

Personal Interest project

'Asylum seekers and Refugees in Australia'

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Introduction

The central idea of my personal interest project is what Australia's views on Refugees in Australia are. This topic was chosen because I have a personal interest in this topic and recently it has been a big issue in politics and the media. I thought it would be interesting to find whether Australian people are really as accepting of other cultures as they would like to think they are and helpful for those who are uneducated on this issue.

Are we really accepting of refugees or only those with skills or those who are like us?

To find the answers to these questions I have employed the use of interviews with various people including a Iraqi refugee and a social worker for refugees who assists them with health and welfare needs, the interviews will assist me in my research as interview will expose the opinions of people who are involved and informed. Interviews were suited to my research as it allowed me to find in depth information about refugees lives and how they are treated by Australian people. The advantages of interviews are that they give the ability to learn about things that could not be learnt from observation, they assist in showing an inner perspective, they increase accuracy of responses and the interviewer can ask questions if not completely understood.

I have used questionnaires as part of my research which will give me different people perceptions of the topic. Using questionnaires was suited to my research as I needed to find the opinions of Australian people and questionnaires are a quick and easy way to find out information from many people. The advantages of questionnaires that the responses are gathered in a way which can find qualitative and quantitative results and data is easily collected from a large group from various ages, genders and backgrounds.

Using each of these methodologies it will assist me in comparing opinions of the people who know firsthand what happens in the process of being a refugee compared to someone who doesn't know and judges from what they see in the media.

I will be doing a cross cultural comparison of generational differences, to find whether the perceptions have changed over the age generations. I will also be comparing male to female perceptions, finding whether there is a difference of perception between the genders.

Log

From the beginning I wanted to research the topic of 'Gang Wars' this topic interested me because there had been a lot of media attention on them, and also I found that idea of psychology side (the idea of the mind of criminals) to be extremely interesting. After I had shown this to my teacher, she told me that I was unable to research this topic as she believes that I was in danger, if I was to research this topic.

After plenty of refining and re-refining I came up with my next idea for my Personal Interest Project; Australia's perception of Refugees in Australia, I spoke to my teacher about this topic and she gave me the OK to go ahead with it.

I began researching this topic in late January, early February, I begun looking for articles, journals, videos ect that involved refugees in Australia, this was to help me get background information and also this was my secondary research.

At this time I was also looking for different methodologies which I could use in my Personal Interest Project, I had decided on Interviews and Questionnaires.

By March I had found 2 people to interview, one being an Iraqi refugee who was legally accepted into Australia in 1995 and a social/welfare worker for refugees. I began to write out the questions which I was going to ask in each interview.

I also continued to find other bits of secondary research, through the internet, newspaper, journals, television news reports and television documentaries.

I did my first interview with the Iraqi refugee in April, I did this interview face-to-face I found this to be a challenge as it was very important for me to ask questions with the utmost respect so that I did not offend this person, the interview turned out very well and I gained a lot of insight and information which I needed for my project.

I began writing my questionnaire questions I had 3 attempts at a questionnaire before I printed the final copy I found that with my first 2 questionnaires both had questions which were too broad, and also too many open ended questions. My 3rd questionnaire had 8 closed questions though they were not too broad and the answers from each gave me great insight.

Throughout May I gave my questionnaires out to my local community, trying my hardest to find a range of diverse people, from different age groups, ethnic backgrounds and genders. When I had received all my questionnaires back I graphed all the information, so that it would be easier to integrate into my project.

I used email to interview my second interviewee, I sent her a list of questions and she sent back how she interpreted the questions, this made it difficult in the communication between us, as some of the questions needed to be explained better and also her answers did as well, there was back and forward emailing between us as there was a bit of misunderstanding but it was figured out in the end.

By June I had written my introduction and a fair bit of my central material, I handed in my first draft on the 21st of June, 2010

Throughout July After it had been proof read and giving back I fixed the things that needed to be changed and kept adding to the central material to make it more concise and clear.

In August I wrote my final piece including an introduction, all my central material, a conclusion, an annotated bibliography and an appendix.

Chapter 1: Are we lawless in regards to human rights

In this chapter I will be researching whether these human rights are being adhered to by Australia when it comes to the treatment of asylum seekers.

The United Nations an international organisation which was created to maintain peace between countries, made after World War Two in 1945, started by 51 countries were committed to peacekeeping, security, developing friendly relationships between nations, promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. According to the 'Declaration of Human Rights according to United Nations'¹ it gives a list of rights which applies for every human on earth.

Through my secondary research I have found that from a report from Amnesty International Christmas Island and other detention centres were "found it to be harsh, unwelcoming and an inappropriate environment for asylum seekers"² According to the United Nations declaration of human rights article 14, Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. According to the report from Amnesty International, this law is not being adhered to in the detention centres, as detainees accommodated there do not have access to the same legal, health and counselling services provided to detainees on the mainland.

Through my primary research I have found that through the Iraqi asylum refugee³ who I had interviewed, explained that in Australia, having refugee status didn't really make that much of a difference to how people treated her but being getting over here was the hardest bit of her life, as she was detained in a refugee camp for 5 years before she was accepted into Australia. She told me about in the refugee camp, she explained it "a refugee camp is not like a room like this- we stayed in tents with maybe something to sleep on, some people made small houses out of mud but when it rained it would collapse on top of them" this was from 1990 to 1995 this was from a refugee camp in Turkey and Iran. This does not adhere with the Human rights declaration article 25 '*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services,*

¹ Appendix page 18

² Appendix page 22

³ Appendix page 25

and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.' Fortunately the refugee camps have improved over the years; putting proper building structures in for people to sleep in but unfortunately on Christmas Island is beginning to become over crowded so people are forced to sleep in tents.

The rights of refugees in Australia make them eligible to apply for Newstart and Youth allowances, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), the age pension, disability support pension, family tax benefit and childcare benefit if they have gained a Permanent Protection Visa or a Resolution of Status Visa. There are no differences for male and female refugees, other than pregnancy benefits.

It is to my belief that the Australian governments are doing all that they can to protect asylum seekers and give them a better future, completely adhering to the United Nations Human Right Laws without not taking care of Australia's security.

Chapter 2: Perceptions in Australia of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

Through my research I have found a varied perception of refugees in Australia, from my questionnaires⁴ I found that only 39% of people questioned were for letting refugees into Australia, also through my questionnaire I found that 44% of those questioned believe that it is not Australia's responsibility to take in refugees, 34% believe that it is Australia's responsibility and the other 22% were had neutral feelings.

Another question I asked in my questionnaire was to number from one to twelve, from which country would you prefer refugees to come from (1 being where you would want them from, 12 being where you least want them from) 95% put England as their number one preference, which the other 5% in coming from Korea. The country which received the least wanted was Iraq and next to this was Iran; neither of these countries received a preference under 5 and was mostly 12's and 11's as well as equal last.

In my questionnaire I asked what gender each participant was, having 72% female and 28% male, I have found that the males aged in the group of 12-19 are uneducated on the topic of asylum seekers in Australia, writing comments such as "I don't know anything about it so I couldn't comment" This shows the lack of education of this issue which could lead to unjust perceptions of asylum seekers. My questionnaires suggest that males are less tolerant to Middle Eastern refugees rather than refugees from other countries. It is also shown that 46% of females who filled out my questionnaire believe that it was not Australia's responsibility to take in asylum seekers, and 27% did not have an opinion and only 27% believed that it is our responsibility. Both male and females had pretty similar outcomes, of the majority being less tolerant to Middle Eastern refugees and not wanting to accept responsibility for them.

⁴ Appendix page 26

Through my interview with an Iraqi refugee she tells me that "more educated and open-minded people have much more tolerance towards us" she tells me that she understands why people do not accept them, she believes they are scared of the unknown and believes that everyone has the right to fear."She told me that the perceptions of refugees in Australia haven't really changed over time and that still after 16 years she still feels as though she needs to prove herself to Australia to feel accepted by people and she believes that she can prove herself to Australian's through education "When I came to Australia, I already had a degree in Visual Arts so I kept going with that in Australia, I got my masters and now I am head of Visual Arts Department at a major University in New South Wales." But if she still feels as though she needs to prove herself (after 16 years) what does this say about how Australian's treat her and possibly many other refugee families who have built a life in Australia.

I believe that many Australians are uneducated on the topic of asylum seekers and make prejudices without any knowledge or information. I believe that this can be fixed by having school children taught about asylum seekers in school, this way we may have less of a prejudice against refugees and people can understand why they need to come here.

Chapter 3: How we can do things better..

I asked the question How would you improve the system to an Iraqi refugee, she told me "Every country has their own rules and I accept that and they have to be careful, I can understand why it was such a long process but when I was in the camps I saw many children who were brought in by their parents, there were children who had been there for over five years and other who were born in the refugee camps and never left."

Improvement of children's rights in refugee camps is important.

In an article written by Paul Maley and Paige Taylor⁵ tells us that Patrick McGorry attacked Australia's system of mandatory detention, describing detention centres as mental illness "factories." According to the Immigration Department, there are 1674 people in detention on Christmas Island, 200 of who are being held in tents due to overcrowding. The facility was originally designed to hold just 400 people, but has been reconfigured to accommodate 1848. These need to be improved to ensure all human rights are given to these people.

In Australia the process of becoming a refugee can over 15 years but there are many reasons for this, an asylum seekers with no documentation has no proof of their identity, many asylum seekers who arrive by illegal boats throw their passports or any personal documents over board so that they are able to gain refugee status in Australia faster but this actually may lead to a longer waiting time to be accepted as the Australian government needs to find genuine refugees and non-genuine and without personal identification it becomes hard to do security checks on these people. If you are looking for refugee status in Australia the first thing is you will have an interview with someone from immigration, which is called a 'screening interview' this is to find genuine refugees, depending on the outcome of the interview you may be accepted or rejected, if you are accepted You wait for police and security checks, which can take up to twelve months during this time you remain in detention. If you are rejected it is not the end you may make an appeal to the Refugee Tribunal, if you are still rejected after this you may go to the courts of Australia and they may be able to get you into another interview with the refugee

⁵ Appendix page 22

tribunal but are unable to give you a visa and throughout this long process you are still in detention.

Through an interview with a refugee case worker⁶ she told me "It depends on people claims, current policy, when a person applied for protection, DIAC's (Department of Immigration and Citizenship) processing times etc. investigation needed in cases etc. it can take anywhere from 3 months – over 15 years. At present DIAC are trying to process (give a positive or negative) decision within 3 months. If refused at the first stage however there is an appeal process where some asylum seekers are granted visas at the 2nd or 3rd stage etc. sometimes the 3 months is however stretched much longer."

I believe that this process is long though necessary for Australia's security protection and border controls. Though possibly making a better place for the refugee camps providing better facilities and proper health care including mental health care.

Gillard vs. Abbott

Julia Gillard's policy for asylum seekers is to stop the boat people from endeavouring on the voyage to Australia, her she wants "to wreck the people smuggling trade by removing the incentive for boats to leave their ports of origin in the first place," by removing the profitability of the trade and the danger of the voyage. Gillard is also looking at having mandatory detention centre's in countries such as East Timor or Papua New Guinea until they can prove themselves as genuine refugees though this may take years to prove, many people speculate that this policy seems to be a lots like the Liberal's John Howard's 'Pacific Solution' which caused much controversy in Australia when implemented in 2001.

Tony Abbott has told ABC radio about his policies on Asylum seekers discarding their personal documentation will not be acceptable in Australia as he believes that they will be "taking advantage of Australia's generosity." Mr. Abbott wants to make a 'no documentation, no entry' law for asylum seekers to stop asylum seekers from discarding their documentation. Mr. Abbott also wants for all illegal boats to be turned around and

⁶ Apendix page 23

sent back to their country of origin. Mr Abbott is also looking at offshore processing of asylum seekers; and reintroducing temporary protection visas.

Each government has policies which are agreed with and not agreed with by the Australian public. The ability for the Australian government to agree on a set policy may be indicative that Australia's leaders are unable to come to an agreement and in turn what does this say about Australia as a country, how will the Australian people react to refugees when our leaders cannot agree on how to treat them?

This year's election will have a great impact on the future of asylum seekers in Australia but with each party wanting a different policy if they win, will Australia ever agree on a concrete set of policies for Asylum seekers? Or will the policies be forever changing according to which government is in power at that particular time? Will the arguing of Australian leaders about this issue have an effect on the perceptions of Australians?

I believe that each government has both got great policies but the one that is in place now is working well for us, Tony Abbott's idea to turn the boats around I believe is rebelling against the human rights international law though Julia Gillard's idea of opening offshore mandatory detention centres is much similar to John Howard's Pacific solution which has proved not to work through Howards reign.

Conclusion

Through my research I have learnt many things, not just about asylum seekers and refugees but also about myself. I have learnt that it is important for every Australian including myself to treat every person as an equal; refugees are a large part of our community, helping Australia to grow as a nation letting us use their skills and abilities to create a better place. I believe that it is important for Australia to put more emphasis on teaching about refugees as I found that many Australians were not educated on this topic and have a prejudice about refugees without any information or knowledge. This research task has helped me grow into a more socially and culturally literate person as I have learnt to accept others with disconcertment toward the media.

My hypothesis was "Are we really accepting of refugees or only those with skills or those who are like us?" through my research I have found that many Australian's are not accepting of those who are different, this may be due to lack of education of this topic. Though there are still many Australian's who do accept refugees as part of our nation. Through my research I have found that many Australian's are accepting of refugees though there is a large majority that are not, I believe that this can be resolved by having more education on this topic.

I employed the use of a questionnaire which was handed out to a number of people and two interviews, both research tools gave me great information, the questionnaire assisted me in finding information about people's opinions on the topic, this research tool was appropriate to my research as it helped me find perceptions of a large group of people from various backgrounds, genders and ages.

The two interviews which I conducted helped me to gather valid information about what it is like to be a refugee living in Australia and how the reality of the process of becoming a refugee. An interview was appropriate to my research as it helped me gather in depth information about asylum seekers and refugees in Australia.

If I was to research this topic again I would choose the same research tools to conduct my research as they were both very appropriate to the topic and have helped me in my research of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia.

Annotated Bibliography

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/Human_Rights/immigration/asylum_seekers.html#who

This website helped me gather information on Australia's legislations and laws on asylum seekers coming into Australia.

8th March, 2010

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/>

This web site was used to gather articles for my secondary research. It was easy to find article on the subject I wanted.

8th March, 2010

<http://www.smh.com.au>

This website has given me a lot of helpful articles, which has helped me conduct a lot of my secondary research. This has helped me to create a better Personal Interest Project because it is easy to read and easy to pull out important information. 8.3.2010

8th March, 2010

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/congo/5330678/Video-Life-inside-a-refugee-camp.html>

this video was helpful to gather background information about refugee camps and how they actually are compared to the media's perception of them.

31st May, 2010

<http://www.un.org/en/>

This website has given me a lot of information on human rights which have been made by the united nations, this has helped me in my research as I can compare this rights to the rights of refugees in Australia.

31st May, 2010

http://www.alhr.asn.au/refugee-kit/downloads/chapter_2.pdf

This website gave me a lot of information about the rights of refugees which has helped me to write my first chapter in comparing the UN's human rights compared to the what refugees are given in Australia.

7th June, 2010

<http://www.amnesty.org.au/>

This website has helped me gather information about organisations which help refugees and asylum seekers. There are many articles which has helped me in my secondary research to get background information.

8th June, 2010

<http://www.immi.gov.au/>

This website enabled me to gather information about Australian laws on Border Security, Detention centres and laws for 'unlawful non-citizens' which includes asylum seekers who try to gain entry into Australia without permission.

26th July, 2010

<http://www.mrt-rrt.gov.au/>

This website helped me to find information about how to gain a refugee visa in Australia, it was very helpful as it is the actual website you can go to get an application for refugee status in Australia. This made my research much more valid as I was able to find the true way that a refugee gets accepted into Australia.

4th August, 2010

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/2010_party_election_policies.pdf

This website helped me to gain information about what each government is planning for asylum seekers if they are elected as government. This has helped me with my secondary research and to find valid information about each parties policies.

10th August, 2010