Facilitating a reflective practice group for exiled journalists

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Exiled journalists, driven by a desire to sustain their careers in host countries, face well-documented tangible barriers, yet the often-overlooked impact of their multiple traumas warrants closer examination. In this paper, we argue that support for exiled journalists must be framed within the context of their dual roles as both reporters and survivors of traumatic events. Focused on a group of female exiled journalists in the UK, participants in the 2016-established Refugee Journalism Project, our analysis centres on their participation in an eight-week virtual reflective practice group. This group provided a platform for them to reflect upon their evolving professional and personal identities. We discuss their experiences, emphasising the pivotal role of addressing the unique challenges they face at the intersection of identity, exile and media. This work underscores the significance of initiatives such as the Refugee Journalism Project, showcasing the resilience of exiled journalists and their need for support in their host countries.

Key words: journalism, exiled journalism, trauma, reflective practice, refugee

Introduction

Humanitarian crises have always been at the root of large-scale migration and displacement. They force people and families to move away from their homes, communities and sometimes even countries, looking for safety and security. The journey, often complex and varied, will likely be long and challenging, consisting of crossing borders, moving through new territories and overcoming bureaucratic barriers. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached an alarming 110 million by mid-2023, highlighting the urgent need for concerted international efforts to address this. Among them are refugees and asylum seekers who seek safety and protection in various regions, including the United Kingdom (UNHCR 2023 and 2024).

As of November 2022, UNHCR statistics indicated in the UK there were a total of 231,597 refugees, 127,421 pending asylum cases and 5,483 stateless persons. The recent escalation of the war in Ukraine has driven a notable increase in displacement, highlighting the dynamic nature of refugee movements and the impact of geopolitical conflicts on global displacement trends. It is important to acknowledge that most refugees remain within their region of displacement and are likely to be hosted in low- and middle-income countries. Turkey currently hosts the highest number of refugees, with 3.7 million individuals seeking refuge within its borders, followed by Colombia with 1.7 million. These statistics underscore the disproportionate burden shouldered by countries in the Global South in providing protection and assistance to displaced populations (UNHCR 2024). In this context, the United Kingdom serves as a significant destination for refugees and asylum seekers seeking safety and stability. However, navigating the asylum process and rebuilding lives in a new country poses numerous challenges for displaced individuals, ranging from legal hurdles to socio-economic integration. Moreover, the mental health needs of exiled populations, often exacerbated by the trauma of displacement and the uncertainty of their circumstances, require comprehensive support and attention (Silove et al. 2017).

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This paper seeks to delve into the multifaceted experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, with a focus on the intersection of mental health, professional identity and the refugee journey. Central to our discussion is an exploration of the role of professional, career and work identities in shaping the refugee experience, as individuals strive to maintain a sense of purpose and stability amidst upheaval. Despite efforts to provide support and services for refugees and asylum seekers, existing provisions often fall short of adequately addressing their needs. This paper examines an initiative situated within the Refugee Journalism Project, a pioneering initiative established in 2016 to provide support and training for exiled journalists in the UK. Central to this project is the implementation of reflective practice groups, which offer participants a platform to explore their professional and personal identities in the context of exile and journalism. Through an examination of the Refugee Journalism Project and its reflective practice component, we aim to shed light on innovative approaches to supporting exiled journalists and fostering resilience within marginalised communities. Drawing upon existing literature on trauma-informed care and reflective practice for healthcare professionals, we will discuss the potential benefits of implementing reflective practice groups as a supportive space for exiled journalists.

Understanding the context: Challenges exiled journalists experience in host countries

Despite developments in research, theory, policy and treatment models, the reality remains that many refugees experiencing mental health challenges do not receive appropriate services. This discrepancy primarily arises from the scarcity and unequal distribution of mental health services, compounded by challenges in coordinating national and international efforts, barriers to accessing care and enduring stigma associated with both refugee status and mental illness. However, there is a growing consensus among researchers and policymakers regarding the need to optimise resource allocation to enhance mental health outcomes for this vulnerable population (Silove et al. 2017).

Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of epidemiological studies in the field of refugee mental health, leading to comprehensive reviews of a range of findings. These reviews have provided nuanced insights into the prevalence and determinants of mental health outcomes among refugee populations. Contrary to prevailing assumptions, not all refugees exhibit symptoms of trauma requiring counselling, with prevalence rates of PTSD and depression averaging 9 per cent and 5 per cent respectively, among those in Western countries (ibid). Hence, it is important to move beyond a focus on trauma and consider other significant aspects of the refugee experience, such as social, political and cultural dimensions. A narrative that is centred solely on trauma and diagnostic criteria tends to overshadow other coexisting stories which may emphasise different values and identities that refugees readily identify with. Moreover, the common portrayal of the 'refugee experience' fails to acknowledge the diverse cultural, economic, political and social contexts that were integral to their country of origin (Marlowe 2010). Therefore, there is a compelling argument to move beyond the trauma lens and adopt a more comprehensive approach that embraces the multifaceted dimensions of refugees' lives.

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Additional factors contributing to poor mental health outcomes include prolonged detention, restricted access to services, demographic characteristics and stressors in the post-displacement environment, such as economic constraints and continued conflict in the country of origin (Campbell et al. 2018). These studies suggest a common pattern of mental health outcomes among refugees, with most exhibiting low or no symptoms, a significant minority experiencing gradual recovery and a smaller group facing long-standing mental health difficulties. Such insights have crucial implications for informing public health interventions and guiding the allocation of resources towards social reconstruction programmes or more intensive psychotherapeutic interventions based on individual needs. However, estimating service needs is complicated by factors such as stigma, mistrust and limited knowledge of available services, which may deter refugees from seeking mental health support. Addressing these barriers requires innovative approaches, including the networking of agencies to share responsibility for refugee care and task-shifting to primary care and lay workers for the delivery of mental health interventions under supervision (Silove et al. 2017).

In light of these challenges, there is a clear imperative for initiatives that not only provide mental health support but also address the broader socio-economic and cultural factors influencing refugee well- being. The Refugee Journalism Project represents one such innovative endeavour to support a group of exiled journalists through a holistic approach. By examining the rationale and outcomes of this project, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of effective interventions for supporting exiled journalists' well-being in the UK context.

Introducing the Refugee Journalism Project

The Refugee Journalism Project was an initiative established by the first author to create opportunities to support a group whose professional experiences and perspectives often struggle to find a place in the mainstream UK media. Since 2016, it has been working with forcibly displaced and exiled journalists and media professionals from across the UK, helping them to become better connected within the industry, updating their journalistic skills, and finding production opportunities, freelance work and permanent roles.

Following their involvement with the Refugee Journalism Project, some have gone on to win journalism awards, get work published in global media outlets or gain employment at organisations such as the BBC, the *Guardian*, the *Economist*, the *Washington Post*, Thomson Reuters Foundation and Bloomberg. They have collaborated with academic teams to produce participatory research projects and public events within universities. Some have also been hired as hourly-paid sessional tutors instructing undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The motivation to start this work came from global events in 2016 and the escalation of the Syrian conflict. It was a period that saw one of the largest movements of people across European soil and sea this century. Although there has been no comprehensive calculation as to the numbers of forcibly displaced or exiled journalists who are in the UK, the transitional needs of this group were recognised many years before this timeframe through studies and initiatives. Work carried out by the MediaWise RAM Project, started in 1999,

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suggested that the career aspirations of exiled journalists should be supported by affordable training and work opportunities to enable them to discover whether it is appropriate for them to continue their career. They also advocated a programme of work-placements in the local or national print and broadcast media to allow exiled journalists to build experience. Another study into migrant media workers in Europe concluded that there were 'many aspects of the recruitment process that could marginalise those outside of mainstream society' (Markova and McKay 2013: 282-299). Focus group interviews conducted to consider the feasibility of the Refugee Journalism Project add to this evidence.

> I feel frustrated. I have experience, but there are too few opportunities. In every single industry you have a really closed circle and in journalism in the UK, more so. You need someone to believe in you, to open the door ('Maria' 2014).

There is currently no network representing migrant/ exiled journalists, and this would be useful because it would be somewhere journalists can go to consult on country-specific or refugee/ asylum issues. Other benefits could be improving refugee journalists' access to mainstream media and offering training opportunities ('David' 2014).

The Refugee Journalism Project (RJP) was designed to mitigate some of the barriers faced by this group. Delivered in collaboration with universities, NGOs and global media organisations, through the structured programme of training and masterclasses and by connecting the journalists with mainstream newsrooms, it also attempted to address negative or poor representation of migration within the UK's media, by helping to diversify the industry and shifting negative narratives. A UNHCR/Cardiff University analysis of the press coverage of migration in the European Union during this time said that, although some newspapers appeared to run stories that were more sympathetic towards refugees:

> ... the right-wing press in the United Kingdom expressed a hostility towards refugees and migrants which was unique. Whilst newspapers in all countries featured anti-refugee and anti-migrant perspectives, what distinguished the right of centre press in the UK was the degree to which that section of the press campaigned aggressively against refugees and migrants (Berry et al. 2015: 10).

Conflict-journalism, displacement and trauma

Since the project's inception, the team has worked with individuals originating from some of the most conflict-ridden countries in the world including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, South Sudan, Ukraine and Yemen. In recent years, the well-being of journalists around the world has been given prominence in academic and industry discussions at a time when there have been unprecedented threats to press freedom and journalists' safety (Reporters Without Borders 2023). According to studies, between 80 per cent and 100 per cent of refugee journalists have either witnessed traumatic events or directly experienced violence (Smith, Newman et al. 2019) and this has an impact on their mental health and well-being with PTSD, depression,

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compassion fatigue and burnout being reported (Backholm and Björkqvist 2010; Obermaier et al. 2023). Their exposure to human suffering arising from reporting at the scene of car accidents, murders, mass killings or natural disasters has meant that the experience of journalists out in the field has been likened to the emergency services or armed forces (Seely 2019). Even those based in newsrooms and not involved in frontline reporting risk being subjected to traumatic events through the repeated processing of violent or graphic images (Feinstein, Audet and Waknine 2014).

Whilst few of the journalists on RJP would describe themselves as war correspondents, or have received specialised hostile environment training, the occupational hazard of living and working within areas prone to ongoing conflicts means their activities are akin to battle zone reporting. They speak of having witnessed mass casualties in the aftermath of bomb blasts; having interviewed young women who had been raped by invading militia or having reported on the malnourished children living in villages cut off through war. Alongside conflict, many also come from regions that have authoritarian leaders where the press is highly controlled. On a routine basis they either experienced or feared direct or indirect threats. Some were victims of violent assaults, had been arrested, tortured or imprisoned. The women spoke particularly of experiencing intimidation through sexual harassment. Their homes and offices were under surveillance and subjected to raids and forced closure. Their online activities were closely monitored, and accounts repeatedly trolled, hacked, or blocked.

Recent research into regional reporters in Pakistan, who were operating in similar environments, found that those working in conflict-ridden regions where there was a high level of press surveillance by the government had a higher likelihood of exposure to trauma and PTSD symptoms (Shah et al. 2022; Dworznik 2011; Feinstein 2103). It also found that for journalists in the Global South, there was a lack of adequate mental health resources and that language and literacy barriers prevented these journalists from benefiting from resources and services offered by Western-based organisations (Shah et al. 2022).

As journalists, these are the experiences that the participants brought to the project. However, their status as refugees, forced to flee their home countries, going through the asylum process and then trying to build a new life in the UK added an enhanced complexity to their circumstances and raised the likelihood that they would have been exposed to traumatic events, and in turn having a detrimental impact on their mental health and well-being.

The popular anthropological notion of liminality offers a useful way of understanding how refugees and asylum seekers, such as these journalists, experience the transition from being forced to leave their countries and attempting to rebuild their lives and redefine identities in receiving countries, and the impact it has on their well-being. Turner's original concept of liminality – building on Van Gennep's rites of passage work (1960 [1909]) – describes the process by which an individual transforms from one social status to another. It is based on the idea that all rites of passage or transitions in life are marked by three phases: rites of separation or pre-liminal, rites of the margin or liminal, and rites of incorporation or post liminal. The first describes the separation or detachment of an individual or group from their previous role in a social structure or cultural

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grouping. The second is when the individual has left the first role but has not yet entered the new role. In the third set of rites, the individual re-enters society in the new role and has gained recognition in this new state, where they are 'expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social positions in a system of such positions' (Turner 1969: 94).

For those who have been displaced, it is the middle, liminal phase and the processes by which individuals move to the post-liminal state that are of most interest. Turner says: 'Liminal entities are neither here nor there: they are betwixt and between' (ibid: 95). Conceptually, this can describe a wide range of experiences that position forced migrants in the margins of their receiving society and within this liminal space – the physical, geographical, sociocultural or professional. Although they had successfully fled persecution, torture or the threat of imprisonment and were now in the UK and safe, their initial status as an asylum seeker meant that they could not participate in day-to-day life like regular citizens. They faced several years of uncertainty whilst they waited to find out whether the authorities would accept the basis of their asylum claim.

Whilst in this position, some asylum seekers are detained in overcrowded, poorly resourced accommodation centres. Under the UK's dispersal system, once released from detention, asylum seekers face being moved from one temporary shelter to another which could mean zig- zagging up and down the country. Whilst their claim is considered, the threat of deportation is ever present. They do not have permission to work and can only undertake limited voluntary work and educational courses. Those without independent financial means are dependent on charitable support to survive. Throughout this time, they have no idea when or if their asylum claim will be accepted. Some end up waiting for years. The arrival of the UK government's new immigration policy that will see asylum processing being outsourced to Rwanda will raise new dynamics.

Even once refugee status is obtained and they have the legal right to live and work in the UK, the sense of being in limbo and an outsider persists. New barriers continued to block their transition to becoming a full citizen of this new community. As they sought work, their professional qualifications and experience were not recognised. Their biometric identity card, given to those with refugee status, also marked them out as being different when presenting themselves to prospective employers and landlords. They faced linguistic challenges. They worried about friends and family who had been left behind in their conflict- ridden home country, feeling guilt that they had escaped.

Emotionally, these experiences lead many refugees and asylum seekers to feelings of helplessness, depression, lack of agency, isolation, powerlessness, fear of identity loss and loneliness (Schöpke-Gonzalez, Thomer and Conway 2020; Baker and Irwin 2021). This is what it means to be on the threshold or boundary of society. 'There is a power inequality to liminality ... as it is frequently likened to death to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness...' (Turner 1969: 95). This existence is highly controlled, and their fate is in the hands of others. O'Reilly (2018) talks of ontological liminality whereby the sense of being a liminal persona becomes internalised. There is the overwhelming feeling that they have no role in society and no control over their

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future, and how they are 'othered', 'homogenised and stereotyped (by local communities), and how they in turn perceive themselves, becoming in a way the label they are given' (ibid: 835).

The unsettling, uncertain status of liminality can also be used to understand their transition from being seen as a professional journalist to an under-employed refugee seeking to re-establish a career in journalism. Many of those of the Refugee Journalism Project had left high-profile journalism careers and found themselves in the UK unable to transfer their professional status to the demands of the UK industry. They lacked professional insider contacts, had not published in English and were unfamiliar with the necessary journalistic conventions and practices. They also faced questions about the professional objectivity of their reporting (Skjerdal 2010). The prevalence of negative news about refugees and the perception of racism, making migrants feel unwelcome and unsafe (Schöpke-Gonzalez, Thomer and Conway 2020), constructs another barrier for those thinking about entering the media profession as it conflicts with how they see themselves.

In addition to the points highlighted above, the mix of traumatic experiences they had potentially been exposed to from being journalists who had reported on conflict, but who also had been forcibly displaced manifested itself in several ways within the Refugee Journalism Project. Those who had escaped leaving colleagues and families behind spoke of the burden of guilt and fear that their departure would lead to reprisals. Some feared being or continued to be persecuted by state and non-state actors from their home countries. This in turn led to a high level of suspicion within the group, particularly between those from the same region. News reports of the escalations in conflicts abroad, whether in their home countries or not, would often trigger painful memories. Nieto-Brizio and Márquez-Ramirez argue that when the two layers of experiences – being a journalist and having refugee status – are combined:

> displaced journalists, already victimised by occupational violence, become even more vulnerable and suffer from specific profession- related hardships on top of the challenges that usually affect displaced population. Journalists suffer from unique and isolated forms of displacement (Nieto-Brizio and Márquez-Ramirez 2023: 990).

Experimenting with a trauma-led approach

While the Refugee Journalism Project was driven by the desire to reconnect the journalists with their professional career, this could not be tackled without addressing the issues that impacted their personal identities and sense of overall well-being. After all, there was little point in preparing someone to work at a global media organisation if they were in emotional turmoil. It was apparent that due to their circumstances, some of the journalists felt isolated, lacked supportive networks or friendship groups and had difficulty in accessing professional services – either from the industry or from medical services.

For many, the workshop gatherings and the regular contact points provided by the Refugee Journalism Project offered a safe space where they could informally voice their feelings and concerns. They developed close

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relationships with the project team so that when a particular crisis occurred, for example, the loss of family members or deep feelings of depression, this was their first point of call. A systematic review of literature found that journalists without family or peer support were at a higher risk of experiencing depression (MacDonald et al. 2023). However, from the offset, it was apparent that by themselves, the project team did not have the expertise or the resources to deal effectively with the complexity of the challenges that arose.

Between 2016 and 2022, the team experimented with different ways of formalising a response. Group workshops were organised in collaboration with specialist delivery partners such as the Refugee Council, the UK's largest organisation for refugees and asylum seekers, and the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma, as well as offering access to therapists who could provide individual counselling sessions that met the group's linguistic and cultural needs. Whilst these interventions offered a degree of support, there were limitations. Significantly within the group sessions gender presented itself as a barrier to open participation, achieving a depth of conversation and solutions. Some of the men felt that the issue of refugee well-being was over stressed, expressing resilience and a desire to use the time for more vocationally focused conversations. However, away from the mixed group, many of the women were more open, keen to talk about their circumstances and express their vulnerability. As a result, the team wanted to experiment with a gender-specific, self-selecting or voluntary group to be able to explore more intensely some of the unique experiences and feelings of women journalists who had been forcibly displaced.

The rationale behind our approach

Employment plays a pivotal role in the mental health and overall well- being of individuals, including refugees. Studies have consistently shown a strong association between unemployment and adverse mental health outcomes, including increased rates of mental illness and mortality, particularly due to suicide (Lai et al. 2022; Campbell et al. 2018). Additionally, employment serves as a crucial determinant of integration, with appropriate employment indicative of successful integration into host societies. However, refugees often face significant barriers to employment, including acculturative stress, discrimination, language barriers and unfamiliarity with the host culture (Autin et al. 2023).

The inability to secure suitable employment can engender feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration and a pervasive sense of de-professionalisation among refugees. This experience of de-professionalisation not only undermines individuals' self-belief and identity but also hampers their integration into the host community, exacerbating existing mental health challenges. Additionally, the dearth of social capital, compounded by discrimination and structural barriers, further marginalised refugees, impeding their access to professional networks and career advancement opportunities (Smyth and Kum 2010).

In light of these multifaceted challenges, we, as proponents of the Refugee Journalism Project, are deeply aware of the complex interplay between employment, social determinants of health and mental well- being among exiled journalists and refugees. While existing research has shed light on the broader impact of

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employment on mental health outcomes, there remains a notable gap in our understanding of how exiled journalists specifically navigate these challenges. Indeed, a scoping review of the literature reveals a dearth of studies examining the unique experiences and coping mechanisms of exiled journalists in making sense of their professional and personal challenges.

Drawing on the insights provided by research on employment, social determinants of health and trauma-informed care, we have developed a pioneering approach within the Refugee Journalism Project. At its core lies the integration of trauma-informed care and reflective practice, aimed at providing comprehensive support for exiled journalists. Trauma-informed care, rooted in principles of safety, trust, collaboration and empowerment, offers a framework for understanding and addressing the trauma experienced by participants. Concurrently, reflective practice spaces serve as invaluable forums for participants to explore their professional identities, process traumatic experiences and cultivate resilience in a supportive environment (Curry and Epley 2022).

Our approach is underpinned by a commitment to person-centred support, recognising the intrinsic links between professional and mental well-being. We have chosen to incorporate trauma-informed care and reflective practice theory in facilitating support spaces for exiled journalists. Through this work, we hoped to support participants in the project in reclaiming their agency, developing self-awareness and fostering peer support networks.

Reflective practice and professional development

Reflective practice, rooted in the work of Donald Schön (1983), is a dynamic process that fosters continuous professional learning. The methodology calls upon professionals to take a close and unbiased look at their experiences, thoughts and actions, intending to gain useful information for further development. Originally employed within the fields of healthcare and education, reflective practice has recently gained traction in diverse professional fields, including journalism (Kay et al. 2011).

In the healthcare and education fields, reflective practice is inextricably linked with training and accreditation programmes, which underscores the function of sustaining the level of competence and the development of self-awareness. Research within the field of counselling psychology has shown that reflective practice enables practitioners to better understand themselves and their impact on their work, leading to enhanced client engagement and improved outcomes (Carmichael et al. 2020). Additionally, studies concerning healthcare professionals highlight that the benefit of reflective practice is the ability to relieve occupational stress and burnout. Group supervision sessions, as well as reflective practice seminars, present practitioners with the opportunity to share their experiences and feelings with others, which helps cultivate coping mechanisms, improve self-care practices and develop psychological resilience (Mann et al. 2009). These findings suggest that integrating reflective practice into professional training programmes and working environments can have significant implications for practitioners' emotional well-being, job satisfaction and longevity in their careers.

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In the journalism industry, reflective practice is gaining recognition as a means to evaluate and improve professional performance amidst evolving standards and responsibilities. When it comes to the intricacies of ethical issues and pressures journalists are exposed to, reflective practice could offer a space where journalists can take time to consider ethical decision-making and the challenges of their work. By engaging in reflective practices, journalists can enhance their ability to navigate complex situations, uphold ethical standards, and contribute to the advancement of responsible journalism (Kay et al. 2011).

The above underscores the potential value for reflective practice to support the work of professionals, particularly exiled journalists navigating complex challenges in their host countries. By bringing together insights from diverse fields, we hoped to create a supportive and inclusive space for exiled journalists to reflect on their experiences and navigate professional challenges.

Methodology

Selection process for participants

The process of selecting participants for the reflective practice group within the Refugee Journalism Project was informed by an initial assessment workshop conducted with current beneficiaries. This workshop aimed to explore the mental health needs of participants and identify areas they deemed most relevant and useful for support. Following the initial assessment session, it became evident that there were potential barriers related to language proficiency and psychological awareness among the participants. Many participants did not appear to understand fully the concept or purpose of reflective practice, which could be influenced by cultural experiences surrounding mental health and psychology. Additionally, some participants expressed a greater interest in practical forms of support, such as workshops to improve language skills. Subsequently, a select few who expressed interest and volunteered to join the reflective practice group were chosen. Recognising the historical gender disparity within the project, the team actively pursued strategies to redress the imbalance, specifically targeting women and engaging with women's groups to enhance gender representation. Given the gendered nature of journalism, this effort extended to the reflective practice group, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment where participants could share homogeneous experiences. Additionally, the selection of participants relied on those who expressed interest in participating, could speak English as fluently as possible and confirmed their ability to attend all sessions. Ultimately, these individuals were regular attendees of other activities that ran as part of the project, had already formed close bonds and were comfortable discussing their personal and professional challenges.

Reflective practice groups, commonly employed in organisational and healthcare settings, have evolved from being learning tools to providing support for individuals experiencing high levels of stress or secondary trauma (Curry and Epley 2022). Due to budgetary constraints, the decision was made to conduct the groups over an eight-week period, with each session lasting for one hour. Four women ultimately participated in the group.

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Structure and format of the reflective practice group

An invitation was extended to potential participants, outlining the purpose and format of the reflective practice group. The invitation emphasised the creation of a safe and supportive space for exiled journalists to reflect on their experiences and engage in discussions about both professional and personal challenges. Facilitated by the second author, a counselling psychologist, the group comprised eight weekly sessions conducted via Zoom. In keeping with trauma-informed guidelines, sessions were structured openly and flexibly, guided by the participants' interests and reflections. The key focus was to develop relationships amongst the participants and the facilitator. Ground rules were established at the outset, with the first session dedicated to discussing participants' hopes, expectations and concerns. Notably, not all participants were able to attend every session, highlighting the challenges faced by refugees in committing to regular engagements due to their demanding lives.

Themes emerging from reflective practice group discussions

In facilitating the reflective practice group, we observed several group dynamics that align with Irvin D. Yalom's (2008) principles of group therapy and these were evident in our sessions. Below we, reflect on these factors and their manifestation within the group.

At the outset of the reflective practice group, identifying the group's task was crucial, aligning with Yalom's (ibid) instruction that this is a key component of successful group work. This task, however, presented a unique challenge due to the nuanced separation between group psychotherapy and reflective practice. Reflective practice primarily aims to support professional development and continuous learning, while group psychotherapy focuses on psychological and emotional support. However, in this context, the distinction was particularly difficult to delineate because the participants were not only professionals but also refugees dealing with significant personal and collective trauma. The participants were new to these types of conversations, which added another layer of complexity. Reflective practice groups typically emphasise professional experiences and development, yet given the participants' backgrounds, discussions inevitably intertwined with their personal journeys and the adversities they faced as refugees. This overlap made the line between reflective practice and psychotherapy even more challenging to define, as the group aimed to support both their professional growth and their personal well-being. Therefore, the group's task evolved to accommodate a dual focus: fostering reflective professional practices while also providing a supportive space for participants to process and share their lived experiences as exiled journalists.

In our small group, consisting of four participants and one facilitator, the dynamics were significantly impacted by absent group members. When two participants were absent, the sense of being a cohesive group was disrupted, leading to a unique challenge in maintaining the group's integrity and purpose. This situation naturally led to early discussions among the group about the fundamental aspects of group formation and the objectives of our reflective practice sessions. These conversations were crucial in exploring and understanding

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what constitutes a group and the specific goals we aimed to achieve together. Such reflections underscore the importance of consistent attendance and engagement in maintaining the group's functionality and achieving its intended outcomes.

Building trust in the context of the reflective practice group presented both a crucial necessity and an initial hurdle for participants. Many grappled with the delicate balance of what they could safely share, given the intertwined nature of their experiences with their asylum- seeking journey. Their past encounters with broken trust, whether in their home countries or during their displacement, cast a shadow of caution over their interactions. Participants navigated this terrain with a sense of curiosity, seeking reassurance about the boundaries of disclosure within the group. This process underscored the profound impact of trust dynamics on their ability to engage authentically and find solidarity within the group setting.

The reflective practice group discussions yielded several key themes reflecting the experiences of exiled journalists in the UK. Participants shared narratives of their journeys to their host country, including the circumstances leading to their refugee status and their previous work experiences. They expressed challenges associated with managing multiple roles and expectations in their host country, such as care-giving responsibilities, language barriers and navigating complex bureaucratic systems. Additionally, participants highlighted difficulties in finding joy amidst daily stressors and grappling with experiences of possible deception and mistrust of others; they appear to have been given false or incomplete information upon their arrival in the UK.

Following the end of our time together, the instillation of hope was evident as members found reassurance and optimism through witnessing peers navigate similar challenges, fostering a sense of possibility. Universality played a pivotal role, alleviating feelings of isolation as participants realised they were not alone in their struggles, promoting solidarity. The group served as a valuable platform for imparting information, facilitating knowledge exchange on journalism, trauma coping and adaptation to new environments. Altruism naturally emerged, with participants offering support and advice, fostering a mutual support network and sense of purpose. Interpersonal learning occurred through interactions, deepening participants' insights into their dynamics and relationships. Group cohesiveness, essential for therapeutic progress, was fostered by trust and connection. Catharsis was achieved as participants expressed emotions in a safe space, contributing to healing. Finally, existential factors such as identity and purpose were explored, facilitating personal reflection and growth.

Personal and professional challenges faced by participants and feedback

Among the challenges discussed were relational difficulties within their surroundings, including issues of trust, jealousy and sexual harassment, particularly for women residing in hostels. Following the end of our time together, participants expressed a desire for more structured sessions and tasks related to mental health,

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recognising the need for additional support and resources to address their evolving needs as refugees and journalists.

Participants spoke of several benefits to attending the group. Overall, the reflective practice group provided a platform for participants to normalise their experiences, find solidarity with others facing similar challenges, and articulate their aspirations for the future. Despite the logistical challenges of attendance, participants valued the opportunity to share openly and receive support from their peers and facilitator. The group's discussions underscored the intersectionality of work, identity and exile, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of the refugee experience in the UK.

Implications and conclusions

The consequences drawn from our paper and the relevant work go beyond the immediate context of exiled journalists to reverberate to the broader fields of refugee support and career development. Through highlighting the complex difficulties that exiled journalists face, we call for a change in the perception of the situation from one that is trauma- centric to one that employs a whole person framework encompassing the totality of their experiences. The introduction of these reflective spaces was to help participants engage in critical self-reflection as well as create connections, share experiences and develop skills. Thus, ensuring they are avenues for amplifying the participants' voices and further resourcing them. Our intervention serves as a pioneering step towards integrating trauma-informed care with a professional development strategy.

By partnering with counselling psychologists and embracing interprofessional working, we exemplify the importance of leveraging diverse expertise to address complex social issues. Encouragingly, critical reflection, a cornerstone of our approach, is recognised by the World Health Organisation as one of the main domains of interprofessional learning (Richard et al. 2019). Richard et al. (ibid) assert that integrating reflective practice into interprofessional continuing education and practice yields positive outcomes, underscoring the effectiveness of this approach in fostering collaboration and improving outcomes across diverse professional contexts.

To conclude, the paper brings to the fore the urgency of personalised approach that tackles both professional and psychological aspects of exiled journalists. Through the application of knowledge gained from different disciplines and by encouraging interdisciplinary cooperation, our goal is to be able to help in the creation of more facilitating and enabling settings for refugees in their host countries. As we advance in the future, we must be dedicated to creating spaces that celebrate the abundance of refugees' experiences, uplift their voices and give way to their path towards self-fulfilment.

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Conflict of interest

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