CHAPTER I

IMPACT OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT ON CHILDREN, KANNAGI NAGAR, CHENNAI

Introduction

This research examines the impact of internal displacement on children due to environmental (with specific reference to natural disasters) and development related causes in the city of Chennai. Having lived in slums along river, railway, road margins and the sea, the children and their families have been forced out of their homes and shifted to a resettlement area far away from their habitual places of stay. Oblivious of the hardships that awaited them in the area of resettlement, these children have experienced the grief of seeing their homes razed down either by the waves of the Tsunami or the bulldozer and experienced the trauma of eviction, displacement, transit and resettlement. Resettlement has made the children more vulnerable as their parents find it difficult to re-establish their livelihood in order to make ends meet, cope with lack of resources, brave social tensions and are disturbed by an overwhelming sense of helplessness. As eviction drives continue and houses in newer resettlement areas are built, findings provide insights so that issues concerning internally displaced children are addressed, resettlement and rehabilitation is planned better, underlying social inequities analysed and a child rights approach to the issue strengthened. This will ensure that the severe impact that internal displacement imposes on children is reduced.
Chapter I

Definition of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Internal displacement is a critical humanitarian issue and a common international phenomenon. After almost fifteen years of debate and discussion, the most widely applied definition coined by Francis Deng, the former UN Secretary-General’s Representative on Internally Displaced Persons defines ‘Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDPs) as those who have been forced to flee their homes of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural and manmade disasters and have not crossed the internationally recognized border (Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement, 1998, OCHA 2010).

Causes of Internal Displacement in India

There are four broad causes of internal displacement in India (Lama, 2000). These include displacement caused due to

I  Political causes, including secessionist movements
II  Identity-based autonomy movements
III  Localized violence
IV  Environmental and development-induced displacement

Though often associated with conflicts, much internal displacement and resettlement is also taking place due to natural disasters and developmental activities in urban areas. Development activities include large urban infrastructure projects such as road widening, construction of flyovers, beautification projects to name a few. These projects are implemented after much political deliberation and often involve funding agencies such as the World Bank, and private players such as builders and construction
companies. While these projects are justified as being in larger public good and in the national interest, they overlook humanitarian aspects (CEHAT, 2006).

**Risks Intrinsic to Displacement**

Michael Cernea, a sociologist who has researched development induced displacement and resettlement for about two decades and contributed immensely to the field of displacement, points out that being forcibly ousted from one’s land and habitat carries with it the risk of becoming poorer than before displacement. Those displaced “are supposed to receive compensation of their lost assets, and effective assistance to re-establish themselves productively; yet this does not happen for a large portion of oustees” (Cernea, 1999). Cernea’s impoverishment risk and reconstruction model proposes that “the onset of impoverishment can be represented through a model of eight interlinked potential risks intrinsic to displacement.” These include

1. **Landlessness**- Expropriation of land removes the main foundation upon which people’s productive systems, commercial activities, and livelihoods are constructed. This he states is the principal form of de-capitalization and pauperization of displaced people, as they lose both natural and human-made capital.

2. **Joblessness**- The risk of losing wage employment is very high both in urban and rural displacements for those employed in enterprises, services, or agriculture. Yet, creating new jobs is difficult and requires substantial investment. Unemployment or underemployment among settlers often endures long after physical relocation has been completed.
3. Homelessness- Loss of shelter tends to be temporary for many resettlers; but, for some, homelessness or a worsening in their housing standards remains a lingering condition. In a broader cultural sense, loss of a family’s individual home and the loss of a group’s cultural space tend to result in alienation and deprivation.

4. Marginalization- Marginalization occurs when families lose economic power and spiral on a “downward mobility” path. Many individuals cannot use their earlier acquired skills at the new location and human capital is lost or rendered inactive or obsolete. Economic marginalization is often accompanied by social and psychological marginalization which is expressed as a drop in social status, loss of confidence in society and in themselves, a feeling of injustice and deepened vulnerability.

5. Food Insecurity- Forced uprooting increases the risk that make people fall into temporary or chronic undernourishment, defined as calorie-protein intake levels below the minimum necessary for normal growth and work.

6. Increased Morbidity and Mortality- Displacement threatens to cause serious decline in health levels. Displacement-induced social stress and psychological trauma are sometimes accompanied by outbreaks of relocation related illnesses, particularly parasitic and vector-borne diseases such as malaria. Unsafe water supply and improvised sewage systems cause epidemics, diarrhoea and dysentery. The weakest segments of the demographic spectrum-infants, children, and the elderly are affected the most.
7. Loss of Access to Common Property- For poor people, loss of access to the common property assets that belonged to relocated communities (pastures, forest lands, water bodies, burial grounds, quarries, and so on) result in significant deterioration in income and livelihood levels.

8. Social Disintegration- The fundamental feature of forced displacement is that it causes a profound unravelling of existing patterns of social organization. This unravelling occurs at many levels. When people are forcibly moved, production systems are dismantled. Long-established residential communities and settlements are disorganized and kinship groups and family systems are often scattered. Social networks that provide mutual help are rendered non-functional, trade links between producers and their customer base are interrupted, and local labour markets are disrupted. Formal and informal associations and self-organized services are wiped out by the sudden scattering of their membership. Traditional management systems tend to lose their leaders. The coerced abandonment of symbolic markers (such as ancestral shrines and graves) or of spatial contexts (such as mountains and rivers considered holy or sacred trails) cut off many physical and psychological links with the past and saps the roots and cultural identity. The cumulative effect is that the social fabric is torn apart. Others have suggested the addition of other risks such as the loss of access to public services, loss of access to schooling for school-age children, and the loss of civil rights or abuse of human rights.
Robert Muggah and Theodore Downing included two additional risks intrinsic to displacement that are included to the risks put forth by Cernea (Dutta, 2007). These include

9. **Loss of Access to Community Services** - Include services from health clinics to educational facilities, but when lost or delayed cause both short and long term costs.

10. **Violation of Human Rights** - Displacement from one’s habitual residence and the loss of property without fair compensation can, in itself, constitute violation of human rights. In addition to violating economic and social rights, arbitrary displacement can also lead to violations of civil and political rights, including: arbitrary arrest, degrading treatment or punishment, temporary or permanent disenfranchisement and the loss of one’s political voice. Displacement not only carries the risk of human rights violations at the hands of state authorities and security forces but also the risk of communal violence when new settlers move in amongst existing populations.

While these potential risks highlight impoverishment, it should be understood that displacement is not a temporary phenomenon that disappears on the return home or resettlement of the displaced (Roberta Cohen, 1998). On the contrary it is often a long term phenomenon that disrupts the lives of not only the individuals and families concerned but also of whole communities and societies leaving children particularly vulnerable.
Impact of Internal Displacement on Children

The impact of internal displacement is felt more acutely by children, women, disabled and elderly (IFSW, 2002). Internal displacement has changed livelihood, has resulted in breakdown of family, community structures, affected education, nutrition, health care and the disintegration of traditional social norms, leaving children particularly vulnerable. The impact of displacement on children cannot be underestimated: many die within days and weeks of displacement due to malnutrition, measles, diarrheal diseases, respiratory infections and malaria (Mahalingam, Narayan and Velde, 2002). Children are exposed to physical danger- they may be separated from their families, physically abused, exploited or abducted. Despite their obvious vulnerability, it has been well documented that children are amongst the worst sufferers in the process adopted, especially in eviction drives. While the physical aspects that often accompany evictions and demolition drives remains most visible, the loss of a home, livelihood and community has affected children in multiple ways (Info Change News & Features, July 2008). Further, these life events cause stress, impacting the mental health of the affected. As displacement is not only physical but also economic and social, the demolition of a home or forced eviction often means the destruction of a lifetime’s savings, shattering not only the present but making the future insecure (India Together, 2004).

Displacement and forced evictions cause high levels of stress, impacting the mental health of affected communities (Hindu, 22 September 2006). Moving and resettling in a new place is stressful for children. For the families who get ‘rehabilitated’, the housing conditions are poor and inadequate. They are deprived of the human right to access basic needs of adequate housing, water, sanitation, electricity and security. The right to development is most
often violated as the resettlement sites lack adequate number of schools and for those that exist, lack of infrastructure and in adequate numbers of personnel is a matter of concern. For those who continue to access schools away from the resettlement area, the long commute, lack of transport and safety during the long journey is a challenge (Singh & Singh, 2007). Many children are often forced to discontinue their education. Girl children are more likely than boys to drop out due to lack of easy access to schools and safety concerns. In communities where education for girls is not a priority, in these situations of economic stress, it is usually the girl-child who is pulled out of school first (Info Change News & Features, July 2008). Many girls are also forced to drop out as domestic work load increases dramatically due to lack of easy access to water, loss of social networks and support systems. They are also forced to take care of the home as adults spend increased time away at work. There are also reports of young girls being sexually exploited in the given situation.

The displacement related experience hence creates a state of threat and dangerous stimuli as the child lacks skills to meet new demands, is vulnerable to a number of situations and is specifically prone to experiencing mental health problems. Protection and support that the internally displaced child gets from the family and other systems in dealing with the related experience is essential in successfully overcoming such experience.

**Internal Displacement and Rights of Children**

The resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (1997) on refugee and internally displaced children directs Governments to recognise vulnerability and pay particular attention to the situation of refugee and internally displaced children by designing and implementing policies for
their care and well-being. In this endeavour international cooperation is extended in particular by the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international humanitarian organizations. Expressing concern on the increasing numbers in this segment of the population, the resolution calls upon all States, United Nations bodies and agencies to ensure safety and care especially in the areas of health, education, and psycho-social rehabilitation of internally displaced children and refugees.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a primary international instrument to address the rights of the world’s children. The UNCRC adopted by the General Assembly in November, 1989 is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history to address the rights of the world’s children (UNICEF, 1989). The Convention puts forth that

"States Parties shall respect and ensure ... rights ... to each child ... without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.... States Parties shall ensure ... the survival and development of the child.... States Parties recognize the right of the child to the ... highest attainable standard of health....; shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to ... health care services.... States Parties shall ... diminish infant and child mortality; ... ensure the provision of ... health care to all children.... States Parties shall take all effective ... measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children.... States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.... States Parties ... shall take appropriate measures to assist
parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support..., particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.... States Parties recognize the right of the child to education.... States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development... States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse... "

Though rights are guaranteed by State parties, too often the rights of internally displaced children are violated, resulting in malnutrition, abuse, discrimination, poverty and sometimes even death.

In the light that India’s legal framework is not comprehensive to effectively rehabilitate IDPs, benefitting them only by ad hoc initiatives, this research undertaken examines the impact of internal displacement on children due to environmental(with specific reference to natural disasters) and development related causes in the city of Chennai. Internal displacement has made the children vulnerable as they are forced to cope with trauma, lack of resources, shoulder domestic responsibilities and are disturbed by an overwhelming sense of helplessness.

**Rationale of the Research**

The city of Chennai, Tamil Nadu is witnessing growth in industries and development in the field of Information and Technology (Chapter IV-Setting and Respondents discusses details). In contrast, the city has also been witnessing an increased growth of slums. In order to meet the specifications to create a ‘global city’, the Government has commissioned several
programmes. However, these programmes have made those residing in slums the worst targets. They are forced to move out of city spaces to resettlement sites far away. In doing so, these internally displaced persons bear several hardships and the impact of the same especially on children is severe.

The interest in the area of the internally displaced children is an outcome of the researcher’s observations and work in the process of concurrent field work supervision of MSW students placed in slums and in school settings. Experience of working with the slum dwellers in Lang’s Road, Pudupet, Chennai, brought to light the threat of eviction they faced for several months. Subsequently, the slum dwellers not only faced the wrath of the bulldozer which razed down their houses but painfully battled the fire (which they claim was a deliberate attempt to force them to move) which reduced to ashes their belongings and make shift homes after eviction. In the course of field work, the researcher and her students provided psycho social support to the children and journeyed with the families as they were forced to resettle at Kannagi Nagar, a resettlement area about twenty five kilometres away from their place of stay.

Post tsunami 2004, many students from slums attending schools near the sea were also resettled in Kannagi Nagar, far away from their area of habitation. In the course of working with these children in schools, it was observed that resettlement posed several challenges for the students to meet and cope. It was inferred that several areas of their functioning was affected which was evident in their difficulties to meet the demands at school.

On exploring the issue further, it was gathered that residents of many slums in Chennai face the threat of eviction. While children face the trauma of being internally displaced, it was realized that their needs require immediate
attention. However, it is understood that their needs cannot be addressed in a vacuum. Internally displaced children need to be considered in the broader context of family, the community, in the national and international context.

**Statement of the Problem**

Chennai has one of the largest resettlement programmes in the country. Driven by ambitious programmes such as the Elevated Expressway, Metro Rail, Coastal Elevated Expressway, Slum Free Chennai by 2013, road expansion, river water cleaning projects, Tsunami Rehabilitation of the Public Works Department (PWD) and the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB), many slum dwellers from almost 49 places in the city (The New Indian Express, July 2009) have been forced to resettle far away from the city in a resettlement area called Kannagi Nagar. Commonly referred to as ‘hell hole’, ‘city’s suicide point’, ‘sub-urban ghetto’, ‘massive concrete slum’, ‘human dump yard’, this research was undertaken in Chennai’s largest resettlement area, Kannagi Nagar, Chennai housing a population of nearly one lakh, (1,00,000).

Although intended as a welfare measure to rehabilitate slum dwellers, environmental disaster and development has cost them their homes, their livelihood, their health, and for some, even their lives. The suffering of those internally displaced to this resettlement site is severe. Internal displacement has exposed children to an environment, which has affected various aspects of childhood, causing psychosocial trauma, which has manifested itself in a variety of ways and has a huge impact on the life choices of children.

Research evidence indicates that the impact of internal displacement on children is devastating. Many children spend their whole childhood in a state of displacement, without ever knowing or benefiting from a normal, happy
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and nurturing family environment. Some experience being displaced two, three or more times, and become more vulnerable after each experience. In many cases children are left in a state of shock as they are exposed to trauma, which includes bearing the anxiety of an impending demolition of their home, shock of hearing the news just before demolition, witnessing homes being razed down, watching scenes of casualties, injury, destruction, loved ones being beaten and struggling to live in extreme life life-threatening circumstances, illness and being in situations where they thought they would die. They also experience lack food, water, personal belongings, separation from loved ones, change of school, friends and the routine of family life. Life thereafter has indicated deteriorated relations within families. Loss of teachers, caregivers and neighbours has been disrupted by displacement. The displacement-related experience (provoked trauma/stress) is not a single event which stops and settles down quickly but is an ongoing process that may last for several years.

A child’s experience in the early years of life is of critical importance, both to immediate well-being and to the future. A secure, safe and happy childhood provides children the foundation to make the most of their abilities and fulfil their potential as they grow up. Advances in fields of inquiry as diverse as neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, developmental psychology, epidemiology, sociology and economics are catalyzing an important paradigm shift in understanding health and disease (Shonkoff, 2012). Stable, responsive, nurturing relationships and rich learning experiences in the early years provide lifelong benefits for learning, behaviour, physical and mental health (Shonkoff, 2009). In contrast, research on the biology of stress with major adversity in early childhood shows that the developing brain architecture is weakened, permanently altering the
body’s stress response system and increasing the risk for a range of chronic
diseases. The past two decades have increasingly highlighted the importance
of childhood as a stage in life that affects adulthood (Morrow, 2011). Many
problems later in life - developmental delays, health and mental health
problems, poor literacy, criminality and unemployment have origins in
pathways that begin much earlier in life, often in early childhood (UNICEF,
2004).

This research aims at understanding the impact of internal displacement on
the lives of children resettled at Kannagi Nagar, Chennai. Data was collected
from children (228 school going and 34 others) in the age group 10-17 years
who were internally displaced due to environmental and development related
causes. The impact of internal displacement on children is analysed,
perception of self in the given situation, violation of rights and adjustment to
life in the resettlement area is studied (Chapter III Research Methodology
discusses details). Though the primary focus of this research is children,
accounts of various agencies which are a part of the children’s day to day life
have also been included to holistically understand issues concerning them.
As the experience of eviction, displacement, transit and resettlement has
caued considerable distress and disruption to normal life, focus of the
research has primarily been on the present and on the future.

Scope of the Research

It is only by the 1990’s that there has been a growing interest and attention
drawn to the needs of internally displaced populations. Internally displaced
children and their families present the world community an exceptional
crisis, the magnitude and severity of which demand a creative and focused
response commensurate with the level of need.
The magnitude of issues presented by internally displaced children requires a deeper systemic understanding, support and full awareness of their unique needs. This will facilitate providing assistance to internally displaced children and their families in a sustained and consistent manner until they are able to resume a normal routine. There is an increased need for intervention and orientation towards internally displaced children and their families. There is also a need to make existing services more accessible and explore opportunities for service collaboration and partnership in addressing and advocating specific needs of displaced children and their families.

Despite the increasing prevalence of this group of persons worldwide, the impact of internal displacement on children has not been investigated adequately. The topic of study is of particular significance to a country like India where environmental and development induced causes are primary causes resulting in internal displacement. As many more resettlement areas are being planned and built nationwide, the findings of this study will provide insights so that issues are addressed and efforts are directed towards meeting needs and interests of this vulnerable group and their families.

**Relevance to Social Work**

From its beginning, the Social Work profession has been committed to the defense and promotion of Human Rights. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) definition of Social Work states “human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification of social work action. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion” (IFSW, 2002). It follows therefore that excluded
people constitute the main focus for Social Work as a profession and this inevitably includes people who are internally displaced especially children.

In India, large numbers of internally displaced persons are unassisted and in need of attention and protection. It is hoped that findings of this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and help enhance protection and assistance services for internally displaced children. Further, this research aims to identify areas of State action to address issues and that internally displaced populations are provided opportunities to participate in the planning of their future. This will help design and formulate preventive, remedial, developmental policies and programs for internally displaced children in future.