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The Internally Displaced Women



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Internally displaced women represents the epitome of the marginalization and the disenfranchisement of the dislocated in South Asia. Their identity and individuality are collapsed into the homogeneous category of 'victim' and community, devoid of agency, unable and incapable of representing herself, powerless and superfluous. In South Asia women being portrayed as 'symbol of honor', are often used as objects for contests of male power. They are raped, molested and tortured to shame the men of 'other' communities.

The use of gender as a category of analysis is premised on the assumption that women experience dislocation and displacement in a particularly gendered way. A gendered analysis prompts an exploration of the implications of the social construction of masculinities and femininities and the tension. Understanding the particular vulnerabilities experienced by women is an essential first step in ensuring that displaced women are protected.

Women are vulnerable to sexual assault and rape both during and after displacement. Too often, they face sexual violence in the camps, which are typically crowded and insecure. In some cases, the distribution of food is used to coerce female beneficiaries into engaging in sexual acts. Rate of domestic violence often is higher during displacement.

Relief camps do not provide for the much needed private space for the female survivors and are forced to compromise on bare necessities like maintenance of hygiene. This is especially worse during the difficult days of the month. Reproductive health care is not adequately taken into account as women's needs. Pregnant and lactating mothers do not receive adequate attention and nursing facilities and care in the relief camps. Expecting mothers with irregular eating habits give birth to malnourished babies. Complications during pregnancy, childbirth, claim many lives.

Both women and men may struggle to find suitable jobs, particularly when traditional livelihoods are destroyed. With the desperate need to support their families many women and especially girls often take up prostitution. Or may even fall prey to human traffickers. They are hardly ever brought back into the mainstream of society.

Education is one sacrifice which is both expected and made mostly by the

female child of the family. Conflict victims are vulnerable to some of the long-term psychological effects like lack of concentration, depression, anxiety and related issues. Its found that mostly women are prone to such psychological impacts.

Solutions to displacement should be based on voluntary and informed consent of all IDPs, but the male head of household are often the decision makers. Moreover, for those returning to their communities of origin, resolution of land and property disputes continues to be strongly affected by the gender of the person making a claim, and women who lost their spouses are more prone to discrimination. In statutory land tenure systems, property deeds often are issued in the name of the male head of household making it difficult for widows or orphans to claim their traditional land and property. Customary systems often also limit women's inheritance and usage rights.

Displacement often leads to dramatic changes in the family structure and gender roles, relations and identities. In conflict situations, women are pushed into the role of head of households because men are recruited to combat, stay behind to maintain land, or migrate in search of work. Men frustrated at being forced to live off a woman's earning take it out on the women in the form of increased domestic violence.

Being aware of the gender differences in displacement is important in reviewing laws and policies to ensure that they do not, intentionally or unintentionally, result in discriminatory treatment. The protection, care, resettlement need to become more gender sensitive, gender inclusive and gender neutral. For example gender should be taken into account in setting up systems for the provision of humanitarian assistance, such as food, health care, and other relief supplies. Female-headed households should be given special attention prior to during and after. However, to practically address the issues of internally displaced women, gender biased attitudes and patriarchal nature of the societies should end.



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