

IMPACT OF UNHCR'S COMMUNITY-BASED OUTREACH FOR INTERVENTIONS ON AFGHAN REFUGEE WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF REFUGEE OUTREACH VOLUNTEERS IN REFUGEE VILLAGE OF SARANAN AND REFUGEE SETTLEMENT OF HAZARA TOWN AND GHUSABAD, BALOCHISTAN

Kiran Muhammad Ayub Baloch ¹

¹ Graduate, BUIITEMS, Department of Sociology, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study examines UNHCR's community-based outreach interventions for Afghan refugee women in Saranan, Hazara Town, and Ghusabad, Balochistan, with a specific focus on the role and effectiveness of Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs). Using a qualitative research design, primary data were collected through a question guide via six in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions conducted with Afghan refugee women and female outreach volunteers. The study explores how ROVs facilitate information dissemination, access to essential services, and community cohesion within refugee settlements. The findings indicate that ROVs play a critical role in improving refugee women's access to healthcare, education, legal assistance, and psychosocial support, while also strengthening trust and community engagement. However, the study also identifies limitations related to delayed service delivery, insufficient health and educational facilities, and financial constraints faced by both refugee women and volunteers. UNHCR partners, including DANESH and WESS, were found to be central to program implementation in the study areas. The study highlights the need for strengthening outreach mechanisms through timely responses, skill development opportunities, and additional support for volunteers to enhance the effectiveness of community-based outreach interventions.

Keywords: *UNHCR, Balochistan, Women refugee outreach volunteers (OV's), Afghan refugee women, Community-based outreach interventions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Millions of Afghan refugees were forced to flee their homes due to conflict and environmental disasters. Pakistan has been one of the primary host countries since the 1970s, It has been hosted Afghan refugees nearly four decades. They had settled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and the former FATA regions of Pakistan during Migration (Borthakur, 2017). Currently, Pakistan accommodates approximately 1.44 million registered refugees and 1.43 million Proof of Registration (POR) card holders, while nearly one million remain unregistered. In Balochistan, around 57% of Afghan refugees reside in urban Quetta, whereas 43% live in described refugee villages (Ayub & Attaullah, 2022).

Afghan refugees remain among the most vulnerable population in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan despite their long-term presence. Their vulnerable conditions are driven by their uncertain legal status. Although, presence of Afghan refugees is acknowledged through issuance of Proof of registration card (POR cards), but it provides only temporary recognition. Due to limited access to basic human rights, they have very limited ability to earn a reasonable living and access essential public service needs. Afghan Refugees typically live in substandard conditions, have poor sanitation, very limited access to medical care, and do not have the ability to get a good education or gain additional skills. The lack of required documentation creates a greater burden on Afghan refugees as there are requirements from the government for National Identity Cards (CNICs) to be presented to medical facilities, which they do not possess.

Women within refugee communities are more marginalized due to cultural, social, and economic constraints. Afghan refugee women often face restricted mobility, early marriage, exploitation, and limited decision-making power. Initially, women's access to healthcare and education is restricted by the absence of female medical staff, language barriers, and conservative gender norms that restrain women from leaving their homes independently (Ali et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2024). Although community health workers and outreach teams provide maternal and child health services, immunization, and basic curative care in the community, cultural and strict social norms persist in limiting women's effective access to these services (Bell, 1996). Secondly, language is another barrier in service delivery to Afghan refugee population in cities (Quetta). Because refugees speak Pashto, Dari, Hazaragi, and other languages, while doctors often do not share a common linguistic background, resultantly, refugees cannot express their health problems clearly. Hence, communication gaps reduce both access to and quality of services. Finally, the fear of authorities and the threat of deportation have caused refugees to shun formal intervention systems, leading them instead to rely on informal and community-based support systems.

To meet this challenge, UNHCR has implemented a community-based outreach program designed to provide opportunities for two-way communication between refugee communities and service providers. The focus of the program is on training refugees as volunteers to provide information to the refugee community, identify community needs and connect refugees with healthcare, education, protection and legal services. Community-based outreach is a specific action-oriented program within broad framework of community-based approach that emphasizes community mobilization, community-based protection, community-capacity-building, and empowerment. Outreach volunteers connect refugee populations to humanitarian assistance organizations; with an emphasis on supporting women who are unable to travel freely and communicate easily with service providers. Volunteers build trust, increase social connections, and create access to much-needed services within refugee camps by providing educational programs, transferring access to relevant resources, and conducting follow-up reviews.

1.1 Background

In partnership with UNHCR, the Government of Pakistan launched a Community Health Worker (CHW) Programme in 1988 to assist Refugees in Pakistan. This was also the first CHW programme in Pakistan focused specifically on the Afghan refugee population. The programme's emphasis was on providing Basic Primary Health Care (BPHC) services to the Refugee population due to limited funding and the remote locations of many Refugees' housing. Due to historical context, female CHWs were prioritized and trained in the provision of Maternity care (i.e. midwifery) since, at that time, only 15% of births were assisted by trained professionals. In Balochistan, around 1,000 female CHWs were trained and appointed to work as unpaid volunteers in Refugee villages, and became an integral part of the health care system (Bell, 1996). UNHCR would later adopt and utilize a community-based approach to CHW programmes, focusing on participatory engagement and monitoring, as well as protection, through the development of partnerships with local agencies. Community-based Outreach Volunteers would become essential to this strategy, acting as intermediaries between the Refugee and Humanitarian communities. The outreach volunteers' participation in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of CHWs provides the program with more culturally sensitive programs, which makes it more responsive to the needs of the Refugee population. These Community-based outreach programmes provide help to the community by partnership with both local and international partner organizations such as DANESH Organization; Women Empowerment through Social Support (WESS); SEHER Foundation; Taraqee Foundation; Balochistan Relief and Support Programme (BRSP); and Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) Programme. The two main organisations providing outreach volunteer programmes in Urban Settlements as well as Refugee villages are DANESH and WESS, whereas legal aid is provided through SAHAR and Taraqee Foundation. The goal of these partnerships is to provide Afghan Refugees with better access to vital services by strengthening and coordinating community-based partnership efforts.

Unfortunately, UNHCR and its partners continue to try and support Afghan refugees, yet the level of support that refugees require continues to exceed available capacity. Limitations include language problems, lack of documentation, low income, overcrowding, and not being allowed to access basic public services. As such, while community-based outreach provides significant support to Afghan refugees and particularly to Afghan refugee women, ongoing structural and cultural barriers continue to hamper the effectiveness of community-based outreach. Therefore, there is an urgent need to enhance and expand current efforts to address the ongoing support needs of and to build capacity for Afghan refugees as well as provide access to essential services.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although UNHCR's community-based outreach interventions provide humanitarian assistance to refugees through Refugee outreach volunteers (ROVs), extensive gaps remain in the participation and inclusion of Afghan refugee women in Balochistan. The purpose of program is to share information, mobilize communities, and improve access to protection services, yet their impact is ineffective. Because male population is in direct contact with the OVs however, Afghan refugee women face cultural restrictions, limited mobility, low levels of awareness, and restricted interaction with outreach volunteers. Resultantly, their access to these interventions is limited. In many households, men inhibit women from meeting volunteers, considering such engagement a private or family matter. As a result, the outreach structure is functional; however, its impact on women's awareness, service utilization, and community cohesion is limited. Understanding how these interventions operate and why women's engagement remains low, is essential to assess the true effectiveness, limitations, and outcomes of UNHCR's community-based outreach program in refugee villages and settlements.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The proposed research is more than just an opportunity to inform policymakers about how best to address some issues faced by refugees living in certain parts of Pakistan. As noted above, this research provides a unique opportunity to identify gaps in published literature, particularly when considering the lack of information related to women victims of violence, OVs. While there have been numerous studies of women OVs residing in Dadaab Refugee Camp and Damascus, there are no current studies examining the functions, consequences, and interactions of women OVs living in refugee camp settings within Balochistan, Pakistan. This will allow for targeted solutions and policies to assist this specific group of refugees. By doing this, this study will close a gap in available knowledge regarding the community-based approach to providing assistance in refugee camps and allow communities to empower themselves through the establishment of proper infrastructure and improved outreach mechanisms.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research primarily studies the geographical aspects of the Saranan refugee camp in Balochistan where the UNHCR is providing outreach services to Afghan refugees through their volunteers who work with these refugees. The main purpose of the study is twofold: first, to investigate how ROVs of the UNHCR interact with Afghan refugee women; and second, to evaluate the success of these outreach programs by analysing the methods ROVs used to provide information and the reasons that obstruct Afghan refugee women from participating in these programs. In this study, community-based approaches are integrated into a framework of culturally appropriate programming with regard to the rights of women. This study have identified how cultural beliefs, restrictions imposed by family members and social barriers impact on how effectively these outreach programs were being implemented and therefore it will broaden the knowledge base for future studies on UNHCR outreach initiatives within the Afghan refugee population of Balochistan, Pakistan.

1.5 Limitation

The research encountered a few challenges due to its narrow time-frame when collecting data; therefore, less comprehensive information was gathered. The geographic focus of the study was the Saranan Refugee Camp and the refugee settlements of Hazara Town and Ghusabad; therefore, only Afghan refugee woman and women outreach volunteers were studied within those refugee camps, excluding the point of view of men and other stakeholders that are often involved in the refugee advocacy process. Additionally, while conducting the fieldwork, some targeted refugee groups were not accessible because of the cultural differences and language barriers between researchers and the refugees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hundreds of millions of people around the world do not have protection and sometimes support from their own countries. Those people become unable to meet their basic needs on their own. Different scholars and activists have classified all those people as 'refugees. Moreover, United Nations high commissioner of refugees defines refugees as the one who have been forced to leave their country due to war and violence and is afraid of being victimized for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees are outside the country of their nationality and are unable to avail themselves of the protection of that country (Lister, 2013).

The article Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Navigating the Legal and Humanitarian Challenges states how control and surveillance mechanisms exercised over immigrants in Australia. They were deprived of access to technology to communicate with family and friends that silencing their voices at global level. The policy of mandatory immigration detention introduced through legislation in 1992 that subjected men, women, and children to constant surveillance. This surveillance is subjected to through closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems, security screening devices to regulate detention sites. Asylum seekers faced social isolation, anxiety, and depression due to lack of direct interaction with host community members. In the absence of community-based outreach mechanisms to identify issues of refugee and help discussion, refugees themselves reacted to their situation though self-harm, hunger strikes, peaceful protests, and other forms of deviance to restore their rights (Ali et al., 2022). This evidence underlines the consequences of absence of community-based outreach and participatory engagement, thus indirectly reinforcing the importance of outreach volunteers as a non-coercive mechanism to identify needs, reduce distress, and prevent conflict by ensuring regular communication between refugee populations and institutions.

Gino Raidy highlighted the role of ROVs in refugee communities that ROVs act as a link between UNHCR and its partners and refugees. ROVs are classified into two types: specialized and general. The specialized ROVs have professional experiences of doctors, lawyers, and educators, While the general ones are usually young and dedicated individuals who handle the coordination between the UN and the refugees. Both, specialized and General ROVs, are given intensive training to provide basic psychosocial services, protection, legal aid, health services and even first aid to refugees. They are assigned to a particular region to live there, and provide information, psychosocial services and other essential services to refugees. Additionally, they hold monthly meetings with UNHCR team to discuss refugees' problems. One of the tasks of ROVs is to convey the rights and responsibilities of refugees in host country. Therefore, access to refugees' communities is almost impossible without ROVs. They are equally important for both UNHCR team and the refugees themselves (Raidy, 2016).

UNHCR has launched a project named Telling the Real Story (TRS), a platform for refugee women and girls to communicate with their concerns. This project recognizes that many refugee women are unaware of their rights and often stay silent Similar to other community-based outreach interventions, this project recognizes that many refugee women are unaware of their rights and often remain silent when something drastic happens to them due to cultural restrictions (Hossain et al., 2018; Bell, 1996). However, through TRS project, women get safe space to openly discuss and share their issue with volunteers. These volunteers encourage refugee women to speak about the issues. Refugee volunteers, such as Tsehaimesh Tesfay and Fatma Ali, spend time with women in the camps to discuss issues and help identify possible solutions for empowering marginalized refugee women (Raidy, 2016; UNHCR, 2017). Volunteers reported that they gain satisfaction from engaging with refugee women, building trust, awareness, and active participation among refugee populations.

During Syrian crisis, Lebanon hosted more than one million refugees, 80% of whom were women and children, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The government of Canada and other donor countries helped UNHCR in empowering these refugee women. Through outreach volunteers, UNHCR obtained up-to-date information on available services in refugee communities. The OVs gave feedback on the needs and problems of refugee women. They conducted awareness and information sessions on child protection, gender-based violence, and other issues. Through these sessions, they encourage refugee women to share their stories, problems, and collectively seek solution. The refugee women themselves have discussion to each other and share their stories; through these discussions they can learn from each other and support one another. Refugee women also engaged in peer discussions, learning from and supporting one another. The outreach volunteer program helped reduce their dependency on external aid (UNHCR, 2017).

Two humanitarian agencies, IRC and CARE, assigned refugee community workers to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps with NGO staff in Dadaab refugee camp. They, many of whom were GBV survivors, received training on gender norms and carried out outreach activities, awareness campaigns, and initial appointments to GBV centers. Through a cohort survey, the experiences of Dadaab camp GBV survivors revealed that the half of the survivors faced intimate partner violence (IPV), emotional, physical or sexual violence and early marriage. Unmarried women and girls were at higher risk of violence, including assault and rape from strangers particularly during repatriation periods. Female community workers helped women access psychological support, care, and protection services while also facing stigma and threats from their own community as they were both service provider and member of the refugee community (Hossain et al., 2018).

Roxane Wilber writes that around 28,000 Iraqi refugees assisted by UNHCR in Damascus. They were living mostly in urban areas due to limited camps. Many hid their identities, making it difficult for aid agencies to assess their needs. Field staff found it challenging to find and connect with female refugees and girls that experienced abuse related to sexual violence, forced marriages, or poverty. To address this challenge, the community outreach programme selected female refugee volunteers (OVs) based upon educational background, leadership experience, and representation from different ethnic/religious groups. At its inception in 2007, the number of trained OVs began with 8 women; however this number later grew to over 3,000 women. These volunteers identified community needs, assisted refugees with accessing resources, raised awareness of the need for protection against security threats and economic challenges, and reported information about these threats to UNHCR staff (Wilber, 2009).

Currently there is little research on the female OVs' roles within the refugee camps and urban settings for refugees in Baluchistan, despite the success of similar programmes throughout other areas. This study aims to fill this gap through qualitative research to assess the effectiveness of OVs in improving access of resources to Afghan refugee women and suggesting policy recommendations for enhancing these programs effectiveness.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter of methodology justifies the selected methods fit to achieve the objectives of research and research questions. This chapter focuses on research method used, sampling size, sampling technique, universe, unit of analysis, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

The researcher adopted a transformative paradigm for conducting this study, employing qualitative research designs. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data.

3.2 Data Collection

In this study researcher used primary data that is collected through in-depth interviews and FGDs (focus group discussions). Question guide served as data collection tool, allowing participants to express their views openly in detail.

3.3 Sample of the study

Sample of the study includes Afghan refugee women and female outreach volunteers living in refugee village of Saranan and refugee settlements of Hazara town and Ghusabad, Balochistan.

3.4 Sampling Technique

Two types of sampling techniques were used: purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select female outreach volunteers who were particularly knowledgeable and experienced in UNHCR's community-based outreach programs, as they could provide detailed insights. Convenience sampling was utilized to select Afghan refugee women based on their availability and willingness to participate. These participants shared their experiences and perspectives relevant to the study objectives.

3.5 Sample Size and Data Saturation

The sample size comprised six in-depth interviews and five FGDs. Most Afghan refugee women participants were married and aged 25-40 years, with all being uneducated. The outreach volunteers were mostly young; a few were married, and one volunteer was 43 years old. Few of the volunteers completed matriculation and few intermediate educations.

The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, a key concept in qualitative research. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or information emerged during interviews and discussions, ensuring the adequacy of the sample for addressing the study's objectives.

Table 1: Geographical Scope of Research

Settlement	Female OV Interviews	Afghan Refugee Women interview	Focus group discussion (2 Afghan women, 3 OV's)
Hazara Town	1	1	1
Ghusabad	1	1	2
Saranan camp	1	1	2
Total	3	3	5

3.6 Geographical Focus

The research focused on the Saranan refugee camp and refugee settlements of Hazara town and Ghusabad in Balochistan. Within the camp and refugee settlement, data collected from refugee women and community-based female volunteers.

3.7 Analysis

Data analyzed using thematic analysis The data collected through 6 interviews and 5 focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is appropriate for qualitative research and allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and report themes within the data. Thematic analysis was conducted in the following steps:

3.7.1 Familiarization with the data

The researcher transcribed all interviews and repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the content.

3.7.2 Coding

Key statements, phrases, and ideas relevant to the research objectives were highlighted and assigned initial codes.

3.7.3 Generating themes

Codes were grouped into broader categories to form themes that reflected the perceptions and experiences of refugee women regarding UNHCR's outreach programs.

3.7.4 Reviewing and refining themes

Themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data and were distinct from each other.

3.7.5 Defining and naming themes

Each theme was clearly defined to capture its essence, ensuring alignment with the research objectives.

3.7.6 Reporting

Themes were organized and presented with support quotations from participants to illustrate the findings.

To analyze the data, the main method of analysis used by the researchers was to code the data by hand. The themes that were created in the analysis of the data were based only on responses from the participants, therefore ensuring that the findings of the analysis were based on the participants and on the objectives of the study which were to investigate how Afghan refugee women see and understand the quality of the community-based outreach service of UNHCR.

7.8 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research study, strict adherence to the ethical principles was maintained. All individuals who participated in the study were given an informed consent form prior to beginning data collection, meaning they understood both the objective and process of the research and chose to participate of their own volition. Participants' identifying information has been kept

confidential through the use of anonymity in both the analysis of data and the way researchers present the results of their work as well as through secure storage of all collected data. Researchers took special care to treat participants with sensitivity to their vulnerability, especially in the case of Afghan refugee women, by creating a safe and respectful atmosphere during interviews and focus group meetings and also by allowing all participants the right to withdraw at any point in time without fear of retaliation.

4. RESULTS

This research characterized by breaking down the information gathered in six one-on-one interviews and five focus group conversations via a thorough review of the data produced. The objective of the research is to help readers develop an enriched view of Afghanistan female refugee's opinions and attitudes concerning Community Based Outreach Programs (CBOPs), as well as identify and categorize the major themes from the analysis of the data to allow better understanding of the common themes within the program(s). Each of these themes is representative of an area within which the respondents share both positive and negative feedback related to the program and/or provide examples to support their feedback regarding the barriers preventing the success of the programs in fulfilling their purpose.

5. THEMES

5.1 Awareness and Introduction to the OV Program

5.1.1 Female Volunteers' Home Visits and Awareness Sessions

The results from this research demonstrate that the most critical way that refugee women learn about the Outreach Volunteer Program (OV) is through home visits and awareness sessions held by female Outreach Volunteers. The theme for this finding came from a significant amount of data describing the process by which volunteers visited the homes of women and explained their role as a volunteer. This type of visit is especially valuable in situations where women have limited freedom of movement. Through these visits, OVs will inform women of the role they are playing in their community as volunteers for UNHCR and in conjunction with different partner organizations (DANESH, WESS, and BRSP). As a result of sharing information about the program and the support available to them, these visits also allow for the establishment of a rapport of trust and familiarity between the OVs and women, allowing for the women to receive an in-depth understanding of the program and the support available to them. Based on the data collected, it is recommended that face-to-face information visits be utilized to build awareness of the OV program with refugee women as opposed to using indirect means for communicating information. The participant quoted below illustrates how the process works:

"I have heard about the Outreach Volunteer (OV) program for the past three years, where women in our community work as Razakar (volunteers). They informed us that they are Razakar and are here to assist us. They visit our homes and invite us to sessions where they explain the program in detail, which is how I became aware of the OV program."

The article demonstrates that home-based outreach serves as both an information dissemination method and an avenue for females to get involved with community-based initiatives. It was found that the ability of women to become aware of the OV program is primarily influenced by the hands-on efforts made by volunteers through outreach.

5.2 Perceived Purpose of the Program

According to the analysis, the women of Afghan Refugees have a definite knowledge base regarding the overall purpose of the Community-Based Outreach Program provided by UNHCR as a result of frequent and ongoing interactions/relationships established with the Outreach Volunteers in home visits and Awareness Sessions. This theme developed as a result of participants stating how the Outreach Volunteers articulated the purpose of the Program and assisted the participants to understand their own role as the link between the Refugee Community and the Organization. The participants stated that the Outreach Volunteers explained to them the Program's objective of helping the Refugee Woman by listening to the refugee woman and providing her with access to necessary services such as Medical Care, Education, Financial Aid/Support, and Protection related Support. The outreach program is seen as a tool through which their individual needs can be attended to together/collectively and in an official format. Providing participants with examples from their own lives, encouraging participation in Open Discussions during the Awareness Sessions increased participants' understanding and confidence in regard to the Outreach Program. Participants shared their understanding of what the Program was trying to accomplish through the Eyes of One of the Female Refugee Participants:

"In the meeting, Khala (volunteer) explained that the purpose of the program is to help the community women and listen to their concerns. She said that she works as a volunteer with an organization and is there to help us. She mentioned that we could approach her with any issues, whether related to financial difficulties, health problems, education, or violence. Khala assured us during the meeting that she would forward our cases to the organization for support. She also invited us to visit her home or contact her directly if we faced any challenges, then we together would find solutions or provide assistance."

This viewpoint shows that women see the outreach program as easy-to-use, being responsive to their needs, and having support from veterans because participants in the program are community residents and not outsiders. The Way Volunteers perceive Victim

Services complements this; one volunteer stated that she believes the primary role of her position is to provide women with an explanation of what is offered through the program:

“I have been working as an Outreach Volunteer (OV) for the past four years. When I first started, I held meetings at my home, inviting refugee women to join. During these meetings and sessions, I explained my role and reassured them that I was there to support them, without any charge or risk to them.”

The statement shows that volunteers make building trust and relieving fears about accessing services for refugee women their top priority. Finally, the volunteers did well communicating to women that they can benefit from the services offered through the outreach program and that they can feel confident that they can get help from those services.

5.3 OVs as a Part of Support System

The research suggests that Afghan refugee women gain confidence in Outreach Volunteers (OV) over time and with each subsequent interaction/collaboration with them, and as a result of their regular interactions with and the type of support provided to them by volunteers, women develop confidence and a greater understanding of OVs. Although most of the women are initially, reluctant to accept the content of an OVs former advice or to believe the accuracy of what they will receive from them, through time, continued meetings with OVs (regular presence) and continued demonstrations of the support they provide have created confidence and equality between the OVs and the Afghan refugee women. With time, women view OVs as positive and valuable resources for support regarding both personal and social matters. Trust in one another opens the door for women to view OVs as part of their circle of support, not only for the information shared, but also as nurturing, supportive, and encouraging sources for encouragement, motivation, and reassurance. A shared experience from an Afghan refugee woman indicates that developing a rapport with an outreach worker was a gradual process:

“I remember when I would first meet with Khala (the outreach worker). I really didn't trust her at all and found it hard to believe anything she said. But even though I didn't trust her completely, I was still happy and hopeful that there was someone who could assist me without wanting something in return. Now, when I have conflict at home or am feeling frustrated, I tell Khala about it, and she encourages and supports me and tells me that together we can solve my problems.”

The two narratives above illustrate the transformation of an initial mistrust into an emotional trust and reliance upon the outreach worker through a continuation of the relationship. The second narrative describes the emotional connection developed between the outreach workers and elderly female Afghan refugees: *‘We feel very helpless and needy, and when someone gives us hope and tells us that we have the ability to be successful in resolving our issues, we feel happy and fulfilled.’*

These two examples illustrate the dual function the outreach workers have in meeting the practical and emotional needs of Afghan refugees, as well as providing them with empowerment. As such, these examples demonstrate that the outreach workers are critical in supporting Afghan female refugees' mental health and resilience.

5.4 Importance of OV's Role

As Outreach Volunteers (OVs), these volunteers play a vital role in providing information to Refugee Community members on resources and services, and for mobilising refugee communities and establishing two-way communication between refugees and UNHCR or other similar organisations. OVs also provide refugee women with a voice to communicate their needs and concerns to the organisation and/or partner agencies. After collecting information from the organisation and/or partner agencies, they return to their community with that information for distribution among the women in the community regarding services offered, requirements for obtaining those services, and assistance from the organisation and/or partner agencies. Additionally, OVs educate the women through an awareness session on issues such as education, violence prevention, as well as other social/protection services that help improve the connection of refugee populations to the service providers. The intermediary role is important to the refugee women, who remarked that without the OVs, there would be limited means to communicate with the organizations.

‘If there were no OV program, how would organizations know about our issues? We would not even know which organizations are working to support us. Now, if I have any issue, I can directly visit the OV's home for assistance.’

According to this declaration, the OVs are instrumental in bridging the gap of lack of trust between the refugee community and the institutions that serve them by acting as the first line of defence, an accessible and reliable resource for assistance within the local community. The results indicate that female OVs provide an increased level of confidence and willingness to contribute by enabling refugee women to find a safe person to talk about any challenging topics that they may face regarding their situation; this is particularly valuable when compared to speaking to someone who is not a member of their community. Creating commonality between the OV and refugee women in both a sociocultural aspect can enable OVs to motivate, educate, and create support networks for refugee women. A specific comment made by one participant is as follows:

“If a Pakistani woman came and said she is here to help us, we would not trust her. Now Khala (OV) is a member of our community, so I can easily trust her. She has helped us understand the importance of education. Previously, we did not know what violence was, but now we are aware and know how to act against it.”

OVs (Outreach Volunteers) facilitate community responsibility and peer assistance through promoting the collective nature of the community, and through the support of the refugee women engaged with OVs and the supportive behaviours that they have been modelled by the OVs. They provide support to other women through providing them with access to OVs.

“Working with the OVs is like being part of a family. When I had a problem, I could always count on support from other women in the community and the OVs to assist me in getting the appropriate support. The OVs were always there to encourage us and give us the strength to continue. Now that I am an OV I also give encouragement and support to my fellow women at times of difficulty.”

The analysis demonstrates that OVs are not just instrumental in sharing information and accessing services, they have also been found to build trust within the community, increase awareness of and promote mutual assistance, and improve the social ties among Afghan refugee women.

5.5 Access to Services and Support

Individuals depend on the services and supportive systems available to them to survive and function within society; this is particularly true for Afghan Refugee Women. Supportive services and systems are necessary for achieving social stability and well-being because it is impossible for a person to live a healthy lifestyle and have a fulfilling life without some form of support or assistance at different stages in their lives. A theme analysis confirmed that Outreach Volunteer (OV) roles in helping Afghan Refugee Women gain access to essential services and supportive systems are significant. OVs assist Afghan Refugee Women with gaining access to numerous areas of need including mental health, financial assistance, health care, education, and information about violence against women.

5.5.1 Emotional Support

People often go through feelings of sadness, fear, anxiety, shame, or anger. However, many individuals reach out for assistance from their family or social network when trying to cope with these types of negative emotions. When looking at how much psychological distress is felt by men compared to women, it appears that refugee women will have significantly more psychological distress than men overall. Refugee women have a higher level of psychological distress than refugee men because of domestic violence, cultural limitations, stress related to their displacement, and limited support from outside their immediate family. As a result, the data indicate that OVs offer refugee women many forms of emotional and psychological support. According to participants, OVs listen to the women's concerns, support, and direct them in order to alleviate their stress regarding domestic and social conditions. One woman stated:

“My husband is addicted to drugs, and he fights with me and beats me. I used to share my situation with Khala. She comforted me and gave me emotional support. I feel easy when I talk to her. She also encouraged my husband, telling him that his wife is a good woman and should not be treated this way.”

This narrative demonstrates that OVs contribute to improving emotional resilience among refugee women and act as a trusted support system during times of distress.

5.5.2 Financial Assistance

Many Afghan women have survived conflict and are now refugee single mothers, which has also forced them to become responsible for their children's upbringing on their own in the country where they are now residing. Many males have limited work opportunities and make low wages, resulting in little possibility for family members to be able to fully provide for their household needs as their families do not have the financial resources to do so. The analysis shows that financial assistance offered through OV is important to women, particularly widows and single mothers, for maintaining household stability and assisting their children with receiving an education. One participant stated: *‘I am a widow with five children and cannot afford to educate them. The community has been kind enough to help me by collecting money to cover my house rent. When I shared my financial situation with Khala, she gave me twelve thousand rupees.’*

This finding exhibits that OVs serve as a bridge between vulnerable women and available financial support by providing tangible assistance that enhances women's capacity to sustain their families.

5.5.3 Health Services

Preventive care, health promotions, rehabilitation and medical service delivery from providers within the medical institution are all considered health services as described by (Iqbal et al. 2024). Access to government hospitals for afghanan refugees has been limited due to lack of documentation. Most refugees do not have the financial capability to seek care from the private sector. Culturally, many women face restrictions on their movement, especially when female staff is not available. The analysis has indicated that OVs have provided access to essential health services and directed women to the appropriate source of care in an effort to decrease these barriers. One refugee woman shared: *‘I have joint pain and stomach issues, and my family could not take me to the doctor. I asked the Razakar of my community for help, and she took me to see one. However, I still have joint pain that requires proper treatment.’*

These findings underline that while OVs improve access to initial healthcare, gaps remain in the availability of comprehensive medical treatment within refugee communities.

5.5.4 Motivation for Education

According to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all humans worldwide should have access to the right to an adequate level of education. Education is essential to building mutual respect between individuals, supporting social inclusion and helping to create the conditions for sustainable culture (World Health Organization [WHO], 1996). Many OVs report that all OVs support the prioritization of education by refugee women and their children and have faced barriers like cultural differences and insufficient support resources. OVs also help educate parents on how their child's education will benefit them in the long run. A participant's comments illustrate this point: *'My husband did not allow our children to attend school, but the Khala spoke with him, encouraging him to understand the benefits of education. Now our children go to school.'*

Another OV noted: *'My neighbor does not allow his two daughters to go to school, but these girls want to receive an education. So, we helped them get education secretly when their father is not at home.'*

A volunteer further explained: *'Before, these women were opposed to education, but now they want to educate their children. Under a two-year project, I have opened a school in my home for children in my community.'*

These findings denote that OVs act as catalysts for behavioral change by reshaping attitudes toward education and increasing access to learning opportunities for refugee children.

5.5.5 Raising Awareness about Violence

Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power inflicted upon someone that leads to harm (physical, psychological, or emotional) and disproportionately impacts women and girls, as per (Jacquin, 2025). Women refugees from Afghanistan encounter many types of violence, which include, but are not limited to: early marriage, domestic violence and emotional violence, and often are subject to increased amounts of violence due to the use of drugs and alcohol by the male members of their families. During the analysis of the data, it was noted that OVs were a major source of support in reducing violence by providing education, counselling, and connections to legal and protection services. One participant indicated: *The cases of domestic violence in my home have decreased. Previously, my mother-in-law and husband treated me violently, but now the Khala helped them understand that this behavior is wrong.'*

Another woman reported: *'Once I refused to give my husband money for drugs, my brothers-in-law beat me and kicked me out. The Khala supported me and spoke to them, advising them not to treat me this way.'*

Evidence indicates that the work of OVs also helps to lessen acts of violence. For example, although there is no formal legal framework for refugees in Pakistan, there is an ongoing mechanism created by UNHCR and its partner organisations so that individuals suffering from domestic violence and other types of abuse will continue to report it and receive justice. In this sense, OVs provide critical support to women in addition to immediate assistance; they help empower those women by providing them with information about their legal rights as well as by encouraging victims to report abuse formally and providing long-term security and protection for those victims.

5.6 Challenges

5.6.1 Approaching

The findings present that there are no major structural barriers in approaching community-based Outreach Volunteers (OVs) However, access remains uneven due to cultural and social constraints. Home visits by OVs ease communication, allowing refugee women to share personal issues within the privacy of their homes. Despite this, Afghan cultural norms often restrict women to visit others' homes or move freely outside. Additionally, most refugee women lack access to mobile phones, which further limits direct communication. Resultantly, women depend on OVs' home visits to convey their issues. One refugee woman explained:

"Before, it was difficult for me to approach the OV because my husband did not allow me to visit others' homes. Then the Razakar herself started coming to our home. As we live in the same community, she is already aware of many issues. When I cannot meet her, she visits me and listens to my problems."

Although visiting women's homes provides women an opportunity to be served, it is evident that there are some challenges also for the OVs. Many of the volunteers expressed being disappointed that it was difficult to gain the trust of women regarding their role and what they intend to provide. Because women do not know about the programs offered through humanitarian organizations and have a lack of trust in them, many women will hesitate to interact with OVs, question their credibility or respond negatively. This leaves the OVs feeling that the outreach they do is both emotionally taxing on them and creates an uncomfortable social situation. One of the OVs gave the example of the difficulties faced: *'Visiting unfamiliar homes felt uncomfortable at first. It was difficult to gain women's trust and convince them that we were genuinely there to help. They often asked for proof and sometimes reacted with disrespect or harsh language.'*

The finding indicates that restricted movement and limited access to communications and other resources for Refugee Women have hindered their ability to reach out to Outreach Volunteers (OVs) independently. Therefore, it is important for programs to visit the homes of Refugee Women to ensure successful implementation. However, Outreach Volunteers also face obstacles when working to develop trust and acceptance within the communities they serve. As a result, both Refugee Women and Outreach Volunteers have trouble gaining access to one another and approaching each other easily.

5.7 Additional Support or Services for Community

The results show that the Outreach Volunteer programme supports Afghan refugee women and indicates that there were several other services participants felt would better enhance the effectiveness of this programme. Participants Chose: providing timely resolutions to their cases; developing their skills; conducting awareness sessions on drug misuse; providing educational support for children; and increasing access to health care. These following subthemes are based on the input provided by participants regarding their current service gaps and ideas for meeting those gaps.

5.7.1 Timely Resolution of Cases

Volunteer coordinators gather documented cases of work with Afghan refugee women, including expressing their needs and barriers, and submit them to the appropriate agency. While there are monthly supervisor meetings that include formal discussions, in urgent situations the coordinators will immediately contact their supervisor via phone. In spite of the time constraints, some volunteers noted that it is common for an individual to wait several months before resolution is achieved or they receive services. By allowing for such a long delay in response time, volunteers have a tendency to see problems escalate, which lessens the ability to provide adequate assistance and often creates reluctance for the refugee woman to access assistance again in the future. As one woman stated:

“We wait for months to get a response from the organization, and sometimes we become disappointed and think it will not help us. We keep calling and visiting the OV’s home to ask whether our concern has been approved or not. I suggest that our issues and services should be provided as soon as we bring them to attention.”

Outreach Volunteers also emphasized that quick responses could strengthen community trust and engagement:

“If women’s problems are addressed promptly and they receive assistance when they need it, our interactions with refugee women will naturally improve. When women share their positive experiences, it encourages the whole community to engage more openly with the OVs.”

These findings suggest that improving response time is essential for increasing trust, program credibility, and overall effectiveness.

5.7.2 Establishment of Skill Development Centers

According to the participants, providing support for skills development is closely linked to providing education to women so they can create economic independence for themselves. Financial insecurity was identified by refugee women as the most difficult challenge they face. A solution to these issues would be to establish skill development centres in refugee villages/settlements. These skills development centres would teach women how to make products such as clothing through sewing, embroidery, craft work, cooking, etc., as well as provide basic computer skills; this will create the opportunity for them to be able to provide for themselves within their community. Adolescent girls would also benefit from having learned valuable skills before they need to support themselves or become economically autonomous. One female refugee said:

“Skill development centers should be established in the community where we can learn sewing, cooking, and other practical skills to earn an income. These centers would allow us to use our talents, create products for sale, and gain financial independence. Our daughters could also learn embroidery and sewing to support their families and secure a better future.”

The findings indicate that skill development initiatives could reduce financial vulnerability and promote long-term self-sufficiency among refugee women.

5.7.3 Sessions Against Drug Use

The issue of drug abuse among males, the refugee population in particular, has also been identified as a key concern. Many of the women's refugee groups and other stakeholders spoke of how addiction is often a contributing factor to domestic violence, child neglect, financial instability and serious harm to children. An OV from Saranan reported that he lost his wife to a drug overdose and that she had also been a victim of domestic violence. *‘Yesterday, a sad incident occurred in a nearby home where a six-year-old child passed away after ingesting his father’s drug medication. The family initially thought the child was sleeping but later realized he had died.’*

These findings stress the urgent need for targeted awareness sessions and interventions against drug use to promote family safety and social stability within refugee communities.

5.7.4 Facilitating Educational Support

Research shows that financial problems and lack of access to education and child labour greatly impact a refugee's ability to attend school. In a Saranan camp, boys are often expected to work to help supplement their family's income, whereas girls can continue to attend school until 5th grade. Many female refugees feel that if they were to receive funds, they could reduce child labour, which would allow more children to attend school. This is what one mother of a refugee said: *'We need financial assistance and educational services so that our children can go to school instead of working. With proper support, families can focus on education rather than depending on their children's income.'*

An OV from Hazara Town highlighted the seriousness of the issue: *'Parents force their children into labor because they cannot afford education. Children become breadwinners for their families. Child labor is increasing drastically, and if no action is taken, it could reach 90%.'*

These findings indicate that integrated educational and financial support is essential to break the cycle of child labor and ensure access to education for refugee children.

5.7.5 Access to Health Services

The number of available health care professionals from either private or public sources is therefore restricted for refugee women who are being treated for a lack of resources due to economic distress and/or restrictions placed upon them by the community. Many of the health facilities in refugee camps (where the majority of the responsibility for health services is handled by the UNHCR) have inadequate staff to deliver services, and are therefore lacking in many essential items such as supplies and equipment necessary to deliver high-quality health care. Refugee women who have gone to other communities outside of the camp setting for health services have reported being treated differently from other women because of being refugees. One refugee woman described her experience this way:

"I went to the old camp for medical care, but they treated me badly because I am from the new camp and refused to provide treatment. Our camp has a small dispensary, but it does not have enough staff or medicines. We want the same health services here as in the old camp."

These experiences indicate a strong need for well-equipped and adequately staffed healthcare facilities within refugee communities to ensure equitable, respectful, and accessible medical care.

5.8 Additional Support and Services for OV

Outreach Volunteers (OVs) provide critical support to Afghan refugee women; however, they also confront numerous difficulties in their roles, which may hinder their motivation, safety, and continued participation. Participants acknowledged the need for institutional support by way of financial assistance, formal recognition, a designated workspace, and experience documentation of OVs. Support mechanisms such as these will help make the OV program more effective and sustainable in the long run.

5.8.1 Financial Support

The same factors that limit employment opportunities, the lack of formal qualifications, the challenges to obtaining documentation, and the restriction of their culture all these factors cause financial disparity for both Afghan refugee women and the Outreach Volunteers. Most of the Afghan refugee women who volunteer are matric or intermediate qualified (FSc) and have no higher education due to their financial situation, and as a volunteer, they spend a great deal of time and energy doing community service for no pay. The overwhelming majority of Afghan refugee women engaged in community service through OV programs feel that they are only volunteers and therefore unable to pursue financial independence as a result of their work through volunteering. The majority of them would prefer to receive financial support, either from the OV program or from paid internships for the purpose of covering their basic household needs and avoiding financial dependence. As an example, one OV stated the following: *'We dedicate several hours away from our homes working as unpaid volunteers. We need payment to support our families. I have to pay house rent and provide education to my children, and for that, I need financial support.'*

Another volunteer highlighted her long-term commitment: *'I have been working with Danesh for the past ten years, gaining valuable experience and expertise. Based on my long-standing commitment and skills, I believe I now deserve an internship opportunity rather than remaining an unpaid volunteer.'*

These findings suggest that introducing stipends or structured internship opportunities could enhance volunteer retention, motivation, and financial stability.

5.8.2 Identity Cards

Identity cards are important for Outreach Volunteers as they provide official confirmation of the individual as a volunteer. Holding an identity card establishes the legitimacy of that individual and raises the level of faith in the community. Identity cards also give

Outreach Volunteers a greater sense of security, both from a legal standpoint and from a personal standpoint, while participating in outreach activities. One Outreach Volunteer stated: *'There should be an identity card for OV's that represents our role and position. It would allow us to prove that we are part of the OV program and are working to help our community.'*

The findings indicate that identity cards could strengthen volunteers' credibility, reduce mistrust, and facilitate safer and more effective community engagement.

5.8.3 Formal Office Space

As per the study results, OV meetings, trainings and sessions are still conducted within the homes of volunteers; there are not currently any dedicated locations for the activities involved with the OV programme. Furthermore, there is no designated office to conduct sessions or to disseminate information regarding the OV programme. Thus, this creates a challenge for the refugee women to discuss sensitive issues as well as for the volunteers to visit someone's unknown house, which may create safety concerns. Participants felt that having an official office located within the community would assist both the refugee women and the volunteer by creating an area of familiarity and comfort in order to access the OV programme. A refugee volunteer said:

"There should be an official office in our community where women and volunteers can easily visit. If anyone has an issue, they could come to the office and share their concerns. This would make our work easier, as people would already trust the office as an official place established to support them."

These findings suggest that establishing a formal office could enhance program visibility, safety, and effectiveness.

5.8.4 Experience Certificates

Experience certificates were identified as an essential requirement for Outreach Volunteers because they provide evidence of an Outreach Volunteer's skills, training, responsibilities, and length of service. Without the appropriate documentation, the Outreach Volunteer is unable to apply for any future paid positions, internships, and potential employment opportunities. An example is Qamar Gull, an Outreach Volunteer in Ghusabad, who said:

"I have gained significant experience and expertise through my work, and based on this, I deserve an experience certificate. I request a certificate that includes details of the training sessions I have attended and conducted, as well as the cases I have worked on. I believe this certificate would help me secure further opportunities."

The findings indicate that providing experience certificates would enhance volunteers' professional recognition and support their long-term economic empowerment.

6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

6.1 Strengthen Community-Based Health Services

Refugee women face barriers to accessing hospitals, including various social, economic, and cultural barriers, discrimination, and inadequate facilities in the camps. To improve the access of refugee women to healthcare, it is important to set up basic health units that are located within the settlements for refugees and that are developed according to population-to-healthcare ratios. Furthermore, when developing basic health units, they should be staffed with female health professionals, including doctors, nurses and midwives, and have necessary medications available to offer culturally appropriate care and services to refugee women.

6.2 Address Child Labor Through Integrated Education and Income Support

Child labour has been proven to be caused by poverty and inadequate access to education. In agreement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), it is recommended that the Government of Pakistan focus on providing free education for refugee children, creating income-support systems for families, and developing community awareness programmes to alleviate dependency on child labour within households.

6.3 Introducing a Structured Quick-Response Mechanism in the OV Program

It was repeatedly reported by refugees, as well as supported by volunteers, that delays in the resolution of cases was a serious issue. For this reason, the outreach volunteer programme should include definitions of designated focal points, realistic timelines for providing responses (to refugees) and enhance coordination among outreach volunteers and partners to improve response times.

6.4 Establish Skill Development Centers for Refugee Women

Widespread financial insecurity is reported by women; therefore, there is a need for skill development centers in refugee villages and settlements to equip women with market-relevant skills, such as sewing, embroidery and basic computer skills so that they can develop income-generating activities in their own communities.

6.5 Strengthen Substance Abuse Awareness and Referral Mechanisms

According to the results of the study, addiction to drugs among male refugees has a detrimental effect on their families and women's welfare. In the report, we propose providing informative sessions and/or counselling, in addition to training OV's in the identification of those with substance use disorders and the referral of these individuals to existing services and mental health care providers in Quetta by means of formalised coordination of care.

6.6 Establish Formal Outreach Offices in Refugee Settlements

Women's involvement is constrained by the lack of official locations and increased safety risks to volunteers. Establishing a formal office for outreach within refugee camps will facilitate increased safety in establishing contact between Community Women and Outreach Volunteers, enhance the visibility of programs, and help build trust between these two groups.

6.7 Provide Financial Support or Internship Opportunities for Outreach Volunteers

As the study shows that most OV's face financial hardship and serve without compensation, introducing stipends or internship-based support would improve volunteer motivation, retention, and program sustainability.

6.8 Issue Official Identity Cards to Outreach Volunteers

Lack of formal identification undermines volunteers' credibility. Issuing official OV identity cards would provide proof of affiliation, enhance trust among refugee women, and offer basic protection during fieldwork.

6.9 Issuance of Experience Certificates

Providing experience certificates to outreach volunteers would formally recognize their contributions and improve their future employment opportunities with NGOs and humanitarian organizations.

7. CONCLUSION

This study investigates outreach programs designed for Afghan women Refugees developed by UNHCR through community-driven efforts in both Saranan and Ghusabad Balochistan; our main aim is attempting to find out how these programs have been interpreted by Refugee Women. This research project's main goal is to gather refugee women's opinions and thoughts about volunteer efforts to assist Refugee Women. In-depth Interviews and Focus Groups were conducted by gathering information from both Afghan Refugee Women and Female Contact Volunteers, which demonstrated that Financial Disparity continues to be the most frequently identified issue they face. However, because of the support and assistance provided by OV's, many of these women have received access to basic private services through their collective community. Generally speaking, Outreach Volunteers are instrumental in helping to identify Refugee Women's needs for health service, education, and Legal Representation. In comparison to what was identified, Outreach Volunteers do not provide adequate services (i.e., health care, education) to Refugee Women and do not help Refugee Women find Employment Opportunities (skills development programs). Because Outreach Volunteers are required to provide training and grow the skillset of Refugee Women, improving volunteer motivation by way of intern programs and financial compensation will be beneficial and advantageous to all parties involved.. The experience certificate can lead to future opportunities for OV's; without an identification card, the volunteer must prove their identity (to overcome difficulties associated with the lack of ID). This study provides contextualised information about UNHCR's community based outreach interventions to Afghan refugee women living in Balochistan, which has not been examined extensively in the existing literature for this geographic region and demographic group. In addition, it deepens the theoretical insight into the community based and participatory intervention approaches used by UNHCR by demonstrating how trust in cultural norms and gender sensitive outreach/communication result in women's access to social services and support networks. Furthermore, from a practical standpoint, this research provides evidence-based results to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of outreach programs creating actionable recommendations for UNHCR and the organisations working with asylum seekers/refugees in improving service delivery and outreach effectiveness while also enhancing the level of participation of women refugee communities.

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