

Integration Challenges: Exploring the Impacts of immigration on Mental Health among Afghan Immigrants in Germany

* Abdul Qayoum Safi

** Mr. Shafiqullah Atish

Abstract



This research investigates the integration challenges faced by Afghan immigrants in Germany and their impact on mental health. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges through a qualitative research methodology. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 Afghan immigrants selected via purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation. The interviews, conducted online in Dari and Pashto, covered key topics such as cultural adaptation, language acquisition, employment difficulties, and coping strategies. Data were analysed using NVivo 12 to identify and explore emerging themes. Findings revealed significant psychological distress among participants, manifesting as anxiety and depression, primarily due to integration difficulties. The study also highlighted the prevalence of trauma from migration experiences, exacerbating mental health issues. Social isolation and the absence of robust support systems further intensified feelings of disconnection and hindered mental health recovery. Language barriers, cultural adjustment struggles, and economic challenges were identified as major integration obstacles, contributing to the overall mental health burden. In conclusion, the research underscores the need for targeted social activities, culturally appropriate mental health interventions, and comprehensive support systems to address the unique challenges faced by Afghan immigrants, thereby fostering better integration and mental health outcomes.

Keywords: Integration Challenges, Psychological Distress, Immigration, Mental Health, Afghan Immigrants.

Introduction

Afghan people and families' migration to Germany is a complicated integration, adaptation, and cultural exchange story. The migration of Afghan immigrants has brought them into a new environment with its chances and problems. They are integrating into German society through a complex process that involves managing a variety of opportunities and challenges. For these people, the process of adapting is characterized by a combination of socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological elements that influence their paths and experiences in the new nation (Liu, 2017). It is essential to comprehend the difficulties Afghan immigrants encounter assimilating into German society to develop inclusive communities that value variety as well as to formulate policies (Safi et al., 2023). The integration of immigrant populations poses multifaceted challenges, especially when taking into account the intricate interactions between social, cultural, and psychological factors. The effect on mental health is one of the most concerning of these issues. This study examines how different integration obstacles impact the mental health of Afghan immigrants in Germany, a group that frequently faces these difficulties.

The psychological well-being of immigrant groups is crucial, not just for the immigrants themselves but also for the larger society into which they are trying to assimilate. Untreated mental health problems can have several detrimental effects, such as a lower quality of life, less economic output, and more demand on the healthcare system. Germany is becoming a more popular destination for Afghan refugees seeking safety and better opportunities (Safi et al., 2023). Even while the German government offers stability and bright economic prospects, there are obstacles in the integration process (Sinning, 2010). The obstacles that Afghan immigrants confront include racism, social marginalization, language barriers, and cultural issues. These challenges exacerbate mental health issues and cause a strong sense of displacement.

* Spinghar Institute of Higher Education Email: abdulqayoumsafi@gmail.com

** Department of Curative Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Spinghar Institute of Higher Education, Nangarhar, Afghanistan

Research Objectives

- To identify the key integration challenges faced by Afghan immigrants in Germany.
- To examine the impact of these integration challenges on the mental health of Afghan immigrants.

Research Questions

- What are the primary integration challenges encountered by Afghan immigrants in Germany?
- How do these challenges affect the mental health of Afghan immigrants?
- What coping strategies do Afghan immigrants use to deal with integration-related stress?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons:

This research will contribute to the growing body of literature on immigrant mental health by focusing on a specific group—Afghan immigrants in Germany—whose experiences are often underrepresented in academic discourse. The study's findings will provide new insights into the mental health challenges associated with integration.

Also, the study's recommendations for culturally appropriate mental health interventions and support systems can be implemented by mental health professionals, NGOs, and community organizations working with Afghan immigrants. This can lead to the development of more effective support networks that cater to the unique needs of this population. This study attempted to shed light on an often-overlooked part of the immigrant experience by concentrating specifically on the mental health effects of integration issues among Afghan immigrants in Germany. This research aims to elucidate the subtle ways in which integration challenges present in mental health outcomes through qualitative interviews and analysis. To create targeted interventions and support systems that can help Afghan immigrants and other comparable groups integrate more successfully and sustainably, these processes must be understood.

Literature Review

Migration has a crucial role in shaping cultural dynamics and has the capacity to transform the cultural makeup of a nation. The increasing global migrant population has brought forth significant concerns about integration difficulties and the need for effective adaption techniques.

The scholars have focused on the integration of Afghan immigrants into German society, analyzing the very complex problems and options for adaptation faced by this demographic group. Historical analysis indicates that Afghan migration to Germany often aligns with times of geopolitical instability and violence in Afghanistan, influencing the patterns and motivations driving immigration (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). According to (Safi et al., 2023) this is likely due to the wars, instability, and unfavourable circumstances that were prevalent in Iraq throughout the stated time. The data highlight the intricate relationship between geopolitical and societal issues that impact migration trends from Iraq and Iran. As pointed out by Berry (2001), immigrants engaging with the culture of the host nation mostly use four strategies: 1) Assimilation refers to the voluntary and ongoing engagement with the culture of the visited place, rather than preserving one's cultural heritage. 2) Separation involves actively safeguarding one's attachment to their native culture and minimizing exposure to the culture of the host country. 3) Integration entails making a conscious effort to interact with and embrace both cultures simultaneously (Berry, 2001).

The first group of Afghan immigrants in Germany, who were mostly involved in the carpet trade, played a crucial role in establishing cultural integration in the city of Hamburg's free-Hamburg area (Vadean, 2007). The growth of Afghan immigrants in Germany is characterized by three major phases.

The First Wave (1960s-1970s) mostly included professionals and students who were pursuing higher education and better employment prospects. Afghan nationals successfully entered many professional fields by enrolling in technical and engineering programs at German institutions (Ruttig, 2017). The Second Wave occurred concurrently with the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan during the late 1970s and early 1980s, leading to a significant migration of refugees from the fighting to Germany. The arrival of this wave presented several obstacles, including issues with communication, the need to adapt to a different culture, and the formidable undertaking of reconstructing lives in an unfamiliar territory (Ruttig, 2017). The Third Wave arose after the events of 9/11, characterized by the reunion of families, the movement of workers, and the flight of asylum seekers seeking refuge from ongoing wars and political instability (Ruttig, 2017). According to government figures as of

Integration Challenges: Exploring the Impacts of immigration on Mental Health....Safi & Atish

September 30, 2016, there were 246,954 Afghan citizens in Germany. This represents a significant rise of 120,000 persons between 2009 and 2016 (Strier, 1996).

In 2021, an enormous wave of immigrants began again, as over one million individuals departed Afghanistan from August to December due to the worsening humanitarian conditions in the nation. The political controversy surrounding the integration challenges faced by many immigrants persists, despite their acceptance by the countries they migrate to (Safi et al., 2023). Accepting migrants is both a moral and legal obligation for them. The perception of increasing variety as a potential threat to communities and the societal cohesion of the host nation is sometimes seen (Fazel et al., 2005).

Recently, a large number of Afghan immigrants live in Germany. As to the data from (Statista, 2023), the highest number of individuals seeking refuge in Germany were from Syria, with a total of 83,336 applications. This indicates a persistent and continuous humanitarian catastrophe in Syria, prompting many persons to seek refuge and stability in Germany. Turkey ranked second in terms of asylum seekers, behind Syria, with a total of 45,086. Diverse variables, including political, economic, and social circumstances, may have prompted people from Turkey to seek refuge in Germany during this timeframe.

In 2023, Afghan immigrants were the third biggest cohort of asylum applicants in Germany. Afghanistan has become a notable source of asylum seekers in Germany, with a total of 43,958 individuals applying for asylum. The significant influx of Afghan asylum seekers prompts inquiries on the enduring difficulties and uncertainties prevailing in Afghanistan, compelling people to seek asylum in Germany. See FIG 1

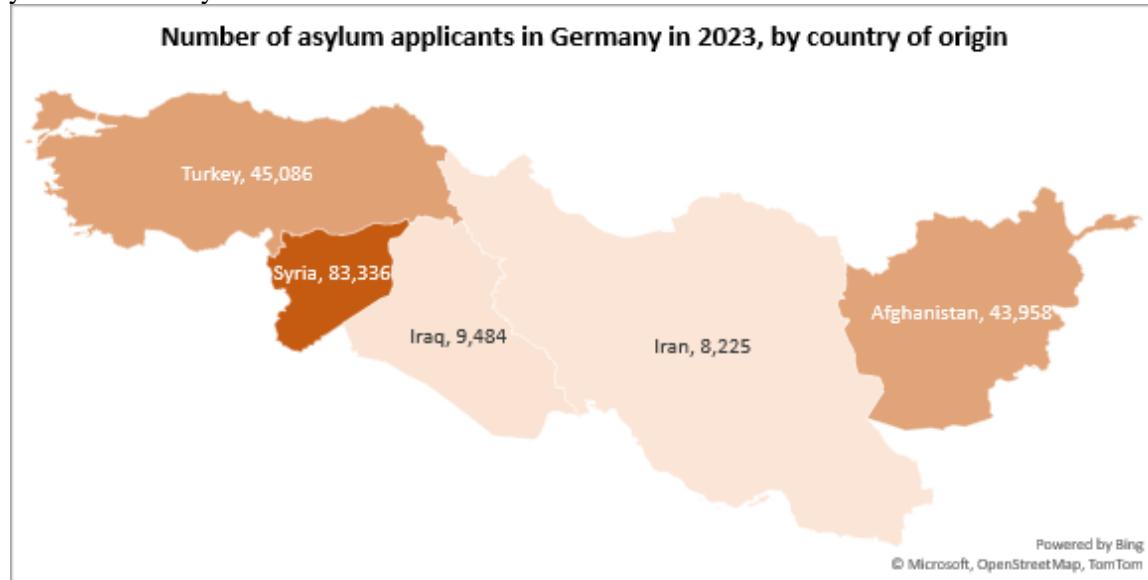


Figure 1: Number of asylum applicants in Germany in 2023, by country of origin

Scholars have highlighted significant challenges faced by Afghan immigrants in Germany, such as cultural and linguistic barriers. These limitations have a substantial influence on their ability to communicate effectively, access education, and find career prospects (Hirsch & Jahn, 2015). Discrimination and social exclusion consistently arise as prominent topics, increasing inequalities in all domains of life and hindering the entire process of integration (Pereira et al., 2010). Furthermore, the ordeal of being displaced and exposed to trauma in Afghanistan adds to the psychological burden, impacting the mental well-being of Afghan immigrants in the receiving nation (Butkus et al., 2018).

The unique difficulties that Afghan immigrants encounter in Germany can hurt their mental well-being. For example, linguistic obstacles restrict social integration chances and make it more difficult to receive necessary assistance (Vadean, 2007). Alienation and loneliness caused by cultural differences in gender roles, family structures, and religious traditions are possible (Safi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the host society's experiences of racism and discrimination add to the pressures faced by Afghan immigrants (Alemi et al., 2014).

Research on the effects of immigration on mental health among Afghans in different host nations offers insightful information. Studies reveal a higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in this group (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). Pre-migration

Integration Challenges: Exploring the Impacts of immigration on Mental Health....Safi & Atish

trauma, including experiences of conflict and displacement, as well as post-migration pressures associated with the integration process, are frequently blamed for these mental health issues (Vadean, 2007). Also, the appropriateness and accessibility of mental health services are a crucial component in addressing the mental health needs of Afghan immigrants (Alemi et al., 2014). According to previous studies, language limitations, cultural stigma, and a lack of culturally competent care may all be factors in this population's poor mental health service utilization rates. Tailored treatments that take into account the distinct cultural and language backgrounds of immigrants from Afghanistan are needed (Berry, 2001).

Considering the research on mental health and integration issues among Afghan immigrants in Germany after the previous discussion, it is clear how complicated this problem is. Creating successful interventions and support networks requires an understanding of how pre-migration experiences, post-migration stresses, and integration barriers interact. Policymakers and medical practitioners can foster the mental health and successful integration of Afghan immigrants and comparable populations by tackling these obstacles.

Methodology:

The challenges toward integration of Afghan immigrants in Germany and how it affects their mental health are examined in this study using a qualitative research methodology. A qualitative method, according to Criswell (2014), enables a full comprehension of participants' lived experiences, viewpoints, and narratives (creswell, 2014). This study's primary methodology is a qualitative research design with in-depth interviews. This approach was chosen to allow for a thorough examination of the integration challenges faced by Afghan immigrants in Germany and the effects these challenges have on mental health.

According to (Woods, 2006) since an in-depth interview is a one-on-one discussion, you have ample opportunity to delve into the underlying reasons for preferences, misconceptions, and views. The interviewer can establish a relationship with the participants, which helps to ease their discomfort. As a result, they can provide candid criticism while also observing their facial expressions and body language. Rich qualitative data may be derived from these cues.

Participants:

The selection of participants involved a purposive sampling method. The primary objective of purposive sampling is to pinpoint the instances, people, or communities most appropriate to assist you in addressing your research topic. Purposive sampling is therefore most effective when you have a wealth of prior knowledge regarding your research issue (Etikan, 2017). So, researchers chose 25 Afghan immigrants residing in diverse regions of Germany. The meticulous selection criteria encompassed a range of variables such as age, gender, educational background, and duration of stay in Germany, ensuring a comprehensive and diverse representation. For more details about participants of this study see the FIG 2.



Total Participant	Participant Gender	Age/ years	City of Residence	living in Germany	Tool used for interview	Interview Duration
25	9 Female	22 – 55 years	Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Mainz, Hannover	4- 26 Years	WhatsApp & Zoom	25- 46 Minute every interview
	16 Male					

Figure 2: Demographic Profile of Participants

Data Collection:

The primary method of data collection involves in-depth interviews, conducted online using (WhatsApp and Zoom) in participants' preferred languages—Dari and Pashto. This multilingual approach aims to create a comfortable environment for participants, enabling them to express their

Integration Challenges: Exploring the Impacts of immigration on Mental Health....Safi & Atish

thoughts and experiences more freely (Leavy, 2014). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for the exploration of emerging themes while maintaining a focus on key research areas (Berg & Lune, 2017).

Interview Protocol:

The interview protocol explores important subjects such as cultural adaptation, language acquisition, employment problems, and coping methods. It was painstakingly constructed after a thorough evaluation of current literature and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This guarantees a thorough investigation of the several elements influencing Afghan immigrants' experiences assimilating in Germany.

Data Analysis with NVivo 12:

An important part of this research is data analysis, and NVivo 12, a potent qualitative data analysis program, will be used to guarantee accuracy and effectiveness. The interview data will be easier to code, organize, and analyses systematically with the help of NVivo 12. Through the utilization of the software's capabilities, the study seeks to identify and make sense of the subtleties present in the data, thereby augmenting a strong thematic analysis. This methodological choice coincides with the best practices in qualitative research, ensuring a methodical, in-depth, and data-driven examination.

Result:

Our thematic analysis of this study, using NVivo 12, examines the Impacts of immigration on Mental Health among Afghan Immigrants in Germany. we categorized our findings of the interviews conducted with our participant of this study about the Impacts of Integration on mental health among Afghan immigrants in Germany in three main themes. see the table 2. In first theme, we summarized Challenges in Integration Process, In the second theme we discuss about Social Isolation and Support Systems and in the last theme we focus on Impact of immigration on Mental Health among Afghan immigrants in Germany.

Table 1. Integration Challenges: Exploring the Impacts of Integration on Mental Health among Afghan Immigrants in Germany.

Theme	Sub-themes	Sub-sub-themes
of immigration on Health Afghan in among Immigrants Germany.	Psychological Distress	Anxiety and Depression
		Trauma from Migration Experiences
	Social Isolation and Support Systems	Lack of Social Networks
		Feeling Disconnected
		Barriers to Seeking Help
		Stigma Surrounding Mental Health
	Language Barriers	Limited Access to Language Resources
		Difficulties in Learning German
		Cultural Adjustment
	Employment and Economic Struggles	Clash of Cultural Norms
		Navigating Social Customs
		Unemployment and Underemployment
		Financial Instability

1| Impact of Immigration on Mental Health among Afghan Immigrants in Germany

Depression and Anxiety: The majority of our participants, who are immigrants from Afghanistan to Germany, reported high levels of psychological suffering, which mainly takes the form of anxiety and sadness. Participants in this study talk of generalized worry and uncertainty about their future, which is made worse by challenges integrating into a new language and society.

"We are from an environment where social interaction is abundant. Every member of the family, including the neighbours, would pitch in to assist address any problems that arose. But each person is on his own if there are issues and challenges here. Thus, I believe that this is the cause of the psychological stress that many Afghans migrants experience" (P6, May 2023).

The adoption of targeted social activities, culturally appropriate mental health treatments, and strong community support networks are crucial for effectively addressing depression and anxiety among Afghan immigrants, according to our respondents. They emphasized that social programs catered to this population's particular needs could offer much-needed support for integration and stability. The success of therapeutic interventions can be greatly increased by providing culturally

appropriate mental health treatments that reflect and integrate Afghan customs and beliefs, increasing the likelihood that patients will seek and benefit from them.

Trauma from Migration Experiences: A sizable fraction of immigrants from Afghanistan have experienced trauma during their migration trip, which includes being exposed to violence, losing loved ones, and traveling through dangerous conditions. These horrific events have left long-lasting psychological wounds that exacerbate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic stress. Participants' strong memories of these traumatic incidents, which still interfere with their daily lives and heighten their emotions of anguish, were revealed during interviews.

"The memories of the journey are always with me. I'm still terrified that we won't make it, and I can hear the screaming. It feels like I'm back there, living through the nightmare, each time I close my eyes." (P 16, June 2023).

However, they struggle to find tranquillity and safety in their new surroundings because of the ongoing mental replay of these terrible experiences, which fosters a climate of dread and terror. The psychological impact of these events can take many forms, including nightmares, flashbacks, and an increased susceptibility to stress, which makes it more difficult for them to adjust to life in Germany.

Social Isolation and Support Systems: According to Afghan immigrants in Germany, one of the biggest problems they face is the absence of strong social networks. This problem can show up in a number of ways, one of which is a strong feeling of loneliness and a break from their former social networks. In addition to their personal families, many Afghan immigrants often find themselves cut off from larger social networks of friends and community members who have either left Afghanistan or moved abroad. The social support networks that historically offered both practical and emotional help are no longer easily available, which can result in a severe sensation of loneliness. One of our participants put it so beautifully when she said:

"I feel like I'm living in a void when I'm away from my family and friends. It seems that the relationships that once offered me support have disappeared, leaving me to make my way through this new existence on my own." (P 16, June 2023).

However, in addition to causing emotional anguish, this isolation aggravated pre-existing mental health conditions, making it more difficult for people to adjust to and succeed in their new settings.

Feeling Disconnected: The feeling of detachment encompasses cultural dislocation along with social networks. Afghan immigrants frequently experience a sense of being torn between two worlds as a result of the cultural contrasts between Germany and their native country. Their capacity to completely assimilate and feel at home in their new environment may be hampered by this cultural dissonance. One person gave a detailed description of this emotion:

"I experience a sense of existing in two distinct realities. Everything in Germany is very different from what I'm used to in my native Afghanistan. I find everything about people's interactions, habits, and even holiday celebrations to be strange. I still have strong ties to my Afghan heritage, so it's difficult for me to adjust and feel like I belong here. There are times when I feel like I'm always juggling these two aspects of who I am, and it wears me out." (P 19, June 2023).

The experience of this participant demonstrates the significant effects of cultural displacement on immigrants from Afghanistan. They frequently feel alone and unsure of their position in the world due to their attempt to balance their old cultural beliefs with the new social norms they find in Germany.

Barriers to Seeking Help: Language issues, a lack of knowledge about the German healthcare system, and a lack of culturally appropriate services are some of the obstacles that Afghan immigrants have when trying to access mental healthcare. Additionally, a lot of people say they trust informal support networks over formal institutions.

"I don't feel comfortable going to a therapist here. They are ignorant of our experiences and traditions. I'm concerned that they won't take my problems seriously because the healthcare system is so complex. Speaking with a member of my community is more convenient." (P 24, June 2023).

These barriers severely impede their ability to get the essential mental health care they need.

Stigma Associated with Mental Health: For Afghan immigrants, the stigma around mental health concerns continues to be a major obstacle to getting treatment. People are frequently deterred from identifying their symptoms or seeking professional help by societal stigmas associated with mental

illness. Many people are unable to get the care they require because of this stigma, which prolongs their suffering and silence.

"In our culture, acknowledging that you have a mental health problem is equivalent to acknowledging that you are insane. People may discuss you behind your back and perceive you as feeble or incompetent. There's a lot of pressure to just 'be strong' and not display any symptoms of weakness, even inside the family" (P 19, June 2023).

Afghan immigrants find it extremely difficult to get essential mental health care because of this stigma and their fear of being judged.

2| Challenges in Integration Process:

According to our thematic analysis, the integration of Afghan immigrants in Germany is significantly hindered by language problems. The lack of sufficient linguistic resources intensifies this challenge, impeding effective communication and absorption into German society. Many immigrants find it challenging to learn German, which hinders their ability to navigate daily life, access services, and find employment.

"Improving language skills in German is crucial for effective communication and deep cultural understanding. It enables individuals to interact with local people, participate in conversations, and understand cultural aspects." (P1, May 2023).

To surmount these linguistic obstacles, it is imperative to provide extensive language assistance initiatives and customized resources that cater to the distinct requirements of Afghan immigrants. This will enable their seamless assimilation and active involvement in German culture.

According to our participant experience, another difficult obstacle is cultural adjustment, which is marked by a clash of norms between the norms of the host German society and those of the Afghan immigrants. It can be confusing to navigate social customs and norms, which can result in feelings of cultural disorientation and alienation.

"The biggest obstacle we encountered was adjusting to a new culture. The standards that we inherited from Afghanistan and the conventions of German culture always collide. It's like attempting to walk a tightrope; you never quite know which way to lean without being lost or detached." (P24, Jone 2023).

Support systems that ease mutual respect and understanding between the two cultures are essential in helping Afghan immigrants adjust to German societal norms while maintaining elements of their own cultural identity. Intercultural awareness and dialogue can also help communities become more cohesive and accepting of one another. Additionally, the difficulties that Afghan immigrants have in Germany are exacerbated by work and economic issues, which result in underemployment, unemployment, and unstable finances. Due to the combined difficulties of cultural adjustment and economic uncertainty, immigrants experience increased social isolation and loneliness as a result of these economic challenges. According to our participants the struggle with "Unemployment and Underemployment" has a severe psychological toll in addition to effects on people's financial security.

"Getting a job that matches my skills is not easy. Getting a job for a migrant in Germany seems like a never-ending struggle. Because of this, migration has a negative impact on the lives of migrants". (P16, Jone 2023).

In order to promote socioeconomic integration and a sense of belonging within German society, it is imperative that individuals have access to employment possibilities that align with their talents and qualifications. By addressing systemic obstacles to work and offering focused assistance for skill development and job placement, immigrants from Afghanistan can become more economically stable and socially included.

Discussion:

According to the results of this study, there are several obstacles facing Afghan immigrants as they integrate, chief among them being language problems, difficulties adjusting to a new culture, and difficulties finding work and a stable income. One major obstacle to successful communication and assimilation into German society is language limitations. Their capacity to function in daily life, obtain services, and find work is hampered by a lack of adequate language resources and the challenge of learning German. It is essential to offer comprehensive language support programs and customized materials to enable the smooth integration and engagement of Afghan immigrants with German society. These results are consistent with the findings of (Safi et al., 2023) and (Esses, 2018) who pointed out that language difficulties play a major role in immigrants' mental health issues.

Another significant barrier is cultural adjustment, which is typified by a normative collision between Afghan immigrants and the host German society. Feelings of alienation and cultural disorientation might result from navigating societal conventions and standards. In order to help Afghan immigrants adapt while preserving their cultural identity, support networks that promote tolerance and understanding between the two cultures are crucial. Communities that are more welcoming and cohesive can benefit from intercultural awareness and conversation. Leao et al. (2018), who discovered that social isolation and a lack of social networks have a significant negative impact on immigrants' mental health, corroborate these findings(Leão et al., 2009).

Moreover, joblessness and financial hardships intensify the challenges encountered by Afghan immigrants. Financial instability and high rates of underemployment and unemployment exacerbate social isolation and psychological stress. It is imperative to tackle structural barriers to employment and offer focused assistance for skill enhancement and career placement to foster socioeconomic integration and a feeling of inclusion in German society. This is in line with research by Tinghög et al. (2017) that shows how socioeconomic status affects immigrant mental health outcomes(Tinghög et al., 2007).

For Afghan immigrants living in Germany, social isolation is a serious problem that is made worse by the lack of strong social networks. A great deal of loneliness and disconnection plague many immigrants from Afghanistan who have lost their extended families and networks of community support. Their emotional anguish and pre-existing mental health disorders are exacerbated by this isolation, which makes it harder for them to succeed in their new setting and acclimate to their new surroundings. Similar difficulties with social isolation among immigrants are highlighted by Leao et al. (2018) and Safi et al. (2024) who also stress the negative effects of this phenomenon on mental health(Safi et al., 2024).

According to our result, because of the cultural disparities between Germany and their native Afghanistan, newcomers frequently feel as though they are torn between two different worlds. Their capacity to completely assimilate and feel at home in their new environment may be hampered by this cultural dissonance. Afghan immigrants frequently feel alone and uncertain of their position in the world as a result of their experience of cultural displacement. This result is in line with research conducted in 2014 by Fazel et al., who highlighted the challenges immigrants encounter in reconciling traditional cultural values with contemporary societal norms(Fazel et al., 2005).

In our findings, we show that immigration has a significant negative influence on Afghan immigrants' mental health; many of them report high levels of psychological discomfort, including anxiety and sadness. These emotions are made worse by the uncertainties surrounding their future and the difficulties of adjusting to a new society. Tackling depression and anxiety in Afghan immigrants necessitates focused social engagement, culturally competent mental health interventions, and robust support systems within the community. Immigrants' likelihood of seeking and benefiting from mental health care can be greatly increased by offering culturally sensitive mental health services that incorporate and reflect Afghan customs and beliefs. These observations are consistent with the conclusions drawn by Tinghög et al. (2017), who highlighted the need to provide immigrants with culturally appropriate mental health care(Tinghög et al., 2007).

The psychological toll that migration-related trauma takes worsens for Afghan immigrants, who frequently encounter violence, bereavement, and perilous travel. It is challenging to find calm in unfamiliar environments because these traumatic experiences exacerbate illnesses like PTSD and chronic stress. Additional obstacles to help include language barriers, lack of experience with the German healthcare system, and difficulty receiving mental health care. Relying on informal networks, many Afghans immigrants harbour mistrust towards formal organizations. This emphasizes the requirement for culturally competent mental health services. Research by Fazel et al. (Fazli et al., 2015 and Tinghög et al., 2007). confirms that immigrants' mental health outcomes can be improved by providing these customized services, which are necessary to address issues including stress associated to trauma, mistrust of formal systems, and cultural obstacles.

Conclusion:

Our thematic analysis reveals that Afghan immigrants in Germany face significant challenges impacting their mental health and integration process. Language barriers, cultural adjustment issues, and economic struggles impede their full integration into German society. Difficulties with learning German and navigating cultural norms lead to feelings of disorientation and alienation. Economic

hardships further exacerbate social isolation and financial instability, compounding the challenges of adjustment. The impact of immigration on Afghan immigrants' mental health is profound and multifaceted. Many participants reported high levels of psychological suffering, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD, largely stemming from traumatic migration experiences such as exposure to violence, loss of loved ones, and perilous journeys. These past traumas continue to influence their daily lives, leading to persistent emotional distress and difficulties in finding tranquillity in their new environment. The ongoing replay of traumatic memories exacerbates their mental health challenges, making adaptation and feelings of security in their new surroundings even more difficult. Additionally, significant barriers to accessing mental health care, such as language difficulties, unfamiliarity with the German healthcare system, and a lack of culturally appropriate services, further hinder their ability to seek and receive support. The stigma surrounding mental health issues compounds these barriers, often leading individuals to rely on informal support networks instead. Addressing these mental health impacts necessitates the development of culturally sensitive and accessible mental health services that acknowledge and integrate Afghan immigrants' unique experiences. Effective interventions should include targeted social activities and therapeutic treatments that reflect Afghan customs and beliefs. By overcoming barriers to care and providing support that respects cultural contexts, these services can significantly enhance the likelihood of successful treatment and support.

However, trauma from migration, including exposure to violence and loss, significantly affects mental health, leading to conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, and chronic stress. To improve the well-being of Afghan immigrants, integration programs must address language acquisition, cultural adjustment, and economic stability, while mental health services should be tailored to the specific needs of this population. Addressing these areas will facilitate better integration, reduce psychological distress, and create a more supportive environment for Afghan immigrants in Germany.

Recommendations:

1. Develop Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Services: Culturally tailored mental health services are essential for Afghan immigrants. Training healthcare providers in cultural competence, offering translation services, and educating immigrants about the German healthcare system can make these services more accessible and effective. Addressing mental health needs in a culturally respectful manner will help reduce psychological distress and stigma.
2. Strengthen Community and Economic Support: Building strong community networks and providing targeted economic support can reduce social isolation and financial instability. Community centres and peer groups offer emotional support, while vocational training and job placement services help immigrants achieve financial stability, easing their integration process.
3. Implement Comprehensive Integration Programs: Integration programs should include not just language instruction but also cultural orientation to help Afghan immigrants adjust to life in Germany. Tailored language courses and cultural orientation sessions can reduce disorientation and support smoother integration into society.

References:

Alemi, Q., James, S., Cruz, R., Zepeda, V., & Racadio, M. (2014). Psychological Distress in Afghan Refugees: A Mixed-Method Systematic Review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 16(6), 1247–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-013-9861-1>

Berg, B. L. (Bruce L., & Lune, H. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*.

Berry, J. W. (2001). A Psychology of Immigration. In *Journal of Social Issues* (Vol. 57, Issue 3).

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Butkus, M., Maciulyte-Sniukiene, A., Matuzeviciute, K., & Davidaviciene, V. (2018). Society's attitudes towards impact of immigration: case of EU countries. *Marketing and Management of Innovations*, 1, 338–352. <https://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2018.1-26>

creswell, john W. (2014). *Creswell-ResearchDesign*.

Esses, V. M. (2018). Immigration, Migration, and Culture. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.287>

Etikan, I. (2017). Sampling and Sampling Methods. *Biometrics & Biostatistics International Journal*, 5(6). <https://doi.org/10.15406/bbij.2017.05.00149>

Fazel, M., Wheeler, J., & Danesh, J. (2005). Prevalence of serious mental disorder in 7000 refugees resettled in western countries: A systematic review. *Lancet*, 365(9467), 1309–1314. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(05\)61027-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(05)61027-6)

Fazli, R., Johnson, C., & Cooke, P. (2015). *US Institute of Peace Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan*.

Hirsch, B., & Jahn, E. J. (2015). Is there monopsonistic discrimination against immigrants? In *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (Vol. 68, Issue 3, pp. 501–528). Cornell University. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793915572124>

Kiriscioglu, E., & Ustubici, A. (2023). “At Least, at the Border, I Am Killing Myself by My Own Will”: Migration Aspirations and Risk Perceptions among Syrian and Afghan Communities. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2198485>

Leão, T. S., Sundquist, J., Johansson, S. E., & Sundquist, K. (2009). The influence of age at migration and length of residence on self-rated health among Swedish immigrants: A cross-sectional study. *Ethnicity and Health*, 14(1), 93–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13557850802345973>

Leavy, P. (2014). *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

Liu, S. (2017). *Cross-cultural adaptation: An identity approach 20 Cross-cultural adaptation: An identity approach*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501510397-020>

Pereira, C., Vala, J., & Costa-Lopes, R. (2010). From prejudice to discrimination: The legitimizing role of perceived threat in discrimination against immigrants. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(7), 1231–1250. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.718>

Ruttig, T. (2017). *Afghan Exodus: Afghan asylum seekers in Europe (3) – case study Germany*. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghan-exodus-afghan-asylum-seekers-in-europe-3-case-study->

Safi, A. Q., Agustin, H., & Rizal, E. (2023). Afghan Migrants in Germany: Cross-Cultural Communication and Impact of Immigration on Afghan Culture. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(7), 135. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i7.6269>

Safi, A. Q., Saeedi, S. S., Agustin, H., Rizal, E., & Sapi, A. M. (2024). Cultural Differences and Discrimination: Afghan Immigrants’ Experiences in Germany. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2337183>

Sinning, M. (2010). Homeownership and economic performance of immigrants in Germany. *Urban Studies*, 47(2), 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009349021>

Statista. (2023). *Asylum seekers origin countries in Germany 2023* / Statista. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/911586/country-origin-asylum-applicants-germany/>

Strier, D. R. (1996). Coping Strategies of Immigrant Parents: Directions for Family Therapy. In *Fam Proc* (Vol. 35).

Tinghög, P., Hemmingsson, T., & Lundberg, I. (2007). To what extent may the association between immigrant status and mental illness be explained by socioeconomic factors? *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 42(12), 990–996. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-007-0253-5>

Vadean, F. (2007). *Skills and remittances: The case of Afghan, Egyptian, and Serbian immigrants in Germany*. www.hwwi.org

Woods, P. (2006). *Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers*.