

# Forced Displacement, Socio-Economic Impacts and Misplaced Identity of Villagers: A Qualitative Exploration of Three Villages in Lahore

Mudasar Ali Nadeem<sup>1</sup>, Kiran Ikram<sup>2</sup>, Mussarat Hussain<sup>3</sup> and Tauqeer Ahmed Lak<sup>4</sup>

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## Abstract

*Displacement forces communities to shift their habitat which may also affect their socio-economic status. Very few scholarly studies documented its socio-economic impacts. Especially the impacts of forced internal displacement resulting from the development of new housing societies are missing in the literature. To fill the gap, the present study aims to explore the socio-economic impacts of internal displacement on villagers displaced from three villages of Lahore. For this purpose, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted through purposively sampling. Qualitative methodology and methods were used to achieve the research objectives, to select and recruit the research participants and to collect and analyze data. Internal forced displacement negatively affected the daily routine activities, social capital, and breakdown in the family system, detachment and identity crises and sense of community ownership. Displacement also generated economic dependence among villagers and made their skills and expertise non-relevant in relocated settings. Hence, proper resettlement policy and plans are advised to be implemented before displacement to avoid its negative socio-economic impacts.*

**Keywords:** Internal Forced Displacement, Displacement Impacts, Socio-economic Perspective.

## Introduction

The present study aims to explore socio-economic impacts of forced internal displacement on individuals and families. Internal displacement may result from development projects. These projects ensure infrastructural needs for the communities. However, the impacts of development projects are not merely constructive but destructive too (Barcellini et al., 2014). Nonetheless, outcomes may vary by the type of displacement induced by different development projects. In case of internal non-voluntary displacement, communities are forcefully pushed from one place to another. Resultantly, the nature of its outcomes may vary from the impacts of voluntary displacement i.e., economic migration (Erdal & Oeppen, 2022).

Displacement in the case of development induced projects is a kind of forced migration from one setting to the other. Moreover, the victims cannot return to their original settings in the case of development induced displacement (Das et al., 2016). Scholarly studies indicate an upsurge in the internally displaced population with the passage of time (Blair et al., 2022). However, relevant

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<sup>1</sup>Lecturer in Sociology, Government College University Faisalabad, Chiniot Campus.

Corresponding Author Email: [mudasaralinadeem@gcuf.edu.pk](mailto:mudasaralinadeem@gcuf.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer in Sociology, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of Sargodha.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Sociology & Criminology, University of Sargodha.



stakeholders are less worried about such displacement and its impacts on the communities (Robinson, 2002). Birkeland (2009) reported the lack of external aid and sympathy from any notable agency in forced internal displacement. On the other hand, displacement because of natural calamities i.e., floods and earthquake are temporary but involves sympathy and aid by many formal and informal agencies.

According to Price (2009), the impacts of development induced projects are mainly negative for the displaced communities. However, these impacts are very severe for already marginal and vulnerable communities. Such communities have to resettle elsewhere and may face poverty and disempowerment too. Zetter (2014) claimed that resettled communities face economic and health problems. Moreover, these are not individual level problems but can be recorded at household level. Landlessness, unemployment, homelessness, and shortage of food are some of the problems that families face after induced displacement.

Landlessness, unemployment, and homelessness negatively affect already marginal and vulnerable rural economies. Its consequences may vary from socio-economic to cultural and psychological. Increasing trends of new housing societies in many developing countries such as Pakistan are being planned in fertile agricultural lands in the suburban areas of major cities. A settled agricultural land and subsequent sources are being converted into residential and commercial projects (Fiala, 2015). Resultantly, settled communities residing in the suburban areas are forced to relocate themselves. The impacts of such relocation may be traced at individual, household and community level.

However, very few studies had been conducted on the internal displacement of communities because of different housing schemes. However, relocation resulting from the development of housing schemes is different from other forms of forced displacement. Most of the time, communities are not forced to leave their traditional settings but they are bribed and offered handsome amounts in compensation (prime sources of their livelihood). Compensation forces them to relocate. However, socio-economic experiences of such people are still undocumented in literature. To fill the gap in the literature, it is important to explore socio-economic impacts of forced internal displacement resulting from new housing projects.

## Literature Review

Development projects are part and parcel of the infrastructural development of every country. In the past few decades, infrastructural plans and projects have become a priority in many developing countries. Although planning and execution are exercised, adverse outcomes of development projects are hard to minimize (Sahoo et al., 2010). Constructive development projects also produce destructive outcomes. Destructive outcomes are higher because communities are forced to relocate (Al-Houdalieh & Sauders, 2009). Relocation is negative for the overall socio-economic conditions of such communities. However, studying the impacts of internal displacement needs special care because of the varied consequences for individuals, families and communities.

Many researchers explored the experiences of the displaced population and found that they were not satisfied in their lives after their relocation. They felt removed from their habitats (Cernea, 2000; Price, 2009). In addition, the cost of relocation was not appropriate. Perhaps it is not possible to compensate for relocation. Relocation costs loss of land, forests grazing plains etc. It destroys the livelihood of affected communities which in turn undermines their socio-cultural heritage (a non-reversal damage) (Ghatak & Mookherjee, 2014). Marginalized and vulnerable communities i.e., rural communities in the suburban areas of metropolitan cities face adverse impacts of forced

relocation. Such communities are less likely to bear the shocks of relocation (Jayawardhan, 2017; Price, 2009).

Socio-economic losses i.e., losing business and/or unemployment and loss of social networks lead to impoverishment. Victims also face an identity crisis. Even after resettlement, victims face the feeling of being lost and no one in term of their identity (Fiala, 2015). The impacts of relocation and resettlement vary across individuals and communities. In any case, displacement destroys or at least undermines community assets, social services, social status and social networks. According to Colson (1971), political leadership, policymakers and economists ignore social aspects of development projects which is very unfortunate. In development projects, stakeholders just count engineering cost but ignore social cost of such projects.

Colson (1971) found that indigenous population was not welcoming to the construction of a dam in Gwembe Tonga. They claimed that the dam is an enemy to their rights and how the government and/or any other agency may decide their future. In almost every case of the development induced projects, the victims consider it threatening to their basic securities (Terminski, 2014). Very few of the victims of such displacement actually rationalize the basic purpose of constructing dams, roads, corridors etc. The majority of victims consider such projects beneficial for externals and others and are to pay the price (Terminski, 2013). Development projects i.e., environmental conservation projects, acquisition of land, slum clearance, urban renewal and rezoning of development, lead to relocation and require resettlement of the communities (Price, 2009).

## **Methodology**

### **Contextualizing Methodology and Methods**

The researcher assumes that the phenomenon of displacement, relocation and resettlement and its subsequent experiences/consequences are different for different people. In addition, displacement, dislocation and resettlement include the emotions and feelings of people. For exploring emotions and feelings, in-depth understanding is required. Consequently, the researcher assumes that the phenomenon is subjective and it is not an objective reality that might be quantified. Therefore, the researcher to achieve the research objectives of the present study adopted interpretive philosophy while employing a qualitative research approach, tools and techniques.

### **Research Design and Geographical Settings**

In the present study, a particular setting is identified and focused to explore the socio-economic impacts of displacement. The studies which focus on a particular setting may best be studied using a case study research design. In the case study, a specific person, group, event or phenomenon is focused upon just like in the present study displaced population is focused. The study focused on the internally displaced population living in Hera Singh, Fateh Singh and Jalalabad. It means that the present study was focused on three social settings for collecting data. These sites were selected purposively according to the research objectives of the present study.

### **Sample and Sampling**

The researcher employed a non-probability sampling technique to select research participants for collecting data. Purposive and snowball sampling technique was used to select research participants. However, the researcher with the help of a gatekeeper identified the cases and used purposive and snowball sampling to maximize sample size. Both the purposive and snowball samplings are used for selecting particular cases from particular social settings. A total of 18 in-

depth interviews were conducted among the research participants, six in-depth interviews from each village.

### **Tool of Data Collection**

For collecting data from the research participants, the researcher constructed a semi-structured interview guide and conducted in-depth interviews. However, systematic observation was also applied to collect and validate data from the field. For constructing an interview guide, the researcher identified codes from the literature and converted them into open-ended questions. The guide was shared with two expert field workers and two qualitative research experts to validate the guide. In addition, pre-testing was also conducted to increase the effectiveness of the interview guide.

### **Data Collection and Fieldwork**

The researcher took prior schedules from the research participants and decided their desired place and time of interviews. It was made sure to conduct interviews at a comfortable place for the participants and they were also assured that their provided information would not be shared with others unless their written permission. Although research participants were identified with the help of gatekeepers, gatekeepers were not allowed to accompany interviews to protect data and participants from any possible harm and to ensure data confidentiality. In addition, participants were asked to provide verbal and written informed consent before their interviews to ensure their voluntary participation in the study. Interviews were conducted in face-to-face mode of data collection at given time, date and venue. The field team, before formal interviews, made research participants comfortable with them. Based on the researcher's judgment, interviews were conducted after rapport building between the interviewer and participants. However, as per the situation, the field team was asked to change the sequence and flow of questions from simple to core and core to general questions at the end of interviews. The field team was trained to use proper strategies to enter and conduct field work. Similarly, the team was also asked to follow all the relevant fieldwork ethics to ensure the dignity of the research activity.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from the field by the team was analyzed using thematic analysis technique. In this data analysis process, the researcher read and reread every transcribed interview. This practice of reading helped the researcher to identify codes from the data. Those identified codes were clubbed into similar categories and similar categories were clubbed into themes. Data analysis generated two types of themes, i.e., pre-decided and emergent themes. However, the researcher also shared the socio-demographic information of the research participants in the opening section of the findings so that findings may properly be contextualized.

## **Findings**

### **Background Information of the Research Participants**

A total of eighteen interviews were conducted from three villages i.e., Hira Singh, Fateh Singh and Jalalabad. The researcher interviewed six research participants from each village including three women and three men. Resultantly nine interviews of men and nine interviews of women were conducted. In addition, the researcher purposively selected participants from each age group i.e., young (n=6), middle age (n=6), and old age group (n=6). The educational background of the research participants ranged from illiterate to post-graduate. However, the majority of the women

were housewives and the majority of the men were engaged in multiple economic activities. An equal number of research participants were selected from each socio-economic class i.e., six participants were from the lower, six were from the middle and six research participants were selected from the upper socio-economic class.

### **Social Impacts of Displacement**

Social impacts of displacement are wide ranging from a change in daily routine activities to a drastic change in social networks. Displaced villagers faced a drastic change in their daily routine activities of dietary patterns, meeting and greeting, socializing and enjoying leisure activities. They were also forced to detach from their rural setting to an urban one where they were external and their ascribed identities were not recognized. Moreover, displacement also affected the family system and pattern of families of the villagers. They were forced to live in nuclear family system. It also negatively affected their sense of community where they were embedded for decades.

### **Daily Routine Activities**

The research participants reported that displacement induced a change in their routine activities. The majority of the research participants faced a change not only in their dietary patterns but also in their leisure activities (Kisinger & Matsui, 2021; Oliver-Smith, 2016; Owen & Kemp, 2015). Moreover, they also reported a change in their social gathering and processes of social interaction. One of the research participants reported that “we used to take breakfast together in the morning with traditional parathas, lassi. Now I cannot remember when we took our breakfast together”. Another research participant added that “it was my routine activity to visit my field and spend morning time at my dera where we sit together at huka while enjoying gossip and laughing. Deras squeeze in drawing rooms and friends are gone”. One of the women reported, “after taking breakfast and managing household chores, I used to visit my mother’s home which was at a distance of three houses from my house to meet and greet on a daily basis which I miss even today”.

It means that before displacement people were enjoying a quite different lifestyle. They were living together. They were interacting with each other on daily bases and their social connections were strong enough (Huang et al., 2018; Nikuze et al., 2019). Interestingly participants mentioned “we” instead of “I” during their interviews. Another research participant reported that

We were sharing food, helping each other, cooperating to manage day to day tasks.

Now everyone is busy in their lives' '. Another participant claimed that “housing society separated the companions of good and bad. The villagers were kind hearted in every matter now people are selfish.

Social gatherings are now part of the past and gone which were missed. Research participants were not enjoying storytelling social gatherings at night, company of their friends, gossip circle, traditional food and diet and scheduled breakfast, lunch and dinner with family members (Jadoo et al., 2019; Wang, 2020).

### **Detachment and Identity Crises**

The displaced villagers were forced to detach themselves from their social environment. The majority of the participants reported a separation from their relatives and friends resulting from displacement. One of the research participants who was about 60 years old claimed that “back in village, there were companions of thick and thin who are not living far away from each other”. Another participant reported that “housing society snatched my childhood friend who was my

partner in all the thick and thins”. Displacement not only distanced villagers from their rural settings and habitat but also detached them from their social capital i.e., family members, friends, colleagues and relatives (Fiala, 2015; Zetter, 2014). The majority of the research participants reported that “after leaving village we are no one but, in our village, we were honored and saluted”. Displacement snatched traditional social identity which were mainly ascribed identities. One of the participants claimed “now I am living with strangers they are selfish type of people who are unable to differentiate between good and bad”. Another research participant claimed that “in my village I was Numberdar. Here I am an ordinary man”. The displaced villagers spread in urban or suburban areas after displacement breaking the traditional social networks and ascribed social identities (Prince, 2009).

### **Breaking Down Family System**

Displacement induced a separation among traditionally connected villagers. Housing society forced the families to leave their village where they were living together in joint families. Economic compensation was divided between family members. They got settled according to their plans and future aspirations. One of the research participants claimed that “we were four brothers living and farming together in a village. After taking compensation, one of our brothers went to Gulberg and started his own business and the younger one went abroad”. Displaced villagers were forced to opt for a nuclear family system instead of a joint family system which was a traditional rural family system (Al-Houdalieh & Sauders, 2009). One of the old men from a research participant claimed that “housing society separated my both sons who were previously living together. Now both are living with their family in two separate housing societies and occasionally meet each other”. Detachment from village, a sense of externality in the new locality, urban and suburban norms and values were not welcomingly acceptable for displaced villagers.

### **Sense of Community**

A strong sense of community was present among the villagers as the majority of the relatives were living together in a single village (Ghatak & Mookherjee, 2014). Displacement changed the nature of their community and now even close relatives were not living in the same area. Informal collaboration and cooperation were at the great extent in their village life which is shattered now in their new displaced social setting (Prince, 2009). One of the research participants claimed that “we were living there before Pakistan and everything there was memorable. We built houses and buried our beloved here”. This implies that housing society projects even after granting economic compensation marginalized the displaced villagers and added to their vulnerability.

### **Economic Impacts of Displacement**

Displacement not only removes people from their settled economic activities but also puts them in a new setting where the nature of economic activities might be different from that of the previous one (Terminski, 2014). Displaced villagers lost their fertile agricultural land which compelled them to change their occupations for earning a livelihood. Economically independent villagers, especially illiterate old-age farmers were converted to dependent family members of their households. Displaced villagers also faced the injustice of non-relevant relocation where their skills and expertise were non-relevant.

### **Losing Agricultural Land: A Shift in Occupations**

In most of the cases, when a rural community is displaced, they suffer severe economic consequences. The majority of the villagers who were displaced in this case were illiterate and they were well settled in their agricultural activities of farming and livestock management (Sridarran et al., 2018). However, after displacement, the majority of them got settled in urban and suburban areas. In urban and semi urban settings their skills were inappropriate. Resultantly, they have to change their occupations (Al-Houdalieh & Sauders, 2009). According to one of the respondents “in my village we were farming 20 acers of land. I was managing farming and was all in all farming and related tasks. I was feeding my family and saving too”.

### **Economic Independence to Dependence**

After displacement, many of the old age farmers were helpless to engage themselves in productive activities. They were now dependent on their family members rather than independent bread earners. Displacement converted independent and active members of society into dependent and a sort of inactive members of society (Owen & Kemp, 2015). One of the research participants claimed that “I do not have any money because I do not earn. I am totally dependent upon my family to bear living cost”. Displacement might also increase the dependent population in the country if it is not properly managed (Owen & Kemp, 2015).

### **Injustice of Non-Relevance Relocation**

Relocation of people in new localities where their skills and expertise are non-relevant is a kind of injustice which villagers reported in the present study. Relocation in urban and semi urban areas was quite irrelevant for villages because of a shift in the economic activities of rural and urban areas. Productive manpower was not able to handle urban economic activities and their requirements (Eckenwiler & Wild, 2022; Hernandez, 2021; Sinthumule, 2018). One of the research participants reported that “I am most of the time free at my house because I cannot work in factories”. One of the women reported that “in my village I accompany my husband to grow and collect vegetables. Now I am always free at home and my responsibility is to cook, wash and clean”. This implies that villagers were relocated to non-relevant places where they were unable to perform productive economic tasks.

### **Conclusion**

The present study aims to explore the socio-economic impacts of internal displacement. The researcher used a qualitative research approach, tools and techniques to achieve research objectives. In-depth interviews were conducted among the displaced villagers from Hera Singh, Fateh Singh and Jalalabad using semi-structured interview guide. Displaced villagers were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques and total 18 in-depth interviews were conducted. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis technique and results were presented in both pre-decided and emergent themes. It was found that displaced villagers faced a drastic change in their daily routine activities of meeting and greeting, socializing and enjoying leisure activities, detachment and identity crises, family system and sense of community. In addition, the most common themes of economic impacts include losing agricultural land, being dependent and facing non-relevant relocation.

### Policy Implications

The policy implications highlight the necessity of taking preventative action in the form of thorough planning and procedures for resettlement before there is any displacement. To ensure a smoother transition for the impacted communities, policymakers should give priority to developing and implementing solutions that offset the negative socio-economic impacts found in the study. Comprehensive resettlement plans, community-building projects, and specialized skill development programs are a few examples of how to solve the complex issues surrounding forced internal displacement brought on by housing development.

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