

Prejudice Towards Migrant Workers in Gulf Arab Countries

Mohammad Mushfequr Rahman

College of Health, Psychology and Social Care, School of Psychology, University of Derby, Derby, UK

Email address:

100438290@unimail.derby.ac.uk

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Abstract: For the majority of modern history, social psychologists have been interested in the problem of prejudice. There are several theories that explain why prejudice exists and how it can be lessened. Due to the fact that societies all over the world need to deal with a variety of different groups of people, prejudice between individuals and groups proves to be a significant barrier to positive relations. The problem of prejudice can be thus seen also among the Gulf Arabs towards migrants. It has been continuous and there is little sign that it is subsiding. Considering these facts the paper made an attempt to address the issue of Gulf Arab Muslim prejudice towards migrants. In doing so it has considered the broader issue of prejudice. The paper provided not only a social and political explanation but essentially a psychological one through psychological theories on why prejudice happens and why the victims accept it. The paper also provided solutions, assessments, strengths, and limitations on dealing with prejudice. It has used established psychological, social, and political theories to explain and address prejudice. The paper found that prejudice is still strong in many cultures including Gulf Arab Muslim culture and that it could be solved through proposed policies.

Keywords: Prejudice, Racism, Xenophobia, Migrants, Arabs, Gulf Countries, Islam, Muslim

1. Introduction

Whether it is racism, sexual harassment of women, or religious discrimination, prejudice has always been a part of life. George Floyd's passing has brought attention once more to the issue of prejudice in other parts of the world. Prejudice is the act of making a judgment about a person or a situation before sufficient facts are known. It is a natural mechanism that enables humans to form an instantaneous impression of the big picture. People unconsciously categorize other people according to their gender, race, and religion. Humans are social creatures, and the organizations we belong to or would like to belong to shape who we are. But, making quick judgments about other people is not always the best course of action. It causes prejudice and stereotyping.

The discussion with a summary of prejudice in a specific part and culture of the world, namely the Gulf Arab Muslim society. It discusses the facts of prejudice and its various occurrences in the socio-economic sector. It then explains the psychological and sociological theories behind prejudice, focusing on evolutionary and socio-psychological perspectives. Then possible solutions in ending prejudice are

discussed. Its strength and limitations are explained with assessment of success.

2. The Gulf Arab Muslim Social Problem

For the majority of modern history, social psychologists have been interested in the problem of prejudice. There are several theories that explain why prejudice exists and how it can be lessened. Due to the fact that societies all over the world need to deal with a variety of different groups of people, prejudice between individuals and groups proves to be a significant barrier to positive relations.

The problem of prejudice can be thus seen also among the Gulf Arabs towards migrants. It has been continuous and there is little sign that it is subsiding. Arab Muslim prejudice has been deterring human rights development in gulf states for a very long time. Racism and xenophobia are the specific types of prejudice that migrants face in the gulf. A large number of the migrant laborer, mostly from Asia, Africa, and other Middle Eastern countries, journey to the Gulf states in search of employment to support themselves and their families. The prospect of great pay, comfortable working circumstances, and the chance to improve their lives entice them to this

employment. In contrast to these initial ideas, working overseas is considerably different in practice. Many immigrants spend decades of their life working in a foreign nation, but in exchange, they are viewed as outsiders and exploited by their employers, who often face bigotry and xenophobia [20].

The migrant laborer from developing nations like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Indonesia pay high fees to secure labor-intensive positions in this region in an effort to escape poverty. In spite of the fact that many of them are able to earn more than they would have in their own countries, many also experience horrifying mistreatment. Migrant workers are frequently duped and taken advantage of by middlemen, sponsors, and employers in both the sending and the receiving nations. The migrant workers frequently lose not just the money they invested in getting their positions, but also their fundamental human dignity, health, and, in some terrible circumstances, even their lives. They are all too frequently denied fair pay, even refused the money, made to work through intense stress and hardship, forced to live in substandard conditions, forbidden the freedom to relocate or change jobs, and the target of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Their exploitation goes against fundamental Islamic beliefs that allegedly form the cornerstone of morality and law in these Arab governments and localities as well as internationally recognized conventions [1].

Prejudice is legalized and institutionalized through the Kafala system. In Jordan, Lebanon, and the majority of the Arab Gulf nations, the kafala, or sponsorship, system provides private individuals and businesses nearly unlimited control over migrant workers' employment and immigration status. Low salaries, unfavorable working conditions, and employee maltreatment are frequently the results of a lack of laws and protections for migrant workers' rights. The relationship between international employees and their local sponsor, or kafeel, which is typically their employer, is defined by the kafala, or sponsorship, system. It has been used in Jordan and Lebanon as well as in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Notwithstanding the fact that both Bahrain and Qatar assert to have allegedly abolished the system, some contend that the reforms are ineffectively implemented and do not amount to abolition. However such alleged reformation should be seen through the concept of Tokenism which is a practice of openly granting slight favors to a minority group to allay charges of prejudice and discrimination.

Workers may lack legal protection under the host country's labor law because the system frequently falls under the purview of interior ministries rather than labor ministries. As a result, they lose rights including the capacity to participate in a labor dispute process or join a union, making them subject to exploitation. Additionally, the system gives private citizens—rather than the state—control over workers' legal statuses, creating a power imbalance that sponsors can take advantage of. This is due to the fact that workers' employment and residency visas are connected and only sponsors can

renew or cancel them.

Most of the time, employees require their sponsor's approval to change jobs, terminate employment, or visit or leave the host nation. Even if the employee is fleeing maltreatment, leaving the workplace without permission is a crime that leads to the termination of the worker's legal status and could lead to incarceration or deportation. In the face of exploitation, workers have few legal options, and many experts contend that the system encourages contemporary slavery [15].

The consequences of prejudice are varied. A minimum of 132,000 workers have been impacted by the documented 497 public allegations filed against corporations that hire and exploit foreign labor since 2016. Employees frequently complain about delayed payments, salaries being withheld, or payments not being made at all. 72% of employees have filed reports of this nature. Locals frequently treat migrant laborers with little respect and as second-class citizens, and they frequently engage in bigotry and discrimination with racial overtones. In the Gulf states, hiring help is viewed as a status symbol for the wealthy; the rich take advantage of cheap labor at the price of other people's lives. Famously stating that "expatriates should be left in the desert or deported since they are placing burden on Kuwait's medical sector," Kuwaiti actress Hayat Al-Fahad. To say something so offensive and upsetting reveals how commonplace racism and mistreatment of migrant workers are in many Gulf countries [4, 11].

3. Theoretical Explanation

Prejudice is a negative perception of someone or something created before having any contact with that person or thing. There are three main types of prejudice: emotional (emotions ranging from moderate anxiety to hatred), cognitive (assumptions and ideas about groups, including stereotypes), and behavioral (actions) (negative behaviors, including discrimination and violence) [13]. Both racism and xenophobia are forms of prejudice. Racism is a type of prejudice that holds that people who fall into different racial categories have distinguishing qualities and that some racial groups are inferior to others as a result. Racism typically includes adverse emotional responses to group members, acceptance of unfavorable stereotypes, and racial discrimination against specific individuals [14]. Xenophobia is aggressive or unfriendly attitudes towards individuals from other countries, ethnic groups, regions, or areas [22].

Why do groups practice prejudice of racism and xenophobia? This can be explained from evolutionary and social psychology perspectives through in-group superiority, perceived threat, identity, and resources. Atrocities committed against humans become essentially no different from squashing an insect if it is possible, through prejudice, to consider people as less than human. The in-group frequently finds itself subconsciously forming the same types of assumptions about the out-group. The in-group makes and acts in accordance with assumptions about the abilities and aspirations of the out-group based on, for example, their age,

ethnicity, race, or sex. Even in civilizations, localities, and institutions where bias is institutionalized, denial of the existence of prejudice is supported by complex but illogical weak arguments. The apartheid system in South Africa was a textbook example of institutionalized bias, yet it was presented to the public as a respect for and acknowledgment of cultural diversity.

In-group superiority arises from a host of interconnected factors such as group self-identity, group narcissism and social dominance theory [9]. Social identity theory argues that we know ourselves through our group memberships. As we see our group as superior we pursue and express our self-esteem as individual members of the group. In other words, group self-actualization is due to what the author terms as the "shrinking concern" psychology where people tend to focus on what is closest to the interest of their selves irrespective of the justification and consequences. This is also similar to the self-presentation theory (Jones and Pittman 1982) where we identify with a group to present, promote, ingratiate, exemplify and even intimidate others. So, for example, racists and nationalists will cherish their racial and national group identities because doing so directly empowers and sustains the interests of their selves against what they see as others or inferiors. To preserve this "shrinking concern psychology", self-presentation and self-categorization, perpetrators of racism and xenophobia will appeal to the techniques of denying racism, denying moral culpability for racism, and accepting and asserting racism; perpetrators of racism deny or hiding their racism by belittling its existence, by whataboutery, by creating alternate perspectives, by projecting non-racism of some to whole group's non-racism, by blaming other's for one group's racism, by portraying one's group as victims of racism, having the conscience of ethnic superiority, inter-group reciprocity and appealing to genetics [17].

The perceived threat from outgroups such as migrants is also a prejudice trigger. For example, Kuwaiti actress Hayat Al-Fahad stated infamously that "expatriates should be left in the desert or deported since they are placing the burden on Kuwait's medical sector.". Gulf Arab Muslim prejudice may also be explained by the theory of dogmatism that separates migrants from the local ethnic population in culture and values. Evolutionarily this could be explained by prejudice against the male out-group that aided human ancestors in resolving adaptive issues such as defense against male-on-male violence and defense against sexual compulsion for women [12]. Also, according to the in-group cohesion hypothesis, humans have evolved a psychological adaption whose purpose is to respond to external dangers, like an invasion by an aggressive group of people. Group cohesion should rise in times of threat, as seen by inclinations like partiality for members of the same group and an increase in prejudice towards members of other groups [5].

Both group living and competition between groups are universal aspects of human society. Prejudice may have developed as a result of evolutionary adaptations that included prejudice against and punishment of members of other groups, xenophobia (hostility towards strangers), adaptations to

uphold community standards, and shunning those who defy them [18].

The theory of system justification makes an effort to explain why members of disadvantaged groups such as migrants may learn to accept their predicament in Arab Muslim gulf countries. It encapsulates the psychological and societal pressures to uphold and accept the status quo as inevitable, good, and fair. Some of the foundations of system justification among members of a disadvantaged group include rationalization of the status quo, internalization of inequity, relationships among ego, group, and system justification motives, and minimization of ideological dissonance [16].

4. Theoretically Grounded Intervention

Whether intentional or unintentional, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination can hinder certain people's ability to contribute positively to society and even worsen their mental and physical health [19]. So prejudice must be first detected before it can be dealt with. In terms of social distance, or how physically or mentally near people are willing to become to one another, prejudice can be measured sensitively. Analyzing the language we employ, the manner in which we express ourselves, and the manner in which we converse with, and about racial outgroups can all help identify prejudice. Physiological indicators, behavioral indicators, the bogus pipeline, and implicit association tests are other protocols for detecting prejudice [7].

Every culture may have a way to deal with the problems that they are facing, including prejudice, and, in the process, create or access identity. Identity can be constructed [8], resisted [2], and functional [21]. For prejudice to be minimized or even end non-prejudicial construction could be achieved and prejudicial identity could be resisted in achieving functional capacity. Arab Muslims have appealed to Islam for their varied social problems for a very long time. They had once resisted and suppressed widespread racism and xenophobia in pagan Arabia. Could they appeal again to it to solve this problem of prejudice? In the simplest terms, the solution to this problem is to return to the Islamic principle of rejecting prejudice, as mentioned in various Islamic texts. This would be then a spiritual faith-based solution for this problem rooted in history and culture- two sources of accessing identity.

Moral diplomacy can act as a catalyst for policy changes that can put an end to the exploitation of migrant workers. Workers from other countries must be treated with respect, receive fair pay on time, and have their basic human rights upheld. In order to ensure that migrant workers have "decent work," which is defined by the ILO as "productive employment in conditions of freedom, justice, security, and dignity," the migrant labor system needs to be reformatted. These rights have their roots in the ethical and social justice traditions found in Islamic law as well as international law [1]. Through positive experiences and connections with members of other groups, through practice and not avoiding them, and

through education, one can lessen their predisposition to harbor stereotypes and prejudices and act on them [10].

Public policies may be adopted as well where policies and laws affecting behavior could force Arab Muslim employers to treat migrant workers with respect and dignity. For example, such policies which promote routine and regular social interaction between Arab Muslims and migrant workers, the study of each other's culture and lifestyle, and get-together events could be arranged. In these contexts eradicating prejudice could be taught and solidarity learned.

5. Assessment of Success

Once theoretical and practical plans are in harmony and in place it could take a period of activity before visible and measurable results could be seen but the extent of which could be only measured through statistical analysis. Visibly people may experience a reduction in prejudice such as through observation, verbal engagement, employer-employee relationships, and reports from witnesses. Measurable results could be collected through questionnaires, interviews, international organizational statistics, and experiments. As this is a very sensitive topic to measure there is a great possibility people will be biased for sake of self-image and reputation. For example, many would reject prejudice as bad even though they might have been practicing it. It is therefore important to frame interviews and questions in such a way that people do not realize they are being measured for their prejudice. Reports from witnesses, especially migrant workers could be a qualitatively stronger means of measuring prejudice among the studied group i.e. Gulf Arab Muslims. Experimentally we could sample a group of Gulf Arab Muslims from employers and common people and implement some psychological tests to measure their prejudice and extend it to the population in general. These tests could be how the participants respond to various images, narratives, questions, and in-group behavior towards out-group migrants. Data from all sources gathered could then give us an idea of the assessment of success.

6. Strengths and Limitations

Good outcomes of the current strategy may be significant for educators and policymakers. Positive intergroup contact may lessen prejudice, according to community leaders in places with high intergroup tension, but they encounter practical challenges that make such improvements challenging. The imagined social interaction technique has advantages as an intervention in that it is simple and affordable to carry out. It can be expanded to be applied in a variety of contexts, such as job induction and training, and it can be applied again while concentrating on various out-group groups. The intervention's applicability would be increased by the fact that the facilitators only need a minimal amount of training. These interventions' simplicity could have disadvantages as well.

Evidence suggests that the primes in our social environment

activate related information structures in our awareness, which are likely to significantly impact our attitudes and behaviors in the future. Sadly, these influences are frequently harmful. For instance, making White participants think about African Americans had them act more hostilely [3]. As a result, we risk making the issue we are attempting to solve worse.

Here, it can be beneficial to take into account additional strategies that could be used in an effort to lessen bias. One of them that might be useful for use is one that aims to alter or dilute stereotypes by providing information about group members that is anti-stereotypical. When the information concerns a wide variety of group members who are otherwise typical of their group rather than when the information concerns a single person, such an approach can be beneficial [6].

7. Conclusion

Whether it is racism, sexual harassment of women, or religious discrimination, prejudice has always been a part of life. Prejudice is the act of making a judgment about a person or a situation before sufficient facts are known. For the majority of modern history, social psychologists have been interested in the problem of prejudice. There are several theories that explain why prejudice exists and how it can be lessened. Due to the fact that societies all over the world need to deal with a variety of different groups of people, prejudice between individuals and groups proves to be a significant barrier to positive relations.

Both racism and xenophobia are forms of prejudice. Racism is a type of prejudice that holds that people who fall into different racial categories have distinguishing qualities and that some racial groups are inferior to others as a result. Xenophobia is aggressive or unfriendly attitudes towards individuals from other countries, ethnic groups, regions, or areas. Why do groups practice prejudice of racism and xenophobia? This can be explained from evolutionary and social psychology perspectives through in-group superiority, perceived threat, identity, and resources. The theory of system justification makes an effort to explain why members of disadvantaged groups such as migrants may learn to accept their predicament in Arab Muslim gulf countries.

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