

Appraisal of BA Thesis *The Impact of War on Ukrainian Women Refugees in Czech Republic* by Anastasiia Stepanenko

In her thesis Anastasiia Stepanenko formulated broad goal for her research without formulating specific enough research problem. So called primary objective “To provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in the Czech Republic including examining the psychological impacts of displacement, some coping mechanisms used by these women, their efforts to integrate into Czech society, their ongoing contributions to Ukraine, and their aspirations for the future” can be translated as a hybrid consisting of objectives-problem-questions, which is, in my opinion, impossible to cover in bachelor’s thesis. There is no mentioning of the Anastasiia’s background in psychology, in which she situates her work (mental health issues described on p. 9 and the chosen literature). Although I’d like to express my doubts that the ambition for in-depth analysis of the social and psychological impact could be realized by chosen methodology and scope of the research work, “the contribution to the broader discourse on refugee experiences and the specific challenges faced by women” (p. 45), which the author considers to be her aim, has been in a way presented and reached by her thesis.

The literature review presented in chapter one takes us through both psychological and social impacts of war and includes brief historical context and overview of the conflict in Ukraine. I view the chapter as rather sketchy and a bit unfocused list of issues more or less related to the topic and the research questions. Conclusion of the first chapter offered on pages 22-23 provides very general basis for this particular research, although the author perceives it as specific to the situation of the women refugees from Ukraine living in the Czech republic (e.g. “...it provides a clear overview of the resilience and challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees as they rebuild their lives”, p. 23)

As to the methodology, the three “key research questions” (p. 24) are partly identical with “six areas” focusing on psychological and social impacts deriving from the literature review (p. 24-26). What I find confusing is the fact that in the last chapter we are faced with a different set of three questions which the research is addressing (p. 43). Six interviews lasting 40–90 minutes were conducted with women who “fled to Czech Republic from Ukraine”. I am not sure, whether (and what kind of) distinction the researcher makes between semi-structured and in-depth interviews (p. 41). Further information about research participants is included in the table 1. The author considered information on occupation, place of living before war, place of origin, previous occupation in CR and occupation in Ukraine relevant to her goal and research question and she later uses them for the analysis (particularly the age and occupation). In chapter three we find short description of “the story and context of their journey” which the author describes as crucial for better understanding of the situation of individual research participants. As the data are not presented as individual stories, but are grouped according to the codes/categories/themes identified prior to the research, this “crucial” line of thinking seems to be lost in the text and it makes it difficult for reader to grasp the individual stories. I guess it would not be considered a betrayal of thematic analysis to present the themes in relation to/in connection to each woman, especially when the “connections between individual experiences and broader sociological and psychological concepts” were part of the approach to analysis (p. 26).

The method chosen for the data analysis is described as thematic analysis, although as already mentioned, the themes were chosen (as a sort of theory) prior to the interviews by the author, most probably as a result of the literature review. On p. 27 there is a mention of “making the questionnaire” and as in the chapter three – empirical research the author tends to quantify the responses of the research participants, I became a bit puzzled by the methodology described and the method and approach used in communication with women as well as about the method applied in the data analysis. It is not introduced which specific approach to thematic (or content maybe?) analysis the author chose, therefore I do not see the point in discussing it further in this appraisal. Nevertheless, the relevant literature should have been cited in chapter two clarifying and grounding the methodology. Reading the information on the researcher’s positionality on p. 27, we learn about the situation of the Anastasia’s family and her personal experience with being diagnosed with anxiety disorder in relation to the chosen empirical field. She admits there are limitations to the research implementation and data interpretation in connection with her personal experience. I assume that at times the interviews were difficult not only for the women invited to the research, but for the researcher herself.

The experience of six women who fled from Ukraine is described as diverse, therefore I would be more careful in drawing the conclusions such as “Despite the differences in their direct experiences of the war, all the women reported significant levels of stress, anxiety, and depression” (p. 31). My problem with such interpretation is that the author as a student of humanities is distributing psychiatric diagnoses among the project participants based on the categories identified prior to research. At the same time, these terms/diagnoses were most probably mentioned (offered) in the interview and have been personally experienced by the researcher. Overall, the thesis is rich of material which might have been elaborated into more comprehensive text.

With her thesis, Anastasiia took me to places where most of us would rather not be. I can only hope that the research in which these seven women participated and through which they made it possible for the readers to learn about their experience was perceived as mutually supportive event.

By concluding, during the defence I would like to ask Anastasiia Stepanenko to address the following questions:

1. What are the research questions deriving from the problem and objective/s you identified? How are the chapter 3, including the *Empirical research conclusion*, and the *Conclusions* related?
2. What are the sources you used for the design of the research methodology?

I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the grade 2–3, depending on the defence.

Dana Hradcová

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