
**EXPERIENCES OF THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED
WOMEN LIVING IN HOST COMMUNITIES OF
ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The impact of insecurity, including insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping, has recently had devastating effects on the lives of citizens, leading to loss of lives, valuable properties, and means of livelihood, as well as painful displacement and other burdens. Women and children, particularly in the most affected areas of Northern Nigeria, are especially vulnerable due to their dependency and weakness. This study examines the experiences of internally displaced women living as destitute in Ile-Ife town, Osun State, Nigeria. Utilizing a descriptive research design, qualitative data were gathered from in-depth interviews with four selected internally displaced women from Zamfara State. The data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis approaches. The findings reveal that displaced women, especially those from the North, who are now settlers in Ile-Ife, face severe social and economic hardships, forcing some into begging for survival. These hardships include forced displacement, destitution, begging, social exclusion, and psychological trauma. The study concludes that these circumstances have significantly diminished the pride and dignity of many displaced women, causing them to accept a second-class status. The study recommends that policymakers, stakeholders in development, NGOs, civil society, and human rights groups should prioritize addressing the issues faced by displaced women.

Key Words: Internally displaced persons, destitution, begging, banditry, insurgency

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Introduction

Nigeria is experiencing numerous security challenges in recent times (Ojo, 2024). These challenges include banditry, cattle rustling, insurgency, kidnaping, militancy, robbery, and brigandage the treats of secession, theft among others. These problems cut across all regions of the country although there are variations in the type and intensity from regions to regions. The effects of these insecurities are pronounced among the most vulnerable groups like women, children, and the poor and under privileged. In the North, insurgency, banditry and kidnapping are more prevalent. Banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling have had serious negative consequences on families Usman, et al (2021).

In the North there are many widows who are left to cater and care for themselves and their wards. These women are mostly socially vulnerable as a result of lack of education, employment and worst still the loss of a bread winner and abode. This situation exposes women to social disability or destitute and lead them to engage in begging as a means for sustenance for both themselves and their wards, (Usman, et al 2021). Remarrying is often difficult for them in view of the burden of having to take care of the children left to them by their deceased husbands and the fear of a prospective husband to shoulder the responsibilities of the children.

Some of these women go out to other states within Nigeria to engage in begging. They are often forced to resort to such a status because the state no longer takes care of the widows and the bereaved children. From such experiences, women encounter numerous challenges that include; poverty, lack of food and shelter, loss of dignity, respect and self-worth, social exploitation, physical and mental retardation and so on. This study was undertaken to explore the experiences of such destitute women who are displaced and are living in an alien land and strange culture. To describe the kind of social, psychological and economic situation which displaced women experience in a land away from their home of origin. This will contribute in designing policies that will assist in planning and implementing progressive policies that will enhance the lives of displaced women.

Displaced woman as a socially disabled

Displaced people are affected in numerous ways which prevent their social functioning in society (Wang, et al, 2020). Special attention by all stake holders needs to be focus to disabled particularly women to improve their participation as citizens (Collins, et al, 2022) Failure in such wise predispose them to begging as a means for seeking livelihood. However, rarely do destitute or disabled receive the needed attention for the improvement of their condition (King, et al, 2023). The resultant pessimism predisposes them to social, psychological, physical and economic troubles (Rezapour Mirsaleh, et al, 2024)

Displaced women are seen as socially disabled because of the socially distressful situation which they face. The conventional cultural practice predominant in the North consider women as a supporter in the family affair. The husband, as a bread

winner is responsible for providing the family with food and shelter (Belaid, et al, 2024). Often, women only serve as an assistance and help in mainly taking care of household chores and taking care of children. Thus, the death of a husband serve as a drawback to them and changes their status from supporter to main breadwinner. This place them in a condition of shouldering greater and difficult task of taking care of herself and her children. Moreover, most of such women are not educated or skilled hence they become vulnerable to hardship, poverty and insecurity, Belaid, et al, (2024).

Since they are socially disadvantaged, it becomes difficult to bear with the difficulties which living as a single parent, far away from relatives and at the same time taking care of children (Farooq, 2018). Finding food and shelter becomes very difficult. Thus the beginning of destitution which in all instances include lack of food, shelter among others. Policies for care of destitute are often ineffective or not properly implemented to ease the problems of the disabled (Ryan, 2020). The World health organization conventions emphasizes the importance of care for the disabled as a human right issue (Rezapour Mirsaleh, et al, 2024) However, in most countries special attention is not given to widows as social destitute.

World Bank (2020) found that many of the disabled rely on close relatives and friends in carrying out daily activities. There is little or no institutional responses in supporting the socially vulnerable widows. This makes their situation worse and deny the widows and their children the ability to enjoy the social services required for personal development (Makanga, 2022).

Attitude towards destitute

Some of the challenges faced by destitute or the disabled originate from the self-acceptance or personal interpretation of destitution by the disabled. Some destitute have self-confidence with their situation, while others harbor a pessimistic view on disability. Ajuwon, et al (2023)

studied disabled attending tertiary health facility in Nigeria and found a high personal commitment of the disabled to their situation. In some instances, the disabled show empathy feelings towards each other. While in some instances there are optimistic and positive societal concerns for the disabled as well as (Khanna, 2020). However, some studies show lack of support by the public towards disabled. In Guanzou China, it was found that caregivers developed a negative attitude towards disabled especially when care take longer duration (Leng, et al, 2024) Barriers to effective inclusion of people living with disability (PWD) include the unfair treatment leveled towards PWD who are internally displaced and women. A report by Islamic relief outlined some of the major blockages that faced (PWD) and their families in a federally administered tribal areas of Pakistan. The blockages include; lack of road, health facilities, education, and gender equality, lack of access to economic and social opportunities and care for safety-related problems. According to the report Girls and Women face more of these blockages. In spite of the inequalities face by PWD, women and Girls with disabilities are not included in

to decision making even during peace making processes that follow conflict despite the fact that they are the worst hit in most conflicts. Olaitan, (2021).

Prejudices and beliefs are important determinants of integration in society. Barbareschi, et al (2021) in a study in Kenya argued that there seem to be a plurality of beliefs on the causes of disability. Some of these include, that disability is as a result of sin committed by the disable, or disability is caused by charm and by others, the will of God, fate, nature, and biological make up of an individual. The researchers, maintained that a search for pragmatism is the causes of such variation. Furthermore, prejudices like considering the disable as those who are an eyesore, or as those who are lazy have been noted among the challenges of PWD to attaining development in Nigeria (Abubakar and Saifullahi-Idris 2023) In the same vein, stigmatization- though receding- was identified as an important factor in the treatment of leprosy in western Nigeria

The sum of the problems mentioned above and many of such that exist in different countries and communities called for an effort to explore the live experiences of disable people (settlers) living among the natives with entirely different cultural orientation, beliefs and norms. For most importantly, as the literature indicated, in this case, the migrant stand the risk of double jeopardy as migrant and as PWD. The purpose of the study is to analyzed live experiences of internally displaced women living in host communities in reference to displaced settlers in Ile-Ife.

Methods

Qualitative design was conducted to generate first-hand information from participation their lived experiences in the host community in Ile-Ife in 2021. The data generated is in form of in-depth interviews with four internally displaced women from Zamfara state, living in Ile-Ife town of Southwestern Nigeria. Following the qualitative interviews that were conducted with the displaced women, recent literature in the area of displacement was undertaken in other to augment the qualitative data and enhance analysis and currency. The selection process involved multiple stages. At the first stage, the researcher visited market place where the displaced gather during the day to beg, then grouped the disabled in to type of disability; those who were physically disabled and the socially destitute. At the second stage, the researcher selected four women who were socially disabled (widows whose husbands died and left them with the children as a result of the conflict in Northern Nigeria) this is because most of the beggars were women and most of the women beggars were social destitute.

The data collected was transcribed verbatim, and translated. Analysis was made on the experiences of displaced women base on the thematic issues as gathered by interviewer.

Results

Four themes emerged from the interview; forced displacement, social destitution, begging and reduction in self-worth and confidence. The women were asked how

conflict led them to displacement and they were ask to describe their present predicament regarding their social situation as explored by the interview.

Forced displacement.

The women see forced displacement as a condition were an individual is expelled out of his home due to condition beyond his/her control. In this case the activities of banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping which lead to loss of their husbands, dwelling places and farms land. They show themselves as being denied their right to dwell in their home and live among their kin. Particularly they decry having to forsake their relatives, kin and wards and come out to Ile-Ife in search of income. For example, a respondent who migrated from Gussau and mother of four children narrates thus,

What can I do? We were living well in our houses and tilling our farms, but the banditry forced as to leave our home and our farms after I lost my husband.

More emphasis was made with regards to force displacement. The participants claim that their homes are now a no go area as a result of the rising insecurity. Most of the people in and around their village has vacated their houses and forsaken their farm lands. Moreover, the interview revealed the lack of concern by Government in attending to their problems. One of the respondent recounted her ordeal below.

I so much cherished my home, husband, the children and all my relatives. However, today here I am alone, trying to find food for the children and myself. All this I undergo without any sympathy from government and other stake holders.

Destitution

The responses generated from the respondents pointed clearly to the fact that, as a result of insecurity their sources of subsistence and sustenance has been destroyed. Their husbands who were bread winners of the family were killed. Worst still some of the close relatives who should have shoulder the responsibility of providing them with food, clothing, and shelter were either killed or dispersed by the bandits. So, they have to resort to begging to meet up with the vagaries of life. A respondent capture this in statement below.

What can I do as a widow who is left with orphans? And no body seem concern about our situation. I do not have capital to start business, neither do I have what it take to be employed. My stake was respecting my marriage relationship. And my husband take good care of us.

Begging and loss of dignity.

Participants pointed to the fact that they were in a respectable social engagement before the advent of the insecurity. They reported living an averagely good life not lacking the basic need like food shelter etc. Their children attend schools and they can afford school fees and health bills. Respondent recounted her ordeal as below

I most have to resort to Begging to take care of my wards. I cannot afford their education and health need. So with no help forthcoming I most accept

what has befall me. I wish I could remarry but who can take me along with my children.

Another important mistreatment which the widows face that subject them to loss of integrity and molestation from the members of society, is the fact that they do not have physical deformity which will help in winning public sympathy on the course of begging for assistance. s

Discussion of findings

The participants for our study reported having been forcefully displaced as a result of insecurity which led to loss of life and property. Their situation became worse as a result of lack of concern by government and other stake holders; this corroborates the findings of Saifullahi-Idris and Ikuteyijo (2023) that major issues in the management of insurgency victims were poor relief supports, inadequate emonetary supports, intervention discrepancies, and poor funding and facilities from the part of those handling the management of the victim. Lack of care and inclusion of disabled women in to decision on matters that affect their lives is well documented by (Ryan, 2020). Often women are given less attention by Governments and other stake holders. This may be as a result of lack of education and relational skills which women- particularly in the North- are experiencing

The general public treat the widows with contempt may be as a result of the relegated position which some belief women have. Study on disability has shown the general lack of respect and regard which society leveled towards the disabled,(Makanga, 2022). Which in context, the displaced women are seen as disabled and destitute widows. This corroborate findings of Abubakar and Saifullahi-Idris (2023) that settlers living with disability were left in congested area and open to all kind of weather condition like sun, rain, wind and so on.

Conclusion

The study concludes that, women who are displaced as a result of insecurity are forced in to begging as a result of lack concern and care by government and other stakeholders. The displaced women who were mostly widows and PWD who were also part of the displaced populations are frequently being pushed around by traders as shops and trading point are being expanded. This led to loss of dignity, self-worth and pride for the widows because being strangers in an alien land make their living conditions vulnerable to social exclusion and psychological stress. Government and stakeholders should rise to assist victims of insecurity banditry, insurgency, and so on to adjust to social life and regain their self-worth.

Recommendations:

Based on the forgoing, the paper recommends the following as panacea to issues of internal displacement of women and its attended consequences

- * Government should be proactive in response to emergency situation. By this, government is expected to plan for the unexpected in terms of facilities

necessary to cater for such an emergency, including evacuation centres, provision of relief items and other social-economic provision for reparation and reconstruction of the victims. This way, the victims of emergency disaster will be prevented from fleeing or being displaced, and will get properly integrated back to their social life.

- * There should be activation of inter-governmental response strategies particularly between SEMAS. In this case, there should be a collaborative effort among the various state-agencies for disaster management, especially the State Emergency Management Agencies of various states, at inter-state levels, to establish, and maintain data for such vulnerable for proper response.
- * Non-governmental organization should rise to the plight of the need of the displaced women. This is to complement the effort of the state agencies for emergency and relief. The intervention should come in terms of relief materials, sensitisation against discrimination and social exclusion of the victims of emergencies, and provision of vocational training and skills acquisition for the displaced women for self-sustenance.

Religious bodies should orient the public on the moral need to care for the stranger especially women. As custodians of spirituality and morality, they should admonish the victims and host on the moral significance of humanity, especially the vulnerable which cover women, children and the aged ones, especially the displaced and the bereaved.

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