

Afghan Community Consultations Focus Group Discussions on Legal Assistance

Over the last four decades Afghans experienced natural disasters, war, internal displacement, drought, and migration to the neighbouring countries of India and Iran. These circumstances would contribute to the worsening of the health, Education and wellbeing indicators among Afghans either living inside or outside of Afghanistan and to some extent would affect their health, education and wellbeing after resettlement in the secure countries such as Australia, European countries and the US. A recent FGD by Legal Researchers conducted with the Afghan Community Advisory Group also found that prevalence of mental health, Education and legal assistance problems are high among Afghans

Aims of the Focus Group Discussions

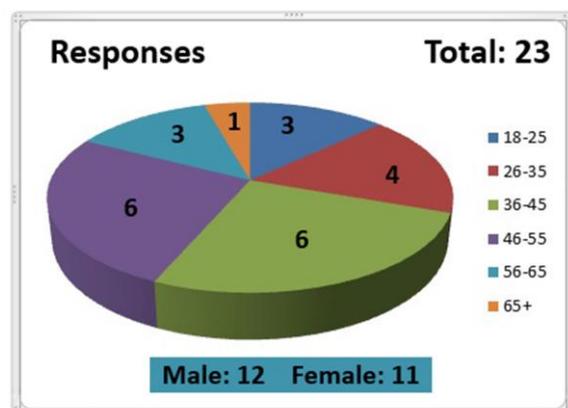
Aims of the Focus Group Discussions The aim of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was to develop strategies to address legal assistance problems and stigma and determine awareness of legal assistance and counselling services among Afghans in the target area of the analysis. The objectives of the needs were to:

- Identify perceptions and understandings of legal assistance by Afghan community members and the prevalence of stigma related to mental health problems
- Determine Afghan community perception, and experience of legal assistance and counselling services
- Discuss different ways services might engage with Afghan community members to better identify and address individual and family legal assistance issues and stigma pertaining to it, including ways of describing legal needs, use of different settings for consultations and effective coping strategies

Profile of the Participants

The FGD were conducted among 11 women and 12 men from different localities in the target area. Participants of the FGD were from the Afghan Elders Council 'Jirga', Sadiqabad, Rawalpindi. The target age group was 18 years old and above with varied levels of education, employment status, income, visa status and first language.

Age	Male	Female	Total
18-25	2	1	3
26-35	2	1	4
36-45	3	4	6
46-55	3	3	6
56-65	1	2	3
65+	1	0	1
Total	12	11	23



Legal Assistance / Police exploitations

Legal Researchers team has visited the Sadiqabad to analysis the needs of Afghan national residing in the areas since 25 years. The team meet with the group of 15 Elders of the afghan national

The discussion agenda was the faced challenges by the afghan national families. They highlighted few challenges were faced and it is increasing day by day.

- a) Health facilitation
- b) Education Access
- c) Employment or income generation
- d) Police Exploitation

The Discussion start with the highlighted agenda of police exploitation, the pointers raised in discussion with them was their insecure legal status and the related threat of deportation. The Proof of Registration (PoR) that most of them are in possession of, does not carry a date of expiry on the card; which as a result puts them at risk of increased police abuse. Reportedly, there was this ever-present threat of police extortion and arbitrary detention that intimidated and stripped them of their limited income and their ability to make ends meet. Some described the PoR; not having a valid date of expiry inscribed on it, as adding to their misery of abuses and the anti-Afghan hostility by the police authorities, as a result of which they feel a sense of vulnerability as they are being stripped of their dignity. The arbitrary arrest by the local police station and charged them in different criminal procedural sections, which is increasing their family vulnerability and risks of violation of Human and refugee rights. The counsel fee is too much high and they are unable to pay. In the most of cases they pay bribe at the stage of arbitrary arrestment on weekly basis.

Focus Group Discussion Findings

The study findings were categorized into three main themes: awareness of POR and legal affairs problems; stigma; and access to legal services. Information was collated based on the participant's visa status and were analysed considering their income, employment, date of arrival and employment.

Orientation to the police station staff

Local Community engagement

Mobile Legal Clinics

Provision of legal Assistance

Questions guide FGD:

Awareness:

What is your conception and understanding of Legal Assistance?

Why do you think good legal needs are important?

What do you think are some of the problems experienced by people who suffer from bad practice of legal procedure?

What might cause legal problems?

What would be the complication and its negative impact on the families, people surrounding you and the society in general?

Stigma:

How common is stigma about POR problems among Afghans and how can we change this?

What other words can we use to describe POR problems to reduce stigma?

Access:

What do people often do when they feel they are feeling anxious, depressed, worried or stressed and where are they going first in seeking help?

What types of services are you aware of that might help?

What types of services are available for Afghans with POR legal issues?

What are the barriers to accessing those services (perceptions of those services in terms of physical access, cost, cultural appropriateness, language barriers, reception barriers such as interaction with individuals, etc...)