

The Unwanted Recipients: Afghan Refugees' Destitution, Socio-Psychological Imbalances And Criminality: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Migration and Criminality are universal realities existing since distant past, going side-by-side, influencing each other, and producing an atmosphere of uncertainty and apathy. Refugees are most likely dealt with absurdity in the receiving societies, which create distance between the “newcomers” and natives. The present study is an attempt to address the phenomenon of crimes and criminality under the ever-existing concept of migration. The study is framed under qualitative research design following the 6-Step Thematic Analysis Model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The study finds an obvious connection between criminality and migration as overlapping and interdependent concepts. It is believed that the increase in any of the phenomenon, gives hype to the other. Less access to employment and livelihood along-with vulnerability of the domestic workers are among the patterns that are produced because of the Afghanis' status of refugees which in turn compel them to indulge in illegalities and criminalities.

Keywords: Migration, Criminality, Human Capital, Labor Market, Employment, Discriminatory Patterns, Social Imbalances

Introduction

Migration as a universally prevalent phenomenon is highly debated across the globe. Multiplicity of conceptions exist about characterization and mischaracterization of its criminalized aspect encompassing accusation of augmentation in crimes' rates (Bell, 2019). Evidence through research at some instances endorse the fact that

migration and immigrants have association with increasing criminalities while the other justifications exhibit (through empirical data) that no simple linkage between migration and crime might be found (Bell, Fasani & Machin, 2018). On the contrary, it is believed that the legalized status of immigrants is most likely beneficial having positive and lucrative results for the receiving society (Bell, Bindler

& Machin, 2013). Migration and immigrants have been an issue of concern especially in the advanced countries where the flow of such people is found alarming. It is often associated with migration that the uneven entry of people from other parts of the world usually spoil the labor market for natives (Dimitriadi, 2021). Controversies exist in academic findings and literature, which emphasize over the multifaceted impacts of migration on different aspects of society (Katseli, Lucas & Xenogiani, 2006) including health and educational services, housing, cultural identity, congestion of cities and increase in the intensity of criminal conducts (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2012).

The existence body of knowledge reveals that crime is negatively or inversely associated with immigrants, where the data from England and Wales showed that instead of heavy flow of immigrants till 2009, the frequency of criminal tendencies and actions visibly decreased (Light, 2016). Contrarily, a notion also exists that both the concepts and patterns of social life (migration and crime) are highly discussed in public and policymaking spheres. The question about nexus between both still seems blur and unanswered explicitly. It is thought that immigrants are often criminals before their entry to receiving country having criminal records (they migrate more when compared to non-criminals), eventually turn into, and adopt criminal and deviant lifestyle after settlement in the new origin, and thus the process of immigration provides a base to criminalization; the question is yet to answer either true or not (Bosworth & Slade, 2014). Similarly, academic and research scholarship addresses the fact that migration is a threat to

societies in terms of causing crimes and/or intensifying the existing criminality, having migrants been both as victims and victimizers (Balica & Marinescu, 2018).

A growing social tension is being witnessed in debates made on the “migration crisis”, in which the newcomers (migrants) are referred to “unwanted newcomers”, which in turn give rise to tension between the authorities concerned and migrants/refugees (Koster & Reinke, 2017). Social researchers claim that controlling migration is an uphill task while unprecedented criminalization of migrants and their exposure to illegalities is another issue of concern (Melossi, 2015). Similarly, the migrants (often being called “guest workers”) are also subject to accusations for being illegal and noted as “the Criminal Foreigners”, which led the research dynamics to debate, discuss and address the issue of “Migration and Criminality” (Kuryliuk & Khalymon, 2020). The current research is also an attempt to address answer to questions, which in sociological and criminological scholarships are yet to be answered. The emphasis is drawn on Afghan migrants in terms of their access to employment and livelihood and labor market’s vulnerabilities in Pakistan especially the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The Argument

During the late 70s, Afghanis migrated in larger numbers due to their evacuation because of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Pakistan, being the closest in terms of geography and most relevant in terms of cultural and ideological contexts, was far accessible and preferred for the persons with

displacement. With their very entrance to the country, they faced issues and hurdles in their integration and livelihood because of the already impoverished and disorganized patterns of the country (the receiving society). Pakistan as a third world country confronting numerous challenges of political instability, poverty and employment, the settlement of people with innumerable vulnerabilities and deprivations was an arduous task. In such scenario, the already deteriorated condition of the migrants added to the less regulated and unstable structure of Pakistan. Resultantly, these people (Afghanis) were entangled in another mire of hardships, apathies, and adversities especially in terms earning a stable and acceptable livelihood, having expectations from Pakistan in terms of “welcoming gestures and facilitation”. The nonfulfillment of their expectations led them to think the other way round to earn their livelihood with informal and illegal means. The fact is palpable that the advent of Afghanis has saturated the labor market, they are treated as second class citizens with a status of minorities and most often offered with menial jobs and comparatively lesser wages. Such an argument leads the researchers to find answer to the questions, either “migration is linked with criminality or not, and if so, what are the factors that contribute to their illegalities in Pakistani Society under the heat of social imbalances.

Objectives

- To investigate the level of access to employment and livelihood of Afghan Refugees and indulgence in criminality

- To pinpoint the vulnerabilities of domestic workers in terms of wages and divergence from legal means of income and livelihood

Research Questions

- How and in what ways the poor access of Afghan refugees to employment contribute to their intrinsic patterns of criminality, which negatively influence their livelihood?
- Why the Afghan workers (mostly daily wagers) are dealt contemptuously in the labor market, and what repercussions are being posed by such discriminatory pattern on societal disruption of Pakistani in terms of crime increase?

Methodology

The study is framed under qualitative research design particularly Thematic Analysis method. The sampled population was selected conveniently from the target population of Afghan Migrants being convicted for crimes (both violent and non-violent) and released during the past five years. The selected respondents were interviewed (each lasting for an average of 30-40 minutes) through an interview guide in a face-to-face interaction. Data collection continued till saturation of data under the “New Information Threshold” presented by Guest, Namey & Chen (2020). The participants were consented before interview and were empowered to “quit” or “don’t respond” to questions, which they deem irrelevant or offensive. The collected data is thematically analyzed following the Braun

and Clarke's (2006) 6-step Thematic Analysis model. The interview transcripts were carefully edited for familiarization, followed by finding the axial/descriptive codes, searching the themes, naming and defining the themes while discussion is made in support of literary information and illustrative quotes.

Analysis and Discussion

This section of the study provides detailed discussion about the themes derived from interview transcripts through data processing. Two major themes are derived which are discussed under literary and empirical data as:

I. Access to Employment and Refugees' Livelihood

One of the most difficult issues that the refugees face upon arrival into the host society is to search and find employment. The literary data submits that the refugees are interested in the entrepreneurial jobs than involving in laborious jobs. Upon arrival, almost each one struggles for finding a job commensurate with work experience and previous educational background. Equally it is reported in the medical reports that refugees who have taken up menial jobs, or involved in jobs, which may not conform to the qualifications have been a source of depression and anxieties for refugees. However, with the potential of having some resources, the refugees could start with small entrepreneurial ventures, such as help in opening a bakery shop or a barbershop, serve as middlemen on commission in the real estate businesses, or operating of a small grocery store.

On the other hand, one of the most important steps towards the integration of refugees is to improve the livelihood protection of refugees, promoting the durable solutions for their integration, and contributing to their long-term well-being. However, the permanent integration of refugees in the receiving countries is averse. Despite the emphasis on refugees' livelihood, UNHCR and its partners are operating within a legal framework to not allow refugees to work while sometimes a blind eye is turned on informal working in the labor markets. However, being limited, there are some laws for the protection of refugees from exploitation, facilitating their livelihoods and protecting them during working hours. Similarly, the Afghan refugees in Pakistan are also often confronted with wide range of financial, cultural, and political hurdles in access to job and livelihood. In many cases, they have little alternative to join the informal economy.

“Most of us are drivers (driving on wages in vehicles of locals), while the new generation is mostly involved in collecting scrap. We have our hotels where we prefer to hire Afghans for work. Look around, you will see Afghans everywhere in this shop” (1V05-45G1).

Based on relevant information, the poverty is also used as a deterrent to integration of refugees. Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has recently pointed out that refugees should be pushed into a 'hostile environment' on their early

reception into the hosting societies (Travis, 2013). The scholars also suggest that the refugees should not live in destitution or cross through the experience of poverty or enforced destitution (Omata, 2013). Refusing that not to allow the refugees to integrate may be a planned outcome of public policy, aiming to 'disincentivize' these individuals to remain in the receiving societies (Coddington, Conlon & Martin, 2020; Crawley, Hemmings & Price, 2011) and to deter the future arrivals (Bloch, 2000). The refugee system may be vulnerable and rather not being used for the protection of refugees. While using the measures and procedures, the O'Connell and Farrow (2007) have dissected policy for the unaccompanied minors, and Darling (2009) has also exposed that how the refugees' regime produces the dehumanizing claimants.

"You cannot find jobs here in Pakistan. There is no provision in rules to find a job in government sector. Even you cannot admit your child in school. I personally went through the hardships when I had to admit my boy in school, for which I had to get permission from the Commissioner to serve our purpose, which is a painstaking process. It's not easy either to cope or streamline with the system that prevails in Pakistan" (3V04-32G2).

The UK Home Office has insisted that the refugees will not be integrated until they

receive refugee status (Goodson & Phillimore, 2008). The refugees are intentionally segregated from most of the population. There is significant evidence, which suggests that the experiences of refugees during the asylum-seeking period do have an impact on integration (Phillimore, 2011). The exploitation of refugees on such lines is well noted, although there is a lack of research in such involvement. Lewis (2007) in a study reflects on refugee labor situations that there was a high labor mobility and the concentrations so far being made on a limited range of professionals. They have pointed out that the refugees are generally involved in manufacturing or serving of food, domestic work, factory packing, cleaning, and food processing. The findings further reveal that the refugees are also exploited in terms of wages and exploitation is not only limited to the refugees who have the legal status, but even low payment below the national minimum wage level was also revealed to those who were given permission to work. The findings also unveil that barring refugees from the work, even while they have no access to public funds, might force them to involve in the forced labor, which is a criminal offence. To ascertain and evaluate the literary debate, the empirical information collected during this study asserts as below:

"We (Afghans) are discriminated everywhere. For example, if you (being researcher I personified as an Afghan) take a shop from a Pakistani landlord, and if he asks you to go out of his shop, you will have to move out. So-for, I have not seen anyone

among Afghans who have conflicted with his landlord/or have tried the other ways to settle the issues through other means. And whenever we come to landlords, they instead to give us relief rather treat us with disgust. They say that being an Afghan you can neither reason nor can try a legal battle in court to settle the issues" (1NV08- 29G2).

2. Experiences of Poverty and Destitution; a nexus with criminal tendency

The refugees generally live in a state of poverty and destitution. It is also indicated both at national and across the regional level that the poverty has an impact not only on the routine life of refugees, but it also shatters the confidence, increases fear, dependence, and isolation among refugees from the local population (Lindsay, Gillespie & Dobbie, 2010). It also restricts refugees from the developing of planning and increase dependency on others, breakdown in families, friendships, and other support networks. Almost there is a consensus among all the research that refugees are living in a state of destitute showing shocking stories of hunger (Allsopp, Sigona & Phillimore, 2014; Newall & Phillimore, 2012). Burnett & Ndovi (2018) revealed in a study about the torture survivors during the process of asylum system that they have not been able to buy a quality food for themselves at a distance from being hungry.

“The level of our miseries and destitution can’t be realized

and actualized. You can’t imagine our sufferings in all aspects of life. It is not only because of the locals but our own people (Afghan refugees) are also responsible for this. My father has died, and I am the only brother of six sisters with a dependent mother” (2V06-44G2).

Newall and Phillimore (2012) also pointed out in a study that the refugees who are living in a state of destitution have high levels of maternal and infant mortality rates. The data also reveal that refugees are suffered from infant mortality, which is related to their dispersal bearing the impact on health of babies with low birth weights and poor access to antenatal care. Moreover, the dispersal also badly affects the integration of refugees by placing them away from local population. Once a person goes for an asylum and fails, he or she is dispersed, which also deprives him/her from medical facilities. The refugees also run out of cash to pay for transport and medical expenses. Furthermore, after giving birth to a child, women were isolated and deprived from attending medical check-ups. In most of the cases it is observed that babies are poorly born because of lack of basic equipment such as pushchair or warm clothes (Tatakulu, Matakala & Mabena, 2014).

“I work on daily wages, which is not on regular basis. Someday I find the labor and many days of the week, I remain idle. In such circumstances, I am unable to facilitate my sisters with

electricity and other things except food. We don't have electricity in our home. In our neighborhood, a local Khan's family resides, who are very kindhearted and caring people. They gave us electricity free of cost, which brought a lot of ease in our daily life" (3V02-29G2).

Burnett & Ndovi (2018) reflects in a study that they are never or have often been to buy clothing, which keeps them warm, clean, and dry. They always look for external help like local charities and support mechanism. Under such circumstances, the refugees are provided cards to purchase essential items. But it is observed that such cards did not work and were valid only in limited range of shopping, which heavily restrict refugees' ability to purchase essential items including travel, clothing, over the counter medicines, household cleaning products, toiletries, and sanitary items (Doyle, 2009) and also prevent them from using the public transport (Newall & Phillimore, 2012). Besides these, the refugees also face some structural issues, for example, the inability to carry-over the support cash from one week to the next; delays in payment/or failure in payment for fares, problems at point of sale or during purchasing, delays in replacing lost or stolen cards or delays in recovering of the cards, and the stigma associated to the use of card (Mulvey, 2009). Moreover, refugees are also stigmatized while passing through the poverty experience. Further this experience causes as double jeopardy among certain marginalized groups including members of the LGBT community (Struthers, 2020).

Refugees also feel stigmatized, particularly when they reach to purchase the essential elements with such cards. It is argued that the difficulties emanating with stigma would significantly be reduced only if all asylum supports are distributed in cash and not with prepaid card or vouchers. They would allow all refugees being more autonomous and viably use the local strategies and knowledge to meet their needs (Allsopp et al., 2014).

"My relatives (Afghans) living near our house, complained against me to that Khan by stigmatizing me and my sisters' character. By this he just meant to convince the Khan to our electricity. The Khan was rational and besides becoming fool by that bastard, he inquired of me about the matter. I clarified my position, and he (in turn) scolded my relative for telling the lies. After that, those relatives terminated all terms with us and used to fight us. One day, I got violent and killed one of them, because of which I'm arrested and behind the bars" (1NV09-57G1).

Conclusion

Afghan refugees, as a human capital were scarcely equipped with attributes that were required and demanded in the local labor market. They were vulnerable, unskilled, illiterate, with no interpersonal communication skills, finances to start a business, having no educational and technical background, which made them incompatible

in the job market. On the contrary, the native and receiving society (Pakistan) was also economically deteriorated and structurally unstable having no proper policies for resettlement and integration. Both these adversities created a condition and atmosphere of uncertainty and less-facilitation. Alongside, Afghanis had more expectations from Pakistani especially Pakhtuns in terms of two analogies i.e., Islam and Pakhto (religious and cultural affinity), which couldn't materialize due to socio-political, ideological, and economic forces and compulsions. Furthermore, the expectations turned into untoward repercussions when they were discriminated in the job market. The data palpably reveals that Pakistanis are preferred in terms of giving jobs and wages, while the Afghanis are given with less opportunities and lower wages leading them to destitution. The rising patterns of discrimination turned into an atmosphere of agony and hatred, which created distance between the two "similar but dissimilar" (Pakhtuns and Afghans – both are similar tribe but dissimilar in response to each other) ethnicities. Having marginalization in labor market, the Afghanis turned their focus to illegal means for income and livelihood, thus led them to creation of criminal tendencies and criminogenic environment in the study area.

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