

Internal Migration and Ethnic identity: Exploring the Experiences of Naga Adolescents

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Naga Adolescents with regard to internal migration and to investigate their understanding of ethnic identity. A qualitative research paradigm was followed to explore the topic of research and a semi structured in-depth interview with the Naga adolescents was conducted primarily to collect the data and to gain a detailed picture of the participant's experience. Eight Naga adolescents, 4 were males and 4 were females aged 18-25 constituted the participants of the study. The sample for the study was selected through purposive sampling and the data was collected from the Bengaluru metropolis. Thematic Analysis was used as a method for data analysis since it provided a flexible and useful research tool, which could potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data. The global themes that resulted from the analyses of the data collected from the participants included: Conceptualization of Ethnic Identity; Internal Migration, Transition and Recontextualization of Ethnic Identity; and the Redefinition and Strengthening of One's Ethnic Identity. The findings of the study are consistent with previous studies which show close relationship between internal migration and ethnic identity. Findings indicate that the participants have conceptualized their ethnic identity through age, experience and exposure to a new cultural context and ethnic identity development is a developmental process. The study reveals that internal migration in itself was associated with a heightened sense of ethnic identity. Limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: ethnic identity; migration; majority/minority status; ethnic minority

Identity is a complex entity. Over the past 60 years, an understanding both of what identity means and how it evolves over the course of the life span have been the inspiration for many theoretical writings as well as numerous research investigations (Kroger, 2007). Erik Erikson has been credited for focusing on the meaning of identity. Erikson (1968) described identity as involving 'a subjective feeling of self- sameness and continuity over time'. According to Erikson's psychosocial model of development, identity should be understood by the individual and accepted by others. Thus, the process of establishing an "identity involves the process of integrating into a coherent whole one's past experiences, ongoing personal changes, and

society's demands and expectations for one's future" (Sprinthall & Collins, 1984). According to Erikson, true identity depends on the support that the young receive from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to them, their class, their nation and their culture being a group of a particular ethnic group holds important identity implications. Young children are certainly aware of differences in their ethnicity and culture. But it is during adolescence, with capacities for reflecting on the past and the future, that one may develop a greater interest in one's own ethnic background. And it is during adolescence that one may have a wider experience within multicultural groups and experience ethnic discrimination.

Experiences of discrimination complicate efforts by adolescents' to develop a strong sense of cultural pride and belonging. Spencer and Dornbusch (1990) have noted how adolescents' awareness of negative appraisals of their cultural group can negatively influence the adolescents' life choices and plans for the future.

Ethnic Identity and internal migration

Identity formation is a central task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968); for many ethnic minority adolescents, identity formation involves their feelings and conceptions about being a member of their ethnic group i.e., ethnic identity (Phinney, 1992). Phinney (1996) has defined ethnic identity as an enduring and basic sense of oneself that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group, coupled with the attitudes and feelings of individuals in that ethnic group. Group affiliation is supported through a shared commitment to a common religion, cultural traits, history and language (Cohen, 2004). Phinney (1992) cites ethnic identity development as a stage process where through exploration they obtain understanding of, and commitment to, their ethnicity. Geographical migration whether within a country (internal migration) or across continents, raises important identity issues during the years of adolescence and such issues and experiences requires a sense of inner sameness and continuity with one's past, which must be integrated into the present and the sense of identity which is forming. Smith in his "Developmental Theory within the Context of Majority/Minority status stated that Ethnic identity development" is tempered by one's majority or minority status (Smith 1991). The fact that humans have the capacity to label and to differentiate makes it seem likely that some degree of status inequality is inevitable, regardless of how simple the society or how dedicated it may be to unrestricted goals inevitably, minority/majority status situations ultimately result in

status inequality. The process is difficult for most young people today, because of the complex world in which they live and the many choices they have to make. Young people from ethnic minority groups face all these challenges, but have additional challenges as well. As ethnic minorities, they belong to groups that are lower in status and power in society, are less well represented in society, are subject to prejudice and discrimination, and may hold values different from those of the larger society. They must come to understand the meaning and implications of these differences and make decisions about how to live with their dual cultural heritage and status in society. Young people from ethnic minority groups therefore face additional identity tasks. These include developing an understanding of the implication of ethnic group differences, figuring out how to relate to their own group and the larger society, establishing feelings of self-worth in face of conflicting messages about their group, and developing ways to respond to prejudice. These tasks constitute the process of ethnic identity formation. (Smith 1991)

Minorities in India

The term minority is something that all Indians keep hearing almost every day in their lives. The North-East as a minority can be seen in its social, political and economical deprivation. Of the fourteen states in India where Schedule Tribes are prevalent, half of the total, seven states fall in the North-Eastern region of India. These areas are politically backward and also the Educational Systems are not as advanced and good enough for the young generations of today's globalized world and thus the State Government is dependent on the Central Government.

Sinha (2011) states in his article that the most obvious deviation from the ideal of 'one nation, one state', is the presence of minorities, especially ethnic minorities which

are clearly not members of the majority nation. Dilip (2009) states that the Northeast ethnic minorities' color, figure, facial features are related to East Asia and Southeast Asia in terms of their ethnic similarity. Geographically and racially, the region Northeast India is situated between the two great Traditions of the Indic Asia and the Mongoloid Asia and because of this, the crisis of identity is something that is felt by most of the people from the Northeast. People from the Northeast constantly have to battle the need of acceptance from the people from the mainland India and also grapple with their sense of belongingness because of the stark cultural differences. Unless one is a member of the Hindi-speaking Hindu majority, there are endless dimensions among which one may categorize oneself as a member of a minority. As a nation, Indians are obsessed with defining who is an insider and who is an outsider. A Naga who categorizes himself/herself as both Naga and Indian is acculturative, while one who emphasizes his/her Indian identity at the expense of the Naga identity is assimilative. The individual who does not feel at home with either of the two identities is classified as marginal. Evidence from all over the world substantiate this model. (Hutnik 1996)

Significance of the study

Majority of students from Northeast India, including Nagas are internally migrating to different parts of India for higher and professional studies and employment opportunities with the impact of globalization. The relatively advanced environment for educational opportunities with multiple options of courses has attracted the younger generation from Nagaland. When they migrate to the cities, the youth are faced with the aspects of living in a strange environment and to interact with people from different ethnic backgrounds which will perhaps lead them to their questioning or understanding of their identity and in specific their ethnic

identity. The topic under consideration is relevant to the subject of applied psychology from a socio-cultural and developmental perspective. The results might help in understanding the experiences that the adolescents go through in adjusting to a new place, their view of ethnic identity and the difficulties that they may be going through. Ethnic identity arises from the ethno cultural experiences of individuals and has important implications for the ways in which adolescents come to view themselves, then it should follow that ethnic identity is important in understanding whether and the ways in which ethnic group membership might increase or decrease the vulnerability of adolescents to emotional and behavioral problems.

Method

Methodological Paradigm

A social constructionist approach is used as the theoretical framework, since the study focuses on ethnic identity and the experiences among the minority Naga adolescents internally migrating to Bangalore. With the postmodern notion that knowledge is not a reproduction of reality as the basic presumption, several assumptions form the base of social constructionism. Social constructionism is a community-philosophy in which the group and the interaction between the group members is the sole focus. Social constructionism emphasizes, as does the constructivism, the construction we make of reality. To put it simply: people construct stories, ideas and theories to help them deal with reality (Galbin, 2014). In short, social constructionism focuses on the creation of meaning, on the existence, the development and the role of joint meaning. Different people can have different perceptions of the same reality and when these differing realities are put together and an agreement is made it gives out certain generalizable constructs. And the same is investigated in the present study among the Naga adolescents, by trying to find a

consensus within the various reports given by people and forming those as social constructs behind the mechanisms and process of their experiences of ethnic identity and the challenges related to it.

Research Design

A qualitative research paradigm was followed to explore the current study.

Sample

Eight Naga adolescent males and females constituted the sample. The technique of purposive sampling and the data was used in the selection of the sample. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and there were 8 participants for the study, each interview lasted for about an hour. Of the 8 interviewed, 4 were males and 4 were females, in the age range of 18-25. All interviews were taped and transcribed and thematic analysis was used in order to explore the themes that emerged from the data. The aim of this analysis was to find the emerging themes among the participants with regard to their experience of internal migration and their ethnic identity.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample was

Inclusion criteria

- (i) Participants in the age group of 18-22 yrs
- (ii) Participants are from Nagaland who have internally migrated to Bengaluru.
- (iii) Participants who have migrated and stayed in Bengaluru for the past 2-4 years.

Exclusion criteria

- (i) Respondents should not be of mixed ethnic origin.
- (ii) Respondents who have resided outside Nagaland prior to internally migrating to Bengaluru

Data collection

Form for Demographic and Background Information: Background information of the participants was collected with the form developed by the researcher taking into consideration the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study.

Semi Structured Interview schedule: The Semi-Structured Interview method was used to gain a detailed picture of the respondent's experience. This was primarily because such interviews require some amount of probing and will help in understanding the aims of the topic (Noaks and Wincup 2004).

Procedure

The participants of the study were contacted and selected by the researcher based on inclusion criteria and other demographic characteristics outline in the Form for Demographic and Background Information. A convenient time for the participants was set up for the interview. Informed consent was obtained from each participant using an Informed Consent Form. Each interview using a Semi Structured Interview schedule prepared by the researcher lasted for approximately one hour. All interviews were taped and transcribed by the researcher and the participants were contacted in case of any clarifications.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in order to explore the themes that emerged from the data. The aim of this analysis was to find the emerging themes among the participants with regard to their experience of internal migration and their ethnic identity. Braun & Clarke 2006 delineated the basic steps and criteria in doing thematic analysis and the same was adopted for this research..

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity was verified by asking the participants to read a synopsis of the findings

generated, as well as the interpretation of their experiences in order confirm the validity of the reporting of the meaning of their experiences. Regarding reliability in a qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that, "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]". Patton (2001) with regards to the researcher's ability and skill in any qualitative research, also states that reliability is the consequence of the validity in a study.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent of the participants was obtained before interviewing them. No mention of the names of the participants or the institutions in which they study was mentioned anywhere in the study. The recorded interviews were destroyed after the submission of the final thesis in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

Results and Discussion

The interviews generated a rich set of data that offered a lot of potential for analysis. The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of the respondents with regard to their internal migration and their understanding of their ethnic identity

The topic was investigated through in-depth interviews to get a deeper understanding of the topic of interest. Throughout the thematic analysis the three global themes that emerged were: Conceptualization of Ethnic Identity; Internal Migration, Transition and Recontextualization of Ethnic Identity; and the Redefinition and Strengthening of One's Ethnic Identity.

Global theme 1: Conceptualization of Ethnic Identity

For the participants, their early experiences of being in touch with their traditions and celebrating the festivals of their culture and being with their own group of

people have predisposed them to be aware of their ethnicity. Hence there is a sense of internalization of the cultural background that they came from. The conceptualization of ethnic identity seems to have developed for the participants from a young age and being exposed to the various cultural traditions of the place that they belong to. To quote a participant,

"My parents have brought me up and instilled in me the values of how I should be and how I am unique and special as being a Naga boy, they have brought me up by taking me to different festivals that we celebrate and seeing all of these in a way I guess has influenced my understanding of ethnic identity."

Saylor and Aries (1999) found that strength of ethnic identity was predicted by family participation in cultural tradition and exploring one's history and culture contribute to ethnic identity conceptualization Phinney (2004) and this seems to hold true for the participants as well, since their early childhood exposure to the traditions of their culture helped them develop a sense of their ethnic identity, the participants were exposed to the culture and the richness of the traditions and the festivals since they were young and their parents and their grandparents played a significant role in instilling in them and exposing them to their unique cultural context. For the participants schools as cultural institutions where subjects with regard to Nagaland were taught made them realize the cultural background that they belonged to which in turn enhanced their concept of ethnic identity and similarly (Omar, 1999) found the importance of school as agents of cultural transmission and social control. For the participants reading literature that were available and being exposed to the different plays that display the richness of their culture has been an influential aspect in their understanding of their culture and this is also corroborated by Phinney (2004) who

found that exploring one's history and culture contribute to ethnic identity conceptualization. Quotes by participants,

"Another factor would be the history and the books that I read on Nagaland...."

"The school where I studied, for example we would have stories about our place and we would learn about the geography and also the history of my ancestors as well so I learned a lot about my culture...."

The participants highlighted that the ethnic culture that they belong to is a part of their own identity and hence stressed on the importance to be conscious of the background that they belong to. Thus, an individual who is embedded in his own culture may protect him/ her from developing a vulnerable identity in the first place and may assist them when their identity becomes vulnerable (Smith, 1991). Baik (2007) described ethnicity as discrete qualities that reflect a particular ethnic group and hence the participants feeling of kinship and connectedness to their people illustrates this point. Another research suggested that valuing both one's heritage culture as well as one's host culture is associated with a number of positive psychological and behavioral outcomes among Mexican-Americans and other Latino groups (Zamboanga, Raffaelli, & Horton, 2006 as cited in Armenta et al 2011). The exposure to a different cultural group and context has given the participants a chance to explore their ethnicity. It is important to think of ethnic identity as a process that is continuous throughout the life course, as opposed to something that becomes achieved never to be explored again (Taylor & Fine, 2004). Hence ethnicity is an aspect which is a part of an individual's existence as he progresses through life. Over time and through exploration they obtain understanding of, and commitment to, their ethnicity. For the Naga adolescents the concept of ethnic identity has

developed through a process of childhood exposure and being exposed to a new culture. They have developed their sense of ethnicity through experience and exposure to different factors. Phinney (1992) stated, ethnic identity is developed through exploration and this holds true for the participants as well. Hence for the Naga adolescents their conceptualization of ethnic identity has been a process through time, experience, age and exposure to different aspects in their lives.

Global theme 2: Internal migration, transition and recontextualization of ethnic identity

This emerged as a second global theme capturing the challenges of internal migration for the Naga adolescents, their interactions with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and their understanding and realization of being a minority.

While exploring the challenges of internal migration of the Naga adolescents in the aspects of adjustment, loneliness and culture shock, the second global theme have helped in delving into the challenges of the Naga adolescents with regard to their internal migration. Among the participants they mentioned of aspects of where they were unable to relate and adjust to the mainstream culture because of the differences between the two and hence found it difficult to adjust to the language spoken, the food and the lifestyle. As mentioned by one of the participants,

"The festivals we celebrate, the way we talk, the language we speak, the way we live and the attires that we wear is very different. The lives that Nagas live is just a simple life but here there is so much of globalization."

It has been found that when there are difference in socio-cultural areas, most of the migrants find it difficult to interact as well as identify with the people from the host place (Ward & Searle, 1991; Bhugra & Arya, 2005)

and this is related to the participants in the study. When people migrate, they carry with them a deep sense of loss, loss of family, homeland, childhood friends, culture and language (Mirsky, 1991). Loneliness is a major issue with regard to migrants and is similarly an issue for the participants in the present study as well. The loneliness arises out of social isolation associated with the absence of an engaging social network (Weiss, 1973). Hence the participants feel the loss of feeling of some connection and thus feel lonely. The participants felt a sense of culture shock when they initially came to the city because of the huge gap between their culture of origin and the mainstream culture, they mentioned differences with regard to the treatment of women, marriage systems and family structure and system. Being exposed to an environment that is unfamiliar they experienced culture shock and a realization of the huge gaps between the cultures. The third objective of the study was to explore the understanding of the participants of being a minority, the participants mentioned of the status inequality that they experienced with regard to them being a minority, after internally migrating to the city the participants explained their experiences of being categorized and labeled as a minority group. Many factors result in a negative excessive distinctiveness: foreign accent, perceived negative representation of the ingroup, through the media, perceived shifts in class as a member of a minority group within a new structure etc (Timotijevic and Breakwell 2000). Hence for the participants in the study through the experiences of feeling distinct and the status inequality that they observed after immigration they need to accept their status as being a minority which will help them in developing a secure identity of who they are and also in turn developing a stable ethnic identity with regard to the cultural background that they belong to. The participants in the study accept the fact that they are a minority

in a country where status and sub systems are prevalent but they do not let it be as a unconstructive part of their identity. To quote a participant,

“I am a person who is independent and hence my minority status as an ethnic minority does not let it crunch down me as a person.... And I feel that just because we belong to scheduled tribe does not mean that we are not good enough. I am happy as the way I am.”

Global theme 3: Redefinition and strengthening of one’s ethnic identity

To explore the redefinition of ethnic identity among the in-migrant Naga adolescents; it was found that the participants were involved in a process of redefining their ethnic identity. For the participants, being exposed to the new culture that was different from their own culture, undergoing experiences of being marginalized among the people in the mainstream culture and at the same time acceptance of their distinct status has been an integral part of their journey which helped them in strengthening their knowledge of their unique ethnicity.

To quote one of the participant,

“I feel that after being exposed to all the different cultures and the traditions out here, my understanding of my place and the culture that I belong to has strengthened in a way and I feel that I am more proud to be Naga as compared to when I was living there.....”

As stated by Smith (1991) young people from ethnic minority groups face additional tasks of being prejudiced by the majority group and at the same time developing an understanding of the implication of ethnic group differences, figuring out how to relate to their own group and the larger society, establishing feelings of self-worth in face of conflicting messages about their group, and

developing ways to respond to prejudice. These tasks constitute the process of ethnic identity formation. For the participants affiliation to common religious groups and at the same time participating in common cultural celebrations of their ethnic groups play a significant role in strengthening their ethnic identity. As stated by a participant

“Yes my identification with my ethnic group has been enhanced and as I said earlier I am more aware and I try to attend the cultural programs and the social gatherings that is organized by the Naga Students Union here because I have learned a lot more about my people and my culture but at the same time I do try to keep a balance and not just stick to my own people I do appreciate the uniqueness of my culture”

(Phinney, 1990) proposed that ethnic involvement—which encompasses language, friends’ networks, religious affiliation, participation in structured ethnic social groups (e.g., sports), political ideology, area of residence, and other miscellaneous activities (e.g., consumption of media, foods, and songs)—was the most widely used indicator of multigroup ethnic identity (as cited in Laroche et al 2009). Hence for the participants their affiliations to their ethnic group and the cultural celebrations have been a facilitating aspect which has helped them in strengthening their ethnic identity and redefining their status of being an ethnic minority from Nagaland, accepting this status and being proud of the cultural background that they come from.

Major finding

The early experiences of being exposed to their traditions and celebrating the festivals of their culture and being with their own group of people have influenced the participants to be aware of their ethnicity. The conceptualization of ethnic identity seems to have developed for the participants from early childhood and being exposed to the

various cultural traditions of the place that they belong to. For participants the fact that the ethnic culture that they belong to was a part of their own identity and to be conscious of the ethnic background that they belong to was significant. However, the exposure to a different cultural group and context gave them an opportunity to explore their ethnicity. They have developed their sense of ethnicity through experience and exposure to different factors. Being exposed to an environment that is unfamiliar they experienced culture shock and a realization of the huge gaps between their own and mainstream culture. Because they have grown up in an environment where they were among their own ethnic group from childhood till adolescence, the phenomenon of internal migration led to the need to adjust to the new environment. This posed challenges and difficulties in adjusting to the unfamiliar environment, interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds other than their own and a sense of alienation from feeling different and out of place. The participants in the study accept the minority status of their ethnicity where status and sub systems are prevalent in a multicultural country like India, but they do not undermine the importance of ethnicity to their identity. For the participants their affiliations to their ethnic group and the cultural celebrations have been a facilitating aspect which has helped them in strengthening their ethnic identity and redefining their status of being an ethnic minority from Nagaland. The study revealed that internal migration in itself was associated with a heightened sense of ethnic identity.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include small sample size, gender of the sample, specific ethnic group population and the researcher’s knowledge of thematic analysis.

The sample size for the research consisted of eight Naga adolescents.

Although an in depth analysis of eight participant's data was conducted, the findings obtained from this study may not be generalized to other Naga adolescents who have migrated to different parts of India. In relation to the small number of participants, gender difference with regard to internal migration difficulties and ethnic identity was not explored Steihaus et al (2009) found that in addition to the migration effects, the authors found some general gender effects, girls showed a pattern of greater susceptibility to life events and their negative impact, lower self-esteem and higher self-awareness. In contrast, boys were more vulnerable in terms of experiencing less positive parental relationships and support from their social network. Hence there is evidence of gender differences which were not represented in the data and thus this factor suggests possible limitation to the study.

Since the study focused on Naga adolescents between the ages of 18-22 the findings may not be applicable to other ethnic groups who migrate to other parts of India.

Lastly, since it was the researcher's first attempt at using thematic analysis, her inexperience in the analysis and her own personal perspective could be proposed as a limitation to this study.

Implications

Majority of students from Northeast India, including Nagas are migrating to different parts of India for higher and professional studies leading to employment opportunities, with the impact of globalization. The better environment for educational opportunities with the multiple choices of courses has attracted the younger generation from Nagaland.

When they migrate to the cities, the youth are faced with the aspects of living in a strange environment and to interact with

people from different ethnic backgrounds which will lead them to their questioning or understanding of their identity and in specific their ethnic identity. The results help in understanding of the experiences that the adolescents go through in adjusting to a new place, their view of ethnic identity and the difficulties that they through. Ethnic identity arises from the ethno cultural experiences of individuals and has important implications for the ways in which adolescents come to view themselves, then it should follow that ethnic identity is important in understanding whether and the ways in which ethnic group membership might increase or decrease the vulnerability of adolescents to emotional and behavioral problems.

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