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Involuntary disaster relocation and its impact on children: a case study in Galle, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami prompted a relocation process of an unprecedented scale in Sri Lanka, relocating thousands beyond the government imposed coastal buffer zone. Amidst the relocatees were thousands of children whom were exposed to multiple risks and stresses. These impacts caused by relocation remain largely unexplored. This paper investigates the impact of involuntary relocation, experienced by children relocated to Cinnamon Garden settlement and Tea Garden settlement of Galle district, Sri Lanka. The paper focuses on (a) what are the impacts children experienced due to forced relocation?, (b) What is the nature of those impacts?, (c) What is the possibility of using a risk model to identify these impacts? Case studies were conducted with a purposively selected sample of individuals whom were relocated as children. The findings suggests that children suffered from social impacts such as disruption of social relationships failing to develop new social networks, decline in education levels and victimized to bullying and discrimination. The study successfully employed the Michael Cernea's (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction to identify key negative and positive impacts of forced relocation, initiating the development of a risk model that can specifically identify the impact of relocation on children.

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1. Introduction

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Disaster induced relocation has gained increased attention of governments, international community and emergency management agencies with specific interest on effective assessment of impact and to develop management options for responding to disasters that may create the need of large scale forced relocations. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami took over 35,322 lives of Sri Lankans and displaced 516,150 (Shepard, 2005). This prompted the government Sri Lanka to ban the construction of houses within a 100 meter perimeter to the sea in the coastal regions of the country, and relocated communities living within the declared perimeters to donor built settlements located away from their previous locations (Muggah, 2008). Among the relocated were thousands of children who are a vulnerable group in the context of disasters due to reduced ability to protect themselves from danger, make decisions and their dependence on adults. Multiple studies conducted concerning these mass relocations reveal that often these resettlement efforts end up being failures or as “development disasters” (Smith, 1991) creating new risks and stress situations to the relocated (Birkman & Fernando, 2008; Mulligan & Shaw, 2007). Other than few (Hettige, 2007; Ruwanpura, 2009) these studies did not pay specific attention to the impact on children. Anderson (2005) confirms the lack of such studies and concludes that even though significant advancements has been made in the disaster research field in the past decades the impact on children have been understudied (Anderson, 2005). This “understudy” could make children an “underserved” vulnerable group in the relocation process. Despite these concerns there is a lack of a risk or stress model that focuses on the risks to the children which hinders the best serving of children against the impacts of forced relocation.

In this context this particular study attempts to identify the impact of forced relocation on children by conducting case studies with individuals who were involuntarily relocated as children to two settlements in Galle. The study offers preliminary comments on utilizing Michael Cernea’s (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction model, in order to identify risks posed by forced relocation to the children. The expressed intent of the author is to open up to a wider audience and for wider discussion how, we can plan, develop and implement a model of risks and impoverishments to better serve children in involuntary relocation.

2. Forced relocation and children

In forced relocation : “persons are forced to leave their homes or home lands for whatever reason and have been allocated specific areas for them to settle down in their own country with at least minimum resources and services to re-establish their lives” (Turton, 2006:13-14). Often the relocatees have little chance to return to their previous residences as negative impacts of relocation are ill addressed by responsible parties (Turton, 2006; Scudder, 2005; Muller & Hettige, 1995; Muggah, 2008). Therefore Turton compares the situation of forced resettlers’ to the refugees as both groups belong to the underprivileged and politically marginalized members of society and relocated also face the danger of being alienated from their government (Turton, 2006).

Literature on relocation and children identifies multiple dimensions of impact in different relocation scenarios. Lazarus et al. (2003) discusses how the devastation to the familiar environment can be long-lasting and stressful. In a study on hurricane Katrina Fothergill & Peek, (2006) unraveled that children experienced problems in adjusting to new schools, which was caused by the absence or presence of old. This loss of peer networks was an added burden as children already had to deal with the disruption in the families and their own losses (Fothergill & Peek, 2006). Further the children suffered from substantial stress anxiety when living in shelters and not knowing if they would have a place to live in the future. Literature also reveals positive impacts induced by relocation. Lazarus et al. (2003) suggests that the support of caring adults children can return to normalcy to a significant extent, providing an opportunity to transform a startling situation into a learning experience. Further Fothergill & Peek (2006) also discovered that children relocated after the hurricane Katrina experienced improvements in education as the new school allowed them to get a new start.

The lack of a model that is specifically concerned with impacts of involuntary relocation on children is another serious issue. Among the existing risk models Michael Cernea’s (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction

model for resettling displaced populations (IRR model) reveals economic, social and cultural impoverishments relocatees suffer from when resettling. Cernea (2000) identifies the following eight risks,

1. *Landlessness* - Negatively impact the foundation of productive systems
2. *Joblessness* - The risk of losing wage employment
3. *Homelessness* - Loss of cultural space
4. *Marginalization* - Economic marginalization, social and psychological marginalization,
5. *Food Insecurity* - Risk of temporary or chronic undernourishment.
6. *Increased Mortality* - Decline in the health by relocation process
7. *Loss of Access to Common Property* - forest lands, burial grounds and water resources
8. *Social Disarticulation* - Resettlement divides communities, social organization, and interpersonal ties

According to Cernea (2000) the model encompasses a set of similar social and economic risks the relocated has to confront. Nonetheless Cernea accepts that one or more risks may not be experienced by certain resettlers due to the confront characteristics of the sector, season of displacement and some new site specific risks could emerge (Cernea, 2000). This all-encompassing nature and adoptability could be used to the advantage of the relocated children in identifying the possible risks to the children allowing for early response and planning. Therefore the study attempts to utilize Cernea's (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction model as a framework to identify risks to the children caused by 2004 tsunami relocation process.

3. Selection of the Sample

Due to the time difference between the 2004 tsunami and the present study the selection of the sample was tricky difficult. After multiple consultations with experts it was decided to purposively select six males and six females who used to be between ages 10 – 16 at the time of relocation. To improve the accuracy of the data collected it was decided to collect data from two different resettlements in Galle district which reported the highest numbers of displaced persons 128,077 and housing units 13,334 in the Southern Province. For practical reasons it was decided to select the relocation settlements Tea Garden and Cinnamon Garden built in the Akmeemana Pradeshiya Sabha area which housed individuals from the Galle city area.

3.1 Data collection and analysis

Case study method was selected to collect data, as it would gather rich qualitative data due to the conversational nature of the method, which would allow for recalling of long by gone memories and experiences. Six case studies were carried out in each settlement out of which three were conducted with females and the remaining case studies were conducted with males as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Number of case studies conducted in each settlement, Akmeemana, Galle.

Settlement	Males	Females	Total
1. Cinnamon Garden Settlement	3	3	6
2. Tea Garden Settlement	3	3	6

Source: De Silva, 2017

Qualitative data collected were written down on field notebooks and were carefully reviewed several times to identify codes based on Cernea's (2000) impoverishment risks and reconstruction model. Then qualitative data was organized according to the developed codes. All the case studies were carried out after obtaining consent of the respondents and the names used in the findings section are pseudonyms.

4. Forced relocation and the impact on children

This section of the article presents the impacts on children that emerged through case studies conducted in Tea Village and Cinnamon Garden in Akmeemana, Galle. Section 4.1 elaborates the negative impacts of relocation on children including homelessness, social marginalization, lack of access to common resources and social disarticulation. Section 4.2 deliberates on the negative impacts that Cernea's model does not confer on, among these are decline in the academic level, stress & depression and social withdrawal. Finally section 4.3 discusses the positive impacts that emerged from the case studies conducted.

4.1 Negative impacts identified using Cernea's risks model

As identified by Cernea (2000) *homelessness* could be a major stress to the relocated. It could bring about a feeling of loss that extends to losing personal belongings and even loss of a cultural space (Cernea, 2000). This assessment was confirmed by the respondents of the two settlements. The sense of homelessness was associated with missing familiar surroundings and privacy.

“We moved to this house in 2005... even after so many years when I come home from work this house never feels like home to me. I still miss the beach (was living with in the 100 meter perimeter)...the sound of the fisherman and the boats ... and the smell of the sea. I have little attachment to this house.”

(Niroshan ,11 in 2004)

Cernea (2000) discuss how the long term displacement can bring about alienation and status deprivation among the relocated. Some Respondents deliberated on how they felt as though they have lost the “respect” they had due to the lack of their home.

“Before the tsunami our family was the most respected among the families of my father's side. We had a spacious house. When the tsunami hit we lost our house and had to live in our uncle's house with seven others. It was a two bedroom house...cramped up...there was little privacy.. And I felt as though with time we lost the respect our uncle had for us”

(Lakshika, was 14 in 2004)

When displacedes resettle in new locations, they are labeled as “strangers or outsiders” and are deprived of equal access to opportunities and prerogatives similar to what the host community enjoys. (Cernea, 2000). The respondents often described how the lack of their own house brought about a feeling of isolation and mistreatment.

“I can remember well... when we first moved here, the children of the village (host community) would not talk to us, they would play cricket in the ground (playground at the settlement) and we were never included. The older boys used to nag us calling us in names as “tsunami kollo” (tsunami boy) , “haaddo” (filthy fellows) and at school they use to threaten us and collect money so they can get reloads (mobile credit) Later on we got use to that”

(Kumudu, 12 in 2004)

These experiences seem to confirm Cernea's argument, that homelessness and economic marginalization could generate social and physiological marginalization (Cernea, 2000). In this particular case the marginalization has then further escalated to discriminatory and abusive actions. The respondents discussed how they faced difficulties in enrolling to the schools where the children of the host community were studying in as they had to face hostilities of the parents of the host community, children and even from the teaching staff at school.

“When we were taken in to the school the villagers of Ihalagoda (the host community) came to the school and made a commotion...saying that by taking us in, their children would become “Madaviyo”(an individual with anti-social behaviour)..Even the principal of our school once said when a fellow classmate had fight one of the relocated children...taking these “tsunami lamai”(tsunami children) was a big mistake...they are always the troublemakers. With all this commotions I felt as a burden to the society and I hated the school...”

(Kumara. Was 15 in 2004)

It is evident that the relocation had created social marginalization and discrimination which had a negative impact on the access to common resources of the relocated children such as schools and the playground creating frustrations and self-victimizing notions with in children.

The discussed findings suggest that some of the risks identified by Cernea's risk model could recognize risks that are also applicable to children. Further it is interesting to notice that the risks often seem to act in unison than as isolated risk factors influencing one another. However the study identified some risks which fail to fit in to the risk model.

4.2 Negative impacts emerged external to Cernea's risk model

Some negative impacts experienced by the relocated children were external to the impoverishment risks and reconstruction model of Cernea (2000) including decline in the academic level and social withdrawal. Respondents experienced a considerable decline in their academic levels which they associated to the involuntary relocation. Ward et al. (2008) confirms this with reference to relocated children in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina who had inferior levels of academic achievement. Often this decline was explained with reference to the difficulty in adjusting to the new environment at the school such as new teachers, new peers and considerable distance to the school from the settlement.

“I had to move to a new school as my previous school got severely damaged. I was 12 years old then and I remember feeling as though having to start everything from the beginning.....The new teachers were very kind to me. But I missed my class teacher in (mentions the name of a school) who was my class teacher from grade 4. That year I went from 5th in the class to 30 something”

(Nihal, was 12 in 2004)

“After moving to the settlement I continued to go to the school near my previous house situated in the center of Galle city...before it was a simple five minute walk to the school. From the settlement (Tea Garden settlement) it was 12 kilometers to the school....i remember being tired after travelling back and forth in buses....in the first few months I was so reluctant to go to school because of this and would get some “*boru leda*”(Pretending to be sick) and stay at home”

(Adheesha , was 10 in 2004)

Experiencing difficulties in adjusting to new schools have been discussed by Fothergill & Peek (20) with reference to the children relocated after the hurricane Katrina. The current study confirms their results and adds to the significance of caring adults and the impact the distance to the school had on the education of the children. The respondents had experienced social withdrawal as a result of forced relocation. According to Abramson et al. (2010) children relocated due to Hurricane Katrina had a greater tendency of showing of severe emotional disturbance in the years after the disaster.

“In the new village I had only few friends from school...my neighbour was also my best friend, we went to the same dancing class ...After the tsunami she and her family left Galle and settled in Colombo....After her leaving I became silent and I started to stay alone , which I started to like ..Instead of going out and playing with others...with time I stopped talking with others in school ...my parents then became concerned and we started to consult a doctor”

(Lakmali, was 13 in 2004)

The responses of Lakmali also points to the possibility that she was isolating herself as she was suffering from Post-traumatic stress disorder caused by disaster induced forced relocation, as suggested by Brumfiel (2013) who studied children relocated after 2010 Fukushima nuclear disaster. These negative impacts which emerged external to the Cernea’s impoverishment risks model have no lesser significance.

4.3 Positive impacts caused by the relocation to the children

The study also identified few positive impacts forced relocation had on children. As discussed in the previous section some children experienced negative impacts on education, however some respondents were of the opinion that their education was positively influenced by the relocation.

“After the tsunami we had to move to Akmeemana, Tea Garden Settlement which quite far away from the school...before that I could simply walk to the school...But I was no keen on studies. My father got injured severely in the tsunami and he was almost crippled.. Them my mother took over the income making and worked as a labourer in the municipal council....All these hardships made me understand that education is the only way to get out of this situation...it pushed me to work hard and get good results.”

(Nayanajeewa-a teacher in an international school
Was 15 in 2004)

It is interesting to see how factors that influence the positive outcomes on one individual can exert negative influences on another.

5. Discussion

Firstly, the findings of the study suggest that the forced relocation carried out in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami; caused an array of negative impacts as a result of relocation, such as homelessness, social marginalization, lack of access to common resources, social disarticulation, decline in academic standards and social withdrawal. These negative impacts have their roots in economic social and cultural dimensions of human life. The findings further suggest that each impact influences the other impacts increasing the intensity of the negative influence exerted on children. Homelessness gives rise to social and physiological marginalization which in turn generates lack of access to common resources schools making the children suffer from discrimination at the hands of peers and adults leading the children to adopt social withdrawal behaviours.

Secondly, it was identified that the relocation impacts known to have an effect on adults in general, also have a impact on relocated children. This became evident as the risks identified in Michael Cernea's (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction model for resettling displaced populations (IRR model) successfully identified few of the key negative impacts that significantly influence the life of the children in a relocation situation. However the nature and intensity of the impact tend to be different from the adults to children. Children seem to suffer from factors that are rooted in culture and social dimensions.

Thirdly the study revealed that relocation can have positive impacts on the lives of the children. It is interesting as these positive impacts seem to stem from the very factors that bring about negative impacts to some children. The data suggests that that development of a positive outlook towards hardships in life could be the root cause for this interesting situation. It is important to identify even though the respondents had experienced both negative and positive impacts, the negative impacts clearly are greater than the positive impacts.

Finally, the study seems to imply that Cernea's impoverishments risks and reconstruction model for resettling displaced populations could be utilized as a framework to identify the negative impacts children experience in relocation. The model successfully identified four negative impacts children suffered from in the relocation process that took place in Galle district after the Indian Ocean tsunami. These negative impacts were homelessness, social marginalization, lack of access to common resources and social disarticulation. However it must be pointed out that the model was not successful in comprehending all the factors that negatively influenced the relocation of children. Two other factors namely social withdrawal and decline in the education level of the children emerged out of the case studies. However if developed further through trial and error the model would further improve the prediction of negative impacts of a forced relocation process allowing to develop counter measures to successfully mitigate the impacts enabling to relocate the children with minimal negative impacts .

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study suggest that children experienced both positive and negative impacts due to forced relocations carried out in Galle district after the Indian Ocean tsunami. The children suffered negative influences that stemmed from economic, social and cultural impoverishments. The findings points to the vitality of identifying these negative impacts prior to the implementation of the relocation to successfully mitigate the negative impacts. The study took the preliminary steps to utilizing the Michael Cernea's (2000) impoverishments risks and reconstruction model for resettling displaced populations (IRR model) to identify the negative impacts of relocation. The model was successful in identifying negative impacts; however the model has to be modified to successfully encompass other significant impacts such as impacts on education, behavioral changes and positive influences created by forced relocation.

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