



Investigating the Social Network of Marginalized Residents in Ahvaz City and its Relationship with Rural Migration

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Abstract

Background and Objective: The expansion of rural migration to urban peripheries is a phenomenon profoundly influencing the social and spatial fabric of cities. This study investigates the relationship between social networks and rural migration, and its subsequent outcome: the formation of informal settlements on the outskirts of Ahvaz, Iran.

Methodology: Focusing on two neighborhoods, Goldasht and Golbahar, as primary destinations for rural migrants, this research employs a descriptive-analytical method. Data were collected via a researcher-administered questionnaire from 300 household heads and analyzed in SPSS using a one-sample t-test and the Friedman rank test.

Results and Findings: The results reveal that kinship relations, with a mean score of 3.02 (above the theoretical average), constituted the most significant network factor in migration decision-making and destination choice. Furthermore, economic factors, with a mean rank of 2.24, were identified as the primary driver for migration from rural areas. In contrast, the overall satisfaction of residents with their living conditions, averaging 2.99, fell below the median, indicating unsatisfactory circumstances in these settlements. In conclusion, the findings underscore the prominent role of social networks and economic pressures in shaping waves of rural migration. The low levels of resident satisfaction simultaneously highlight the persistent and serious challenges to quality of life within these informal urban settlements.

Keywords: Social Networks, Marginalization, Rural Migration, Ahvaz, Satisfaction, Informal Settlement.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction:

Rural-to-urban migration has become one of the most influential forces shaping cities in developing countries today. As people leave villages in search of better opportunities, many end up settling on the outskirts of large cities, often in informal neighborhoods that grow rapidly and without sufficient planning. In Iran, the city of Ahvaz is a powerful example of this trend. As an important industrial and administrative center, Ahvaz has long attracted rural migrants—yet it is also a city constantly battling environmental challenges such as drought, dust storms, and water shortages. These pressures have accelerated migration and led to the expansion of large informal settlements across its urban fringe. This study seeks to answer those questions by examining the connection between social networks, the motivations behind rural migration, and the satisfaction of residents living in Ahvaz’s informal settlements. By combining theory and local data, the research shines light on the deeper human mechanisms that drive and sustain urban marginalization.

Methodology:

To explore these dynamics, the study used a descriptive–analytical approach, supported by a large household survey. The research focused on adult heads of households living in Goldasht and Golbahar—two neighborhoods known for their high concentrations of rural migrants. Using Cochran’s formula, a sample of 300 participants was selected through random sampling.

Results and Discussion:

Majority of respondents—76%—migrated directly from rural areas, confirming the central role of rural–urban migration in forming these communities. Many left due to economic pressure, limited job opportunities, or environmental decline in their home villages.

Other social factors also played a meaningful role. Weak social support in rural areas, limited access to proper education, and declining community cohesion acted as push factors. Meanwhile, ethnic tensions, low educational attainment, and restricted access to modern information sources further contributed to migration flows. At a broader level, economic pressures were the top-ranked motivators for leaving rural areas. High unemployment, low income, the absence of job-creating industries, and unstable agricultural work were the most frequently cited reasons for migration. Despite the hope that migration to the city would improve living conditions, the study found that residents’ satisfaction levels were generally low across all dimensions—economic, environmental, social, and physical. Many respondents expressed frustration with poor infrastructure, inadequate services, and harsh environmental conditions in their neighborhoods. A particularly interesting insight was the inverse relationship between strong social networks and satisfaction. Those with the densest kinship ties tended to report lower satisfaction with their living environment. This may seem counterintuitive, but it aligns with research on “bonding social capital.” While strong internal networks provide emotional support and short-term stability, they can also limit exposure to broader opportunities, creating social isolation and reinforcing cycles of marginalization.

Conclusion

Overall, the study shows that migration into Ahvaz’s informal neighborhoods is driven by a combination of economic hardship, environmental stress, and the powerful influence of social

networks. Although relatives and friends play a crucial role in easing the initial transition to urban life, long-term integration remains limited, and living conditions often fall short of migrants' expectations. These findings highlight the importance of developing policies that address both ends of the migration chain. Improving rural livelihoods, expanding employment opportunities, and strengthening rural services can help reduce the pressures that push people away from their villages. At the same time, improving infrastructure, services, and social integration programs in Ahvaz's informal neighborhoods is essential to ensure that migrants can truly benefit from urban life.

Ultimately, understanding migration not just as an economic calculation but as a deeply social process can lead to more humane, realistic, and effective urban development strategies—ones that acknowledge the bonds that bring people to the city and the challenges that shape their everyday lives.

Declarations

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Authors' Contribution

Authors contributed equally to the conceptualization and writing of the article. All of the authors approved the content of the manuscript and agreed on all aspects of the work declaration of competing interest none.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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