

Changing Gender Relations among Displaced Households in Georgia

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Literature on the effects of migration on gender roles and relationships

- **Impact of social changes resulting from involuntary displacement on marital behaviours.**
- **Contradictory effects of forced displacement on migrants: lessening /reinforcing gender inequity.**
- **One of the significant effects of migration on individual families manifested through shifts in gender relations.**

- The Impact of Forced Migration on Marital Life in Chad (Danièle Laliberté, Benoît Laplante, Victor Piché 2003)
- Power, Patriarchy, and Gender Conflict in the Vietnamese Immigrant Community (Nazli Kibria 1990)
- Eritrean Canadian Refugee Households As Sites of Gender Renegotiation (Matsuka, Atsuko & John Sorenson 1999)
- Migration and relationship power among Mexican women (Emilio A. Parrado et.al 2005)

Theoretical Framework

- Research situated within the context of scholarship which focuses on gendered implications of forced migration for displaced households, deals with the renegotiation of gender roles, and does not discuss migrant women in isolation from men but rather with the experiences of both on an equal basis and in relation to each other.

- **Main research question:**

To what extent has the displacement affected gender relations in IDPs' households and in which ways has the self-identification of women, as well as men changed since the time of their involuntary movement.

Research Design and Methods Applied:

Selection criteria of participants:

- IDPs living in Tbilisi for more than a decade
- Couples married before and not after displacement
- Ethnic Georgians from different parts of the conflict region Abkhazia
- Belonging to the middle-class strata before migration.
- 7 men and 14 women (*6 couples*) ; 3 female-headed households : one divorced and two widowed women

Gendered Experience of Migration

Gender Roles of Displaced Persons before Migration:

- Traditional gender roles were clearly defined in most households of the study before the displacement. Men were primarily responsible for livelihood security of their families, while wives' first and foremost obligation and concern was related to the management of domestic matters and the responsibility for proper upbringing of their children.
- Female participants economically depended on their husbands (even if both spouses used to work outside home, economic maintenance of the household by and large depended on incomes of men rather than both of them, because of men's relatively higher salaries).
- Equal participation in intra-household decision-making process (although it did not automatically mean that the final decisions were made by mutual agreement).

Adapting to a New World

- Displaced women (as compared to men) revealed greater strength, dignity and common sense to bravely face the difficulties and harshness of the post conflict miserable life.
- To make it through in the worst financial crisis displaced women have come up with a range of ideas.

Possible reasons of easier adaptation process for women:

- One of the reasons why women have adapted easier might be the availability of various, even though physical, menial jobs, but still it has turned out easier for them to keep being employed. Moreover, women are responsible for the well-being of their children primarily as mothers, thus they have somehow acquired more strength and have not displayed weakness while overcoming stressful and deteriorated conditions of life after displacement. [Interview David, 25.04.09]
- Women turned out to adapt to new life circumstances much easier, I think because when being busy with housekeeping and all that related work, their minds have been driven away from thoughts about what happened in the past. Contrary to women, displaced men started drinking in order not to be constantly haunted by thoughts about their immense loss. [Interview Giorgi, 28.04.09]

Impact of Displacement on Gender Roles and Relations

- Displacement has not had any impact in terms of decision-making.
- Women's duties and responsibilities have dramatically increased after forced migration.
- ...to reveal if personal changes affected spousal relationship.

- All female interviewees described their personal experience in an extremely negative way caused by the existing reality after migration:

Forced displacement has changed the whole country, not only IDPs. Personally I have become more emotional, pessimistic and hopeless. Mostly I have lost the faith in the system, i.e. the government, especially after the events of August, 2008 which rendered us - 'old refugees' in a more difficult situation. Sometimes I think that we can never get rid of the IDP status. [Interview Tamara, 16.04.09]

- On the whole, even if the displacement was experienced very negatively (none of the respondents of the study stressed any experience of positive effects of migration)
- Nearly all female participants stated that the utter need to struggle for survival personally made them much stronger and confident.

Personal changes manifested in displaced men:

- The loss of property and the status among other factors of concern emphasized.
- Only a few women have mentioned about their husbands' change towards becoming more aggressive (*no significant change in their spousal relationship*).
- Some underlined that despite the hardship and difficulties they had to undergo after forced migration, only with the support of each other they have been able to survive , thus their bond has become stronger and marriage even more stable.
- Tensions in spousal relationship was not perceived as unavoidable in displaced community from Abkhazia.

Tensions of Identity Reconstruction Process

- The issue of the 'loss' was differently perceived by male and female displacees.
- Displaced men associated their identities mostly with the property and the status - i.e. the recognition of their acquired position by the people of the community they belonged to (*feeling of humiliation was strongly associated by them with the loss of property and status*).

- The loss of the status was experienced not only by men but also by women. Nearly half of the female participants were employed (*in fields such as healthcare and education*), by the time the armed conflict broke out they had also acquired respectful position.
- Self-identification of women was associated with the stable family, proper upbringing of their children and by that time already achieved well-provided life.

Major Findings of the Research

- Analysis of empirical data revealed that in displaced households from Abkhazia gender roles have been renegotiated.
- Women's duties and responsibilities have dramatically increased after forced migration, but only a few participants admitted the change in their spousal relationship.
- Engendered reaction of displaced men and women to forced migration can be related to the fact that women and men were deprived of different things and identifications as a result of the armed conflict.

Thank You !!!