

A discussion on *Zofia Włodarczyk's* paper titled “**ESCAPING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN TIME OF CONFLICT: How do female refugees decide to flee?**”

Tamoghna Halder

University of California, Davis

This paper is a novel attempt in exploring how survivors of domestic violence decide on fleeing a country during a political crisis. It uses biographical interviews and abductive approach to comment on the role of macro, meso and micro forces behind such decisions. The paper argues that political conflict, at least in case of the Chechen society, is observed to have either strengthen the patriarchal patterns present in a community or have led to degeneration of such customs, and at the same time created a way out of abusive relationships for the survivors.

In general, this paper includes a fair amount of literature review as well as description of the sampling procedure to convince the reader about the importance of the research question, as well as the conclusions. This is exactly why researchers across disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science and psychology will be able to intellectually engage with the paper and raise further research questions.

One general concern which even the author seems to have shared in her paper is the sample size and representativeness of the sample. This can be addressed better if the author accommodates either or both of the following:

1. Formally explain the applicability/comparability of the context to other countries: In the past 5 years, multiple news articles and narratives were published to bring forth the experiences of especially Central American women fleeing their countries (or remaining trapped) under worsening socio-economic conditions (a macro context).
2. Analysis of common phrases/repeated words in the narratives: It is often used in psychometric studies (and in behavioral economics) to explain the representativeness of the sample. An out of sample validation in this context will imply comparing the most frequent phrases and words used by the interviewees with some external source such as news articles, NGO reports etc., (interviews of other survivors in other parts of the world who are migrants as well).

For those interested, the following points will hopefully provide a brief insight and a constructive criticism of its key sections.

- Discussion on the **Macro Context**: This section builds on the narratives of the survivors, (primarily Kariina's) to show (i) how the cultural trap of patriarchy operates and force women to remain trapped, (ii) how existence of political conflicts can strengthen the abusive trap yet at the same time

help the women to leave such traps (and migrate). Although the section is well written, it can benefit from certain modifications to address the following points –

(a) This section seems heavily dependent on the narrative of Kariina and refers to the rest of the interviewees only in passing or through phrases like ‘multiple narratives from other women...’. It demands a couple of sentences to explain (either) why Kariina’s narrative is representative (within the sample) in terms of analyzing the macro context, (or) to mention a few common phrases used by other interviewees which strengthen the conclusions of this section.

(b) The *discussion* on how political conflicts could help the survivors to leave the country is too brief, when compared to the discussion on how political persecutions can strengthen the abusive trap. Since it is an extremely important implication, it requires further elaboration, possibly a mention of prior literature on these macro roles (or the lack of such literature) could be useful to convince the reader about the importance of this finding.

- Discussion on the **Meso Context**: This is probably the most well written section of the paper. However, the author can highlight and analyze the following in detail (or take it up as a part of related future research):

Is there any difference between the family backgrounds (or childhood experiences) of those who avoided social networks and those who used social networks to flee their country? This is important, since the existence of social networks as well as the extent of solidarity in such networks for women can be a function of both the parameters.

- Discussion on the **Micro Context**: This section lacks convincing argument on how the narratives (primarily Maliika’s) negate the core assumption of labor migration framework. First, since these women are survivors of domestic violence, their decisions to migrate are bound to be taken independently of their families (husbands or even parents), therefore the typical definition of household or family does not apply behind the decision-making process. Second, based on the narratives presented in this section, these women left with their children, thereby, maximized the prospects of the future generations of the family by not leaving them with their legal parents in charge (*vis-à-vis* the abusive fathers). In addition, this section also needs to highlight on the representativeness of Maliika’s narrative within the sample.
- Discussion on the *linkage* between these contexts: For the purposes of broadening our theoretical understanding of migration, a further section on the linkage between these contexts will help us to understand how the emergence of Macro, Meso and Micro contexts can be inter-dependent. For example, how the emergence of informal institutions and social networks (the Meso context) are triggered by severe political unrest and disruptions (the Macro context), etc.