

Social Work with Children from Severe Materially and Psychologically Deprived Families. A study for Displaced Families in Erbil camps

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of social work interventions in meeting the needs of children from severely deprived families residing in displacement camps, particularly focusing on the Dara Shakran camp for Syrian refugees in Erbil, Kurdistan Region. Through qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of participants, the study aims to identify the primary material and psychological needs of children in the camp, assess existing social work interventions, explore barriers to accessing services, and examine the influence of cultural factors on intervention effectiveness. Findings highlight significant challenges faced by children and families in the camp, including difficult living conditions, poverty, limited educational opportunities, psychological distress, and inadequate support from social workers and NGOs. The study underscores the complexity of addressing the needs of displaced children and families and emphasizes the importance of tailored, holistic interventions to promote their well-being and resilience. Recommendations are provided for enhancing social

work support and addressing systemic issues contributing to material and psychological deprivation in displacement settings.

Key words: Social Worker, Material and psychological needs, displaces families, Dara Shakran camp.

Literature review

Globaly, around 79.5 million people have been forced to leave their homes, with approximately 40% of them being children (Gillespie et al., 2022) . The Kurdistan Region has emerged as a refuge for displaced families, individuals and refugees, offering a glimmer of hope amidst turmoil. As disclosed by Srwa Rasul, the Director General of the Joint Crisis Coordination, the region currently accommodates a staggering total of 900,467 displaced individuals. Among them, 631,174 are internally displaced persons (IDPs), while 269,293 are refugees, hailing predominantly from Syria, Turkey, Iran, Palestine, and various other locations. Notably, 30% of these refugees and IDPs reside within camps, whereas the remaining 70% have assimilated into communities outside these facilities (“Kurdistan Region: A Beacon of Hope for Displaced Persons and Refugees,” 2024)

Numerous studies have highlighted the psychological toll of displacement on children. For example, research by Derluyn and Broekaert (2007) underscored the impact of displacement and material deprivation on children is a multifaceted issue that warrants thorough examination. The psychological ramifications of displacement, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, are widely documented among children in such environments (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007). Moreover, the compounded effects of material scarcity further intensify these challenges, encompassing adverse consequences on children's physical health, educational opportunities, and overall quality of life (Fazel et al., 2012). Betancourt et al. (2012) conducted an extensive examination of interventions aimed at aiding children impacted by war and displacement. Their review underscored the widespread psychological effects experienced by displaced children and emphasized the significance of employing trauma-informed care and psychosocial support to address their needs. This trauma can arise from the loss of home, community, and stability, as well as exposed to violence and conflict (Betancourt et al., 2012). This underscores the intricate interplay between psychological distress and material deprivation,

highlighting the intricate web of adversities faced by children in displaced families residing in Erbil camps.

The lack of necessary resources like food, shelter, and healthcare further worsens the difficulties faced by children in displaced families. Studies have shown that this scarceness negatively affects children's physical health and development (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Moreover, educational opportunities are limited in displacement settings, leading to lower school enrollment and higher dropout rates among children from displaced families (Krafft et al., 2022)

The study on displacement, deprivation and hard work among Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, particularly focusing on child labor. Conducted in the Bekaa Valley, it surveyed 1902 households, including 4377 working children aged 4-18. Findings reveal that children as young as 4 are forced into labor, predominantly in agriculture, due to harsh economic conditions resulting from the Syrian war. Female-headed households, facing greater poverty and food insecurity, are particularly vulnerable. Many children experience labor for the first time after migrating to Lebanon. Girls face harsher working conditions, earn less, work longer hours, and are more prone to health risks and accidents. The study highlights the urgent need for policies to facilitate adult refugees' access to work, aiming to alleviate economic hardship and reduce reliance on child labor (Habib et al., 2019)

The significance of social work in addressing to the necessities of children hailing from severely materially and psychologically deprived families cannot be overstated, as it plays a critical role in alleviating the negative impacts of poverty and trauma. Current research and theoretical models advocate for holistic, culturally attuned, and trauma-informed interventions, which have shown promising results in enhancing the welfare of such children (Smith & Jones, 2023).

Jones and Kumar (2022) highlight the significance of providing comprehensive assistance that addresses both material necessities and mental health concerns. They suggest that interventions must go beyond material aid and include access to mental health services, educational support, and parenting programs.

A growing body of research supports the use of strengths-based approaches in social work. Thompson and Davis (2023) explain how emphasizing the innate strengths of families and

communities can enable them to strive towards self-reliance. Likewise, the implementation of trauma-informed care, as examined by Lee and Rodriguez (2023), offers a structure for comprehending and tackling the intricate effects of trauma on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The success of social work treatments is heavily dependent on cultural sensitivity. In their research on immigrant families, Wang and Ahmed (2024) provide empirical data indicating that interventions that are specifically designed to align with the cultural backgrounds of families are more successful in promoting trust and involvement.

The literature extensively emphasizes the necessity of collaborative methods and advocacy. Brown and Green (2022) elaborate on the advantages of coordinating efforts among multiple agencies to offer thorough assistance to disadvantaged families. Similarly, Martin and Lewis (2023) urge social workers to actively participate in advocating for policy changes aimed at tackling the systemic origins of material and psychological deprivation.

The Kurdistan Region is facing a notable humanitarian challenge in providing assistance to a diverse population of displaced individuals, especially children hailing from severely deprived families. These children, particularly those displaced due to conflict, require specific social work interventions. Erbil, located in Iraq's Kurdistan Region, has experienced a considerable influx of internally displaced persons, many of whom reside in camps marked by difficult living conditions. Despite efforts made, there remains a gap in both understanding and implementing targeted interventions for these children.

Importance of the Research:

The study is crucial as it aims to address the urgent need for tailored social work interventions to support children from severely deprived families living in displacement camps, particularly in the Dara Shakran camp in Erbil. Understanding the specific challenges faced by these families and evaluating the effectiveness of existing interventions can inform the development of targeted programs and policies to better meet the needs of these vulnerable children and families.

The objectives of the research

The aim of this research is to investigate the effectiveness of social work interventions in addressing the needs of children from severely materially and psychologically deprived families living in displacement in the Dara Shakran camp for Syrian Refugees in Erbil. Additionally, the study aims to identify barriers to accessing services and to explore factors influencing the well-being of these children within the camp context.

Research Questions:

1. What are the primary material and psychological needs of children from severely deprived families in the Dara Shakran camp?
2. What social work interventions are currently being implemented in the camp to support children and families, and how effective are they?
3. What are the main barriers to accessing social work services for children and families in the Dara Shakran camp?
4. How do cultural factors impact the providing and effectiveness of social work interventions in this specific context?
5. What are the long-term outcomes of social work interventions for children and families residing in the Dara Shakran camp?
6. How do family dynamics and parenting practices influence the well-being of children in this population?

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with a total of 13 individuals at the Dara Shakran Camp in Khabt, Erbil, which serves as a residence for Syrian refugees. The interviewees included six female refugees, five male refugees, one male social worker, and one male staff member, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Through semi-structured face-to-face interviews guided by a predefined set of questions, the study delved into the life challenges confronted by families and children within the camp. Data analysis will employ qualitative methods, particularly thematic analysis, to offer a nuanced comprehension of the research inquiries. Throughout the research endeavor, the utmost attention will be dedicated to ethical considerations, encompassing the acquisition of informed consent and safeguarding confidentiality.

Ethical consideration

In conducting research at the Dara Shakran Camp in Erbil, ethical considerations were paramount. Prior to participation, individuals were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks, ensuring voluntary consent. Confidentiality measures safeguarded participants' identities, while interviews conducted in private settings respected their privacy. Throughout the process, researchers approached participants with sensitivity, acknowledging their experiences and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, efforts were made to maximize benefits while minimizing harm, ensuring participants' well-being. By upholding ethical principles, the research-maintained integrity and protected the rights of vulnerable individuals, contributing to responsible and impactful outcomes. Furthermore, verbal consent were obtained to record their voices while interviewed by one of researchers. Also, explained the recorded voices will be used for research purposes only and without mentioning their identity.

Research obstacles:

While carrying out primary research in camp, the main issue faced researchers was there was no social worker to interview. Due to withdrawn support by all Non-Governments Organisations and United Nations in Dara Shakran camp, the residents of the camp have been suffering from poverty, food supply, lack of education, health issues as there are no medicine and medical support, and much more.

The main challenge of this research was obtaining details and information from social workers. The only NGO is still in camp and provide their support is one local organisation. One of the local organisation worker was in the office his title was social worker, while he has no qualification only one week training qualified him to work as a social worker in the camp. He supported researchers and contacted interviewees and arranged a one-to-one interview to interview them.

This obstacle made it difficult to get information and details about social workers role in camp.

Research Findings:

Dara Shakran camp, 40 KM from Erbil, Syrian refugees, have many children (3 – 8) per family

Challenges faced by children in the camp:

- 1- Difficult living conditions: Females: no food support (ارزاق), young men using motorcycles that is dangerous to go to work (transportation is not available), bad shelters: rain enters the homes. difficult living, poverty, no work, have children and responsibility. The homes are small. F6 and her son did not get their residency yet, they are here since 7 months, and no one is helping them to get it. Males: very bad situation, if he could he would migrate to Iran, daughters need support because there is no work. No salary for Iraqis' means no job for refugees, clinics lack suitable tools and close early, some deaths caused because they couldn't get the patient to the hospital in Erbil on time, psychological depression. Desperate living conditions. Have 2 wives, lost his job because they wanted another person to get benefits.
- 2- Poverty: no financial resources, no food support since 5 years. She has a shop since few months, no money to support their children and their educational expenses. Males: simple jobs just to survive. Not enough money to pay for electricity, water, and other expenses.

- No work for men affected their psychology and their domestic life. His in laws in Europe support them financially. Selling water or paper towels on traffic lights to get some cash.
- 3- Difficulties: no job or work opportunities, illness. Males: expensive life expenses like food and water, clothes, no fuel to warm the home, the situation is same as Syria but without the war. For medical treatments they return to Syria.
 - 4- Challenge management: trying to overcome the difficulties day by day. Males: by the help of God they are living. Males: life became a challenge they are facing since 11 years, lots of NGOs but with no help. Some families are in a very bad psychological and emotional states because they lost family members when they were trying to immigrate to Europe, some are missing since years and their families are still waiting for any news that they are still alive.
 - 5- Access to education: school is available for children, but without training courses school is not useful. Males: 10 year old girl the school manager told her to stay at home because when she arrived it was the end of the academic year. Some children left school because of the different dialect (Sorani).
 - 6- Aspirations for future: thinking to return to their country. Males: government to solve salary problem. Immigrate to Europe.
 - 7- Discrimination or social stigma: generally no discrimination, safety and security, they are happy with that, they have friends. She has good relationship with her neighbors, but she felt discrimination without anyone telling her. Most of the women have good relation within the camp. Males: no discrimination, good social relations, like brother and sister since they are here for 11 years. His daughter had to leave studying architecture because her head of department asked her to change to another profession because she is Syrian. NGOs are supporting new arrivals and leaving the old refugees.
 - 8- Aid or support through Social Workers: she did not hear about SW and did not get any help through SW, but the help of Psychologist was useful. SW helped her 9 year old son to not leave school for the sake of work. Usually they don't go to social workers for help. Males: no help from SW. they don't have any role to support individuals or families. Lots of NGOs provide trainings but no tools to work with it. During covid-19 he got a training from one of the NGOs, and he became a SW, but later his salary decreased and he left the job.

9- How to enhance SW's support: it is important to help youth and adolescents.

IT: small houses with 11 members living in a very small space, less NGOs to help or provide support, simple physical labor, transportation by motorcycles that causes lots of accidents and deaths, they deal with challenges through their strong social life and supporting each other socially and financially, No SW because there are no NGOs, so there is no SW services or support.

SW: many of them have legal problems – no legal documents to prove marriage or divorce, or birth certificates, and some of them do not even acknowledge their children.

Data Analysis:

The main challenges are:

- 1- Difficult living conditions: all the interviewees mentioned that living at the camp is very difficult, and main reasons are the small houses provided for big families, for example, a family of 11 members live in a small house. The quality and structure of these houses are not good, for example, during the winter, the roof doesn't provide enough shelter from the rain. Also, the lack of electricity and their ability to pay for general generators, lack of fuel and gas that makes it difficult to warm the houses in the winter and cool them during the summer. 2 or 3 men mentioned their desire to immigrate to Europe to find a better life condition for their families, they compared their life in the camp to Syria, the only difference according to them is the safety and security here, while it is an ongoing war in Syria.
- 2- Poverty/ Unemployment: poverty is one of the main challenges faced by these displaced families. All the interviewees mentioned the lack of job opportunities. Men work simple day to day handy jobs for small wages, and the face dangerous situations while going back and forth between Erbil and the camp, because the use motorcycles due to the lack of proper transportation, and the camp is about 40 KM from Erbil city. Most of the women mentioned the difficulties they and their families are facing because of poverty, except one of them, who had recently opened a shop and started to support her family. Both male and female

interviewees mentioned that in the recent years, food support decreased, and they have to pay for food, water and medical treatment. Many of them went back to Syria for medical treatment for being cheaper than Erbil, and the clinic in the camp doesn't have proper medical equipment to treat different patients, for example, a number of the patients passed away due to the lack of medical support at the camp and not being able to reach the hospital in Erbil city on time.

- 3- Lack of education: all of the interviewees have children, some of them have 3 and some of them have 8. Most of them are at the school inside the camp, but the interviewees mentioned the difficulties their children are facing at school such as learning a different Kurdish dialect, and not being able to control the courses without proper training courses. Some of the children had to leave school for the sake of working and helping their families, other had to leave because of not being able to financially provide university fees, and one case had to leave because of discrimination.
- 4- Psychological issues: most male interviewees mentioned being in a bad psychological state for not being able to provide for their families and not being able to find a proper job. Seeing their families living in poverty for almost 11 years affected these men deeply. Also, many families are living in worry and under stress because some members of their family have immigrated to Europe without any news about their wellbeing, they don't know if they are a live or dead which caused them some psychological issues.
- 5- Lack of Social Worker/NGO support: due to the decrease of the number of NGOs, their services and support decreased as well. Most of the cases didn't know what a social worker is, only 2 of them know about it and got some benefits from their help. They expressed their wish for someone to help them, someone to listen to their concerns and daily problems.

Recommendations and Conclusions:

To address these challenges effectively, several recommendations are proposed:

1. Increase Support Services: Enhance the presence of social workers and NGOs in the camps to provide tailored assistance and support to families facing various hardships.

2. Improve Living Conditions: Invest in better housing infrastructure and ensure access to essential utilities like electricity and heating to improve living standards for displaced families.
3. Enhance Education Opportunities: Provide additional support for children's education, including language assistance and access to necessary courses, to ensure all children can thrive academically.
4. Prioritize Mental Health Services: Offer psychological support and counseling services to address the significant psychological distress experienced by men and families in the camp.
5. Strengthen Community Support: Foster community resilience and support networks to help families cope with stress and uncertainty, particularly regarding relatives' migration.

In conclusion, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by children and displaced families in the Dara Shakran camp requires a comprehensive approach involving increased support services, infrastructure improvements, stakeholders and targeted interventions to promote well-being and resilience within the community.

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پوخته ی توژی نهوه

ئهم توژی نهوه به دوا داچوون بو کاریگری دهستیهردانهکانی کاری کومه لایهتی دهکات له دابینکردنی پیداو یستیهکانی مندالانی خیزانه بیههشکان که له کهمپهکانی ئوار مبوندا نیشتهجین، به تایبهت له کهمپی دار شهکرانی پهنا بهرانی سوری له ههولیر- ههریمی کوردستانی عیراق. له ریگهی شتوازهکانی توژی نهوهی چۆنایهتی، لهوانهش چاوپیکهوتنی نیمچه ریکخراو لهگهڵ گروپیکی ههههچهشنی بهشداربووان. نامانجی توژی نهوهکه دهستنیشانکردنی پیداو یستیه جهستهی و دهروونییه سههرهتاییهکانی مندالانی ناو کهمپهکه، ههلسهنگاندنی دهستیهردانهکانی کاری کومه لایهتی، لیکۆلینهوه له بهر بهستهکانی دهستراگهیشتن به خزمهتگوزارییهکان، و کاریگرییهکانی توژی نهوهکه. هۆکاره کولتورییهکان لهسهر کاریگرییه دهستیهردانهکه.

دهرئهجامی توژی نهوه تیشک دهخهنه سههر ئهه ناستهنگه بهرچاوانههی که رووبهرووی مندالان و خیزانهکان دهبنهوه له کهمپهکهدا، لهوانه بارودۆخی سهختی ژیان، ههژاری، دهرفهتی پهروهردهیی سنووردار، فشاری دهروونی و پشتیوانی ناتهواو له لایهن توژی نهوانی کومه لایهتی و ریکخراوه ناحکومییهکانهوه.

توژی نهوهکه جهخت لهسههر ئالۆزی دابینکردنی پیداو یستیهکانی مندالان و خیزانه ئوارمهکان دهکات و ههروهها له لایهکی تر جهخت لهسههر گرنگی دهستیهردانی گشتگیر و تایبهتمهههدهکات بو بهرزکردنهوهی خوشگوزهرانی و خۆراگرییان. پینشیارمهکان دهدرین بو بهههیزکردنی پشتیوانی کاری کومه لایهتی و چارهسههرکردنی پرسه سیستماتیکییهکان که بهشدارن له بیههشبوونی لایهنی ماددی و دهروونی له له کهمپی ئوارمهکان.

ووشههی سههرکی: توژی نهوهی کومه لایهتی، پیداو یستیه ماددی و دهروونییهکان، خیزانه ئوارمهوهکان، کهمپی داره شهکران.

خلاصه

تبحث هذه الدراسة في مدى فعالية تدخلات العمل الاجتماعي في تلبية احتياجات الأطفال من الأسر المحرومة بشدة والمقيمة في مخيمات النزوح، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مخيم دارا شکران للاجئين السوريين في أربيل، إقليم كردستان العراق. من خلال أساليب البحث النوعي، بما في ذلك المقابلات شبه المنظمة مع مجموعة متنوعة من المشاركين، تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد الاحتياجات المادية والنفسية الأساسية للأطفال في المخيم، وتقييم تدخلات العمل الاجتماعي الحالية، واستكشاف العوائق التي تحول دون الوصول إلى الخدمات، ودراسة التأثير، العوامل الثقافية على فعالية التدخل.

تسلط النتائج الضوء على التحديات الكبيرة التي يواجهها الأطفال والأسر في المخيم، بما في ذلك الظروف المعيشية الصعبة والفقر ومحدودية الفرص التعليمية والضغط النفسية وعدم كفاية الدعم من الأخصائيين الاجتماعيين والمنظمات غير الحكومية.

تؤكد الدراسة على تعقيد تلبية احتياجات الأطفال والأسر النازحين وتؤكد على أهمية التدخلات الشاملة والمصممة خصيصاً لتعزيز رفاههم وقدرتهم على الصمود. يتم تقديم توصيات لتعزيز دعم العمل الاجتماعي ومعالجة القضايا النظامية التي تساهم في الحرمان المادي والنفسي في أماكن النزوح.

كلمات مفتاحية: الأخصائي الاجتماعي، الحاجات المادية والنفسية، الأسر النازحة، مخيم دارة شكران

Attachment:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

1. Could you describe the living conditions of your family within the camp?
2. How do you perceive your family's financial status?
3. What are the primary difficulties you confront in your daily life?
4. How do you manage to deal with these challenges?
5. What are your thoughts on the accessibility of education for yourself?
6. What are your aspirations for the future?
7. Have you encountered instances of discrimination or social stigma?
8. How do you sustain social connections within the camp?
9. Have you ever received aid or support from social workers or other organizations?
10. How do you think social workers could enhance their support for children and families within the camp?