## Family Dynamics and Emotional Wellbeing: Exploring the Experiences of Underprivileged Single Mothers in South Yorkshire

### Overview

From March to April 2024, United Women’s Affiliation (UWA), in collaboration with Chloe Froggat from Sheffield Hallam University, led a qualitative research project exploring the lived experiences of underprivileged single mothers—primarily refugees and asylum seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa—living in Sheffield. The focus was on how poor parental mental health impacts family dynamics, and the systemic barriers to accessing emotional wellbeing and support services.

### Research Aims

The research aimed to understand:

1. The barriers to social inclusion and wellbeing experienced by refugee and asylum-seeking mothers.
2. How parental responsibilities, language, cultural exclusion, and access to services impact their mental health and community engagement.

### Methodology

This project was grounded in community-based participatory research and guided by ethical principles ensuring informed consent, participant safety, and cultural sensitivity. It used a phenomenological framework to highlight participants’ lived experiences.

* **Sampling**: 15 single-parent families were purposively selected based on refugee/asylum status, single motherhood, and residence in highly deprived areas.
* **Data Collection**:  
  + In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide that encouraged open storytelling on themes such as social inclusion, parenting, wellbeing, and service access.
  + 2 focus group discussions (with 10 and 12 participants, respectively) were also held.
  + Sessions took place in familiar community settings (e.g. UWA offices), with bilingual facilitators offering interpretation in Swahili, French, and Kirundi to ensure inclusivity.
  + Field notes and translated transcripts were securely stored and analysed through content analysis and open coding, using Microsoft Excel.

### Key Insights

Participants reported widespread social isolation, language barriers, difficulties accessing mental health and GP services, and cultural stigma around seeking emotional support. Parenting challenges—especially among single mothers—were exacerbated by housing insecurity, lack of childcare, and financial hardship.

### Outcomes

The research produced early-stage recommendations to:

* Improve accessibility of community mental health support tailored to migrant and refugee women
* Strengthen community partnerships for peer-based parenting support.
* Reduce structural barriers (e.g. digital exclusion, GP access, language navigation)

### Next Steps and Current Progress

We are currently in the post-fieldwork phase of the research. The following steps are underway to complete the project and prepare for its wider impact:

* **Data Transcription and Translation**: Interviews and focus group recordings are being transcribed, with non-English contributions translated to ensure all voices are equally represented in the analysis.
* **Thematic Analysis**: Using a content analysis framework, we are identifying key themes aligned with our research questions on social inclusion, emotional wellbeing, and single parenthood.
* **Drafting Findings**: The research team is collaboratively developing the results section, supported by community insights and narrative quotes to retain authenticity.
* **Discussion and Recommendations**: We are formulating context-specific recommendations for local service providers, health commissioners, and policy influencers.
* **Academic Write-Up and Dissemination**: An academic paper is in progress, which will present the findings to a wider scholarly and practitioner audience. Alongside this, we are planning a community-facing summary and local roundtable to ensure accessibility and influence across different audiences.

These steps reflect our commitment to both academic rigour and community relevance, and lay the groundwork for a longer-term legacy aligned with the *Working Together in Research* principles.