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# Assessing Asylum Seeker Well-being: Pakistani Life in Bangkok

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a supplement to my thesis intended to provide insight for organizations and churches in Bangkok who may be currently interacting with or in the process of considering assisting the Pakistani asylum seekers.



By: Cailah Cox

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### Community Context:

Persecuted in their home countries, multitudes of people come to Thailand seeking asylum. The asylum seekers end up overstaying their visa because the application process for becoming a refugee takes years. Many of them are not prepared for the way of life they are forced to live in Thailand. The UNHCR provides little assistance to the asylum seekers. As a result, non-government organizations and churches have taken it upon themselves to serve these marginalized people.

### Methodology/question:

This research project addresses the question of, *what are the significant factors that effect the well-being of Pakistani asylum seekers in Bangkok?* The question applies to anyone who has left Pakistan because of persecution and has registered as an asylum seeker with the UNHCR in Bangkok. Since the situation in Bangkok is less than ideal, the purpose of the study is to better understand how they are handling it.

In order to answer the research question, a participatory approach was implemented, which contained surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The written surveys, interviews, and focus groups were conducted in one of the largest communities of Pakistani asylum seekers in the city. The online surveys came from families receiving assistance from Life Raft International; they came from a variety of areas within Bangkok.

### Social determinants of health:

Asylum seekers are a vulnerable population, which means they are easily affected by the social and environmental conditions around them that could either help or hinder their well-being. These social and environmental conditions that influence the health of people and communities are called the social determinants of health. The social determinants of health as laid out by the WHO (2015) show just how extensive the impacts of health can be. These determinants can be grouped into 5 categories of social, physical, spiritual, mental, environmental.

#### Social -

3/4 of the people surveyed said that they feel isolated from community. The Pakistani community can support each other to an extent, but when it comes down to it they are all fighting for the same thing. It becomes important to receive support from community outside their context. Living in Thailand, the Thai community is something they cannot avoid. The importance of becoming involved with Thai people cannot be underestimated. Some Pakistani asylum seekers are involved with the Thai community through their church. By getting involved with the Thai community it will help them to better assimilate into this new culture.

#### Physical -

Food and room rent are constant concerns, but somehow

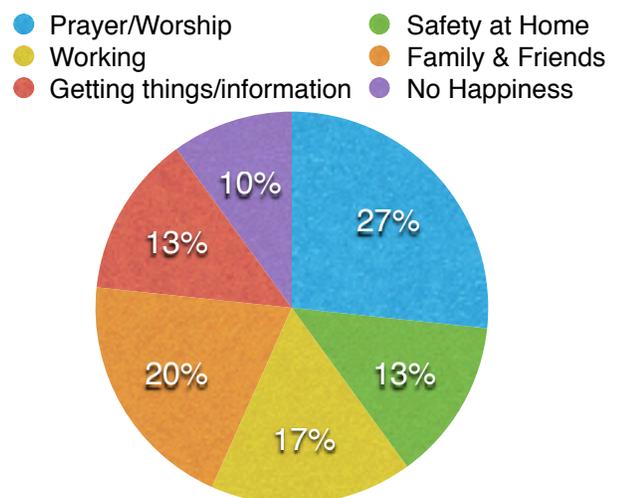


Figure 1: The Types of things that bring happiness

every family is able to survive month after month. It was unclear as to how most of the families support themselves. If families have money, they hide that fact from others. Afraid that if organizations or individuals find out they have money, the support will cease. Though most families have money saved, being unsure of how long they will be in Thailand causes them to take as much help as they can get. 79% receive some type of food or money support from a church.

It was found that the Pakistani diet is heavy in oil, bread, vegetables, and sugar, while lacking in fruit and protein. Fruit and protein are crucial to having a healthy and balanced diet, but these commodities are expensive. Eating a diet high in carbs, fats, and sugar over a long period of time is bound to create health problems.

One area where there seems to be very little outside help is in the obtaining of medications. Many of the asylum seekers have chronic health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, etc, that they should be taking medication for. Many families must choose between providing food and shelter, or buying medications. It would be much appreciated by the asylum seekers if there was some assistance with medications.

### *Spiritual -*

Since coming to Thailand, most asylum seekers say their faith has increased despite the hardships. Depression can easily overcome the asylum seekers. Faith brings hope.

### **Role of the church:**

The church is a significant contributor to the overall well-being of asylum seekers. The church creates *a place for community* by gathering believers together weekly to worship. Community reminds people that they are not suffering alone. This allows space for asylum seekers to find their purpose within the situation.

The church is also *a place for physical help*. The Lord does not just care about our souls, but also cares for our physical needs such as food, shelter, and health. Many churches in Bangkok give food to asylum seekers or they partner with organizations that do.

Lastly, the church should be *a place for spiritual revival*. The body of believers can be led to have a big picture, Kingdom mentality. When the church itself is working in the full power of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual landscape around them cannot help but change. Together the churches in Bangkok must unite together to strive for revival in this city.

### *Mental -*

Schooling has been a pressing issue for many families, but recently many community learning centers have been established. Generally speaking, children have a place where they could go to receive an education. To improve the quality of education though, these learning centers could use an increase in funding for the teachers, materials, and supplies.

For the adults, employment is very important because it not only provides an income, but it also gives them a way to productively spend their time. Of the people surveyed, 32% have found a means of making an income. The people who genuinely need income have been able to find work, though often the work is laborious.

### *Environmental -*

Given the context of their situation, many asylum seekers feel like the environment they live in is hostile. Constantly fearing arrest, they rarely go outside. They are not able to live in freedom. A majority of them have asked for more help going through the legal process of obtaining refugee status.

The Lord calls us to help the poor and the sojourner. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

**Strategies:**

Short term -

Learning **Thai language** so that they can better communicate with the Thai community.

Providing **counseling** so that people can process what their going through.

**Networking together churches** to provide spiritual unification throughout the city.

Long term -

**Raising awareness:**

For change to happen there must be work done on both the side of the community groups as well as the government agencies. The general public needs to know more about what exactly is happening to asylum seekers not only in Thailand, but throughout the world.

**Mindset Change:**

The Lord has blessed the asylum seekers and will continue to be faithful to His word. In this time the asylum seekers are faced with a choice to either give into the hardships of their situation or to put their trust in the Lord. A mindset change must happen both on the part of asylum seekers and those who help them. It is important for asylum seekers to see their situation as an opportunity to grow closer to God and bring others closer to Him as well. The people that help the asylum seekers must strive to not look at them as helpless, but instead to help them reach their potential.

**Boldness in Faith:**

The Pakistani asylum seekers think that by cowering in fear they are protecting themselves. In reality, by doing this they are not living up to the potential that the Lord has called them to. Whether by choice or not, the Lord has sent them to the Buddhist nation of Thailand. What better way to spend their time than telling others about Jesus. And what a great testimony they have of the power and provision of God! They have the opportunity to not only redefine their purpose for being here, but to also redefine the spiritual landscape in Thailand.

Figure 2:

A.) The skills people currently possess  
 B.) The skills people would like to improve on

