



E111 The Role of Human Rights as a Reason for Refugee Status and Immigration Requests: A Retrospective Analysis of Southern Italy

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the more common reasons why migrants leave their countries.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing the need to promote the defense of human rights.

Immigration is a phenomenon of great social impact. In recent years, there was an increase in disembarkations in the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017, according to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, approximately 110,000 migrants landed in Italy. In recent years, forensic sciences have also been interested in this phenomenon. In 2017, more than 2,300 immigrants died.¹ This was related to the risk of drowning, dehydration, and dangers associated with travel. Despite the spread of the phenomenon, the reasons for escape from their native countries are not always known. The goal of this study is to assess the reasons for legal requests of refugee status.

The study was carried out with the collaboration of a law firm in southern Italy that analyzed the rights of approximately 1,500 immigrants. A retrospective analysis of the testimonies of 500 immigrants disembarked in southern Italy was performed. The data were collected from interviews carried out and performed with a native speaker. The interviewees were asked to explain the reasons why they had left their own country. The data were then classified according to sex, country, and reason for requesting a residence permit for every immigrant. Data was compared and analyzed.

The retrospective study revealed that 98% of the questioned people were male and all came from Asia or Africa. Regarding geographical origin, 289 (57.8%) came from Pakistan, 42 from Bangladesh (8.4%), 42 from Nigeria (8.4%), 37 from the Gambia (7.4%), 37 from Senegal (7.4%), 16 from Ghana (3.2%), 12 from Mali (2.4%), 8 from the Ivory Coast (1.6%), 6 from Guinea (1.2%), 3 from Guinea Bissau (0.6%), 2 from Niger and Afghanistan (0.08%), and 1 from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Togo (0.08%). Approximately 40% provided evidence or documents regarding their origins.

The main reason for escape was terrorism (30.6%), followed by religious (14.2%) and political persecutions (13.6%). Among the remaining reasons were unjust judicial persecutions (11%), personal persecutions (9%), homosexuality (6.8%), family persecutions (6%), and poverty (3.8%). The remaining 5% of cases of escape were due to female circumcision, mistreatment, sexual violence, ethnic discrimination, war, or illness.

From this investigation, terrorism was the reason for escape, especially from Pakistan, and the victims named specific organizations. The migrants describe many attacks, forced disappearances, systematic homicides involving family members, witnessed by photos, threat letters, newspaper articles, and images about autopsies or funerals of family members.

Regarding religious persecutions, most reported attacks on religious minorities, such as Ahmad, Shiite, Hindu, Christians, or violence committed by members of religious sects. Religious persecutions were the first reason for leaving from Nigeria and Senegal but were also present in Gambia and Ghana.

With regard to political attacks, migrants described many episodes of violence by police or opponents belonging to terrorist groups during demonstrations. Political persecution was the first reason for escape from Bangladesh.

Unfair justice persecutions, due to episodes of repression of the judiciary or fear of unjust detention, torture, or death sentences, were the first reasons for escaping from Gambia and Ghana.

Homosexuality was considered a crime in nearly all countries examined, and nearly all of the homosexual interviewees said that they suffered threats, personal injuries, torture, and the death penalty.

Female circumcision was a relevant reason for escaping, especially from Africa, particularly in Senegal, Nigeria, and the Gambia. In fact, not only women but also men who opposed this practice were forced to escape, as they were condemned by their communities.

This study revealed that less than 4% reported poverty as a reason for escaping. Therefore, the serious violation of human rights in these countries would be the main cause of request for a residence permit. Although only 40% of interviewees provided evidence, their statements were significant for understanding the need to promote the defense of human rights in these countries. This study offers evidence of the importance of epidemiological data regarding the phenomenon of immigration in order to find new solutions for migratory flows and to improve assistance to refugees.

Reference(s):

¹. *Statistiche UNCHR*. Available on: <https://www.unhcr.it/risorse/statistiche> (accessed on 07- 28, 2018).

Forensic Science, Human Rights, Immigration