

Schooling Related Challenges Faced by Displaced High School Students. The Case of Olposimoru Forest Evictees in Narok County, Kenya

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Internal displacement is one of the most critical humanitarian issues of current times. The purpose of this research is to investigate the challenges experienced by displaced high school students while schooling as well as the role of the school community in assisting the displaced student to continue in schooling. The objective of this study was to investigate the physical, social, emotional and financial challenges faced by internally displaced high school students as they experienced schooling as well as the psycho social support accorded to the students in order to continue with schooling. This study was guided by Phenomenology theory. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely regarded as the founder of phenomenology as a transcendental philosophy of consciousness. It's the careful description of experiences in the manner in which they are experienced by the subjects. It's an inductive descriptive approach that focuses on understanding the response of the whole human beings not just understanding specific parts or behavior. It endeavors to describe an experience as it is lived by the person. Sample size of 96 students was sampled through purposive sampling technique. The participants included displaced high school students, teachers and Principals. The data instruments included questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed and presented in frequency distribution tables and percentages. Qualitative data was organized, coded and analyzed based on emerging thematic topics according to the objectives. The study found out that displaced high school students have several schooling challenges in addition to the normal learning challenges facing un-displaced students. Those interviewed agreed that displaced students had the challenges of financial, psychological and social which must be addressed by educational stakeholders. Though the school were trying to alleviate the challenges faced by displaced student, the support provided was not adequate. The research findings would be useful to the Ministry of Education, Non-Governmental Organization, schools, parents, and other stakeholders in education sector.

Keywords: Challenges Displaced High School Students, School Community, Olposimoru Forest Evictees, Narok County, Kenya.

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INTRODUCTION

School education is influenced by various kinds of external factors. Notably, the global crisis of internal displacement presents an enormous challenge to the international assistance community. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) present the most compelling crises confronting the international humanitarian assistance community today. Each year the number of countries reporting internal displacement increases. Displacement of population has diverse physical, psychological, social and economic effects on students secondary. The situation is compounded by the fact that student at this level of education are still in the adolescent stage of human growth and development.

Moreover, the highest fear of displaced person is repetition of displacement. In Kenya relatively few studies have been done on the specific challenges bedeviling displaced students.

Almost 60 million people were in forced displacement in 2015, the highest number since 1945 (UNHCR, 2015a). These include internally displaced people (IDPs), asylum seekers and refugees, a small percentage of whom are resettled. Although the precise number of IDPS is unknown, experts estimate more than 50 million people were forcibly uprooted worldwide at the end of last year. This is the highest level since after the end of Second World War. Half of whom are

children. Additionally, the UNHCR states that the level of risk among the IDPs remains high due to precarious living conditions, the absence of durable solutions and threats and selective killings, particularly related to the issue of land restitution (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011). Furthermore, according to data on IDPs, displacement has a critical effect on vulnerable groups such as women, children and indigenous ethnic communities (Forero, 2003). Thus, the precarious conditions of displaced families become a transmission mechanism of intergenerational poverty that is accentuated by their rural origin and its demographic composition (Ibañez & Moya, 2006a).

Statement of the Problem

Schooling of students is affected by several internal and external factors. Displacement of population is one of the important external factors. Forced evictions have been carried out on a massive scale in forest areas and the Ministry of Environment has stated that these actions will continue. The government has also failed to make allowance for traditional forest dwellers, such as the Ogiek. There is need to establish the challenges faced by displaced high school students as they experience schooling. The major problem for this study is to examine the challenges facing the displaced students in their bid to achieve the benefits of education. Access to secondary education is particularly limited for refugees in many countries. In Kenya, less than 5% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 were enrolled in secondary education. In many refugee camps, secondary education services meet a fraction of the demand (UNHCR, 2015c). Although Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) targeted a transition of 70% from primary to secondary level, the challenges occasioned by the displacement has not been factored in and examine fully. The purpose of this study is therefore to bridge a gap that has not been cognitively dealt with that has made the achievement of 70% and its continuity possible.

During the Olposimoru eviction, settlements were burned, property and food stocks destroyed, children (half of the affected population) can no longer attend school, all residents, particularly children lack food, proper clothing and shelter, no relief food has been sent by the government or any other agency and there are no medical services to deal with the likely increase in disease. (Du Plessis, 2006). The Government recently announced it would only resettle 250 squatters.

The effect on the lives of those evicted is catastrophic, leaving them homeless and subject to deeper poverty, discrimination and social exclusion this will intern affect education of the family children. These communities were invariably evicted against their will. The affected children face numerous adjustments when seeking chance to continue with their education. These adjustments aspects include pupils

seeking required uniforms, walking long distances in search for education, they lack shelter and in extreme cases lack of food. These aspects affect the access of education in Kenya and hence leading to low enrolment in schools and high dropout rate. The Government of Kenya has indicated that evictions in forest areas will continue thereby rendering many school going children at the risk of abandoning schooling. Evictions of local communities frequently violate national laws as well as international human rights safeguards, such as those articulated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

According to Margret Ann (2014), displaced populations are at high risk of being neglected, unprotected and left without durable solution to displacement. Ferris and Winthrop (2011) note that detailed country-level data on education access for IDPs is scarce. The study done by Ellen Mapiko and Chinyoka (2013) revealed that IDP children face a host of challenges from home ranging from economic to protection issues that may lead into them dropping out of school with no hope of ever recovering the lost time. This study will investigate the school challenges affecting displaced pupils a case of Olposimoru forest evictees.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to investigate the schooling challenges faced by displaced high as well as the role of the school community in assisting displaced students to continue in schooling.

Theoretical Frame Work

This study was guided by Phenomenology theory. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely regarded as the founder of phenomenology as a transcendental philosophy of consciousness. It's the careful description of experiences in the manner in which they are experienced by the subjects. It's an inductive descriptive approach that focuses on understanding the response of the whole human beings not just understanding specific parts or behavior. It endeavors to describe an experience as it is lived by the person. The phenomenological approach aims to develop a complete, accurate, clear and articulate description and understanding of a particular human experience or experiential moment. It achieves its goal through the use of a special investigator stance and approach and through specialized methods of participant selection, solicitation of information, systematic data treatment, and assembling of interview. The phenomenological approach provides a rich and complete description of human experiences and meanings. Findings are allowed to emerge, rather than being imposed by an investigator. Every experience is situated in a horizon which encompasses earlier experiences, memories and schemas, and also

anticipations and expectations as well as their fulfillment or disappointment (Gadamer 2013).

With reference to this study the theory apply in the context that displaced high school students had first had experiences of the ordeals of force eviction. Dean Whitehead, (2014), opines that phenomenology is designed to discover phenomena and UN earth previous unnoticed or overlooked issues. It revealed the meanings that appear hidden or identifies the impact of those phenomena. Displaced students often face myriads of challenges as they reintegrate in to the new school. Schooling processes that value relational connectedness seek to nurture the wholeness of students through a genuine concern for the teacher-student relationship (Miller & Nakagawa 2002). This is the time the students are supposed to nurture their abilities by fully concentrating on their academic work. Any distraction that may cause mental anguish like trauma resulting from force eviction and related violence is likely to divert their attention in school and therefore affect their development and potential (Sullivan, 2013).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature related to the study gives a discussion on challenges faced by displaced high school students. The physical, psychological as well as social and economic challenges are discussed below.

Psychological Challenges

MacCormack (1998) noted that children's wellbeing and development depend very much on the security of family relationships and a predictable environment. When children have been exposed to events beyond the normal boundaries of human experience, that is, traumatic or psychologically wounding events like forced eviction, all kinds of stress reactions will be apparent. Some children may withdraw from contact, stop playing and laughing, or become obsessed with stereotyped war games, while others will dwell on feelings of guilt, or fantasies of revenge and continual preoccupation with their role in past events. In a few cases, depression sets in and may even lead to suicide. Other reactions include aggressiveness, changes in temperament, nightmares, eating disturbances, learning problems, repeated fainting, vague aches and pains. Children may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after displacement. Ladd, Gill and Marszalek (2007) aver that the psychological wellbeing of children will likely suffer when they have observed scenes of destruction. The fact that a child experiences symptoms of psychological distress may not be apparent to adults, sometimes not even to parents. If a child's changed behavior is not understood as distress, the adult reaction may be to punish, reject or simply ignore the child. Loss of speech and bladder control may even be interpreted as mental retardation.

Social Challenges

In a situation of displacement, sociological issues including separation from family members, social networks and communities, lack of shelter or problems related to camps, discrimination, stigmatization and sometimes criminalization, lack of personal documents which often restricts access to services, such as healthcare and education, the loss of social support systems and community solidarity. Men may be unable to find work or may become involved in the conflict leaving the woman responsible for the household. In India, the evicted Adivasi communities are cut off from the ancestral forests that served as the natural resource base for their livelihoods for generations. They are no longer permitted to enter the forest to collect firewood and forest products and graze their cattle. Even their farming lands have been cordoned off, prohibiting them from cultivating any food crops.

UNHCR 2011 reported that in Kenya Forest evictees in Embomos who lost their identity cards could not be registered by the government. In Shika Adabu in Likoni it is reported that some of the displaced children who were orphaned do not have details about their parents as no documents were left behind during the violence. To replace an identity card or birth certificate, an applicant is asked to go back to their original homes and get a letter from their area chief or local administrator. In addition, one may be required to present other supporting documents such as the parent's identity cards for one to apply for a birth certificate. These supporting documents may be unavailable as they were lost during flight. Other IDPs are afraid of going back to places where they were displaced from.

Sassoon (2009) has reported that displacement affects communities beyond the individuals who are themselves displaced. The communities hosting refugees and IDPs, particularly when the numbers are large, clearly experience economic, social and political consequences for doing so.

Sometimes this is positive as when the establishment of a camp provides health or education services to the local community – services which may not have been available in the past. But often it has a negative result as community and public services are strained. A significant facet of the recent large-scale displacement in Pakistan has been the disproportionately high reliance of the affected population on local communities for shelter and support (Din, 2010, p. 12). Mayer and Jencks (1989) have found that youth who grow up in disadvantaged neighborhoods fare substantially worse than those who grow up with more affluent neighbors on a wide variety of health and socioeconomic outcomes.

Economic Challenges

The financial instability facing displaced pupils and their families is pronounced in displacement. Because of the nature of forced eviction, families often have to evacuate as quickly as possible and thus leave most of their belongings behind. Many ended up moving temporarily into the homes of friends or relatives, resulting in substandard and crowded living conditions (Picou *et al.*, 2007). Following Katrina, children who lived households with more than five people showed lower satisfaction with their health and lower academic performance (Barrett *et al.*, 2008). Financial instability also resulted in unstable and insecure transportation for children, which caused delayed enrolment in school and missed school days (Picou *et al.*, 2007). According to Porter-Bolland *et al.*, (2012) in some cases, monetary compensation is offered. However, this is not an adequate replacement for the loss of livelihood and way of life. The mechanism of compensation moreover highlights the disproportional impact of forced evictions on women.

Role of the School Community in Alleviating the Challenges Faced by Displaced Children

Research generally indicates that characteristics outside the formal educational setting – or non-school factors – also have a lot to do with whether children and adolescents are successful in school. Therefore, it seems important to examine not only how schools can be improved but also how non-school factors can be enhanced to foster learning and educational attainment.

Strategies to Support Displaced Children

The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) entered into force in September 1990 and has been ratified by 193 countries. CRC sets out the rights of children, the prohibition against discrimination. Whatever benefits a State provides to its own child citizens must be afforded to all children within its territory. Furthermore, CRC specifically address children's right to education, as well as humanitarian assistance to displaced children. Many of the out-of-school children are the internally displaced.

Education for IDPs is essential as a human right enshrined in international law. In emergency situations where the State fails to provide education for IDPs, the international community, though not legally obligated, maintains an ethical responsibility to ensure that IDP education is included as an integral component within the humanitarian assistance framework (Rhoades, 2010).

According to Lloyd *et al.*, (2010), displaced students need to be provided with appropriate support services to promote school attendance and retention. This should include school feeding programs to meet nutritional needs and provide access to water and sanitation facilities, taking into account the specific needs of girls and students with disabilities.

DISCUSSIONS OF STUDY FINDINGS

The main objective of this study was to investigate the schooling challenges faced by displaced students. Students were asked to state the challenges they face while they participate in schooling. The following table illustrates their responses.

Table 1.1: Challenges faced by Displaced High School Students (Students' Views)

Challenges faced by displaced high school students	Frequency	%
Lack of school fees	91	90.09
Lack of basic needs	80	79.21
Those displaced fear of future displacement.	60	59.41
School absenteeism	58	57.43
Being labelled as IDP	40	39.60
Working to earn a living	21	20.79
Lack of concentration in class	9	8.91
Drop in academic performance	3	2.97

From the table above, most displaced students had problems with school fees (90.1%), followed by those who had problems acquiring basic needs at home (79.2%). Other challenges identified included fear of future displacement (59.4%), school absenteeism (57.4%), stereotyping (39.6%), having to juggle studies with working for a living (20.8%), lack of concentration in class (8.9%) and poor academic performance (3.0%). The UNHCR Kenya (2011) has reported that in other places IDPs suffer stigma and discrimination in employment merely for being IDPs. In Lanet, Nakuru,

IDPs complained that they are perceived as the cause of increase in crime in the area (UNHCR, 2011). The students reported that IDPs are sometimes derogatively referred to as the tent people". They said displaced children are especially forced to engage in child labour in order to supplement family income. According to the respondents, in some cases, families hosting IDPs exploit children and women for free or cheap labour.

The teachers were also asked to indicate what they perceived as the major challenges that displaced

students faced in relation to their educational experiences. Their responses were as summarized in

Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: Teachers' Perceived Challenges Facing Displaced High School Students

Challenges facing displaced students	Frequency	%
Lack of participation in class	15	57.69
Lack of school fees	13	50.00
Lack of learning materials	9	34.62
Lack of basic needs	8	30.77
Psychologically unstable	6	23.08
Lack of concentration	5	19.23
Feeling isolated	3	11.53
Fear of dropping out of school	3	11.53
Low self esteem	1	3.85

From Table 1.2, the greatest challenge faced by displaced high school students was lack of participation in class (57.7%). This was followed by lack of school fees (50.0%) and lack of learning materials (34.6%). Other challenges facing displaced students were lack of basic needs (30.8%), psychological instability (23.1%), lack of concentration

(19.2%), feeling isolated (11.5%), fear of discontinuing studies (11.5%) and low self-esteem (3.9%).

The school principals were similarly asked to indicate the challenges they perceived to be afflicting the displaced students in their respective secondary schools. The head teachers' respondents to this item were as presented in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3: Principals Perceived Challenges Faced by Displaced High School Student

Challenges facing displaced students	Frequency	%
Fear of dropping out of school	4	100
Absenteeism in school	3	75
Fear of poor performance academically	3	75
Walking for long distances	3	75
Lack of school fees	3	75
Psychologically disturbed	2	50
Low self esteem	2	50

From the table above, according to all (100%) of the principals, the greatest challenge for displaced students was the fear of discontinuing their studies. Other challenges identified by the principals included absenteeism from school (75%), fear of failure in academics (75%), walking for long distance to and from school (75%), lack of school fees (75%), psychological instability (50%) and low self-esteem (50%).

Based on the study findings, lack of basic needs and lack of school fees are two of the major challenges facing displaced high school students. Psychological challenges have also affected the self-esteem of the teenagers which has negatively impacted on their academic performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The will be conducted through descriptive case study. A descriptive case study successfully provides multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative evidence for triangulating such experiential data in an all-encompassing manner. The study was carried out in Narok County, Narok North Sub County. Four schools were selected through purposive sampling. A total of 96 students were selected as subjects in the 4 schools; 25

students will be from each school. In each school 8 students will be selected using simple random sampling from Form 2 Form 3 and Form 4. Peil (1995, p. 27) argues that one or a few communities are selected because they are considered either typical or outstanding examples of variables with which the research is concerned. Principal and Form 2, 3 and 4 class Teachers will be interviewed. The results from questionnaires were analyzed and tabulated respectively.

The Role of a School Community in Assisting Displaced Students to Continue with Schooling

The second objective for this study was to evaluate the psychosocial support given to displaced students to enhance their schooling. This was through interview and questionnaire given to the 96 sampled pupils, 4 principals and 26 class teachers. The study explored further the practical ways in which the church, school, NGOs and the government are doing to ensure continued schooling of displaced pupils. Majority of the students were in agreement that they were receiving psychological from a professional person help from the school. The finding was presented in the Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3: Psychological Help accorded to Displaced Students

Variables	F (YES)	F (NO)
Have you ever received counseling from a professional person after being evicted?	63(78%)	18(22%)
Was the counseling 1 above adequate?	35(48%)	36(49%)

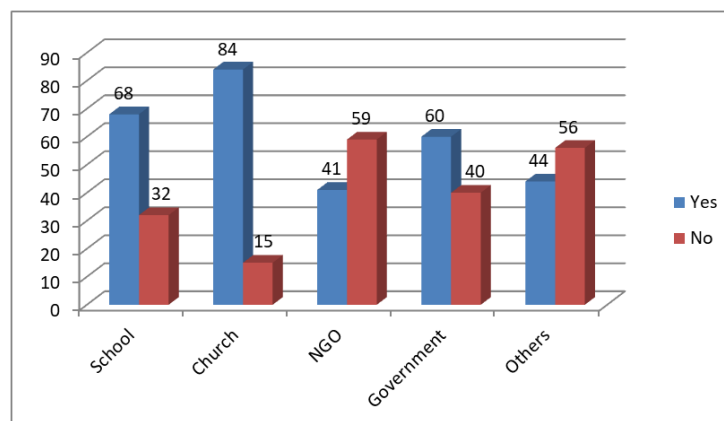
It can be deduced from the Table 1.3 above that majority (78%) of the displaced students had received counseling. The students reported that they had received psychological counseling from pastors and teachers counselors. Only 22% of the students said they had not received any counseling from a professional person. However, of those who had received counseling, 49% noted that the counseling was not adequate. According to Ogina (2008), teachers are unable to respond appropriately to such special needs of learners because they are not properly trained to deal with special circumstances. Victims of any disaster

often suffer from post-traumatic stress. Displaced students are no exception. Counseling could be an important tool for educators to help such students alleviate the negative effects of post-traumatic stress on their life and schooling experiences.

The respondents were further asked to state if they had received any assistance from the schools, the church, NGOs, government or other social actors. The statistical data obtained from this item was as shown in Table 1.4 and Figure 1.1 below.

Table 1.4: Nature of the Support Received

Nature of the support received	Frequency	Percentage %
Bursaries	70	72
Clothing	30	43
Counseling	28	31
Housing	8	9
Prayers	23	23
Writing materials and text books.	92	91
Uniform	19	19

**Figure 1.1: Nature of assistances given to displaced high school students**

From the comparative bar graph above (Figure 1.1), it can be inferred that the church played a bigger role in assisting displaced students. This was attested to by 84% who indicated that they had received assistance from the church. Majority of the respondents said they had received clothing and prayers from church members who often visited them in school. The school has to be a safe environment where the children can flourish without being victimized, taunted, bullied or at worst, physically harmed so the children can learn and develop (Hamilton, 2004).

The research further established that 92% of the displaced students had received writing materials from the school to replace the one that destroyed as a

result of eviction. The school is one of the major socializing agents for, especially, teenagers. The above findings echo what McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2012) posits, that for young people separated from their parents or guardians during times of disasters, the school provides a stable and secure environment, offering structure and supports to help them overcome the trauma they have experienced and regain their academic, social and emotional footing. Even though the government of Kenya provides tuition materials for every student through subsidized secondary education, it seems that displaced students had not been specially budgeted for in those initiatives. Recognizing these challenges, some schools have

consequently had to sacrifice their resources to help the displaced students.

Financial support was also accorded to displaced high school students. Of the respondents, 70% said that displaced students had received bursaries to aid them in paying school fees. Secondary school fees, however, although subsidized, are still prohibitive. Some girls (as well as boys) consequently work as day laborers during school vacations to save money for school fees. The government of Kenya, through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), provides financial assistance to needy students. This was mentioned as the main source of bursaries to displaced students which had helped to keep many of them in school.

In addition, 43% of the respondents said they had received clothing from well-wishers. This had helped them to replace the clothing they had lost during eviction. Some of the students said they had received some school uniform from fellow students. Uniform is a major admission requirement during admission of any student to a new school. Many of the displaced students may not be able to secure admission due to lack of school uniform. As such, such donations from fellow students are greatly helpful for displaced students.

Housing also constituted another form of assistance that displaced students had received. As noted earlier, 69% of students have not built new houses since their houses had been demolished or ever since they were evicted from their homes. According to McKinney Vento (2012), children and youth who suffer direct displacement as a result of disasters, like other students in homeless situations, are often condemned to live in a variety of unstable, temporary arrangements. From the table above, however, 9% of the respondents said they had been assisted by well-wishers to build new houses.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the challenges influencing the schooling of displaced students and the role of school community in assisting the displaced students in order for them to continue in schooling. It discusses the important challenges facing displaced students. It outlined the physical, psychological, social and economic challenges facing the students. Notably, displaced students face many challenges such as lack of writing materials and school uniforms. Most of them lost their personal items and school requirements during eviction. Lack of proper housing is also a major challenge for them. Moreover, displaced students constantly fear that they may be forced to drop out of school due to lack of basic requirements. They also fear to be further evicted from their present places of residence leading to further disruption of their studies.

Second, already, displaced students have received some level of support. This support has come mainly from their colleagues, schools, NGOs and churches. The schools have helped to provide writing materials while churches have offered prayers and counselling. NGOs have also provided blankets and the government has provided bursaries to support fee payment for displaced students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study gained in depth understanding of the schooling experiences of displaced high school students. It is evident that displaced high school students are struggling with myriads of several psychological, physiological, economic and sociological challenges. Although the school community can provide for the needs of displaced students, the needs are so numerous that it requires intervention by various stakeholders.

The government should develop a realistic and sustainable approach to ensure displaced high school students continue with their schooling. Displaced students need financial support their stay in school. In a nut shell, the eviction carried out by the government should not disadvantage the schooling of high school students.

This study further recommends the following:

- 1) Peer support group should be formed to provide guidance and counselling for those affected by displacement.
- 2) The government should give adequate time to illegal inhabitants before eviction is done. This will give victims have smooth transition to other places. Moreover, the victims should be compensated before eviction is done.
- 3) The government, churches, schools and non-governmental agencies should assist the orphans by paying fees. They should also find resources for training of school teachers in diagnosing psycho-social challenges facing displaced students.
- 4) Well-wishers should assist displaced student to be boarders in schools so as to alleviate challenges of lack school fees and lack of basic needs at home.
- 5) The Government should undertake a comprehensive review of the situation of all categories of IDPs in Kenya with a view to determining the appropriate assistance required.

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