

Situating the Problems of Refugees: A Critical Discussion

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Abstract

Life as a refugee is often characterised by various problems as a result of the sudden change from the familiar environment to the new and unfamiliar environment. These common problems which of the refugees are often prove to be a source of great discomfort which can affect their self-concept and their general wellbeing. The present paper is an attempt to critically analyse some of these problems that often hinder refugees from successfully rebuilding their lives in the new country. It offers a comprehensive deliberation on the problems of the refugees situating the same to individual, social, cultural and educational levels in the case of refugee children. The paper is also an attempt to provide ways to tackle these serious problems experienced by all refugees alike by offering practical suggestions as well as theoretical solutions to these challenges. The seriousness of the problems surrounding the refugees lies in the fact that they place the refugees' health at a constant risk which in the long run can eventually develop in chronic illnesses and other mental issues.

Keywords: Social integration, post-migration, refugee children, general wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

Refugees across the world are subject to problems that often leave them vulnerable and insecure in their day to day lives. The unfortunate circumstance caused by forced migration due to conflict, violence and civil war in the native country often pose uncertainty in all walks of life making their lives extremely difficult and problematic. The problems surrounding life as a refugee become a great matter of concern. As it has been stated—

1. host societies' mistrust, hostility and discrimination expressed in overt or subtle ways towards refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants have a harmful impact on their biopsychosocial well-being, often triggering feelings of helplessness, anger, frustration and general mistrust;
2. society's discriminatory attitudes and behaviors may lead refugees and asylum seekers to avoid social and health services even when needed, and to transfer their negative feelings onto helping professionals... (da Silva Rebelo et al., 2018, p.1)

These problems are not exclusive to a certain group of refugees. The adult refugees, when they are deprived of basic necessities in life are likely to suffer from certain forms of mental issues including anxiety, tension, depression and stress. Similarly, the process of growth and development can be adversely affected especially in children since they are heavily influenced by experience encountered at this stage. It has been stated that "...refugee children are at significant risk of developing psychological disturbance as they are subject to a number of risk factors" and a number of "physical health

problems...required further medical attention” (Fazel & Stein 2002, p. 367). All these problems hinder their relationship with others in the host society leading to a more chaotic life which affects the process of social integration.

A successful social integration becomes significant for rebuilding life and this is even more so in the case of refugees. A successful blending into the new culture is a prerequisite for a well-balanced life as well as for general wellbeing especially in the case of refugees. It has been rightly stated that for self-esteem, a positive assessment and for a successful adaptation to the new culture (Feng et al., 2024). In this sense, the relationship with others in the new society are greatly shaped by the integration strategy adopted the refugees. Therefore, this paper explores the problems faced by refugees, both children and adult included, by situating them to home, school and society. Each refugee’s experience is unique and is therefore not same in all circumstances. However, one may also draw a certain similarity in all these experiences which are common to all the refugees and this becomes important for understanding their lives as refugees post-migration along with the drawbacks.

Objective

The study explores problems faced by refugees after migration to the new country by substantiating the discussion with available studies on the similar topic.

Problems Faced by Refugees: A Critical Discussion

Refugees often encounter problems and challenges upon entering the new country, some of these are expected while some are unexpected due to several reasons. Some of shared problems experienced by refugees at any given point of time are discussed in the following:

1. **Social Exclusion:** For refugees who have come to the new society are likely to be placed at the periphery. One of the biggest disadvantages of being socially excluded is discrimination and rejection which often lead to hostility, stereotyping and lack of access to essential services (Biyizinka, 2025). This happens when there is lack of support from the locals who look at the refugees with a sense of distrust and suspicion. In such a circumstance, the refugees are reduced to a further state of depravity, poverty and vulnerability. This becomes a very significant problem faced by the refugee and it is also a hint that the refugees continue to be victims even after migration and their lives are filled with challenges and problems and the struggle continues in the new social environment.
2. **Economic Integration:** The refugees encounter the problem of finding a new job in the new country. It has been rightly stated that unemployment problem (Byrd, 2022) is one of the greatest challenges faced by refugees after migration. This in turn prevents them from having economic independence and survival itself becomes a great concern for them. Without economic independence, poverty escalates and they are deprived of even the most basic necessities in life making their lives extremely miserable. Thus, economic integration is a big problem for the refugees at any given time and this problem is not new to the refugees worldwide.
3. **Health Concern:** The refugees are prone to certain physical as well as mental health problems due to lack of access to health support services. For instance, due to wide prevalence of “epidemics, malnutrition and other diseases...with mental health problems receive little or no attention” along with unemployment and homelessness (Clinton-Davis & Fassil, 1992, p. 510) and even poverty, the health status of the refugees are at stake. Therefore, their physical health along with wellbeing

becomes a great concern in the case of refugees. Since all these problems and challenges are part of their daily lived experience as refugees, they continue to live their lives as victims even in the new country after migration.

4. **Cultural Barrier:** The differences in cultural practices are found to be a source of discomfort for the refugees when they come into contact with the new culture. One of the adverse effects of cultural differences is that they can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. Another cultural aspect that becomes a source of problem for the refugees is language barrier which can lead to isolation and limited opportunities for social integration (Ashura 2021, p. 193). The cultural related barriers and the friction caused by the same have become a source of great problem for the refugees as well as the host society.
5. **Deportation:** One of the biggest concerns faced by refugees is the constant fear of deportation despite the existing legal protection. Some of the harmful consequences of living in the constant state of being deported are “chronic anxiety, restricting movement and social engagement and avoiding healthcare” (Yamanis et al. 2021, p 2). These are some of the important components for a well-balanced life for individuals. As a result, life as a refugee becomes even more chaotic and problematic in comparison to life as a non-refugee. Further, isolation from social life or interaction is harmful for mental health and behaviour in an individual.
6. **Educational Problems:** In the case of the refugee children, they are deprived of education despite the right being given to them. Some of these problems stem from lack of resources and trained staff to work with refugee children, language barriers and lack of information on enrolment procedures on the part of the refugees. In addition, the refugee children, when they first join a new school, they underperform (UNHCR & UNICEF 2019, p. 7 & 11). In addition other issues, refugee children’s educational problems become one of the most significant matters that need a careful consideration. The reason being that education empowers and prepares an individual for life and this becomes an important weapon for the refugee children for a better future.
7. **Loss of Identity:** Migration is often accompanied by cultural bereavement and the sad plight of being uprooted has been described by Eisenbruch stating that, “The loss of one’s social structure and culture can cause a grief reaction” (ac cited in Bhugra & Becker 2005, p. 19). The refugees, having been uprooted from the familiar cultural and social environments are now forcibly placed in a whole new environment and this can become a source of stress and discomfort for the victim population. It has been said that, “Cultural changes in identity can be stressful and result in problems with self-esteem and mental health” (Bhugra & Becker 2005, p. 21). The loss of identity caused by cultural bereavement forms one important problem shared by all refugees in varying degrees and this becomes one of the paramount experiences of the refugees around the globe.
8. **Discrimination:** Discrimination can happen at various levels and in different ways at any given circumstances. The kind of discrimination which is common to all refugees despite the difference in cultural backgrounds is discrimination based on racial background. Racism is one of the root causes of discrimination against refugees around the world (Pittaway & Bartolomei 2000, p. 21). This is often accompanied by gender based discrimination and violation of human rights. Another important source of intolerance and discrimination against refugees is anti-foreigners’ attitude or xenophobic discrimination (Achieme, 2016). The prejudice against refugees on the grounds that they are foreigners becomes one of the biggest sources of discrimination and hatred towards refugee population around the world. This forms another deep-rooted problem for the refugees and it is not

new to their experience as displaced people.

These are some of the problems that refugees face in their daily life after migration or resettlement to the new society. These are not exclusive to some groups of refugees only, but are common to all the refugees despite different cultural or backgrounds. Furthermore, the list of problems does not end there nor is it limited to those few problems highlighted in the discussion. These problems require serious consideration and attention since they can prove to be a source of tension, anxiety and other physical as well as psychological disadvantages for the victim population.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The refugee's experience is characterised by problems and issues which are unique in their own ways. Some of the ways to tackle these problems associated to refugeehood include:

1. **Social Support:** Strengthening the social support system becomes a significant way to tackle these problems or challenges faced by the refugees. Since the wellbeing of the refugees are often found to be at risk (Amare et al., 2024), the kind of support can be both physical as well as psychological in nature. Furthermore, understanding the barriers that prevent the refugee population from accessing the available social support with a special focus on the more vulnerable groups including children and women.
2. **Acculturation:** In order to address barriers caused by cultural, racial along with ethnic backgrounds, acculturation can prove to be useful for both the refugee population as well as the host culture. The change in situation often experienced by the refugees as well as those at the receiving ends can be successfully addressed by the acculturation strategies of Berry (1997). By advocating the integration strategy, i.e. the successful blending of two cultures without disowning one's original culture while at the same time integrating the new culture (Berry, 1997), much of the conflict can be tackled successfully.
3. **Health Support System:** Since refugees' health is often found to be at risk and they are subject to health conditions such as "anxiety, sadness, hopelessness, difficulty sleeping, fatigue, irritability, anger and physical pains" (WHO, 2025), efforts should be given to provide health services to the refugees. The health services could be both psychological and physical in nature.
4. **Language Support:** Lack of language proficiency can be a source of discomfort, frustration and discouragement for the newly displaced people such as refugees (Alefshe & Al-Jamal, 2019). In the case of refugee children, the inability to use and understand the new language of the country can demotivate them in their studies and as a consequence socialization process, interaction and building relationship can be detrimentally affected. These are all important contributing factors for a holistic growth and development in children and the absence of which may result in some psychological as well as physical health issues. Similarly, in the case of adult refugees, lack of proficiency in the local language can be a source of anxiety and distress which may intimidate them from accessing available support services under circumstances.

In order to address the problems surrounding the refugees and their problems, including those which have not been highlighted in the present discussion, there needs to be a culturally and socially responsive service systems put in place. Efforts should be directed towards promoting positive social interactions to prevent conflict due to difference in cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the case of the refugee children, access to education should be extended and ensured that their right to education is not denied even after migration.

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