

EMPOWERING WOMEN OF DISPLACED AFGHAN COMMUNITIES IN URBAN SETTLEMENTS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Dr. Sheeba Farhan^{*1}, Dr. Mahrukh Khan², Dr. Tooba Atif³, Abid Farman⁴

^{*1}Assistant Professor, Federal Urdu University of Arts Science and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan.

²Senior Lecturer, Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology

³Assistant Professor, Sir Syed University of Engineering Technology, Karachi, Pakistan.

⁴Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Karachi

²mahrukhk@ssuet.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Sheeba Farhan

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined the empowerment of women within displaced Afghan communities residing in urban settlements. The objective of the research was to sightsee the problems of displaced Afghan women. Main focus was on Afghan displaced women inimitable experiences, challenges, and opportunities, hence the common interventions driven were resilience of women, education and skill development and dearth of community led initiatives.

This study comprises of qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, to shed light on the strategies and interventions that promote the empowerment of Afghan women in the face of displacement. Purposive sampling was used for the interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes in the data.

Findings reveals the resilience of women, the importance of education and skills development, and the potential for community-driven initiatives to effect positive change. Afghan refugee women experience substantial barriers to integration and inadequate access to healthcare and education. Participants also reported feelings of isolation and loss of identity, compounded by a lack of social support. Despite this Afghan women also demonstrated resilience and willingness to support they're their families.

The study highpoints the need for policies that address the exact challenges faced by Afghan displaced women. By intensifying their voices, this research intends to form policies that indorse their well-being and facilitate their efficacious integration into society.

Keywords: *Afghan Displaced Women, Resilience, skill development, community driven initiatives.*

INTRODUCTION

Displacement has been a great challenge for afghan women, decades of conflict with increasing number of refugee crises driven by persecution, human rights abuses, political instability and socio-economic adversities. Afghan displaced women face numerous difficulties including lack of access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal protections. These challenges are further

exaggerated by cultural and gender norms that bound their mobility and decision-making supremacy.

Afghan refugee women struggle with socio-economic difficulties, inadequate mobility, cultural variances, and limited access to education and health, all of which hamper their ability to acclimate. (Deacon, Z., & Sullivan, C., 2009). Cultural restraints further limit afghan

women from retrieving essential resources, leaving them susceptible to challenges due to the lack of support. Added barriers like unfamiliarity with customs, problems in obtaining healthcare, poverty add their hardships (Barakat, S., & Wardell, G., 2002). Afghan women carry the massive violence, and loss, prominence the urgent need to strengthen their voices in speculative literature. Their stories of resilience are priceless, showcasing bravery and ingenuity amidst the challenges of displacement in Pakistan. (Rivas, A. M., 2020).

Urban settlements have been identified as a habitat for displaced Afghan women, which is affected by countless challenges, including limited access to education, economic opportunities, healthcare and social support networks (Ramos, A. A., 2023). These factors have already rendered women more vulnerable with gender-based violence, discrimination and social barriers only exacerbating their vulnerability (Reilly, N., Sahraoui, N., & McGarry, O., 2021). Insecure water and sanitation facility and unavailability of job for displaced afghan women (Kamruzzaman, Palash, et al., 2022). As a result, these challenges are magnified by the erosion of social ties and traditional support systems that take place during displacement (Majidi, N., & Hennion, C., 2014). Previously numerous empowerment strategies have been applied to address the needs of displaced Afghan women in urban settlements. These interventions encompass educational programs, and psychosocial support services (Alemi, Qais, et al. 2023). Community-based approaches, including women's groups and peer support networks, have also been utilized to collective empowerment (Abrade, L., 2022). Research from different contexts suggests that being a refugee, combined with gender factors, amplifies the difficulties women encounter, resulting in increased psychological distress as they manage family support, adjust to unfamiliar surroundings, and maintain cultural values. (Tahir, R., Due, C., Ward, P., & Ziersch, A., 2022).

Empowering displaced Afghan women faces many challenges including cultural, social, economic problems (Ahmed, N., Tasmin, M., & Ibrahim, S. M. N., 2022). Displaced afghan females face momentous gender restraints to

retrieving education, well-being and employment chances. (Hamidazada, M., & Cruz, A. M., 2023). Displaced afghan women have lost liberties, and social networks they may have formerly enjoyed. (Singh, D. G., 2010). In general, across Afghanistan more men are at home often missing skills to grow supportable urban livelihoods has augmented levels of domestic violence. (Kantor, P., & Pain, A., 2012). Despite progress in recent years, access to education remains partial for many afghan women, particularly in rural zones and among displaced populations. (Burde, D., 2014). Problems such as poverty, cultural barriers, insecurity, and absence of infrastructure contribute to low enrollment and high dropout rates among girls. (Dryden-Peterson, S., 2009). Women's contribution in the formal labor market is controlled by cultural rules, biased practices, and absence of skills and training (Zetter, R., & Ruaudel, H., 2016). Despite legal improvements aimed at improving women's rights and protections, application remain feeble in many areas.

Empowerment of afghan women is significant, as it ensures access to food, living and education for all displaced Afghans, regardless of their legal status or circumstantial (Gibbs, Andrew et al., 2020). This study is conducted to explore the Displaced Afghan communities in urban settlements. The situation of Afghan refugees and internally displaced women in urban areas presents unique challenges and opportunities. The reason behind this qualitative study was to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of Displaced Afghan women and find means to empower these women.

There is a noteworthy gap in research focused on the displacement experiences of Afghan women in Pakistan. This research aims to explore the experiences of Afghan displaced women, analyzing the factors that contribute to their displacement, the challenges they encounter in host communities or refugee settings, and the coping mechanisms they adopt for survival and resilience. By examining their social, economic, and psychological struggles, this study seeks to shed light on their needs and aspirations, while also assessing the effectiveness of existing humanitarian interventions. The findings will fill the gap in the literature with provided insight into policy recommendations and potential

strategies to enhance the well-being and empowerment of Afghan displaced women.

Research methodology

The study was conducted on the women of displaced afghan communities in urban settlements. Qualitative research methods were employed, including semi-structured interviews with 30 displaced women. The present study was qualitative because it is useful when the researcher needs to gather in-depth data about the issue, setting, and condition. Afghan women living in urban settlements. Participants were purposively selected to represent various age groups, educational backgrounds, and family statuses. Interviews were conducted with the collaboration of afghan interpreter; it was convenience purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted in controlled setting whereas confidentiality was endured.

All the women were aged between 25 to 50 years. The data was gathered through in-depth interviews with women of displaced afghan communities in urban settlements. This method was effective due to the close nature of the Afghan community. Before data collection, they were informed about the agenda. All the respondents were uneducated women or were studying Quran in different religious settings. In-depth interviews took place in a relaxed setting selected by the respondents. The interview guide was prepared and approved by researcher, further reviewed by three PhD colleagues. The questions regarded the experiences of women of displaced afghan communities, their feelings about displacement, relevant information how displaced afghan women steer these challenges and involve in empowerment happenings in urban settings. Earlier permission was given from all the women to record, transcribe, and translate the interviews. Codes were given to the respondents to guarantee confidentiality and secrecy. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify recurring themes related to women's empowerment, challenges, and strategies.

This qualitative study was consisted of an extensive semi structured in-depth interview approach. The format allowed for flexibility in answers while ensuring that all topics were methodically covered. The research was led in Karachi, where a significant population of Afghan refugees are located. Interviews took

place in comfortable settings, ensuring a supportive environment favorable to open dialogue.

Ethical considerations were dominant throughout the study. Consent was gained from all members, mentioning the study's purpose, confidentiality of participation. The interview guide was refined based on insights from initial interviews, allowing investigators to probe into different aspects of participants' lives. To minimize bias, researchers continued aware of their own potential, prejudices and biases throughout the interview process.

This size was considered sufficient for qualitative research, letting for a deep search of individual involvements while achieving thematic capacity. Qualitative Data were recorded with participants' consent, whereas the duration of the interview lasting between 40 to 90 minutes. As this was a qualitative study, emphasis was placed on thematic explanation of the qualitative data to provide inclusive understanding of the knowledges and encounters faced by Afghan refugee women.

Results

Participants emphasized on various challenges faced by displaced Afghan women like limited admittance to education and social inclusion. Culture, customs and gender-based discernment often degenerated these challenges. Discriminatory practices, such as early and forced marriages, restrict women's autonomy and opportunities for empowerment. Afghan women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence. Traditional patriarchal norms and attitudes perpetuate the marginalization of Afghan women and reinforce gender inequality. Societal expectations regarding women's roles and behavior limit their freedom of expression. Afghan women who are displaced or living as refugees face additional challenges, including limited access to basic services, heightened vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, and legal barriers to education, employment and residency in host countries.

All the respondents reported that lives of women of afghan communities in urban settlements were meaningfully affected due to displacement. Total three themes to empower women were identified after thematic analysis (i) Resilience of women, (ii) Importance of education and skills

development, and (iii) Potential for community-driven initiatives.

THEME 1: Resilience of women.

Despite the challenges, women in the study showed remarkable resilience. Many shared stories of starting small businesses, forming support networks with other women, and supporting for their children's education. These coping strategies demonstrated their determination.

The resilience found in Afghan displaced women is evidence of their strength. Afghan women faced conflict, displacement, and other hardships due to that they have demonstrated remarkable resilience. Majority of the afghan women have developed coping mechanisms to deal with the stress, trauma, and uncertainty of displacement. Here are some features contributing to their resilience: Displaced Afghan women often demonstrate resourcefulness and creativity in finding solutions to their challenges. Many Afghan women find a sense of purpose and resilience in their roles as caregivers and community leaders

One participant echoed these concerns:

"Now we have engaged ourselves in informal income-generating activities, utilize available resources within their communities, and adapt to new environments to meet basic needs of our families."

(Participant #1)

Participant further elaborated on her experience living:

"Despite the hardships we face, I remain committed to caring towards my family supporting our children's education, and contributing to the well-being of their communities."

(Participant #2)

35 years old described her experiences:

"Our strong social support networks within Afghan communities boost women's resilience and there is sense of belonging among us. I as afghan woman feel connected to supportive networks may feel more empowered to face challenges and overcome obstacles."

(Participant #3)

Despite the hardships many Afghan displaced women maintain a sense of hope and optimism

for the future. They draw strength from their resilience, their faith, and their belief in the possibility of a better life for themselves and their families. Not only have this Afghan displaced women demonstrated adaptability and flexibility in responding to changing circumstances and environments. They may relocate multiple times, adjust to new cultural norms, and find innovative ways to meet their needs and pursue opportunities for themselves and their families.

THEME 2: Importance of Education and Skill Development

Education appeared as a key driver of empowerment.

"Education can benefit us, we can contribute to family and community development. It enables us to access information about healthcare, reproductive rights that lead to better health outcomes for our families.

(Participant #4)

"By expanding women's chances for education, societies can indorse gender equality and social inclusion."

(Participant #5)

"Educated and skilled displaced Afghan women are valuable assets to their communities, contributing to growth of community. Knowledge, expertise, and leadership can drive positive change and development at the ordinary level". (Participant #6)

One of the afghan said:

"We have sensed it that education has a positive inter-generational impact. Education creates opportunities for future generations to thrive nut we do not have access to education".

(Participant #10)

Most of the participant's common belief was that education and skill development are fundamental rights and essential tools for the empowerment, resilience, and well-being of displaced Afghan women. Investing in these areas not only benefits individual women but also contributes to the overall development and stability of communities and societies.

THEME3: Community led initiatives

Participants articulated a desire for community-driven initiatives that provide a stage for women to support each other and address common challenges. They spoke positively about self-help

groups and community centers that offered a safe space for enabling activities.
(Participant #8)

One of the afghan women described her distressing living conditions in Afghanistan:

“NGOs, international organizations often provide support and assistance to displaced Afghan communities in urban settlements, including access to healthcare, education, and livelihood programs”
(Participant #9)

One of the afghan women described her distressing living conditions in Afghanistan:

Access to important services such as healthcare and education may be limited for displaced Afghan communities, particularly due to our lack legal status or documentation.

A 39year old afghan women lamented:

“We feel more contented and trustful engaging in ingenuities led by members of our own community. Community-led initiatives can create harmless spaces where women feel respected, and appreciated, leading to greater contribution and empowerment”
(Participant #9)

One of the afghan women shared her perspective:

“Community members possess valuable local knowledge and expertise. We understand the social dynamics, encounters, and opportunities of our community, making us well-positioned to address women's needs successfully.”
(Participant #4)

Community-led initiatives can progress solutions that are personalized to the unique tasks faced by displaced Afghan women, taking into account issues such as language barriers and cultural norms.

DISCUSSION:

The research verdicts key themes that underline the resilience of women, the significance of education and skills development, and the transformative power of community-driven initiatives. These findings highlight the need for specialists to address unique, urban refugee problems for Afghan women. Empowerment can be accelerated through access to or development

of educational opportunities and skills, as well as community-driven programs. And, at the same time, promoting gender equality and encouraging traditional gender roles are important steps toward the empowerment of women within these communities. Acknowledging and fostering their resilience can help stakeholders enable them to rebuild their lives, support their community, and help craft a brighter future for themselves and their families. Empowerment of Afghan women needs to be context-specific, culturally sensitive and holistic, taking into account the inter-related factors inhibiting their empowerment and participation in society.

Resilience of Women

The resilience of women is obvious in their aptitude to steer challenge and find groundbreaking solutions to overawed barriers. Many women reveal remarkable persistence in the face of financial hardships, gender-based judgement, and social restraints. This resilience is often entrenched in their capability to influence available resources and personal fortitude to achieve their goal line. Considering the factors that contribute to this resilience can inform policies and programs that further reinforce women's capacities and chances for growth.

Importance of Education and Skills Development

Education and skills expansion play a vital part in enhancing women's status. Entree to quality education allows women to increase confidence, and the capacity to make informed decisions. Furthermore, training and skill-building agendas prepare women with the proficiency needed to contribute effectively in the ventures. Capitalizing in education and all-time learning chances for women but also contributes to the overall development of societies and economies.

Community-Driven Initiatives for Positive Change

For effective in addressing socio-economic encounters and fostering sustainable development, community driven initiatives are vital. When communities take an vigorous role in generating and applying solutions, the influence is more evocative and lasting. Initiatives provide women with the essential resources and podiums

to thrive, eventually contributing to more reasonable and inclusive cultures.

So, in these ways, community-led initiatives are being critical in terms of empowering displaced Afghan women where the ownership, sustainability, trust, participation, social cohesion, resource mobilization, advocacy, and tailored solutions are playing their fair share. They play a crucial role in the empowerment and well-being of unemployed Afghan women to invest talent and skills into their communities and societies by taking full advantages of community service in helping them to retain their well-being.

CONCLUSION:

Education and skills development should be the priority of empowerment initiatives, along with creating strong community support systems and challenging gender-based discrimination wherever possible. Through this, displaced afghan women can act as most influential part in their community promoting a better life for themselves as well as upliftment of the displaced afghan society by standing example as change makers. Definitely, resilience, knowledge, skills building and community-led movements are the cornerstone to enable. Community-driven initiatives empower afghan displaced women by binding the collective resources, knowledge, and webs within their communities. These initiatives are entrenched in local contexts and priorities, making them more relevant, maintainable, and effective in addressing the precise needs and challenges faced by women in displacement settings. by assimilating resilience-building activities, education, skills development, and community-driven initiatives, stakeholders can create holistic and empowering interventions that support the empowerment and well-being of afghan displaced women.

Community-driven initiatives empower Afghan displaced women by binding the collective resources, knowledge, and webs within their communities. These initiatives are entrenched in local contexts and priorities, making them more relevant, maintainable, and effective in addressing the precise needs and challenges faced by women in displacement settings. By assimilating resilience-building activities, education, skills development, and community-driven initiatives, stakeholders can create holistic

and empowering interventions that support the empowerment and well-being of Afghan displaced women.

Policymakers and stakeholders must cooperate to create an allowing environment that nurtures gender equality and authorizes women to spread their full potential. By knowing and addressing the barriers women face, humanities can solve new opportunities for development and inclusive development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government may have to facilitate Displaced Afghan Communities in Urban Settlement. The concerned sectors may have to provide socio-psychological, financial, facilitate to the women of Displaced Afghan Communities. Resilience among Afghan displaced women is crucial for their well-being and empowerment, especially given the challenging circumstances they often face.

Here are some recommendations to support their resilience:

Facilitate the formation of supportive community networks where women can connect with each other, share experiences, and provide mutual assistance. Social support systems strengthen resilience by providing a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Advocate for the integration of Afghan displaced women into formal education systems in host countries, ensuring recognition of their prior learning and qualifications to facilitate their transition into higher education and employment.

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