

Understanding and Caring of Displaced People

There are millions of refugees and displaced people worldwide due to violence, conflict and disasters. How can we as Christians share the love of Christ with people who have suffered such significant losses? What do we need to know and what best practices should we implement as we seek to serve them effectively?

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I. Abstract

Traumatic events are defined as extremely unusual and shocking events that are life-threatening. It involves violent man-made acts, such as war, ongoing violent conflict (tribal wars), or acts of God, such as natural disasters (tsunami, bush fires). It threatens the mental health of millions of people and challenges social and cultural ways of life and spiritual beliefs. It calls for new and creative forms of resilience and willingness to change social behavior. Forcibly displaced persons internally and externally (across borders) are the result of collective traumas. The intent of this workshop is to increase understanding and care of forcibly displaced persons from a biblical perspective.

II. Learning objectives

- A. Definition and causes of forcibly displaced persons
- B. Understanding the impact of collective trauma (war/disasters/violent conflict) on forcibly displaced persons and their mental health
- C. Understanding the type and extent of loss due to forced displacement (what do we need to know?)
- D. Strategies to care for this population group from a Christian perspective (active listening, empathy, compassion, practical support and love)
- E. The value of technology

III. Outline

A. Definition and Causes

Displaced persons are defined as follows: “Persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violence of human rights, or natural or human made disasters. The definition covers both internal and cross borders displacement” (UNHCR, cited in UNESCO, 2021).

The intent of this workshop is to explore the central phenomenon of displaced persons in Europe and other continents. The scope of the crisis of displacement is emphasized by Reischmann et al. (2022) who stated that 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021). Lawson et al. (2020) stated that it was predicted that the Russian invasion would lead to 4-5 million refugees. The war in Ukraine resulted in the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II with more the 10 million people being internally displaced or displaced across borders in the beginning of April 2022 (UNHCR, 2022). Attention will be given to the displacement of Ukrainians by the Russian-Ukrainian war and the need for trauma-informed counseling.

B. Displacement and Mental Health

Literature on the impact of war on the mental health of displaced persons indicated that it has a significant impact on mental health. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of the most significant crises in Central Europe since World War II (Boiko et al, 2023; Meredith, 2023, Toros et al., 2024) as Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes in pursuit of protection.

According to Basishvill et al. (cited in Boiko, et al., 2023) refugees and internally displaced people are a unique category of civilians. They experienced extreme stress due to loss of their residence, loved ones, and change in external environment. For the first time, the EU has implemented the Temporary Protection Directive (Meredith, 2023). However, many Ukrainians cannot access services and protection, especially against SBV. An aspect that is noteworthy is the support that is available through technology. Ukrainians can use their smartphones to access social media support groups and key information. The ultimate impact of the displacement of Ukrainians on Europe is unclear (Meredith, 2023). Reischmann et al. (2022) stated that 1 out of 3 refugees is affected by depression, anxiety or PTSD. Secure attachments are threatened and replaced by the development of anxious and avoidant attachment patterns.

C. Understanding the extent and type of loss

What do we need to know and what best practices should we implement as we seek to serve them effectively?

1. Active listening and empathic responses are key to effective caring and sharing.

Questions should cover experience, attitude, behavior and knowledge components, for example,

a) Questions Related to Attitude (How did you feel?)

(1) Can you tell me about the time when you were forced to leave your home and flee to,

(a) another part of your home country or (b) another country?

(2) Can you describe what it was like trying to access shelter during the conflict?

(3) How did the journey impact your relationship with your family?

b) Questions Related to Behavior (What did you do?)

(1) What was your first response, once you realized you must leave your home and flee your country?

(2) How did you respond to your family members' expressions of fear, for example crying or freezing on the journey?

(3) What actions were taken upon arrival at the shelter?

c) Questions Related to Knowledge (What did you know?)

(1) What factors influenced you in your decision to leave your home and flee?

(2) Can you recall any details about the extent of armed forces/ flames/ waves, for example, geographical position, (close by or far away) when you decided to leave your home?

D. Strategies for Care and Best Practices

How can we as Christians share the love of Christ with people who have suffered such significant losses?

1. Compassion

Active listening and empathy should be paired with Biblical compassion.

- Jesus felt compassion: Matthew 9:36
- Jesus wept: John 11:35
- The parable of the good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37
- Ephesians 4:32
- 1 Peter 3:8
- Romans 12:15

2. Practical Support

The basic needs for survival according to Maslow's triangle of needs are shelter, food, clean water and sanitation. Secondly, it would be important to care for the continuation of education and the provision of employment, and thirdly, maintain religious practices and beliefs.

3. Build resilience by means of Christian faith interventions

Spiritual needs should be addressed, and church services or Bible study groups made accessible to displaced persons to encourage and build resilience.

4. Grief counseling

Assist displaced persons to deal with their losses by implementing a grief counseling protocol,

- 1) Tasks model, 2) Stages model, 3) Prolonged and complicated grief.

5. Technology

The use of an app for support can create a sense of connectivity and alleviate anxiety, for example, connecting through a WhatsApp group. Confidentiality of all information should be maintained as it is an integral part of ethical practice.

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