

# Review of: "Forget the cake: let them work. Conflicting narratives towards work, health and the plight of asylum seekers in the UK"

Debbie C Hocking<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Monash University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an important opinion piece about the impact of policies of deterrence by wealthy host nations on those fleeing conflict and persecution in search of protection. Domestic populations on state benefits and asylum seeker populations residing within a host country are often pitted against each other (as if we can't assist both). The article discusses employment as a social determinant of physical and mental health, which has been the subject of numerous papers in relation to asylum seekers. However, the author of this article intelligently unites the two to highlight the UK's disingenuous and contradictory policy stance relating to both populations.

It is critically important that clinicians – not just academics – write about the downstream issues of these immigration and social policies and the extensive deleterious impact of such, not just on the individuals, but their communities and the broader mainstream society. The point was well-made regarding the direct and indirect impact on physical and mental health and an individual's work status. So, at a time when the NHS is groaning under years of fiscal neglect, potentially a further specific point could be made about the (putative?) increasing burden of a social policy-driven underclass of asylum seekers on the NHS.

The paper appears to be pitched to a domestic audience (e.g., not defining acronyms and assuming some prior knowledge of policies, and/or leaving these unreferenced). However, this is a global issue and is of relevance to most if not all nations which permanently or temporarily host asylum seekers.

What is omitted is the reality of those working illegally out of desperation, and the exploitation engendered by denying asylum seekers the right to work. The existence of these individuals is even more liminal and precarious than those comprising the casual/insecure workforce. Hence, there is a milieu of fear and exploitation which flourishes with impunity under such policies.

The piece could be strengthened by drawing back the lens to highlight the bigger picture (re: social policies of deterrence and the impact on health/mental health of those most vulnerable), and by drawing on literature documenting similar issues from host nations outside of the UK. This would underscore the reality that this is a global issue with a critical mass ever-demonising those who seek protection and survival by whatever means possible. The problem is increasing, so requires a rethinking and reworking of policies to reimagine a durable solution.

