

# A Qualitative Exploration of Psychological Experiences of IDPs in Bannu, Pakistan

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The study explored psychological experiences of people displaced from North Waziristan as a result of army operation against terrorists and taking shelter in Bannu. IPA was used to draw out themes from in-depth interviews of 8 men and 4 women. Two focus groups were conducted and data was content analyzed for themes. The psychological symptoms identified included deep anxiety, identity confusion, adjustment issues, depression and a general feeling of uncertainty. Many people had been contemplating suicide, a clear reflection of gloom and despair. Women expressed an even deeper level of despair and dependency. However, a substantial number of people showed resolve to face the hardships and were very hopeful of going back to their land soon. At the same time, economic difficulties were reported by every individual ranging from soaring rents to preserving property back home. Overall, terrorism was seen in a conflicting manner.

*Key Word:* Displacement, psychological experiences, qualitative, women

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The magnitude of the social phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) is a daunting humanitarian challenge. Today, upwards of twenty-six million people (UNHCR, 2013) are believed to have become IDPs, who differ from refugees in that they are displaced within their own national borders of origin according Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of UNHCR (Kalin, 2008). Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border as a result of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violation of human rights and natural or man- made disasters.

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The major difference between living conditions of IDP's and non-IDP's is the proximity and exposure to the conflict region. It is determined that people who are near and exposed to conflict region are high on morbidity rates and degree of psychological distress. Fear of losing one's life was lower in non-IDPs than IDPs (Turnip, Klungsoyr, & Hauff, 2010). Furthermore, most of the IDPs had lost their assets, such as houses and land, during the forced migration that followed the conflict. Fewer assets among IDPs were associated with higher distress than among non-IDPs (Turnip et. al, 2010). IDPs also experienced more disturbance of education than non-IDPs, which may lead to school dropouts and job loss.

According to Ergun, Cakici, & Cakici (2008), 31.4% of displaced person thought that their socio economic condition would worsen. Displaced persons suffered more loss than non-displaced. There were similar features of psychological responses recorded in response to loss of property and to loss of close person.

Women suffer more anxiety and depression than men (Sandanger, Nygård, Sørensen, & Moum, 2004). Although women did not face any gender based violence in Mollucas conflict but many of them have been victim of domestic violence because women domestic responsibilities increase. These overload of responsibilities lead to psychological distress. Among IDPs, females had significantly higher distress level than males (Turnip et al, 2010).

The man-made disasters in low economic countries are associated with the worst outcomes (Davidson & McFarlane, 2006). There was significant between difference displaced and non-displaced persons regarding war related trauma, PTSD and depression, 9.8 % displaced person had major depression whereas non-displaced had 2.3%. (Ergun et al. 2008). Higher frequency of war-related traumatic events in displaced persons, greater suffering from post traumatic stress was found. Mels, Derluyn, Brockaert & Rosseel (2010) found that among eastern Congolese adolescents there was high exposure to violence and daily stressors due to displacement. However, resilient outcomes were also reported among returnees despite former trauma.

Kim, Torbay & Lawry (2007) surveyed 6 camps of internally displaced persons in South Darfur, Sudan. A prevalence of 31% depression was estimated to occur among the displaced women. Women reported limited right regarding marriage, movement and assess to health care. Displacement and specifically conflict-induced displacement can now be appropriately understood as a multi-faceted conflict issue, as it is not only triggered by violence in the first

place, but carries potential seeds that can spark further conflicts, such as between the host and IDP communities. The forceful eviction of persons and families from their homes results in issues of a spiraling nature. Subsequent phases of displacement rapidly deteriorate the plight of those displaced, already traumatized by the break-up of families, loss of identity, home, and belonging (Rajput, 2012). In addition, their arrival into host communities involves a complex intergroup dynamic, is often characterized by intergroup prejudices, discrimination, and power relations dominated by the host group.

In one of the most recent and local work, Mujeeb (2015) aimed at determining the psychological effects of internal displacement, that is, psychological well-being, depression, anxiety and stress (internalizing problems) of the individuals who were displaced as a result of an armed conflict in Swat, Pakistan. A sample of 126 internally displaced persons was taken including females (n = 65) and males (n = 61). Age of the sample ranged from 20 to 75 years with a mean of 47.5 years. Translated and adapted versions of Well-Being Affectometer-2 Scale and Depression Anxiety Stress Scale were used. There were differences between males and females, females being higher on internalizing problems and lower on psychological well-being, whereas family loss during displacement affected the results in the same way. Well-being, gender and family loss emerged as significant predictors of internalizing problems, and gender moderated the relationship between well-being and internalizing problems. Internal displacement may bring psychological issues for internally displaced persons.

## **Rationale**

The psychological issues of displacement have been focused upon in a very narrow manner and not many research efforts can be cited in this regard. Displacement touches and adversely magnifies a range of issues at multiple levels, individual, social, economic, legal and political issues. This was an attempt to tap the reaction and feelings of adult men and women as to how they interpreted their experience of displacement. Additionally, it was vital to know the perceptions of people working for the displaced persons.

## **Research Context**

This article is based on the research team's week long inquiry into the psychological aspects of the experience of displacement of people from North Waziristan having taken shelter in the city of Bannu, some 65 kilometers from their areas of habitat. The data was collected during October, 2014. More specific context is the displacement from North Waziristan, a tribal

area close to Khabar Pakhtoon Khawa province of Pakistan as a result of army operation i.e., Zarab-e-Azab, against terrorists making the local population go through forced displacement in haste and the numbers run into millions.

They were on average in Bannu for over a month's time. They were in the initial phase of settling themselves and were visibly upset and confused. These people were not from the army run camps. They all were residing in self developed camps, in a larger community like manner. On inquiry it was found they were from more or less the same area of North Waziristan so they were familiar with each other and knew about each other's problems. Reportedly, some seven to eight million people had been displaced and majority of them had taken up temporary refuge in Bannu city.

Relying on this first hand data will help to guide diverse audiences, such as conflict resolution practitioners, the scholarly community, and community builders, into systematically deciphering what at first appears to be a web of complex displacement issues into easily understood domains. Research participant narratives provide the bulk of this article, with interviewees representing various IDP settlements (the term camp was reserved for army run settlements).

## **Method**

Two methods were used throughout the research: interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and content analysis. IPA aims to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants. Consistent with its phenomenological origins, IPA is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants, to take their side. Content analysis helped in drawing out more general themes from the discussions pertaining to overall situation of displaced persons.

## **Participants**

Participants of this research paper were 8 men age ranging from 20 to 36 and 6 were married. There were 4 women age ranging from 26 to 40. All females were educated and maximum qualification was graduation. Focus group was also conducted to get further insight into the psychological experiences of IDPs. First focus group was comprised of 7 men all of them were IDPs and second group consisted of 5 male IDPs and 4 male representatives of NGO working in that area.

## Data Collection

Data was collected with the help of local guide and potential respondents were identified. Local guide also helped with translation and better understanding of concepts. All the participant men and women were overall sufficiently well equipped with using Urdu as language of communication. To motivate participants to participate actively small incentives such as pens, diaries etc. were distributed. Average duration of duration of interview was 70 to 80 min and for focus groups one hour was taken up on average. All interviews and discussions were recorded through note taking with the permission of the participants.

Interview guideline was prepared having questions that focused specifically on transition in the life of people and how it might have affected them. Although the main focus was on the psychological transformations, all content pertaining to economic social aspects of their lives was recorded and made part of the analysis as a standalone analysis is meaningless in such a context. Core interest was in their interpretation of the experience and what kind of mental health indicators could be located. Concomitantly, any positive resolve was also the focus, cognitions that carry a positive message.

For focus group discussions specific aim was to find out local realities in the context of huge displacement in order to get some idea about the political contextualization of the issue of displacement and general feelings at community level in terms of psychological adjustment. One focus group was conducted with mixed group of NGO representatives and community leaders. This helped getting a clear picture of extent of displacement. The second focus group consisted adult males from displaced population and the focus were on their experiences and psychologically how they interpreted the myriad of experiences.

## Data Analysis

Interview content was analyzed through IPA, and for focus groups, content analysis was carried out. Mainly six themes emerged after a very laborious exercise of analyzing interpretation of displacement experience and additionally, focus groups helped in identifying themes pertaining to general adjustment.

**Table 1: Interview Respondents' characteristics**

No. Participants	Gender	Age
P1	Male	36

P2	Male	28
P3	Male	30
P4	Male	20
P5	Male	25
P6	Male	22
P7	Male	34
P8	Male	21
P9	Female	35
P10	Female	40
P11	Female	38
P12	Female	29

**Table 2: Frequencies of the themes emerging through IPA**

Emergent Themes	Frequencies
Adjustment Issues	20
Identity Confusion	5
Depression and Deep Anxiety	12
Women Related Issues	6
Ethnocentric Thinking	7
Positive Resolve	7

## Results

### Adjustment Issues

The narratives of many KP families suggest that the most important feature of their displacement was being forcibly uprooted from their ancestral homes. IDP's all over the world go through adjustment issues so it was pretty much predictable that IDP' of North Waziristan will be going through problems like health care issues, financial problems, accommodation problems so and so forth mental issues. As it is supported by verbatim too IDP's had to face a lot of difficult time to get along with the new and unsettling situation in Bannu. IDP's showed substantial amount of resilience and patience to face the difficulties.

Six to seven people are bitten by snakes coming from nearby woods. You have no idea how difficult it is here to stay.

- We are here from past four months (staying in rented houses), rent is from ten to fifty thousand.
- Rent of 15 marla (unit) house is eighteen thousand.
- Since 2001 were in state of war. Government camps are accommodating one thousand families, sixty to seventy percent are poor hand ten percent are moderate.
- It took us three days to travel (traveling on foot) the distance of two hours with our luggage and cattle. We were eighty families in number.
- A lot of health care issues of children.

### **Identity Confusion**

When IDP's were interviewed they were in a state of conflict and confusion. Despite the physical and practical adjustment issues their major concern, question or demand was to know their status of going back to their homes. Along with other issues their conflictual state of mind had effected their mental health, especially in the case of women.

- All the belonging might be burnt, people had to stay in mosques, everything might be destroyed.
- We might be able to go back soon, but we are in state of uncertainty.
- We have children and infants with us, we have no clue when will we go back.
- We have no idea about going back.
- No idea about our homes (state of houses in North Waziristan)

### **Depression and Deep Anxiety**

Mental health of the IDP's was found to be deeply affected as supported by the verbatim. Factors which contributed to low mood and suicidal ideation of IDP's primarily are the feeling of monetary loss, feeling of uncertainty, fear, separation anxiety, being unsure and not informed about the future.

- People are suicidal; fifty to sixty percent people could be going crazy.
- Due to the mental pressure people are upset.
- Don't feel like doing anything
- We have fear of drone attacks.
- People could not move around freely.

### **Women Related Issues**

As far as women are concerned they turned out be the most effected ones. Their problems range from health issues to mental problems were just like the ones men but women could not be vocal about it. Which made them feel suffocated and more irritated than men because given had to give up their liberty.

- There are a lot of issues regarding women's health, we cannot even share.
- I can do a lot with sewing machine, can teach kids as well.
- Here (Bannu) we have to be in veil all the time. Back at our home we had more liberty.
- We have lots of problems.

### **Ethnocentric Thinking**

People from North Waziristan found stark difference in the culture of Bannu and theirs. Although the general population of Pakistan holds a unanimous opinion that all of the Pathan community have similar culture and tradition. In face to face interview with IDP's it was revealed that culture of Bannu was quite alien for people of North Waziristan. As we explored in detail it turn out that IDP's adjustment issues were arising from the culture disparity. IDP's are suffering and bearing hardships at the cost of ethnocentrism.

Due to our traditions we Pathan people cannot stay in camps, we can bear the hardships but cannot stay there (government camps).

- Men feel shame to wait in a queue to get ration.
- Because of our tradition of (parda) we have to live in small camps, almost 15 to 20 people in one camp.

### **Positive Resolve**

IDP's showed substantial amount of resilience and patience to face the difficulties. Despite the ongoing uncertainty and no formal announcement from the Government displaced had a very strong belief that they will go back to their homeland. Displaced persons had firm belief in Allah and are positive that issues will settle down.

- Government is not telling anything. InshAllah we will go back.
- We are in state of uncertainty, hopefully things will get better
- We faces a lot of hardships travelling to Bannu, Allah will help us.

### **Findings from focus group discussion**

The representatives of NGOs reported that many local people were suspicious of the motives of displaced persons. Many economic concerns were shared. Also it is important to note that adult men had conflicting ideas about the army operation. There were sentiments that supported army action and there were voices of concern. Economic issues were of immediate nature.

Participants shared that few NGOs were providing mental health services along with an army camp where a psychiatrist was available once a week. It is not difficult to understand that the depth and breadth of mental health issue do not match well with level and intensity of



services. The situation and its impact far outweighs the response being provided. Significant gaps in women health remain unattended. Overall, three main themes could be outlined: economic hardships, women related issues and depression that could lead to suicidal ideation.

## **Discussion**

In the context of internal displacement, the Geneva-based Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has explored the concept of “house” from the perspective of those displaced (Achieng, 2003), where the house is seen to symbolize material, cultural, social and economic dimensions of those displaced. In that respect, the concept of “house” extends from a mere physical structure to one that includes property rights, shelter, security and a sense of belonging and identity (Achieng, 2003).

Competing claims for finite resources, specifically the use of land, can further spark IDP/host tensions (Ferris, 2011). Certain perception may turn out to be dehumanizing such as stealing or looting the local resources or in general usurping others rightful share. Such tensions, as well as the fear of being uprooted again, contribute to some IDPs’ reluctance to embrace the local community. The displaced may then create their own sub-community, but their vulnerability can lead to targeting by their host and a myriad of other negative consequences.

The findings from the current study can be generalized to displaced people of the region in particular and to other situations of displacement in general. There is an immense need to carry out more structured analysis of the stress and adjustment related issues and to try to build up on the positive resolve that some of the people displayed. Whether the policies or interventions are aimed at the rehabilitation of the displaced communities within their host communities, or aimed at securing their safe return to ancestral towns, such efforts need to account for the interaction of individual, social, economic, legal and political spheres of those displaced.

Finding one’s place in a new society poses additional hardships for IDPs. The participants expressed deep concerns about their economic condition including integration into local community. Calderon (2010) suggests that ‘pressure from the local population, which typically must shelter a large number of outsiders with limited resources’, poses additional challenges for IDPs, impacting their fit into the society. Such pressures often result in resentment, hostility, and mistreatment of IDPs (Duncan, 2005). Calderon (2010) also suggests that displacement typically brings diversity to a new community, which may not necessarily be welcomed by the host.

As compared to other studies mentioned earlier, women did not report any harassing experience. This is mainly attributable to local customs where women are highly respected and protected and they usually do not interact openly with men. However, the women related issues need to be addressed in much detail in future research endeavors. The presence of others at the time of interview probably hampered very open expression and also the women were facing lot of pressure about adjustment.

Although humanitarian aid was being provided through various governmental and nongovernmental agencies, mental health issues remain largely unaddressed and therefore, are a matter of grave concern. Currently, the efforts to settle the IDPs back to their native home have been initiated. However, there is need to address the psychological effect in far more depth and with far more commitment.

### **Implications**

The study serves a baseline for future research. This study serves as an insight to an emerging significant psychosocial phenomenon. The research brings forward first hand information about the situation of the displaced individuals.

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