

EXPERIENCING LIFE AS A WAR REFUGEE: AN ACCOUNT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES RESIDING IN PERI-URBAN CENTRES OF MALAYSIA

¹*Uzma Rani, ²Azlinda Binti Azman, ³Raheel Ahmed

^{1,2}School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

³Government College University, Lahore, Pakistan.

*Corresponding Author's Email: uzma_rajaahmed@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: *The Syrian war in 2011 displaced millions of people to move outside of Syria. There are a lot of challenges present in the provision of a protection space to refugees. Often scattered in the urban environment, it is difficult to ascertain specific individual needs, prevent exploitation or provide concerted livelihood support. Malaysia is a non-signatory to the UN Convention of refugees, accepting refugees from Syria on a humanitarian basis. This study surveyed to have a view of Syrian refugees in Malaysia and what they want in the future. The survey was carried out in the regions where Syrians reside by the allotment of the Malaysian government. A self-constructed survey question guide based on previous literature was used to collect the data and then the data was analyzed manually using 6 steps Braun and Clarke thematic analysis because of the small sample size. Many important themes were generated regarding conditions of refugees in Malaysia including, lack of food, unemployment, desire to return to the homeland, health issues, access to education and poor quality of life. The results of the study strongly suggested that Syrians in Malaysia direly wanted to return to their countries because they are not allowed to do decent jobs in Malaysia so they are desperate. Cultural differences are another reason for their disturbance in Malaysia and they wanted peace in their country to settle again in their homeland. This study is a way forward for policymakers in Malaysia to look upon their policies related to immigrant rights and makes regulations accordingly. It is need of the hour to create space for those who are in dire need.*

Keywords: Syrian war, Syrian refugees, Migrants Rights, Refugee resettlement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the previous decade, the worldwide popularity of coercively displaced individuals developed considerably from 43.3 million in 2009 to 70.8 million in 2018, hitting at a record high. A major part of this increase was between of 2012 and 2015, driven essentially by the Syrian conflict [1]. Malaysia is also one of the main countries which are selected by Syrians to be a place of stay. In spite of the fact that Malaysia is a reluctant host, silently recognizing the presence of refugees, yet with the most restrictive state policies. Malaysia is accommodating Syrians not only refugees but numerous students as well. Everyone's including refugees' objectives and goals and ambitions are different, subjective subject to individual differences. These included discovering security, family unity, discovering approaches to support themselves and accommodating the instruction and eventual future of their children.

However, while refugees were often ready to distinguish clear objectives and goals, enhanced levels of uncertainty in their lives and conditions implied that they sometimes struggled to know or take practical steps to accomplish these long term objectives. For all refugees in prolonged dislocation, the entirely tangible manners by which short term, transitory arrangement, and policy responses, undermine their responses and reactions to the opportunities accessible to them and demonstrates the requirement for longer-term protection, planning and security [2].

Collaborations and interactions among refugees and country nationals' refugees are unpredictable, complex and dynamic, varying widely for various individuals over time. Exiles' descriptions of their day to day contacts with individuals from the host environment were portrayed by two themes i.e., assistance and exploitation.

As opposed to considering individuals to be the host condition as supportive or threatening, a common reflection

among refugees among numerous studies was that there are good individuals and bad individuals all over.

While refugee and host networks can be valuable and mutually significant, they are insufficient all in itself to assist displaced people overcoming the effects of refugees' approaches and policies set by host governments, and the related auxiliary and institutional hindrances and barriers [3]. Malaysia is a hesitant host: there is an implicit affirmation of the presence of Syrian displaced people and their need for transient protection, however, state policies are the most limiting. Malaysia has not marked the 1951 Refugee Convention, and its official policy is that refugees within Malaysia are illegitimate migrants, and subject to confinement. With no managerial structure and administrative framework for responding to shelter to refugees and asylum seekers or a comprehensive whole-of-government policy, reactions to refugees tend to be specially appointed and conflicting.

The Syrian government extends to no administrative services to refugees: refugees have no legitimate right to work, they can't go to Malaysian schools and access to health care is a struggle for the majority generally, because of the absence of documentation and expenses. Generally and presently, UNHCR is the primary character responding to refugees and shelter seekers, however, prohibitive enrollment policies make it hard for asylum seekers to gain registration and refugee status, and most by far get no help. It can likewise be hard for global NGOs to register in the country, and not many have done so [4].

METHODOLOGY

This study follows qualitative research methodology involving interviews of the participants to collect the desired data on life experiences of war refugees settled in Peri-urban regions of Malaysia including the areas of Seberang Jaya,

Klang Valley, Subang Jaya, and Ampang. Syrian families who are 20 in number were chosen through purposive sampling from these areas. These families were settled in these areas for 2 years or more. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants. They were happy to participate in the study.

A semi-structured, face-to-face interview was applied to collect specific data. Based on a review of the literature, a set of questions was developed in advance. Each interview took a maximum of 60 mins.

The data obtained were classified into various themes. Due to the small sample size, the data was analyzed manually.

RESULTS

The main concern of the targeted population of this research has been shown in the form of four major themes. The perspectives of the participants are discussed under each theme.

Seeking Refuge

The refugee's individuals interviewed fled for a range of reasons (from persecution to civil war), and for most their essential objective was to discover wellbeing and safety. While for some it was a deliberate choice to look for shelter in a specific nation or city, for other people, this was not arranged or more rational individuals fled towards the closest open fringe or moved inside their country of asylum since they couldn't see an approach to subsist where they were or where they found conditions unfortunate and intolerable.

The initial change and adjustment was often troublesome, and required a recalibration of expectations – one Syrian lady said that she had at first idea she would be here for a couple of months, however, she had been here for quite a long while (years); one Syrian refugee said that he had expected to find security, yet now felt that there was no hope and was simply counting the days. A subsequent priority was the longing to keep families together. A few refugees settle on the troublesome choice to disperse their families within and between countries of origin and shelter, often dependent on age and gender as part of their livelihood strategy.

Education

Another family need was training. In accordance with existing literature [5, 6, 7] this study also found that the education and future of their youngsters was a principal objective for most refugees. Refugees saw potential in education to better their students' job and life results and they struggled to overcome the hindrances to sending their children to school. Such obstructions incorporate cost (school charges, transport), loss of potential income, troubles in admission for kids due to crowded schools, or rules forbidding the enrolment of refugee kids, as in Malaysia, and stigma and social discrimination.

Education was also connected to self-respect, positive change and hope. There was a prevailing sense among some adult refugees that their lives were 'faded' or 'over', and that their only reason and expectation was that their youngsters would have a reasonable and better life. Education can likewise give a critical mechanism for de facto or de jure incorporation, giving a scope of chances to adjust younger refugees' linguistic skills and technical abilities with the prerequisites of their country of refuge. The significant refugees'

importance on the future of their children recommends a requirement for dedicating far greater emphasis and resources to better the education and livelihood possibilities of a young refugee.

Following what others have proposed, it is, accordingly, recommended that occupations should not be considered in isolation, but instead more comprehensively within the economic, political and policy setting of the country of asylum, and along with refugees' long term plans and goals [8].

Psychological Consequences

Scholarly and academic work has investigated how coercive displacements influences refugees psychologically, and how living in a constant condition of temporariness influences refugees' lives [9, 10, 11]. The finding of this study demonstrates that both topics are profoundly significant and relevant and are linked to refugee livelihood in fact, and from different points of view, they seemed to outline the choices refugees made. As Brun and Fábos [9] state: 'For refugees and forced migrants, the multifaceted urges for safety, for meaningful lives and livelihoods, and belonging are not very well served by the "permanence of temporariness," as these extended liminal states have been called'. For the refugees interviewed as a part of this inquiry, trauma and the emotional results of dislocation implied that most decisions they made were supported and, in many cases, undermined by feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. Refugees' elevated levels of vulnerability about their own lives, the conditions wherein they lived, and the future emerged clearly while examining refugees' employment strategies and activities. For instance, while refugees were often able to recognize clear objectives and aspirations, high levels of uncertainty in their own lives and conditions implied they struggled to know what practical steps to take to accomplish these more long term goals.

Employment

Support in the Syrian refugee crisis has focused on getting refugees the privilege to work. Even though, while they consider a stage forward, and offer the possibility for refugees to move towards lawful and formal employment, they can't be compared with allowing refugees the privilege to work: they just give refugees similar right to work as other foreign nationals, in specific areas, and contingent on having an employer willing to apply for the permit. Refugees were keenly mindful and most of the time careful about the expenses and limitations related to work permits. Interviewees felt that being tied to the only manager would give employers more authority and power to abuse and mistreat them, and didn't accept that employers would agree to pay the direct and indirect costs related with the permits, including the tax and social benefit expenses of lawful work, or would essentially give the expenses to them. Skilled professions are to a great extent barred from work permit schemes, and refugees who ran home organizations or worked in the informal sector didn't perceive how they could get to legal work or persuade their present manager to legalize their situation. Refugees also felt the way toward getting a license as confusing and especially hard for females, who felt unfit to work outside the home. Refugees who had work licenses tended to possess particular abilities and skills,

frequently gained in their nation of origin, strong social or linguistic capital and a supportive and considerate employer. Eventually, work permits were only one factor in a broader livelihood calculation including wages and treatment at work, the number of relatives working, the stability of a job and the cost of food, education, health care, and assistance level.

DISCUSSION

To conclude the study findings and the analysis from the This section identifies 9 key principles of an effective livelihood response based on the perspective of refugees and keeping in mind the immigration and refugee laws in the host country. These points are as follows:

1. Develop and plan systems to help the long term jobs of refugees at the onset of a refugee movement.
2. Base jobs support on refugees' perspectives and organization.
3. Assuring social security and the provision of safety network into job support.
4. Going ahead of supporting economic activities to consider wider refugee needs and rights.
5. Connect with an alliance of actors in supporting refugee jobs and livelihoods.
6. Consider host community relations and social integration as a central part of job strategies.
7. Support refugee livelihoods through intervention at different levels.
8. The livelihood of refugees is not equivalent to the jobs of the non-refugee population.
9. Supporting refugee employments through advocacy, strong arrangements, and creative methodologies.

REFERENCES

1. UNHCR (2016) Global Trends: Displacement in 2015. Geneva UNHCR.
2. UNHCR (2013) 'Note on the Mandate of the High Commissioner for Refugees and His Office', <http://www.unhcr.org/526a22cb6.pdf>.
3. UNHCR (2014a) 'Protecting Refugees and the Role of UNHCR', <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/about-us/background/509a836e9/protecting-refugees-role-unhcr.html>.

4. UNHCR (2017a) Global Focus: Turkey, <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2544>.
5. Dryden-Peterson, S. (2006) 'The Present is Local, the Future is Global? Reconciling Current and Future Livelihood Strategies in the Education of Congolese Refugees in Uganda', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 25(2).
6. Perlman Robinson, J. and S. Alpar (2009) 'Hope and Opportunities for Young People', *Forced Migration Review*, 33.
7. Watkins, K. and S. Zyck (2014) *Living on Hope, Hoping for Education*. ODI: London.
8. Jacobsen, K. and S. Fratzke (2016) *Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice*. Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute.
9. Brun, C. (2015) 'Active Waiting and Changing Hopes: Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement', *Social Analysis*, 59(1).
10. Brun, C. and A. Fábos (2015) 'Making Homes in Limbo? A Conceptual Framework', *Refuge*, 31(1).
11. El-Shaarawi, N. (2015) 'Living an Uncertain Future: Temporality, Uncertainty, and Well-Being among Iraqi Refugees in Egypt', *Social Analysis*, 59(1).