are here"* **(31)**

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[14] Leisure allowance refers to money that the UAMs are free to spend on eg. sports clubs. Translated from Swedish, fritids bidrag
[15] BUP – barn och ungdomspsykiatrin

From the analysis, this statement by respondent six statement shows the overwhelming response to the challenges faced by the respondents in this thesis. It highlights Lipsky's (1980; 2010) observation that street-level bureaucrats attempt to the best they can, under the structures in which they work from. However, as the quote highlights, overwhelmingly the respondents felt that they had to draw a line somewhere and as such, adhere to organisational professionalism. This became evident when noting that organisational professionalism's accountability rests upon an adherence to the rules and regulations set forth by the organisation (Dellgran, 2015). It was observed from the analysis that there was a connection between the respondent's responses and Nordling's (2017) study on UAMs in contested citizenship, as the respondents stated that their discretion was minimal in relation to UAMs who were still in their asylum process. This raises the conflict that the respondents face of either adhering to organisational or occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017), which respondent four noted in relation to UAMs that did not fulfil the requirements of the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act and consequently got their care terminated by the social services,

"they get ordered to do it because it's their role, which includes that you should just as well be capable to write up a case that results in deemed in need of care, as cases that results in being deemed not in need of care. I get this, at the same time as I get that this is tough because it goes against our ethics and morals" **(32)**

There was a clear struggle between adhering to an organisational or occupational professionalism, in which the social assistants adhered overwhelmingly to the organisational one. However, what was elucidated from the analysis of the data was that there were several strategies that the respondents employed in voicing their disapproval of the treatment of the UAMs whom did not fulfil the requirements of the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. Firstly, many noted that they were allowed to voice their disapproval within their workplace, as exemplified by respondent one,

"many times [I] say no but I don't approve of these decisions, I really don't and within this workplace you're allowed to say that" **(33)**

This reflects that there is discretionary space for the respondents to raise their concerns, on basis of their reasoning pertaining to an occupational professionalism. Other respondents had refused to sign the paper that terminated their care within the social services[16] and made their managers sign them instead. Finally, an important aspect that was raised was pointing out their concerns to the social welfare board, as respondent five had done after discussions within their department. Connecting this to the theoretical concepts, this could be analysed as the respondents employing discretionary reason (Molander and Wallander, 2014), on the basis of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). To expand, through these discussions, a form of collegial authority (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017) arose, which spurred them to voice their concerns to the social welfare board with the decisions of the termination of care,

"so that they could see what we grounds we have terminated upon and that was good cause then they, well they don't see otherwise who we terminate" **(34)**

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[16] Respondents two, four, five, six, seven

This reasoning links to what Backlund et al. (2014) noted in her study that the social assistants found a general lack of will and engagement by the management, and subsequently politicians to the situations that faced UAMs. Arguably, this was also seen through the experiences that the respondents described. However, the lack of will in this instance was overwhelmingly due to the fact that the Migration Agency also fulfils a reasonable standard of living, as was reflected upon by respondent two,

"one can always blame another public authority; it is the Migration Agency that assess the age… The Migration Agency have their accommodation and they get their… They obtain a reasonable standard of living even there" **(35)**

The respondents however, noted that this did not take into consideration the impact this had upon UAMs and the loss of the networks they had built up whilst they were waiting for their asylum claim to be processed, similar to what was noted in section 9.2. As the Migration Ageny's institutional rules are placed about the institutional rules embodied by the social services, the respondents did not have the authority to challenge this prevailing rule. Several other respondents[17] also raised the importance of bringing forth cases to the social welfare board, when they felt there had been some issues the decisions in certain cases. However, even if the UAMs were deemed to be in need of care through the social services, respondent seven reflectively stated,

"one could say that often when we work with our target group, it is too late because they are already written out of the system and this can't really be changed and take someone back"
(36)

This was due to the process of the UAM being moved from either the HVB home or foster family to one of the Migration Agency's residential units was quicker than receiving a decision from the social welfare board. Irrespective of these actions that were adopted by the respondents, it was noted by that they had to draw a line in what they actually could impact in relation to the UAMs in the asylum process. They justified this on the grounds,

"But one doesn't have the energy for too much either. And if one can't cope with it any more then one shouldn't stay" **(37)**

As respondent five stated. This reflects the effects of struggling between organisational and occupational professionalism, especially when the former takes the upper hand. It echoes the struggles that were faced by Aracena (2015), but also the social workers in Nordling's study (2017). As Dellgran (2015) noted, the tension between these two has given a rise to ethical conflicts for the respondents. From the analysis, it was observed that they attempted to overcome this through justifications based upon occupational professionalism to the social welfare board. However, as was stated in the beginning of this theme and under section 9.2, the authority the respondents have to gain influence over the handling of this group of UAMs, is minimal. This is due to the face that the social services is subsidiary to the Migration Agency. It is also evident that the respondents have been influenced by the wider social mechanisms (Houston, 2001) to adhere to the organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). They have acknowledged the contradictions within working in an open system, such as the social services,

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[17] Respondents two, six, seven

in which causal mechanisms have worked in contradictions with one another (Edwards, O'Mahoney, Vincent, 2010; Houston, 2001). Furthermore, it can be seen that the respondents have attempted to challenge the social structures that they have found to not fulfilling the needs of the UAMs.

6.4 Emerging theme

Since the interview guide was merely a way of orientating around the research questions, one emerging theme arose that do not specifically fall under these. However, the aspects raised were still of interest for the topic of this thesis and related to the challenges faced by the social assistants and their power to use their discretion to challenge them.

6.4.1 Theme four: The emergence of voluntary individuals and organisations

The emergence of voluntary individuals and organisations were identified by several of the social assistants in relation to the UAMs that did not fulfil the Care of the Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. There was a variation on how the voluntary forces manifested themselves, as the respondents interviewed spanned across five social services departments, in four different municipalities. One of the social assistants worked in a social service department, where many UAMs had been placed in foster care with family relations and noted that many kept them in their care even though renumeration had ceased[18]. Other respondents noted the engagement of the legal guardians with UAMs, even though legally they were not bound to support them any further. The respondents noted that they helped UAMs with writing appeals to the administrative court[19] regarding their termination of care within the social services. The rise of formal voluntary organisations was also present, that both provided practical aspects, such as housing, but also yet again, helped with writing appeals to the administrative court.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents discussed these voluntary forces as a positive impact upon the lives of the UAMs. Connecting these observations within this thesis, it could be observed that the interpretation of the respondents that this is a positive aspect relates to a sense of occupational professionalism. As the respondents observed that although there was discretionary space to voice their concerns with the treatment of this group of UAMs, but that they did not actually impact the praxis. Thus, the voluntary forces arguably cover up the shortcomings of the social services, as the respondents still deem them as morally worthy and should be within their jurisdiction to care for. What is interesting to note is a part of the interview with respondent seven on how they reason around how the voluntary forces have covered the needs of the UAMs,

Linnea: so it becomes that they rely more on volunteers then?
Respondent seven: Yes and I think that this is even done in the government and political sphere, or well the social welfare board. It feels like that, that there are organisations that work for them [youths] and that then the thinking goes, I think that they solve it because they are desperate to try and help these youths that eventually are going to move to *municipality far away* after three days from when they've gotten a decision. And then they solve it because they feel like they have to and that somewhere it sometimes becomes how they think [social welfare board], that the problem doesn't exist, because they manage to solve it for

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[18] Respondents four, five
[19] Swedish translation – förvaltningsrätt

*these here youths and then you don't have to work with that problem inside the
administration. Are you following along on my train of thought?*
*Linnea: Yes, more that they patch up than really, they see the symptom but don't address it
from the ground?*
Respondent seven: yes, well they think that it's anyways been solved for everyone
Linnea: Yes
*Respondent seven: but it's not because of us that it's been solved, but others then, volunteers,
the church, they do a huge job, for the ones then that have had their age written up and
terminated care*
(38)

What is highlighted through this is the inherent political nature of caring for individuals within the welfare state (Hasenfeld, 2010; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). The voluntary individuals and organisations adopted a stance that this group of UAMs were morally worthy of care and did not feel it was justified to terminate the care of them. Although the respondents were positive to this initiative, respondent two questioned the development of it,

*"that civil society should take a responsibility for what actually should be on a public
authority. And especially a public authority like the social services, that works from the
principle of the best interest of the child and all that that entails"* **(39)**

Here yet again, the arguments are based upon an occupational professionalism, as the respondent argues that the social services have not upheld the standard set in the preamble in the Social Services Act. This is what forms the basis of the ethics work that the social services should work from (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2016). Analysing it with the concept of the street-level bureaucrat, the respondent has highlighted the fact that the social services have not upheld the "*litmus test* of the validity of the rhetoric of the organization" (Hasenfeld, 2010:29). Through the lens of critical realism, it becomes clear that the social services as an open system is inherently complex and has been exposed to conflicting institutional rules. These rules have put the respondents in a juxtaposition of attempting to attend to the needs that the UAMs had within an organisation that does not see those needs as something which they are mandated to provide.

7 Discussion and conclusion

To begin discussing the results, it is important to reiterate the aim of this thesis, which was to find out how social assistants have been impacted by the changes enforced since 2016 in their work with unaccompanied minors. To unpack this, it meant gaining insight over the structural factors that impacted the social assistants work with UAMs, and how they reasoned around these impacts. Furthermore, it was a deliberate choice to keep this aim so open, rather than referring specifically to the interim Aliens Act or any of the other changes implemented at the time. This done in order to highlight not only what the social assistants themselves felt to be the biggest impacts upon their work, but also with adherence to the framework law that Sweden adopts. As such, this means that the municipal social services have the discretion to provide care according to the issues that arise within their jurisdiction. The respondents in this study consisted of seven social assistants from five different social service organisations, across three different municipalities. From this varied group, local nuances arose, however, there were still themes that were similar across the interviews. There were several challenges that faced the respondents when working with UAMs, which primarily were centred around the ones that were still in their asylum process or had been denied asylum.

This was evident with the first research question, *what challenges have the social assistants encountered working with unaccompanied minors*. Overwhelmingly, the respondents were heavily restricted by the Migration Agency and the institutional rules that this public authority exercised. The respondents were sceptical to this, as they felt the institutional logics that were employed within the organisation, such as the medical age assessments as they were not legally secure, as they have been proven to be imprecise (Hjern and Ascher, 2015)**.** Interestingly, it could be seen on the one hand here that the respondents critiqued this method, based on organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2003), as the argument against these methods is a rational-legal logic. However, as was seen from the other critiques below, an occupational professionalism formed the larger basis of the critiques. Secondly, springing from the fact they worked towards different goals, the respondents questioned how the Migration Agency's authority is determining standards that the social services worked from regarding UAMs in their asylum process and the *Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act*. Overall, the respondents questioned the Migration Agency's institutional rules on an ethical basis, as they felt they did not uphold the principle of the best interest of the child. It was revealed that the respondents adhered to an occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Dellgran, 2015). As such, they were the experts on the needs of the UAMs and critiqued the Migration Agency on basis of their professional ethics, as stipulated by the preamble in the Social Services Act.

A second challenge was revealed to be that the resources allocated to the UAMs, which for the ones in their asylum process, was dependent upon the Migration Agency, as they subsidised the care for them within the social services. Here it became evident of the differentiation of UAMs within the social services, as the restrictions referred to the UAMs in their asylum process, which was seen in previous studies as well (Aracena, 2015; Nordling, 2017). The focus on resources could also been seen in the light of NPM, as the work within the social services highlighted cost efficiency (Hood, 1995; Green-pedersen, 2002; Johansson, Dellgran, Höjer, 2015). It can be understood in terms of standardisation, with the BBIC assessment tool being ambivalently received (Ponnert and Svensson, 2017). This was re-formulated by the respondents, to ensure that they at the least, identified the needs that they had holistically. However, even though this tool arguably helped the respondents fulfil accountability within the

organisation, and as such, retain authority and trust, it was noted that there was a downside to adhering to a more organisational professionalism (Evetts, 2003). Another challenge that was elucidated from the analysis was that the respondents felt that UAMs had needs that could not be met within the social services. It highlighted the thinking that UAMs are a particularly vulnerable group (Stretmo, 2014), that need more care than what could be provided within the institutional rules of the social services. Within this challenge, it also became apparent that within the social services, there was limited space to work with the caring aspects of the occupation. This was particularly worrying as what the UAMs need most, as identified by Herz and Lalander (2017) was to have someone that is there and able to listen to them, as this could increase their sense of agency. Thus, on an organisational level, it was observed that there were inherent issues when working with this group within the social services, as noted by Backlund et al. (2014), Aracena (2015) and Nordling (2017).

The second research question *how has the interim Aliens Act impacted upon the UAMs according to the social assistants*, was answered under sub-theme two under theme one, which was seen as elongating the indeterminacy of the UAMs future in Sweden. There was critique to the implementation of this, as it on the one hand, complicated the integration of the UAMs into Swedish society because the UAMs questioned what the point was to do so. On the other hand, this also meant that it was much harder for the UAMs to get an approval of family reunification by the Migration Agency. The respondents were noted to critique the implementation of this on grounds of occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2003; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Liljegren, 2012; Dellgran, 2015). Yet again, similar to the critique of the institutional rules (Hasenfeld, 2010) that the Migration Agency applied, this was due to the fact that they argued that it did not rest upon the principle of the best interest of the child, as stipulated by the preamble of the Social Services Act. As this preamble forms the basis for professional ethical standards within social work in Sweden (Akademikerförbundet SSR, 2016), it becomes clear that the occupational professionalism is what has been employed in their discretionary reasoning (Wallander and Molander, 2014).

The third research question *how have these challenges impacted upon the discretion that the social assistants have* elucidated the fact that there was discretionary space for the respondents to critique the institutional rules that the social services had to adhere to. This was particularly used in relation to asylum-seeking UAMs whom did not meet the requirements of the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. This correlated to the theme three, which explored the various actions that the respondents took to fulfil the needs of the UAMs, as well as challenging the prevailing institutional rules that presented themselves under the first research and second research question. Overarchingly, it was observed that the respondents, through discretionary reasoning (Wallander and Molander, 2014), came to the conclusion that the treatment of UAMs within the social services did not adhere to the standards that they felt should be embodied within their work. As such, this spurred them to act in ways which the respondents felt were justified on the grounds of occupational professionalism, through spending more time with them than they were legally bound to or, as was found in Backlund et al.'s study (2014), approved a slightly bigger grant than the UAMs were allowed.

Within the social services, on an organisational level, the respondents felt that they had little discretion when it came to the UAMs whom were still in their asylum process, illuminating yet again the power that the Migration Agency had over the social services. Irrespective of this, the respondents still challenged the treatment of the UAMs whom were not deemed in need of care

under the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act, had their asylum claim denied and either were eighteen or were assassed to be so. It was analysed that the respondents had discretionary space (Wallander and Molander, 2014) to voice their disapproval, through employing actions such as not signing the termination of care papers and bringing forth cases to the social welfare board. What became strikingly clear was the conflict between the struggle of adhering to an organisational or occupational professionalism, in which the actions taken by the respondents was justified on basis of the professional ethics (Evetts, 2003; Liljegren, 2012; Ponnert and Svensson, 2017; Banks, 2013). However, what became evident was that this did not hold any authority within the social services, as the organisational professionalism is what was preferred. This could be understood in light of the implementation of NPM measurements, which has arguably led to a preference for organisational professionalism. In light of this, the respondents noted that they justified their positioning of adhering to organisational professionalism on the grounds that it would take too much energy from the tasks that they had at hand.

From the analysis, it also became clear that there was one theme of the emergence of voluntary forces that picked up the care that the social services were not mandated to provide for this particular group of UAMs. Many respondents noted both individuals and organisations that provided care, through providing housing, but also through helping write appeals to the administrative court regarding the termination of care from the social services. Through the lens of discretion (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010), it could be seen that the respondents argued this was a positive, due to the fact that within their discretionary space (Wallander and Molander, 2014), they did not have any authority to significantly change the institutional rules of the social services (Hasenfeld, 2010). However, it was still questioned on the basis that providing care for this particular group of UAMs should be within the social services.

Reflecting over these results, the respondents as street-level bureaucrats have faced many struggles in their work with UAMs, largely because the Migration Agency has the power to determine the scope of care provided by the social services. There have been clear struggles between adhering to organisational and occupational professionalism, of which the latter has predominately rested upon objections due to the professional ethics the respondents felt were lacking when it came to the care of UAMs. Furthermore, contrary to Lipsky's (1980; 2010) and Evans (2011) claims that the more policies and procedures implemented, the more opportunities the street-level bureaucrat would have to be able to use their discretion. In this case however, this has not been seen to great lengths. Tentatively, what could be argued on why the results have pointed to this is because the UAMs in their asylum process had not gained full access to the Swedish welfare state, which echoes the findings from Aracena's (2015) and Nordling's (2017) studies. What is further worrying is the respondents observations that the principle of the best interest of the child had been forgone for this particular group of UAMs, especially as it is not only enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also the Social Services Act and the interim Aliens Act. In addition to this, the observations by Dellgran (2015) on the emotional and cognitive toll that can arise in social workers when faced with the conflict between organisational and occupational professionalism was noted. Several of the respondents had resorted to having to compartmentalise the conflicts, to be able to cope with the stress of working within organisational structures that allow this to flourish. However, the question arises then, at what cost?

It thus becomes important to remember that social work, at its core, is an emancipatory practice, that seeks social justice on with and on behalf of vulnerable groups, such as the UAMs in this study. This has, and will always, be a struggle and even harder to challenge when "hegemonic orders prevail and global economic and social injustice is the order of the day" (Smith, 2012:203). A way forward surely is to mobilise against these injustices, such as the Vi Står Inte Ut (2018) lobby group has done, and as seen by the voluntary forces that the respondents noted in this study. Potentially through this, it would be possible to uphold the critical realist vision of not only unveiling structures that inhibit emancipatory practices, but also employ ways in which to change them (Pease, 2010).

8 Suggestions for further research

As this thesis was conducted on a small scale, with both limited budget and time, one of the suggestions for further research would be to conduct more in-depth knowledge on the localised strategies on how municipalities work with unaccompanied minors. This springs from the fact that the Social Services Act is a framework law, which municipalities fulfil according to the local issues that they face. Building upon this, it would be interesting to have a study focused on how the managers and social welfare board viewed the challenges of working with unaccompanied minors. This is particularly interesting as they were found to be significant in the daily work with UAMs according to the responses in this study. Thirdly, it would also be interesting to conduct a study on the volunteers and voluntary organisations that blossomed under since 2015 to support UAMs, when the social services could not. Finally, as this is not the first study that has focused on social assistants and the struggles they face when working with UAMs, it would be interesting to interview them on strategies that could be employed to address the inherent issues that they face. This would fulfil the emancipatory project which is core to not only the critical realist stance, but also social work.

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Legislation, conventions and propositions

§*2016:746 Aliens Act*

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Convention on the Status of Refugees Article 1(A)

Proposition 2005/06:46 Mottagande av ensamkommande barn

§*1994:137 Reception of Asylum Seekers and Others Act*

§*2001:453 Social Services Act*

§*1990:52 The Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act*

Qualification Directive 2011/95/EU

Figures

Figure 1: Socialstyrelsen (2019) *The BBIC triangle,* digital image, Socialstyrelsen Available at: https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/dokument-webb/ovrigt/bbic-triangeln-engelska

Figure 2: Fletcher, A.J. (2017) *An iceberg analogy for CR ontology,* digital image, p. 183 in 'Applying critical realism in qualitative research: methodology meets method' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(2), pp.181-194 DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401

10 Appendix

In the following appendixes, the information letter, consent form, and interview guide have been provided, both in Swedish and English. Furthermore, the quotes used in the findings and analysis are attached in their original language, Swedish.

10.1   Appendix 1a: Informationsbrev

GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

<u>Informationsbrev och förfrågan om medverkan i studie om socialsekreterares arbete med ensamkommande barn</u>

Jag heter Linnea Roslund Gustavsson och jag studerar på internationella programmet, Social Work and Human Rights. Under utbildningen ingår att göra en studie som kommer att presenteras i en skriftlig mastersuppsats.

Syftet med min studie är att få en förståelse hur socialsekreterare inom socialtjänsten som arbetar med ensamkommande barn har upplevt dom ändringar som har skett sedan 2016 (ändringarna i utlänningslagen mm.) som berör denna målgrupp och hur detta har påverkat deras dagliga arbete.

Jag söker personer som utifrån sitt arbete har erfarenhet gällande denna grupp (både pågående eller avslutad) som kan ställa upp för en intervju. Intervjun kommer hållas på svenska, ta cirka 1 timme och kommer att spelas in. Allt material som samlas in behandlas konfidentiellt och materialet kommer att förstöras efter att studien är godkänd. Deltagare, kontor och plats kommer att anonymiseras.

Om du accepterar att medverka i studien kommer du att kontaktas via e-mail eller telefon för att boka in en tid för en intervju. Du är också varmt välkommen att kontakta mig vid anmälan av intresse eller frågor, samt som min handledare kan besvara ytterligare frågor.

Tack för din uppmärksamhet.
Med vänliga hälsningar,

Linnea Roslund Gustavsson   Handledare: Charlotte Melander
Institutionen för socialt arbete   Institutionen för socialt arbete
Göteborgs Universitet   Göteborgs Universitet
gusgusliar@student.gu.se   031-786 6384
                                                       charlotte.melander@socwork.gu.se

Information letter regarding participation in a study about social assistants work with unaccompanied minors

My name is Linnea Roslund Gustavssona and I am currently studying the international programme, Social Work and Human Rights. A mandatory part of this programme is to complete a written Masters thesis.

 The aim of my study is to get an understanding on how social assistants within the social services that work with unaccompanied minors have experienced the changes implemented since 2016 (the introduction of the interim Aliens Act, amongst others) that affects this group. Furthermore, to understand how this has affected the social assistants daily work with this group. I am looking for people that, through their work, have experience regarding this group (both currently employed or have been employed after the changes were implemented) who are interested in participating in an interview. The interview will be conducted in Swedish and will take approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded, however all the material collected will be handled confidentially and will be destroyed upon completion. Participants, the social services they are employed at and the municipality in which they work will be anonymised.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be contacted either by email or phone to book in a time for an interview. You are warmly welcomed to contact me if you are interested, or if you have further questions. You are also welcome to contact my supervisor with further inquiries.

Thank you for your time.
Kind regards,

Linnea Roslund Gustavsson   Supervisor: Charlotte Melander
Department of Social Work   Department of Social Work
University of Gothenburg   University of Gothenburg
gusgusliar@student.gu.se   031-786 6384
                                                   charlotte.melander@socwork.gu.se

Samtyckesblankett

Detta forskningsprojekt (mastersuppsats) är obligatorisk del av Mastersprogrammet Social Work and Human Rights vid Göteborgs universitet. För att kunna försäkra att detta projekt upprätthåller dom etiska riktlinjerna inom forskning så formas arbetet utifrån dessa följande principer:
- Intervju deltagarna i projektet kommer att få ta del av syftet med forskningen
- Intervju deltagarna har rätten att bestämma om hen vill delta i projektet, även efter en avslutad intervju.
- All data som samlas in kommer att hanteras konfidentiellt och kommer att sparas så att ingen obehörig kan ta del av den

Intervjun kommer att spelas in då det dels underlättar dokumentationsprocessen och dels nästa del moment i studien. För att upprätthålla sekretess av deltagarna så kommer namn att anonymiseras i studien. Informationen som samlas kommer enbart användas för detta forskningsprojekt, samt som den kommer förstöras när den är klar.

Du har rätt att neka att svara på frågorna under intervjun, samt avsluta utan vidare anledning.

Linnea Roslund Gustavsson
Göteborgs universitet
gusgusliar@socwork.gu.se

Om du har fler frågor så kan du kontakta min handledare, Charlotte Melander. Hennes kontaktuppgifter är:

Charlotte.melander@socwork.gu.se

031-786 6384

10.4 Appendix 2b: Consent form

This study (Masters thesis) is an obligatory part of the International Masters programme Social Work and Human Rights, University of Gothenburg. To ensure that this study upholds the ethical guidelines within social research, it is informed by the following principles:

- The interview participants will get information regarding the aim of this study
- The interview participants have the right to decide if they wish to partake in this study, even after completing an interview
- All the data collected during the study will be handled confidentially and will be protected so that no other party can get a hold of it

The interview will be recorded, as firstly, it eases the documentation process of the data, and secondly, it will form the basis of the next part of this study. To uphold the secrecy of the participants, names will be anonymised in the study. The information gathered for this study will only be used for this study and will be destroyed upon completion.

You have the right to not answer questions during the interview and also stop the interview without further reason.

Linnea Roslund Gustavsson   Participants name
University of Gothenburg   Participants contact details
gusgusliar@socwork.gu.se

If you have any further questions, you can contact my supervisor, Charlotte Melander.
Her contact details are:

Charlotte.melander@socwork.gu.se

031-786 6384

10.5 Appendix 3a: Intervjufrågor

Ungdomarnas mående och påverkan på deras arbetsmetoder/utmaningar

- Vad anser du är deras största behov i relation till dom villkor som dom lever under just nu?

- Hur har du upplevt ändringarna i utlänningslagen i relation till ditt arbete med ensamkommande barn?

- Hur skulle du beskriva deras situation? Vad präglas det av?

- Hur påverkar detta ditt arbetssätt?

- Anser du att du kan tillgodose dessa barns behov utifrån din uppgift som social sekreterare och dom medel som stödjer dagliga arbetet med dom?

- Har dessa ändringar påverkat samverkansarbetet med andra aktörer?

Fördjupande: T.ex lärare, godman mm.

- Har du erfarenheter av åldersuppskrivning?

Fördjupande: hur påverkar detta arbetet?

- Har kontakt med ungdomarnas familj blivit starkare på grund av den situationen dom befinner sig i?

Professionalitet och handlingsutrymme

- Hur ser du på dessa förändringar i relation till din roll som socialarbetare och dom värderingar och etik som teori och praktik utser att man ska ha i detta yrke?

- Har ni diskuterat dessa ändringar inom eran arbetsplats?

- Hur ser du på din roll utifrån SoL's samhällsförändrande aspirationer i relation till ensamkommandes behov och den tillfälligheten som har skapats av dom nya utlänningslagarna?

Fördjupande: i relation till barnens bästa?

UAMs needs and the impacts on the social assistants working methods/Challenges

- What do you feel are their biggest needs in relation to the conditions they currently live under?

- How have you experienced the changes in the Aliens Act in 2016 in your work with unaccompanied minors?

- How would you describe their situation? What is it informed by?

- How does this impact your working methods?

- Do you feel that you can address the needs of these children in relation to your role as a child social assistant and the methods that support your daily work?

- Has it impacted upon your daily work with other organisations/professionals? Teachers, carers at HVB homes, legal guardians?

- Do you have experience of unaccompanied minors age being raised due to medical age assessments?

    Probing how does this impact your work?

Professionalism and discretion

- How do you view these changes in relation to your work as a social worker and the values and ethics that theory and practice mandates that a social worker should embody?
    Probing: Did these changes challenge this role? If so, how?

- Have you discussed these challenges within your workplace?

- How do you view your role when noting the Social Services Act societal changing aspirations in relation to unaccompanied minors needs and the uncertainty that has been created by the new Alien Act?
    Probing: in relation to the best interest of the child?

(1) *"jag har aldrig direkt känt att jag har så jätte bra relation till Migrationsverket men det är ju också för att dom jobbar, vi jobbar åt två helt olika saker"*

(2) *"sen finns det ju dom som man är mer orolig för å sett har större behov och den enda möjligheten vi har haft, ja det är ju utifrån dom ekonomiska ramarna som Migrationsverket har ändrat på att det måste vara likställt med LVU"*

(3) *"jag tänker att alla skulle må bättre av att vara inom socialtjänsten, iallafall majoriteten"*

(4) *"varför ska det krävas omfattande vårdbehov"*

(5) *"jag tänker på hela den här LVU grunden som är väldigt luddig, också där dom inte har någon kunskap om socialtjänstlagen och LVU"*

(6) *"jag tänker väl att hellre, liksom att gå på dom här röntgen, nu, jag är ju kritisk till hela den biten överlag Men ska man gå på någonting så är det väl i såna fall röntgen och inte det här godtyckliga innan med ett samtal"*

(7) *"det tänker jag det är konstigt för dom lägger ju hela sitt beslut på det. Men det är ju också vad jag personligen tycker"*

(8) *"som on dom har suttit och haft ett möte på Migrationsverket och säga att nu utvisar 100 stycken till"*

(9) *"så tar MIG över, och det spelar ingen roll egentligen vad det innebär för ungdomen med att flytta...till en helt annan stad, en helt annanstans, och ett helt annat boende, och alla bara försvinner på samma gång"*

(10) *"en myndighet som socialtjänsten som jobbar utifrån barnens bästa och allt vad det innebär, och sen från en dag till en annan har vi inte längre barnens bästa för nu jobbar vi helt plötsligt med en vuxen. Det är väldigt svårt att jobba i"*

(11) *"och då ska det vara ett ordnat mottagande å då var det en faster som han kanske hade i livet någonstans i Afghanistan, det var det ordnade mottagandet, men det fanns inget att ordna upp där för det, vi visste inte ens om fastern fanns"*

(12) *"det är otroligt tuffa besked för mig som handläggare att ge det till en ungdom"*

(13) *"vi gör ungdomen beroende av oss å sen släpper vi hen. Som får stå på egna ben helt och hållet, det är det som är det jobbiga"*

(14) *"så det finns ingen logik i att dom ska sitta så länge i Sverige och vänta i min värld, asså det, det är omänskligt"*

(15) *"det kan ta två år å ens få sitt första beslut det säger ju också om var har dom, vad är barnens bästa i det"*

(16) *"å det är flera av killarna då nu som har fått tillfälliga uppehållstillstånd som vissa, vissa blir ju knappt glada för det för det är fortfarande den här ovissheten, vad händer sen?"*

(17) *"jag tror inte att Migrationsverket riktigt har märkt effekten av att dela ut så många tillfälliga"*

(18) *"hur tänker man att inte möjliggöra att så många ungdomar inte får återförenas med sin familj. Jag fattar inte det, det liksom går ju ifrån vad allt med mänskliga rättigheter innebär"*

(19) *"jag har aldrig jobbat någonsin i en verksamhet som har så mycket med ekonomi och återsökning av pengar att göra, att man bedöms tillhöra målgruppen bara om man kan söka pengar för just det barnet eller ungdomen"*

(20) *"Det är tyvärr ekonomi som styr. När det gäller främst asylsökande, det är dom vi pratar om då. När dom har fått PUT eller uppehållstillstånd så är dom ju som vilken medborgare som helst"*

(21) *"och vi har inte...tillräckligt med resurser heller..för att kunna matcha liksom alla"*

(22) *"för allt handlar ju om pengar, medel, medel, medel, medel"*

(23) *"börjar sakta tappa hoppet"*

(24) *"någon skär sig så får man ringa akuten, åka till BUP och sen så sitter man där och sen så mumlar dom lite och sen blir dom hemskickade"*

(25) *"dom har ett tomrum som inte vi kan fylla heller. Dom har behov av något så mycket större som inte vi kan ge, med den bakgrunden som dom har och frånvaron av familjen"*

(26) *"man blir lite slagen av hur bundet det är till lagar och till byråkratin och man hoppas väl att bli någon hjälte som ska ut och rädda alla från någonting, men så märker man hur, hur enormt styrt det är av allt annat"*

(27) *"så sitter man och försöker och bara, tänka individuellt för varje ungdom i en organisation som tänker ganska...att generalisera mycket...dom ensamkommande blir en grupp istället för var och en"*

(28) *"Sen har vi i vår grupp då *plats* märkt att vi väntar mer med att LVU:a jämfort med traditionella ärenden. Där LVU:as dom snabbare än vad vi gör med våra ensamkommande och det är för att vi har alltid mycket mer information kring dom traditionella jämfört med ensamkommande"*

(29) *"att man inte ens hinner med det man ska göra, rent administrativt här, så man har inte, det finns inte plats å å var engagerad"*

(30) *"man finns i alla fall här och man lyssnar på dom och man försöker förstå och man försöker göra det bästa"*

(31) *"jag jobbar utifrån mitt uppdrag sen tänker jag att det andra tänker jag är något som man får välja att göra på sin fritid, så har jag hanterat det för annars blir det väldigt ohållbart å jobba för någonstans har vi våra ramar att förhålla oss till. Sen kan vi påverka å göra våran röst hörd men när det gäller dom ungdomarna vi har, så får jag göra mitt jobb så bra jag kan utifrån dom förutsättningarna jag har och när dom är här"*

(32) *"dom blir beordrade att göra det för att det är deras roll, det ingår i deras uppgift att du ska även kunna lika väl som att du skriver utredningar som resulterar i bifall, ska du kunna skriva avslags utredningar, det förstår jag, samtidigt som att jag förstår att det är jobbigt eftersom det går emot vår etik och moral"*

(33) *"Många gånger säger näe men jag står inte bakom dom här besluten, jag gör faktiskt inte det och det kan man alltså på den här arbetsplatsen får man lov att säga det"*

(34) *"dom ska se vad vi ger avslag på och det var ju bra, för då ser ju, för dom ser ju dom aldrig annars"*

(35) *"man kan hela tiden skylla på någon annan myndighet, det är ju Migrationsverket som skriver upp...Migrationsverket har sina boenden, och får sina....dom uppnår skälig levnadsnivå även där"*

(36) *"man kan säga ofta när man jobbar med vår målgrupp så blir det för sent, dom är redan utskrivna, så det är inte som att man ändrar på det å tar tillbaka någon"*

(37) *"men man orkar ju inte för mycket heller. Och orkar man inte mer så ska man ju inte vara kvar"*

(38) *Linnea: så det blir att dom förlitar sig mer på frivilliga då?*

*Respondent seven: ja å det tror jag även man gör i regering å politik eller asså nämnden. Det känns så, det finns föreningar som jobbar för dom här å man tänker att, jag tänker att dom löser ju det för att dom är ju desperata efter att försöka hjälpa dom här ungdomarna som eventuellt då ska flytta till *kommun långt bort* efter tre dar efter dom har fått något beslut. Ehmm å å då löser dom ju det för att dom känner att då måste dom ju det å någonstans hamnar man ibland att man det kanske är så att man räknar, problemet finns inte, för att dom lyckas lösa det för dom här ungdomarna å då behöver man inte jobba med problemet inom förvaltningen. Är du med på vad jag tänker?*

Linnea: ja, mer att man lappar än att liksom, man ser symptomen men man går inte från grunden?

Respondent seven: ja nämen man tycker ju att det ändå löst sig för alla

Linnea: ja

Respondent seven: men, men det är ju inte på grund av oss som det har löst sig utan på grund av andra då, frivilliga organisationer, kyrkan å dom gör ju ett jätte jobb, för dom uppskrivna å utskrivna då

(39) *"att civilsamhället ska ta et ansvar som egentligen borde ligga hos en myndighet då... och speciellt en myndighet som socialtjänsten... som jobbar utifrån barnens bästa och allt vad det innebär"*

10.8 Appendix 5: Themes and corresponding codes

Themes	Codes
1. The uneven playing field	• Talk about Migration Agency's working methods • The principle of the best interest of the child • Human rights • Talk about temporary residency permits • Resources • Talk about Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act • Asylum process
2. Managing the uneven playing field	• Talk about the needs of unaccompanied minors • Mental health • Administrative tasks • Talk about BBIC triangle • Social Services Act
3. Challenging the uneven playing field	• Discretion • Talk surrounding their mandated role • Justifications for actions they've taken/not taken • Discussions with colleagues • Signing termination of care papers
4. The rise of voluntary forces	• References to legal guardians, foster homes • Civil society • Volunteers