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Forced Internal Displacement and Mental Wellbeing: An Anthropological Analysis of Invisible Scars and Resilience Pathways among Internally Displaced Persons in Yaoundé, Cameroon

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Abstract

Compulsory internal displacement has become one of the major socio-political and development challenges affecting communities in conflict-affected contexts. In Cameroon, the armed conflict in the North-West and South-West Regions has generated significant population movements, forcing many individuals and families to seek refuge in urban centres such as Yaoundé. While existing studies have largely examined displacement from humanitarian, security and psychological perspectives, this article adopts a development anthropology approach to analyse how forced displacement transforms social relations, livelihoods, cultural identity and mental wellbeing among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Yaoundé VI. Drawing on qualitative ethnographic research involving internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions, the study explores the lived experiences of displacement and the social processes through which suffering, vulnerability and resilience are produced. The findings reveal that displacement signifies more than physical relocation; it constitutes a disruption of belonging, economic autonomy, cultural continuity and social status. Participants' narratives demonstrate that mental distress is deeply embedded within broader experiences of social suffering, livelihood loss and identity disruption. However, the study also highlights the agency of displaced populations through family networks, spirituality, community solidarity and adaptive economic strategies. By linking empirical experiences with social suffering theory, development anthropology, cultural identity theory and resilience theory, this article argues that mental wellbeing among displaced populations must be understood as a social, cultural and developmental issue rather than only an individual psychological condition.

Keywords: *Forced Internal Displacement; Mental Wellbeing; Resilience; Cameroon*

Introduction

Forced internal displacement has become one of the most significant social, political and developmental challenges of the contemporary world. Beyond the physical relocation of populations, displacement represents a profound disruption of social relations, economic activities, cultural identities and the systems of meaning that sustain everyday life. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024), forced displacement continues to affect millions of people globally, generating complex humanitarian and developmental consequences. From an anthropological perspective, however, displacement cannot be understood only as a demographic movement or a humanitarian emergency; it is also an experience of social rupture, suffering and transformation.

The anthropological understanding of suffering emphasizes that individual distress is often produced within wider historical, political and economic structures. Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) argue that social suffering results from "the devastating injuries that social forces can inflict on human experience." This perspective moves analysis beyond individual psychological trauma and highlights how violence, poverty, exclusion and political instability shape the everyday lives of affected populations, producing what Farmer (2004) terms structural violence — harm that is embedded in social, economic and political arrangements rather than reducible to individual pathology. Thus, the experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs) must be examined within the broader contexts of structural violence, disrupted livelihoods and changing social worlds.

Globally, forced displacement has increasingly become linked to development challenges because displaced populations often lose access to land, employment opportunities, social networks and community-based support systems. Development anthropology draws attention to how displacement affects people's capabilities to participate in economic, social and cultural processes. The loss of livelihoods, for instance, is not simply an economic problem; it can affect dignity, identity, family responsibilities and social status. As Sen (1999) argues, development is fundamentally concerned with expanding human capabilities and freedoms. When displacement limits these capabilities, it creates conditions of vulnerability that affect both wellbeing and development trajectories.

Across Africa, forced displacement has historically been associated with armed conflicts, political instability, environmental pressures and social inequalities. African displacement experiences reveal that uprooted populations do not only lose physical spaces; they often experience disruptions in belonging, kinship obligations and cultural continuity. The African context demonstrates the importance of understanding displacement through social and cultural lenses rather than only through humanitarian frameworks. Mbembe (2001) highlights how political conditions can produce precarious forms of existence in which certain populations experience insecurity, exclusion and uncertainty about their future. Similarly, Nyamnjoh (2005) emphasizes the importance of belonging and mobility in African societies, where identity is often negotiated through relationships, histories and connections to places. Writing on social change in Cameroon specifically, Nkwi (2015) likewise stresses that anthropological analysis must attend to how historical and political ruptures reshape community life and everyday practice.

In Cameroon, internal displacement has intensified following the socio-political crisis affecting the North-West and South-West Regions since 2016 (IOM, 2024). Thousands of individuals and families have been forced to leave their communities because of insecurity, violence and the destruction of social and economic infrastructure. Many have relocated to urban centres, including Yaoundé, where they must reconstruct their lives in unfamiliar environments. While urban relocation may provide physical safety, it also creates new forms of vulnerability linked to unemployment, poverty, social isolation, cultural disruption and psychological distress.

For internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI, displacement represents more than geographical movement. It involves the interruption of livelihoods, the transformation of family relations, the weakening of community support systems and the continuous negotiation of identity in an urban setting. Their experiences reveal what Bourdieu (1999) describes as the effects of social suffering produced through unequal social conditions. The displaced person is therefore not only a victim of conflict but also an actor attempting to rebuild social life within conditions of uncertainty.

A growing body of empirical research has documented the humanitarian and psychosocial dimensions of the Anglophone Crisis. Quantitative work in the Ntui subdivision of the Centre Region has shown that community satisfaction and solidarity are associated with better psychological health among displaced populations (Tassang et al., 2023), while research on livelihood collapse among IDPs has called for durable, development-oriented responses that move beyond emergency relief (Bang, 2024). Among ageing IDPs resettled in Bafoussam, Wolter (2023) shows that ‘waiting’ to return is not passive endurance but an active practice of care, work and improvisation. More recently, qualitative research in Douala has examined how displacement, gender-based violence and Anglophone identity intersect to shape the mental health of displaced women (Ngangue et al., 2026), echoing continental evidence that conflict-induced displacement compounds women's health vulnerabilities across Africa (Amodu et al., 2020). Together, this literature confirms that displacement affects psychological wellbeing, livelihoods and social integration. However, much of it relies on cross-sectional survey methods or focuses on specific host sites such as Ntui, Bafoussam and Douala; comparatively little ethnographic attention has been paid to Yaoundé VI, or to how displaced persons themselves narrate the meaning of suffering, dignity and resilience in their own cultural terms.

This study addresses that gap by examining the lived experiences of internally displaced persons in Yaoundé VI through the lens of social suffering and development anthropology. The study argues that forced internal displacement produces interconnected forms of suffering affecting psychological wellbeing, livelihoods and cultural belonging. However, displaced populations are not passive recipients of vulnerability; they develop adaptation strategies, mobilize social networks and create new pathways of resilience. By exploring these experiences, this research contributes to broader debates on displacement, mental wellbeing and sustainable development in African contexts.

The main research question of this article is: How does forced internal displacement shape the mental wellbeing and social realities of internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI?

The main hypothesis is that forced internal displacement negatively affects the mental wellbeing of internally displaced persons by disrupting their social networks, livelihoods, cultural identities and sense of belonging; however, displaced populations develop adaptive strategies and forms of resilience that enable them to reconstruct their lives within new social environments.

This links to the objective of the study, which is to analyse how forced internal displacement influences the mental wellbeing, social relationships and resilience pathways of internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI through an anthropological perspective.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative ethnographic research design to explore the lived experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon living in Yaoundé VI. The ethnographic approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth understanding of how displaced populations interpret their experiences of suffering, mental wellbeing, social disruption and resilience within specific cultural and social contexts. Rather than examining displacement only as a humanitarian phenomenon, the study sought to understand how forced migration transforms everyday life, relationships, identities and development trajectories.

The study population consisted of internally displaced persons who had relocated to Yaoundé VI following the socio-political crisis affecting the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct experience of forced displacement. The study involved 50 participants who provided rich qualitative information through different data collection activities.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. The interviews explored participants' experiences before and after displacement, changes in family and social relationships, livelihood challenges, perceptions of mental wellbeing, cultural interpretations of suffering and healing, and the strategies developed to cope with displacement. Participant observation enabled the researchers to capture everyday realities, social interactions and adaptation practices within the displaced community.

Data collection instruments included interview guides, observation notes and audio recordings, made with participants' consent. Ethical principles guided the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and respect for participants' dignity. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their participation.

The data were analysed thematically. Emerging themes were identified, coded and interpreted in relation to the theoretical perspectives of social suffering, trauma, resilience, ecological systems and cultural identity. Scientific rigor was ensured through triangulation of data sources, prolonged engagement with participants, careful documentation of field observations, and reflexive consideration of the researchers' positionality throughout the research process. Through this methodological approach, the study offers an anthropological understanding of forced internal displacement by centring the voices, meanings and lived realities of displaced persons themselves.

Major Findings

The findings reveal that forced internal displacement among persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI represents more than a physical relocation. Participants described displacement as a profound disruption affecting their emotional wellbeing, social relationships, economic security and sense of belonging. Their narratives demonstrate that the consequences of displacement are experienced through interconnected dimensions of loss, uncertainty, adaptation and resilience. What follows is an anthropological reading of this social suffering and its bearing on mental wellbeing.

Displacement as a Source of Psychological Distress and Social Suffering

Participants consistently described displacement as an experience marked by fear, uncertainty, sadness and continuous reflection on their lost homes and disrupted lives. Many explained that leaving their communities was not a voluntary choice but a forced decision taken in response to insecurity and threats to their survival. The emotional consequences of this rupture continued even after reaching Yaoundé, where physical safety did not necessarily eliminate psychological distress.

Esther, a 45-year-old IDP from Kumbo, explained that she, her siblings and her parents had struggled for years to build their family house. Most of the labour was done by the family itself: they moulded the blocks and carried the water, paying technicians only to draft the building plan and guide the construction. They sacrificed time and energy, and at times fell sick, but pressed on because the house represented a long-held family dream.

Emotional attachment to property

"Since I came here, my thoughts are not stable. I keep thinking about where I came from and what happened there. My father was a hardworking man and believed every child, both boys and girls, has the right to build their compound. So we suffered to build our compound we moulded blocks, carried water, did very hard labour, my brothers and I." [Esther, female, 45, Kumbo, North-West Region]

Loss of family hard-labour investment

Esther went on to describe how that hard labour was undone in an instant, without warning. Her account conveys how passion and long-held expectations were suddenly cut short.

"Every one of us had his or her own section of the compound, alongside the main house belonging to my father and mother. We were about to finish the sections meant for rent when the conflict started. With our own eyes we saw how so many years of very painful hard labour was destroyed in a few seconds." [Esther, female, 45, Kumbo, North-West Region]

The Collapse of Family Dreams and Unity Due to Conflict

Several participants used the language of "collapse" to describe how deeply their sense of the future had been shaken.

"My parents collapsed and until now, they have not yet recovered from the shock. We were forced to leave my beloved home, people, daily customs, to all flee to Yaoundé, Douala and Bafoussam. We were forced to separate ourselves, of which we have been so used to living together. It is sad, but we have no choice but to survive and thrive." [sociodemographic details not recorded in the transcript]

This testimony illustrates how displacement creates what anthropologists describe as social suffering the intersection between personal pain and wider political and social forces. The distress experienced by participants was not only an individual psychological reaction but a consequence of violence, loss of social environments and uncertainty about the future. Several participants reported feelings of hopelessness, anxiety and emotional exhaustion linked to unemployment, dependency and the inability to restore their previous way of life. For many, the loss of home represented not only the loss of physical space but also the loss of identity, social status and community recognition.

Loss of Livelihoods and the Development Consequences of Displacement

The findings further show that forced displacement significantly affected participants' economic capacities and development opportunities. Before displacement, many participants engaged in farming, small businesses, skilled trades and community-based economic activities. Relocation to Yaoundé disrupted these sources of livelihood and forced many to depend on unstable income-generating activities.

Participants explained that economic insecurity increased their psychological burden because they were unable to fulfil family responsibilities or maintain their previous social roles. The inability to provide for children, contribute to the household or participate fully in community life produced feelings of frustration and diminished self-worth.

"I am called Paul. As a father, I have not been able to provide for my family as before, when I was in Bamenda. We rushed to Yaoundé with three kids, a decision I regret until now. Here I could not speak, understand or write French how do I get a decent job in a renowned law firm? I found myself becoming a taxi driver in Yaoundé. Most of the burden fell on my wife. I was humiliated, frustrated, when she could pay bills I could not. My African man's ego made me become a narcissistic person. Honestly, as I am talking now, I am ashamed of all that I did to her. Our marriage is destroyed she stays in another room, and the kids treat me as a stranger. This displacement has changed the family pattern I was brought up with. I am totally lost." [Paul, male, father of three, Bamenda, North-West Region → Yaoundé, taxi driver]

The Loss of a Good Trade

Susan narrated, with pride and nostalgia, how she had once been a prosperous food seller. She was known for her cooking of kokki beans, a business that had allowed her to buy a plot of land and build on it she had bigger plans still, but the conflict and displacement arrived unexpectedly.

"I am called Susan, I am 55 years old, from Bamenda town. I used to be called Mammy Kokki, because I cooked and sold kokki in front of the district hospital. This business enabled me to buy a plot and build a house for my children, separate from our family investment with my husband, their father. But with the conflict, my children in Yaoundé insisted I come to Yaoundé." [Susan, female, 55, Bamenda, North-West Region → Yaoundé]

Financial Hardship in Low-Status Jobs in Yaoundé

In Yaoundé, Susan took work as a house help for a much younger employer, an arrangement she experienced as humiliating: she was scolded when things went wrong, and her earnings came to only a fraction of what she had made from her sales business in Bamenda. Attempts to restart her food business in Yaoundé did not succeed, and at one point she considered returning to Bamenda, though she eventually stayed on, dissatisfied with the job but unable to leave it.

"Here I have been forced to take a job as a house girl, can you imagine? Even with this, I am unable to meet up with bills I usually call and beg all my kids to send me money. Before coming here, I was someone who could work and support my family. Now I depend on others, and it affects how I see myself." [Susan, female, 55, Bamenda, North-West Region → Yaoundé]

These experiences demonstrate that mental wellbeing among displaced populations is closely connected to economic participation and social recognition. Displacement therefore produces not only humanitarian vulnerability but also a development deficit, by limiting individuals' capabilities and opportunities.

"I am living in Yaoundé only hand to mouth. In most cases I am even indebted. This has given me panic attacks. At times, when I think of the debts, how to pay my bills and take care of myself, I literally feel my heart pounding in my chest. This gives me palpitations, and I am in constant worry about how my life will be. The stress is too much." [sociodemographic details not recorded in the transcript]

This informant's account of financial anxiety was echoed by several others: thinking about bills, debts and responsibilities alone was enough to produce physical sensations of agony, fear and shame.

The Invisible Scars: Psychological Distress and Mental Wellbeing

According to the findings, the violence and displacement participants witnessed produced not only material loss but also profound psychological and emotional suffering. Participants repeatedly described their experiences using language of fear, sadness, hopelessness, persistent worry and emotional exhaustion. Although these experiences were expressed differently according to age, gender and personal circumstances, they collectively reveal that displacement left enduring internal distress — what this article terms "invisible scars": psychological strain that does not fade with time.

"I am called Njiki, from Widikum, 35 years old, and now based in Melen. I usually just sit like this and cry, or notice tears flooding down my cheeks. This happens before I even realize I had been lost in sad thoughts about all the loss the consequences of the conflict and displacement. The loss of warm relationships, the loss of lives, the loss of property, the violence, the hatred of one human being for another. All of this, gathered in one mind, is not easy to heal." [Njiki, 35, Widikum, North-West Region → Melen, Yaoundé]

Disrupted Livelihoods, Economic Insecurity and Development Challenges

According to the findings, one of the most immediate and enduring consequences of forced internal displacement was the disruption of participants' livelihoods. Almost every participant described losing an important source of income following displacement from the North-West and South-West Regions. Farms, small businesses, workshops, trading activities and other forms of economic engagement were abandoned because of insecurity, leaving many households without stable means of survival upon arrival in Yaoundé. Many also reported difficulty finding jobs or well-paid jobs in Yaoundé, which reduced their capacity to afford a decent standard of living in a city considerably more expensive than many towns in the regions. As a result, many described feeling stuck, with life projects at a standstill.

"I am called Maurice, 42 years old, from Muyuka, and I live in Obili. My displacement to Yaoundé, due to the conflict, though it saved my life, has caused me tremendous setbacks. While in the region, I had a project a house under construction but since the conflict the building has remained unfinished. Even here, I am unable to raise the money to complete it. I am even thinking of relocating back to my home town, but will I have any money in hand to start something?" [Maurice, 42, Muyuka, South-West Region → Obili, Yaoundé]

Prolonged Economic Insecurity and Mental Restlessness

According to the research findings, prolonged economic insecurity has emerged as one of the most significant sources of mental restlessness among internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI. Participants said that escaping conflict was the best choice available to them for physical security, but many now feel trapped in overlapping cycles of economic and social limitation that extend into other areas of life, including access to healthcare. This chronic insecurity has shaped a persistent mental restlessness.

"I am called Mariam, from Mamfe, 35 years old, living in Nsimeyong towards Akwa. I now cook and sell food in Yaoundé. While in the region, I was at the University of Buea, but when my parents were killed in the conflict, I did not only drop out I also left the town for Yaoundé. The battle with poverty has left me speechless, but honestly I am in constant restlessness now. I am always scared of what tomorrow holds." [Mariam, female, 35, Mamfe, South-West Region → Nsimeyong/Akwa, Yaoundé; former University of Buea student, now food vendor]

Resilience, Agency and Pathways to Rebuilding Lives

Despite the profound challenges associated with forced displacement, the findings reveal that internally displaced persons are not only defined by vulnerability and suffering. Participants demonstrated different forms of resilience, agency and creativity as they attempted to reconstruct their lives within new social environments. Resilience emerged not as the absence of suffering, but as the capacity to adapt, create meaning and continue living despite difficult circumstances. Many participants identified social support, religious communities, skills development, small-scale economic activities and mutual assistance as important mechanisms that enabled them to cope with displacement. These strategies allowed individuals and families to regain a sense of purpose and autonomy after experiencing loss and uncertainty.

"My name is Sylvie. I always believe there is a silver lining in every dark cloud. I used to learn how to make clothes while in the South-West Region. So when I found myself in Yaoundé, I begged a woman to help me finish my training instead of taking money, she told me to learn tailoring while helping her in the house as a house maid. The arrangement worked out well, and I opened my own shop a year later. My advantage is that I am creative and stylish. I am a fashion designer now, in traditional wear, and I export." [Sylvie, female, South-West Region → Yaoundé, fashion designer/tailor]

"We lost many things when we left home, but we are trying to start again. We cannot remain where we were; we have to find a way forward. And honestly, with hard work, we are taking steps further in our business initiatives." [Awah, Bafut, North-West Region → Akwa, Yaoundé]

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that forced internal displacement among persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI is a multidimensional experience involving psychological distress, social disruption, economic vulnerability and processes of adaptation. Rather than understanding displacement only as a movement of people from one location to another, the study reveals displacement as a social process that transforms identities, relationships, livelihoods and the meanings attached to everyday life.

The psychological distress reported by participants reflects the concept of social suffering developed within medical anthropology. Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) argue that suffering must be understood within the historical, political and social conditions that produce it a view echoed in Kleinman's (1988) earlier work on illness narratives, which treats suffering as a story shaped as much by social context as by bodily experience. The emotional difficulties expressed by participants were therefore not isolated individual problems but consequences of broader structural conditions, including conflict, insecurity, loss of livelihoods and forced separation from familiar social worlds. The "invisible scars" identified in this study represent the embodied consequences of social and political disruption, consistent with the World Health Organization's (2022) framing of mental wellbeing as inseparable from the social conditions in which people live.

The findings also resonate with trauma perspectives that recognize forced displacement as capable of producing prolonged emotional consequences. However, an anthropological interpretation extends beyond clinical understandings of trauma by emphasizing the cultural and social contexts in which suffering is experienced. As Summerfield (1999) cautions, imported psychological trauma frameworks can obscure the social and political roots of distress in conflict-affected settings if applied without attention to local meaning-making. In line with this caution, participants in this study did not interpret their distress only through psychological categories; they connected their experiences to the loss of home, disrupted relationships, spiritual struggles and uncertainty about the future an interpretive pattern consistent with Kirmayer's (2007) argument that psychological distress is always mediated by culturally specific concepts of personhood. This demonstrates that mental wellbeing among displaced populations is shaped by both internal emotions and external social realities.

The transformation of kinship relations and social networks observed among participants confirms the importance of ecological perspectives in understanding displacement. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, individuals are shaped by interconnected social environments, including family, community and broader societal structures. Forced displacement disrupted participants' immediate social environments by separating them from familiar communities and placing them within new urban contexts. The

weakening of traditional support systems contributed to vulnerability, while the creation of new networks in Yaoundé illustrates the adaptive processes described by resilience theory (Holling, 1973; Masten, 2014) — the capacity of individuals and systems to reorganize and continue functioning after disturbance.

The findings further reveal that displacement involves a negotiation of cultural identity and belonging. The loss of home was experienced not merely as the loss of physical territory but as the disruption of memories, relationships, cultural practices and social recognition. Cultural identity theory helps explain why relocation can affect wellbeing even when physical safety is achieved. Participants' attachment to their communities of origin remained central to their sense of self, while adaptation in Yaoundé required the development of new forms of belonging.

The role of spirituality and culturally grounded healing practices among participants highlights the importance of considering local interpretations of wellbeing. The findings challenge approaches that separate mental health from cultural meaning systems. For many participants, healing involved faith, social connection, hope and the restoration of dignity. This suggests that psychosocial interventions among displaced populations should integrate culturally meaningful approaches alongside professional support mechanisms.

Finally, the findings contribute to development anthropology by demonstrating that mental wellbeing is closely connected to development processes. Economic insecurity, unemployment and the loss of productive roles affected participants' sense of dignity and future possibility. Yet their resilience strategies reveal that displaced persons possess agency and capacities that can contribute to reconstruction. Supporting displaced populations therefore requires approaches that move beyond humanitarian assistance toward empowerment, livelihood restoration and social inclusion.

"I am called Azah, and it has been very tough on us in recent years. We lost many things when we left home, but we are trying to start again. We cannot remain where we were; we have to find a way forward. We are determined to do buy-am-sell-am, to take all sorts of legal jobs, to push our way to the top. I hate poverty and limitation. We have drawn on the spiritual, too, in the process of thriving and pushing ahead in life." [Azah; sociodemographic details not recorded in the transcript]

This narrative illustrates the dynamic nature of resilience. Participants were not simply recovering from a past experience but actively negotiating new identities and possibilities within changing circumstances.

The findings further show that resilience was closely connected to dignity and participation. Access to livelihood opportunities, psychosocial support and social networks contributed to restoring confidence and a sense of belonging. Participants emphasized that assistance should not only address immediate needs but also create opportunities for empowerment and self-reliance.

From a development anthropology perspective, these experiences demonstrate that displaced populations possess knowledge, capacities and social resources that can contribute to their own recovery processes. Recognizing these forms of agency challenges approaches that portray displaced persons only as passive recipients of humanitarian assistance.

Overall, the findings reveal that forced internal displacement produces invisible scars affecting emotional wellbeing, social identity, livelihoods and belonging. However, these scars exist alongside processes of adaptation, solidarity and resilience. The experiences of IDPs in Yaoundé VI illustrate the complex relationship between suffering and reconstruction, vulnerability and agency, loss and renewal.

Conclusion

This study has examined forced internal displacement as a complex social, cultural and developmental experience among internally displaced persons from the North-West and South-West Regions living in Yaoundé VI. The findings demonstrate that displacement extends beyond the physical act of leaving one's home; it represents a disruption of social worlds, livelihoods, identities and systems of belonging. The experiences of participants reveal that displacement produces invisible scars expressed through emotional distress, uncertainty, economic insecurity and weakened social connections.

Through an anthropological lens, this study argues that mental wellbeing among displaced populations cannot be understood only through individual psychological conditions. It is deeply shaped by historical, political, economic and cultural realities. The suffering experienced by displaced persons is connected to structural conditions that limit their opportunities, disrupt their relationships and challenge their sense of identity. Addressing mental wellbeing therefore requires approaches that consider the broader social environments in which people live.

At the same time, the study highlights the resilience and agency of internally displaced persons. Despite experiences of loss and uncertainty, participants developed strategies of adaptation through social networks,

spirituality, livelihood initiatives and collective support mechanisms. These pathways demonstrate that displaced persons are not only victims of crisis but also active participants in rebuilding their lives and communities.

The study contributes to development anthropology by showing that mental wellbeing is an essential dimension of sustainable development. Development interventions that focus only on material needs, without addressing emotional suffering, social belonging and cultural identity, risk overlooking important aspects of human recovery. Integrating culturally sensitive psychosocial approaches, livelihood empowerment and community-based support systems is therefore crucial in responding to forced displacement.

Future interventions and policies addressing internal displacement in Cameroon should move beyond emergency responses toward long-term strategies that restore dignity, strengthen social inclusion and support the capabilities of displaced populations. Recognizing the invisible scars of displacement while supporting pathways to resilience offers a more holistic framework for understanding and responding to the realities of internally displaced persons. Ultimately, the experiences of IDPs in Yaoundé VI reveal that displacement is both a story of suffering and a story of reconstruction and understanding this dual reality is essential for developing responses that acknowledge human vulnerability while empowering displaced communities to shape their own futures.

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