

A Qualitative Study To Identify The Social Problems Of Seasonal Migrants: A Case Of Bagri Community Married Women With Children

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Abstract

The aim of this qualitative case study was to explore the living conditions, causes of migrations and the social issues faced by women and children of a minority migrant community in Pakistan known as 'Bagri'. The Bagri community seasonally migrates from the province of Sindh to Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan province in Pakistan. This exploratory study used semi-structured interviews with ten participants. Purposive sampling was used for sample selection. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using NVivo version 11. Techniques such as word tag clouds and tree map analysis were used for theme identification. Major categories/themes that emerged were poverty and weather induced migration; poverty and movement as barriers to education; out of school children's activities; health related issues; and residents' attitude and behavior towards the Bagri migrant community. Policy implications for the government along with the suggestions for future research are discussed in the end.

Keywords: Seasonal Migration, Health, Education, Bagri women, Qualitative study.

Introduction

Pakistan is populated by people from many diversified ethnicities that are very different from each other considering their language, religion, and other cultural aspects. One such group is known as the Bagri community. The people belonging to this ethnic group are mostly from the Sindh province. The language that Bagri community speaks is called Bagri language which is a part of Indo-Aryan group of language. This particular group has not been subject to ethnographic research and not much is known about them. Most of the Bagri people perform seasonal migrations between the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan both due to harsh climate and for earning reasons (Tribes, 2020).

Migration is used as livelihood strategy in almost all countries by economically disadvantaged people (Mc Dowell & De Haan, 1997; Deshingkar & Start, 2003; IOM, 2005). This aspect of migration is getting increased attention of the academician and researchers (Black & Sward, 2009). Migration means crossing the boundary of a political or administrative unit for a certain minimum period (Boyle et al., 1998). Internal migration refers to a phenomenon when people move within their own country from one province to another or from one district to another (Agarwal, 2009).

When people migrate for short duration or in other words reside at the destination place for some months in a year, are referred to as 'seasonal' migrants or 'circular' migrants (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). The seasonal and circular migration is most prevalent among the socially and economically disadvantaged groups of society (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). Many seasonal migrants move with families (Beleli, 2013).

Despite existing studies on internal migrants, the research related to seasonal migration is very scant. Researchers and policy makers have mainly focused on permanent internal migration and have neglected the domain of seasonal migration (Deshingkar & Grimm, 2005). There is a lack of coordinated strategies to assist these internal migrants. In Pakistan, there are neither any official statistics available

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regarding these internal movements of population nor any study documenting the causes of these movements and its impacts (Mahmud, Musaddiq, & Said, 2010).

The Case of Bagri Community

Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan province of Pakistan, is inhabited by migrants from different regions during summer (from April to October). After harvesting season, the people from Bagri community migrate to Quetta. At the end of summer season, that is, at the start of plantation season in their hometowns, they travel back to their homelands. These migrants have no political representation in the destination areas, are mostly involved in low paid jobs, have problems in accessing public education and health, and are victims to sexual exploitation (UNESCO/ UN-HABITAT, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

This paper is a case study of the minority seasonal migrant community, named Bagri Community. This qualitative study aims to explore the causes of migrations and the living conditions of these migrants with specific emphasis on the social issues faced by the women and children of Bagri Community.

Research Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature using semi-structured interviews. The consent of participants was received after the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of their participation in the study. In the first phase, two community elders were interviewed regarding the historical backgrounds, general living patterns and social problems of the community. The interviews were of a conversational nature. Based on these initial interviews, a comprehensive interview guide was developed.

Sample characteristics.

In the second phase, only married women living with children were targeted for further investigation. The first reason for their selection was that women are main bread earners in these communities. Second, during earlier encounters with community members, it was found out that only married women were the main income earners of the families. Third, for obvious reasons, the married women and those with children were mainly concerned with the health and education of their community children.

Sample size.

The sample size depends on many factors such as resources and time available, nature or type of study and techniques of data collection. For interview-based study, an important criterion given by many scholars is data saturation or redundancy. Although this concept was developed initially for grounded theory studies, it is now applicable to almost all qualitative studies that employ interviews as the primary data source (Marshall et al, 2013). Baker (2012) also argues that it is difficult to decide about the size of sample or number of interviews required for qualitative research in the beginning of the study.

A total of ten women were initially identified to participate in the study. The saturation occurred after the fifth interview and in the remaining interviews the same themes were articulated. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), saturation mostly occurs at sixth to twelfth interview when the scope of study is narrow, and the targeted population is homogenous. In our case, the reason for early saturation may be due to the homogeneity of sample characteristics: single community; migrants; poor; married women with children and major earners of the family income.

Sample selection

Purposive sampling technique, with homogenous sample strategy, was used in this research. Since the purpose of qualitative study is not generalization but rather in-depth study of the phenomenon, only the information rich cases are purposefully selected in these kinds of studies (Patton, 2001). Thus, we selected only those participants who were able to provide the best information. Although the target population was married women with children of Bagri migrant Community, an additional criterion was their ability to understand and speak Urdu language.

Informed Consent

Oral consent was sought from the women and their family elder (usually the women father-in-law or husband). The interviews were video / audio recorded and they were assured that these records will be used only for this research study and all the data will be disposed of after completion of the research. The interview schedule and guide were discussed with them in advance. For those who were hesitant to be video-recorded, paper pencil note taking was used instead.

Empirical Results

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using N Vivo 11 version. Techniques such as word tag clouds and tree map analysis were used for theme identification.

Word tag clouds

Word Tag Clouds or word frequency query technique is used to check the validity of the themes found through manual techniques or through software. The sizes of the words reflect the frequency or repeated use in the textual data. The 'Word Tag Clouds' figure below also support our findings showing different themes of the study e.g. area, bangles, beg, behave, children, clothes, earn, educate, elder, family, flour, food, help, hot, husband, ill, labor, leave, live, local, money, months, ornaments, people, place, sell, Sindh, spend, street, tents, treatment, winter, women, work, young. (See figure 1).

200 area back bangles beg begging behave believe belong big birth child children clothes come daily daughter day difficult divorce earn earning eat educate elder everyone family flour follow food get good haji happy help home homes hot houses husband ill influential job keep keeper kids labor last leave like live local lord male man manage marriage marry meet men money months much never nothing old ornaments outside people permission place planning police remarry rupees sale sell selling set shop Sindh six sometimes son spend streets tents time treatment two use winter woman women work year young

Figure 1. Word Tag Clouds

Tree Map Analysis of Social Problems of Bagri Migrant

Tree map (Figure 2) shows the category wise major themes of Bagri migrant community social problems. Among the causes of migration, weather change (hot season) and poverty are major factors while flood is less spelled one. In the category of 'female sources of income', selling bangles and ornaments are the major sources while begging is less common source. In 'male sources of income' category, begging and selling balloons are the common themes and some are also involved in selling cooked rice and burning special herbs. Among the reasons for avoiding other labor works, lack of trust has been identified as the most important factor and then lack of technical skills and illiteracy emerged as important themes, respectively. In the category of causes of illiteracy, frequent movement and poverty have been identified as major factors while following forefather pattern is less important factor. In the category of children passing time, playing in the streets emerged as a major them, subsequently followed by begging and watching TV. In health problems, family planning and hepatitis have been identified as major themes and lack of medical facilities and chest infections emerged as less critical factors. In the treatment by local people category, ridiculous treatment was an important theme and physical violence and gender based differential treatment were comparatively less important factors. The factors occupying the big space in each category are major themes as compared to factors occupying little space in the tree map.

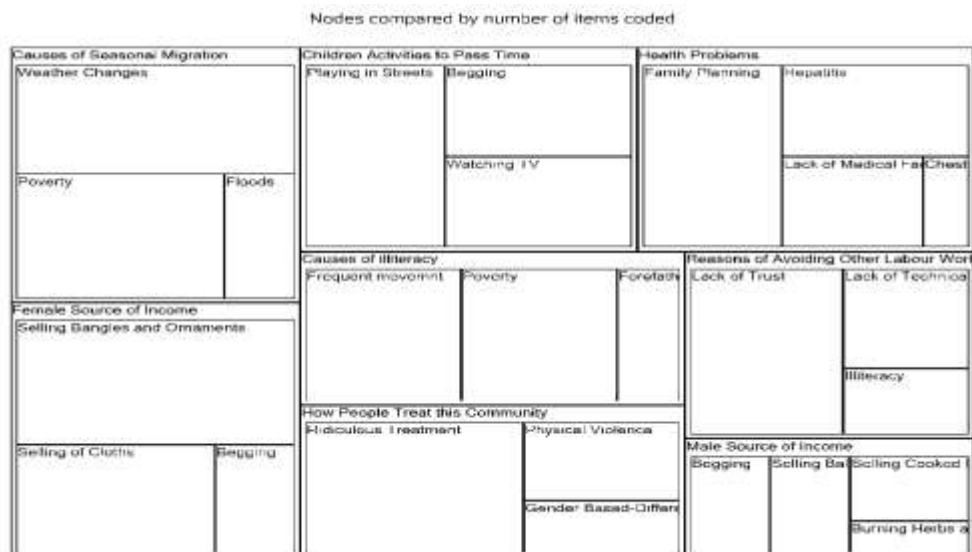


Figure 2: Tree map (Hierarchy Chart) of social problems of Bagri migrant community

The following categories /themes emerged.

- 1) Poverty and weather induced migration.
- 2) Poverty and Movement as barriers to children education
- 3) Out of school children's activities
- 4) Health related issues
- 5) Local people treatment of this migrant community

Discussion

The migrants, with their small personal belongings, suffer a great deal of social and economic problems in the destination areas (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003). The categories identified earlier are discussed in some detail in the following sections.

Living conditions (physical context of migrant community)

The living conditions as observed by the researchers are summarized in the following lines:

“There were tents on both sides of the road and Gobarmaidani (cow manure field) in between the two lines of tents. The smell was unbearable. Their tents were made of cotton with patches on them. There were no proper drainage, water, or sanitation arrangements. They defecate either in open or by digging a big hole in the ground like a well (septic tank) covered with small round tent (they told that four families were sharing one such washroom).”

Previous studies have revealed that migrants often live in difficult conditions without access to clean drinking water or hygienic sanitation. These migrants mostly live in tents or reside in slum areas, in poor conditions (Srivastava & Sasikumar, 2003; International Organization for Migration, 2008; Prem Singh & Ebenezer, 2013).

Causes of Migration

The main cause of the migration of Bagri community from their areas of origin to Quetta emerged to be poverty. Another major cause of migration that they articulated was the hot weather of their city of origin. One of the Bagri migrant women described it as under:

“Because of hot weather in Jhat Pat (home city), no one can go for earning in such scorching sun. It is hard to even walk, that's why we come here to Quetta in the summer. When we come here we work as salespersons, like selling clothes and ornaments etc. rather than working as labor.”

Another woman articulated this problem in the following manner:

“It’s very hot there. Floods ruined our land. All our crops are being ruined every year by floods. Flood water destroyed our belongings. That’s why we migrated here. We sell clothes, bangles, and ornaments etc. This is how we earn. Some also beg because we are under debt.”

The major themes that emerged under this category were two push factors that compel these migrants to leave their places: poverty and the hot season. Previous studies have also identified income level, employment opportunities, social wellbeing (c.f. Hugo, 1998) and individualized efforts to maximize their income as major causes of migration (c.f. Borjas, 1989). It is argued (Department for International Development (DFID) Report, 2007) that poverty, lack of employment and livelihood opportunities, and search for better life cause people to move to areas where they can find these. Rao (2011) discusses three major causes of migration in India as: survival, additional income/work as another source of income during period of no agriculture work (after completion of harvesting season), and search for comparatively better compensation and workplace environment (cited in Deshingkar & Start, 2003).

Some authors have described migrants as bonded laborers, who are poor and continuously in debt (see for example, Olsen and Murthy, 2000; Deshingkar & Start, 2003).

Profession (in both city of origin and destination)

An important finding about this community was that they adopt different professions in the city of origin and city of destination. Many of the interviewees said that they work in fields of zamindar when they are in their home city. They are peasant workers. One of the informant/respondents narrated his story as under:

“Male and female (all members of family) work on lands (agricultural activities like, preparing the land, planting, weeding, applying of fertilizers, harvesting etc.). Zamindar invests money in all these things and we give labor. Hence the profit is 50-50 between zamindar and us.”

In the destination city, Quetta, they are mostly involved in street selling or marketing job. Women usually sell cosmetics, clothes, and ornaments like bangles and other artificial jewelry, going from house to house and in the street. Men mostly sell balloons or toys in bazaar or streets. Many of the women, men and their children beg door to door in the surrounding areas to collect food items.

It has been observed by other researchers that migrants generally choose specific jobs which are low paid and not valued socially and they mostly prefer to reside in slums or areas which are not expensive due to their poor economic status (Castles, 2000). Children are drawn into begging or other blue-collar jobs from the age of five years. Leduc (2009), in a study on Himalayan Mountain migrants whom source of earnings were agricultural production and livestock raising, found similar results and stated that women were major earners of food for families.

Barriers to Education

In the two migrant tent areas, we did not find any child that attended school. The reasons stated by them were:

“We don’t have schools in our area. We don’t have permanent residence either in Sind or here in Quetta. For the kids to complete a year in school, we must stay at one residence for at least 9-10 months, but we are not able to do so. Moreover, we have no food to eat, no clothes to wear. How can we educate our children?”

“None of our children go to school, the first reason is that we are poor. The other reason is constant shifting from one area to another. We cannot bear living expenses. One problem is seasonal shifting and other is poverty, we can’t spend on books or clothes etc.”

These along with similar other narrations revealed two major causes of children’s deprivation from education: continuous migration and poverty. They start leaving their city of origin in April and spend the next six to seven months in Quetta, and in October they travel back to their villages. When the winter is over, they start leaving their own villages again. Due to this seasonal migration cycle, it is not possible to get their children to complete a whole academic year, and it does not correspond with the school calendar. The same findings were found by scholars in other countries about migrants’ children

education (see for example, Prem Singh & Ebenezer, 2013). According to the migrants, they are extremely poor and can't afford to spend on books or uniforms.

The Bagri migrant children are deprived of their basic right of education. The main problem related to migration is that migrant children do not have access to education and government assistance (International Organization for Migration, 2008). Due to the negligence of government authorities, they remain uneducated, unhealthy, and often get involved in illegal activities.

Health Problems

According to our findings most of the women were suffering from Hepatitis A and B. Out of the nine women that we met, six were suffering from Hepatitis. Most of them were not able to get vaccinations or treatments for these diseases due to lack of awareness and their poor financial conditions.

Similarly, the children were not regularly getting vaccinations for polio and other diseases. Similar problems were found to be prevalent in other countries due to seasonal migration. For example, it was noted that periodic outbreaks of measles were found in Niger due to periodic movement of the migrant families, their children often missed the due immunization course for measles (Berman, 2008).

Another health issue of migrant women articulated by authority law enforcement official was the risk of HIV/AIDS.

“Some Bagri women, mainly due to financial pressures, opt to be cheaper sex workers.”

During Interview some Bagri women also stated:

“We are sometimes sexually harassed/abused while being in the field during our door to door selling business. We have no choice but to tolerate it. There is a general agreement among all Bagri women that we will neither share it with our male counterparts nor report it to police.”

It has also been documented in the previous literature that migrants are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and are more likely to be sexually abused (International Organization for Migration, 2008). Burja (1997) and Pittin (1984) have documented those migrant women use commercial sex as a way of making a living in destination area away from home city. Our findings are very much in line with the findings of previous researchers. Since the Bagri women are uneducated and have absolutely no awareness regarding the risks involved in unsafe sex, this may have dangerous consequences not only for them but also for the people who interact with them. The living environment of migrant children is mostly unhygienic and dingy. They have no access to medical assistance. Their mothers lack basic nutrition and so do the children. Babies are often left by themselves or in the care of an older sibling (Prem Singh & Ebenezer, 2013).

General Treatment of People

When asked about how local people treat them? The respondents told,

“Very bad, in a very humiliating way. People abuse us in exchange for a small amount of money. Everyone has his own conscience. Sometimes people kick us out of their homes or shops. Some blame that we will steal something from their property.”.

Other respondents replied as:

“They misbehave. When they see I am a woman they tease and harass me. What can we do? we are poor.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Severe weather conditions for more than seven months make these families leave their hometowns and migrate to Quetta city for earning. The two main push factors for these Bagri migrants are weather and poverty. Based on our findings, the following recommendations are presented:

- 1) Government should make policies to handle the problem arising from internal migration and seasonal migration like the policies made for handling international migration/cross frontiers or borders migration.
- 2) They should be encapsulated at one point in the city so that provision of health facilities (vaccination etc.) and education are manageable.

- 3) Government can learn from the policies and programs of other countries to provide education to the children of these migrants who are unable to attend school only due to poverty and frequent movement. Policies such as a take-home ration scheme, school feeding formula, mobile school etc. can prove to be useful for such migrants.
- 4) NGOs should also arrange free medical camps and make efforts for provision of facilities such as building public toilets near their camps, conducting trainings for enhancing their skills and promoting awareness regarding maintaining a healthy living environment.
- 5) Coordinated efforts are required by all the government departments including local government, education departments, health units, water, and sanitation authorities not only to track the activities of these migrants but also to solve their problems.

Limitations

As for any qualitative research, the generalizability of the findings is a limitation of this study. The interviews were conducted with a seasonal migrant minority community in Quetta city. Hence the findings can't be generalized to other migrant groups in the city or other parts of the country.

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