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(Il)legality and psychosocial well-being: Central Asian migrant women in Russia

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Abstract

Legal status has shown far-reaching consequences for international migrants' incorporation trajectories and outcomes in Western contexts. In dialogue with the extant research, we examine the implications of legal status for subjective well-being of Central Asian migrant women in the Russian Federation. Using survey data collected through respondent-driven sampling in two large cities, we compare migrants with regularized and irregular legal statuses on several interrelated yet distinct dimensions of subjective well-being. We find that, regardless of other factors, regularized status has a strong positive association with migrants' perception of their rights and freedoms but not with their feeling of being respected in society. Regularized status is positively associated with self-efficacy and negatively with depression. Yet, no net legal status difference is found in migrants' views on their relations with other migrants or on treatment of migrants by native-borns. The findings are situated within the cross-national scholarship on the ramifications of racialized immigrant (il)legality and its implications for membership and belonging.

Introduction

Legal status, shaped by both the content of immigration laws and their implementation (De Genova 2004; Menjívar 2006; Menjívar and Abrego 2012), affects all aspects of international migrants' lives (Bloch et al. 2014; NASEM 2015).¹ Yet, legal status intersects with other dimensions of immigrant experiences, especially in the current context of increasingly racialized and exclusionary public narratives and policies (Koulish and van der Woude 2020; Landale et al. 2017; Menjívar and Abrego 2012; Nakano Glenn 2010; Schachter 2016). The implications and consequences of legal status are therefore complex and vary across immigration contexts, migrant groups, and specific outcomes (e.g., Gorina et al. 2018; Hamilton et al. 2019).

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¹We use the words 'migrant' and 'immigrant' as semantically equivalent given the increasingly blurred distinctions between temporary and permanent moves in today's transnationalized world. In Russia, from where our data come, the word 'migrant' is more widely used.

In this study, we contribute to the understanding of these complexities by investigating the connections of several dimensions of international migrants' subjective well-being with their legal status using data from a survey of migrant women in the Russian Federation (hereafter also Russia), a major migrant-receiving country. Specifically, we distinguish between migrants with regularized legal status and those with irregular status and examine the net difference between the two subgroups in a range of subjective outcomes – migrants' perceptions of their civic inclusion and belonging in the host society; their views on relations with other migrants and on treatment of migrants by native-borns; and self-efficacy and depression. While capturing different dimensions of migrants' lives, these outcomes reflect the breadth of migrants' experiences. We find instructive variations in the effect of legal status across these outcomes. Our study contributes to the scholarship that seeks to account holistically for multilayered and interconnected complexities of migrants' incorporation (cf. Bosniak 2000; Bloemraad et al. 2008).

Background

Legal status has shown profound and far-reaching implications for international migrants' trajectories and experiences across major migrant-receiving contexts, and it is widely recognized as a critical axis of stratification for migrants, especially as exclusionary regulations and enforcement practices exacerbate in host nations (Cook-Martin 2019; Koulish and van der Woude 2020; Light et al. 2014; Menjívar and Abrego 2012).

Thus, legal status is highly consequential for migrants' socioeconomic integration in the host society. For example, Greenman and Hall (2013) found in the U.S. that undocumented status is associated with lower educational attainment and higher risks of school discontinuation. Menjívar (2008) showed how legal uncertainty curtails the educational aspirations of Central American immigrants in liminal legal status in the U.S. Immigrants lacking legal status endure labor market marginalization and wage penalties (Bloch et al. 2014; Gorina et al. 2018; Hall et al. 2010; Orrenius and Zavodny 2015) and elevated occupational risks (Flynn et al. 2015; Hall and Greenman 2015), with the effects of these labor market disadvantages often reaching into the second and even third generations (Bean et al. 2015). Undocumented immigrants' socioeconomic exclusion intersects with and is further amplified by their residential segregation (McConnell 2015).

A precarious legal status also has shown a negative association with immigrants' perceptions of belonging, rights, and inclusion and with their civic involvement (Bloemraad 2013; Flippen and Parrado 2015; Larchanché 2012; Thayer Correa et al. 2016). Legal precariousness also can induce strain and disruption into immigrants' family and social relationships (Abrego 2019; Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Dreby 2015; Menjívar et al. 2016).

Several studies have examined connections between legal status and physical and mental health in western immigration contexts. Legal precariousness has been shown to constrain immigrants' access to health care (Castañeda 2009; 2011; Deeb-Sossa and Billings 2014; Larchanché 2012; Ortega et al. 2018; Sudhinaraset et al. 2017; Van Natta et al. 2019; Vargas Bustamante et al. 2012) and to negatively imprint their health outcomes (Asad and

Clair 2017; Cheng and Massey 2019). Regarding mental health, in particular, immigrants in precarious legal statuses have shown greater psychological stress, anxiety and trauma, compared to immigrants in more secure legal statuses in the U.S. (García 2018; Gee et al. 2016; Gonzales et al. 2013; Hatzenbuehler et al. 2017; Martinez et al. 2015; Moya Salas et al. 2013; Patler and Laster Pirtle 2018; Potochnick and Perreira 2010).

Legal exclusion often goes hand in hand with, and is reinforced by, ethno-racial discrimination and marginalization of migrants (e.g., Agadjanian et al. 2017; Calavita 2005; Flippen and Parrado 2015; Reeves 2013a) further aggravating migrants' well-being and health outcomes (Asad and Clair 2018; Larchanché 2012). And the effects of illegality often intersect with those of gender inequality (e.g., Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Gorina et al. 2018; Salcido and Menjívar 2012; Straiton et al. 2017). In particular, the health penalty of illegality may be especially high among women given their caretaking roles (Gómez Cervantes and Menjívar 2020) and their gender-specific needs such as those for reproductive and sexual health services (e.g., Agadjanian and Yoo 2018; Agadjanian and Zotova 2019; Casillas et al. 2015; Schoevers et al. 2010; Wolff et al. 2005) and for protection against abuse by domestic partners and others (e.g., Parson et al. 2016; Reina and Lohman 2015; Salcido and Adelman 2004).

While the above literature has demonstrated the centrality of legal status for migrants' experiences and outcomes, several recent studies have questioned the protective role of legal status, especially for highly racialized migrant groups. Specifically, legal status may not be sufficient to ensure what Schachter (2016) defined as immigrants' "symbolic belonging," and immigrants racialized as undocumented continue to be perceived as such by the public regardless of the degree of their formal legal inclusion (Flores and Schachter 2018). For example, in Landale et al.'s (2017) study of Latino youth in Los Angeles, undocumented immigrants did not report higher levels of discrimination than their native-born counterparts; in fact, the latter were more likely to report experiences of mistreatment at both the institutional and personal levels. The effects of racial prejudice that transcend the legal status boundaries are further aggravated by restrictive and punitive policies. Thus, in the U.S., the harshening anti-immigrant legislation and corresponding xenophobic public discourse were found to decrease self-rated health among Latino immigrants regardless of legal status (Vargas et al. 2017). In a qualitative study of undocumented and documented immigrants in Texas, Asad (2020a) argued that both groups' integration is constrained by the largely punitive US immigration regime. An analysis of the US National Survey of Latinos data by the same author (Asad 2020b) concluded that fears of deportation, while generally lower among Latino US citizens than non-citizens, increased substantially among the former as deportation rates rose, even though this group is presumably shielded from deportation risk by its legal status. And the local context of reception may also impact the implications of legal status. For example, Garcia (2019) found that undocumented status is more detrimental for immigrants' well-being in US cities with more restrictive treatment of undocumented immigrants, compared to those in more accommodating cities.

With respect to health, Fillon et al. (2018) observed that non-citizen adolescents had better mental health than U.S.-born citizens. Vasquez Guzman and Sanchez (2019) found that perceived racial prejudice has a stronger negative association with self-rated health

among US Latino citizens than non-citizens. Vargas and Juarez (2017) reported that the enactment of anti-immigrant laws had a negative effect on self-rated health among all Latinos, transcending legal status distinctions. And Hamilton et al. (2019) showed in the U.S. that unauthorized Mexican immigrant farm workers reported better physical health outcomes than did their co-ethnics who were US permanent residents or citizens. The authors suggested that their findings should be interpreted within the framework of the “immigrant health paradox”: while immigrants’ health advantage over native-borns of comparable socioeconomic status is influenced by selection into migration, similar selection mechanisms may shape health outcomes within the immigrant population.

Importantly, legal status may have different implications for different aspects of migrants’ lives. For example, Gorina et al. (2018) found in Russia that although migrant women with more established legal status had, *ceteris paribus*, higher earnings than those with more precarious legal statuses, the two groups did not differ in their perceptions of migrant vs. native-born pay inequality or in the level of their job satisfaction. Garcini et al. (2018) detected significant variations in some aspects of health-related quality of life across legal status groups of Mexican-origin immigrants in the U.S., but no difference in other aspects. Ortega et al. (2018) showed that, compared to US-born Latinos, undocumented Latinos in California were less likely to rate their health as excellent/very good health, despite having better physical and behavioral health outcomes. And improvements of undocumented migrants’ legal status, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) in the U.S., may reduce some challenges that those migrants face while creating others (Siemons et al. 2017). Moreover, although the transition from undocumented to a relatively more secure status brings initial benefits, the protective health advantages of programs like DACA do not endure over time in the context of rising uncertainty about the future of such programs (Patler et al. 2019).

Despite multifaceted and far-reaching consequences of migrant (il)legality, analyses of its effects are often constrained by the paucity of direct quantitative data as legal status is rarely recorded in surveys. Much of the existing evidence relies on imputations of migrant legal status, which produce different estimates depending on the method choice (e.g., Oropesa et al. 2016; Van Hook et al., 2015; Young and Madrigal 2017). Moreover, while there is substantial evidence on the effects of legal status on various processes and outcomes, most of this scholarship has focused on the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. In this study, we expand this traditional geography to include the Russian Federation, a major destination of international migration. We use data from a survey of migrant women that, among other characteristics, collected information on various aspects of their lives and experiences, as well as direct and detailed information on their legal status. These data, therefore, offer a unique opportunity to examine the implications of legal status for the well-being of migrant women in that large, yet understudied, immigration setting.

Conceptualization

Our theoretical framework is guided by the cross-national scholarship that connects international migrants’ legal status to trajectories and outcomes of their incorporation into the host society. We expand this scholarship, which is disproportionately concerned

with objective measures of migrants' integration, such as educational attainment, labor force participation, income, civic inclusion, etc. (see NASEM 2015), by focusing on migrants' subjective well-being. Although not as tangible and apparent as many objective markers of migrant incorporation, subjective well-being, we argue, reflects migrants' objective experiences but is also in itself a critical and consequential component of their incorporation trajectories. Importantly, our study also connects with the scholarship on gendered intersectionalities in migrants' well-being and health outcomes by focusing on the subjective well-being of migrant women with different legal statuses.

Studies on the implications of migrant legal status, typically carried out through a single disciplinary lens, tend to focus on certain types of outcomes. Bridging disciplinary divides, we conceptualize subjective well-being as a broad complex of complementary feelings, attitudes, and assessments. We define three distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions of migrant women's subjective well-being, which together, we argue, capture and reflect both the nature and the levels of processes of migrant integration. Thus, in what can be construed as a societal belonging dimension, we focus on how migrants situate themselves in the host society's broad civic environment. Here, we look at migrants' perceptions of their rights and freedoms as well as their feelings of being respected in the host society. We define the second dimension as relational. In our analysis, it is represented by migrants' views on their interactions and relations with their co-ethnic migrants as well as on treatment of migrants by native-borns. The last, micro-level, psychosocial dimension taps universal psychometric characteristics: here, we focus on self-efficacy and depression.

The dominant thread of the cross-national research reviewed above suggests that secure legal status acts as an important buffer against multiple adversities faced by migrants in host societies. Following this thread, one should expect that having a more secure legal status would be positively associated with subjective well-being of migrants in all three domains. Specifically, compared to migrants in precarious legal conditions, legally secure migrants should be more likely to feel included in society, as measured by their perceptions of rights and freedoms that they have and the feelings of being respected, regardless of other factors. Likewise, migrants with secure legal status, compared to those without it, should be expected to demonstrate greater satisfaction with their relations with other co-ethnic migrants as well as with the treatment they receive from native-borns. Finally, this dominant perspective suggests that secure-status migrants should display higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of depression than their counterparts with insecure legal status, net of other characteristics.

However, our conceptualization also engages the reviewed evidence that legal status may not fully shield migrants against prejudiced attitudes and punitive actions. Specifically, when migrants are racialized as illegal regardless of their actual legal status, the advantages of legality may not manifest in migrants' subjective well-being. This may be particularly true in a context where migrants face pervasive and increasing public and legal hostility and outright discrimination, such as that of the Russian Federation.

Context

The Russian Federation is home to the second largest international migrant population in the world (Pison 2019). Most international migrants come to Russia from the neighboring countries that used to be part, along with Russia itself, of the Soviet Union before its disintegration in 1991. Among these countries, three predominantly Muslim nations of Central Asia – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – supply particularly large numbers of international migrants (Ivanova and Ryazantsev 2017). This migration flow is reflective of these countries' historical ties with Russia and facilitated by the visa-free entry of its citizens into the Russian Federation. Depending on the estimates, citizens of the three countries account for between two-thirds and four-fifths of officially registered foreign workers in Russia (Demoscope 2013).²

Central Asian migration started as almost exclusively male, but the share of women among these migrants has increased considerably over time (Khusenova 2013; Tyurukanova 2011).³ Most Central Asians come to Russia as temporary workers. They are required to obtain temporary registration and work permit (or 'work patent', in Russian legal definition), a daunting bureaucratic process that inevitably becomes fraught with irregularities (Reeves 2013b). Pathways to securing permanent residence status and naturalization (for migrants who may seek Russian citizenship) are much more complex and costly and, as a result, many migrants maintain temporary status, often with numerous legal violations, for a long period of time, thus living under constant threat of deportation (Davé 2014; Light 2016; Reeves 2015).

As elsewhere, in Russia legal precarity impacts migrants' access to social security and to health care services (Popova 2020). In particular, it hinders their access to the state-run Obligatory Medical Insurance system (Agadjanian and Yoo 2018; Demintseva and Kashnitskiy 2016; Kashnitskiy and Demintseva 2018), and intersects with other barriers rooted in economic insecurity, limited access to health-related information, lack of trust in health providers, and cultural and linguistic differences (Agadjanian and Zotova 2019; King and Dudina 2019; King et al. 2020). The penalties of precarious legality are magnified by increasingly restrictive immigration regulations (Kubal 2019) and are further exacerbated by entrenched and growing racism and xenophobia (Zakharov 2015). Russian public opinion surveys show that xenophobic sentiments are directed, in particular, toward migrants from the southern part of the former Soviet empire, especially migrants from Central Asia, who are phenotypically and culturally distinct from the Russian ethnic majority (Levada Center 2018). As a result, Central Asian migrants suffer from widespread marginalization, exploitation, and abuse (e.g., Abashin 2014; King et al. 2020; Kuznetsova and Round 2019; Reeves 2013a). Yet, prior research also suggests that regularized legal status may help to shield these migrants from anti-immigrant hostility. Thus, Agadjanian et al. (2017) found

²The data used in this study were collected mainly before Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union in August 2015, which, at least nominally, offered Kyrgyz citizens greater access to the Russian labor market, compared to citizens of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

³Although gender-specific migration statistics are not available from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Rocheva and Varshaver (2017) used data from the now dissolved Federal Migration Service to estimate that women constituted 38% of Kyrgyz citizens, 18% of Uzbek citizens, and 16% of Tajik citizens registered in Russia in the middle of the 2010s (p. 93).

that migrants with a more established legal status were less likely than migrants with more precarious legal statuses to report experience of harassment by either law enforcement agents or other actors, regardless of other factors.

Data

Our analysis uses survey data collected in 2014-2016 in two large Russian cities – Nizhny Novgorod (population 1.3 million; fifth largest in the country) and Kazan (1.2 million, eight largest), located some 350 km from each other in the Volga Federal District. Both cities, like other large Russian urban centers, have attracted a growing number of international migrants, including those from Central Asia. However, while similar in many respects, including the provenance, demographic, and socioeconomic characteristics of its migrant populations, the two cities differ in administrative status and ethno-religious makeup, with potential consequences for the experience of migrants, especially those of Central Asian origin. Thus, Nizhny Novgorod is the administrative center of the eponymous *oblast* (province), populated predominantly by ethnic Russians. In comparison, Kazan is the capital of the autonomous Republic of Tatarstan, where almost half of the population is made up of ethnic Tatars, a group of Turkic origin (like Kyrgyz and Uzbeks) who are also at least nominally Muslim. These similarities and differences of the two cities were among the considerations for their selection as the study sites.

Because no reliable sampling frame is available for drawing a representative sample of international migrants, in both sites, the survey employed respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to recruit participants. RDS has been widely used to sample hard-to-reach populations (Heckathorn 1997; Gile and Handcock 2010), including migrants (e.g., Montealegre et al. 2013; Platt, Luthra, and Frere-Smith 2015; Tyldum and Johnston 2014; Zhang et al. 2014). The sampling procedure targeted migrant women aged 18-40 from the three Central Asian countries. First, each site 15 seeds were selected purposefully to represent the three ethnic provenance groups (Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik) as well different age groups and different areas of the city. Each of the seeds was administered a face-to-face interview. Upon completion of the interview, each participant received remuneration and was given three coupons to recruit three non-coresident migrant women of the same ethnicity in the target age group. Each subsequently interviewed woman was also given three recruiting coupons. The recruiters were paid additional remuneration for each recruit who successfully completed a survey interview. All interviews were carried out by female interviewers who were themselves migrants of matching provenance, which helped to ensure participants' trust and comfort. In all, 74% (75% in Nizhny Novgorod and 72% in Kazan) of the distributed coupons resulted in a complete interview. This survey design generated a total of 649 interviews almost evenly split between the two cities. The survey instrument contained various questions about women's characteristics (including legal status) and experiences; it also included several items measuring respondents' subjective well-being. The study design and instruments were approved by the Institutional Review Board of Arizona State University. The de-identified survey dataset and supporting materials are available from the authors upon request.

Method

Measures

The outcomes corresponding to the three dimensions of interest are defined as follows. The first dimension, migrants' perceptions of their civic inclusion in the host society, is represented by two measures. The first outcome is the perception of own rights and freedoms. It is derived from the following survey question: "*Imagine that in society there are people who are almost completely deprived of rights and freedoms and there are people who have most rights and freedoms. If this is expressed on a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 is the maximum of rights), at how many points would you put your rights and freedoms?*" The corresponding variable is operationalized as a continuous scale with values ranging from 1 to 10." The second outcome in this category is feeling respected in society. It is based on the following question: "*Imagine that in society there is a scale of respect and there are people who are most respected in society (maximum of respect = 10 points) and least respected (1 point). On this scale, in your opinion, how much are you respected?*" The corresponding variable is also a continuous 1-to-10 scale.

The second, relational dimension that we investigate is also represented by two outcomes. The first outcome, satisfaction with relations with co-ethnic migrants ('compatriots' in conventional Russian parlance), is based on responses to the following question: "*How satisfied are you with relationships with your compatriots?*" The second outcome measures respondents' view of how native-borns ('locals') treat migrants on the basis of responses to the following question: "*How satisfied are you with the way locals treat migrants?*" Both questions had the same range of response options – very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. Accordingly, the two corresponding variables are four-point scales, with 1 being "very dissatisfied" and 4 "very satisfied."

Finally, the third, psychosocial dimension is represented by two indicators widely used in psychometric assessments – general self-efficacy and depression. Each of the outcomes was derived from a set of corresponding items adapted from standard, widely used instruments (Radloff, 1977; Schwarzer and Jerusalem 1995) and their earlier applications in the Russian context (e.g., Dershem et al. 1996; Schwarzer et al. 1996). Self-efficacy is based on a set of the following ten statements describing a person: "If I try hard, I always find solutions to even difficult problems"; "If something gets in my way, I nevertheless find ways to reach my goals"; "I manage to reach my goals rather easily"; "In an unexpected situation, I always know how to behave"; "When difficulties come up unexpectedly, I believe that I can handle them"; "If I make enough effort, I can solve most problems"; "I am ready for any difficulties because I rely on my own abilities"; "If I face a problem, I usually find several ways to solve it"; "I can come up with something even in situations that appear hopeless"; and "I can usually keep the situation under control." Respondents were asked how well, in their opinion, each of those statements characterized them: very well, rather well, rather not well, completely not. The composite outcome scale is a combination of the responses to these questions, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$.

The depression scale was built from a series of eleven questions adapted from the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Carleton et al. 2013; Radloff 1977). The

questions asked how often the respondent experienced certain conditions in the past seven days: almost never (not one day), sometimes (1-2 days), periodically (3-4 days), or almost always (5-7 days). The conditions are: “I didn’t want to eat anything, I had no appetite”; “I felt depressed”; “Whatever I did required a big effort”; “I felt fear”, “I felt happy”, “I felt lonely”, “I couldn’t do anything, I gave up”; “I enjoyed life” (reverse-coded); “I felt sad”; “I felt that people treated me badly”; and “I felt confident about the future” (reverse-coded). The composite scale based on the responses has Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$. For all six outcomes, following the common practice, “Don’t know” and “Not sure” responses as well as refusals are excluded from the analysis.

The predictor of interest is legal status. As part of the interview, survey respondents were asked to state their citizenship(s). In a separate part of the interview, those who did not have Russian citizenship were asked whether they had a permit for permanent residency in the Russian Federation. Those who did not possess such a permit were asked if they had a permit for temporary residency. Guided by earlier research on migrant women’s experiences in the Russian context (Agadjanian et al. 2014; Agadjanian et al. 2017; Agadjanian and Yoo 2018; Agadjanian and Zotova 2019; Kornienko et al. 2018), we condensed the diversity of possible legal situations into two categories: 1) those who have Russian citizenship or permanent residence status; and 2) those who have temporary residence status (obtained legally or illegally) or who do not even have a temporary residence registration. Again, following terminology employed in previous research, we refer to these two categories as “regularized” and “irregular”, respectively. While this dichotomy, like any legally-produced classification, may not fully reflect the complexity of migrants’ legal situations and trajectories (cf., Menjívar 2006), it captures what previous research has identified as a primary divide in migrants’ legal experiences – one that separates migrants at different stages of the process of full legal incorporation (e.g., from permanent residence to citizenship) from those for whom such incorporation remains largely out of reach. The divide has multiple consequences for migrants’ lives, including residential and economic security and access to social protection and health care (Popova 2020). At the same time, while we acknowledge potential differences between citizens and permanent residents, the relatively small number of the former (c. one-tenth of the total sample), would not provide sufficient statistical power for disaggregated analyses given the overall sample size.

Models

Given the nature of the outcomes, for all multivariate tests, we fit OLS regression models.⁴ The models control for the individual and household characteristics that might be related to the outcomes of interest. First, respondent’s age is included. Marital status is a dichotomy – married vs. not married. The models control for the number of respondent’s living children – none, one, two, and three or more. Educational attainment is operationalized as a dichotomy – complete secondary or less vs. at least some post-secondary education. Respondent’s employment status is also operationalized as a dichotomy – currently working vs. not working (regardless of the nature employment and work hours). The models also

⁴At the exploratory stage, we experimented with different modeling strategies, including ordered logit models. The results of those models are very similar to those presented here. They are available from the authors upon request.

control for respondents' total personal monthly income in rubles; to smooth the distribution, income is log-transformed. Ethno-provenance is a set of dummy variables representing the three sending countries' titular ethnic groups – Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek. The models also include a control for approximate local peer network size: it is derived from responses to a question on how many women of approximately the same age living in the same city respondents interacted with in-person, by phone, or digitally in the four weeks preceding the interview. Finally, given the earlier noted difference between the two study sites, a control for the city where the interview took place – Nizhny Novgorod vs. Kazan – is also included. The cases with missing information on any of these variables are excluded from the corresponding multivariable analyses. Notably, missing values are overwhelmingly due to “Don't know” and “Not sure” responses. In comparison, reflecting the survey team's concerted efforts to establish trust with participants, refusals to answer even sensitive questions were very uncommon. In particular, just over one percent of the respondents refused to provide information on their legal status. Refusals to answer the questions that generated the outcome variables used in this study accounted, on average, for less than one percent of the missing cases, with no noticeable variation across legal status categories and ethno-provenance.

The distributions of the predictor and control variables used in the multivariate tests are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, only one-third of respondents had regularized legal status. Respondents' mean age was 29 years old, 54 percent of them were married, with 1.1 children, on average. Just over a quarter of respondents had at least some tertiary education, and 64 percent of them were employed at the time of the survey. By the study design, the sample had a fully balanced distribution by ethno-provenance and study site. The respondents listed approximately six individuals, on average, in their close peer networks.

The network structure of respondents is a potential source of bias in estimations of data collected through RDS (Tyldum and Johnston 2014). Therefore, we adjust the multivariate estimates for the RDS design by applying corresponding weights generated with RDSAT statistical package (Spiller et al. 2012).⁵ All statistical estimations are carried out in STATA 16.

Results

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the six outcomes of interest for the entire sample and by two legal status categories. On both measures of perception of civic inclusion – having rights and freedoms and feeling respected – regularized migrants score higher than their counterparts in irregular statuses. However, the gap between the two legal-status groups is somewhat larger with regard to the perception of rights and freedom than in feeling respected. For the first relational outcome, migrants in irregular statuses appear slightly more satisfied with their relations with other migrant co-ethnics, but the difference between the two categories of migrants is not statistically significant. Somewhat surprisingly, the direction of the difference between the two legal-status categories is the same for the second

⁵Results of the models without RDS adjustments are similar to the ones presented here and are available from the authors upon request.

outcome in this category – satisfaction with treatment of migrants by native-borns, and the difference for this outcome is statistically significant. Finally, on the two psychometric characteristics, regularized migrants score somewhat lower on self-efficacy but are virtually indistinguishable from migrants in irregular statuses on the depression score.

The results of the multivariable tests, adjusted for the RDS design, are presented in Table 3 (the analytic samples sizes for the multivariable models are somewhat smaller than those in Table 2 due to missing values on some of the covariates). For migrants' civic inclusion (Section 2.A), paralleling the pattern transpired at the bivariate level, the analyses show a statistically significant advantage of regularized migrants in the perception of their rights and freedoms, compared to migrants in irregular statuses – a 0.58 point differences on the 1-to-10 scale. In comparison, the difference between the two categories of migrants with regard to the other component of civic inclusion, feeling respected in society, while pointing in the same direction, is marginally statistically significant (0.45 points, $p=0.08$).

The results of the two models testing for the association of legal status with the two relational outcomes – satisfaction with relations with co-ethnic migrants and with treatment of migrants by native-borns – are presented in Section 2. Although the signs of the effects coefficients point in opposite directions, neither effect reaches statistical significance once the RDS design adjustment is made, effacing the variations observed at the bivariate level.⁶

Section 3 displays the results of the models for the association of legal status with two psychometric outcomes – self-efficacy and depression. In contrast to the relational models, the predicted differences by legal status are potently present in both outcomes after controlling for other factors. Thus, compared to migrants in irregular statuses, regularized migrants display significantly higher levels of self-efficacy (reversing the pattern observed in the bivariate comparison), scoring 0.22 points higher, on average, on the 1.00-to-4.00 self-efficacy scale. They also show significantly lower levels of depression – 0.16 lower, on average, on the 1-to-4 scale, than their counterparts in irregular statuses.

The effects of several of the control variables are also noteworthy. Among these effects, the differences between the two study sites – Nizhny Novgorod and Kazan – are particularly intriguing: the results for four of the six outcomes (except for perception of rights and freedoms and satisfaction with relationship with co-ethnics) suggest a relative disadvantage associated with living in Kazan, i.e., a city that, as we presumed, should be more accommodating of Muslim newcomers. It is also noteworthy that personal income does not appear to enhance the sense of civic inclusion, to influence group relationship satisfaction, to buttress self-efficacy, or to buffer against depression. The positive effects of education and the negative effects of personal network size on the relationship satisfaction outcomes are also rather interesting. Explorations of possible interactions between legal status and other characteristics included in the models did not produce any consistent patterns (the results of these exploratory tests are available upon request). Yet, these intriguing results suggest potentially important directions for further research.

⁶In the satisfaction with treatment of migrants by native-borns model that does not adjust for RDS design the effect of legal status is larger and statistically significant (not shown but available upon request).

Discussion and conclusions

Our analysis engaged the cross-national scholarship on the effects and implications of migrant legal status to examine the subjective well-being of regularized and irregular-status Central Asian migrant women in the Russian Federation, a major, yet relatively understudied, destination for international migrants. In fusing different disciplinary and analytic foci, we defined three interrelated, yet distinct realms, of subjective well-being – societal, relational, and psychosocial-- identified two markers within each of those realms, and tested the association of migrants' legal status with those markers.

The results of the analysis add mixed evidence to the literature that examines the consequences of (il)legality for migrant women. Specifically, in the realm of societal belonging, a regularized status appears to reinforce these migrants' perception of their rights and freedoms regardless of other factors, but it does not seem to impinge on their feeling of being respected in society to the same degree. We suggest that this difference may reflect the subtleties in the subjective meanings of each of the two outcomes and of their connections with legal status. Thus, regularized status and legal opportunities that such status, at least nominally, confers may have a strong subjective connection with civic inclusion. In comparison, legal status may not reflect on less formal aspects of civic belonging, such as the sense of "being respected", which may be more affected by other experiences and expectations, including those rooted in the racialized othering of outsiders (e.g., Agadjanian et al. 2017; Armenta 2017; Garcia 2017; Flippen and Parrado 2017; Schachter 2016).

For the two measures of subjective relationality – satisfaction with relations with co-ethnic migrants and with treatment of migrants by native-borns – the analyses showed no net association with legal status. Here, we propose that both results are reflective of the same processes that establish subjective group boundaries – enhancing ethnoprovenance-based collective identities and solidarities while also reifying the native-born vs. migrant divide. From this perspective, legal status, at least in this context and in this population, may not act as a sufficiently strong modifier of these deeply entrenched and racialized collective identities and stereotypes (cf., Flores and Schachter 2018).

In contrast, at a more micro, psychosocial level, legal status demonstrated a net positive association with self-efficacy and a net negative association with depression among the women in our study. Self-efficacy and depression, as other aspects of mental well-being, are products of continuous and accruing experiences in various facets of everyday life. As these results suggest, such experiences are, on balance, strongly affected by what can be defined as the cumulative penalty of legal precariousness. These results thus illustrate potential negative consequences of such precariousness for mental health and psychological wellbeing, paralleling findings from other migrant-receiving settings (e.g., García 2018; Gee et al. 2016; Gonzales et al. 2013; Hatzenbuehler et al. 2017; Moya Salas et al. 2013; Potochnick and Perreira 2010, Simmons et al. 2020).

In sum, the findings highlight the complex meanings and implications of (il)legality for Central Asian migrant women's subjective well-being, thus further nuancing the picture painted by the cross-national scholarship on correlates and consequences of migrant legal

status as it intersects with racialized othering. Understandably, these findings from one, even if major, immigration setting and a specific, even if sizeable, segment of the migrant population in it cannot be automatically extrapolated to other settings and groups, as the effects of (il)legality on subjective well-being may vary across contexts. In addition, because the data used in this study were collected among migrant women only, we refrain from any speculations about the gendered nature and scale of subjectivization of (il)legality. Nonetheless, the parallels between our findings on Central Asian migrant women in Russia with evidence produced in better studied immigrant-receiving contexts attest to important cross-contextual universalities in how (il)legality impacts on migrant women's everyday gendered experiences and on their interpretation and internalization of those experiences (cf., Gómez Cervantes and Menjívar 2020; Parson et al. 2016; Salcido and Adelman 2004; Simmons et al. 2020; Wolff et al. 2005).

The limitations of our study must be acknowledged. Thus, as in any observational study, causality in the detected associations cannot be firmly established, especially because potential selection into different legal trajectories, which may imprint the outcomes of interest (cf., Hamilton et al. 2019), is impossible to identify. The RDS design, while a powerful alternative to household-based sampling for the study of hard-to-reach groups, does not produce perfectly representative estimates, and RDS weights adjustment for multivariate analyses has been the subject of continuous methodological debate (e.g., Heckathorn 2007; Tyldum and Johnston 2014; Winship and Radbill 1994). Finally, our data come from only two cities, which, however large, may not fully represent the complex regional panoply of Russian immigration policies and politics (see Schenk 2018) and corresponding variations in migrants' experiences (cf., Garcia (2019) for the U.S.). We hope that our ongoing and future data collection efforts will address these limitations.

Yet, these limitations and constraints notwithstanding, our study's findings usefully contribute to the literature on the complex implications of legal status for migrant women's incorporation and experiences in host societies, especially in understudied non-Western high-immigration contexts. They are particularly important in the current climate of rising anti-immigrant political rhetoric and the corresponding propagation of restrictive immigration laws and practices.

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De-identified survey data are available upon request.

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Table 1.

Distribution of the predictor and covariates (means and standard deviations)

	Mean	SD
Legal status		
Regularized	0.33	0.47
Irregular	0.67	0.47
Age	28.91	6.93
Current marital status		
Married	0.54	0.50
Not married	0.46	0.50
Number of children	1.11	1.07
Education		
Complete secondary or less	0.74	0.44
Postsecondary education	0.26	0.44
Employment status		
Currently working	0.61	0.49
Currently not working	0.39	0.49
Monthly income (in RUR, log-transformed)	7.72	3.65
Ethno-provenance		
Kyrgyz	0.33	0.47
Tajik	0.33	0.47
Uzbek	0.34	0.47
Peer network size	5.93	4.70
Site		
Nizhny Novgorod	0.49	0.50
Kazan	0.51	0.50

Note: RUR – Russian rubles

Table 2.

Descriptive results: bivariate association of legal status with subjective well-being (means and standard deviations)

	All		Regularized status		Irregular status		N
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Having rights and freedoms (1-10)	5.68	1.71	6.11	1.80	5.47	1.62 ^{**}	584
Being respected (1-10)	6.20	1.79	6.30	1.77	6.15	1.80	564
Satisfied with relations with co-ethnic migrants (1-4)	3.29	0.86	3.22	0.69	3.33	0.94	603
Satisfied with treatment of migrants by natives (1-4)	2.96	0.97	2.85	0.79	3.02	1.04 [*]	579
Self-efficacy (1-4)	3.37	0.59	3.20	0.51	3.45	0.61 ^{**}	640
Depression (1-4)	1.71	0.43	1.69	0.41	1.71	0.45	647

Note: T-test significance level

⁺ p < .10

^{*} p < .05

^{**} p < .01.

Table 3.

Multivariate results: OLS regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses)

	A. Perception of ...		B. Satisfaction with ...		C. Psychometrics	
	Having rights and freedoms	Being respected in society	Relations with other migrants	Treatment of migrants by native-borns	Self-efficacy	Depression
Legal status (Ref. = Regularized)						
Irregular	-0.58 (0.22) **	-0.45 (0.26) †	0.11 (0.08)	-0.12 (0.12)	-0.22 (0.09) *	0.16 (0.07) *
Age	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Marital status (Ref. = Currently not married)						
Currently married	-0.21 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.19)	0.12 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.01(0.07)	-0.15 (0.05) **
Number of children	-0.14 (0.11)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.07 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.06 (0.03)
Education (Ref. = Secondary school or lower)						
Some tertiary education	0.34 (0.20)	0.51 (0.24) *	0.20 (0.08) **	0.21 (0.10) *	0.10 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.05)
Current working status (Ref. = not working)						
Working	0.12 (0.19)	0.37 (0.24)	0.00 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.11)	-0.02 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.06)
Personal income (log-transformed)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Ethno-provenance (Ref. = Kyrgyz)						
Uzbek	0.28 (0.21)	0.37 (0.22)	0.29 (0.09) **	0.19 (0.12)	0.24 (0.09) **	-0.06 (0.06)
Tajik	-0.44 (0.19) *	0.24 (0.22)	0.34 (0.08) **	0.32 (0.11) **	0.09 (0.08)	-0.05 (0.05)
Peer network size	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.01) **	-0.05 (0.01) **	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01) *
City (Ref. = Nizhny Novgorod)						
Kazan	0.00 (0.21)	0.50 (0.24) *	0.11 (0.09)	0.69 (0.12) **	0.76 (0.08) **	-0.17 (0.07) *
Intercept	5.75 (0.49) **	6.28 (0.58) **	2.82 (0.20) **	2.73 (0.26) **	2.80 (0.19) **	1.80 (0.17) **
R-squared	0.09	0.04	0.09	0.15	0.28	0.08
N	570	549	580	556	620	625

Notes: RDS weight-adjusted models. Significance level

† p < .10

* p < .05

** p < .01. (two-tailed tests).