

# The use of Persuasive Communication by Social Workers in the Adaptation Process of Unaccompanied Minors

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**Abstract.** Illegal immigrants under 18 years of age who come to Indonesia and are without a parent or a guardian are referred to as UAM (Unaccompanied Minors). During their stay in Indonesia, they remain in a detention center before proceeding to special accommodation that provides services and cares to these unaccompanied minors. This study aimed to construct the notion of how the social workers rested on persuasive communication as to providing the special accommodation to UAM and how these UAM began adapting to life in a new culture in Medan City. Results indicated that the persuasive communication broke down and failed due to noise, UAM' lack of knowledge of what the future held for them, and social workers' lack of obligation that required them to guide the UAM through the completion of the interviews to gain admission into the destination country. The process of UAM' adaptation to the new surrounding was inhibited by the social workers and DCH (Dinsos Community House) officers to avoid potential social gaps and conflicts with the locals. The UAM, instead, was thriving on intercultural adaptation with the fellow immigrants from 4 countries. The adaptation, so far, has shown no sign of major conflicts.

**Keywords:** Unaccompanied Minors, Persuasive Communication, Cultural Adaptation

## 1 Introduction

Indonesia is a quintessential transit country that immigrants cross on their way to their country of destination. In addition to immigrants' attempts to adjure their rights, immigrants are required to comply with the directives and regulations of their country of asylum. An important one is to notice pax obligations and other fiscal costs. Cooperation on a broad range of immigration issues at global, national and regional scales is necessary to acknowledge a shared responsibility to help governments build synergies in policies, administrative structures, and operational areas to respond to diverse immigration and its challenges [1]. Immigration-related organizations committed to sustained and mutually beneficial interaction include United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Immigration (IOM), Department of Social Affairs and Immigration Offices of Indonesia.

Unauthorized immigrants abiding in Indonesia are geographically dispersed and vary by age, including adults with or without family members and children under 18. Immigrant children without the presence of a legal guardian are referred to as UAM (Unaccompanied

Minors). They are situated in immigration detention facilities before special accommodation that provides a range of reasonable, improved living conditions. UAM have different needs from other looked-after children and should be treated accordingly, authorized by child protection laws. Relevant procedural safeguard of asylum and procedures of immigration, where applicable, must take account of children's special needs and adopt persuasive communication with them, extending intercultural interaction that reflects cultural diversity while taking residence in Indonesia.

Though immigrant children projections may build in uncertainties, especially for years further in the future, they are likely to reach adult milestones when they turn 18, including; 1) their claim for asylum is recognized by the transit country, which involves relocation to third countries especially Australia, Canada and the United States of America; 2) they fail to meet the legal requirements for entry but have the option to lodge a legal basis to remain in Indonesia and are eventually placed in adult detention centers – some in family members – under IOM coordination in Indonesia; and 3) they remain in their country of asylum to obtain greater safety and well being than they did in their country of origin. Social workers in special shelters must assist them to meet their physical and social needs and provide training courses to adapt to a new environment.

Social workers are fundamentally responsible for helping UAM to cope with problems they are facing to improve their life quality. One of the previous researches revealed that social workers who excelled in cross-cultural communication and were able to provide compassionate support to vulnerable children were so mindful of individual needs that they keep their work priorities aligned with the children's welfare [2].

One important literature review in this regard is "Eternal Return: Present-Day Problems Associated with Social Reintegration of Ukrainian Labor Migrants Arriving in Ukraine from the EU (Based on Sociological Result)" written by Katerina Ivashchenko in a 2013's CARIM-East research report. This study observed Ukraine as a gateway entry and transit of immigrants, more than 70% coming from Russia, Belaru and Moldova seeking to reach the European Union. Protracted economic instability and growing number of unemployment lead to a rising rate of immigrant arrivals for better economic opportunities and living standards. The study indicated that; 1) there were some plausible factors that encouraged asylum seekers or refugees to remain indefinitely in their host country; 2) migration to the Europe Union was primarily driven by the desire to improve class status and prosperity, gain new experience, and participate in international and national market; 3) relocation to native country was driven by the motivation of family reunification, environmental reasons, regaining social capital, cultural capital and economic capital, and seeking long-term prospects of life. She further contended that the problem of migration is massive and systemic as the management is improperly done [3].

"Cultural Adaptation of Rohingya Ethnic into the Culture of East Aceh and Langsa City," written by Bayu Pratam tackled the process through which Rohingya refugees negotiated cultural adaptation into Acehese culture as their shelter's culture. Despite shock culture upon their arrival, the migration experience appeared to be relatively smooth as they adjusted to new cultural setting. Cultural adaptation that stems from blending between cultures can be observed in multiple cultural bases, including language, clothing, cuisine and religion. Pratam hinged on the notion that cultural adaptation may take indefinite time, and the pace of transition varies widely for different people. While some struggle with major sets of transition throughout their stay in their host country, others can last in a relatively short period [4].

Social workers hold a very important responsibility in the framework of UM's rights. Effective communication skills enable social workers to be capable and knowledgeable in a

range of ways that are instrumental in advocating awareness about their fundamental human rights and future preparedness. This study sought to construct the process of persuasive communication of the social workers serving in accommodation centers with special provision for UAM and the attempts the social workers developed to communicate with these UAM mostly unable to speak English or Indonesian. A couple of research questions were raised, i.e., 1) how does the persuasive communication work between the social workers and the UAM in special accommodation? and 2) how is the process of adaptation of the UAM in special accommodation to their new cultural and social environment in Medan?

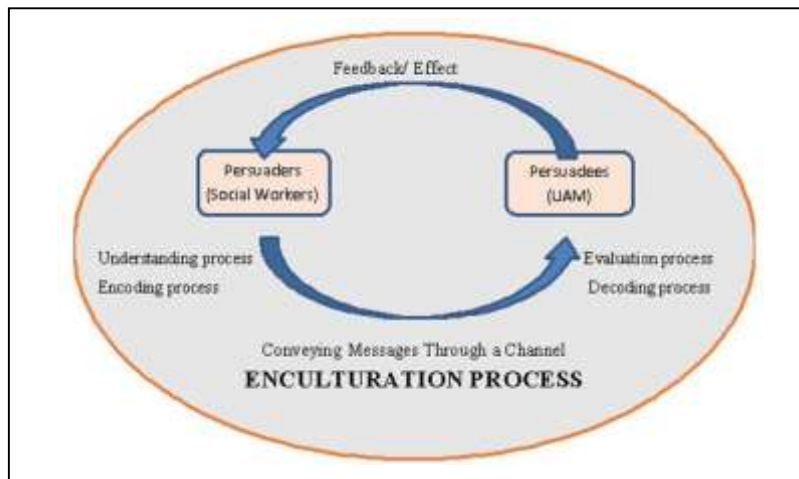
De Vito pointed out that attempts to take on persuasion focus on the aim of altering and reinforcing one's attitude and belief as well as encouraging him/ her to act in a certain way. It is intended to obtain a response to both verbal and non verbal messages presented smoothly and confidently in a way that the recipient finds pleasure in doing something [5]. The routes to persuasion may deal with rationality and emotion. Rational arguments persuade people to change their cognitive such as an idea or a concept that eventually forms a belief [4]. Emotional appeals, on the other hand, concern the ability to tap into underlying emotions to motivate people to act in specific ways. Both routes begin with the attention of the message recipient. Persuasive messages can be immediately tailored to the recipient's attributes, needs and interests. Five basic elements of persuasive communication include: Persuader, Persuadee, Perception, Persuasive Message, Persuasive Channel, Feedback and Effect [4].

Simple persuasive communication, as proposed by Herbert W. Simons, is constructed in several stages, including; (1) awareness stage, where a persuadee acknowledges and sorts various alternative choices of perceptions, thoughts and feelings to convey; (2) encoding stage, where a message is linguistically constructed and proceeds with a physical stimulus that travels through space; (3) decoding stage, where a persuadee turns the physical stimulus into semantically-approved forms; (4) evaluation stage, where a persuadee comes across discrepancy between the intended and the received messages, eventually providing specific feedback to a persuader [6]. Unlike other types of communication, persuasion has a certain target or accomplishment toward feedback that accounts for the effect of communication rendered by a persuadee.

Gudykunt & Kim classified two stages of adaptation, viz., cultural adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation refers to a basic communication process that entails at least a sender, a receiver, a medium and a message, ultimately leading to encoding and decoding process. Such process is defined as the rate of change that ensues when an individual relocates to a new, culturally unfamiliar environment. This adaptive change develops as sojourners (i.e., temporary residents) or permanent settlers engage in a given environment through the exchange of messages with host nationals. This adjustment process is called enculturation that takes place during socialization [7].

The second stage is cross-cultural adaptation. Cross-cultural adaptation covers three major components. First, acculturation occurs as foreign-born individuals, who have compromised the experience of socializing, acquire the primary social interaction within the host culture. As time progresses, they begin to understand the whole new cultural horizon as they settle into routines and may come to develop a sense of belonging to a given society. Furthermore, acculturation takes places while they leave some of the old patterns of the native culture behind (deculturation – which constitutes the second component). Subsequent changes in acculturation, in most cases, can affect their psychological and social behaviors as they cope with the bereavement of cultural norms and values, and most notably the identity and the self-concept. This, in turn, triggers resistance to cultural contact in a way that they isolate themselves in their own communities from the majority society.

It is, therefore, important to note that cultural adaptation are predisposed to change, and at the same time, to avert it. Gudykunts & Kim asserted that there is a small probability that individuals attest persistence of native culture since cultural change whereby they become mainstreamed into the dominant host society is inevitable. The third component, if successfully done, is the utmost stage of adaptation, namely assimilation. Assimilation deals with absorbing traits of the host culture to such an extent that the assimilating individuals socially resemble other members of the host society as they shed the old culture. Theoretically, assimilation accounts for the adaptation process subsequent to acculturation changes. In fact, successful acculturation does not necessarily guarantee the individuals begin the assimilation phase. To acculturate themselves to the host culture, they must develop intercultural contact and maintain continuous activities of new cultural learning within the new social-cultural environment. Intercultural adaptation is reflected in the receptivity and conformity of a communication pattern of the newcomers, from which it originates, to that of the natives [7]. The conformity dimension of communication patterns among consensual communities, in turn, underpins intercultural transitions.



**Fig 1.**Research conceptual framework

We observed and acknowledged the process of persuasive communication between the social workers (persuaders) and the UAM (persuadees) emerged as part of the socializing stages linked to the enculturation process to enable adjustment and integration into the new cultural milieu. These persuasive messages aimed to increase awareness and understanding of the impact of cultural differences which would help the UAM to adapt more easily to their host culture and provide them with key insights and practical information about the social practices in the new environment.

## 2 Research Method

The study was framed by a qualitative research method using constructivist paradigms. This enabled us to gain the analysis of qualitative data sets since the resulting data could not

be measured by statistical-mathematical techniques. Deduction from interview transcripts was processed into axial coding and selective coding to generate a range of significant data findings. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews of 5 UAM from 4 countries, i.e., Afghanistan (2 UAM), Sri Lanka, Sudan and Somalia, and social workers as well as officers at Dinsos Community House (DCH) in Medan. Secondary data were gathered from the regulations and annual activity reports of DCH.

### **3 Result and Discussion**

Selective coding on the transcription of qualitative interviews of 3 social workers, 2 security officers, 2 caretakers and 5 UAM from 4 countries (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Sudan) settling in DCH presented a number of significant findings, including:

- The social workers frequently developed persuasive messages that favored assistance to the UM's self-development that entailed learning to act outside their cultural comfort zone and, at the same time, avoiding issues that might arise from cultural clashes with the neighboring communities.
- This was the first time that DCH welcomed immigrants from Somalia, Sri Lanka and Sudan. Prior to this, 2015-2107, DCH welcomed arrivals from Afghanistan and provided proper arrangements to the UAM.
- The UAM were held to a strict set of rules and restrictions by the social workers in terms of socialization processes within the community to maintain social order by preventing cultural conflicts.
- The patterns of persuasive communication between the social workers and UAM included: 1) role-taking, 2) reward-giving, and 3) rights-based approach to norms of gender equality. The interviews indicated the UAM neither actively nor effectively engaged in the persuasive interaction with the social workers and DCH officers when they did not understand what was being spoken due to a language barrier. Furthermore, the DCH officers perceived that motivating the UAM with incentives was, in most cases, purposeless as they showed inconsistent behaviors.
- The UAM could gain the depth of the persuasive interaction by means of a language they understood distinctly, such as English.
- Among 39 immigrant children, only 10 could hold a balance between speaking their native language and English, while 3 officers of DCH resorted to speaking English upon the persuasive interaction.
- In 2017, only 1 UM passed the final interview and the entire selection for UNHCR resettlement program and was granted admission into the destination country.
- Most UAM could not cope with the challenges of the long-term prospects of adjusting to the local culture of Medan.

According to the interview-based data, we found that the social workers sought to set up and extend a base of persuasive messages for the UAM over an intercultural bridge to understand the nature of social diversity in Indonesia and in Medan, particularly. While simultaneously serving the entire UAM with a range of needs, all social workers (persuaders) acknowledged the UAM' desire and interest in the mainstream culture and understood their cultural competence. However, they built upon cultural settings and values to such an extent that avoided local opposition against the UAM. They were, consequently, restricted to social engagement in the local community to prevent tensions within the social framework. Central

to this social engagement is a set of codes that delineates expectations for certain social behaviors according to conventional norms and customs within the society. The UAM were required to be attuned to the cultural aspects to meet such expectations. The social workers also placed a great emphasis on self-development that was considered as an important potential of the immigrant youth. It is, however, important to note that the social workers are not responsible for their entries in the third country for vocational purposes. DCH, along with the social workers, does not have the authority over the hiring decisions, but rather locating their needs while giving them rich opportunities for self-development without coercion.

In the encoding process, the persuaders (social workers and DCH officers) carried the messages through an oral medium. Noise-producing circumstances were detected upon encoding these messages. This type of noise, in turn, emerged as a language barrier to the decoding process led by the persuadees (UAM). Only few of the social workers could prove fluency with English, and none of them could speak the native languages in Afghanistan (Afghan Persian), Sri Lanka (Tamil & Sinhalese), Somalia (Somali & Arabic) and Sudan (Sudanese Arabic). Communication with such foreign-speaking immigrants must rely on sign language, visual communication, professional interpreting service or the English-speaking social workers.

In the evaluation process, the UAM were contemplating the content of the desired messages and taking several factors into account. When encountering these persuasive messages presented in a language that was understandable for the UAM, they would try to determine the intended meaning and embrace the local culture without giving up their culture of origin. Their cultural ties and a sense of belonging to their cultural origins remained strong as the majority of the UAM was inclined to cluster with their fellow citizens rather than the native-born citizens. This was especially true when a group of immigrants from other countries than Afghanistan arrived, or when a group of immigrant adults came into contact with those from the neighboring shelters. They would not deculturate from their ethnic culture, thus failing to adopt the local culture. One counter-argument is that they neither had to fully assimilate nor be deprived of their traditional standpoints when they did not cause harm to others when it came to dining etiquette, for example, where they were accustomed to eating with their fingers without any cutlery.

In this evaluation phase, only 1 out of 5 UAM developed a great spirit of personal struggle and established himself in self-development during shelter at DCH. They were fully aware of their future aspirations, but the social workers felt remorseful that they did not demonstrate practices in leveraging their potential and maturational development by engaging in such programs as English courses. In this phase, a motivation strategy to create and maintain a great spirit of enthusiasm is essential to foster life-altering experience during migrating journey and identity pursuit. Most of the UAM were not naturally eager to learn and did not take on active roles in the skill-developing programs. Such lack of motivation, based on the data findings, was due to the dramatically-declining number of UAM who took up employment in the third countries. The challenges of resettlement and vocational opportunities discouraged them to envisage better future.

During the process of feedback-giving from the persuadees to the persuaders, the social workers came across reluctant UAM in terms of complying with and participating in the set of self-developing courses. The UAM perceived that the bulk of the persuasive messages were prone to failure or misleading. Despite frequent attempts to identify and employ numerous persuasive strategies that most appealed to the UAM' needs, the social workers failed to key in them to the motivation to self-develop during childhood endeavors and cultural pursuit as they demonstrated inconsistent behaviors over strategic reward system.

Due to the inherently challenging nature of the change and the psychological breakdown of the UAM, most of them failed to go through the transitions to a more local lifestyle in Medan. This result was plain to see. Evidence showed that most of them remained attached to their culture of origin, severely limiting their abilities to assimilate. They neither opted to acculturate nor enculturate in a broader sense, thus resisting complete assimilation. Another factor permanently forestalling the assimilating process is that the UAM, most notably the immigrant adults, only engaged in intense interaction with coethnics within DCH and in the neighboring shelters.

#### **4 Conclusion**

Based on the approach for framing and contextualizing the research problems, we can conclude that; 1) noise interfered the ability of the social workers to transmit persuasive messages and have it decoded by the UAM; 2) UAM' lack of ideas pertaining to their potential in the future resulted in a lack of motivation for self-awareness and personal development; 3) the social workers were not held responsibility toward UAM' success in the third-country admission interviews who navigated eligibility for employment; and 4) The UAM found difficulties socializing with the locals as the social workers constricted the practices of integrating them into socializing with the locals living nearby so as to avoid social conflicts or at least the potential of social conflicts. The result indicated that the UAM were thriving on intercultural tolerance with the fellow immigrants from 4 countries. The links between the intercultural understanding and physical and mental health outcomes among them were, so far, particularly well established.

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