

Legal Status and Psychosocial Well-Being of Central Asian Migrant Women in Russia

Victor Agadjanian*

University of California, Los Angeles

ByeongDon Oh

University of Kansas

Cecilia Menjívar

University of California, Los Angeles

Abstract

Immigrants' legal status has shown numerous tangible consequences for their incorporation trajectories in Western contexts. However, little is known about the effects of (il)legality in non-Western settings. Moreover, most research has focused on economic and other objective effects of (il)legality. In this study, we use rich survey data from Russia, the world's second biggest recipient of international migrants, to examine the association of legal status with several psychosocial outcomes among migrant women from Central Asia. The preliminary results of the multivariate analyses suggest that legality is positively associated with immigrants' perception of their rights and with their assessment of their relations with natives. Yet, legality is also negatively related to immigrants' satisfaction with their income. Finally, legality positively correlates with self-efficacy and negatively with depression. Together, the findings deepen the theoretical foundations of the scholarship on the effects of immigrant (il)legality, while also broadening its thematic and geographic foci.

* Corresponding authors: Professor, Department of Sociology, UCLA. Email: agadjanian@soc.ucla.edu

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Extended Abstract

Background

Legal status, shaped by both the content of immigration laws and their implementation (Menjívar and Abrego 2012; De Genova 2004), affects all aspects of international migrants' lives.¹ Legal status has shown profound and far-reaching implications for migrants' economic advancement and social well-being in major western migrant-receiving contexts (e.g., Bean, Brown, and Bachmeier 2015; Bloch, Sigona and Zetter 2014; Dreby 2015; Durand, Massey, and Pren 2016; Garcia 2018; Gee and Ford 2011; Gorina, Agadjanian, Zotova 2017; Greenman and Hall 2013; Hall, Greenman, and Farkas 2011; Hall and Greenman 2015; Landale, Oropesa, and Noah 2017; McConnell 2015; Orrenius and Zavodny 2015; Thayer et al. 2016). Fears and threat of detention and deportation undermine immigrants' social and emotional connections to mainstream society (Valdez et al. 2013). Exclusionary laws and precarious legal status also have important consequences for access to health care and health outcomes (Agadjanian and Yoo 2018; Agadjanian and Zotova, forthcoming; Asad and Clair 2017; Casillas et al. 2015; Castañeda 2009; 2015; Deeb-Sossa and Billings 2014; Gee et al. 2016; Schoevers, van den Muijsenbergh, and Lagro-Janssen 2010; Vargas and Juarez 2017; Wolff et al. 2005). The implementation of exclusionary immigration laws and related xenophobia impact migrants' mental health by increasing stress and anxiety (García 2018; Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco and Dedios 2013; Moya Salas Ayón 2013).

¹ We use the words 'migrant' and 'immigrant' as semantically equivalent given the increasingly blurred distinctions between temporary and permanent moves in today's transnationalized world. In Russia, from where our data come, the word 'migrant' is more widely used.

Legal exclusion typically goes hand in hand with, and is reinforced by, ethno-racial discrimination and marginalization (e.g., Agadjanian, Menjívar, and Zotova 2017; Calavita 2005; De Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Flippen and Parrado 2015; Reeves 2013a), further aggravating migrants' well-being and health outcomes (Asad and Clair 2018; Larchanché 2012). Finally, the effects of illegality intersect with those of gender, as female migrants with undocumented or irregular legal status may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Agadjanian, Menjívar, and Zotova 2017) as well as to adverse health outcomes due to restricted access to health and social services (Agadjanian and Yoo 2018; Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Reina and Lohman 2015).

Despite multifaceted and far-reaching consequences of migrant (il)legality, analyses of its effects are greatly constrained by the paucity of direct quantitative data as legal status is rarely recorded in surveys. Much of the existing evidence relies on imputations of migrant legal status which produce different estimates depending on the method choice (e.g., Oropesa, Landale, Hillemeier 2016; Van Hook et al., 2015). In this study we use data from a survey of Central Asian migrant women in urban Russia that, among other characteristics, collected direct and detailed information on respondents' legal status.

Conceptualization

Our theoretical framework is guided by the cross-national scholarship that links international migrants' legal status and their incorporation into the host society. While most of this scholarship is concerned with "objective" outcomes such as employment, wages, access to health care, and physical health (NASEM 2015), we focus here on migrants' psychosocial well-being. Although not as tangible and apparent as many objective markers of migrants' incorporation, psychosocial

well-being, we argue, is a reflection of migrants' objective success and/or failure but is also a critical and consequential component of their incorporation trajectories.

We examine three interrelated dimensions of migrants' psychosocial well-being. The first dimension captures migrants' perceptions of their civic inclusion in the host society. Here, we look at migrants' perceptions of their rights and freedoms as well as their perceptions of being respected in the host society. The second dimension encompasses migrants' (dis)satisfaction with their economic conditions and social environment. Specifically, we focus on migrants' reported satisfaction with their income and with their relations with natives and with their co-ethnics. Finally, the third dimension taps universal psychometric characteristics. Here we focus on self-efficacy and depression.

Guided by the existing cross-national research (referenced above), we posit that a secure legal status (hereafter also 'legality') acts as an important buffer against multiple adversities faced by migrants in increasingly hostile host environments. Therefore, our general hypothesis is that legality should be positively associated with psychosocial well-being of migrants. Specifically, compared to migrants in precarious legal conditions, migrants with more established legal status will be more likely to feel that they have rights and freedoms and to feel respected in society, regardless of other factors. Likewise, they will be more satisfied with their economic conditions and with their relations with natives as well as with their co-ethnics. Finally, they will also display higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of depression.

Context

The Russian Federation (hereafter also Russia) is home to the second or third largest international migrant population, depending on estimates (Ratha, Eigen-Zucchi, and Plaza 2015).

Most international migrants come to Russia from the neighboring countries that used to be part, along with Russia itself, of the Soviet Union before its disintegration in 1991. Among these countries, three predominantly Muslim nations of Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – supply particularly large numbers of international migrants. This migration flow is facilitated by these sending countries’ historical ties with Russia and the visa-free entry of its citizens into the Russian Federation, and depending on the estimates, citizens of the three countries account for between two-thirds and four-fifths of officially registered foreign workers (Demoscope 2013).

Central Asian migration started as almost exclusively male, but the share of women among these migrants has increased considerably over time (Tyurukanova 2011; Khusenova 2013; Rocheva and Varshaver 2017). Most Central Asians come to Russia as temporary workers. Pathways to securing permanent residence status and naturalization (for migrants who may seek Russian citizenship) are complex and costly and, as a result, many migrants maintain temporary status, often with numerous legal irregularities, for a long period of time (Reeves 2013b). Their legal precarity is exacerbated by entrenched and growing xenophobia. Public opinion surveys show that xenophobic sentiments are directed, in particular, toward migrants from the southern part of the former Soviet empire, especially Migrants from Central Asia, who are phenotypically and culturally very distinct from the Russian ethnic majority (Levada Center 2018). As a result, Central Asian migrants suffer from widespread marginalization, exploitation, and abuse (e.g., Abashin 2014; Malakhov 2014; Reeves 2013a). Yet, prior research suggests that legal status may help to protect from anti-immigrant harassment (Agadjanian, Menjívar, and Zotova, 2017).

Data

Our analysis uses survey data collected in 2014-2016 in two large Russian cities – Nizhniy Novgorod (population 1.3 million) and Kazan (1.2 million), located just over 200 miles from each other in the Volga Federal District. While Nizhniy Novgorod is the administrative center of the eponymous *oblast* (province), populated predominantly by ethnic Russians, Kazan is the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, where almost half of the population is made up of ethnic Tatars, a group of Turkic origin (like Kyrgyz and Uzbeks) who are at least nominally Muslim. While both cities have attracted a growing number of Central Asian migrants, Kazan has had a more established and larger inflow than Nizhniy Novgorod. These similarities and differences of the two urban contexts determined their selections as the study sites.

Because no reliable sampling frame is available for drawing a representative sample of international migrants, in both sites, the survey used Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) to sample migrant women aged 18-40 from the three Central Asian countries. First, each site 15 seeds were selected purposefully to represent the three ethnic provenance groups (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik) as well different age groups and different areas of the city. Each of the seeds was administered a face-to-face interview by a female interviewer of matching provenance. Upon completion of the interview, each participant received a remuneration and was given three coupons to recruit three non-coresident women of same ethnicity in the target age group. Each subsequently interviewed woman was given three recruiting coupons. The recruiters were paid additional remuneration for each recruit who successfully completed a survey interview. The survey instrument included various questions about women's characteristics and experiences; it also included several items measuring respondents' subjective well-being. The study design and

instruments were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Arizona State University. The anonymized survey dataset and supporting materials are available from the authors upon request.

Method

The outcomes corresponding to the three psychosocial dimensions of interest outlined above are defined as follows. The first dimension, migrants' perceptions of their civic integration in the host society, is represented by two outcomes. The first outcome, is perception of own rights and freedoms. It is derived from the following survey question: *“Imagine that in society there are people who are almost completely deprived of rights and freedoms and there are people who have most rights and freedoms. If this is expressed on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 is the maximum of rights), at how many points would you put your rights and freedoms in [THIS CITY]?”* The corresponding variable is operationalized as a continuous scale with values ranging from 1 to 10.” The second outcome in this category is feeling respected in society. It is based on the following question: *“Imagine that in society there is a scale of respect and there are people who are most respected in society (maximum of respect = 10 points) and least respected (1 points). On this scale, how are, in your opinion, you respected in [THIS CITY]?”* The corresponding variable is also a continuous 1-to-10 scale.

For the second dimension, migrants' satisfaction with their conditions and environment, we use three variables. The first outcome is respondent's stated satisfaction with her/his household's income. The second outcome is derived from the question on how satisfied she is with the way natives treat migrants in the city. The third outcome is her satisfaction with her relationship with her co-ethnics. For each outcome the corresponding questions used a Likert scale – very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied, very dissatisfied.

The third dimension that we investigate is represented by two outcomes widely used in psychometric assessments – general self-efficacy and depression. Each of the outcomes was derived from a set of corresponding items adapted from standard instruments and their earlier applications in the Russian context (e.g., Dershem, Patsiorkovski, & O'Brien, 1996; Schwarzer, Jerusalem, & Romek 1996). Self-efficacy is based on a set of ten statements describing a person; respondents were asked how well, in their opinion, each of these statements described them: very well, rather well, rather not well, completely not. The composite outcome variable combines the responses to these questions, with Cronbach $\alpha = .91$. Depression is derived from a series of eleven questions about how often the respondent experienced certain conditions in the past 7 days: almost never, sometimes, frequently, almost always. The composite scale based on the responses (some reversely coded) has Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$. For all the outcomes, “Don't know” and “Not sure” responses as well as refusals are excluded from the analysis.

Our predictor is legal status. Following earlier research (Agadjanian, Menjivar, and Zotova 2017; Agadjanian and Yoo 2018), we condense the diversity of possible legal situations into two categories: 1) those who have Russian citizenship or permanent residence status; and 2) those who have temporary residence status (obtained legally or illegally) or who do not even have a temporary registration. We refer to these two categories as “regularized” and “irregular”, respectively.

For the multivariate analyses, OLS regression is used to analyze perception of rights and freedoms and of feeling respected, and ordered logit and regression is used for the analyses of the Likert-scale outcomes (we also fitted OLS regressions that would treat these outcomes as continuous and the results were essentially the same). The models control for various individual and household characteristics: age, marital status, number of children, educational attainment,

employment status, income (logged), ethnicity (Kyrgyz, Tajik, or Uzbek), personal network size, and the city where the interview took place. Because the effect of legal status can be confounded with that of length of stay in Russia, the models also control for the number of years the respondent continuously lived in Russia prior to the survey date.

Results

The results of the preliminary multivariate tests are presented in Table 1. For the first dimension, migrants' civic inclusion (Section 1), the analyses show a statistically significant advantage of regularized migrants in the perception of their rights and freedoms, compared to irregular migrants. In comparison, the difference between the two categories of migrants with regard to the other component, feeling respected, while pointing in the same direction, is not significant. For the second dimension, migrants' satisfaction with their conditions and social milieu (Section 2), the analysis detects a significant difference in the level of satisfaction with income. However, the direction of the difference contradicts our prediction: net of other factors (including reported income), regularized migrants are less satisfied with their income than irregular ones. In contrast, regularized migrants demonstrate greater satisfaction with natives' attitudes toward migrants, which is in line with our expectation. At the same time, there is no net difference between regularized and irregular migrants regarding satisfaction with relations with their compatriots. Finally, on both measures of the last dimension of interest – self-efficacy and depression – the predicted advantage of regularized migrants is potently present: the former display significantly higher levels of self-efficacy and significantly lower levels of depression than the latter (Section 3).

Table 1 about here

The network structure of respondents is a potential source of bias in RDS estimations (Tyldum and Johnston 2014). We therefore conducted sensitivity analyses which adjust for the RDS design by applying corresponding weights generated with RDSAT statistical package (Spiller, Cameron, and Heckathorn 2012). The sensitivity analyses generally confirm the patterns detected in the presented unadjusted models, even if in some cases the magnitude of the effects diminishes. We should note, however, that RDS weights adjustment for multivariate analyses has been the subject of considerable methodological debate (e.g., Heckathorn 2007; Tyldum and Johnston 2014; Winship and Radbill 1994).

Preliminary conclusions and next steps

Our study makes an important contribution to a better understanding of the complex implications of legal status to migrants' incorporation and experiences in host societies, especially in understudied non-Western high-migration contexts. The preliminary results point to psychosocial cleavages between the two categories of Central Asian migrants in Russia, further illustrating the implications of legality for migrants' integration and well-being. Legality appears to reinforce migrants' perception of their rights but does not seem to impinge on their feeling of being respected in society to the same degree. The negative association between regularized legal status and satisfaction with income may reflect regularized migrants' heightened perception of economic discrimination as they realize that regularization of their legal status does not level the economic playing field. A recent analysis using data on employed migrant and native women in the Russian Federation showed that regularized legal status effectively closes the earnings gap

with natives (Gorina, Agadjanian, and Zotova 2017). However, irregular-status migrants, as our current results suggest, may be more accepting of their income disadvantage. Regularized migrants' greater satisfaction with their relations with natives illustrates how legality may facilitate acceptance of migrants in the host society (or at least migrants' perception of that acceptance). Regularized legal status creates a greater sense of security thus giving migrants a stronger footing in their interactions with natives. At the same time, legal status does not show any relationship to migrants' relations with members of their ethnic communities. Most potently, however, legal status demonstrates a positive association with self-efficacy and depression.

The limitations of our study must be acknowledged. Thus, our study is limited to migrant women. Vulnerabilities of migrant women, and the role that legal status plays in shaping, mitigating, or exacerbating them, may be different from those among migrant men. The sample is relatively small and come from two Russian urban settings. The RDS design, while a powerful alternative to household-based sampling for the study of hard-to-reach groups, does not produce perfectly representative estimates, even with appropriate statistical adjustments. As we prepare the paper for presentation at the PAA conference we will further refine our models and evaluate different options for adjusting for the RDS design. We will also explore other intriguing patterns that transpired in the presented models by relating them to our primary axis of variation – legal status. This conceptual and methodological fine-tuning of the analyses will help us to situate our findings more effectively within the growing cross-national scholarship on the consequences of migrants' legal status and to better evaluate the benefits and challenges of using respondent driven sampling to recruit international migrants and to study their psychosocial and other outcomes.

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Table 1. Multivariate Results

	1. Perception (OLS)		2. Satisfaction (Ordered logit)			3. Psychometrics (Ordered logit)	
	Rights /freedoms	Being respected	Income	Relations with natives	Relations with Co-ethnics	Self-efficacy	Depression
Legal status (Ref. = Irregular)							
Regularized	0.51(0.20)*	0.36(0.22)	-0.45(0.22)*	0.54(0.22)*	-0.17(0.22)	0.47(0.24)*	-0.66(0.24)**
Age	0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.02)	0.00(0.02)	0.00(0.02)	0.02(0.02)	0.01(0.02)	-0.02(0.02)
Marital status (Ref. = Currently not married)							
Currently married	-0.22(0.16)	-0.24(0.18)	0.51(0.19)**	-0.22(0.19)	0.04(0.20)	-0.16(0.21)	-0.46(0.20)*
Number of children	-0.13(0.10)	0.09(0.10)	-0.05(0.12)	0.06(0.12)	-0.13(0.12)	-0.16(0.12)	0.17(0.12)
Education (Ref. = High school graduation or lower)							
Some tertiary education	0.35(0.17)*	0.41(0.19)*	0.23(0.21)	0.37(0.20) ⁺	0.48(0.21)*	0.23(0.21)	-0.04(0.21)
Working status (Ref. = Currently not working)							
Currently working	0.00(0.17)	0.31(0.19) ⁺	0.36(0.21) ⁺	0.06(0.22)	0.18(0.22)	0.09(0.22)	-0.37(0.21) ⁺
Log-transformed income	0.00(0.02)	-0.01(0.02)	0.20(0.03)**	-0.01(0.03)	-0.01(0.03)	0.04(0.03)	0.04(0.03)
Ethnicity (Ref. = Tajik)							
Kyrgyz	0.29(0.18)	-0.32(0.20)	0.27(0.21)	-0.79(0.21)**	-0.95(0.22)**	-0.07(0.22)	0.25(0.22)
Uzbek	0.78(0.17)**	0.34(0.19) ⁺	-0.41(0.21)*	0.07(0.21)	0.12(0.21)	0.35(0.22)	-0.56(0.21)**
Personal network size	-0.01(0.02)	-0.03(0.02) ⁺	0.06(0.02)**	-0.07(0.02)**	-0.04(0.02)*	0.05(0.02)*	0.03(0.02)
Years in Russia	0.07(0.02)**	0.04(0.02) ⁺	0.03(0.03)	-0.05(0.03)*	-0.05(0.03) ⁺	-0.01(0.03)	0.06(0.03)*
City (Ref. = Nizhniy Novgorod)							
Kazan	-0.14(0.20)	-0.57(0.22)**	-1.14(0.22)**	-1.46(0.24)**	-0.34(0.23)	-2.21(0.25)**	0.63(0.23)**
Intercept	4.93(0.41)**	6.65(0.45)**					
Cut1			-0.39(0.53)	-3.53(0.52)**	-2.88(0.53)**	-7.07(1.14)**	-0.92(0.50) ⁺
Cut2			1.35(0.54)*	-2.34(0.51)**	-2.38(0.52)**	-3.00(0.56)**	2.54(0.52)**
Cut3			2.75(0.55)**	-0.52(0.49)	-0.17(0.51)	-0.10(0.53)	
<i>N</i>	570	549	559	556	580	619	624
<i>R</i> -squared	0.10	0.06					
Adjusted <i>R</i> -squared	0.08	0.04					
Pseudo <i>R</i> -squared			0.11	0.06	0.05	0.14	0.05

Significance level: ⁺<.10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01. (two-tailed tests)