

EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH METHOD IN ENHANCING SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH MIGRANTS: A PATHWAY TO INTEGRATION AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

Nigar Shahhuseynbayova *

Azerbaijan University, Baku, Azerbaijan

Abstract

The integration of migrants into host societies remains a complex and vital global challenge. This thesis delves into the use of biographical research as a powerful tool within the field of social work to address the multifaceted issues faced by migrants. Biographical research captures the life stories, experiences and aspirations of migrants, serving as a foundation for informed interventions that foster integration, preserve culture and identity and ultimately contribute to the development of inclusive societies.

The increasing mobility of individuals across borders underscores the importance of effective strategies for supporting migrants' integration and well-being. Biographical research, rooted in qualitative methodologies, offers an innovative approach to comprehending migrants' unique trajectories, challenges, and aspirations. By valuing the individual narratives of migrants, social workers can identify the barriers they face and the strengths they possess, thus enabling the tailoring of interventions that best address their needs.

Keywords

Biographical method, social work, migrants, refugees, individual case history.

1. Introduction

Biographical data in sociology is the main source of detailed and motivated descriptions of the “history” of an individual. Both significant social connections and motives for action receive convincing coverage here “from the point of view of the actor.” Most often, personal documents (memoirs, notes, diaries etc.) or materials from interviews and conversations become the source of biographical data. In very rare cases, a researcher deals with a biography that includes all the events of life, presented in the “first person” (Kozlova, 2004).

Since the 70s XX century in the wake of the revival of interest in the biographical method, its scope expanded significantly. Currently, it is used where the researcher is interested in the subjective experience of socio-historical processes (wars, revolutions, crises, migrations) and certain phases of human life (childhood, illness and death).

At the same time, its use is important where the main database is first-hand information about individual social experience - actions, events, emotions. It is valuable precisely as the subjective point of view of a social “actor”, therefore its main source in the biographical method is personal documents (life histories, written autobiographies, diaries, letters, family archives, photographs, pedigree dossiers, etc.) (Golofast, 1995).

*Corresponding Author: Nigar Shahhuseynbayova, e-mail: Nigar.Shahhuseynbayova@au.edu.az

The biographical method is an interdisciplinary method and is used in many social sciences and humanities, where the center of interest is the individual. The biographical method is a method of analysis that focuses on an individual or individuals, their experience of living life and the reflection of socio-cultural processes in it. It provides thoroughly complete information about the entire length of a person's life path and subjective experiences (Banks, 2006).

Preserving Identity and Promoting Integration.

Migration is a multifaceted experience marked by numerous challenges, with one of the most central being the preservation of cultural identity amid the process of integration into new societies. Navigating this intricate balance requires a nuanced approach and biographical research emerges as a valuable tool. This research methodology serves as a bridge, enabling migrants to articulate their cultural backgrounds, share their diverse experiences and express the values that form the bedrock of their identities. The significance of this process extends beyond the individual, fostering mutual understanding between migrants and the local population. Furthermore, it empowers migrants, providing them with the agency to actively preserve and celebrate their rich cultural heritage.

Biographical research offers a platform for migrants to articulate the intricacies of their cultural backgrounds. Through in-depth interviews and narrative analyses, researchers delve into the multifaceted layers of migrants' histories, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the diverse elements that shape their identities. This exploration encompasses not only geographical roots but also linguistic nuances, traditional practices and familial customs. Consequently, the richness and diversity of migrants' cultural backgrounds become vividly apparent, creating a tapestry that contributes to the broader societal landscape.

In addition to cultural backgrounds, biographical research delves into the lived experiences of migrants. This involves capturing the challenges, triumphs, and transformative moments that have shaped their journeys. These narratives provide a window into the unique pathways migrants have traversed, offering insights into the resilience and adaptability that characterize their experiences. By sharing these stories, migrants contribute to a collective narrative that enriches the societal understanding of migration, dispelling stereotypes and fostering empathy among the local population. (Semenova, 1994)

Values serve as the compass that guides individuals through life and for migrants, preserving these values is integral to maintaining a sense of self. Biographical research allows migrants to articulate and emphasize the values that are crucial to their identities. Whether rooted in cultural traditions, religious beliefs or ethical principles, these values not only shape individual behaviour but also contribute to the diversity that strengthens the social fabric. Recognizing and respecting these values becomes a cornerstone in fostering inclusive communities where diverse perspectives are acknowledged and celebrated.

Beyond documentation, biographical research becomes a catalyst for empowerment. By providing a platform for migrants to share their stories, the methodology validates their experiences and voices. This validation, in turn, empowers migrants to actively engage in preserving and celebrating their heritage (Rapenko, 2019). The act of sharing and celebrating fosters a sense of pride and belonging, affirming that cultural diversity is not a barrier to integration but rather an enriching force that contributes to the cultural mosaic of the host society.

Acknowledging the importance of cultural identity is not solely the responsibility of migrants; it extends to the broader support system within the host society. Social workers, as key facilitators in the integration process, play a pivotal role in recognizing and respecting the cultural identities of migrants. By understanding the significance of cultural diversity, social workers can implement strategies that go beyond mere assimilation, fostering an environment where migrants feel acknowledged and valued. This recognition, coupled with culturally sensitive interventions, is instrumental in steering the integration process towards inclusivity and harmony (Orlova, 2010).

Skills and Knowledge Required for Effective Implementation

Effectively utilizing the biographical research method demands a range of competencies from social workers. These include active listening, empathetic engagement, cultural sensitivity, ethical considerations in research, and the ability to collaboratively design interventions with migrants (Schütze, 2007). Furthermore, a solid understanding of research methodologies is essential for accurately collecting and interpreting life stories, thereby shaping meaningful interventions that promote successful integration (Rubilar, 2013).

Case Study: Biographical Research in Social Work with Ukrainian Migrants

The examination of the application of biographical research in social work with migrants from Ukraine, particularly in the context of their settlement in Azerbaijan, serves as an insightful case study. With over 8,000 Ukrainians having settled in Azerbaijan, a demographic shift that intensified after February 24, a profound exploration of their experiences unveils the complexity of their integration process. The legal framework allows them a 90-day settlement period, automatically extended if they choose to stay. To unravel the intricacies of their journey, social workers employ a multifaceted approach involving interviews and narrative analysis (<https://www.migration.gov.az/>).

Through these qualitative methodologies, social workers engage deeply with the life stories of Ukrainian migrants. This in-depth exploration goes beyond mere demographic data, delving into the motivations propelling their migration, the challenges they encounter and the dreams that shape their aspirations. By peeling back the layers of their narratives, social workers gain nuanced insights that guide culturally sensitive interventions. These interventions aim not only to address immediate needs but also to empower migrants in navigating the subtleties of their new environment, ultimately fostering a profound sense of belonging.

The role of social workers in Azerbaijan extends beyond the exploration of individual life stories. In the context of the Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons, social workers play a pivotal role in providing essential assistance and support. This support is comprehensive, encompassing practical aid while recognizing the intricate interplay of cultural, social and psychological factors influencing the well-being of migrants.

Scientifically Substantiated Approaches:

Needs and Resources Assessment:

Thoroughly assessing the needs and available resources of Ukrainian refugees becomes a foundational step. This comprehensive approach ensures that individualized support plans address not only material and medical needs but also educational and

psychosocial requirements. Social workers collaborate with refugees to develop holistic strategies that empower them to navigate their challenges effectively.

Information Provision:

Social workers act as conduits of crucial information for refugees. This involves not only informing them about their rights but also providing insights into available services, employment opportunities and educational possibilities. By bridging the information gap, social workers empower refugees to make informed decisions about their future in Azerbaijan.

Psychosocial Support:

Addressing trauma and stress resulting from displacement is a shared experience among refugees. Social workers step in as crucial pillars of support, offering psychological assistance to help individuals adapt to their new environment. Coping strategies are collaboratively developed, acknowledging the unique challenges of each migrant.

Sociocultural Adaptation:

Cultural sensitivity is paramount in formulating support programs. Social workers actively consider the traditions and values of Ukrainian refugees, incorporating them into adaptation strategies. This approach ensures that the adaptation process is not merely assimilative but respects and celebrates the cultural diversity brought by the migrants.

Family Well-being Support:

Recognizing the importance of family stability, social workers assist in resolving conflicts, accessing medical care and securing educational opportunities for children. By addressing family well-being, social workers contribute significantly to the overall adaptation and integration of Ukrainian refugees.

Employment and Education:

Facilitating employment opportunities and access to education is identified as a key aspect of long-term integration. Social workers take an active role in assisting refugees with job hunting, resume preparation and pursuing educational endeavors, fostering self-sufficiency and a sense of purpose.

Building Social Networks:

Recognizing the potential isolation faced by refugees, social workers actively facilitate the creation of new social connections. This involves not only connecting refugees with each other but also integrating them into the local community. Building these social networks is instrumental in diminishing feelings of isolation and promoting rapid integration.

Partnership with Organizations:

Collaboration with local NGOs, international organizations, and governmental agencies becomes a strategic approach to enhance the coordination and effective distribution of aid. Social workers forge partnerships that amplify the impact of their interventions, ensuring a more cohesive and comprehensive support system for Ukrainian refugees. Drawing on research by Banks (2006) and Semenova *et al.* (1994), this collaborative approach proves to be crucial in addressing the multifaceted needs of the migrant population.

Supporting Ukrainian Refugees: A Multifaceted Process:

Supporting Ukrainian refugees in Azerbaijan is acknowledged as a multifaceted and intricate process. Beyond technical skills, effective engagement by social workers demands empathy, cultural sensitivity and the ability to build trusting relationships. The success of interventions hinges on the recognition of the unique challenges faced by each

migrant and the customization of support plans accordingly. Social workers, as frontline advocates, embody the role of empathetic facilitators, actively participating in the intricate dance of integration.

The multifaceted nature of supporting Ukrainian refugees emphasizes the need for a holistic and collaborative approach. It requires not only a technical understanding of social work principles but also a deep appreciation for the cultural nuances that shape the experiences of migrants. Empathy, cultural sensitivity and the ability to build trusting relationships emerge as the linchpins of effective social work in this context.

The case study of biographical research in social work with Ukrainian migrants in Azerbaijan illuminates the depth and complexity of the integration process. Through a thorough exploration of individual life stories, social workers gain insights that inform culturally sensitive interventions, fostering a sense of belonging among migrants. The scientifically substantiated approaches outlined for supporting Ukrainian refugees underscore the comprehensive nature of social work in this context. Effective engagement goes beyond practical aid, recognizing the intricate interplay of cultural, social and psychological factors. As social workers navigate this multifaceted process, their role emerges as not only technical but profoundly human, requiring a delicate balance of skills, empathy and cultural understanding. In supporting Ukrainian refugees, social workers become architects of integration, actively shaping a harmonious and inclusive community in Azerbaijan. Future Prospects and Concluding Thoughts:

In an era of unprecedented global mobility, the complexity and diversity of migration patterns have elevated the role of social work to a paramount position. As societies continue to evolve and become more diverse, the imperative for effective integration strategies intensifies. The biographical research method emerges as a linchpin in understanding the intricate journeys of migrants, offering a nuanced lens through which social workers can craft interventions that go beyond mere assimilation. This section explores the multifaceted dimensions of future prospects for social work in the realm of migrant integration, delving into the evolving nature of migration, the expanding role of technology and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Understanding the future prospects of social work necessitates a contemplation of the evolving nature of migration itself. With globalization shaping interconnected societies, migration is not merely a one-dimensional movement but a complex web of interconnected trajectories. Social workers must anticipate shifts in migration patterns, considering factors such as climate change, geopolitical events and economic fluctuations. As the dynamics of migration continue to evolve, the adaptability of social work methodologies, particularly biographical research, becomes paramount in addressing the diverse needs of migrants.

The integration of technology presents both opportunities and challenges for social work with migrants. On one hand, technological advancements offer innovative tools for communication, information dissemination and remote assistance. Virtual platforms can facilitate support groups, language learning and vocational training, transcending geographical barriers. However, the digital divide remains a concern, with some migrants lacking access to technology. Social workers need to navigate these challenges, ensuring that technology enhances rather than exacerbates existing disparities in access to resources.

The future of social work in migrant integration lies in fostering robust interdisciplinary collaborations. Recognizing that migration intersects with various fields - including psychology, sociology, law and public health - social workers must

collaborate with professionals from diverse disciplines. This collaborative approach ensures a holistic understanding of migrants' needs and challenges, leading to more comprehensive and effective interventions. Professional development programs should encourage interdisciplinary training, emphasizing the interconnected nature of issues faced by migrants.

To meet the demands of an increasingly complex and diverse migration landscape, social work training and education must undergo a transformative evolution. The incorporation of biographical research skills becomes not just an option but a necessity. Social workers need to be equipped with the ability to conduct in-depth interviews, analyze narratives and understand the cultural nuances that shape individual journeys. Training programs should also emphasize the ethical considerations inherent in biographical research, ensuring that the dignity and agency of migrants are preserved throughout the research process.

In conclusion, the trajectory of social work in facilitating migrant integration is intricately intertwined with the evolving dynamics of global migration. The biographical research method emerges as an indispensable tool, offering a profound understanding of migrants' experiences that extends beyond statistical data. As societies continue to diversify, the adaptability of social work methodologies becomes imperative in addressing the complex and evolving needs of migrants.

The examination of the case of Ukrainian migrants, within the context of biographical research, serves as a poignant illustration of the method's efficacy. It highlights the transformative potential of understanding individual life stories, showcasing how nuanced challenges can be addressed to pave the way for a more harmonious and inclusive society. Social workers, armed with biographical research skills, become architects of change, contributing not only to the successful integration of migrants but also to the preservation and celebration of their cultural identities.

As we look to the future, the continued success of social work in migrant integration hinges on a commitment to ongoing learning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the ethical application of research methodologies. By embracing these principles, social workers can navigate the complexities of migration, contributing to the creation of inclusive societies where the tapestry of diverse life stories weaves the fabric of a more harmonious future.

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