

OPPRESSION OF WOMEN, FEAR OF CHANGE, AND NEED FOR SURVIVAL: A CASE OF CONFLICT-INDUCED INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN DISTRICT JAFFARABAD, BALOCHISTAN, PAKISTAN¹

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Abstract

The humanitarian emergencies offer prospects for shifting gendered power structures, patriarchal norms, and ideas around performing masculinities and femininities by unsettling existing traditional gender roles and expectations. This study examines how conflict displacement of internally displaced persons in District Jaffarabad, Balochistan, Pakistan, leads to changes in their survival strategies and contributes to changes in their gender roles. Displacement has provided new opportunities for women, albeit at the cost of adding new roles to their existing roles. As a result, they have taken on non-traditional roles and assumed the financial responsibilities of their families. However, women's increased economic responsibilities are apparently temporary because the conflict-induced displacement has limited men's access to resources and prevented them from fulfilling their traditional role as providers for their families. This study suggests that although displacement has weakened the gendered norms and disrupted traditional gender roles and created new opportunities for women, it has been unable to alter the deeply embedded patriarchal structures and norms.

Key Words: Women, Gender Roles, Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement, Balochistan, Pakistan.

Background

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often among the most vulnerable groups; they are forcibly uprooted within their own countries due to disasters, violent conflicts, and human rights violations (Egeland, 2004; OCHA, 1999). According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998):

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (2025), the number of IDPs who fled their homes due to armed conflicts, generalized violence, human rights abuses, and disasters worldwide stood at 83.4 million at the end of 2024, the highest figure ever recorded. Of these, 73.5 million were displaced due to conflict and violence, while 9.8 million were forced to flee because of disasters. The countries with the highest numbers of IDPs included Sudan with 11.6 million, Syria with 7.4 million, Colombia with 7.3 million, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with 6.2 million, and Yemen with 4.8 million. These countries represent nearly half of the world's internally displaced population. These figures reveal very little about the enormity of the issue, which is much more complex in its dynamics and effects. Internal displacement poses significant challenges not only for displaced families but also for the broader society across various sectors, including social and political instability, increased pressure on resources, and economic strain (IDMC/NRC, 2009; Holmes, 2008; Women's Refugee Commission, 1998).

Guiding Principles on IDPs (1998) articulate that "internally displaced persons are entitled to enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic laws, as do other persons in their country". Although the legal status of internally displaced persons differs from that of refugees, they are entitled to basic amenities, such as food, water, medical care, and shelter, in accordance with international humanitarian law, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In practice, the majority of the IDPs are denied access to necessities and face gross violations of their human rights. They are often exposed to mental health issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a lack of access to sexual and health services. It is also pertinent to mention that the provision of basic amenities to IDPs, including their long-term rehabilitation, is primarily the responsibility of their own governments (UNCHR, 1995); however, the majority of the states faced with IDP crises fail to carry out this responsibility effectively and efficiently due to inadequate resources, weak institutional arrangements, and lack of political will (Holmes, 2008).

This means that the IDPs often face a lack of adequate protection and support, leading to a huge gap and a significant need for assistance from international organizations and other governments. Moreover, the lack of age- and gender-disaggregated data on the IDP population limits the ability of organizations to plan and deliver targeted support, which means that various groups such as women and girls, elderly, transgender persons, and persons with disabilities within the IDP population are unlikely to receive any assistance, even if the government or NGOs are eager to offer it (IDMC/NRC, 2009).

Women and girls constitute nearly half of the displaced population (Ni Aolain, 2009; Ganguly-Scrase & Vogl, 2008; UN-ESCWA, 2006; UNHCR, 2008; Kaapanda & Fenn, 2006). However, there is limited recognition that forced displacement is gendered (Behera, 2006). Displacement affects women and men differently across the various stages of humanitarian emergencies (El Jack, 2003). These differences predominantly stem from unequal gendered power relations and gender inequality between the spouses, which also relegate women to a subordinate position of a caregiver (Ni Aolain, 2009). Internally displaced women are expected to uphold social and cultural norms to protect their families' honor, even when they have been driven out of their family or community support, or their husbands have abandoned them due to their inability to fulfill their role as breadwinners (Ganguly-Scrase & Vogl, 2008).

Internally displaced persons are not a homogeneous group (IDMC/NRC, 2009; Kaapanda & Fenn, 2006); they include women, girls, people with disabilities, transgender people, the elderly, and children with particular needs, issues, concerns, vulnerabilities, and coping

strategies based on their age, social class, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, and group membership (IDMC, 2009). The impact of displacement is disproportionate and not uniform for all women. For instance, ethnic minority women in Sudan faced marginalization due to their ethnic minority status, resulting in an enormous death toll among them because of armed conflict and its consequences (El Jack, 2002). Armed conflicts and displacement have profound psychological, social, physical, sexual, and economic consequences on women, such as psychological trauma, breakdown of traditional support systems or social safety nets, the loss of close family members, long-distance travel to safety, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation at the hands of aid workers (Women and Forced Migration, 2006; El Jack, 2002). The men's deprivation of their livelihood, land, and economic opportunities can contribute to their inability to fulfil gendered expectations of being the provider and protector of their families. Generally, in any armed conflict, men are expected to protect women and children from harm, exploitation, and violence inflicted by other men, including the combatants. When men fail to fulfill these roles, they develop feelings of failure, frustration, and guilt, which can contribute to the outburst of violence directed towards those who are dependent on men for their support, particularly women, girls, and children (El-Bushra, 2003).

Displacement can result in shortage of food due to disruption in families' livelihood and sources of income, and this is worsened by disparities in the distribution of relief by the aid workers who assume men as the primary heads of their families, excluding women from decisions around the distribution of aid; hence, impacting women and girls disproportionately and increasing their vulnerability to malnutrition (UN-ESCWA, 2006). Infants, lactating mothers, and pregnant women have specific needs, particularly those that may be more challenging to meet during armed conflicts and displacement, resulting in iron and vitamin deficiencies in women due to the lack of availability of these essential supplements (Al Gasseer, 2004). It is also pertinent to mention that the relief and resettlement policies and programs fail to recognize the unique needs, issues, concerns, and vulnerabilities of women and girls, often exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering their long-term recovery (Women and Forced Migration, 2006).

During displacement, the lack of access to employment and income-generating activities, as well as a shortage of essential resources, including food, makes it extremely difficult for women to fulfill their household responsibilities (El-Bushra, 2003; El Jack, 2002). Additionally, humanitarian organizations often relegate displaced women to the status of victims by providing them with limited space to participate in decisions about aid distribution and the long-term rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (Banerjee, in Ganguly-Scrase & Vogl, 2008). Women also lack access to reproductive health services owing to deteriorated security situation, lack of health care infrastructure and trained healthcare staff, and their restricted mobility due to rigid socio-cultural norms (Women and Forced Migration, 2006). Hence, the disruption of the healthcare infrastructure and supply systems severely obstructs women's ability to obtain family planning information and emergency obstetric care, resulting in unsafe abortions, stillbirths, premature births, and unwanted pregnancies due to the lack of access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (Al Gasseer, 2004).

Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement in Balochistan

Balochistan covers 43.6 percent of Pakistan's land area, with a 770 km-long coastline along the Arabian Sea (Andley, 2006; ADB, 2005), bordering Iran to the west and Afghanistan to the northwest (Grare, 2006). Despite its enormous size, it accounts for only 6.2 percent of Pakistan's total population of 14.89 million (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Balochistan accounts for a significant share of Pakistan's mineral and energy resources. It is rich in vast

mineral reserves, including gold, copper, uranium, aluminum, platinum, and silver. Despite being the wealthiest province in terms of resources, Balochistan remains underdeveloped and economically impoverished, lagging behind other provinces in human development (AITPN, 2007). The prevalence of poverty is starkly marked by food insecurity, lack of access to basic services, high unemployment rates, limited economic opportunities, low incomes, and a poor quality of life. A lack of access to basic services, such as education, healthcare, safe and clean drinking water, sanitation, and road and transportation infrastructure, also contributes to critical issues. Additionally, poor governance, lack of democratic legitimacy, participation of the masses in decision-making processes, a lack of transparency, misuse of public authority and funds, and lack of accountability in public institutions, as well as the failure of governments to deliver socio-economic and political benefits to the masses, further marginalized the most vulnerable sections of society (ADB, 2004). The long-standing grievances over political and economic marginalization, exploiting its resources without democratic legitimacy, and disregard for public sentiments and their say are central to the ongoing conflict in Balochistan province.

Baloch insurgents have staged several uprisings against the Pakistani state to demand greater control over their political, economic, and administrative affairs, as well as a larger share of the local population in development projects and benefits derived from natural resource exploitation (IDMC/NRC, 2009). These resentments persist today due to the absence of economic and social development in Balochistan, the exclusion of the local population from decisions on major regional projects, and the central government's lack of seriousness in taking up these issues through consensus (Grare, 2006). Furthermore, the federal government perceives the violence in Balochistan as being instigated by a few 'miscreant' tribal leaders who undermine the state authority by misleading the public through manipulation and coercion (Dunne, 2006).

The alleged rape of a medical doctor employed at Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), apparently by an army officer in Sui tehsil of the Dera Bugti district in January 2005, ignited the most recent phase of Balochistan's long-standing conflict. The incident served as a flashpoint, exacerbating the decades-long issues of political and economic marginalization, exploitation of natural resources, and perceived injustice by the central government (AITPN, 2007). The situation in Balochistan intensified when the Pakistani government launched a full-scale military operation against Baloch militant groups in the region. This escalation followed the firing of eight rockets at a paramilitary camp on the outskirts of the district Kohlu during the visit of then-President General Pervez Musharraf (IDMC/NRC, 2009; AITPN, 2007). As a result of military operations and aerial bombardment in the Marri and Bugti tribal areas in the districts of Kohlu and Dera Bugti, hundreds of thousands of people fled to safer places (AHRC, 2006).

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has estimated that around 100,000 people, mainly women and children from Dera Bugti and Kohlu districts, were forcibly displaced from their homes following the eruption of armed conflict between the Baloch tribespeople and the law-enforcement agencies in the early summer of 2005. Nearly 40,000 people returned home in 2009, while the remaining 1.5 million remained displaced. The government did not declare a single officially recognized IDP camp in the affected areas of the province. The displaced population was located on the outskirts of Bolan, Sibi, Naseerabad, Jaffarabad, and Quetta districts in Balochistan, as well as in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab (IDMC/NRC, 2009; AHRC, 2006). They lived in miserable conditions in makeshift camps, lacking access to necessities such as food, safe drinking water, adequate shelter, healthcare, sanitation, and

schooling (AITPN, 2009). The International and national humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations, were denied access by the government to places where IDPs were residing in temporary settlements, apparently due to security reasons (IDMC/NRC, 2009).

This study aims to address a knowledge gap in the existing research on the gender aspects of displacement experienced by the Bugti tribe in Balochistan. It examines how conflict-induced displacement has altered traditional views of masculinity and femininity among internally displaced persons of the Bugti tribe. Additionally, it seeks to understand the extent to which these changes in gender roles, brought about by displacement, create opportunities for ideological transformation, especially in inter-household and intra-household gender dynamics.

Research Methods

The research area constituted two Tehsils, Jhatpat and Sohbatpur, in Jaffarabad district, where a significant number of Bugti displaced persons resided in temporary camps (a tehsil is an administrative subdivision of a district). District Jaffarabad is located near the border of Sindh province, making it convenient for IDPs to cross the provincial boundary and search for employment.

The relevant data were gathered through six focus group interviews (FGIs) with three male and three female groups, key informant interviews (KIIs), informal discussions, non-participant observation, and secondary data sources. Each focus group interview included 5 to 7 members. Initially, the study considered employing in-depth interviews as a primary data collection tool; however, the field situation did not allow for maintaining privacy during in-depth interviews at the household level. Given that the Bugti IDPs resided in a close-knit community — often extended families — associated through blood with their neighbours, who typically visited guests hosted by the nearest houses as part of their culture of hospitality. Nevertheless, it was unethical to request privacy for an in-depth interview under such circumstances. Hence, the focus group interview appeared to be the most suitable tool for collecting data for this study. The focus group interviews facilitated the collection of more information within a shorter time than individual interviews. A focus group interview checklist was developed to ensure that all required information was obtained and that no critical data-collection components were missed. The study's key informants included officials from the Home and Tribal Affairs Department of the Government of Balochistan, international NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), local NGO officials, social workers, community leaders, and journalists. The key informants provided critical insights and assisted in identifying and locating IDPs, as no preexisting information on the IDP population was available.

Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using “thematic analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were coded and grouped into subcategories, then organized into main categories. Finally, these categories were combined into overarching themes. Principles of “respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice” (Creswell & Poth, 2016) were strictly observed throughout the study. Oral informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to their participation in the focus group interview. Participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect their identities and maintain their privacy.

Location and number of focus group interviews in Jaffarabad District

Location of IDPs		Ethnicity	Number of FGIs	Gender-Disaggregation
Destination	Origin			

Judair Shakh Tehsil Jhatpat	Dera Bugti	Bugti	02	01 Female, 01 Male
Noor Pur Tehsil Sohbatpur	Dera Bugti	Bugti	02	01 Female, 01 Male
Thul Tehsil Sohbatpur	Dera Bugti	Bugti	02	01 Female, 01 Male

Results

This section presents study findings and organizes them into three main thematic areas: the migration patterns of conflict-induced internal displacement, changes in survival strategies after displacement, and changes in survival strategies that account for shifts in gender roles among displaced persons of the Bugti tribe in Jaffarabad District, Balochistan Province.

Migration Pattern of Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement

The majority of the Bugti displaced persons fled from Dera Bugti since December 2005 due to the clash between the paramilitary forces and the Bugti tribesmen. The first group of IDPs arrived in Jaffarabad district following the attack of military forces on the fort of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, the tribes' chieftain, on March 17, 2005. More and more people fled from their homes as the military operation escalated and reached its peak with the assassination of Nawab Bugti on August 26, 2006.

"When our Nawab left for the mountains to protest against the military operation, he also ordered us to leave wherever we feel safe and return once the situation normalizes (Mir Hassan Bugti, 49 years old)."

One of the members of the Bugti IDP family recalled the horrible experiences and unfolded the story of the journey from Dera Bugti to Dera Allah Yar in December 2005.

"We walked miles for five continuous days and nights. Mass exodus was on our way, due to continuous traveling and lack of food and safe drinking water, we, along with many of our relatives, had to pass through the terrible loss of bodies. I saw two children die on the way. We could not do much for the victim's family except offer silent tears of condolence. The mother who lost her children stayed for a while at the place where the children were buried and started walking with snobs and tears rolling down her face (Lal Jan, 45 years old man)."

The distance between Dera Bugti and Dera Allah Yar is estimated at 231 km, a nearly four-hour drive, and an additional 26 km (1 hour) of road travel to Sohbatpur from Dera Allah Yar.

"Those Bugti families who were very poor, dependent on wage labor, and could not afford to rent a pickup or a truck escaped by walking through the mountains. They were more vulnerable, since several places were risky due to land mines (One of the key informants, a 27-year-old man)."

“Even though we had no time to collect our clothes, in the thunder of blasts and heavy shelling of rockets, we left our home and escaped in a state of horror, and even forgot to carry our belongings, without knowing where to go for refuge (Razo, 28-year-old woman).”

Participants reported that some families fled from Dera Bugti before the military operation in search of safer places. The vast majority did not have enough time to collect their belongings and left everything behind, thinking they would return home as the situation normalized. In some cases, IDPs moved with all of their belongings, including animals and household items. The decision to move from the conflict zone was primarily made and exercised by the male heads of the families.

“Situation was extremely tense for many days; time and again, there was an exchange of heavy fire between the Bugti militia and the armed forces. Before we could catch fire, we left our homes. Jaffarabad was nearest to Dera Bugti, and we (the men) were familiar with the area, so we decided to come here. We moved here hoping to find work (Daad Karim Bugti, 33-year-old man).”

Displaced families walked for miles in search of safe places, including the pasture lands. They informed us that the routes to the area were heavily mined, making it risky and dreadful to escape in such a situation. Even after being forcibly displaced from Dera Bugti, the social ties among the displaced families remained strong. Approximately eight to ten displaced families resided in the vicinity, mostly having blood ties. Most of the displaced Bugti families worked as agricultural laborers for local landlords (Zamindars), who, in return, provided them with protection and food and allowed them to set up makeshift camps and graze their animals on their lands.

Changes in Survival Strategies after Displacement

The majority of the displaced Bugti families relied on livestock herding—specifically goats, sheep, and cattle—as their primary source of income prior to displacement. Few families also possessed small landholdings and were engaged in subsistence farming, as well as relying on the seasonal movement of herds between summer and winter pastures – essentially a transhumant system. The pastoral communities of the Bugti tribe were forced to migrate to suitable grazing lands as a survival strategy due to harsh winters and the limited availability of year-round pastures. These nomadic communities were continually on the move throughout the year in search of grazing lands, with no fixed base. They migrated from the uplands to the lowlands in winter and back in summer. The migration route of the pastoral communities was fixed, and along the way, they had connections with local communities that provided them with food, shelter, and grazing facilities. In return, the Bugti nomads sold their animals and animal products, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and butter, and provided farm labor. Before displacement, some male members of the displaced families were also engaged in wage labor or menial work, as it was challenging for them to make ends meet.

Before coming here, we had cattle, sheep, and goats. We were herdsman. It was the primary source of our survival. A continuous journey for days and nights led to severe impoverishment due to the loss of livestock. There were economic hardships even before displacement, but at least life was safe (Atta Muhammad, 31-year-old man).”

Prior to displacement, men were the sole breadwinners of their families, while women were responsible for household chores. These responsibilities included caring for children and the elderly, cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water for household use, and caring for animals. These reproductive roles were typically associated with women due to their status as mothers and wives, often confining them to the private sphere of the family. At the same time, men dominated the public realm as breadwinners and family providers. The divide between the public and private, the inside and outside world, was maintained through strict enforcement of the gender norms, notions around appropriate masculinity and femininity, and men's honor. Men were expected to protect the honor of their families through domination, control, and strict adherence of the family members, particularly women, to gender norms. Hence, women's mobility was strictly confined and controlled not only because of the tribal norms and customs but also to protect the family's honor and maintain their safety and security.

"We used to work inside our homes. We were responsible for cooking, caring for the children, washing clothes, fetching water, and milking the animals. Our men used to work outside; they devoted the whole day to caring for animals. Now we must also work with our men in agricultural farms (Gul Naz, 32-year-old woman)."

Before Displacement, men primarily controlled resources such as livestock, land, and revenue from these resources, and they made all significant decisions regarding crop cultivation, the buying and selling of livestock, and the sale of produce from the land. Men, being the head of the family, were typically expected to provide security and protection to their families. Women were expected to sustain gender norms and provide care for their families and children. Displacement has led to the emergence of new roles and responsibilities for the displaced Bugti women, in addition to their previously held traditional gender roles associated with household chores and caregiving. The women were forced to take on additional roles, engaging in farm work alongside their men. These tasks included planting seeds, weeding and thinning, harvesting crops, and post-harvest work along with their men.

"We also work as laborers, as the earnings of our men are not enough to manage family expenses (Mah Bano, 28-year-old woman)."

The majority of IDP families were living in extended family arrangements, and their earnings were insufficient to cover household expenses. Each household comprised 10 to 15 members, and for many IDP families, income was mainly inconsistent, depending upon the availability of seasonal work. As a result of displacement, the traditionally held roles of women have changed, and women have become economically active and more mobile than they were earlier; however, their mobility was restricted to the farm and their camp. It was comparatively likely for the displaced Bugti women to help their men with farm work because it was common to see women working as farm laborers in Jaffarabad district.

"We work here as farm laborers. Every family member (both women and men, except children) works on agricultural farms to earn a living (Yar Muhammad, 34 years old)."

The lack of access to essential services such as food, shelter, safe and clean drinking water, healthcare, and education was further aggravated for the Bugti displaced persons, obviously due to their displacement.

“As soon as peace was restored, we would not stay here for a minute. We would go back. We are not here with a clear mind. You can see our condition. No one would leave his land willingly. We are compelled to harvest one hectare of land only for a meager amount of wheat. We earn half of our normal wages. We are forced to drink contaminated water. We work all day but earn little, which is insufficient to cover our household expenses. We are uncertain about our future. Of course, we are dismayed at being forced to abandon our homes. We cannot access basic healthcare, education, and potable water. We live in pathetic conditions (Shah Muhammad, 43-year-old man).”

The displaced men also revealed that gender roles had differed before the displacement. Displacement forced women to engage as farm laborers alongside their men to meet family expenses, as displaced families lost most of their belongings and valuable assets during the displacement. On the contrary, women’s participation in the economic sphere outside the home has not reduced their household burden. Women’s and men’s tasks were defined and clear even after dislocation. Women helped their men with the farm labor, while simultaneously managing household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, childcare, fetching water, milking animals, and collecting fuel. It is important to mention that although women’s gender roles have changed, men still think that carrying out reproductive work is women’s responsibility.

“Before displacement, we never allowed our women to work outside, but now they have to do so, and still, they are working under our very noses. They are working like male members of the family because whatever we (men) earn is not enough to survive (Bahoo, 54-year-old man).”

“We have to manage our houses, cook, clean, wash clothes, fetch water, and milk animals, which are routine tasks. Besides these tasks, we must help our men harvest the wheat, collect it, and store it. However, our men do not help us in household chores (Mai Kano, 35-year-old woman).”

“Of course, those who earn have a final say in family matters. My sons earn and decide everything. We women must rely on them; they are our guardians (Sani, a 57-year-old woman).”

The notion of women’s identity tied with men is so internalized and maintained, persisting even after their displacement, that women did not think of themselves as fully independent human beings capable of exercising their own agency in family matters.

“The identity of women is often defined by men, ranging from the family through fathers, husbands, and sons to broader cultural and traditional contexts. They look after their fathers, husbands, and sons, have children, and stay home. Their identity is defined in relation to the men in their family: you are the daughter of someone, the wife of someone, or the mother of someone. Women are not taken as a full person (Zar Bakht, 38 years old).”

“For us, fathers and brothers make major decisions before marriage, and our ownership is transferred to the husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law. Decision

making is men's domain, and they never consult us when deciding about our lives (Mah Bano, 28-year-old woman)."

Women were unable to decide on matters regarding their reproductive health, such as family size and contraceptive use. Simultaneously, they had no access to safe, affordable, and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their own choice.

"I have three kids, two daughters and one son; all born here in this temporary camp without professionally qualified doctors. My mother-in-law and other aged women of the family were with me at the time of the delivery of my babies. My husband has never asked me to decide the number of children (Mai Shareen, 29-year-old woman)."

Displaced families had no access to safe, clean drinking water, toilets, or healthcare services. One of the community health workers indicated that the Bugti IDPs, particularly women and children, are faced with serious health issues and infectious diseases such as malaria, typhoid, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C, skin diseases, and malnutrition due to poor sanitation and lack of access to clean drinking water. They use herbal medicines for their treatment due to limited income and lack of access to healthcare. Health is not only a concern that threatens their lives; thousands of school-age children were out of school and were deprived of their right to education. They were forced to drink contaminated water, along with their animals, from the same source: stored rainwater in small ponds.

"Displacement has not only snatched socio-economic entitlements but also compelled displaced families to keep their selves aloof from the local people. They were living in such deplorable and pathetic conditions that local people seemed indifferent. Inhumane displaced conditions are combined with serious health issues as these families have no access to health services to save their offspring (One of the key informants, a 28-year-old man)."

"We feel alienated from the local population. We are treated as refugees. Survival has become terrible after forcible displacement. We and our animals drink from the same pond of saline water, which is contaminated (Atta Muhammad, 31-year-old man)."

The host communities in District Jaffarabad seemed suspicious of the large number of IDPs' presence in their area. This distrust largely stemmed from their precarious status as internally displaced persons who were mainly from the Bugti tribe. The local population expressed concerns about a potential change in the demographic composition. They believed that the Bugti IDPs could settle permanently in their area, potentially altering the district's population and, consequently, the political landscape. A significant political divide appeared to exist between the local population and the Bugti IDPs. Hence, they were unwelcome and faced stigma and shame for leaving their homeland and settling on land owned by the local landlords, who exploited the Bugti IDPs for cheap labor.

"The population of district Jaffarabad has suddenly increased, and the law and order situation has deteriorated. The situation is worsening daily (One of the key informants, a 39-year-old man)."

The displaced families did not receive any support, either in cash or in kind, from the government or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), except for a few local organizations that organized medical camps for the Bugti IDPs to treat minor health issues. The IDPs had a strong desire to return home, provided that the situation allows it or that peace conditions are restored.

“We would return to our homes as peace would be restored. Nothing has changed for us five years later, and we still keep waiting for things to settle down (Abdur Raseed, 35-year-old man).”

“We would not beg for survival; whatever is written in our destiny, would we have to go through that? None of the organizations supported us (Shah Muhammad, 43 43-year-old).”

“Everybody comes and sees our pathetic conditions and disappears. Nothing has changed till today. Even though we were not helped when we left our homes, property, and everything (Shah Bibi, 26 a 26-year-old woman).”

Changes in Survival Strategies Account for Changes in Gender Roles

Even though the women were economically active and contributed to the household economy, they were still responsible for household chores—a strong demarcation of gender roles between men and women seemed to exist. At the same time, women were unable to exercise control over their income—the assumption of productive responsibilities was considered as an extension of their reproductive roles. Men, as the heads of the family, controlled all significant decisions within and outside the household, and women’s roles were mainly limited to the household and farm labor. Nevertheless, this division of labor has essentially increased women’s vulnerability by limiting their access to and control over resources and decision-making, and forcing them to fulfill multiple roles both within the household and on the farm.

“For us, life is the same; nothing has changed. Here, we work on agricultural farms to support our men. Before displacement, men were meeting household needs; now, whatever we earn, we give it to our men. It is the only way to manage our survival; otherwise, life could be more difficult than it is now. Working as a farm laborer at the same time when we have to take care of the house and the kitchen is really hectic (Mai Shareen, 29-year-old woman).”

The Bugti tribes lived in an isolated area surrounded by mountainous terrain and maintained a strong cultural distinctiveness. After the displacement, the Bugti IDPs were somewhat exposed to other cultures, and women were forced to adapt to the changes in their gender roles. The displaced men informed that the displacement has impacted their tribal norms and customs to a greater extent. Before, the displacement veil (purdah) of women was more restricted, and they were limited to the four walls of their houses. However, this has become somewhat flexible after the displacement, as tasks requiring women’s mobility, such as fetching water and working in the fields, have become necessary.

“After displacement, we relinquished our Balochi ravaj (customs). All family members, both women and men, are working now. We cannot maintain the gender division of labor because there is no room for that. Each of us earns around 50 to 100 rupees daily, and within this amount, it is tough to manage everything (Muhammad Murad, 45-year-old man).”

“Our tribal norms have been affected. It is not our norm for women to work outside their homes. We (men) are bound in chains and unable to meet household expenses. (Shah Muhammad, 43-year-old man).”

The displacement has led to changes in the gender roles of women, whereby women were forced to engage in productive work. Men who previously controlled all household income and resources before displacement continue to control all income and decisions about its spending after the displacement. As a result of displacement, men lost access to and control over their previously held resources, including land, livestock, and associated income-generating activities, such as crop production and livestock raising. Hence, displacement restricted men's access to and control over resources, such as land and livestock, from which they primarily derived their wealth and power. Despite being economically active and contributing to household income, women continue to depend on men, who predominantly meet household needs and make financial decisions after displacement.

“Dislocation has forced us to come out of our homes. Here we have only responsibilities; no control over decisions, even no control over our earnings (Mah Bano, 28-year-old woman).”

“Women are expected to carry out whatever was agreed upon by the elders (men) of the family, even if it involves risks to us. Decisions about education, marriage, and the number of children are all taken by fathers, brothers, and husbands (Mah Bano, 28-year-old woman).”

Displacement has altered traditional household roles, with women assuming roles previously held by men. On the other hand, men have lost their traditional roles because they have lost access to resources, such as land and livestock, that enabled them to make significant financial decisions. Lack of access to resources has led to inadequate income, food insecurity, malnutrition, especially among infants and children, inadequate clothing, and lack of access to healthcare due to income shortage. Before displacement, there was a clear divide in the roles men and women played. For instance, men were responsible for farming and herding, while women typically handled household chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water, and caregiving. Women also collected and stored the produce, particularly during the post-harvest period, ensuring household food security. After the displacement, women's gender roles have been altered, and they have assumed productive roles in addition to their reproductive responsibilities since men alone were unable to provide for the family and afford to finance the household expenses, especially with many children and dependents.

Despite women having assumed new gender roles in paid work, their labor is unrecognized, undervalued, and less paid in comparison with men. The gender norms surrounding appropriate behavior, as well as socio-cultural and tribal norms and restrictions, have confined women to the private sphere of the home, limiting their acquisition of skills, knowledge, and

competencies that could have enabled them to work and earn a decent living. This has resulted mainly in women's social and economic dependency, which has provided the basis for male dominance and control over women. Thus, women with no formal education, knowledge, or skills were limited in their capacity to explore avenues and create alternatives to improve their lives.

Discussion and Conclusion

Displacement affects women and men in different ways, with more serious and disproportionate disadvantages for women. "Women experience significant disadvantages in the course of armed conflict, but it does not necessarily follow that men are always the perpetrators and therefore the winners, and women the losers" (Byrne in El Jack, 2003). Women are differently affected due to their family responsibilities, resulting in "reduced access to resources to cope with household responsibilities and increased physical and emotional violence" (El Jack, 2003). Forced displacement is the inevitable result of the armed conflict, which affects gender roles and gender relations through disruption in family ties and community destabilization (El Jack, 2003). The prolonged armed conflicts and displacement intensify social exclusion by pushing the affected population into chronic poverty and limiting their access to healthcare, education, and livelihood. Additionally, the unequal distribution of aid and food items during the armed conflict and forced displacement exacerbates women and girls' vulnerability to malnutrition (UN-ESCWA, 2006).

The study findings demonstrate that the deplorable conditions caused by protracted displacement pushed displaced Bugti women to assume responsibilities in the public domain that were previously denied to them. Before displacement, men were the primary breadwinners of the family, and women were responsible for household chores. Displacement has not only compelled women to assume new roles in the public sphere but also disrupted gender norms among the Bugti tribe regarding women's roles, presumed to be confined to the domestic sphere. Although women have become economically active and, to a limited extent, mobile, their burden has increased significantly. Even after displacement, the tasks of women and men were clearly defined, and women's participation in the economic sphere has not reduced their burden in the household. Women assisted their husbands on the farm, managing both household chores and caregiving responsibilities simultaneously. Women's workload has increased after displacement because they were expected to engage in multiple roles — both productive and reproductive — with lesser control over their income, time, and mobility.

The study findings suggest that the changes in women's gender roles and their increased involvement in the economic sphere warrant critical analysis, as their temporary economic responsibilities after displacement appear to be a result of this shift. Conflict-induced displacement has limited men's access to and control over resources that previously enabled them to collect wealth, exercise power, and make major household decisions. As a result of displacement, the men have become unable to fulfill their traditional role as breadwinners, requiring women to assume new responsibilities in the public domain. However, the increased involvement of women in economic activity may not be sustained once the situation normalizes and displaced persons return home. Hence, displacement has provided some space to redefine gender norms. However, it has not offered substantial alterations in the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and biases in Baloch society, which are primarily responsible for disempowering women and perpetuating the gendered power structures.

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