

Original Article

Resilience Amidst Adversity: Afghan refugee women's experiences of resettlement in Pakistan

Haiqa Asif¹, Faiza Tayyab¹  & Fouzia Sadaf²

¹Department of Gender Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan.

²Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan.



Copyright © The Author(s). 2024 This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



DOI: 10.29052/2413-4252.v10.i1.2024.1-10

Citation: Asif H, Tayyab F, Sadaf F. Resilience Amidst Adversity: Afghan refugee women's experiences of resettlement in Pakistan. *IJWE*. 2024; 10(1): 1-10

Corresponding Author Email:
Faiza.dgs@pu.edu.pk

Funding: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

Conflicts of Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Received 27/06/2024

Accepted 24/09/2024

First Published 31/12/2024

Abstract

Background: The ongoing refugee crises worldwide have created complex challenges for host countries and displaced populations. Afghan refugee women, in particular, face unique hardships due to cultural norms, legal uncertainties, and limited access to essential resources. Despite their resilience, these women often endure heightened psychological distress and socio-economic disadvantages during their resettlement in Pakistan.

Methodology: This qualitative study employs in-depth interviews to explore the lived experiences of Afghan refugee women in Pakistan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those who have been residing in Pakistan for an extended period. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

Results: The findings reveal that Afghan refugee women experience significant barriers to integration, including cultural constraints, discrimination, and inadequate access to healthcare and education. Many participants reported feelings of isolation and loss of identity, compounded by a lack of social support. Despite these challenges, women demonstrated resilience and a strong desire to provide better futures for their families.

Conclusion: The study highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies that address the specific challenges faced by Afghan refugee women. By amplifying their voices, this research aims to inform policies that promote their well-being and facilitate their successful integration into Pakistani society.

Keywords

Afghan Refugee Women, Resettlement, Resilience, Refugee Policy.

Introduction

The world is currently grappling with a rising number of refugee crises driven by war, persecution, and human rights abuses. According to the Global Trend Report, as of the end of 2021, 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced globally¹. Afghanistan ranks as the third-largest producer of refugees, with 2.7 million individuals displaced². The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone unable or unwilling to return to their country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

The Afghan refugee crisis escalated following the overthrow of Muhammad Daoud's government and the Soviet Union's intervention in 1979³. This conflict compelled many Afghans to flee, primarily to neighboring countries like Iran and Pakistan⁴. However, Pakistan's status as a developing nation complicated its ability to accommodate this influx, particularly since it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention⁵. Afghan refugees have been arriving in Pakistan in waves for over four decades, yet their legal status remained uncertain until 2007 when Proof of Registration (PoR) cards were issued. Prior to this, many lived without legal documentation, leading to significant challenges, including arrests under the Foreigners Registration Act of 1939, and frequent complaints of police harassment and extortion⁶. Despite their difficult experiences in Pakistan, the ongoing conflict and instability in Afghanistan discourage many from returning⁷.

Resettlement and integration into Pakistani society have proven challenging for both Afghan refugees and the government due to the rapid population increase, which strains resources⁸. Legal hurdles regarding refugee registration and a lack of comprehensive data further complicate their settlement process. While prior research has examined various aspects of refugee experiences and the challenges faced in post-migration life, including the struggles of Afghan male scavengers who face constant discrimination and harassment⁶, women's experiences remain underexplored.

Afghan women, often constrained by cultural and religious norms, frequently lack the agency to voice their concerns and experiences⁹. In Afghanistan's patriarchal society, women are primarily relegated to domestic roles, leaving them without opportunities for social or political engagement¹⁰.

There is a significant gap in research focused on the resettlement experiences of Afghan refugee women in Pakistan. Literature from other contexts indicates that refugee status, compounded by gender, heightens the challenges women face, leading to greater psychological distress as they navigate family support, adaptation to new environments, and the preservation of cultural values¹¹⁻¹⁴. Afghan refugee women, in particular, contend with socio-economic disadvantages, limited mobility, language barriers, cultural differences, and inadequate access to education and healthcare, all of which hinder their ability to adapt^{15,16}.

Cultural constraints further restrict women from accessing essential resources, leaving them vulnerable to mental health challenges due to the lack of social support. Additional barriers, including unfamiliarity with local customs, difficulties in obtaining healthcare, poverty, and discrimination, exacerbate the hardships faced by this marginalized community¹⁷. Afghan women who have fled their homeland carry the weight of trauma, violence, and loss, highlighting the urgent need to amplify their voices in academic literature. Their stories of resilience are invaluable, showcasing courage and resourcefulness amidst the challenges of resettlement in Pakistan.

This study aims to fill the existing research gap by focusing on the lived experiences of Afghan refugee women as they flee Afghanistan and navigate their resettlement in Pakistan, assessing its impact on their overall well-being. Additionally, this research seeks to provide a platform for Afghan women to share their narratives and personal experiences. The findings will also contribute to informing gender-sensitive refugee policies that address the unique challenges faced by women in the resettlement process.

Methodology

Study Design

This qualitative study employed an extensive semi-structured in-depth interview approach to explore the lived experiences of Afghan refugee women in Lahore, Pakistan. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics were systematically covered.

Setting

The research was conducted in Lahore, a major city in Pakistan where a significant population of Afghan refugees resides. Interviews took place in safe, comfortable locations agreed upon by the participants, ensuring a supportive environment conducive to open dialogue.

Participants

A total of 11 Afghan refugee women were recruited for the study using snowball sampling. This method was particularly effective due to the close-knit nature of the Afghan community in Lahore. Initial participants were selected based on their first-hand experiences as refugees, and snowball sampling method was also incorporated as the participants referred other potential interviewees to the researcher¹⁸.

Ethics

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Written and verbal consent was obtained from all participants, with literate women signing a consent form that detailed the study's purpose, confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. For participants who were uneducated, the consent process was facilitated by an interpreter to ensure comprehension and informed consent. The names of all participants were changed to pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Data Sources/Measurement

The primary data source comprised the semi-structured interviews, which were guided by an interview framework developed from the literature review. The interview guide was refined iteratively based on insights from initial interviews, allowing researchers to probe deeper into aspects of

participants' lives that emerged as significant but had not been anticipated.

Variables

Key variables of interest included the participants' challenges faced in their war-torn homeland, difficulties encountered during migration, and experiences of resettlement in Pakistan. Each of these themes was explored through targeted questions designed to elicit rich, descriptive responses.

Bias

To minimize bias, researchers remained aware of their own potential preconceptions and biases throughout the interview process. The use of an interpreter helped bridge language barriers and provided a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences, ensuring that the participants' voices were authentically represented.

Study Size

The study involved a sample of 11 Afghan refugee women. This size was deemed sufficient for qualitative research, allowing for a deep exploration of individual experiences while achieving thematic saturation.

Qualitative Analysis

Data were audio recorded with participants' consent, with interviews lasting between 40 to 90 minutes. Recorded interviews were transcribed by the researchers in Roman Urdu and subsequently translated into English for analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data, following the steps outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013). This process included familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and revisiting themes for relevance and importance before final reporting.

Statistical Methods

As this is a qualitative study, statistical methods were not applied. Instead, emphasis was placed on thematic interpretation of the qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Afghan refugee women.

Results

A total of 11 Afghan refugees were interviewed, ranging in age from 35 to 55, with an average age of 45.7. All participants lived with their extended families, with most having built their own houses, while a few resided in rented accommodations. The refugees had migrated to Pakistan at various times, with some having lived there for the last three decades and others for over two decades.

Major Themes

• Emotional Implications of Loss

The theme of loss emerged as a predominant sentiment in the interviews with Afghan refugee women. Almost all participants expressed profound feelings of loss that affected every aspect of their lives. Many spoke about losing relationships and possessions, resulting in loneliness. Gul-e-Rana (35 years old) shared her experience:

"I feel lonely in Pakistan because I was attached to my house there. I had friends, but I don't know where they are now. I wish things were better in Afghanistan, and we never had to migrate."

The primary causes of these losses included death and forced migration.

Manizha (43 years old, housewife) recounted the traumatic impact of her husband's death in a terrorist attack:

"After a few years of marriage at a relatively young age, I became a widow. My husband, the sole provider of our large family, was killed in the bombings. There was terror everywhere. I will never forget how it made me feel because, in Afghanistan, a woman is known by her man, and my man was killed. I lost my identity. Now I feel lonely without him."

Deniz (48 years old) articulated the emotional toll of leaving family behind:

"Yes, I get sad when I think about my family and the overall situation in Afghanistan. My children are born here in Pakistan, but my family is back in Afghanistan. No one knows how I spend my nights, always crying and reminiscing about the good times. I miss my siblings and parents. I was really sad about leaving them."

Parveen (50 years old) spoke of the pain associated with losing relatives:

"I lost two cousins in Afghanistan, and now I'm in Pakistan. Since they were killed, I was unable to bid them farewell. Their children were left orphans. I'm not sure who killed them or what happened. It was very difficult and painful for me to lose my brothers."

Each participant reported losing their home, jobs, money, and belongings. Many found that their family homes had been taken over by others after they fled, with no proof of ownership to reclaim them. Parveen lamented the loss of her home:

"Yes, I lost everything. When we left Afghanistan, we left everything behind. I had a house, which, though made of bricks and mud, was very precious to me. We left immediately after I lost my home."

Mahrugh (40 years old) shared her experience of conflict in her homeland:

"I had a house in Afghanistan, but every time I looked ahead, I saw conflict, and I didn't want to live in a war zone. I arrived in Pakistan with just two suitcases."

Participants also discussed the cultural dislocation they experienced as refugees. Afsheen (55 years old) expressed deep emotional ties to her homeland:

"A person who loses both his home and his child loves his country because it feels like my mother. I have lived in Afghanistan since I was born, touched the land, and drank its water. I love this country. It never leaves my mind, even during sleepless"

nights. Spending Nowruz with my Afghan friends is something I miss."

Most participants reported experiencing significant stress, listing factors such as leaving their country, unemployment, language barriers, inadequate housing, and lack of education as contributing to their mental health struggles. Maneza (43 years old) reflected,

"When we came to Pakistan, we were left with nothing. In Afghanistan, I had honor and dignity. We didn't exist. There was genocide in Afghanistan, and we lost both our lives and our homes."

Rabia (38 years old) remarked on the initial challenges of social integration:

"Initially, Pakistanis would not make friends with us. I often questioned women why they didn't talk to me. You are a woman, and I am one."

• Settlement Issues in Pakistan

Starting anew as a refugee required leaving behind homes, jobs, and familiar surroundings. Each woman shared stories of how they celebrated holidays and family occasions with their large families in Afghanistan, despite the myriad issues that drove them to leave. They faced various challenges in Pakistan, including inequality, discrimination based on identity and ethnicity.

Deniz recounted her experience upon moving to Pakistan in 1995:

"We faced numerous challenges. Since we had no money and no idea where to go, we first stayed in KPK with relatives who had migrated there in the 1980s. Because of our refugee status, the local community was reluctant to rent us a house, so we started working for daily wages to save some money."

All participants expressed a desperate desire to escape Afghanistan due to the constant fear of war, willing to endure any hardships in a new country. Mahrukh (40 years old) described her worries when relocating:

"Since no one from our extended family was present when we moved here, I was concerned about what would become of our lives with these five children. We went to Pakistan and lived in camps; it was a really trying period for us. My children were quite small, and I did not comprehend the native language. Even though I had to take care of them, I felt relieved that they wouldn't perish in this place."

Rabia shared the difficulties faced in settling down:

"Since we had no money, it was very difficult for us to find work. After our family moved to Punjab, the men in my family started working as daily wage earners. After that, we built our shop and earned some money. However, it took years to open our own store, and it wasn't easy."

A recurring theme among the participants was the dependence of large families on a single breadwinner and the cultural restrictions on women's employment. Many refugee women expressed a desire to contribute to their families financially but faced societal barriers.

Parveen explained:

"It was very difficult for us to start a new life in Pakistan because in Afghanistan, our men used to do the work. Here in Pakistan, we could not make a living. I wanted to help my husband earn money, but he refused. Women in our family don't work outside the home because there are men outside, so we stay home."

Some participants faced discrimination linked to the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, noting that their ethnicity affected their treatment in Pakistan. Ishaal (30 years old) shared her experiences of ethnic discrimination:

"We moved to Pakistan a long time ago, but we are still discriminated against because of where we come from. Every outpost treats our young people as if we are terrorists. We are Afghans, so when we visit our relatives, there are police checks. They always question our men. Despite our extended

residence in Pakistan, we are considered foreigners."

Lalarukh (45 years old) described her experiences of prejudice:

"When we first arrived in Pakistan, we experienced prejudice because Pakistanis don't treat Afghans well in general. Pakistani women have been known to say things like, 'You are not good people; you left your country.' We had difficulties establishing ourselves here since Pakistanis initially did not accept us. After a few years in KPK, we relocated to Punjab, where opportunities are greater and people are friendlier."

Refugees struggled to settle in Pakistan due to their outsider status, facing stigma and the belief that they were involved in social evils, such as street crime. Most respondents noted that their socio-economic difficulties stemmed from a lack of support from the Pakistani government.

• **Fear of Repatriation**

The process of repatriation can be exceptionally challenging, particularly for women and children, who are often the most affected during such transitions. Many refugees hesitate to return to their home countries due to uncertainties surrounding the availability of basic facilities, especially in nations marred by decades of conflict. Female Afghan refugees have established lives in Pakistan and are reluctant to return to Afghanistan because of security concerns, violence, forced recruitment of young boys as soldiers, and the lack of medical and educational facilities. As Deniz pointed out,

"We can move freely here, but it is not possible in Afghanistan's villages where the Taliban have control and do not allow women to go to school or receive an education."

Insecurity and fear regarding how refugees will be forced to return add to participants' anxieties. Gul-e-Rana, a 35-year-old refugee, voiced her concerns:

"We fear that when the repatriation process starts, the transportation will be slow and inhumane. Women and children suffer the most during these long waits." She described how trucks loaded with families and their belongings often wait for three to four days.

Most participants indicated that fear of ongoing war was a compelling reason for their refusal to return. Their children's safety was their utmost priority, and they did not want them to grow up in a conflict zone. Gul Bibi expressed her concern, saying,

"Life in Pakistan is peaceful. We do not worry about our children's safety or well-being here. We have lost loved ones in Afghanistan, and I refuse to let my children be forced into warfare."

Forty-year-old Mahrukh shared a similar sentiment:

"We grew up during the war and faced many challenges, but I want a better future for my children – a life free from the fear of conflict."

Likewise, Muniza, a 43-year-old housewife, stated,

"Here, my children can roam freely; no one is forcing them to join the army. They can go to school and work."

Gul Bibi further elaborated on her experience living in a conflict zone:

"I don't want armed groups to recruit my kids. Many have lost their lives in the fighting. While they pay well to recruit the illiterate and underage, it's a fraud. My only child is young, and I do not want to see him harmed. We have endured so much pain that I cannot express it."

Saba described her distressing living conditions in Afghanistan:

"We were mentally disturbed when the conflict escalated. Our lives were anything but comfortable, and sending our kids to school felt unsafe. We lost faith in the state and lived in constant terror."

Alia recounted her childhood trauma:

"You see, these so-called mujahidin came to our house and used it as a checkpoint. We were expelled and turned into refugees. This was in Kabul when I was a child. After relocating to my aunt's house, we eventually had to leave the country altogether, and we have no desire to return."

Despite the hardships faced in Pakistan, many participants expressed hope, particularly regarding their children's education, which was a significant factor in their decision not to return to Afghanistan. They yearned for a better future for their children and wanted to shield them from the traumas they themselves experienced. Alia shared her relief:

"We lived in extreme poverty, and there were horrific school bombings in Afghanistan. I'm thankful my kids can receive an education now. They study in government schools in Pakistan."

Gulalai shared her perspective:

"Even though I am illiterate and cannot speak Urdu, I want my children to go to school. Since moving to Pakistan in the 1980s, my children have learned their mother tongue, gotten married, and started businesses. They work hard to build a life here."

This sentiment was echoed by many respondents, who found a home away from home in Pakistan. Despite facing numerous challenges, these obstacles paled in comparison to the terror and violence prevalent in Afghanistan. Participants felt at peace knowing their children were receiving a decent education in Pakistan, free from fear—one of the primary reasons for their reluctance to return to their home country.

• Economic Hardships

Afghan refugees have long lived in poverty, as those in conflict zones are particularly vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. Even before migrating to Pakistan, they faced numerous issues, including resource scarcity and constant fear of war.

Gul-e-Rana articulated this struggle:

"Poverty and misery were rampant throughout Afghanistan's conflict. Sometimes we had food, other times we didn't. We often didn't know where to find food, even when we had money. Violence surrounded us, and we had to live in unsafe conditions. We would eat breakfast in someone else's house because our neighborhood was so dangerous."

After relocating to Pakistan, many issues multiplied as refugees arrived with nothing, making it incredibly challenging to start anew in a foreign land. They lacked the resources needed to maintain a decent standard of living or access quality health services.

Manizha, a 43-year-old housewife, lamented,

"We are not treated well in government hospitals, but we don't have the money to go to private facilities. We have no choice but to see doctors who charge less, but I doubt their competence."

Deniz, 48, shared her family's tragic experience:

"My cousin, who was pregnant, died in a government hospital. Her family was devastated. They believed that if they had more money or weren't refugees, she might have survived because they could have taken her to a better hospital."

Another participant echoed these concerns:

"My husband is a scrap collector. We have a large family to support, but managing finances is incredibly difficult. Still, we thank Allah that at least we are safe from violence."

In Pakistan, most respondents expressed concerns over low wages, as the jobs they managed to secure were insufficient to support an entire household. Participants discussed the sacrifices they had to make regarding their health due to a lack of resources and minimal support from the government.

Discussion

While substantial research exists on the refugee experience, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific lived experiences of Afghan women refugees in Pakistan. For over three decades, Pakistan has hosted Afghan refugees, yet comprehensive studies addressing their settlement issues are lacking.

Before migrating to Pakistan, Afghan refugees faced dire conditions in Afghanistan that compelled them to make the difficult decision to leave their homeland. This choice was not made lightly; it required immense courage to abandon their families, culture, traditions, and homeland. The protracted conflict in Afghanistan rendered normal life nearly impossible, forcing many to seek refuge. However, the decision to relocate to Pakistan marked not the end of their suffering but rather the beginning of new challenges. Afghan women refugees encountered significant poverty, ethnic discrimination, settlement difficulties, and an overarching fear of repatriation.

Participants described a wide range of emotions following their migration to Pakistan, including isolation, a lack of belonging, loss of identity, disruption of social stability, and the challenges of adapting to an unfamiliar environment. A recurrent theme among participants was the profound pain of losing relationships and assets. Although they accepted that life in Afghanistan would move on, the losses they suffered during migration were enduring and deeply felt. The common sentiment was one of loss, whether it involved loved ones or material possessions.

This study brings to light the traumas endured by these refugees. The horrific experiences of migration, compounded by the loss of loved ones, haunted many participants. They described their pasts in Afghanistan as nightmarish, living under the constant threat of violence a "sword of Damocles" hanging over them. Even after resettlement in Pakistan, feelings of stress persisted due to isolation from family and friends, as well as the local community's reluctance to accept Afghan refugees. Literature highlights the various forms of

stress refugees commonly face¹⁹, particularly acculturative stress, which arises from the abrupt transition to unfamiliar social and cultural contexts²⁰, and traumatic stress, stemming from exposure to violence²¹.

The study also underscores the precarious living conditions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, many of whom live below the poverty line. Participants shared how their lives worsened as violence escalated in Afghanistan, compelling them to flee with hopes for better living conditions in Pakistan. Unfortunately, their experiences in the host country often mirrored their past hardships: challenges such as difficulty finding housing and facing derogatory treatment from locals persisted. Some respondents expressed frustration with the inadequate medical care they received, particularly during childbirth, as they were often forced to wait longer due to their refugee status.

Discrimination against Afghan refugees by Pakistani security forces was another critical issue highlighted in this study. The Afghan community has been stigmatized due to perceptions of their involvement in terrorism and illegal activities. Locals often associate Afghan refugees with rising crime rates, including drug trafficking and smuggling. This has fueled a narrative among the local populace demanding their return to Afghanistan. Despite these challenges, many participants expressed a reluctance to return, citing the unrest and lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan.

The fear of repatriation emerged as a significant theme. The Pakistani government has been implementing measures to repatriate refugees, especially following improvements in Afghanistan's security situation. Many participants preferred to remain in Pakistan, where they feel a semblance of stability for their children, who are now building lives and futures away from the violence of their homeland. With some refugees having resided in Pakistan for two to three decades, they have established new lives and communities. The government of Pakistan, along with UNHCR, has initiated voluntary repatriation programs that offer

assistance packages for refugees willing to return. Since 2002, over 5.3 million Afghan refugees have returned under UNHCR's facilitated programs²².

Notably, despite the numerous challenges faced by this vulnerable and marginalized community, there remains a flicker of hope. Participants expressed optimism about their children's education and a sense of safety that is lacking in Afghanistan. The comparative peace and improved living conditions in Pakistan provide a refuge from the chaos they left behind, reinforcing their decision to remain in the host country. This study emphasizes the resilience of Afghan women refugees, who continue to navigate the complexities of their lives in search of a better future for themselves and their children.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant challenges Afghan refugees face in settling in Pakistan, including discrimination in accessing essential services. Despite their past traumas and current frustrations, Afghan women demonstrate remarkable resilience and hope for a new beginning. Refugees are a vulnerable population lacking specific protections under Pakistan's Constitution, resulting in a limited understanding of refugee rights among law enforcement and judicial systems. To support successful resettlement, the government should implement policies that provide adequate opportunities and resources, with a focus on gender-sensitive approaches. Community programs that promote local interaction and offer language courses and vocational training can help Afghan refugees integrate into society. By fostering inclusivity, Pakistan can empower refugees to adapt and contribute positively to their new environment.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the women participants who shared their experiences and struggles while navigating their life in Pakistan. Their contributions are the foundation of this research. The authors also appreciate the support of individuals who facilitated connections with the participants.

References

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Global trends. UNHCR. [Assessed: October 15, 2022]. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends>.
2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Figures at a glance. UNHCR. [Assessed: October 15, 2022]. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
3. Grare F, Maley W. The Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Middle East Inst-Fondation Pour La Rech Strategique. 2011.
4. Dimitriadi A. Migration from Afghanistan to third countries and Greece. IRMA Background Rep. 2013;1-34.
5. Zieck M. The legal status of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, a story of eight agreements and two suppressed premises. *Int J Refugee Law*. 2008;20(2):253-72.
6. Malik B, Lyndon N, Vivien YWC. Accounts of discrimination: a phenomenological study of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. *Int J Acad Res Bus Soc Sci*. 2018;8(13):113-21.
7. Khan A. Protracted Afghan refugee situation: policy options for Pakistan. Available at: http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/3-Amina_SS_Vol_37_No.1_2017.pdf. 2017.
8. Borthakur A. Afghan refugees: the impact on Pakistan. *Asian Aff*. 2017;48(3):488-509.
9. Wilson C. A "boots on the ground" perspective of caring for the women and children in Afghanistan. *J Obstet Gynecol Neonatal Nurs*. 2011;40:255-261.
10. Wimpelmann T. One step forward and many to the side: combating gender violence in Afghanistan, 2001–2014. *Womens Stud Int Forum*. 2015;51:101-109.
11. Tahir R, Due C, Ward P, Ziersch A. Understanding mental health from the perception of Middle Eastern refugee women: a critical systematic review. *SSM-Ment Health*. 2022;100130.
12. Schubert CC, Punamäki RL. Mental health among torture survivors: cultural background, refugee status and gender. *Nord J Psychiatry*. 2011;65(3):175-182.
13. Miskurka M, Goulet L, Zunzunegui MV. Contributions of immigration to depressive symptoms among pregnant women in Canada. *Can J Public Health*. 2010;101:358-364.

14. Samuel E. Acculturative stress: South Asian immigrant women's experiences in Canada's Atlantic provinces. *J Immigr Refugee Stud.* 2009;7(1):16-34.
15. Deacon Z, Sullivan C. Responding to the complex and gendered needs of refugee women. *Affilia.* 2009;24(3):272-284.
16. Tabassum I, Rahman F, Haq F. Dynamics of communal land degradation and its implications in the arid mountains of Pakistan: a study of district Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *J Mountain Sci.* 2014;11(2):485-495.
17. Sipsma HL, Falb KL, Willie T, Bradley EH, Bienkowski L, Meerdink N, Gupta J. Violence against Congolese refugee women in Rwanda and mental health: a cross-sectional study using latent class analysis. *BMJ Open.* 2015;5(4).
18. Bryman A. *Social research methods.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2016.
19. Bogic M, Njoku A, Priebe S. Long-term mental health of war-refugees: a systematic literature review. *BMC Int Health Hum Rights.* 2015;15(1):29.
20. Davidson GR, Murray KE, Schweitzer RD. Review of refugee mental health assessment: best practices and recommendations. *J Pac Rim Psychol.* 2010;4(1):72-85.
21. Lillee A, Thambiran A, Laugharne J. Evaluating the mental health of recently arrived refugee adults in Western Australia. *J Public Ment Health.* 2015;14(2):56-68.
22. Voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees - South West Asia quarterly update, 2022 Q2. UNHCR Oper Data Portal (ODP). [Assessed: October 15, 2022]. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94278>.