War-induced Challenges and Coping Strategies of Displaced Students in the Primary Schools of Addis Ababa

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the war-induced challenges and coping strategies of displaced students in the primary schools of Addis Ababa. It was qualitative in its design and an in-depth interview was employed to collect data from 23 purposively selected grade 5 to 8 students (war-displaced) attending in six purposively chosen primary schools. The findings revealed that nearly half of these students neither faced significant psychosocial, economic, and educational challenges nor exhibited severe reactions nor employed extreme coping strategies. Although many factors contributed for this situation, the most important of all is the school meal and materials support program of the City Government of Addis Ababa. Fear of loss of a relative and/or property, language and economic problems, and loss of parental care were the major challenges. Telephone communications, family support and friendships with other displaced students, working in the informal sector, and seeking school community cooperation were the coping strategies deployed for the four challenges, respectively. It was concluded that not all displaced students face severe challenges, but when they do, they employ different copying mechanisms. Addressing language and economic problems in the short run and dealing with displacing factors and safety issues, as well as planning for federal and regional

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school meal and materials support programs in the long run, are recommended as the ways forward.

Keywords: Coping Strategy; Displacement; Primary School; War-induced Challenges

1. Introduction

By intentionally targeting civilians, armed forces and non-state armed groups have demonstrated considerable disrespect for international humanitarian law, leaving one in six people under the age of 18 years live within 50 km of violence, or worse (Bennouna et al., 2020; Wanjiru, 2018). Conflicts from these forces cause deaths and displacements, and beyond the humanitarian loss, they cause collateral damage to civilian infrastructure (UNICEF, 2021a; Achinewhu, 2020; Bennouna et al., 2020).

In conflict settings, social-order stabilizing systems, such as education, become fragile even before violence begins (Bennouna et al., 2020). And, as wars rage, education institutions in these conflict zones, like other sectors, face at least two challenges: either they will become homes for armed groups or be destroyed (Mayai, 2020). Schools are often attacked in many armed conflicts and children are very often targeted on the route into or out of school (Achinewhu, 2020; Bennouna et al., 2020).

These all encounters lead to an unprecedented level of forced migration. Decades of multiple conflicts, wars and human rights abuses globally have forced millions to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of their own country or in others (Bennouna et al., 2020; Cha, 2020; Ghosh, 2019). Statistically speaking, by Mid-2021, various disasters forcibly displaced 82.4 million people worldwide, of whom 42% were children less than 18 years old (UNICEF, 2021a). More than 65 million

people are displaced globally due to armed conflict and persecution (Anis et al., 2021; Bennouna et al., 2020; Gosh, 2019), many of whom are children and youth under the age of 18 and some are forced to spend their preprimary to tertiary education in displacement (Cha, 2020). Although every member of the society can face displacement, women and children constitute the hardest-hit internally displaced populations (UNICEF, 2021a; Amodu et al. 2020).

In the post-colonial twentieth century, cross-border wars between African states were uncommon (Stapleton, 2018). However, in contemporary Africa, internal crises and armed conflicts have been denying children of their rights to education often leading to displacement from their homes, away from formal learning (Achinewhu, 2020). The largest forced displacement in the world is in Africa, with an estimated 17.8 million (40% of the total worldwide) displaced people as of December 2018 (Achinewhu, 2020). Conflicts and violence displaced several million in South Sudan between December 2013 to September 2018 (Mayai, 2020), 4,756 and 16,308 students in the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years respectively in two northern regions of Cameroon, (Safotso, 2020), and hundreds of thousands of people in Kenya (Wanjiru, 2018). Moreover, conflicts have displaced 2.3 million persons internally in Nigeria, three million in Sudan, one in four persons in Central Africa, and over 5.5 million in Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNICEF, 2021a).

In Ethiopia, too, recent conflicts marginalized child education rights and pushed them to displacement (UNICEF, 2021a). A year after conflict broke in the Tigray region in November 2020 and expanded to Amhara and Afar regions, thousands of schools have been partially or fully destroyed, leaving an estimated three million children across the three regions miss learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2021b).

In displacement, education, the declared right to everyone (UN, 1948) and the key to children's public lives around the world (Bennouna et

al., 2020), helps victims reduce uncertainty and rebuild a sense of confidence and self-worth in ways that compensate their social, economic, and cultural losses (UNICEF, 2021b; Anis et al., 2021; Cha, 2020). It is also a practical solution to many associated ripple effects (Mulimbi, 2020). Nonetheless such violence-induced challenges are compromising the abilities of the displaced, mostly women and children, from benefiting the most out of formal education.

Wars bring unimaginable disasters external and internal to the victim including losing someone (family, relatives, or friends) or something (neighborhood and property), feeling unsafe, losing a sense of identity as a schoolchild (Punamäki et al., 2021; Jones, 2020), and giving up one's right to education (UNICEF, 2021a; Achinewhu, 2020). Displaced children face different types of emotional disorders (Ventevogel & de Jong, 2020) or different types of acculturation and adaptation challenges and exhibit various reactions (Gosh, 2019). Such challenges are not new (Safotso, 2020) but more important is that victims must be able to cope with them as their ability to do so plays a significant role in their mental health outcomes (Bennouna et al., 2020).

While visiting one primary school in Addis Ababa for a different task, one of the researchers of this study learnt that there are internally displaced (those who are forced to leave their homes due to armed conflicts and who live within their own country, Achinewhu, 2020) school children in this school. Teachers there explained that these children have been facing different challenges (loss of parents, financial constraints, and so on) and using various coping strategies (living with relatives in Addis Ababa, living in the school's compound, receiving financial support from teacher contributions, etc.). This encounter and the fact that there are different conflict-induced challenges and reactions as well as coping strategies necessitated this study as a timely and crucial issue. It identifies specific challenges and reactions displaced children in the primary schools of Addis Ababa face and the practical coping mechanisms they deploy.

1.1. The Problem

Conflict uproots children from schooling (Anis et al., 2021; Achinewhu, 2020), and when access to formal education is possible, it causes loss of academic motivation, especially if their displacement is protracted and if they feel marginalized in the new school environment (Cha, 2020; Wanjiru, 2018). Once displaced, they, as stated above, are surrounded by multiple challenges and exhibit various reactions that call for different coping strategies.

1.1.1. War-induced challenges and reactions

The psychosocial (sociocultural and psychological) challenges of displaced children, which can potentially create severe psychological damages (Anis et al., 2021; Mayai, 2020) emerge from the loss of someone or something (Jones, 2020). Even without the death of someone, leaving family and relatives behind can also pose significant challenges on the emotional, practical, financial and social status of these children (Carr et al., 2021).

According to Jones (2020), a common experience for almost all those displaced by conflict is loss and grief, the sense of sadness, fear and insecurity one feels when a loved person or thing or place is missing, without which human life would be quite unbearable. This scholar classified loss as internal and external. While losses of security, identity, self-respect and belief in the future are among the internal losses, external losses include loss of family members, friends, home, community, school, money, and other material possessions. Bennouna et al. (2020) and Wanjiru (2018) also described internal challenges as depression and daily stressors (from social isolation and discrimination to impoverishment) and external challenges as being treated with fear, suspicion, hostility by host communities, and discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, gender, or language.

Gosh (2019) classified the challenges as acculturation and adaptation challenges. Acculturation challenges happen when individuals with different cultures come in to contact and these involve problems of assimilation and integration, or alternatively separation and marginalization, cultural identity problems (sense of belonging), and perceived discrimination problems (being treated unfairly or negatively or feeling unaccepted). Adaptation (socio-cultural and psychological) challenges, on the other hand, include problems in social activities, life satisfaction, and self-esteem.

Jones (2020) went to add that grief elicits a wide variety of affective, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reactions and victims may experience one or more of these reactions. Table 1 shows some of these reactions.

Table 1: Reactions to Grief

Affective	Cognitive	Behavioral	Physiological
Depression	Preoccupation	Restlessness	Loss of appetite
Despair	with thoughts of deceased	Fatigue/apathy	Sleep disturbances
Fear	Sense of presence of deceased	Sobbing	Energy loss
Self-blame	Pessimism about future	Crying	Exhaustion
Hostility	Suicidal ideation	School difficulties	Susceptibility to illness
	Concentration difficulties		
Loss of pleasure			
Loneliness	Avoidance	Rapid maturing	
No reaction	Disbelief		

Adapted from Jones (2020)

Ventevogel and de Jong (2020) noted that disaster or conflict related challenges in children cause emotional disorders, and reactions include prolonged or very intense feelings of sadness or unhappiness, inability to enjoy things that were previously pleasurable, lack of energy, wish to be dead, sleep problems, constant feelings of boredom, and diminished appetite, refusing to go to school, extreme discomfort in social situations such as in schools, and excessive and uncontrollable worry about personal safety and that of family members.

Overall, internal displacement encounters are detrimental to everyone affected and especially to children (Achinewhu, 2020). Violence-related trauma and loss of parents or close relatives can have an enormous impact on students' emotional wellbeing and their ability to learn (Pherali et al., 2020) and their outcomes depend on victim's age and conflict length with younger individuals and those with shorter durations of exposure often suffering lesser (Bennouna et al., 2020). Displacements that stay for longer periods may also lead children to drop out of school as they become over-age to schooling (Wanjiru, 2018).

Studies show that one or a combination of these challenges and reactions were observed among displaced school children. Anis et al. (2021) found making friends among peers, social integration such as receiving a sincere welcome in school and the host society, discrimination, feeling lonely or depressed, and worries about feeling uncomfortable socializing, lack of support from educators and classmates, as well as being ignored or rejected as the major challenges encountered by Syrian refugee in public high schools. Wentzel (1997) found support from family members, teachers, and peers as a key determinant of children's academic engagement and motivation. Likewise, in her study, Wanjiru (2018) established that all study participants (displaced children) were concerned with exclusion and the majority was anxious about being accepted in the new school as they suffer from the problem of new relationships with others.

Anis et al. (2021) also found not being treated as part of the school in both reward and punishment as one of the psychosocial challenges that led some displaced students to drop out of school and education, especially male teenagers. On the contrary, they added, valuing and appreciation of participation in class and school activities, including football matches helped students gain a sense of belonging and perform better in learning. Cha (2020) found that students' sense of belonging at school is the strongest predictor of academic motivation.

Similarly, assessment of the mental health and psychosocial needs of displaced Rohingya found that 30 to 40 percent of children frequently experience difficulty sleeping, feelings of sadness and tension, and complaints such as headaches, sore muscles, and back pain (Foulds et al., 2021). And in a study involving internally displaced and refugee students in Cameroon, Safotso, (2020) found trauma of war, insecurity, famine, homesickness, lack of learning materials, breaks and interruptions in their learning process, culture shock, unfamiliar environment, and hostility or reluctance of the host community as the pedagogical and psychological problems faced by these students.

Researchers also proved that age and gender are highly correlated with displaced children's predisposition to drop out of school. A study on war-affected adolescents in Sierra Leone found that every additional year of age in schools increased the tendency to dropout by 14 percent and this may be due to loss of academic motivation and social and economic pressures (Cha, 2020). Cha added, displaced girls were found discouraged from studying due to gender roles and family economic problems. A study by Hatoss and Huijser (2010) found that socially constructed gender roles for Sudanese refugee girls often posed a challenge to their education. Moreover, a study in Northern Uganda found that women were twice as likely as men to exhibit symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and over four times as likely as men to exhibit symptoms of depression (Amodu et al., 2020). These writers added, studies revealed that girls are at a higher risk than boys

to suffer from depression whereas more boys than girls to suffer from alcohol and substance use.

1.1.2. Coping Strategies

To meet their social, psychological, and academic needs while adjusting to their new host school environment and community, children around the world respond in a variety of ways (Anis et al., 2021; Safotso, 2020; Bennouna et al., 2020; Jones, 2020; Gosh, 2019; Mteki et al., 2019). Strategies can change over time or come in varying combinations (Jones, 2020).

One strategy is being academically motivated, not giving up, as education is generally regarded as the means for future success and is often associated with psychosocial wellbeing, greater life satisfaction, and better academic performance whereas lack of motivation is associated with low self-esteem, higher levels of stress and anxiety, and poor academic performance (Cha, 2020). In 2010, Hatoss and Huijser found Sudanese refugees in Australia showing a high level of academic motivation as they regarded education as the only means for achieving some sense of achievement and purpose in life.

According to Bennouna et al. (2020) other coping strategies include working both in the formal and informal economies to potentially overcome financial constraints, actively resolving a problem either personally or by seeking support from others, practicing the traditional arts and crafts of their homes and coming together to dream of better lives, working to establish good relationships with friends, and taking care of one another. Religion, as to these writers, can also have a protective effect on young people's mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Jones (2020) and Tope-Banjoko et al. (2020) divided the coping strategies as adaptive and maladaptive. While adaptive strategies include forming strong relationships with others (attachment),

maladaptive strategies, on the contrary, involve separation or avoidance or detachment and are reflected through despair, withdrawal, crying, not to engage with others, and not to eat or play. Adaptive coping mechanisms (resilience) contribute positively to academic identity (Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020).

According to Gross (2001), there are cognitive-emotional coping strategies that can be positive or negative. While positive coping strategies that are associated with resilience include acceptance, positive refocus on planning, self-blame and blaming others are identified as negative strategies and are associated with depression and poor academic performance.

Empirical evidences show that these strategies were deployed by displaced persons. A study by Wanjiru (2018) found that peer-keeping in the form of collective ownership among displaced children themselves, being active actors in their own education, and developing a positive attitude (hope) towards the future as coping strategies employed by internally displaced school children. Moreover, Mteki et al. (2019), in their study to identify the coping strategies of displaced people in Tanzania, found that these strategies included crop cultivation, running small businesses (trading activities) to reduce financial constraints, and joining self-help community groups (establishing relationships with other displaced persons).

1.1.3. The Ethiopian Context

Despite its negative human rights profile, education, like defense and health, is among the projects where the Ethiopian government spends the most and this made the sector to show more growth, especially in quantity (Abbink, 2017). However, Abbink went to add that, the weak absorption capacity of the economy in itself is “causing the migration of tens of thousands of people every year to the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere” (p.8).

To make the situation worse is conflict and/or war. In Ethiopia, there were short border conflicts between 1977-1978 (the Ogaden war) and 1998-2000 (the Eritrea-Ethiopia war) (Stapleton, 2018). Although these wars had the potential to drive people off their homes, the most recent conflict is not a war on borders with other countries, but internal. The conflict in Northern Ethiopia (Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions) left thousands of schools destroyed or damaged and millions of children lost their education (UNICEF, 2021b). This and other associated disasters remained the main drivers of displacement (UNICEF, 2021a). In his study involving internally displaced refugees from the Somali region, Alemneh (2022) found food insecurity, health care and housing problems, lack of income generating opportunities, and family separation as some of the most common challenges faced by these refugees

Overall, a displaced individual may have some, all, or none of the challenges mentioned earlier, reactions may occur in many patterns and combinations, coping strategies may vary (Anis et al., 2021; Safotso, 2020; Jones, 2020), and women can be disproportionately affected (Amodu et al., 2020). Based on these premises, this study attempted to answer the following questions.

1. What war-induced challenges do primary school displaced students in Addis Ababa face?
2. What coping strategies do they deploy to address these challenges?
3. Are the challenges, reactions, and coping strategies gender-specific?

By answering these questions, this study investigates the war-induced challenges, reactions, and corresponding coping strategies of internally displaced students in the primary schools of Addis Ababa. When challenges are properly examined and addressed on time, education leads to economically and socially productive futures (Dryden-Peterson, 2020) and equalized socioeconomic development (Mayai,

2020). Moreover, as internally displaced children are by far the most endangered, their best interests should be stressed when considering helping them (Achinewhu, 2020). Thus, by identifying students' challenges and interests, this study provides empirical evidence to all concerned to fix the challenges and meet interests so that displaced students can profit the most from education.

Understanding the coping strategies employed by the displaced is essential to choose the best intervention practices that can enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms (Mteki et al., 2019). Besides, individual coping strategies that have a positive influence on children's academic motivation are critically important, not only to help prevent at-risk students from dropping out but also to help those performing well to continue their education (Cha, 2020). This study presents these strategies to intervention programmers so that they can plan and act accordingly and to child educators and trainers so that they can be taught to other struggling displaced students.

Moreover, literature reveals that the negative effects of displacement are more severe for girls than boys. If the study finds the situation to be so, then this study can provide important feedback to humanitarians, social and gender-related workers so that they can make informed interventions. Finally, as a relatively current issue in Ethiopia, war-related challenges and coping strategies have not yet been studied in depth with a wider scope. In this regard, the study can serve as a stepping-stone for further broader and deeper studies on the same issue.

2. Materials and Methods

This study is qualitative in its design. Migration is an elusive experience that makes qualitative research an ideal method to investigate issues at the micro level (Colosio, 2021). Data sources, the instrument, and collection procedures are made to fit this design. First, fleeing one's home to another country is not as such new in Ethiopia. In 2016 for

instance, economic challenges and social unrest pushed about 94,000 Ethiopians to flee to Yemen (Abbink, 2017). This study, however, focused on those who are internally displaced due to internal conflicts, the most common but least acknowledged and underexplored type of migration (Mulimbi, 2020; Richter, & Salami, 2020). More specifically, although people can be displaced due to violence and other family-related issues, war-induced displacement (from the regions of Tigray, Amhara, and Afar) is the scope in this regard. Second, in armed conflict, children face unique and incredibly challenging circumstances (Carr, Rogers, & Hickman, 2021) and are always among the hardest hit (UNICEF, 2021a). Third, primary education is an economic enabler - an important point of departure into higher learning, which leads to a significant economic gain (Mayai, 2020). Combining these three premises, internally displaced primary school students (children) in Addis Ababa were used as data sources.

At the beginning, 10 schools were purposively identified (those that host war-displaced students in grades 5-8) as research sites. In consultation with the principals and others tasked with student information (who are referred as the gatekeepers, BSA, 2017), we got a total of 42 students. Then, we started the data collection. As the data collection process progressed, data were saturated after interviewing 13 students from three schools. We continued to collect data from three more schools that have a total of 14 students, but we did not come up with any new information. This was expected as all government primary schools operate under similar circumstances. Of these 14, four students were not willing to participate in the study, and thus, were allowed to leave based on our informed consent agreement. Although the purpose of the research was explained to the school principals, informed oral consent was obtained directly from the children themselves. Overall, data were collected from 23 purposively selected (war-displaced) students who were attending their education in six purposively selected primary schools across the four grade levels of

primary schooling (grades 5-8). The primary schools are Jerusalem, Dil Betigil, Minilik, Meskerem, Biherawi Bete Mengist, and Atse Naod.

Data were collected by using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interview questions included where the student came from, whether parents are alive and if s/he communicates with them, with whom s/he lives, source of income to live and to buy learning materials, any challenge s/he faced or is facing, how s/he deals with the challenge, and so on. The issue is so sensitive that interviews were made on a one-to-one basis. Moreover, keeping this sensitivity in mind, the research was informed by the 2017 research ethics guidelines of the British Sociological Association, BSA (BSA, 2017). Accordingly, interviews were made in such a way that the physical, social and psychological well-beings of those children were not adversely affected by the study and their privacies and identities were protected. To this effect, students were interviewed one by one in an empty classroom. As they entered the classroom, we received them with warm greetings and gave pens and pencils. Before every interview, the researchers introduced themselves to every participant and attempted to establish rapport. They re-checked the informants' consent. We also told them that their information will be kept confidential, and their personal names will not be written in the research paper. Besides, we once again reminded them that they can withdraw from the interview partly or wholly whenever they needed. The researchers also refrained from making any interruption while informants were telling their stories. No tape recorders, video cameras or photographs were used in order to allow informants full freedom to speak. Data were collected only as written researcher notes. The interview was made in Amharic and we did not find any student unable to understand the questions. Finally, responses were analyzed using themes indicated in the research questions for data organization, i.e., challenges and coping strategies. Although no new information was solicited from the three added schools following data saturation, the frequency counts of students in these schools were included in the analyses.

3. Results and Discussion

When informant characteristics are closely examined by gender, 12 (52.2%) were girls and 11 (47.8%) were boys. Based on the area where they were displaced from, 17 were from Amhara region (Wollo, Gondar, and North Shewa) and six were from Tigray region. We did not find a student displaced from Afar region in the sample schools. Four, eight, five, and six students were from grades 5, 6, 7, and 8, respectively. Most of them live with relatives, one lives in a military camp with his parents' friends, one has nobody to live with and lives in a house where he serves as a guard, one lives as a house worker, and another student lives in a family home in Addis Ababa that was bought since the war. Most of them do not plan to return back to their hometown. Instead, they just want to visit their relatives there for a week or so during the summer vacation. Two students left this decision to their parents and three students (all females) decided to return back for good for health and economic reasons. On the contrary, one student will not go back for economic reasons and planned to work in Addis Ababa, especially during summer, to support aging-parents back home.

Challenges and Coping strategies

All informants have vivid images of how they left their hometown and the horrors amid war. Although overexposure to such a situation can have severe consequences on the academic performance, cognitive development, and physical health of children (UNICEF, 2021), broadly speaking, to the surprise of the researchers, to the relief of those who may ever think otherwise, and in contradiction with some of the theoretical and empirical literature stated above, about half of the displaced students claimed that they faced no considerable psychosocial, economic, and educational challenges. Nor did they show visible reactions or deployed extreme coping strategies. And this was true for both genders. This apparently supported the assertion that "war-affected children also demonstrate psychosocial resources and can even

blossom despite trauma" (Punamäki et al., 2021:254). Data revealed that many factors contributed to this finding, as explained below. And it appeared that, as stated by UNICEF (2021b), Anis et al. (2021), Guglielmi et al. (2021), and Cha (2020), the fact that displaced students are attending to their education helped them reduce uncertainty, aspire for decent employment, and rebuild a sense of confidence.

Some students were displaced with their parents (though now parents have already returned back after the war subsided) and did not face the new environment alone as soon as they arrived. In line with this, Punamäki et al., (2021) claimed that when parents and children face traumatic and stressful events together, they show endurance and care for each other. Parents can also comfort children (Özen-Uyar et al., 2021) and it was found that paternal care is linked to lower social phobia (UNICEF, 2021). Moreover, some students are attending their schooling with close relatives (siblings and nieces) in the same school, and this helped them minimize the burden of getting a close friend. Studies, as to Punamäki et al. (2021), proved that intimate sibling relationships can prevent traumatic war events from negatively affecting the mental health of children. Other related factors were also found helping students cope with the situation including the fact that all informants did not have loss (death) of their parents back home, most of them live with relatives (aunts and uncles) in Addis Ababa, who can afford to support them to some degree, and few of them get money from their parents, relatives abroad, and have family homes in Addis Ababa. The fact that they did not lose parents and relatives (as far as their knowledge is concerned) is good as such losses could have led children to suffer from severe psychological damages (Anis et al., 2021; Mayai, 2020).

A different comforting situation for one displaced student is related to the professional characteristic of both parents, who are active soldiers. This helped the student to live in a military camp in Addis Ababa with all the needed accommodation (food and residence) and plays in the

defense sport club. Due to the nature of the parents' job, this student is not also required to provide a monthly-pay for a weekly-tutorial in the school. Other displaced students also need to be exempted from such requirements since war-affected children show remarkable recovery when help is accessed (Punamäki et al., 2021).

The most outstanding factor that relieved displaced students' challenges, however, is the unprecedented support from the City Government of Addis Ababa that provides all primary government school students, displaced or otherwise, with learning materials, school uniforms, shoes, and above all school meals (breakfast and lunch). One student, who claimed to have a financial problem, said 'it is good that we eat and wear the same'. Even without the school materials support, school meals alone promote the health and well-being of children (Ralston *et al.*, 2008), boost cognitive development, improve school attendance and learning efficiency in both high- and low-income countries, although their impact on school performance was found to be only partial (Adrogue & Orlicki, 2013). Moreover, Guglielmi et al. (2021) found that providing educational support has the potential to enhance educational enrolment. Unfortunately, food insecurity was found to be among the hardships students from low-income families and who missed schooling were facing (Levinson et al., 2021). Moreover, clothing and other educational costs are among the essential needs families should meet (Şengönül, 2021). Addressing these needs contributes to children's suitable learning environment.

Nonetheless, in this study, four different severe challenges with corresponding coping strategies were identified. Several displaced students (regardless of gender) were found facing psychological (fear of loss of relatives and/or property), language, economic, and loss of parental (family) care challenges. Though mild, there were also social and educational problems. In line with this, Alemneh (2022) found that displaced people faced different challenges, and they employed

different coping mechanisms. These severe challenges are discussed as follows.

Fear of loss of a relative and/or property and feelings of missing their parents and their hometown were among the psychological challenges identified by this study. In line with this scholars in the field noted that fear is a common experience among displaced people (Jones, 2020; Wessells, 2020; Wanjiru, 2018). As a coping strategy, students with these problems telephone their parents, especially after many occupied places were freed and communication infrastructures were restored. But these students stressed that they do not frequently call their relatives fearing that they may be told a relative has passed away or their property is destroyed. Two students with similar views said,

> 'Even I do not want to talk to my parents because I am afraid to hear such a bad news'. 'In fact, 'I talked to them twice and they told me that everyone is fine. But I do not believe them because they are telling me such good news not to disturb me while I am far away from them. I do not know what is actually going on there'.

Language barrier was identified as another major challenge. Six displaced students told us that, at the beginning, this was a problem for them as there was language difference (for communication and as a medium of instruction) between their hometown and Addis Ababa. When these students were asked what they are doing to cope with this challenge, one said 'my mother can speak the widely used language in Addis Ababa (Amharic) and she teaches me the language and supports me when I do my assignments. Now I improved my language skill'. Two students said they get support from their fathers. This is an important coping strategy since, as Koloti and Jita (2021) noted, when parents understand a given language, they can contribute to the effective

learning process of their children. One student with the same language problem said,

> ‘I have close friends, who themselves are displaced from another country to Ethiopia but speak the same language like mine. So, we discuss issues together. Communicating with non-displaced students was and is not my problem since even before displacement the language I was using in a military camp was the same as the language these students are using’.

Other two students also replied that they have close friends who speak the same language, although now they are becoming friends with other students as well. This finding coincided with the findings of Mteki et al. (2019) and Wanjiru (2018) that collective ownership among displaced children themselves was a strategy used by the displaced. This challenge is apparently complicating the education of these students since communication barrier can affect learning and socialization and language is of extreme importance in our daily interactions (Ozoemenal et al., 2021).

Two students were found to have severe economic challenges. As coping strategies, one of them is serving as a house worker and the other student as a guard to a private home. The house worker student said,

> ‘Although I am serving that home, I am not paid at all. The employers say they are sending the money to my relatives through one lady whom I know but my relatives told me that this is not correct. So, I will go back at the end of this year’. Teachers are covering my tutorial cost.

The student who is working as a guard said,

> ‘I am confused. I lost two uncles during the war. I have been displaced twice. First an inter-family conflict displaced me to a nearby town and now the war pushed me to Addis Ababa. I want to join the military but my relatives have been advising me not to. They say, let you be alive to support your aging parents. So, I stayed here. In fact, I want to work and not to learn. I have no body to live with. Thus, I am serving as a guard. This has helped me in two ways: first I help my parents with the money I earn and second I got a place to spend the night. During the day at school learning and at night at a private home guarding. But this is tiresome and I am losing interest to learn. During summer vacation I will look for a full-time job’.

This finding on economic challenge for the above two students agrees with the finding by Alemneh (2022) where he noted that suffering from not having income-generating mechanisms is one of the fundamental issues among displaced people. As to their coping strategies (doing extra jobs), the finding coincides with what Bennouna et al. (2020) stated as working in the informal sectors is among the strategies deployed by displaced people.

Three students were also suffering from minor economic constrains such as inability to pay for tutorials and transportation. One of them is receiving money from parents back home, who themselves are selling their livestock to send the money. The second student is getting financial assistance from teachers and the third is preparing to return back home even before the semester ends. A student, who receives money from a teacher for failing to pay for tutorials, said ‘my teacher is paying for me’. The other student, who decided to return back home, said ‘I better live with my families’. The one who receives money from parents stressed ‘I must give this money back to my families and

education is my best tool for this'. If this student keeps this determination, it can be a good motivating force since hopes about the future dictate decisions about how much to devote today (Eble & Maya, 2021) and this finding matched with a study on displaced students that found strong motivation for education among them (Cha, 2020). We suggest that, as war-displaced students with similar problems are few, schools better extend their cooperation (tuition-free tutorials), for direct school collaboration is said to improve children's quality of life and interest in educational activities (Serrano-Díaz et al., 2022).

Loss of parental (family) care caused by displacement was found as a critical challenge for one student. This student has epilepsy and believes that life far away from families with this health challenge is impossible. The student said,

> 'My only problems are my own health and my critically ill father who lives back in the hometown. I am always afraid to play with other students fearing that I may fall. I have fallen many times and hurt myself. Though it is not helping, I take medicine. Since my problem is known the school community is so cooperative and assists me a lot. My parents also fear that I may face this problem and are calling me to return back. So, I will go back at the end of this semester'.

This challenge is in line with one of the findings of Alemneh (2022) in that family separation is among the most common challenges faced by internally displaced people. Telling the problem to the school community as a strategy was appropriate as it helps to get immediate support and this health problem is in fact a challenge that needs close family attention and care. In the second decade of the 21st century in human development (that includes the development of this student),

parents, caregivers, peers, and schools remain vital resources for the mental wellbeing and lives of children (UNICEF, 2021).

Although the problem is being gradually solved, at the beginning, several students found it difficult to have close friends. One said 'Addis Ababa students want to have friends who are from Addis Ababa, not us'. Another said 'they laugh with my dialect and thus I do not talk and play but stand behind and watch'. It is good that the challenge is being solved. Otherwise, being separated from families by war and not being able to get friends is doubly bad for a displaced student. Researchers found that having no close friends is a factor that affects mental health- as one of the risks children of these ages face (UNICEF, 2021). If it were not disappearing, this problem could have been a considerable challenge as attachment with others is an important adaptive coping strategy for the displaced (Jones, 2020; Tope-Banjoko et al., 2020).

Some educational challenges were also identified including inability to register in time and lack of interest to learn. Timely registration was a problem since students did not have the relevant documents necessary for registration. In this regard, schools were cooperative to register the students and documents were accessed later. However, such challenges were expected since schools in conflict zones will be partially or fully destroyed (Mayai, 2020) which, in turn, results in loss of educational documents. As to lack of interest to learn, it is understandable that the displacement is war-induced which harms one's interest. This finding is in line with Jones (2020) in that lack of interest and concentration is among the problems displaced children exhibit. But with the abating war, students' situations are improving.

4. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

This study aimed at investigating the war-induced challenges and coping strategies of displaced students in the primary schools of Addis

Ababa, with a particular focus on grades 7-8. Generally speaking, about half of the students neither faced significant psychosocial, economic, and educational challenges nor reflected severe reactions nor employed unexpected coping strategies. Many factors contributed for this but the greatest of all is the school meal and material support program in all government primary schools. Fear of loss of a relative and/or property, language, economic, and lack of parental (family) care were the major challenges. Telephone communications, family support and having displaced students, who speak the same language as friends, working in the informal sectors, and seeking cooperation from the school community were the strategies for the four challenges respectively. Minor problems such as inability to have friends, inability to access registration documents, and lack of concentration were gradually solved.

Although the war-displaced are few in number, with some already returned back (e.g., Dil Betigil primary school and all in the case in Jerusalem primary school), most of them appear not to return back for safety concerns and fear of economic hardship. Addressing language- and economic-related problems in the short run and dealing with the displacing factors in the middle- and long run are recommended. We also suggest that schools extend their cooperation by providing tuition-free tutorials.

This finding involved displaced primary school children, where school meals are available. What would the situation look like when this opportunity is missing at the secondary school level? This can be an important area for future research. Moreover, one of the findings of this study implies that school meal and materials support program has a considerable impact in reducing the effect of schooling in displacement. This support is even the reason why some students do not want to return back to their hometown. In this regard, planning for federal and regional school meal and materials support programs in the long run could be one way forward.

Authors' Contribution

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