



Educational Disruption in Conflict-Induced Displacement: Experiences of Internally Displaced Students in Manipur

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Abstract: Manipur, a state known for its ethnic diversity and complex social and political dynamics, has often experienced inter community tension and conflict. Manipur has witness it most devastating communal conflict in 2023, causing disruption of livelihood, essential services and according to reports displacement of nearly 67000 individual (The Hindu,2024) which has significantly affected access to education for many school going children and adolescents. Educational continuity is critical for stability, psychological wellbeing and future prospects of young people effected by conflict. This study examines the nature and extent of educational disruption experiences by internally displaced students in conflict affected areas of Manipur. For the purpose of the study a descriptive exploratory research design has been adopted using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to approximately 59 displaced student who were enrolled in high and higher secondary classes (classes 9-12). The research explores the duration and causes of educational interruption, challenges in continuing education after displacement, accessibility to learning materials, and the psychological impact on displaced students. Secondary sources, including policy reports and existing literature on education in conflict and displacement settings, are used to contextualized findings. The primary finding suggest that displacement has resulted in prolonged interruptions in school, difficulties in transferring to new institutes due to loss of relevant academic document and financial constrain, limited access to academic materials such as text books and course materials. Many students have also reported experiencing psychological stress affecting learning outcome. In several displacement setting,

inadequate educational infrastructure further exacerbates the educational challenges faced by displaced students. Despite these challenge and obstacles, many respondents demonstrate resilience and strong aspiration to continue their education. The study highlights the urgent need for educational support mechanisms, including flexible admission policies, temporary learning spaces in relief areas, and psychological support services within educational institutions for displaced student. There is a need to strengthen institutional responses to educational disruption not only for safeguarding the right to education but also fostering recovery, resilience, and long-term peacebuilding in conflict affected societies.

Keywords: *Educational Disruption, Internal Displacement, Conflict, Manipur, Psychosocial Impact, Peacebuilding, Resilience*

1. Introduction

Education takes a central place in the progress of a person and community, and it is not only a means of knowledge gain but also a stabilising factor in the process of post-conflict recovery, identity building and long-term peacebuilding. Conflict is not only disastrous to education systems when it affects them, but it has a long-lasting impact on them: it endangers the psychological health of a person, as well as social unity and the future of whole generations of youths. Among the most acutely affected by such disruptions are internally displaced persons (IDPs), who by virtue of their sudden displacement and unstable livelihoods are in the thick of it.

Being a northeastern Indian state with high ethnic diversity and complicated socio-political relations, Manipur has traditionally been a location of the intermittent communal tensions. The violence that broke out in May 2023 based on inter-ethnic disputes between the Meitei and the Kuki-Zo communities turned out to be the most violent act of communal violence in the state in recent decades. It was reported that about 67,000 people have been displaced (The Hindu, 2024), and complete villages, schools, and the infrastructure of the community became ashes or unusable. Although the media coverage was mostly devoted to the humanitarian and political aspects of the crisis, the educational outcomes of the displaced children and adolescents were relatively lowly systematically addressed.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms the right to education and is supported by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which makes it a right to inclusive and equitable quality education. The actualisation of this right, in the conflict and displacement contexts, however, is highly contingent on structural,

institutional, and psychosocial aspects, which are seldom envisaged appropriately. The Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015) and Durable Solutions Framework of IDP further highlight education as key to finding sustainable ways out of displacement scenarios.

Here, the current research will look at the lived educational experience of internally displaced students in Manipur with emphasis on the period and reasons of educational interruption, the difficulties in accessing and pursuing education, access to learning materials, and the psychological effects of displacement on academic participation and ambition. The paper also contextualizes its results into a larger discussion of reconciliation, transformation, and peacebuilding, the motifs of paramount importance in the modern Manipur situation, by emphasizing the importance of education in enhancing recovery and resilience.

2. Review of Literature

The connection between military conflict, displacement, and education has been widely reported on the international literature. Smith (2011) developed a theoretical framework which links four dimensions of education in emergencies; safety, access, quality and protection; as essential pillars of humanitarian response. Conflict is not only disastrous to the physical infrastructure but also to the social and pedagogical ecosystems on which learning flourishes.

In a seminal work on the topic of community-based schooling in Afghanistan, Burde and Linden (2013) showed that the physical distance between schools, aggravated by insecurity, were a significant limiting factor on enrolment, especially among girls. Likewise, Nicolai and Triplehorn (2003) discovered that school infrastructure destruction was one of the strongest deterrents to the continuity of education among displaced children. Such material upheavals are also complicated by the fact that academic records are lost- an obstacle that often denies displaced learners the opportunity to resume formal education systems (UNHCR, 2019).

Psychosocial aspects of displacement have equally been well-documented. Betancourt and Khan (2008) demonstrated that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety rates among children exposed to war-related violence are extremely high; all of which directly affect the academic concentration and the learning results. In a systematic review of refugee mental health, Fazel et al. (2012) reported that 19-54 percent of displaced youth had a diagnostic PTSD. Importantly, psychological distress does not act on its own, it overlaps with material deprivation and social isolation to add to educational disadvantage.

Similar results have been found in research on displacement in the South Asian context. Research on ethnic-based displacement caused by conflicts in Assam, Kashmir and Sri Lanka

has also shown that ethnic and communal conflicts have a cascading educational effect such as closing of schools, displacing of teachers, disrupting curriculum and internalising of trauma (Kantha, 2009; Bose, 2003). Shimray (2004) recorded the culture of insurgency and ethnic militancy in Manipur in the northeast of India, which had historically weakened educational infrastructure and student motivation, to the point that the conflict in 2023 has rendered it catastrophic.

According to Paulson (2011), education systems of post conflict societies are both conflict reproducing and conflict transforming locations as seen through the perspectives of peacebuilding. How displaced students are (or are not) reintegrated into educational systems may indicate the extent to which institutions are reconciled- and inclusive recovery-focused. Dryden-Peterson (2016) also argues that the provision of education to displaced populations is not only a welfare necessity but a more political gesture, one that would indicate to the entire society the willingness to acknowledge and respect displaced groups.

Although there is a significant amount of international literature available on education in conflict and displacement, there is little empirical research available on the particular experiences of internally displaced students in Manipur with regard to education. This research attempts to fill that gap through the creation of contextually-based data that has the potential to guide policy and practice during the short-term post-conflict phase.

3. Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To document the duration and immediate causes of educational disruption experienced by internally displaced students in Manipur.
2. To examine the challenges encountered by displaced students in accessing and continuing their education after displacement.
3. To assess the availability of and access to learning resources before and after displacement.
4. To investigate the psychological impact of displacement on students' academic concentration, emotional wellbeing, and motivation.
5. To identify existing support mechanisms received by displaced students and recommend policy-relevant interventions.

4. Methodology

This research takes on a descriptive-exploratory research design, which tries to systematically record the educational experiences of a specified group of internally displaced students. The design was considered to be suitable considering the relative lack of empirical baseline data on this topic in the Manipur setting and the necessity to produce both quantitative and qualitative data.

The sampling and sampling procedure will involve the following:

4.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample used in the study included a total of 59 internally displaced students who were mainly of Classes 9 to 12 (secondary and upper secondary) and undergraduate students enrolled in college. The sample was comprised of students that lived in various districts of Manipur, though there was a higher percentage of Imphal West (47.5%), Churachandpur (16.9) and Imphal East (15.3) students, the areas that were most severely impacted by the conflict in 2023. Purposive and snowball were used to access the respondents via relief camps, community networks, and institutions in the host areas.

4.2 Data Collection Instrument

To accomplish this study, a structured self-administered questionnaire with 27 questions was created. The scale included six thematic areas: (1) demographic and background background; (2) pre-displacement educational profile; (3) nature and length of educational disruption; (4) post-displacement educational access and difficulties; (5) psychological effects; and (6) support received and future aspirations. Items related to difficulties and sources of support were provided as multi-select response options. The questionnaire was conducted face-to-face and online in March-April 2026.

4.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical data analysis techniques such as frequency distributions and percentage calculations were used to analyse quantitative data. Multi-select questions were split into separate response categories and tabulated separately. Open-ended items were analyzed using a thematic analysis of qualitative data, and the patterns and representative verbatim responses were utilized to complement the quantitative results. Policy reports, humanitarian assessments and academic literature were secondary sources that were used to put the primary data into perspective and interpretation.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

All the respondents agreed to participate in the study through an informed consent. Since the experiences of the study population are sensitive, the questionnaire was created in

such a way that it did not re-traumatise the respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents have been observed during the research process.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

The 59 respondents used are of ages between 13 and 30 years with a majority of them falling within the 15 to 22 years of age. Regarding gender, 61.0% of the respondents were female, 37.3% were male, and 1.7% other. Most of the respondents (62.7) were staying in rented houses during the time of the study with 10.2 being in the house of a relative and only 1.7 in a specified relief camp. The majority of the respondents (62.7) were residing with the nuclear family, even though 16.9% were living alone or with non-family members- a major risk factor in being psychologically vulnerable and disengaged in school.

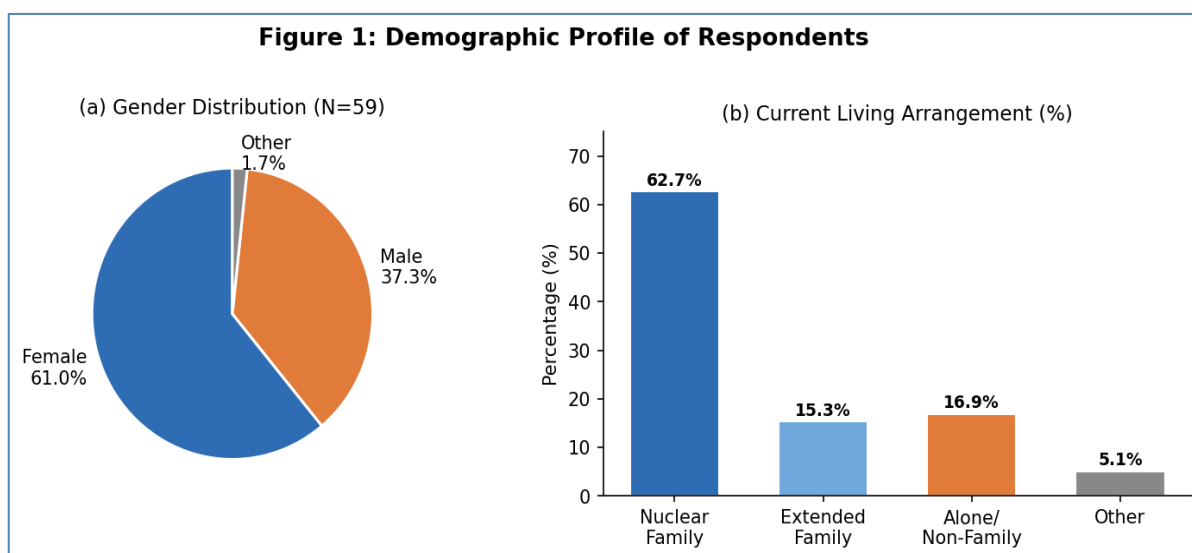


Figure 1: *Demographic Profile of Respondents – Gender Distribution (a) and Living Arrangement (b)*

The distribution of educational levels within the sample revealed that the majority were enrolled at the undergraduate level (61.0%), followed by higher secondary (Class 11–12: 23.7%) and secondary (Class 9–10: 8.5%) levels. Most had attended government institutions prior to displacement (61.0%), with 32.2% from private institutions.

Table 1: *Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=59)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	36	61.0
	Male	22	37.3

	Other	1	1.7
Current Residence	Rented Accommodation	37	62.7
	Other (incl. informal)	13	22.0
	Relative's House	6	10.2
	Host Community / Relief Camp	3	5.1
Living Arrangement	Nuclear Family (Parents)	37	62.7
	Extended Family	9	15.3
	Alone / Non-Family	10	16.9
	Other	3	5.1
Education Level	Undergraduate (College)	36	61.0
	Class 11–12	14	23.7
	Class 9–10	5	8.5
	Technical/Vocational	2	3.4

5.2 Pre-Displacement Educational Background

A vast majority of the respondents (98.3 percent, n=58) said they attended school or college regularly before the conflict. Academically, 18.6% of them rated their performance as excellent, 49.2% as good, and 30.5% as average, meaning that the majority of displaced students were academically engaged and were performing at a satisfactory or above-average level prior to displacement. Prior to displacement, 98.3% of the students were sufficiently equipped with textbooks and course materials, 84.7% had consistent internet, and 78.0% had a quiet and dedicated study area. Such data paint a picture of a student population which was on average well-endowed educationally prior to the conflict- giving increased weight to the upheavals that ensued.

5.3 Character and Length of Educational Interruption

Out of 100 respondents, 84.7% (n=50) of the respondents indicated that the war directly halted their school or college enrolment. The number of those whose education was interrupted also differs significantly in terms of disruption time as shown in Figure 2. Out of the entire sample, 37.3 percent said they could not attend a single educational establishment longer than six months of their lives- a result that highlights how long and how serious educational displacement was in the situation.

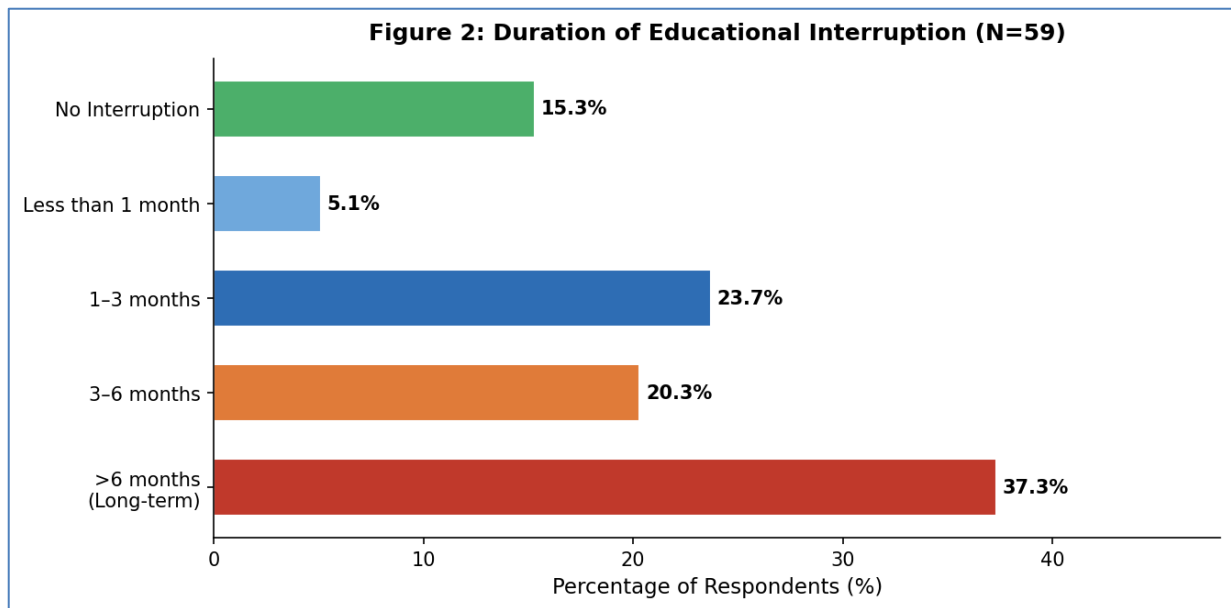


Figure 2: *Duration of Educational Interruption Among Displaced Students (N=59)*

Table 2: *Duration of Educational Interruption*

Duration of Interruption	n	% of Total Sample
Less than 1 month	3	5.1
1–3 months	14	23.7
3–6 months	12	20.3
More than 6 months (long-term)	22	37.3
Not applicable (no interruption)	9	15.3

About what had happened to the schools or colleges of respondents, 27.1% said that their school was still operating, but it was hard or unsafe to get to; 25.4% said they did not know; 18.6% said the school had already been closed; 13.6% that the school was physically destroyed; and 11.9% that they did not know. The combination of these figures depicts a topography of extreme institutional upheaval. In regard to current enrolment, 64.4% of the respondents were enrolled in an educational institution during the time of the study, and 35.6% came out of school completely (n=21).

5.4 Continuing Education issues following displacement

The respondents were requested to list all the crucial challenges they had faced in their further education following displacement. Psychological stress and trauma were identified as the most commonly mentioned barrier (52.5%), as shown in Figure 3 and Table 3, with financial problems (47.5%), and loss of academic documents (33.9%) coming in at the second and third position respectively. The fact that these problems are co-occurring is itself

interesting- displacement triggers a cascade of material, institutional, psychosocial barriers that are mutually reinforcing and have a resistance to piecemeal solutions.

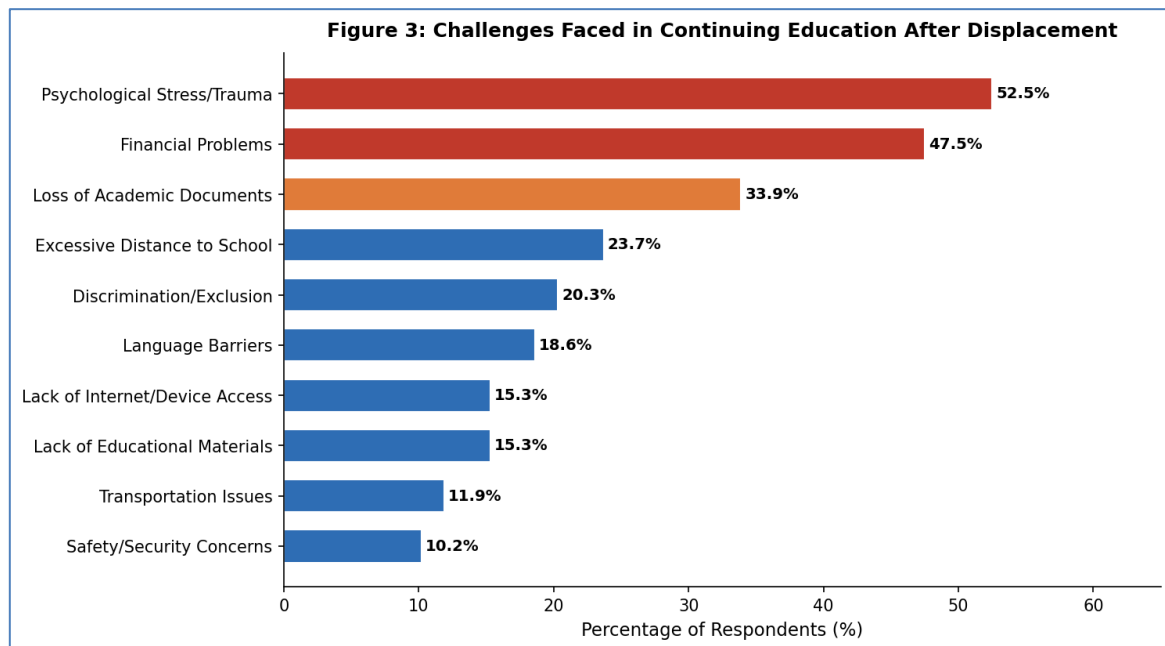


Figure 3: *Challenges Faced in Continuing Education After Displacement (N=59, Multiple Responses Permitted)*

Table 3: Challenges Faced in Continuing Education After Displacement (N=59)

Challenge	n	%
Psychological Stress or Trauma	31	52.5
Severe Financial Problems (fees, supplies)	28	47.5
Loss/Damage of Academic Documents	20	33.9
Excessive Distance to New School	14	23.7
Discrimination or Exclusion at New School	12	20.3
Language Barriers	11	18.6
Lack of Internet or Device Access	9	15.3
Lack of Essential Educational Materials	9	15.3
Lack of Safe or Reliable Transportation	7	11.9
Safety or Security Concerns During Travel	6	10.2

5.5 Availability of Learning facilities: Pre-displacement and Post-displacement

When there is a comparison of the access in resources before and after displacement, there is a significant decline in the accessibility of important learning supports as shown in

Figure 4. Although 98.3% of the respondents were able to access the textbooks in full before displacement, it dropped to 64.4% after displacement and 10.2% reported no access whatsoever. The most extreme change was in access to a quiet and adequate study space: prior to displacement, 78.0 percent had a specific allocated study space, whereas, after displacement, only 37.3 percent reported complete access, and 54.2 percent reported partial or occasional access. The deprivation of a constant home environment, the spatial text of study, proved to be a particularly acute aspect of educational disadvantage in displacement.

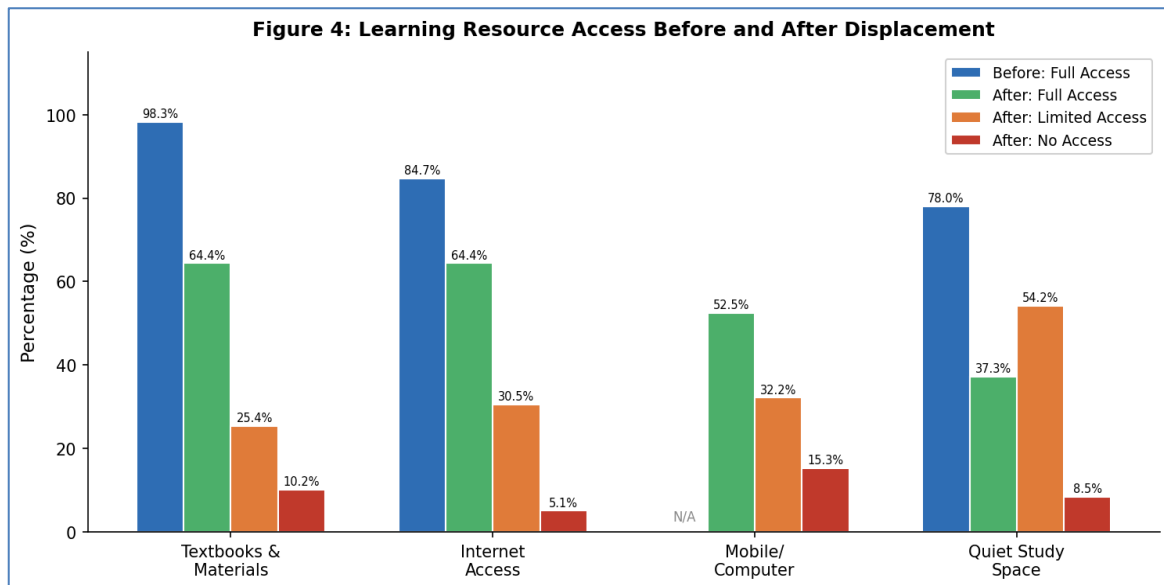


Figure 4: Comparison of Learning Resource Access Before and After Displacement

5.6 Psychological Consequence of Displacement on Education participation

One of the most critical aspects of the study results is the psychological ones. Figure 5 shows that when respondents were asked whether displacement and related trauma had impacted their study-related concentration, 32.2% of the respondents said they were severely and consistently impacted and 59.3% said they were impacted sometimes. Only 8.5 percent said that their concentration skills had not been seriously affected- that is, more than three-quarters of the students who had been displaced were suffering to some extent some form of cognitive impairment due to the trauma.

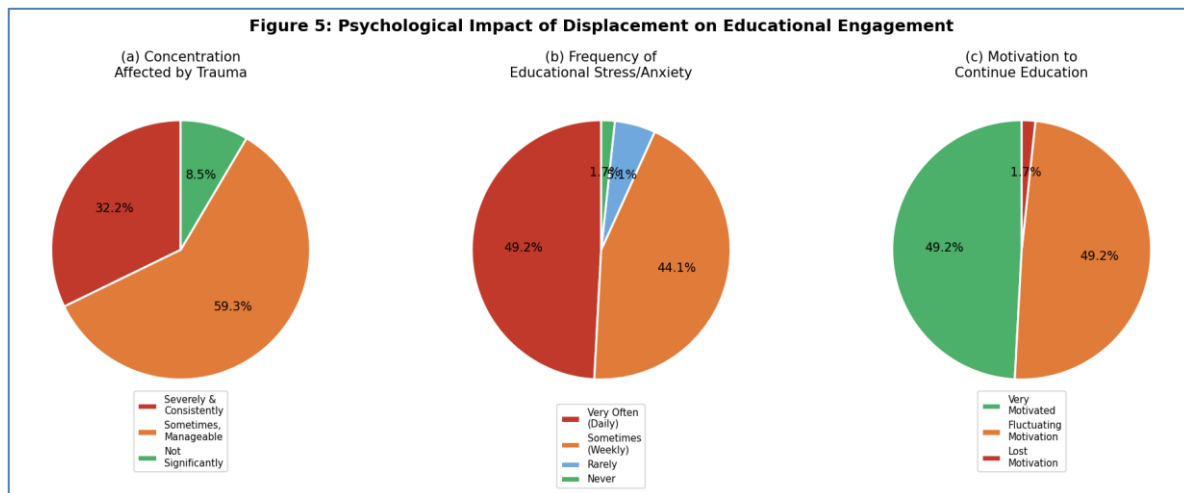


Figure 5: *Psychological Impact of Displacement — Concentration (a), Stress/Anxiety (b), and Motivation (c)*

Moreover, 49.2% of respondents said they were stressed or anxious about their education and future very often (almost daily), and another 44.1% said they were stressed or anxious about their future sometimes (several times a week). The high rate of educational anxiety in this sample is impressive and is consistent with the rest of the international literature on the mental health effects of forced displacement among youth (Fazel et al., 2012; Betancourt and Khan, 2008). Amid these daunting psychosocial issues, there is an opposing aspect of data: resilience and aspiration. Respondents were questioned about their motivation to continue their education, 49.2% of the respondents reported strong motivation, the other 49.2% reported fluctuating motivation and 1.7% of respondents reported that they were no longer motivated. The observation can be related to previous evidence on other displacement contexts that has shown that displaced youth tend to have a strong aspirational orientation towards education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Qualitative responses affirm this: one student responded, 'I wish we all could forgive one another, bring peace and attempt to live in a state of peace. Another one said: 'It totally messed up my balance. It is a continual battle in terms of finances. The isolation and worry are very tough emotionally and it is really difficult to concentrate.

5.7 Support Received and Institutional Gaps

The information on support received is a very worrying story of institutional unavailability, as Figure 6 demonstrates. Forty-seven point five percent of the respondents said that they received no external support at all that was specifically directed towards their continuation of education. Family support (emotional or financial assistance of family members) was the most widespread source of help to those who got some (45.8%). In support on a community level, 11.9 percent were cited, school or teacher support 10.2 percent,

government support 6.8 percent and NGOs support 3.4 percent. A respondent observed: 'Absence of responsible institution or authority in relation to displacement and its after effects renders the entire affair a lot more challenging.

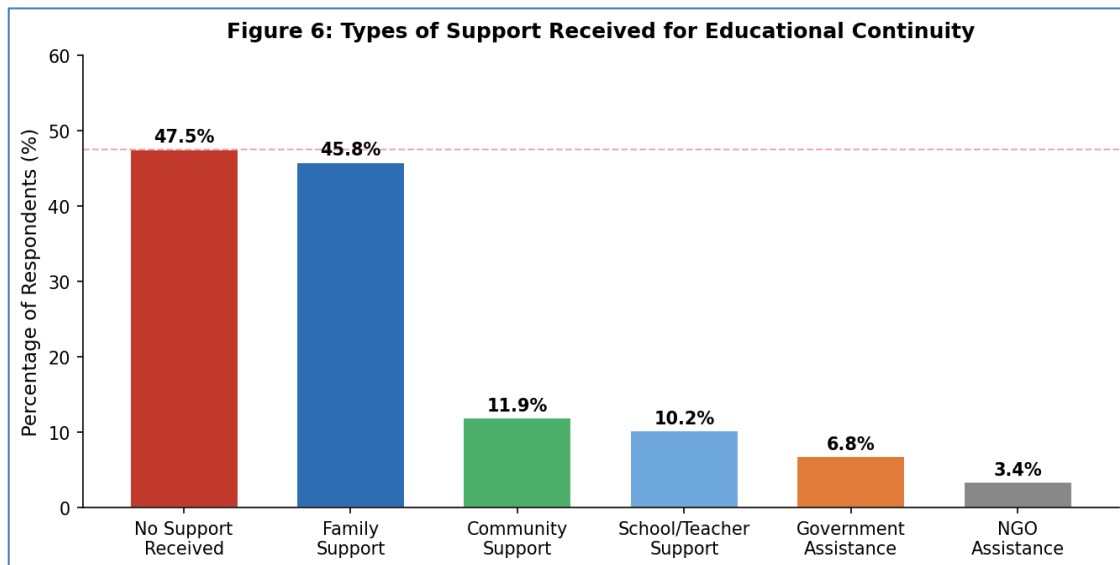


Figure 6: *Types of Support Received for Educational Continuity (N=59, Multiple Responses Permitted)*

In response to questions regarding future education objectives, as in Figure 7, half of the respondents indicated a desire to go to college or university, and 32.2% wanted to find a job right away (due to the need to urgently cover the expenses) and 16.9% were unsure. The fact that most people are driven by the need to get higher education despite the widespread adversity- offers a strong argument in favor of investing into the availability of post-secondary education to displaced students.

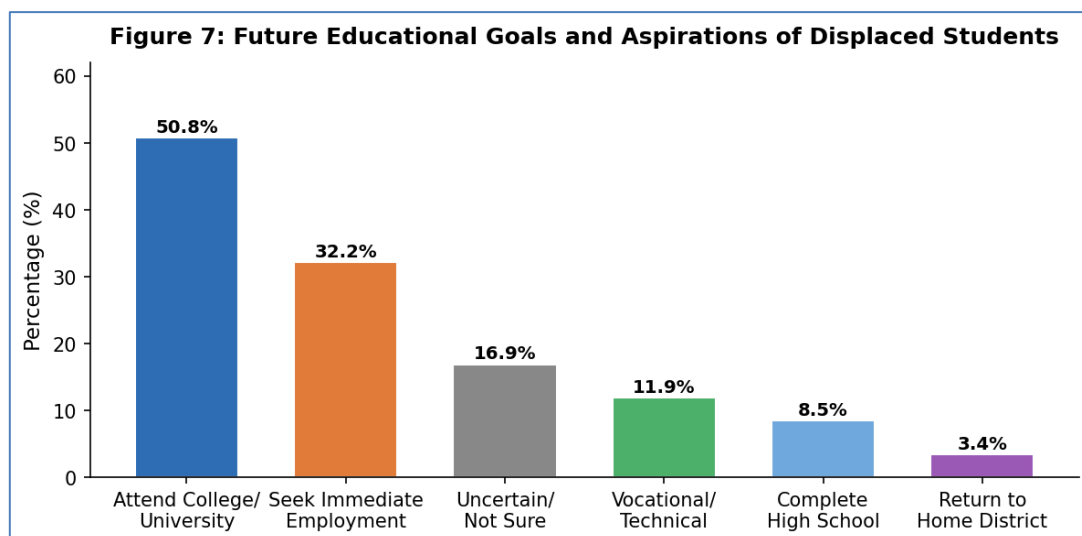


Figure 7: *Future Educational Goals and Aspirations of Displaced Students (N=59)*

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has captured, based on empirical evidence gathered among 59 displaced students in Manipur, an image of extreme, multidimensional education disruption due to the 2023 communal conflict. The results show that displacement is not simply a postponement of education but a systematic destruction of the material, social, institutional and psychological conditions, on which continuity in education relies. The impact has been long lasting, cumulative and poorly managed by the current support systems among a large percentage of respondents.

The consequences of these discoveries are not only educative but also very basic political and humanitarian. Education, it is as Paulson (2011) and Dryden-Peterson (2016) argue, at the heart of politics of recognition in post-conflict societies. The symbolic message of less value in the future and aspirations of displaced students leads to the displacement and militates against the reconciliation and social reintegration of the displaced students when they are excluded or marginalised within the educational systems. On the other hand, when institutions react in an elastic, delicate and sincere way to the inclusion, they are the agents of peacebuilding.

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Lax Academic Policies: Academic institutions must implement tentative enrolment systems where displaced students are allowed to enrol without full documentation with grace periods during which the certificates and transcripts would be submitted. Examination boards are to come up with quicker measures to reissue the lost academic documents.

2. Support Financing Systems: The state government is supposed to create a specific scholarship or fee-waiver programme to conflict-displaced students. Government provisions should be complemented by community-based fundraising and civil society alliances due to the magnitude and immediacy of financial necessity.

3. Psychosocial Support In Institutions: Schools and colleges being received by displaced students ought to have trained counselling officers and mental health professionals. Pedagogy needs to be approached in a trauma-informed way, which will allow the teachers to identify and address the psychological needs of displaced students in a relevant manner.

4. Temporary and Alternative Learning Spaces: Temporary learning centres, mobile school programmes, and community-based learning programs should be set up in regions with high populations of the displaced. The provision of devices and assistance in connectivity should be increased in distance and open learning modalities.

5. Institutional Coordination: A needs-responsive institutional response to the educational aspect of displacement (through a coordinated inter-departmental task force of Departments of Education, Social Welfare, and Health, and civil society and community leaders) should have accountability mechanisms to ensure long-term monitoring of results.

6. Education as a part of Peacebuilding Frameworks: Education in response to displacement should be a part of long-term reconciliation and peacebuilding. The curriculum, teacher education and school culture ought to be geared towards intercultural dialogue, empathy, and peaceful management of difference.

The statistics help to understand that the dreams of displaced students in Manipur are still alive despite the challenges they have to deal with. It is the duty, as well as the chance, of institutions and policymakers to embody these dreams into reality- and in the process, to establish the foundations of a more just, educated and peaceful society.

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