

Marriage and family formation among the second-generation Afghans in Iran¹

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Abstract

In 2005, around 1.2 million documented Afghans remained in Iran around 33 percent of whom were second-generation, aged 15-29 who were either born in Iran, or arrived in Iran as children and were subsequently raised and educated in Iran. Education, occupational skills, family dynamics, and economic prospects of the second-generation Afghans in Iran have inspired different values and economic aspirations as compared to the first generation, and thus, the former has different perspective towards life in either of their host- or home society. This paper is based on the results of a qualitative study conducted in three settings, Mashhad, Tehran and Isfahan, and draws on data collected via 80 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions with second generation Afghans in Iran. The paper investigates the integration of the SG Afghans in Iran, but mainly concentrates on their marriage and family formation.

Introduction

Iran, for almost three decades, has experienced immigration wave from Afghanistan. Because of the mass influx migration, Iran is now faced with large numbers of second generation Afghans. Drawing on the 2005 Amayesh⁷ data the total number of registered Afghans living in Iran is a little over one million (1,021,323), 54 percent of whom are males. It has been estimated that the number of documented Afghans in Iran is close to 1.2 million (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2008), but this figure does not include unregistered Afghans, including single labour migrants, estimated to be 500,000 (Abbasi-Shavazi et

¹ Paper prepared for the session 904: The transition to adulthood among second generation migrants: navigating between two cultures of the 26th General Population Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, 27 September -2 October, 2009, Marrakech. The findings of this paper are based on The Second Generation Afghans project conducted in Iran with the with funding provided by the European Commission (EC), administered through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU).

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⁷ Amayesh refers to a census to identify foreign nationals periodically carried out by BAFIA. Three Amayesh or census have been conducted with the most recent conducted in 2008.

al. 2005; Glazebrook and Abbasi-Shavazi 2007). In 2006, around 341,157 or 33.0 per cent of the total population of Afghans in Iran were second-generation, aged 15-29 who were either born in Iran (around 41.5 %), or arrived in Iran as children and were subsequently raised and educated in Iran. This group composes the study population.

Second-generation Afghans in Iran comprise a particular demographic whose experiences and aspirations while not homogenous within the demographic, are different from their parent's generation, and from their counterparts in Afghanistan. Educational achievements, occupational skills, and economic opportunity in Iran have inspired different values and aspirations, although it should not be ignored that some Afghans claim that they have regressed in material terms in Iran. However, policies which differentiate non-nationals from nationals shape the opportunities and experiences of second-generation Afghans in Iran. Second-generation Afghans in Iran have been raised in an arguably more liberal social and religious environment, and exposed to values, attitudes and practices that are different from those of their parents (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2008). It is perhaps inevitable that some of their preferences and aspirations will reflect some convergence with their Iranian counterparts. Inter-generational differences occur universally as a result of naturally occurring social and technological change, however where two generations have been raised in different cultural and social environments, these differences may be exacerbated. Until now, the experiences and aspirations of this large population of Afghans in Iran have not been the subject of focused research. The aim of this paper is to analyse social adaptation of Afghan refugees with particular emphasis on their marriage and family formation.

Theoretical considerations

Consecutive immigrant generations and the process of their *adaptation* into host societies are emerging as a new focus of interest in the contemporary study of migration (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Since the 1990s, social scientists have focused their attention on the experiences and behaviour of the second generation as central to the understanding of immigrant adaptation and progress in the host society. Adaptation generally refers to the first (born outside the receiving country) and second (born in the receiving country but raised by foreign-born parents) generations of immigrants, because later generation descendants of immigrants generally integrate themselves into the receiving culture and do not acquire or retain many elements of the culture of origin.

Adaptation models in migration studies tend to theorize that as migrants adapt to the society of destination, their behaviour is converged towards that of the native-born population. Adaptation (social adaptation) is defined as 'the process by which a group or an individual adjusts his behaviour to suit his social environment, that is, other groups or the larger society' (Theodorson and Theodorson 1969:5).

Change is expected to occur at both the group level and individual levels (Berry 1992:70). In the context of second generation Afghans in Iran, and using marriage as

example, adaptation is examined in Afghan family formation, age at marriage, the degree of relative marriage, decision making process, and transition to adulthood (Lloyd, 2005; IUSSP, 2003; Jekielek and Brown, 2005; Billari et al, 1999; Rindfuss, 1991; Pajouhandeh,2004). Changes in each of these factors will demonstrate departure from their first generation, and convergence towards Iranian levels.

In this paper, we first examine the extent to which second generation Afghans have been adapted to the Iranian society, and then focus on their marriage, family formation and transition to adulthood.

Data and setting

The results in this paper are drawn from the study of Second Generation Afghans in Iran which was conducted in the cities of Mashhad, Tehran and Isfahan (see Appendix 1) in 2006. The three locations (Mashhad, Tehran, and Isfahan) were selected based on size of the Afghan population in their respective provinces. Thirty-one percent of registered Afghans reside in Tehran Province, 15 percent in Khorasan Province (Mashhad) and 12.6 percent in Isfahan Province (Amayesh 2005).

Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews using an open-ended questionnaire format, focus group discussions, and basic social mapping. The interviewers were themselves second-generation Afghans, four from Mashhad and one from Tehran, and all were Hazara Shia. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, training was conducted at the University of Tehran. In each field site, a key informant from the local community, usually associated with the local Afghan-administered school, was engaged to identify suitable second-generation respondents based on the study's sampling frame (See Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2008).

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the sample. In addition to the in-depth interviews, six focus group discussions (one male and one female focus group in every site) were conducted across the three fieldwork locations. None of the participants were the subjects of individual interviews. Eight interviews with parents of second-generation Afghans were conducted to understand generational issues.

Table 1. Second-generation Afghan study sample (N=80)

	Female		Male		TOTAL
	Single	Married	Single	Married	
Mashhad	9	7	7	9	32
Tehran	9	7	9	7	32
Isfahan	4	4	6	2	16
Sub-	22	18	22	18	80
TOTAL	40		40		

In addition to the qualitative data on second generation Afghans, we used the results of the Iran 2006 Census as well as the Amayesh data collected by the BAFIA in 2005.

Summary of findings

Second-generation Afghans had a much higher level of education compared to that for their parents and that for their counterparts in Afghanistan. The gender equality in educational attainment for second-generation Afghans was very high. Despite the improvements obtained in education, their integration in occupational structure was not considerable. As with their parents, second-generation Afghans were mainly concentrated in low level jobs, although there was slight occupational mobility across the generations. This was mainly due to restrictions posed by Iranian government. In addition, Afghan's lower level of skill and capital hindered their integration into higher level occupations.

Qualitative data showed that second-generation Afghans' attachment to the host society seemed to be at a relatively high level. A majority of them had interactions with Iranians. The interaction was positively related to higher level of education, being born in Iran and less intentions to return to Afghanistan. Only one-fifth of respondents wanted to return to Afghanistan. About one-fourth of the Afghans had no intention to return and the rest could not make any decision about the return.

Along with this attachment, second-generation Afghans showed their sympathy toward Afghanistan to a high extent. Many respondents (two-third) considered Afghanistan as homeland. Males and those born in Afghanistan were more likely to do so. Of those who were undecided about return to Afghanistan, more than 70% considered Afghanistan as homeland. The high level of consanguineous marriage as an indicator of family influence can also show tendencies toward the place of origin.

Many respondents identified intergenerational differences grounded in different values and attitudes. Some of these differences are a result of education, and it can be said that education represents one of the multiple layers that can shape identity. Respondents mentioned several dispositions that have grown out of the process of becoming educated. "Sociality" is also mentioned as an effect of education, as is consciousness about civil society, and the way patriarchal ideology structures gender relations. Holding values and dispositions more aligned with the Iranian socio-cultural milieu differentiates second-generation Afghans in Iran from their parents, and from Afghans in Afghanistan. But this is not to say that such alignment means that second-generation Afghans identify themselves as Iranians or are recognised as Iranians. Return to Afghanistan will not necessarily reduce this sense of being "in between"; in fact it may extend that feeling.

The average age at marriage for second generation Afghan (men and women) was significantly lower than among Iranians. While arranged marriage, often consanguineous, was the dominant mode of the parents of the second generation, assisted marriage and independent marriage have evolved to become contemporary practices, and preferred by many second-generation respondents. Unanimous approval for independent or "love marriages" was by no means forthcoming among second-generation respondents. There

is a tendency for second-generation women to perceive or to have experienced that they have less choice than their brothers in relation to choosing a spouse.

Marriage between Iranians and Afghans has implications for the identity of the offspring of these marriages, and the residential and national status of the Afghan partner. While the marriage of Afghan men to Iranian women was the dominant pattern, more recently, Iranian men have married Afghan women.

Finally, the second generation Afghans in experiencing a transitional period and is caught between two cultures of the same route but in different stages of transition. Given the level of education and transformation of their ideas towards a more modern life, the second generation is likely to converge to the Iranian culture, and at the same be a force of change for the attitudes and ideas of their counterparts in Afghanistan.

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