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## Solidarity in Time of Armed Conflict. Women's Patterns of Solidarity in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camps in Darfur, Western Sudan

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**Solidarity in Time of Armed Conflict.  
Women's Patterns of Solidarity in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) Camps  
in Darfur, Western Sudan**

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*This study, a vital part of a Ph.D. thesis, delves into the prolonged armed conflict's impact in Darfur, which has resulted in severe loss of assets and lives, disrupted livelihoods, and food insecurity. Among the most vulnerable are internally displaced women, primary targets of violence due to their caregiving roles and responsibilities. Addressing the gap in existing literature, this research explores the meanings, practices, experiences, and representations of solidarity among women residing in the Abu-Shouk IDP camp. Challenging conventional perceptions, the study highlights women's competencies and strengths, empowering them to develop unique coping strategies within the conflict context. It uncovers the significance of solidarity as a force of resilience and collective support. The insights shared emphasize the transformative potential of empowering displaced women and fostering positive change in conflict-affected communities.*

**Keywords:** Armed Conflict, Abu-Shouk Camp, Darfur, Internally Displaced Person, Social Solidarity, Women.

**Introduction**

*"I'm capable. I can do anything."  
(Amna, 33-year-old a teacher, married)*

Darfur, a former independent state in western Sudan, has been a scene of acerbic warfare between several insurgent movements and the Sudanese central government since February 2003. The Arab Janjaweed militia and the Sudanese government use sexual violence to suppress the people's capacity to fight and as a tool of ethnic cleansing (Khadka, 2017). The ongoing conflict in the Darfur region has revealed how the rape of girls and women is used as a systematic, intentional weapon of war. Moreover, many Darfur women have lost their "male guardians" or husbands, communities, homes, and belongings, leaving them alone to care for their families, which increases their vulnerability and added responsibilities and workload. Men and boys, who were the primary source of domestic income, lost their lives protecting their families, resulting in stress, resource deprivation, and uncertainty for those who survived. Both men and women in Darfur are subjected to a high level of derogatory and racist epithets.

The conflict and violence in Darfur have led to the breakdown of societies. Many people have died, infrastructure has been destroyed, health and education services have suffered, and the environment has been damaged. Additionally, political tensions have resulted in the breaking of ties that once linked people together, leading to the collapse of social solidarity and social bonds. Furthermore, socio-economic development has been delayed due to the destruction and carnage caused by conflicts (Murithi, 2006). The combination of all these elements firmly categorizes the Darfur Armed Conflict as one of the worst possible types of conflict and has been labeled by the United States and the United Nations as "genocide" and "one of the world's worst humanitarian crises" (Quach, 2004). This extensive conflict has forced people to flee from their homes to neighboring countries as refugees or as internally displaced persons in their

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own country. From Darfur, two hundred thousand refugees have spilled into Chad (Murithi, 2006), and more than 2 million have become displaced inside Sudan (UNAMID, 2016).

Yet, despite the overwhelming challenges and devastation caused by the conflict, Darfuri people in internally displaced person camps have found ways to cope. The collective grief for the damaging impacts of conflict motivates people to participate in mutual actions to find solutions to hard-living situations in times of conflict (Cooper & Block, 2007). As Durkheim (1995, [1915]) believes, society will find its social glue to engage with each other and overcome challenges. Extreme instability can motivate people to cooperate and foster social solidarity, even in the most difficult circumstances.

Solidarity between internally displaced persons in Darfur, especially among women, is magnificent. Women in the camp share their experiences with each other to ease the process of finding accommodation and overcoming everyday challenges. Moreover, they collaborate and work in mixed or separated groups in a new context (Puente, 2011). These activities flourish because women identify themselves as subject to the same threat and assume an attitude of collaboration and solidarity when they recognize that the struggle of each is the struggle of all (Da Silva et al., 2015). In such circumstances, the feeling of belonging to a community is significant, according to Da Silva et al. (2015), and this feeling becomes even stronger when the challenges are greater.

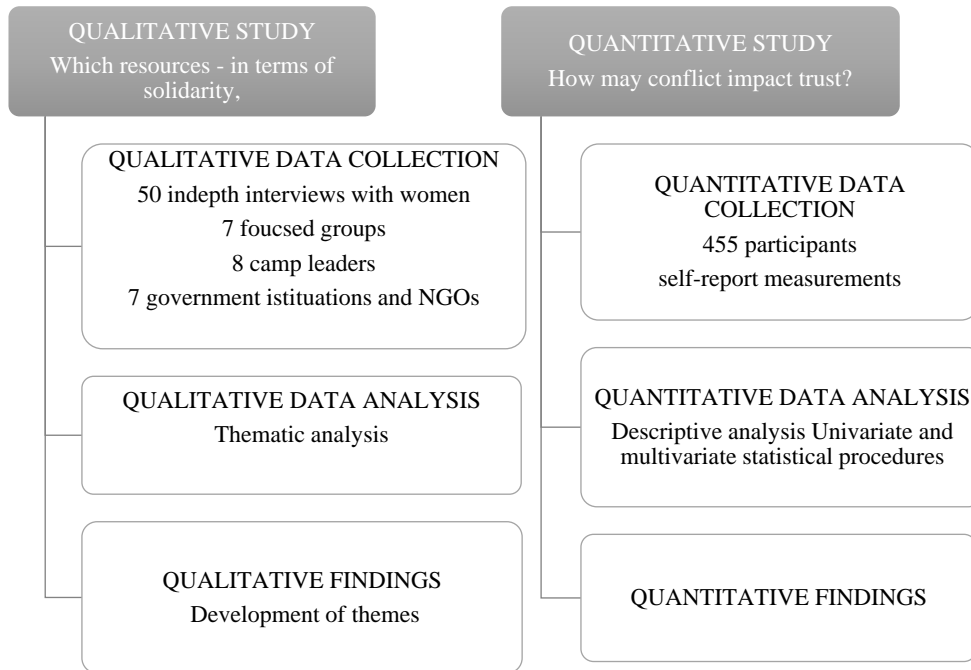
This study aims to explore Darfur women's experiences and responses to such violent transformations and ongoing disruptions of their lives in the Abu-Shouk IDP camp, North Darfur, Sudan. The focus is on how they re-establish a sense of normal order and negotiate the moral dilemmas they encounter through social solidarity. The study delves into the meanings, practices, experiences, and representations of solidarity among Darfur women in the camp, examining how solidarity can be described within these challenging conditions. By investigating women's solidarity behavior, the study seeks to uncover the conditions and motivations that create fertile ground for building social solidarity in the context of conflict.

This research endeavors to bridge the gap identified in the literature on women's behavior in conflict settings. To explore women's social solidarity practices in a time of armed conflict inside the Abu-Shouk camp, this study brings together three rather unrelated traditions of social scientific thinking concerning social bonds: sociological theory on solidarity, anthropological theory on the cultural and social meanings of exchange, and social psychology theory of emotions. Additionally, the study considers the theory of trust and social networks to provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of war on women's solidarity behavior. This multidisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of solidarity in conflict settings.

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed method and an ethnographic approach to comprehensively examine women's solidarity in the Abu-Shouk camp. This design allowed for a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of solidarity by combining qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell et.al, 2003, p.178). The ethnographic approach was particularly suitable for the context of armed conflict, as it provided a holistic view of the camp's humanitarian arrangements, requiring the researcher's personal presence to capture intricate details and individual perspectives (Michel, 2011, p.7).

The ethnographic methods used in the study included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, enabling a rich exploration of women's experiences

and practices within the camp. Additionally, quantitative data was collected through a self-reported questionnaire, providing valuable insights to complement and further elaborate on the



*Figure 1 Research process: exploratory sequential mixed method*

qualitative findings (Figure 1 illustrates the research process). The data collection was divided into three phases to provide a deep understanding of women’s solidarity in the IDP camp. The first phase (Pilot study) was conducted from the 9th to the 23rd of February 2020. The Second phase of qualitative data collection was conducted from the 28th of August 2020 to the 28th of October 2020. The last phase of collecting quantitative data was from February to March 2021. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the study employed a combination of focused and descriptive ethnography. The descriptive approach allowed for a detailed depiction of everyday life and cultural practices within the new environment. Simultaneously, focused ethnography targeted specific social phenomena related to women's solidarity, resulting in targeted and relevant results within a relatively short timeframe. This method proved advantageous in collecting focused data across various settings and sharing experiences effectively. Moreover, the approach proved vital in the context of COVID-ized ethnography, adapting research methods to the constraints imposed by the pandemic.

The study's findings shed light on the resilience and strength of women's solidarity in the Abu-Shouk camp despite the extreme hardships and adversities they face. It offers valuable insights into how social solidarity can thrive even in the most challenging circumstances and how it plays a crucial role in supporting and sustaining communities in times of conflict. The information generated by this research can inform policies and plans for managing and coordinating internally displaced person camps, as well as developmental projects aimed at supporting communities affected by armed conflict. By understanding the conditions and motivations that foster social solidarity, policymakers and humanitarian organizations can design more effective interventions to support communities in conflict-ridden regions.

It is important to note that this study is a part of a larger PhD thesis. The research conducted here forms a significant component of the comprehensive doctoral investigation into the dynamics of social solidarity among internally displaced women in conflict zones. By focusing on the Abu-Shouk IDP camp in Darfur, this study contributes to the broader understanding of

the complex interactions between armed conflict, social bonds, and resilience among vulnerable populations. The insights gained from this research can potentially inform not only humanitarian efforts in Darfur but also similar contexts around the world, where communities face the challenging conditions of displacement and conflict.

### **Conceptual Framework:**

This section will present the main concepts guiding the study (armed conflict, internally displaced persons, and social solidarity). The scenario outlined here will allow for a general comprehension of the phenomenon.

#### *- Armed Conflict*

Since the Cold War, the concept of conflict has gained paramount importance (Al-Majali, 2017). Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, occurring among individuals, families, tribes, clans, nation-states, and city-states, and can manifest in various forms, such as social, political, cultural, and symbolic (Brecher, 2008). It encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from minor familial disputes to armed conflicts, crises, and wars, with diverse scopes and outcomes (Al-Majali, 2017).

A fundamental element in defining conflict is the presence of two or more parties with opposing goals, wherein meeting the needs of one party may lead to the neglect of the other's needs (Al-Majali, 2017). Such conflicts can drive social development or escalate into radical political developments (Al-Majali, 2017). Generally, conflicts are categorized into three types: intra-state, inter-state, and trans-state.

The Darfur armed conflict is classified as an intra-state conflict. An intra-state conflict refers to a conflict that takes place within the borders of a single state or country. In the case of Darfur, the conflict primarily occurred within the western region of Sudan, involving various rebel groups, government forces, and allied militia groups. This protracted and intricate conflict resulted from various factors, including ethnic tensions, competition over resources, political marginalization, and regional disparities.

#### *- Internally Displaced Person (IDP):*

The concept of IDPs gained international attention in the early 1990s. Although there is no universal definition, the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement defines IDPs as individuals or groups forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, internal strife, human rights violations, or natural or man-made disasters without crossing an internationally recognized state border. The plight of IDPs is a complex issue encompassing those displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, development projects, and natural disasters.

#### *- Solidarity*

From the beginning, solidarity or pro-social behavior has been a central concept in sociology since it relates to collective action and social order, generally considered the omega and alpha of classical sociological theory (Hechter, 1987). Both contemporary and classical scholars placed the concept at the core of their theories and empirical research. This has led to differences in definitions, operationalizations, and applications of the term.

In the twelfth century, the term used to indicate solidarity in the Islamic world was “*Asabiyah*.” Ibn Khaldun, in his *al-Muqaddimah*, postulates the need to have *Asabiyah* in building a strong civilization. *Asabiyah* or “*esprit de corps*” represents the bond of cohesion among humans in a group-forming community. In other words, *Asabiyah* is the state of mind that makes

individuals identify with a group and subordinate their interests to the group's interests (Dusuki, 2006). According to Ibn Khaldun, human beings, by nature, prefer to cooperate, live together, and help each other. However, due to many worldly motivations and temptations, people sometimes act to serve their own interests, thereby weakening the interest of society at large (Dusuki, 2006).

The spirit of '*Asabiyah*' exists due to the life experiences of specific nations or groups when facing certain problems. These make them more likely to stand together to protect their peers and themselves from any outsider threat to their group. The core element of '*Asabiyah*' usually arises from blood relations (Halim et al., 2012). Likewise, religion is critical in binding the group members through the spirit of '*Asabiyah*' (Halim et al., 2012). In his writings, Ibn Khaldun states, '*Asabiyah*' was more evident and much stronger in nomadic tribes because nomads lead a simple life. On the other hand, the sense of '*Asabiyah*' is less evident in urban contexts, where people compete to gain the resources, they need to survive - space and power - in negative ways.

Many classical scholars have translated the word '*Asabiyah*' to represent group feeling or social solidarity. The notion of social solidarity emerged in response to the changes wrought by the rise of capitalist economies, the development of industry, and the expansion of cities. Tönnies (2003) was the first to examine the transformation of solidarity in the nineteenth century. He describes the evolution of the change from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*: from traditional community values as they are embodied in small-scale social communities to the large-scale centralized nation, where social relations are dominated by free competition and economic rationality between individual interests (Komter, 2005).

Émile Durkheim (2014, [1893]) coined the term '*mechanical solidarity*' in relation to *Gemeinschaft*. Mechanical solidarity is based on internalized social norms, beliefs, and common values in a society with strong moral norms (mainly religious), which tie the individuals to the community. In these societies, the individuals' consciousness is fully integrated into the collective consciousness, which binds the individual to the community and makes them act according to the shared norms (Morrison, 2006). This type of solidarity is reflected in applying severe penal sanctions, "*repressive law*," to address deviant behavior or the violation of norms (Morrison, 2006).

In modern societies, *organic solidarity* is gradually replacing mechanical solidarity. Organic solidarity is based on differences between individuals. In modern industrial society, Durkheim (2014, [1893]) says, social cohesion depends upon the division of labor. As the division of labor extends, the "*collective conscience*" weakens: its content becomes increasingly secular and human-oriented, and morality becomes universal and abstract (Morrison, 2006). Durkheim argues that Contract Law characterizes advanced societies; sanctions are restitutive rather than repressive under these judicial rules.

- *Social Solidarity in the Context of Conflict*

Armed conflict leaves behind a chaotic situation, such as broken social relations, the loss of property, and damage to infrastructures. For Durkheim, extreme instability, like war, violence, and disasters, may motivate people to cooperate in normalizing these situations (Durkheim, 2014, [1893]). For Durkheim, extreme instability drives the community to share responsibility and make concessions towards one another, this being social solidarity, to reinstate normal situations.

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The idea of “*solidarity in disasters*” was formulated by Dombrowsky (1983). Dombrowsky sees that disaster triggers social action, which may not be found under non-disaster situations, and social solidarity offers a basis for this action (Dombrowsky, 1983). Many scholars see that social solidarity gives people a feeling of unity, cohesion, and assistance in difficult circumstances (Dombrowsky, 1983). Actions of cooperation and solidarity between community members in a time of disaster may enhance, maintain or evolve community resilience (Silvaa et al., 2015).

This analysis is essential in the context of women’s solidarity during armed conflict or extreme instability. During the conflict, many women lost their husbands, communities, homes, and belongings; they were left alone to care for their families, which increased their vulnerability, responsibilities, and workload. Consequently, women had to develop unique mechanisms to deal with challenges and secure an adequate life for their families. Women organized themselves around gender-related survival strategies and became aware of more gender-specific concerns. They worked in groups, generating networks, norms, and community trust.

### The Study Field

The Darfur situation allows us to analyze and examine the condition of IDPs who have been displaced due to violent armed conflict on a massive scale and in a situation where the government is unwilling to support and help them.

In North Darfur State, five main camps were established in 2004: Abu-Shouk, Halloof, Zamzam, Fatta Barno, and Kassāb. The study takes the Abu-Shouk camp<sup>2</sup> as fieldwork because it is the oldest, most diverse, and most accessible compared to the others.



Map 1 Aerial view of Abu Shouk Camp, El Fasher, Darfur, 2008 (Bunclark et al, 2011), and the Historical region of Darfur (Encyclopædia Britannica)

This section will address the impact of armed conflict on the Abu-Shouk community and social bonds.

- *The Abu-Shouk camp community*

Before the conflict, the community had a high level of safety and security. The rural traditional extended family for the IDPs in the camp comprised more than a dozen individuals. Before the displacement, the primary profession for most families in the Abu-Shouk camp was cultivating cash crops and food, followed by grazing and trade (Ali et al., 2016). Women used to do home chores, like cooking, washing clothes, and fetching firewood and water. They were assisted by their daughters, who used to have less access to local schools. Pre-displacement families in the Abu-Shouk camp ignored the education of their children, especially girls; this is because children were often involved in farming and grazing activities. However, many boys migrated between the Sudan States to attend Quranic *khalāwi*<sup>3</sup> and study the Quran from Sheikhs<sup>4</sup>. These *khalāwi* are located in places far from their homes. Moreover, in pre-displacement times, friends and neighbors would help the groom cover wedding expenses, build his home, and sometimes choose the bride for him. All of this has been affected by the war.

Before the displacement, people were satisfied. They had food and had a surplus, except for some manufactured things such as salt and sugar. In the past, people used to be happy and comfortable. People, especially the elderly, preferred rural life because they were so comfortable and had never even been to the city before. But because of war, people's lives changed; they lost their property, and thus trust was broken. These displaced people have come to a place where the main necessities of life are not found. They came with the clothes they wore. People would steal from each other, and if a person does not have 'faith,' he will steal from others because he has reached a stage where he does not have his day's food.

(*Omda*<sup>5</sup> Taj Al-Din)

War has a catastrophic impact on the well-being of nations. Conflict destroys families and communities and sometimes disrupts the development of nations' economic and social fabric (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). Many studies have shown that conflict situations cause more disability and mortality than any major disease (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). This can be illustrated in Figure 2. The figure shows that the individuals' well-being dropped when the war started. This figure has been developed based on the experience of the displacement of women, youth, and men.

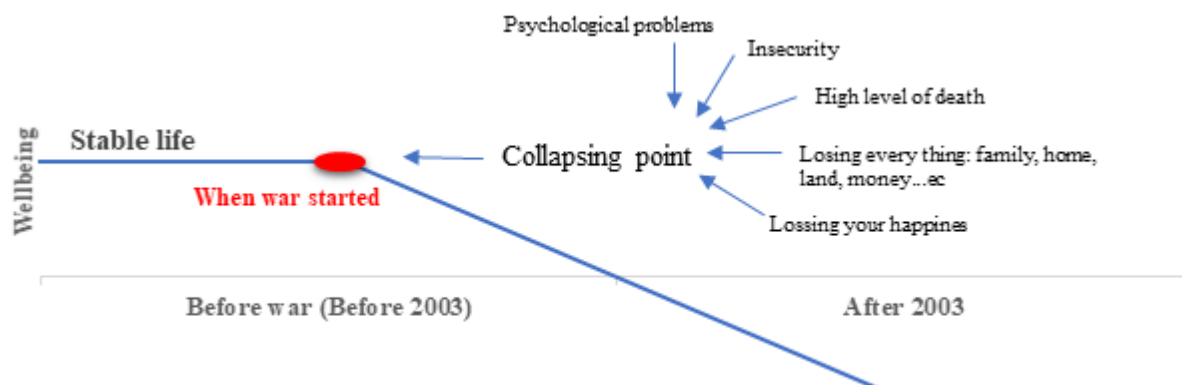


Figure 2 The impact of war on individuals' well-being.

Displacement in its early stage led to the disintegration of the traditional rural family into nuclear families, generally composed of parents, children, and the nearest kin. Children had to



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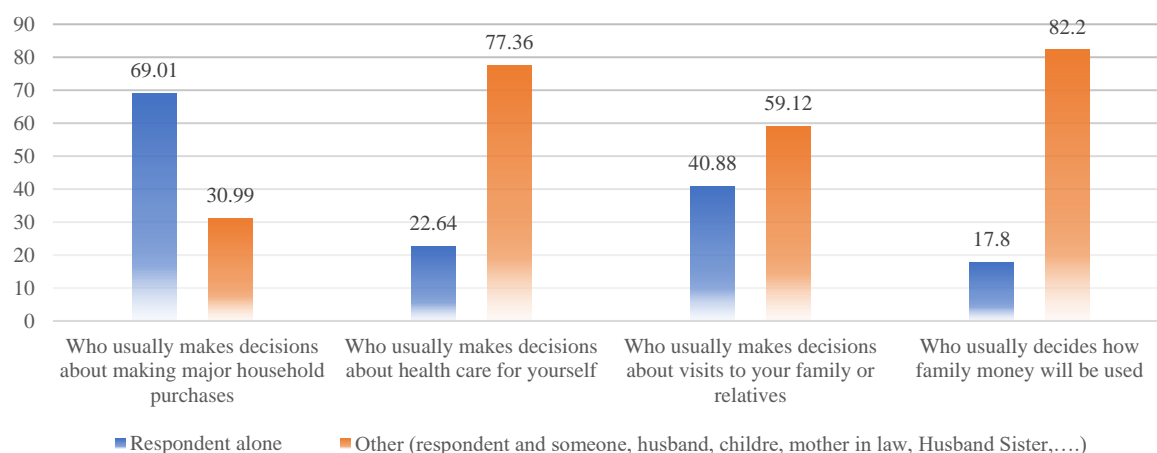
search for alternative livelihoods in different locations. The split of extended families into nuclear ones has led to changes in social roles and statuses, the emergence of a new division of labor, and the redistribution of authority. For instance, many women have become responsible for their families, having lost their husbands in the conflict, or have been forced to travel outside the camp to earn more money<sup>6</sup>. Yet, women in the camp have become aware of their rights after attending the many intensive workshops organized by different local and international organizations in the area. Nonetheless, the increase in the responsibilities and burdens of women has allowed them to share with their husbands in the decision-making sphere more freely. Figure 3 presents the percentages of women who take decision inside the household.

In the past, we used to hit the woman so that you could control her, and she would follow orders. But now I can’t control her, and she doesn’t listen. Now women do whatever they want, and if you talk to your wife or hit her, she will go to the court, and the court will stand with her and not with the man.

*(Adam, Men FGD)*

The role of women is different than what it was in the past. In the past, younger and older women would stand up when a man passed in front of them. Now there is no such thing. Also, when the woman greeted the man in the past, she would sit on the ground. Women are not ashamed anymore, as they go to the market, eat there and call for freedom and power.

*(Omda Yahya Muhammed)*



*Figure 3: Decision taking inside the household.*

Yet living in the camp was very difficult for most IDPs, especially for women; it wasn’t easy for them to adapt to the new living conditions due to many challenges. The first difficulty IDPs encountered related to the small size of the provided residences. In all cases, each family was assigned a tent sized 100 meters, a space too small for a family comprised of seven members<sup>7</sup>. The second problem was the lack of accessible fire-building sources such as charcoal or firewood. This type of resource could be found in a remote area where women were exposed to the risk of rape by Janjaweed. Moreover, there was always a conflict between ethnic groups either inside the camps or where water was located.

One of the main challenges and problems was the many conflicts between different ethnic groups inside the camp, which resulted from “injustice and resentment.” This is because of the nature of the conflict. During the war, some tribes were marginalized, and other tribes were subjected to high violence. So, when these people came to the camp, they were afraid to bond

with other people. Many of them were afraid of people of different shapes and colors. For example, if one has “a light skin color,” people will think he belongs to an Arab tribe” (...). “In the beginning, there were no social bonds among people. Instead, there was hate, but with time, people began bonding with each other and overcame the idea of tribalism.

(Omran, 24 years old, Youth FGD)

Thirdly, finding a job constituted another difficulty for IDPs because their agro-pastoral production qualifications did not coincide with the city’s economic sector requirements. This led to an increase in unemployment among internally displaced men. Additionally, new and unfamiliar expenses became the norm, relating to access to clean water, electricity, and the fares for local public transportation —the combination of these elements increased the level of poverty among IDPs.

IDPs in the Abu-Shouk camp had to reduce the number of meals from three or four per day pre-displacement to two or fewer post-displacement. Most IDPs would depend on relief food, which was insufficient to nourish the entire family unit. Water also constituted a pressing issue, as there were no water sources in or around every home, the only sources being water pumps located at specific places inside the camp. The lack of water and food worsened IDPs’ living and health conditions.

The most relevant problem internally displaced women face in their new life inside the camp is the risk of rape and theft by men, who often use drugs and alcohol. Furthermore, life for women inside the camps is generally unsafe, especially at night. Ehsaan, a 13-year-old girl, said: “I am scared at night because of the men who take drugs or drink” (...). “I don’t go out at night, and I wish this could be solved.”

The study shows that the majority of the women inside the camp are unhappy, as can be seen in Figure 4.

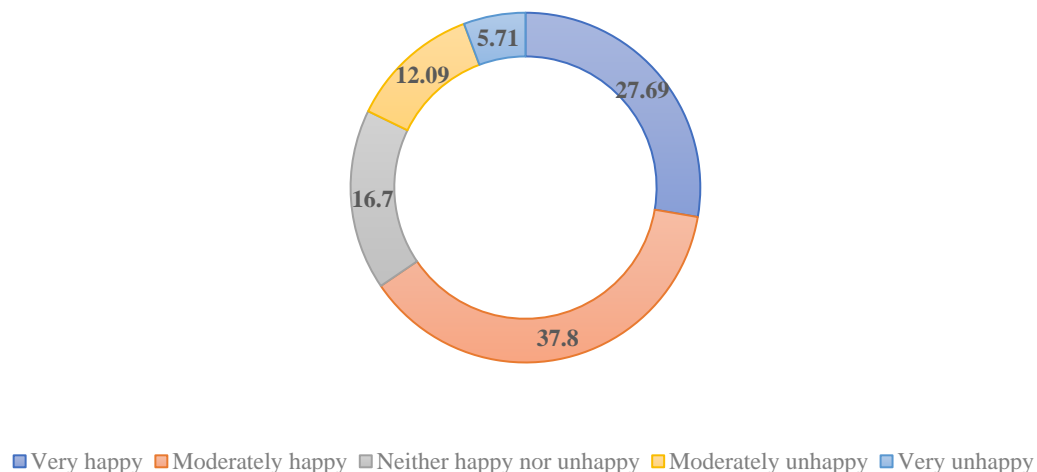


Figure 4: In general, how happy do you consider yourself to be?

Families in the Abu-Shouk camp found themselves alone and confronted by the difficulties of managing their life in the camp. Therefore, families in the Abu-Shouk camp, especially women, had to interact and adapt to the new conditions and lifestyle. One of the mechanisms that helped them overcome those challenges was unity and cooperation. Zaynab, 45 years old, lives with

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her four daughters, two sons, and three granddaughters: “Together we have overcome the difficult situation that we faced” (...).” Since we came to the camp, we have been helping each other.”

With the new traditional division of labor, women and children worked together to build alternative homes using grass, mud, wood, and sun-dried bricks, which are found at the camp. Over time the number of families who live in tents has decreased, and today all families in the camp live in houses. With the emergence of new living conditions, families have become interested in their children's education, even that of their daughters. The awareness of the importance of education and the availability and proximity of schools and free education services has increased education enrollment.



*Image 1 One of the houses in Block 17. Photo by author*

Many families in the camp changed their economic activities after the displacement, though a small portion has kept practicing grazing and farming seasonally in their areas of origin. Others have become teachers, laborers, government officials and NGO employees. Some of them, especially women and children, work in sun-dried brick industries at the edge of the camp, distributing drinking water or constructing houses inside the camp. In addition, some IDPs work at the Abu Shouk or Nifash market, where they have shops that sell meat, cattle, clothes, charcoal and firewood, local building materials, and local medicine.



*Image 2 Displaced women working in brick baking. Photo by author*

In general, both the urban environment and the conflict have impacted the displaced rural families, manifesting in changes in social relations and institutions, cultural practices, gender roles, economic activities, beliefs, and ethnic relationships.

- *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Social Bonds Inside Abu-Shouk Camp:*

Armed conflicts between different ethnic groups will create anger and fear. People become cautious when interacting with individuals outside their close group, leading to a lack of trust and an increased likelihood of conflict. The bad economic situation also harmed social bonds. However, hate, anger, and fear eventually decrease over time as people start to trust and interact with each other. This can be summarized in Figure 5. The figure shows the impact of non-international armed conflicts on social solidarity. The data shows that people started to despise each other when the war happened, as well as an increase in conflict and disputes among individuals:

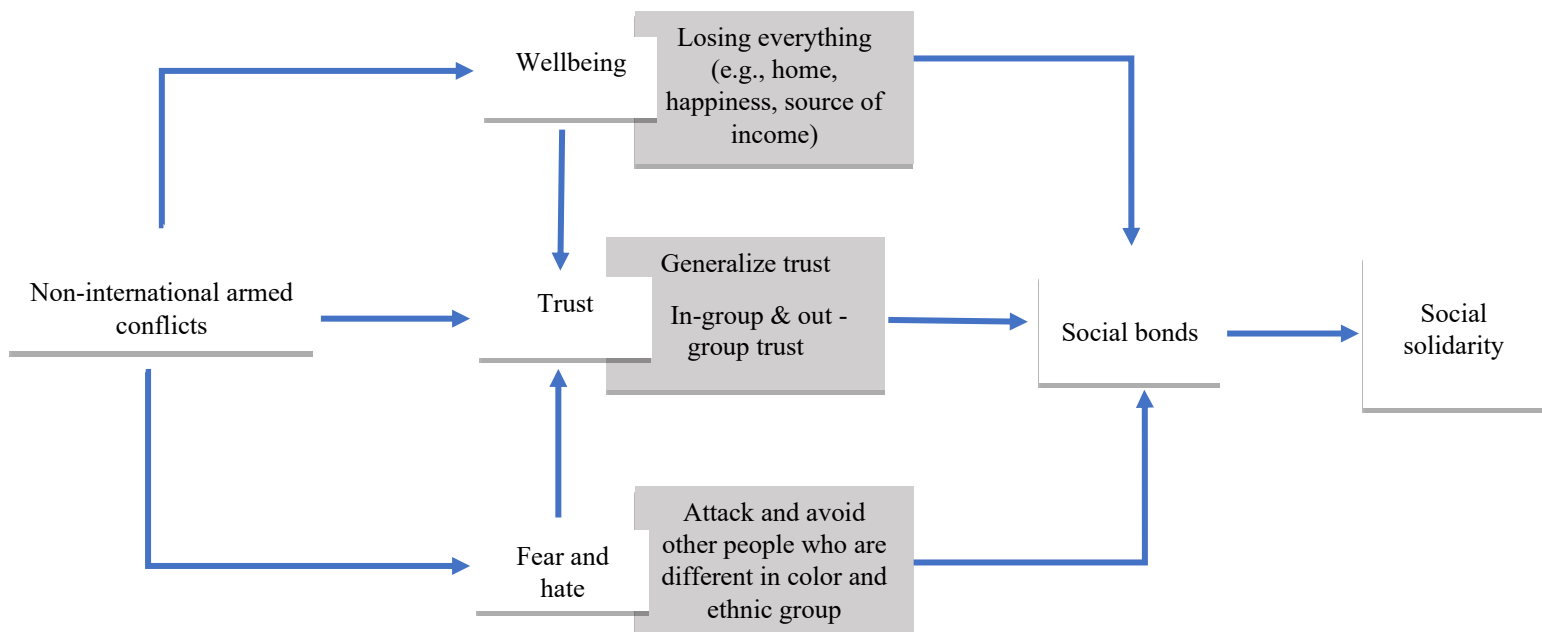


Figure 5: The Violence - Social solidarity - Trust nexus

Moreover, people lost their source of income, which also affected their mental health (e.g., Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). These elements combined harm, trust and social bonds among people inside the camp, consequently harming social solidarity. Social solidarity is like a glue that links people together (Durkheim, (1995, [1915])), and social bonds represent that glue.

**Women’s solidarity practices in the Abu-Shouk camp**

The study shows that using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative with qualitative data methods and analysis offers a deep understanding of the actions behind women’s social solidarity. Integrating in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis into a quantitative research program on women’s solidarity behavior has resulted in valuable scientific insight and the generation of novel hypotheses for testing.

- *Women’s Daily Challenges Inside Abu-Shouk Camp*

According to Goldstein (2001), armed conflict is constructed by gender. The conflict leads to increased female-to-male ratios and Women-Headed Households (WHH). For instance, in Darfur, women and children make up the majority of IDPs. In the Abu-Shouk camp, females

and children comprise more than 60% of the total IDPs and women headed approximately 33% of all households (Camp administrative 2020.). These numbers reflect a demographic imbalance (Berry 2015). Moreover, the gender-related effect of conflict on family demography increases the number of widows and WHH in post-conflict settings. For example, in the Abu-Shouk camp, the percentage of married women whose husbands do not live with them is 33%, and the total rate of widows and divorced women is 13% (author's study).

Women in the camp faced many challenges that affected them physically and mentally. The most pressing challenges they face daily are financial difficulty and depression: "Sometimes, I don't have money to buy food, but my husband should take responsibility for feeding us" (Afaf, 31-year-old Zaghawa, married, housewife, and master's student, has three children).

Figure 6 summarizes the main challenges that women face inside the camp.



Figure 6 The challenges that women face inside the camp.

To cope with daily challenges women built a social circle that supports them.

**Women's social circle: Women's support systems inside the camp**

The study shows that women adopted several practices which helped them cope with everyday challenges. When women arrived at Al-Mashtel<sup>8</sup>, they consciously created unity groups with a sense of shared purpose and social cohesion to safely move at night to fetch water and firewood. Furthermore, women bonded with other families to find strength in numbers and sleep together at night to feel safe (see Figure 7).

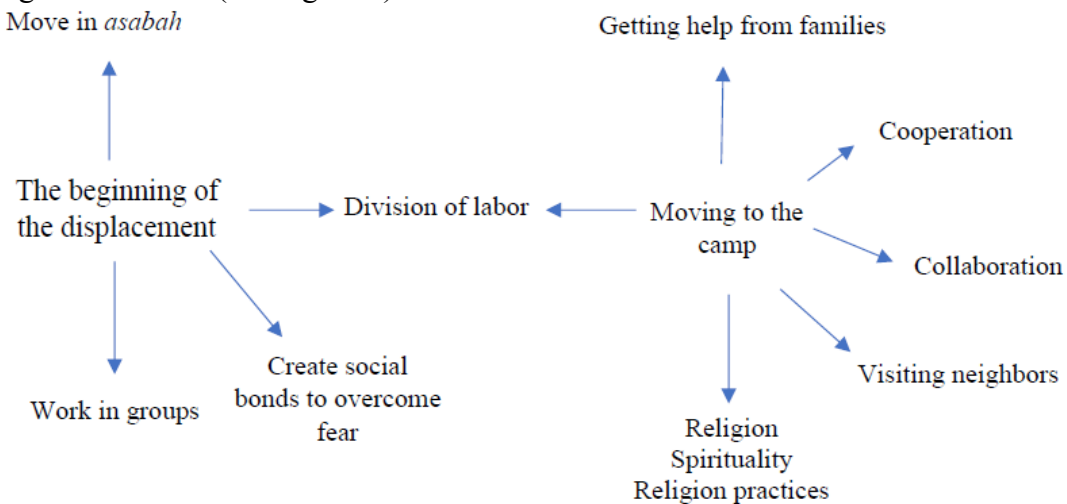


Figure 7 Women's coping strategies at the beginning of the displacement and when they move to the camp.

When women moved to the camp, they adopted different coping strategies to address the new living conditions. First, each woman built a social circle that provided them with the financial and emotional support necessary to go through the day. The findings indicate that women in the Abu-Shouk camp have two different social circles that vary based on their family and community's support level and social connections (see Figure 8).

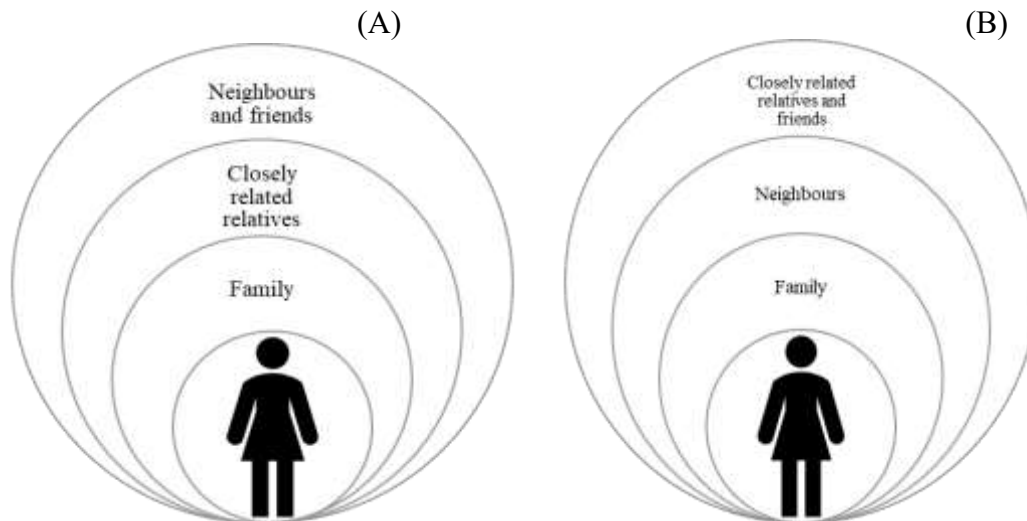


Figure 8 Women's social circles

The survey indicates that 83% of the women in the camp have complete trust towards their closely related family, 41% in their relatives, and 36% towards neighbors. On the other hand, the level of trust towards people from the same ethnic and language group or living conditions is almost the same for people from different ethnic groups and living conditions. The results get more extreme when women are asked if they trust other people from different or the same political group. The survey found that 63% of the women do not trust other people from the same political group, and 70% do not trust people from different ethnic groups (see Figure 9).

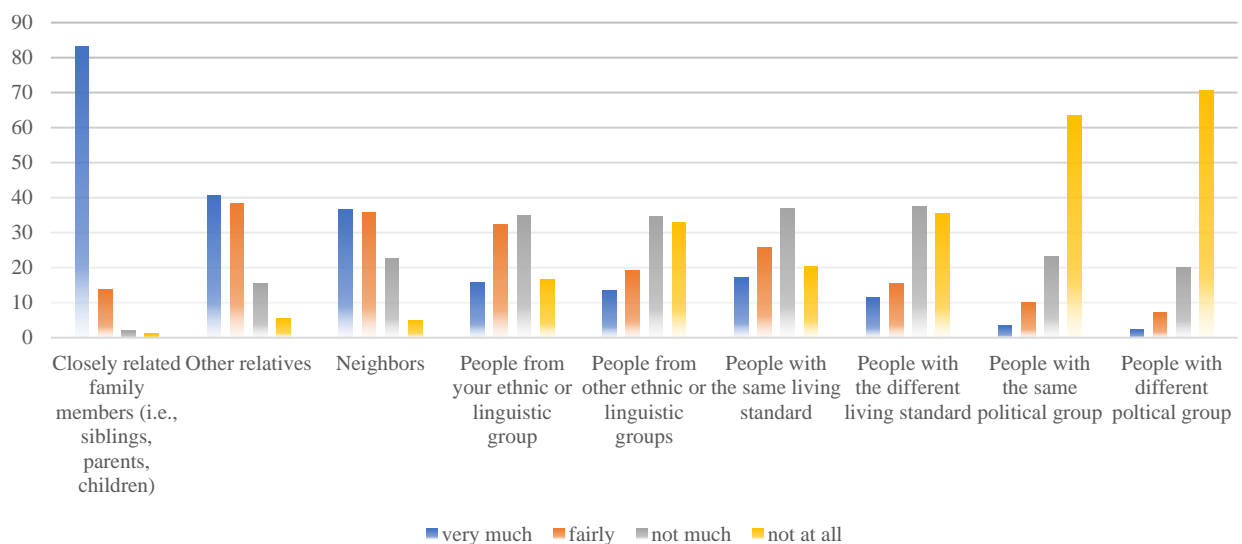


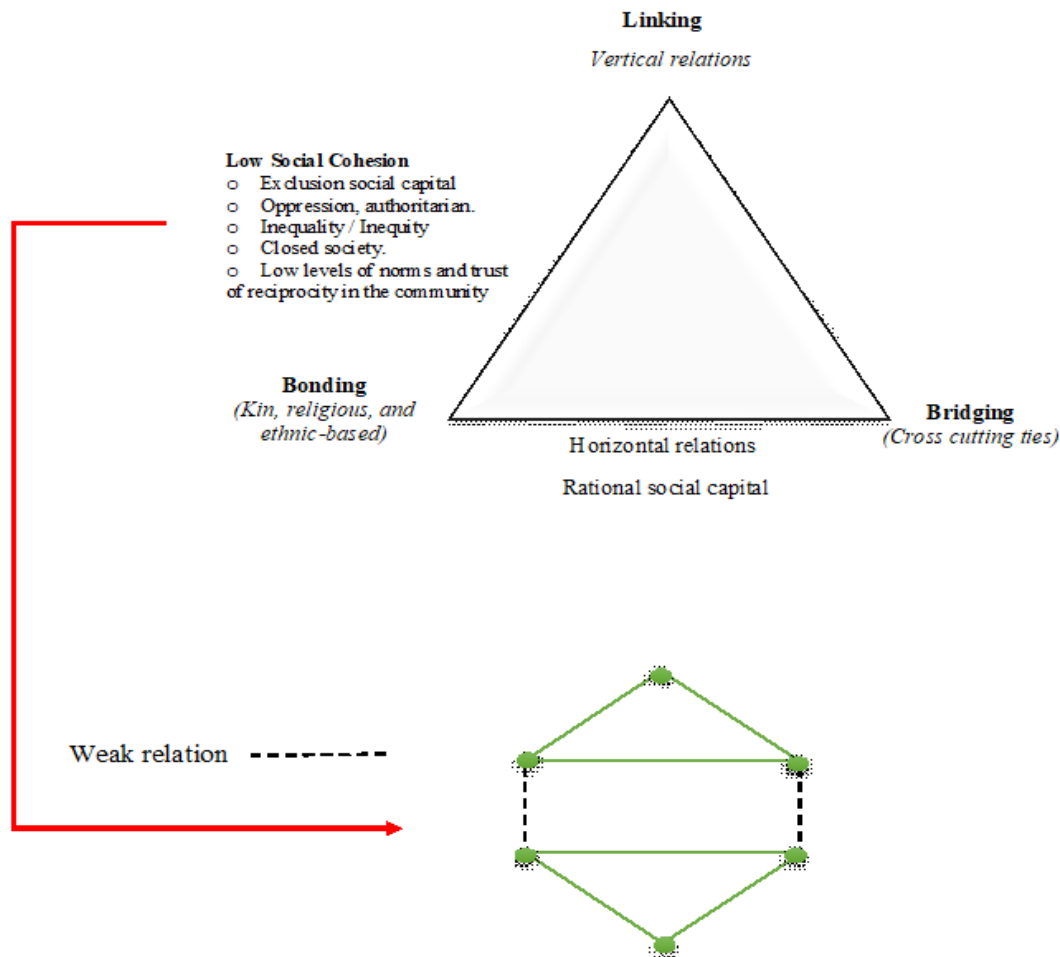
Figure 9 Women social trust.

Although women have a high level of trust towards their relatives, they do not turn to them when they want to solve social problems (e.g., couples, neighbors), improve the social and

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economic situation, or meet their minimum basic needs. In these cases, women turn to their closely related family or neighbor. This could be due to women considering their neighbor as their families. According to them, family is not about blood relations -- family is people who live within the same space, have the same religion, and share the same pain.

The quantitative and qualitative data indicate that women collaborate more with their social support group and less with people outside their support group. Thus, there is a low level of social cohesion inside the camp, as illustrated by Figure 10. The figure shows a high level of social solidarity inside the social circle support and weak solidarity outside it.



*Figure 10 The level of women's social cohesion inside the camp*

The data find high cohesion and structural unity inside the social support circle. In this social support group, the members have strong, enduring, and direct relations with each other. In other words, women in this group are highly connected; hence, they have great unity.

Second, women created several association groups, such as monetary savings groups and religious groups. These associations helped women in many ways; for instance, savings associations helped women start new jobs without taking bank loans.

Then the study explores the contributions of women in building peace and social cohesion inside the camp. The results indicate that women's agency plays a significant role in gradually transforming the broken relationships in the Abu-Shouk camp. The study classifies women's agency into individual and collective agency. Women's roles as mothers and caregivers shape their individual agency, whereas their collective agency is carried out through women-led associations that create a space for interpersonal and intergroup discussions among women.

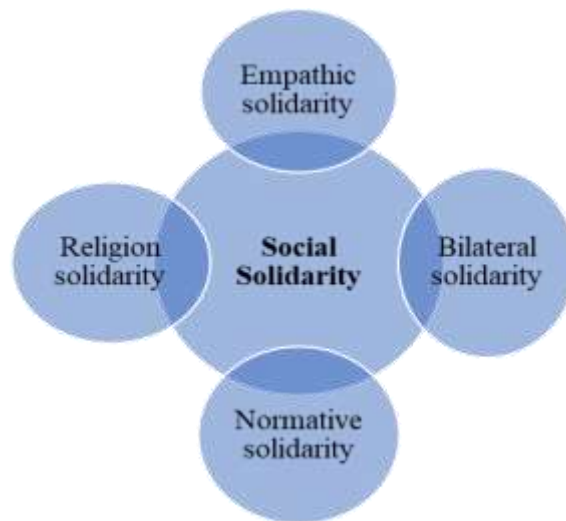
These associations also engage in activities that empower women, such as skill acquisition and savings groups.

- *Women's Solidarity Practices*

This approach helped identify various aspects that research participants depicted as playing a significant role in creating social solidarity, enabling them to cope with everyday challenges. Specifically, the study identified four sources related to women's solidarity and connected these sources with the attitudes, feelings, or emotions that motivate solidarity behavior.

The research points to four sources of solidarity: conflict, religious practices and rituals, reciprocity, and participation in different events. Alongside these sources, the study found four behaviors that motivate women to engage in acts of solidarity: normative, religious, bilateral<sup>8</sup>, and empathic solidarity.

The findings illustrated in this study do not align with the classical and contemporary theories of social solidarity that emphasize religion (Rosental, 1965), instrumental and affective solidarity (Durkheim, 2014 [1893]), reciprocity (such as Mauss, 2011, Lévi-Strauss, 1950, and Sahlins, 1972), norms (Hechter, 1987), values, or emotions (Komter, 2005) as the main sources of solidarity. Instead, this study posits that women's solidarity in the context of conflict is a combination of religious, normative, bilateral, and empathic solidarity, rather than a single element, as previous theories suggest.



*Figure 11 multiple dimensions of the motivations behind women's social solidarity*

Figure 11 suggests different types of social solidarity prevalent under diverse conditions or among different women. For example, bilateral solidarity would be expected to dominate in the neighborhood, while in family relations, people would primarily expect empathic solidarity. However, this is not what this study claims. On the contrary, this study assumes that actual solidarity is mostly a mixture of these four ideal types, or at least two of them. Thus, a specific solidarity behavior might be partly bilateral, partly empathic, somewhat normative, and partly religious at the same time.

The data also show that highly educated and younger women give more gifts. Likewise, these same categories of women provide more help and care when needed. Moreover, the data reveal that women give more to people who have less because they consider poorer people to be more deserving of the gift. The study demonstrates that trust, along with networks and social norms,



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is a key component of social relationships. Trust is a fundamental value that influences the unity of a group, family, and community, and it plays a crucial role in socio-economic growth.

In summary, social solidarity in a time of armed conflict means *standing with each other during the violence and worse. It is cohesion, cooperation, and collaboration, which create social bonds that help cope with everyday challenges.* In times of armed conflict, solidarity takes on a profound and crucial meaning for individuals and communities facing the challenges and hardships brought about by war and violence. Solidarity in such contexts can be understood as a collective and mutual commitment to support and stand by one another, promoting a sense of unity and shared responsibility in the face of adversity. It involves individuals coming together to provide aid, comfort, and assistance to those who are most affected and vulnerable during the conflict.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this study underscores the gendered impact of conflict, revealing that while the armed conflict in Darfur brought hardships to women, it also served as a catalyst for empowerment. The transformative effects of their experiences in the camp and engagement with NGO workshops have reshaped women's aspirations, knowledge of their rights, and determination to achieve their goals. Women now strive to improve their status, pursuing education by attending schools and universities with newfound determination.

One respondent, Afaf, a 31-year-old Zaghawa woman, married, a housewife, and a master's student with three children, expressed the newfound sense of agency that has emerged among women: "If you have wishes and goals, you must achieve them, and a woman must have goals." Notably, women in the camp have formed cohesive groups that provide crucial financial and emotional support. United by a strong sense of solidarity, they have weathered the most challenging circumstances, recognizing that mutual support is essential for overcoming daily obstacles. The camaraderie that emerged amidst their living conditions exemplifies the true essence of solidarity for the women of the Abu-Shouk camp.

As a result of this study, it is evident that the effects of conflict on women extend beyond victimization, revealing their resilience and capacity for agency. The transformation observed in the lives of women in the Abu-Shouk camp underscores the critical role of social support systems, educational opportunities, and awareness of rights in empowering women. These findings have broader implications for conflict-affected regions and underscore the importance of recognizing and fostering women's agency and solidarity in fostering positive change within communities.

Overall, the study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of women's experiences during conflict but also highlights the transformative potential of empowering women in post-conflict settings. By amplifying the voices and experiences of these women, we hope to inspire further research, policy development, and interventions that nurture the agency and solidarity of women in conflict-affected regions, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and resilient societies.

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### **Endnotes**

1. Known also by Nifasha camp. Abu Shouk camp was established in April 2004 to accommodate a massive influx of 30,000 IDPs from Korma, Jebel Si, and Tawilla. After the attack on Korma and Tawilla in November 2004, there were more influxes of 30,000 IDPs. The camp is divided into two parts, the West part, which is divided into 11 blocks, each one with 8 squares, and the East part. In the East part, there are 28 blocks. Each block is divided into 15 squares. There are about 25 homesteads in each square, and some shared latrines and showers. An area of 10 square meters was set apart for each homestead. Health canters, water pumps, and schools were distributed across the camp.
2. A place dedicated to learning the Quran.
3. A Sheik is a person who assists people in reading the Quran.
4. Omda is a name called for camp leaders and is part of the camp's administration. The camp's administration, which the local administrators appointed at the Al-Fāsher Administrative Unit, sought the help of these native administrators in the camp's management (i.e., guaranteeing order and facilitating the relations with individual IDPs). The camp's administration deals directly with Omdas, the Omdas with Sheikhs, and the people, corresponding to the traditional native administrative system. Native administrators are vital in relating and dealing with their followers. They have been helpful in the registration and enumeration of IDPs, solving issues between different ethnic groups and talking on their behalf, as well as coordinating with the camp's administration, the government, the organizations, and other concerned bodies, and lastly, distributing relief directly to the residents and providing various services. IDPs themselves convey their complaints and issues through their native administrators. However, the native administration does not participate in programming and planning activities in the camp.
5. In most cases, the surviving working men did not send money to their families or inquire about their livelihoods.
6. The average household size in the Abu Shouk camp.
7. An unused tree area called the "Al-Mashtal" on the outskirts of Al-Fāsher city. People stay in this area before moving to the camp by NGOs and the camp administration.
8. The study refers here to the difference between bilateral solidarity and reciprocity. Bilateral solidarity is a broader and encompasses a deeper sense of unity and support. It may involve providing aid, support, or cooperation without expecting a direct and immediate return. The emphasis in bilateral solidarity is on a strong and enduring relationship based on shared interests and values, rather than a strict tit-for-tat exchange as seen in reciprocity (De Beer, 2017). In contrast, reciprocity involves a mutual exchange of benefits or actions between two parties, where each party gives and receives in return. It is a more transactional concept, where actions are taken in response to each other's actions, with an expectation of equivalent treatment (Malinowski, 2013).