Understanding Migration and Resettlement Experiences of Uzbek Immigrants in the United States

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This qualitative study utilized a thematic six-step analysis process of interview data to identify prominent themes in the life experiences of 20 Uzbek immigrants regarding their migration to and resettlement in the United States; it also examined gender differences in their experiences. The results indicated that at the time of migration, most Uzbek participants were well-educated, middle class, and in their mid-20s. The primary reasons for their migration were limited socioeconomic and employment opportunities, and the declining educational quality in Uzbekistan. Uzbek participants reported some difficulties in their resettlement, including language barriers, cultural challenges, and financial stress. Most participants felt welcomed by the host community, believed in the "American dream," considered themselves successful, and envisioned their future in the US rather than in Uzbekistan. Across all interview questions, women tended to focus on their children's well-being and the opportunity to gain personal freedom in terms of education and employment, whereas career aspirations and achievement of financial stability were the focus for men. The results from this study provide much-needed information about the life experiences of Uzbek immigrants in the US and have implications for future research with this understudied population from Central Asia.
Keywords: Uzbek immigrants, migration, resettlement, cultural adjustment, gender differences

The immigrant population in the United States (US) is the largest in the world; more than 40 million people living in the US were born in another country (Budiman, 2020). With future waves of immigration, the demographics of the US population will continue to change, resulting in increased diversity and awareness of new immigrant groups. Over the past two decades, the number of Uzbek immigrants in the US increased from 22,800 in 2000 to 65,126 in 2019 (US Census Bureau, 2020), making them the largest group of immigrants from Central Asia. For most Uzbeks who migrated to the US after 2000 (US Department of Homeland Security, 2021), the pathway for legal immigration has been the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (DV Program) or Green Card Lottery. Among Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan is the country with the highest number of DV Program lottery winners (4,494), followed by Tajikistan (1,209), Kazakhstan (1,020), Kyrgyzstan (753), and Turkmenistan (306) (US Department of State, 2018). Over the last decade, researchers have explored migration and cultural adjustment of immigrants from post-Soviet countries but with a limited number of participants from Uzbekistan (Birman & Taylor-Ritzler, 2007; Birman & Trickett, 2001; Roytburd & Friedlander, 2008). Therefore, the primary goals of this qualitative study were to address this gap in the research literature and to identify the prominent themes related to the migration and resettlement of Uzbek immigrants in the US. In addition, we placed particular emphasis on exploring potential gender differences across these experiences.

Migration of Uzbek Immigrants to the US

The first wave of migration from Uzbekistan to the US began in 1991, after perestroika (refers to the restructuring of the Soviet political and economic system during the 1980s; for more information, see e.g., https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/perestroika-and-glasnost) and the breakup of the Soviet Union. The Uzbek community in the US has grown quickly (Jackson, 2010; Kordunksy et al., 2012; Moskin, 2006), and currently, Uzbek immigrants reside in more than nineteen states (US Census Bureau, 2020). However, it is difficult to precisely quantify the number of Uzbek immigrants living in the US because prior to 2000, Uzbek immigrants were recorded as originating from the former Soviet Union. Official routes of migration employed by Uzbeks include the DV Program, student and tourist visas, and asylum (US Department of Homeland Security, 2021). However, the fastest way to come to the US remains the DV Program. In 2020, the number of Uzbeks who applied for the DV Program was 1,674,787 (2,572,653 with derivatives or 8% of the Uzbek population), making Uzbekistan the nation with the second-highest application rate after Ghana (US Department of State, 2022).

Uzbek migration is influenced by both push and pull factors, where push factors (e.g., political repression, lack of education, poverty) impact citizens' motivation to leave Uzbekistan, and pull factors (e.g., better opportunities, employment, safety, political stability, psychological and physical well-being) attract people to relocate (Castles, 2013; Lee, 1966). The primary

reasons Uzbeks migrate to other countries are the lack of job opportunities, followed by low life satisfaction, job insecurity, and unemployment (Seitz, 2019). Researchers also noted that outdated education in Uzbekistan negatively impacts the quality of training, making Uzbeks less suited for the current job market, leading to unemployment and low life satisfaction (Library of Congress, 2007; Ruziev & Burkhanov, 2018). Uzbekistan's slow transition to a market economy also has been challenging for Uzbek citizens to adapt successfully under the new political and economic system (Batsaikhan & Dabrowski, 2017). These various push factors may reflect the pre-migration stress experienced by Uzbeks prior to their migration to the U.S.

For many immigrants, regardless of their status or reasons for migration, the relocation process is challenging and stressful (Dinh, 2009; Heleniak, 2004; Vinokurov et al., 2020; Yakushko, Watson et al., 2008). Immigrants experience depression, isolation, and homesickness both during and after migration. Immigrants may also experience pre-migration stress and face additional challenges after their relocation (American Psychological Association [APA], 2012, 2013).

Resettlement of Uzbek Immigrants in the US

Uzbek immigrants reside primarily on the West and East Coasts (US Census Bureau, 2020) and live in Russian-speaking ethnic enclaves (Vinokurov et al., 2020). For example, many Uzbeks living in New York City have recreated makhallas (neighborhoods or local communities), built thriving environments for the Uzbek community (e.g., supermarkets, restaurants, offices with bilingual staff), and replaced well-known post-Soviet Jewish neighborhoods, such as Brighton Beach, Sheepshead Bay, Bensonhurst in Brooklyn (Kordunksy et al., 2012), Forest Hills, Rego Park, and Kew Gardens in Queens (Jackson, 2010; Moskin, 2006).

Approximately 59% of Uzbek immigrants are proficient in English, and 53% have bachelor's degrees or more advanced degrees (US Census Bureau, 2020). However, most Uzbek immigrants prefer to speak Russian at home and maintain their customs, traditions, and post-Soviet values (Birman et al., 2005; Birman et al., 2014). Although most recent Uzbek immigrants are blue-collar workers, established immigrants have pursued careers in the arts, business, academia, and medicine. Additionally, Uzbek immigrants have established nonprofit organizations to raise awareness and serve the needs of the Uzbek and Central Asian communities in the US (e.g., Turkestanian American Association, Uzbek American Association of Chicago).

The resettlement of immigrants and their adjustment to new social and cultural norms can be stressful, a process that can last from several months to several years or more (Dinh, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2006). Immigrants experience acculturative stress from various factors, including language barriers, social and cultural challenges, trauma-based problems, hostile attitudes from host communities (e.g., anti-immigrant comments), and discrimination (APA, 2012, 2013; Dinh & Le, 2019; Roytburd & Friedlander, 2008; Vinokurov et al., 2020; Yakushko, Backhaus et al., 2008). Many immigrants from post-Soviet countries, including Uzbekistan, value ethnically dense communities within the US (Vinokurov et al., 2020), where they can receive social support and maintain many facets of their pre-migration lifestyle (Birman & Trickett, 2001; Birman et al., 2005).

Gender Differences in Uzbekistan

Central Asian cultures are generally considered collectivistic and have traditional gender roles. Like other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan is patriarchal: Men serve as "breadwinners" while women fulfill the primary duties as homemakers and family caregivers (Kamp, 2018). In Uzbekistan, early marriages, where one or both spouses enter marriage at the age of 18 or under, vary from 46% to 61%, depending on the region of the country (The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, 2019). Typically, women tend to enter marriage earlier than men. Even though the literacy rate among school-age girls (7-15 years old) in Uzbekistan is 99.9%, young married women are limited in their access to higher education; they also face other risks associated with early marriage, including depression and domestic violence (Bacchus et al., 2018; Buzi et al., 2015; Chandra-Mouli et al., 2015). Additionally, girls and women in Uzbekistan have restricted freedom of choice, including reproductive rights (Kamp, 2018), especially after marriage. These gender disparities in education enable Uzbek men to further leverage the benefits of a patriarchal society and leave fewer opportunities for women in both education and employment.

The Current Study

Although there has been interest in understanding the experiences of Asian immigrants in the US, little research has explored the lives of immigrants

from Central Asia, especially those from Uzbekistan. This study, the first of its kind, was designed to address this gap. Using a thematic six-step analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019), this study identified common themes in the Uzbek migration and resettlement narratives, including the reasons for emigration from their homeland and the experiences of establishing a new life in the US. In addition, we explored potential gender differences in these migration and resettlement experiences.

Research Team

In qualitative research, it is important to present the research team's background information that is relevant to the current research work. The research team for this study was comprised of three researchers at the master's or doctoral level in their training and academic career. The first and third authors were born in Uzbekistan. They are fluent or proficient in English, Russian, and Uzbek languages and familiar with Uzbek culture and immigration issues. The second author was born in Vietnam and has conducted extensive research with Asian and Latinx immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S.

Method

Participants

Twenty Uzbek immigrants residing in the US (10 female participants and 10 male participants, according to participants' self-identification and pronouns preference), ranging in age from 20–48 years old (M = 32; SD = 6.88), participated in the study. Nineteen participants were born in Uzbekistan, and one was born in Russia but arrived in Uzbekistan by the age of one and was raised there. Most participants identified as Uzbek (n = 14) or mixed ethnicity (n = 3; Uzbek-Russian, Uzbek-Korean-Russian, Uzbek-Greek). 90% of participants achieved a bachelor's degree or higher and 10% were in the process of completing a bachelor's degree. Regarding socioeconomic status, 70% identified as middle class, 20% as lower class, and 10% as upper-middle class. In terms of living accommodations, 65% rented a house or apartment and 35% owned a house. Please see Table 1 for a summary of participants' demographic information.

Migration and Resettlement-Related Demographic Information

The participants' year of immigration ranged from 1993 to 2017, with an average of 8.55 years of residence in the US. The mean age of participants at the time of migration was 23.25 years old, ranging from 8 to 42 years old. 30% of participants migrated through the DV Program, 20% via student visa, 15% via tourist visa, 15% via work and travel program, 15% via unification with family, and 5% did not specify visa type. All participants were US citizens or permanent residents at the time of their interview. Most participants migrated to the US alone, while other participants migrated with parents, siblings, or spouses and children. At the time of their migration, 10 participants had relatives in the US and 18 had friends from Uzbekistan who were living in the US. At the time of their interview, participants were residing in 10 states and the District of Columbia. The primary languages in participants' homes in Uzbekistan were a mix of Uzbek and Russian (n = 13), Uzbek alone (n = 4), and Russian alone (n = 3). After migration, many Uzbeks used a mix of English and Russian at home (n = 8), followed by English (n = 4), Russian (n = 3), a mix of Uzbek, English, and Russian (n = 3), a mix of English, Russian, and Croatian (n = 1), and a mix of Uzbek and English (n = 1). None of our participants used Uzbek as their primary language at home after migration. An equal number of female and male participants learned English in Uzbekistan (n = 16). Please see Table 2 for additional migration and resettlement-related demographic information.

Procedure

Following approval by the Institutional Review Board to conduct this research study, we recruited participants through social media posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram (please see Appendix A: Recruitment Invitation for Social Media Posts- English version). The recruitment invitation, in Russian and English, was posted on Uzbek immigrant Facebook groups (e.g., Uzbeks in USA, American Uzbekistan Association, Uzbek Cultural Garden of Cleveland) and on the first author's LinkedIn and Instagram pages and was reposted by the members of these social groups 65 times within the first 72 hours. Interested participants contacted the first author through social media messaging platforms who then confirmed their eligibility through follow-up emails. To be eligible, the study required participants to be at least 18 years old, have been born in Uzbekistan or the Uzbek Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek USSR), and reside in the U.S. as U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Excluded from study participa-

tion were Uzbek individuals on student or work visas.

A total of 63 individuals expressed an interest in participating in the study. Those eligible for the study were scheduled for an individual interview on a "first come, first serve" basis until the 20-interview goal was reached for the study, with 10 female and 10 male participants. We decided on 20 interviews because according to Guest et al. (2006) and Morgan et al. (2002), the first five-six interviews produce most of the information for qualitative research and after the 20th interview, there is little new information to be gained from additional interviews. Prior to the scheduled interview, each participant received an email reminder that provided interview instructions and an informed consent form (please see Appendix B). Study participants received no financial compensation or other incentives.

Each participant took part in a one-hour audiotaped interview and had the option to be interviewed in English or Russian. The selection of language options was based on the first author's experiences in the Uzbek primary and secondary educational systems, in which students have more exposure to the teaching of the Russian language than the Uzbek language. The language options were also based on the first author's stronger fluency in the Russian language over the Uzbek language, making it easier to conduct the interviews and do the transcription and translation work. However, during the interview participants were not restricted from using the Uzbek language, so they were free to add specific words or phrases related to cultural context (e.g., gap – gathering). Interviews in English (n = 11) were transcribed by a transcribing service (TEMI). Interviews in Russian (n = 9) were translated and transcribed by the first author, who is fluent in English and Russian, and proficient in Uzbek languages. The first author checked these interviews for cultural nuances, such as noting the specific vocabulary used by participants (e.g., kelin – bride, makhalla – community, neighborhood).

Measures

Participants responded to demographic questions about their age, gender, place of birth, ethnicity, current residence, educational level, marital status, spoken languages, socioeconomic status, and year of migration. After the completion of demographic questions, the interviewer asked participants a set of open-ended questions related to migration and resettlement experiences. In relation to their migra-

tion, we were interested to learn about their reasons for migration to the US (e.g., Why did you leave your home country?). In relation to their resettlement, we explored their adjustment to the US (e.g., Did you feel welcomed? Did you have any challenges? What were your expectations about life in the US?) For the full set of interview questions, please refer to Appendix C.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used for coding and analysis to identify the most common themes across participant interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019; Clarke & Braun, 2015). The primary goal was to explore the lives of Uzbek immigrants in the context of migration and resettlement. Therefore, a data-driven approach was used to generate the themes inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure analyst triangulation (Patton, 2015), two coders (first and third authors) individually coded interviews and then reviewed the findings. The coders reached inductive thematic saturation on the eleventh interview when no new codes or themes emerged from the data (Saunders et al., 2018). To reduce errors in translation or loss of cultural nuances, the coders paid close attention to interviews in which the participant spoke in both Russian and Uzbek. To accurately capture meaning across different languages, both coders were fluent or proficient in all three languages (English, Russian, and Uzbek) and were familiar with Uzbek culture and practices.

The data analysis employed Braun and Clark's (2006, 2016) six-step process of thematic analysis to measure reliability, especially when codes were derived inductively. First, the coders read all interviews multiple times to familiarize themselves with the data. In this initial stage, they did not develop any codes nor analyzed any themes. However, the first author wrote casual memos on potential insights and observations (Boyatzis, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The second phase included the completion of the initial coding of the transcripts by the first author, who recorded these codes in a codebook. The coders used in vivo coding and assigned labels to sections of data (e.g., sentences or paragraphs) by using a specific word or short phrase. After the first author coded all interviews, the second coder coded 20% of the interviews (four interviews) as recommended to meet the saturation and accuracy criteria (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest et al., 2006). In the third phase, the coders categorized the most common codes, based on both coders' responses, and identified

potential themes. Any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through consensus. During the fourth phase, the coders reviewed the themes and the relationships between them. The coding and analysis yielded four main themes in two categories that highlighted participants' experiences. Once the themes and the overall structure of the analysis have been identified, the fifth phase focused on defining these themes and extracting quotations from the interviews to illustrate the data. In the final sixth phase, in the Results section of this paper, we contextualized our analysis, presenting the major themes, and in the Discussion section, we highlighted the main contributions and limitations of our study (Clarke et al., 2015).

Results

The interview data yielded four key themes (Table 3): (a) migration for better opportunities under the migration category; and three themes under the resettlement category, (b) support and challenges in new home, (c) expectations and adaptation, and (d) "American Dream" and future plans. We also presented our findings on gender differences within each category.

Migration for Better Opportunities

Most participants (n =19) migrated to the US voluntarily, excluding one participant who responded that their migration was involuntary due to their age (the participant was a minor at the time of relocation). 95% of participants stated that the main reason for their migration was an overall lack of opportunities in Uzbekistan in concert with financial stability in the US. For example, a 31-year-old male participant reported, "I saw more opportunities here [US]. I decided to leave because I had no future prospects in there [Uzbekistan]; [laughing] our generation, come on, they all left, the majority left." Overall, push factors for many participants were critical in their decision to migrate, including unemployment and financial instability (n = 4) and limited opportunities for their children, such as poor educational quality (n = 8). Among pull factors, participants mentioned employment opportunities (n = 5), ability to travel (n = 1), unification with family (n =1), and furthering their education (n = 1).

Regarding gender differences, twice as many women (80%) as men (40%) highlighted push factors as their primary reason for migration. Of the four male participants who responded that push factors were their primary reasons for migration, three were minors at the

time of their relocation but only one mentioned involuntary migration. Women (n = 8) reported limited economic opportunities to sustain a family and limited educational opportunities for their children, whereas men highlighted limited job opportunities as their primary reasons for migration. Among pull factors, one woman reported unification with a spouse and another woman mentioned furthering education as their primary reason for migration, whereas men's responses focused on employment opportunities in the US.

Familiarity with the host country dictated the migration pattern for participants. Before permanent relocation to the US, three female participants had studied in the US as exchange students. No male participants studied in the US prior to migration. Ten participants visited the US to familiarize themselves with the host country before relocation; these participants held a nonpermanent visa at the time of their visit (e.g., student, work-travel, tourist visa), of whom, six (all women) stayed in the US one month or longer. All six women and two men returned to Uzbekistan before migrating to the US permanently. The other two male participants pursued permanent visas while visiting the US (i.e., they changed a student visa to a green card application).

Resettlement

Support and Challenges in New Home

Relating to resettlement experiences, 75% of participants (n = 15) reported feeling welcomed and receiving support from the host community (e.g., neighbors, teachers). Additionally, 10% of participants (n = 2) reported receiving support from a Russian-speaking immigrant community where they were living. Despite participants highlighting the host community as welcoming and open-minded toward learning about their experiences and home country, a 33-year-old male participant recalled being bullied in school because he did not speak English, "The first probably 2 years were difficult at school, the adjustment period because we're, we didn't speak the language…we did not fit in very well." Another male participant also faced discrimination but from a Russian-speaking person. One female participant who felt unwelcome for several years responded that she had no access to communication with either a Russian-speaking community or an American community due to her isolated residential area and inability to drive. Regarding gender differences, more women (90%) than men (60%) reported feeling welcomed

and supported by the mainstream host community.

50% of participants (*n* = 10) reported experiencing difficulties in their resettlement process. Five participants noted the language barrier and cultural differences as the most difficult aspects of their adjustment, followed by financial struggles (*n* = 3), paperwork (*n* = 1), and separation anxiety (*n* = 1). For some women (*n* = 2) and men (*n* = 3), language and cultural differences played a role in their adjustment, "When I came over, I did speak no English at all. It was difficult transition because, you know, different culture, different traditions, different way of life, different pace" (26-year-old male participant). Two female participants and one male participant faced financial difficulties. However, the former associated these difficulties with the pressure of having to financially support their family in Uzbekistan:

I somehow had to convince them [parents] that if I go to the US, I will be working and I will be sending money. Moreover, um, that was the only thing I think my mother liked about going to the US that I would be supporting them financially. That was the only reason how she allowed me to go. (28-year-old female participant).

Expectations and Adaptation

70% (*n* = 14) of participants had expectations before they migrated to the US; 65% (*n* = 13) thought that adaptation and achieving goals would be faster and easier. For example, a 32-year-old male participant stated, "I thought... everything is easy, and money grows on the trees...I did not expect it to be that challenging...." A few other participants also highlighted the notion of money growing on trees. Many participants, even those who did not have expectations, noted that social media and movies influenced their perception of life in the US and cultivated the idea of easy goal achievements

I have never heard about the state where we came [to]. All that [I] heard was New York, Los Angeles, Miami, three cities that everyone knows, unfortunately... When you watch movies, you watch it from the lens of Hollywood, and of course, movies are movies, but you have this notion like, 'Oh, OK, so America is like this.' Unfortunately, when I came, reality hit me, everything what I expected fell down because it was tough, especially when I came to Ohio, and I saw 2 meters of snow. (24-year-old female participant).

In relation to gender, more men (*n* = 8) than women (*n* = 6) reported having expectations about life in the US; one woman expected more freedom of expression and five women stated that life would be easier in professional and personal matters, but eight men expected that the process of adaptation itself would be easier. Only two participants, both men, mentioned hard work as a factor in achieving their goals, "without effort, you won't even pull a fish out of a pond." Five participants shared that they did not have any expectations due to their age. Four women noted maturity and preparedness to migrate. For example, a 41-year-old female participant stated, "I'm actually a person with my experience and age [old enough], and whatever lessons I learned in my life, I don't have any expectations." One male participant shared that he had no expectations because he was underage at the time of his migration. Another male participant did not respond to this question.

"American Dream" and Future Plans

Nearly all participants (90%) believed in the "American Dream," and more than half (55%) considered themselves successful. Also, more than half of the participants (*n* = 13) described the "American Dream" as an opportunity to achieve goals, as exemplified in a statement by a 33-year-old male participant, "[The] 'American Dream' means whatever you dream of that you want to do in life, you can do it by working very hard, by committing time, by committing effort that you can accomplish those." Regarding gender differences, fewer women (80%) than men (100%) believed in the "American Dream." 90% of men (n = 9) but only 10% of women (*n* = 1) described their "American Dream" as the achievement of professional goals and financial stability. 40% of women (*n* = 4) associated the "American Dream" with freedom of choice and expression. For 30% of the women (*n* = 3) and 10% of the men, the "American Dream" was linked to family goals, such as raising children and balancing their professional and personal life.

All participants defined what success meant to them; while 90% of the men defined success as achieving goals and gaining financial stability, only 10% defined it as having a family. For 70% of the women, success was an ability to work and study the subject of their choice, whereas 30% of the women defined success as creating and building family relationships. When asked about success, of the 55% of participants who defined themselves as successful, six were women and five were men.

Regarding future plans, reverse migration was not an option for 13 participants (65%). Although six participants (two women and four men) considered returning to Uzbekistan permanently, they all discussed the importance of first achieving their life goals in the US. Because of close family bonds back home, only one participant was confident in their decision to return to Uzbekistan permanently. Regarding gender, seven women and six men expressed their desire to stay and build their future in the US. Most female participants (n = 7) stated they would like to stay as an "independent woman," or "wanted to escape living in Uzbek mentality." Some male participants (n = 4) also expressed similar sentiments about not wanting to return to Uzbekistan, as shown in the following statement, "I feel like my outlook and values have become different, perhaps even my mentality has changed. It is most likely that I will struggle adapting to that life and my profession allows to live more comfortably here" (35-year-old male participant).

Discussion

Our study sought to explore the life experiences of Uzbek immigrants in relation to their migration and resettlement in the US. Particularly, we aimed to explore the reasons for their migration, understand various aspects of their resettlement, and examine potential gender differences in their experiences.

Migration and Resettlement Experiences

Similar to the experiences of other immigrants (e.g., Marcus, 2009; Paat, 2013), there were various push and pull factors underlying the reasons for Uzbek immigrants to start a new life in the US. Many participants shared that limited socioeconomic and employment opportunities and a declining level of educational quality in their homeland influenced their decision to migrate to the US. Concurrently, pull factors, such as their expectations for a better life in the US (i.e., improved socioeconomic, employment, and educational opportunities), unification with family members, and perceived opportunities to experience more personal freedom and liberties (e.g., freedom to make decisions for themselves, freedom to pursue their life interests, freedom to travel) further reinforced their conviction to leave their home country. These migration narratives of Uzbek immigrants contribute to the rich history of voluntary and involuntary migrations of various cultural groups to the US (e.g., Barkan, 2013; Takaki, 1998).

The resettlement process of Uzbek immigrants encompassed positive and negative experiences, pointing to the complex dynamics of adjusting to a new cultural context like the US. For example, most participants felt welcomed by the host community, but some experienced discrimination and bullying. Most participants also reported proficiency in English, but some described considerable language and cultural difficulties. These factors, either positive or negative aspects, can have major influences on subsequent adjustment and adaptation to U.S. society. In this study, most participants migrated to the U.S. alone, meaning they left much of their family and social network in Uzbekistan, so the extent of support they received from the host or existing Russian-speaking communities may be crucial in their resettlement and consequently in navigating any related challenges, including language, cultural, economic, employment, educational, or other difficulties. Findings from previous research have shown the importance of social support from the host and existing immigrant communities in the resettlement process and the well-being of various immigrant groups (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Msengi et al., 2015). Furthermore, the degree of discrepancies in the expectations they had about life in the US pre-migration and their actual life in the US post-migration also may have influenced the quality of their resettlement experiences (Negy et al., 2009).

Despite the various challenges in the migration and resettlement processes, nearly all participants expressed a belief in the "American Dream" and stated that freedom of choice, financial stability, and the ability to provide for their families represent the primary pillars of their "American Dream." Although various scholars have written about the myth of the "American Dream" (e.g., Tittenbrun, 2015), for Uzbek immigrants, their positive belief and hopefulness in this dream might have buffered some of the stresses and challenges they faced in the resettlement process. Previous research has shown the connection between positive attitudes toward migration and positive adjustment to a host country (Gong et al., 2011; Vinokurov et al., 2020). Indeed, half of the participants in this study reported little or no difficulties in their resettlement process and more than half considered themselves successful. However, it is also important to note that most participants in this study reported high levels of education, English proficiency, and so

cioeconomic status, as well as having opportunities to visit the US prior to their permanent relocation, which all can facilitate more positive resettlement outcomes for immigrants (e.g., Zlobina et al., 2006).

Like many immigrant groups before them, most participants envisioned their future in the US rather than returning to their homeland, citing various economic, social, and cultural reasons. Because most participants often linked achieving their life goals and being successful to financial stability and personal freedom, this connection may be a primary reason as to why they did not imagine their future life in Uzbekistan where they perceived limited economic and educational opportunities and individual rights. This is not to say there are not limited opportunities or individual rights in the US, but rather this reflects the participants' perceptions of life in their home country versus life in the US. Additionally, many participants mentioned their "change in mentality" and newly adopted values in the US. These changes may be related to the number of years they have spent in the US, as supported by the findings of Kwak and Berry (2001), showing that time spent in a host country is positively associated with changes in identity development, assimilation, and the development of new cultural and personal values.

Gender Differences

There were patterns of gender differences across interview questions regarding migration and resettlement experiences. For most women, push factors were the primary reasons for their migration (limited economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their children in Uzbekistan), whereas pull factors were the primary reasons for men (employment and economic opportunities in the US). More women than men felt welcomed by their host community, whereas more men than women expressed a belief in the "American Dream." These differences may have a differential impact on subsequent adjustment for women and men in US society (Dion & Dion, 2002). Additionally, women tended to define success as the freedom to pursue educational and employment opportunities and to attend to their family's well-being, whereas men's definition of success focused on individual goal achievements and financial stability. These differences in migration and resettlement experiences appear to reflect gender socialization and gender roles of women and men in Uzbekistan (e.g., Kamp, 2018), which can play out in the process of their adaptation to US society.

Limitations of the Present Study

We recognize several limitations in our study. Although we carefully tried to recruit Uzbek immigrants from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, most participants reported having a bachelor's degree or higher, English proficiency prior to migration, and middle-class status at the time of the interview. Therefore, the study results may reflect sample selection bias; immigrants of differing socioeconomic and educational backgrounds from those in our study may have other perspectives on migration and resettlement. Future work should consider the experiences of Uzbek immigrants from diverse educational, social, and economic backgrounds, as these factors would provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the life experiences of Uzbek immigrants in the US. A second limitation was the languages in which the interviews were conducted, either English or Russian, although many participants used a few Uzbek words or phrases in their interviews. We recognize these language options might have restricted participation by immigrants from rural Uzbekistan, where the majority speak the Uzbek language. Future studies should consider including Uzbek immigrants from rural areas and interviewing them in Uzbek, as it may reveal more diverse perspectives on migration and resettlement experiences. In addition, we recruited participants through social media platforms predominantly used in the United States (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram) and therefore reached individuals who have high English language proficiency and have adjusted well in the US. The results may be different for those with less English proficiency and less exposure to the host community where the primary language is English. Similar to conducting participant interviews in Uzbek, recruitment on Uzbek-speaking platforms (e.g., Telegram) may also bring additional perspectives and insights into the life experiences of Uzbek immigrants.

Implications for Future Research

Despite the limitations, the results from this study have implications for future research with Uzbek immigrants and other groups from Central Asia. Our study identified specific push and pull factors for Uzbek migration to the US, but we suggest that future research examines more in-depth the contextual aspects surrounding these factors. For example, a focus on the family context and dynamics would provide richer data for understanding the reasons underlying

their decision to start a new life in a new country far from their homeland. Additionally, an examination of the current sociopolitical context of Uzbekistan, a post-Soviet country, would provide a more macro understanding of the reasons for Uzbek migration to the US. Similarly, we also identified some prominent themes in their resettlement experiences that can inform future research to replicate and expand on the current findings. For example, our understanding of resettlement experiences would benefit from future inquiries on the elements that constitute a welcoming host or receiving society as they can determine subsequent life outcomes for Uzbek immigrants. Furthermore, because Uzbek immigrants comprise the largest group from Central Asia to receive the DV Program status in the US, this provides opportunities to conduct longitudinal research, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to delve into the processes of pre-migration, migration, and post-migration over time. Finally, we suggest any future research with immigrants from Uzbekistan or Central Asia to attend to gender issues as they may play a role in aspects of migration and resettlement. Altogether, these future research directions would yield a more complete picture of the life experiences of Uzbek immigrants.

Conclusion

This qualitative study is the first of its kind to explore the life narratives of Uzbek immigrants in the US, focusing on their migration and resettlement experiences. Through a six-step thematic analysis, the participants' narratives highlighted four major themes, as well as the push and pull factors that compelled them to leave their home country and establish a new life in a new cultural context. Although there were some challenges in their experiences, many perceived their new life as part of the "American Dream," full of possibilities to achieve the educational, economic, and career goals they had for themselves and their family. Their new country is where they envisioned their future and thus, they have become a part of the rich and complex tapestry of immigration to the US.

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Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Characteristics	Women (*n=10*)		Men (*n=10*)		Full Sample (*N=20*)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Country of Birth						
Uzbekistan	9	90	100	100	19	95
Russia	1	10	0	0	1	5
Ethnicity						
Uzbek	7	70	7	70	14	70
Mixed Race	2	20	1	10	3	15
Russian	0	0	1	10	1	5
Uyghur	0	0	1	10	1	5
Kazakh	1	10	0	0	1	5
Highest Educational Level						
Incomplete Bachelor's	0	0	2	20	2	10
Bachelor's	4	40	6	60	10	50
Master's	5	50	2	20	7	35
Doctoral	1	10	0	0	1	5
Socioeconomic status						
Low	4	40	0	0	4	20
Middle	5	50	9	90	14	70
Upper middle	1	10	1	10	2	10
Living Accommodation						
Rent	6	60	7	70	13	65
Own	4	40	3	30	7	35

Table 2

Migration and Resettlement-Related Demographic Information

Characteristics	Women (*n=10*)		Men (*n=10*)		Full Sample (*N=20*)	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Accompanying Immigrant Member						
Alone	6	60	6	60	12	60
Parents and siblings	2	20	1	10	3	15
Parents	0	0	2	20	2	10
Siblings	0	0	1	10	1	5
Children	1	10	0	0	1	5
Spouse and children	1	10	0	0	1	5
Region of Residence						
Northeast (NY, NH, CT, ME)	4	40	4	40	8	40
South (NC, VA, GA, DC)	4	40	3	30	7	35
Midwest (OH, MO)	2	20	2	20	4	20
West (CA)	0	0	1	10	1	5
Visa upon Arrival						
Diversity visa (Green card)	2	20	4	40	6	30
Student visa	4	40	0	0	4	20
Tourist visa	2	20	1	10	3	15
Work and travel visa	1	10	2	20	3	15
Unification with a family	1	10	2	20	3	15
Unspecified	0	0	1	10	1	5
Spoken Languages						
Before Migration:						
Uzbek, Russian	6	60	7	70	13	65
Uzbek	2	20	2	20	4	20
Russian	2	20	1	10	3	15
After Migration:						
Uzbek	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uzbek, English	1	10	0	0	1	5
English, Russian	3	30	5	50	8	40
English	3	30	1	10	4	20
Russian	1	10	2	20	3	15
Uzbek, English, Russian	1	10	2	20	3	15
English, Russian, Croatian	1	10	0	0	1	5

Table 3

Participants Themes

Themes	Sample Quotations	Women (*n=10*)	Men (*n=10*)	Full Sample (*N=20*)
Migration for Better Opportunities				
Limited opportunities for children	"I was divorced with 3 children. Since a doctor's salary was very low in Uzbekistan, I wasn't able to pay for their (kids') education. Both of my girls got accepted into a university at the same time, and I thought from the financial standpoint that I was in America because I was here before and [I knew] it was very easy to find a job and pay for their education. That's how I decided to make this step, I just had a strong desire to give proper education to my children." (47 years old female participant) "So, um, main reason was, (pause) main reason was, it was an opportunity to move to U.S. and to, I think it was the mainly uncertainty off the state that I lived in. Basically I think resulted corruption and that you couldn't achieved anything on your own. Um, you either have to know someone or like corrupt someone, bribe someone and stuff like that. [...] he got exposed to kind of a western lifestyle and then he looked into it, he looked into the opportunities for the future for his kids." (33 years old male participant)	5	3	8
Unemployment and financial instability	"I grew up in a very poor community and my parents are also still, they still live in village where I'm from. Um, they don't have	3	6	9

(seeking employment opportunities in the U.S.)	to say, we were not granted too much. Um, people have hard lives. You have to work really hard for like, for literally for a small amount of money. And so, I couldn't, I didn't want to go back to that community again, work in some kind of school in the village, um, either want out." (29 years old female participant) "It was just economic, economic that's been my mother was divorced and um, she was economically doing not well in Uzbekistan, and so at the time my aunt, my uncle were living in United States and there were opportunities to, um, you know, have a better life for herself and then as well as um, her children – me." (33 years old male participant)			
Unification with family	"Love, love (laughing) I fall in love, get married (laughing). Honestly speaking if not my husband, I would stay in Uzbekistan, I had everything in there especially my parents are there." (33 years old female participant)	1	0	1
Ability to travel	"Um, initially it was to travel and explore, you know, and experienced the life in U.S. and work, I participated in this work and travel program, and after being here for a while and decided to stay." (33 years old male participant)	0	1	1
Further education	"I first it came from pursued of further education, to further my higher education, to be specific to get my master's degree, and then once I was here, I decided that it was the right decision, and I basically stayed to improve my life conditions, to seek, seek better professional opportunities." (29 years old female participant)	1	0	1

Resettlement

Supported by the host community	"People always, like offering their help with everything basically. Teaching me to drive, helping with different, like, questions I have about the application process to get my green card and all of those this, yes, very welcomed because people extended their genuine hand of help if we can call it so." (29 years old female participant) "[...]the American community, they were very curious to hear our stories, how we came about, coming here making the choices. And, they were more than happy to help us out get settled. And my dad's job as well, there were a lot of individuals who donated a lot of items to help us get settled and, you know, uh, started up." (21 years old male participant)	9	6	15
Supported by immigrant community	"My parents made everything possible, so we can have impression from the U.S. I did not feel myself as a stranger. Also, we have a large Russian-speaking community in Cleveland, and I never feel myself as a stranger." (35 years old male participant)	0	2	2
Did not receive support	"We lived in an apartment complex where neighbors don't really talk to each other. I didn't have a job because I was in a small town in Louisiana and didn't work. Besides my husband I didn't really talk to anyone." (32 years old female participant) "We didn't have all the money to, enough money to get to the airport [...] so he dropped us off right in the middle of highway. And so, it was me, my mom and two young children with number of	1	2	3

suitcases and it was um, you know, we none of us spoke the language. None of us knew the country and the culture. And we couldn't believe that Russian person who spoke our language just left us in the middle of the street. So, we, we felt, I mean, we were very scared at that time." (33 years old male participant)

Challenges

Language barrier and cultural differences	"I would say just not knowing the language was my difficulty. I do recall, you know, going through ESL classes and basically not knowing English at all but other than that, it was just my father and my brothers trying to, you know, work two to three jobs and survive." (34 years old female participant)	2	3	5

"I came here, I was 16 [...] I knew only like two or three people. All of them are adults that my father knew. And it was kinda, it was kinda of a culture shock I guess. It was not what I was expecting that I saw in the movies [...] I started working when I was 16 years old, so it was mixture of not knowing anyone, mixture of finding, a tough time, finding a job and even if you did, tough time of working at the age of 16, like 16 hours a day and stuff like that to make some money support yourself, support your family, it's like not doing what you planned for and just like going to college and stuff like that [...] I took me about like two years, start understanding what, I start understanding what people are saying by like year, year and a half, and for a full conversation took me about 2-3 years." (33 years old male participant)

Financial struggle	"Financial part was problem [...] I'm from very conservative family. My parents didn't seem to like the idea of, um, like young girl going to different country [...] So, I somehow had to convince them that if I go to U.S., I'll be working and I'll be sending money. And, um, that was the only thing I think my mother liked about going to U.S. that I would be supporting them financially. That was the only reason how she allowed me to go." (29 years old female participant) "Obviously it was difficult in the beginning because everything was new, um everything was unknown. It was difficult financially and also, I had to get used to a new city, new environment." (28 years old male participant)	2	1	3
Paperwork	"The process itself was lengthy. We were not in rush, so we did everything by ourselves, no lawyers. So, that's why it took a little bit longer. Also, because we did not know the process, sometimes, we spent too much time in preparing documents. Um, I can say that the procedure was not easy but not super challenging." (32 years old male participant)	0	1	1
Separation anxiety	"But the most difficult thing for me was separation from my big family. My parents worry so much, and of course, it is one of the layer of struggles being here." (33 years old female participant)	1	0	1
Expectations and Adaptation				
Expected easier transition	"Honestly speaking, I had a lot of classmates who moved to the U.S. and at that time, I was thinking so if everyone leaves, then	5	8	13

everything is perfect there, money is on the left and the right [meaning: money everywhere and easy to earn], easy to find a job, easy to earn, everything is easy, life is easier, no bureaucracy like here, everything is much easier." (24 years old female participant)

"The money grows on trees. So, I mean, even now when I go back to Central Asia, a lot of people think that they, you come to the United States and money grows on trees and I, when I, when I was, you know, young and in, in Uzbekistan that's what I was saying, you know, you, because of Hollywood, we watch, we watch movies and we assume it's one thing. In reality it's, it's, it's different." (33 years old male participant)

Expected freedom	"Freedom of expression I would say of my views, of any kind freedom to be myself basically and especially like my rights as a woman, having equal rights and equal faith with men. That's especially would I value here, and I can't really have 100% back home." (29 years old female participant)	1	0	1
No expectations	"I have no expectations [...] I did not rely on America, didn't have expectations that America would give me a wealthy life, my diploma would be approved and I would be a doctor here and would make lots of money [...] I came with no such expectations." (47 years old female participant)	4	1	5

"I didn't know anything back then when I first started or when we first moved in I didn't know what to expect. I've just heard stories of just better opportunity, more

opportunity but I honestly, I didn't know what that meant [...]I had no expectations." (33 years old male participant)

"American Dream" and Future Plans

Goals achievement and financial stability	"For me, it [American Dream] is an opportunity to achieve my goals in career, um, and work where I want to work, um, not only with the connections but also with my dedication and persistence." (26 years old female participant)	1	9	10
	"American dream means (long pause) when people that I love are next to me and I am able to support them. American dream to me is when I am healthy, able to develop myself in both professional and personal ways, with a strong and loved family, and when I am able to support my family, um, financially, physically, emotionally, um it is also um when I can become a self-made person." (31 years old male participant)			
Freedom of choice	"I feel like I have been oppressed because I'm a female, even back in Uzbekistan, like I grew up with the mentality like, father, your father came home, he is tired, he is tired, working all day long, go back to your, go back to kitchen, don't come out when your father is here or like don't talk when a man is talking. [...] I was introduced to this, a concept of like, I don't have to do that anymore [in the U.S.]. I am equal, I can be as good, maybe I am even better than them. So, which I love like you know, I've, I was never given that opportunity for us [...] so with American, I don't have to pretend, I can be whatever I want and they will just equally love me just, just the way I was	4	0	4

presenting myself, you know?" (29 years old female participant)

Family goals	"To have a house where kids might feel comfortable, help them to get an education, send them to good universities, have an ability to travel, also have a stability in the country, peace in the country, because you know all these racial conflicts, I am scared that they might affect my kids […] American dream is to raise kids in a way where I could be proud of them one day." (33 years old female participant)	3	1	4
	"I think for us, it means to raise good children, kind children, children who appreciate, and make them educated and ready for life, and help them always, um, to have opportunities, opportunities to choose, I think creating this kind of atmosphere is a part of the American dream. Be able to create this atmosphere (pause) because there are countries where people have no choice at all. Um, here, um, yes, of course, there are some circumstances when you have no choice, but it is possible to create the atmosphere for children where they can grow up kind, intelligent, and ready for life, I think this is the main priority." (32 years old male participant)			

Future Plans

Do not consider reverse migration	"Despite the fact that women can work, after marriage they um people think in a very old and traditional way like if a man earns enough, why do you have to work, um you take care of your home. Because I live here for a very long time, and I get used to the fact that you are more independent, and no one tells you like the society when you	7	6	13

have to get married or give birth [...] and continue doing what you were doing, but there, they will not understand it. So, I think it will be more challenging for me to live there." (24 years old female participant)

"I feel like my outlook and values have become different, perhaps even my mentality has changed. It is most likely that I will struggle adapting to that life and my profession allows to live more comfortably here." (35 years old female participant)

Considering reverse migration	"Why not, but I want to go there after I achieve something here, let's say, I do not want to go back right now without things that I plan to achieve here. Maybe in 10 or 20 years or maybe more." (26 years old female participant)	2	4	6
	"Once I'm a little bit more closer to maybe retirement, my kids are, you know, on their own, that might be another, you know, I may consider going back. I mean there's a lot of things that I like about, Uzbekistan, in Tashkent, I love the culture, I love the food, I love the people. I love the landscape [...] there's just a lot of things that I really enjoyed about Uzbekistan, but (pause) you know, who knows maybe in the future later on once kids are on their own, and I'm closer towards to the end of my career." (35 years old male participant)			
Confident in reverse migration	"If not my husband, I would definitely go back... with my kids. I had a really good job there, I have parents there, a lot of relatives, also our values are different. Here, you always have to have your hand on pulse to protect them from this bad influence, of course, there is also a bad influence but	1	0	1

because I know that system, I think it would be easier for me to navigate there. If I would have a chance to go back and have my old job, to be with my family, with my relatives, of course, I would go back. My husband would never do this for me." (33 years old female participant)