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# The Impact of War on the Independence and Security of Lebanese Southern Displaced Women



Mrs. Ola Sbeity directed this Participatory Action Research (PAR) study. The research was a joint endeavor with various women who shared their perspectives and experiences. The participants included:

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This study aimed to explore the multifaceted impact of war on the independence and security of women from southern Lebanon. The research's conclusions highlight the difficult and demanding conditions that displaced women are currently dealing with. They stress the need for prompt and ongoing support for mental health, financial aid, and community reconstruction initiatives, among other areas of intervention. The study supports an all-encompassing approach that promotes long-term resilience and empowerment for these women in the wake of war, in addition to meeting their immediate needs.



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## **The Impact of War on the Independence and Security of Lebanese Southern Displaced Women**

### **Acknowledgment**

This report investigating the impact of war on the security and independence of displaced women in south Lebanon was made possible due to the efforts of dedicated women enrolled in the U.S. Embassy Program Teaching Women Enhanced English (TWEE), a component of participatory action research (PAR). Their commitment was a key success factor in the development of this report.

We are also grateful to the USPEAK organization, represented by Ms. Rawan Yagi, for providing us the opportunity to enhance our research skills through undertaking this project. Special thanks to Mrs. Ola Sbeity, our PAR trainer at the TWEE program, for her constant guidance and patience.

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## List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
PAR	Participatory Action Research
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations

## Introduction

Individuals who have been forced to leave their homes but stay inside their country's boundaries due to armed conflict, militancy, or natural disasters are known as internally displaced persons, or IDPs (Mohsin, 2013). Women and girls are especially vulnerable during times of war throughout the world. Existing disparities are exacerbated, societal structures and relationships are destroyed, and human rights are jeopardized during times of conflict. Women are disproportionately affected by the long-term and secondary repercussions of war and warfare for a variety of reasons. They are impacted in several ways, such as reduced access to reproductive and health care, food insecurity, and displacement (Akseer, 2020)

Hostilities began in the South of Lebanon on October 8, 2023, a day after the conflict in Gaza began. Ten months later, it is estimated that Israeli bombing has forced almost 100,000 citizens in Lebanon to escape their homes. Large tracts of agricultural land have been severely damaged as a result of the airstrikes on villages in southern Lebanon. The displaced are not returning to their hometowns while the fighting rages on. Most of them are dispersed farther southward from the border, and many have fled to Beirut's capital.

Even though missiles and bombs kill both men and women equally, other components of combat impact women and girls in particular (Ashford, 2000). Few have pointed out that non-combatant civilians, not soldiers, suffer the most casualties in modern warfare. Even fewer have admitted that women and girls are impacted by conflict and its aftermath and are targeted explicitly among civilian casualties (Hynes, 2004). All wars, both just and unjust, as well as less common conflicts, are essentially unanalyzed public health catastrophes that result in damage to women and girls, extreme environmental degradation, humanitarian crises, and violations of human rights (Geiger, 2000). One of the fundamental aspects that comes up when considering the harm is the effect of war on women's security and independence. The issue is vital because war is defined as only using weapons in direct conflict (also known as armed conflict), and if we ignore the disruption of social services and economic activity that results from war, as well as the displaced people living in unstable situations with the associated twin effects of pollution, we will be unable to record the more systemic, gender-based, and long-lasting effects of war on women (Murray, 2002). The military gathers data on morbidity and death during the conflict, mainly focusing on the direct impacts of battle and combat-related exposures on combatants and, less commonly, on civilians (Garfield, 1997).

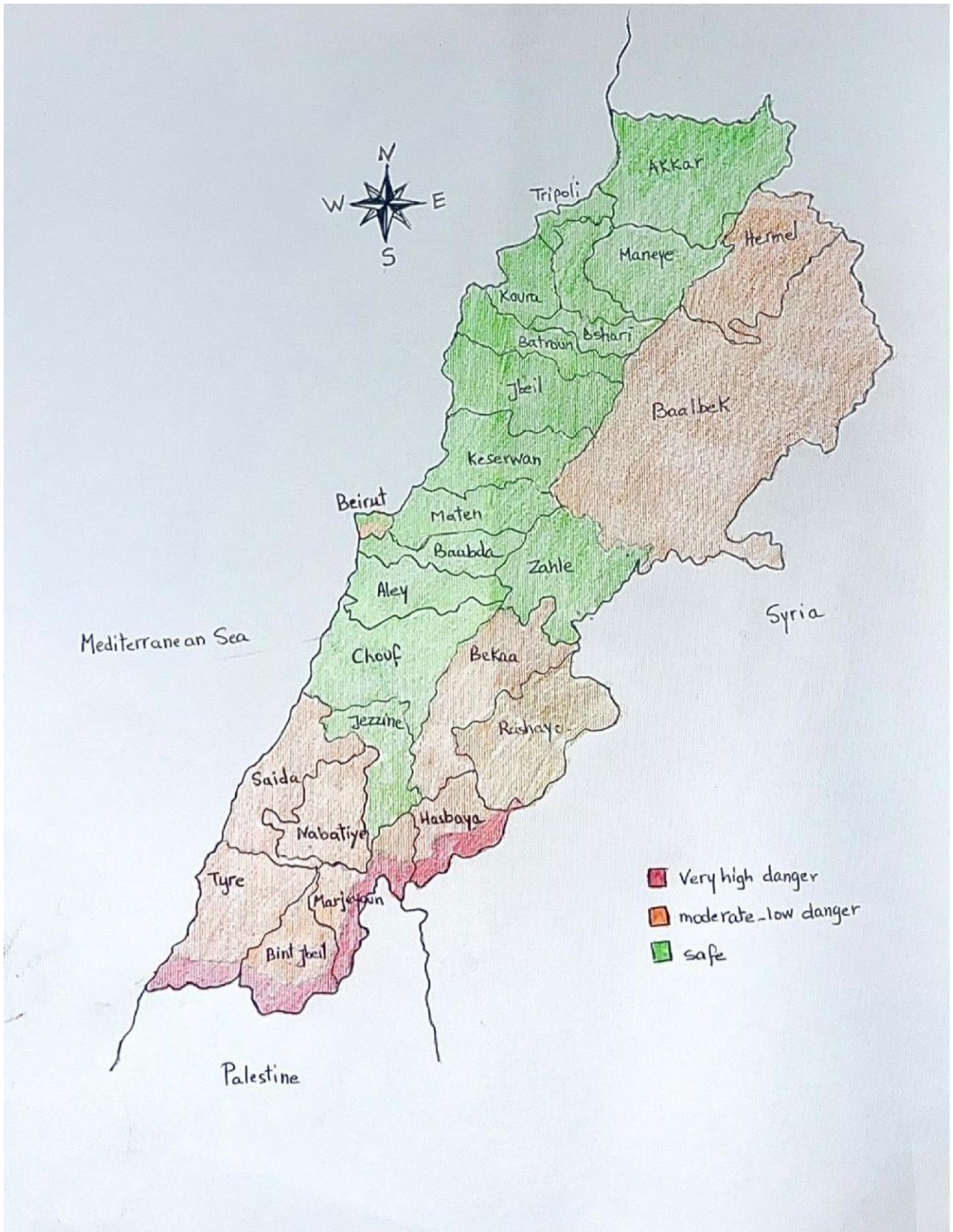
During the war, dying from a bullet is a clean death, while losing one's home, family, and community due to conflict is comparable to a living death characterized by severe poverty and tremendous sorrow (Muska, 2002). These war's aftereffects, which predominantly impact women, cause terrible morbidities of the soul, psyche, and livelihood that are rarely identified in clinical incidences of morbidity and mortality and are absent from traditional health statistics and surveillance. Little information is available concerning the situation of the southern displaced women; hence, this study aims to assess the impact of war on their independence and security during the past ten months.



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## Methodology

A dedicated group of females at the Teaching Women Enhanced English Program, which is funded by the U.S. Embassy and implemented by the USPEaK Organization, collaborated to undertake this Participatory action research (PAR) to investigate the impact of war on the independence and security of southern Lebanese displaced women. In the research methodology process, we developed tools for conducting this research, collecting the necessary data, and analyzing the results.

The study adopted a mixed-method data collection approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the Impact of War on the Independence and Security of Lebanese southern displaced women.

The quantitative data was gathered through an online survey distributed worldwide. This survey contained information about the sociodemographic characteristics and questions about the social, economic, and psychological dimensions impacted by the war in South Lebanon. It also included questions regarding the long-term goals, mental health, and main concerns of these displaced women.

The qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed thematically. Key themes emerging from the participants' narratives were identified and examined to understand the broader implications of displacement on women's lives in southern Lebanon. The analysis aimed to highlight these women's resilience and strength, as well as the systemic challenges they face in their quest for stability and security.

## Objective:

This research aimed to explore the experiences of displaced women affected by the war in southern Lebanon. The methodology employed quantitative and qualitative approaches, focusing on in-depth surveys and interviews to gather information that illuminated the impact of displacement on these women's lives.

## Project Set-Up

This study focused on understanding and addressing the challenges related to the impact of displacement on southern Lebanese women. Participants shared their stories and reflections on the difficulties they encountered during and after displacement. The interviews allowed them to discuss potential solutions to their challenges, fostering community and support among the women.

## Participant Selection

The participants included 145 both single and married women who had been displaced due to the ongoing conflict. Before initiating the interviews, each participant was asked for their consent to share their experiences. This approach ensured that the women felt comfortable and valued, recognizing the importance of their time and stories. The research team worked with participants to ensure that their voices were heard, and their experiences were accurately represented. The ultimate goal was to create actionable recommendations that could lead to effective support systems and resources for displaced women in the region.





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## Data Collection

The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to explore the impact of war on displaced women. Quantitative data was gathered through surveys, specifically online surveys designed for the project. Qualitative data was collected using interviews with some displaced women and girls.

The structured interviews with displaced women included a series of questions related to the experiences of displacement. These interviews focused on women's emotional, psychological, economic, and social challenges due to the conflict. Specific attention was given to their feelings of loss, adaptation to new environments, and the uncertainties they faced regarding their futures. An additional interview was conducted with the municipal council in Shebaa, which offered insights into the support and services available for displaced individuals and the challenges the local community faces. The interviews aimed to capture diverse perspectives, including those of educators, local leaders, and other stakeholders involved in supporting displaced populations.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed thematically. Key themes emerging from the participants' narratives were identified and examined to understand the broader implications of displacement on women's lives in southern Lebanon. The analysis aimed to highlight these women's resilience and strength, as well as the systemic challenges they face in their quest for stability and security.

## Research Team

The research team comprised 14 females from diverse Lebanese regions in the South.

## Research Sample:

This study comprised 145 displaced Southern women (aged 18 to more than 64). Participants had diverse levels of education. Additionally, the research sample included women from various employment backgrounds. Some participants, such as teachers, were working professionals prior to displacement, while others were homemakers or caregivers. This diversity provided insights into the economic impact of displacement on different demographics.

## Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the interviews, ethical considerations were prioritized, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring confidentiality. The participants were informed that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that their identities would remain anonymous to protect their privacy.

## Findings

### Survey responses

### Age and Social Status

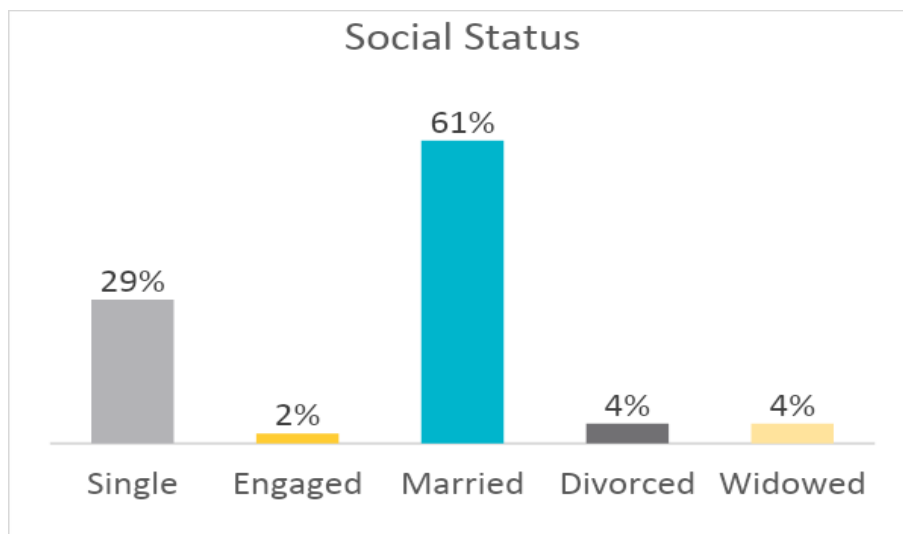
The majority (44.82%) of the participants are between 31-45 years old, and the majority of the women are married (62%)



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Age	%
18-30	34
31-45	45
46-64	14
Above 64	3
Below 18	4

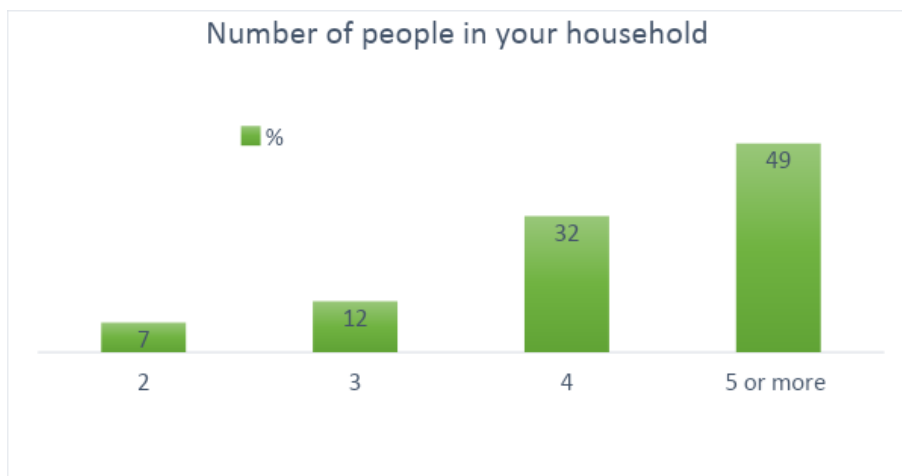
**Figure 1**



**Household**

Regarding the question regarding the number of family members, the majority are 5 or more in the same household (49%), indicating crowded living conditions, which could impact the independence of displaced women.

**Figure 2**





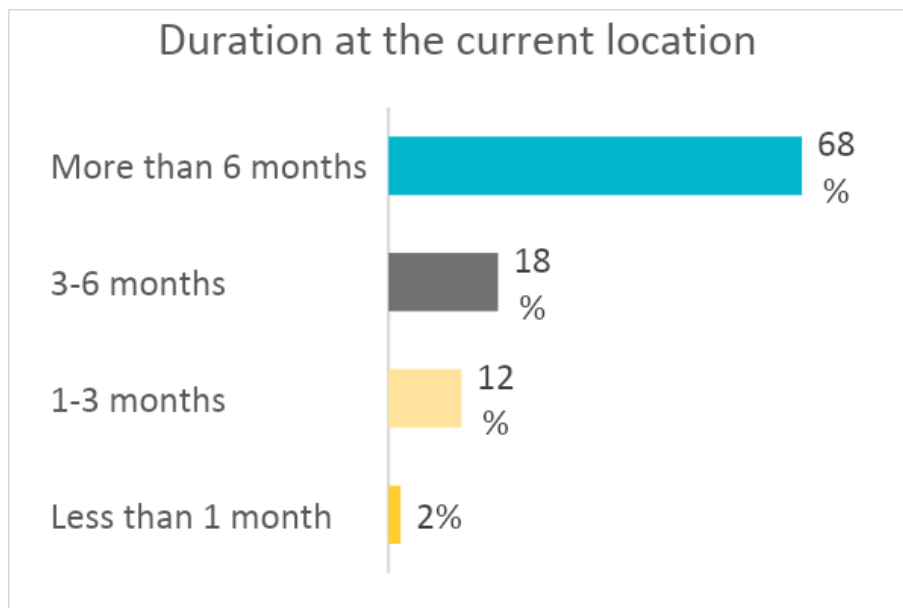
### Current location and date of displacement

Regarding the current location of displaced women, most are displaced to Nabadieh, Tyre, and Saida. Most of them left their hometown in October 2023.

Where is your current location?	%
<b>Nabatieh</b>	35
<b>Hasbaya</b>	3
<b>Marjeyoun</b>	5.5
<b>Kfarsir</b>	10
<b>Beirut</b>	5.5
<b>Maten</b>	3.4
<b>Saida</b>	10
<b>Tyre</b>	10
<b>Bekaa</b>	7.4
<b>Hibarye</b>	9
<b>Saadyat</b>	0.6
<b>Chouf</b>	1



Figure 3



### Type of Shelter

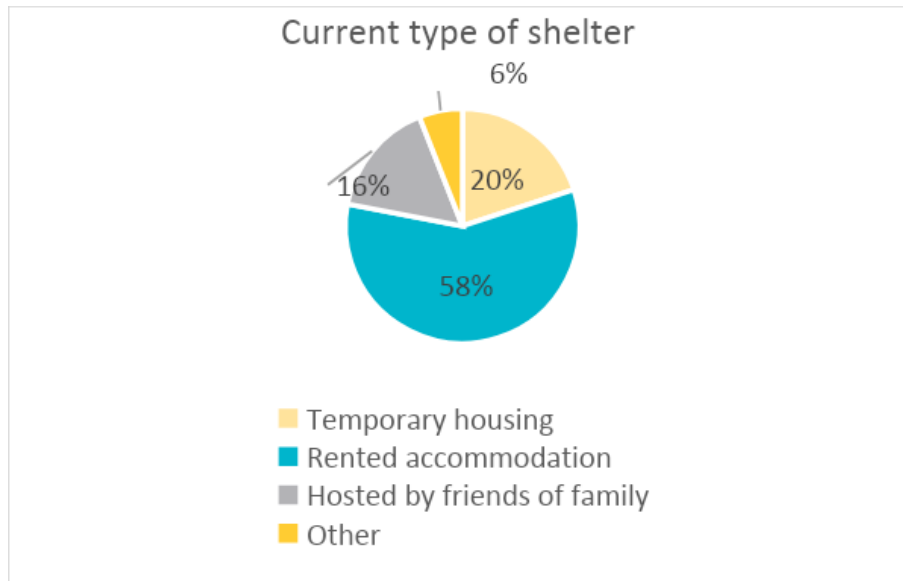
Regarding the current type of shelter, the majority of displaced women (58%) live in rented accommodation, and most have been in their current location for more than six months.





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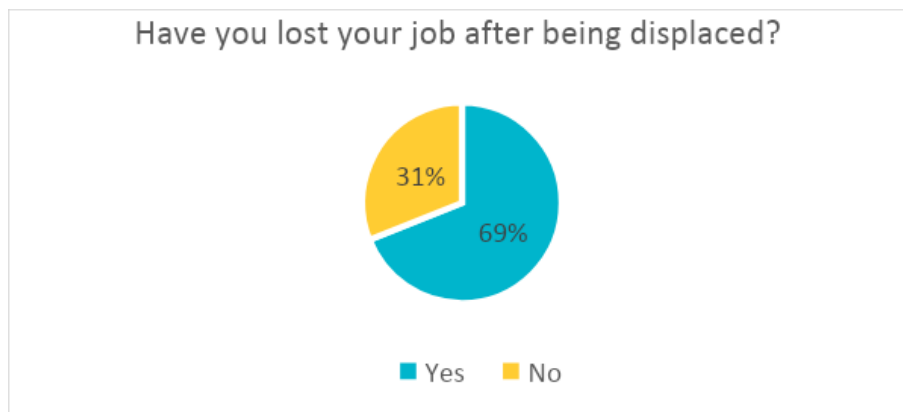
**Figure 4**



**The primary source of income loss of job health concerns**

As for their job, 69% of displaced women lost their jobs, and 45% relied on aid and relief as their primary source of income.

**Figure 5**



Losing a job is an unintentional, disruptive life event that profoundly affects the paths people choose in life. The prevalence of job loss and unemployment among expanding parts of the workforce and the current period of extreme economic turmoil have drawn more attention to these issues. The study of displacement provides robust estimates of relationships between socioeconomic conditions and life outcomes. According to research, being displaced is linked to several adverse outcomes, including long-term wage losses, lower-quality jobs, physical and mental health declines, psychosocial assets, social disengagement, disruption of families, and worsening levels of achievement and well-being for children. Reemployment does not entirely eradicate the negative impacts of losing one's job, but it helps lessen them (Brand, 2015)

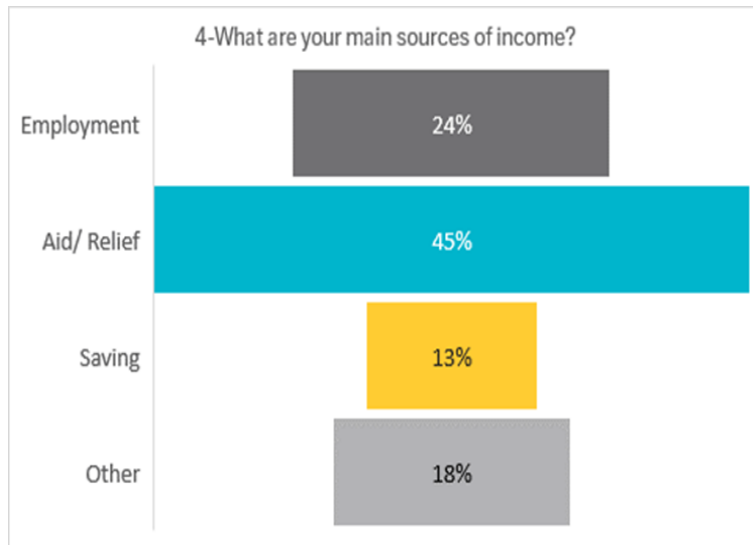
About 55.8% of displaced women are facing health concerns. The answers regarding health concerns include a variety of issues such as difficulties caring for a family member with special needs, depression, diabetes, muscle pain, psychological disorders, migraines, mental health problems, stress due to war and living conditions, postpartum issues, heart conditions, cholesterol, and the impact of war on family members.



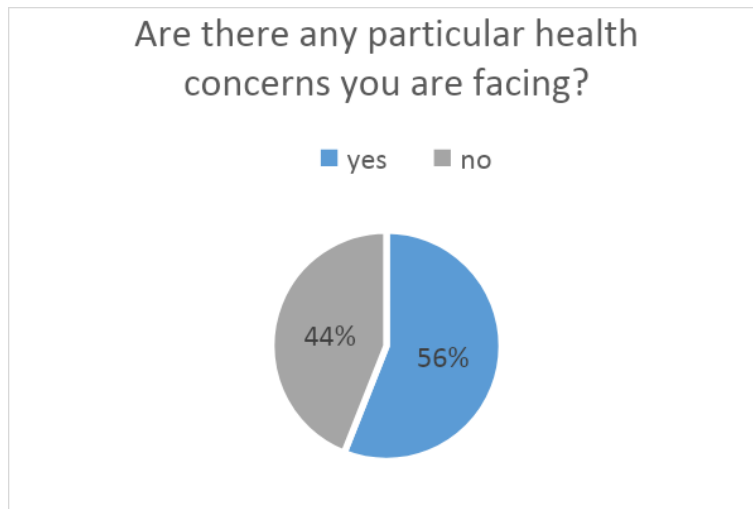


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**Figure 6**



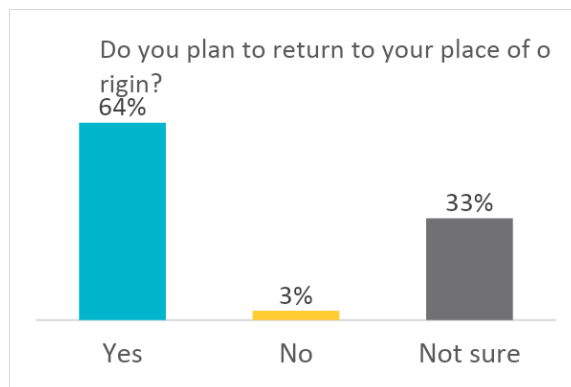
**Figure 7**



**Return and long-term goals**

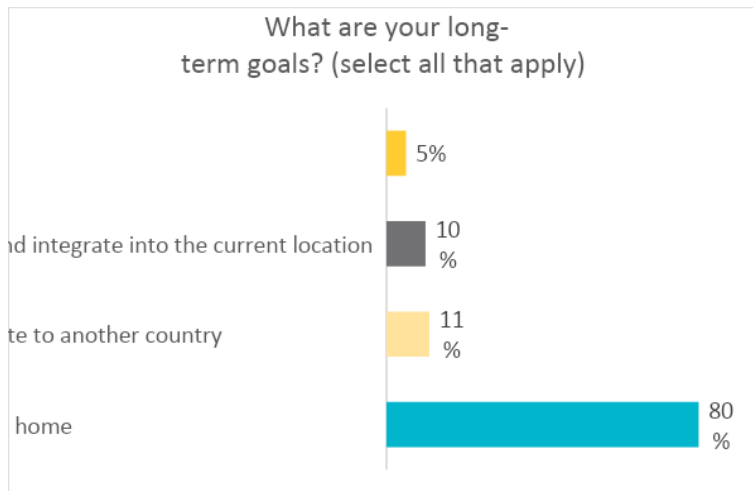
Most displaced women (64%) desire to return to their place of origin; the same result was found in the long-term goals question, where 68 % are also planning to return home.

**Figure 8**





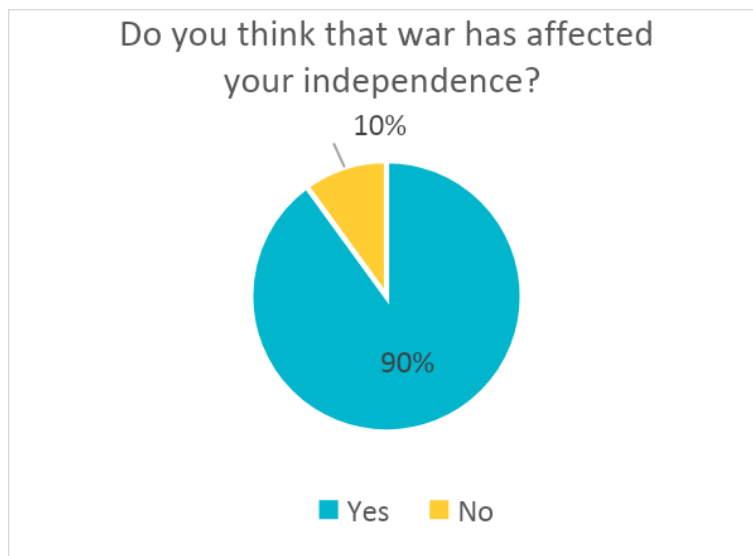
**Figure 9**



### Effects of war on independence

Regarding the effect of the war on women's independence, 90% of displaced women said that their independence was affected.

**Figure 10**



### Experienced Symptoms and Current mental health

The war negatively affected most women since the majority of them experienced the following symptoms nearly every day: feeling anxious/nervous (74%), inability to control worrying (56%), having little interest in doing things (46%), feeling down or depressed (57%). These results were directly reflected in the question about mental health rating, where most displaced women (32%) rated their mental health as 3 (average), and 27% rated their mental health as 1 or 2 (bad). Moreover, 81% of the displaced women experienced reliving traumatic events, 55% experienced nightmares, and 84% experienced severe anxiety.





Figure 11

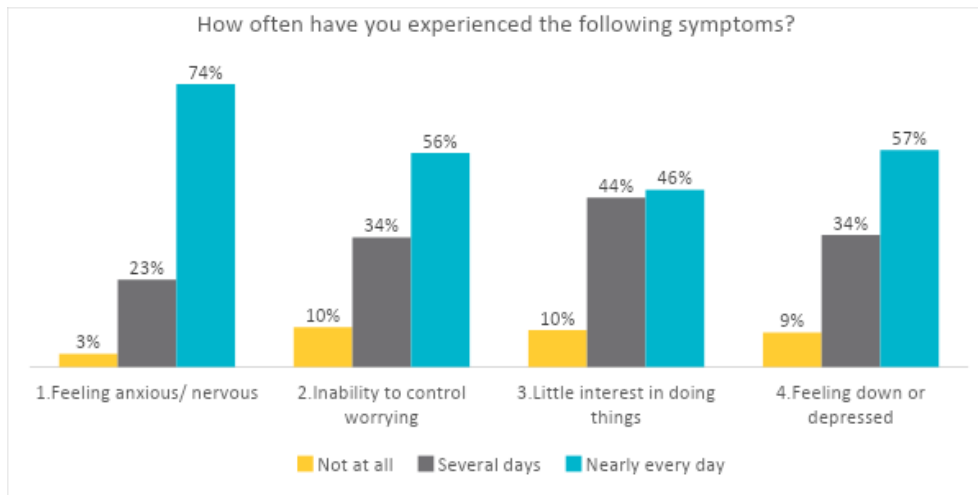


Figure 12

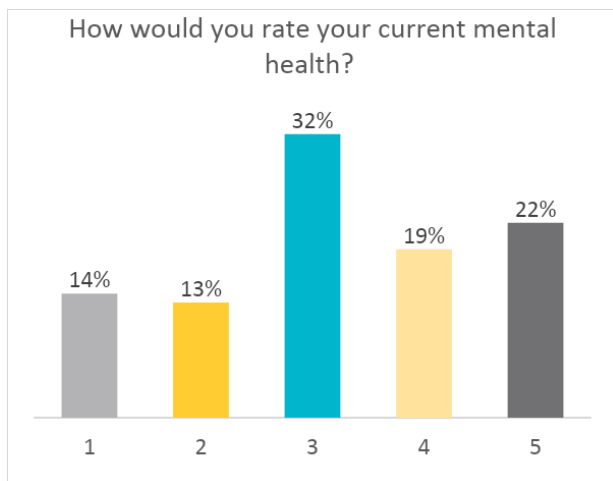
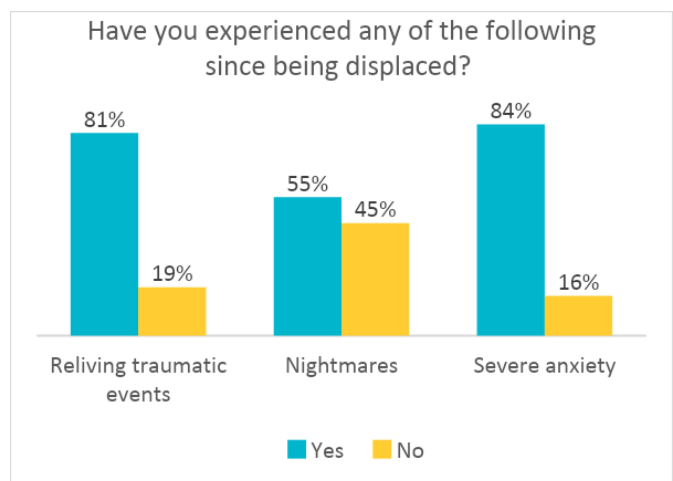


Figure 13



The effects of war can be seen in combatants and, perhaps even more so, in civilian populations. There is an increased risk of transgenerational transmission for civilians living in conflict zones or as refugees, which suggests long-lasting (decades-long) impacts. Extreme trauma can induce a variety of problems and psychological effects, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and psychosocial dysfunctions, which affect both military personnel and civilians. War conflicts heightened by rapidly advancing mass media, the internet, and social networks exacerbate anxiety and contribute to unpredictability (Rozanov et al, 2019).

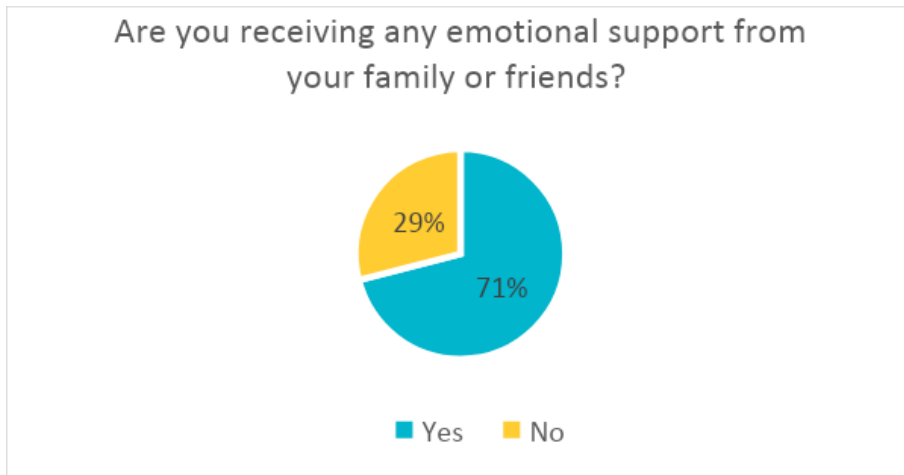
### Emotional Support

71% of displaced women receive emotional support from their family and friends, which could positively impact women's mental health and might lessen the negative impact of war. In addition to primary aid, psychological support, and psychotherapy can be practical and even essential in assisting women who have been subjected to violence and abuse during wars and conflicts in their efforts to heal and start again. Justice and healing require acknowledging the psychological effects of war on women and offering the required assistance.





Figure 14



### Safety feeling and positive impact on displacement

Most displaced women (84%) do not feel safe in their current situation. The forced relocation scenario adds to the physical and psychological strain. After moving, female respondents mention feeling less secure. A lady moves to a new location, breaks off direct communication with her regular social group, and may experience anxiety and mistrust in her surroundings.

Only 33% of displaced women agreed that there is a positive impact of displacement on their personality, and most of the positive impacts are related to financial empowerment (45%), followed by social empowerment (44%)

Figure 15

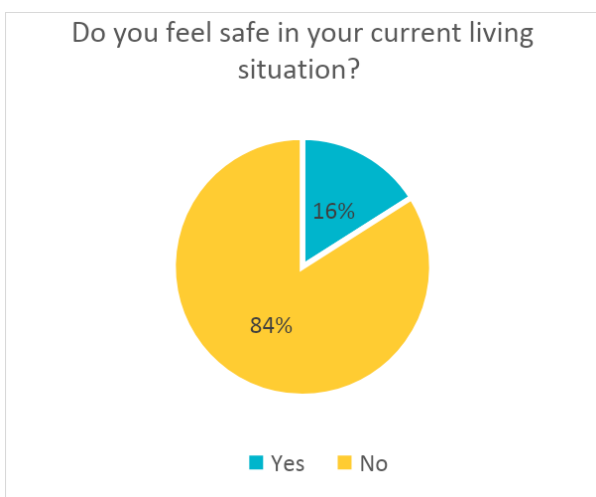
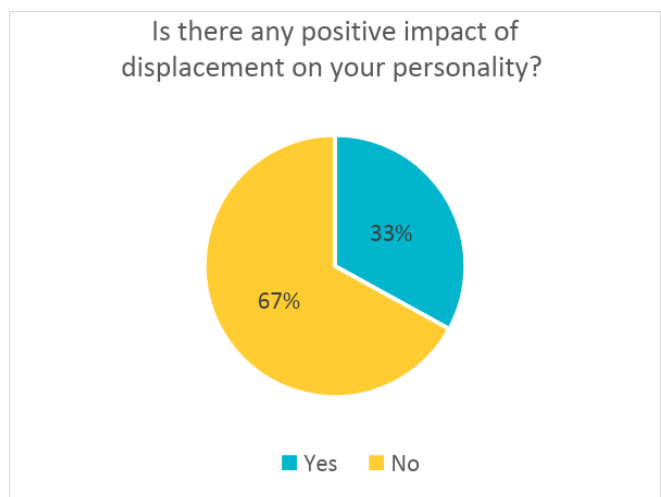


Figure 16

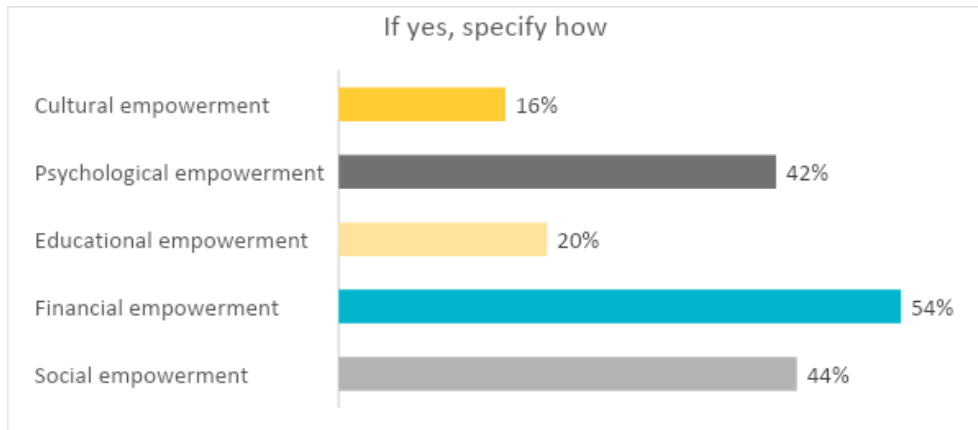






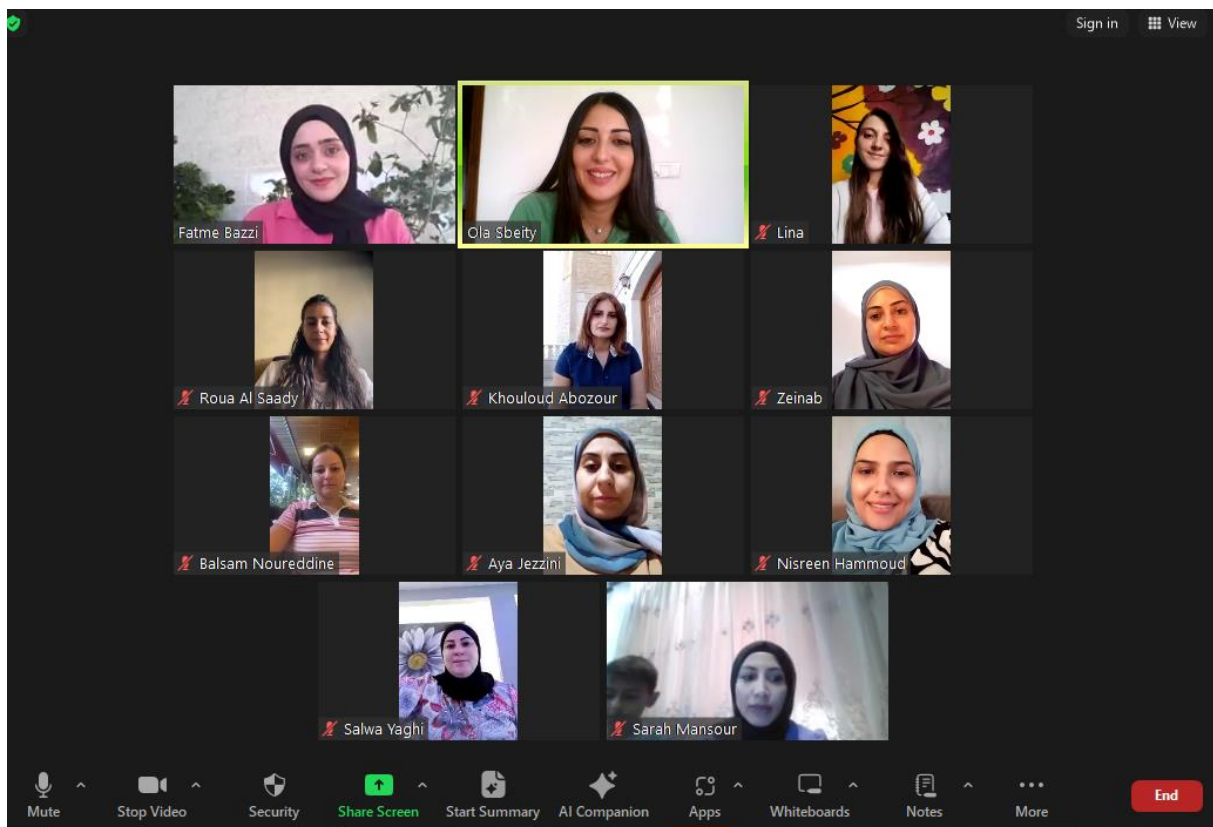
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**Figure 17**



### Interviews

Three interviews were conducted with both single and married women who have been affected by the displacement caused by the war in southern Lebanon. Before beginning the interviews, the women were asked if they would share their experiences. The goal is to understand better the perspectives of those impacted by the displacement resulting from the war in this region. A member of the municipal council in Shebaa- South Lebanon, was interviewed as well to inquire about some matters related to the war and the displacement of women. Of course, this interview was conducted after obtaining prior permission.





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## Interview 1

Ms. Zeinab Hamze, interviewed on June 28, 2024, shared her experiences of the profound impact of war and displacement. She recounted the distressing moment of leaving her home amidst shelling, which left her and her family with significant emotional and practical challenges. Despite not immediately losing her job in education, the instability of life reduced her productivity and made finding new employment difficult. She remains hopeful about returning to her original town and rebuilding her life, although the ongoing war currently prevents this. Ms. Hamze's story underscores the severe emotional and psychological toll of displacement. The loss of her home, job instability, and the challenge of adapting to a new environment have profoundly affected her well-being. She has experienced significant distress, including fears about safety and the future. Her ongoing efforts to adapt and her hope for a return highlight a strong sense of resilience despite the hardships. The interview also reveals the limited support available to displaced individuals. While some local assistance covers basic needs, Ms. Hamze feels that more comprehensive support is necessary. Her advice to other displaced women emphasizes the importance of maintaining hope and resilience and seeking psychological and social support. This highlights the need for increased aid and resources to help displaced people navigate their challenging circumstances effectively.

## Interview 2

The interview was conducted via WhatsApp on July 24, 2024, with questions asked and answers provided by Hawraa Mayyas from Mais Al Jabal. The Initial impressions include Hawraa's background in Early Childhood Education, her work as a model, and her recent acceptance to study journalism and media at the Lebanese University. The Patterns and themes identified include displacement, loss of dreams, separation from family, and the desire to return home. Codes can be applied to segments such as difficulties faced, positive encounters, desires, support received, Financial Struggles, Personal Fulfillment, Family Reunion, and efforts to overcome psychological challenges. In her own words: "My mental state is destroyed." "Our dreams had vanished." "I learned not to trust people." The Themes may include displacement and loss, resilience, the impact of support (or lack thereof), and the importance of pursuing dreams.

The analysis reveals the emotional toll of displacement, the significance of social support, and the role of personal agency in overcoming challenges. Seeking feedback from Hawraa or others familiar with her situation can help validate the interpretation of her experiences.

- Present the findings in a structured manner, highlighting Hawraa's journey, challenges faced, and strategies for coping and moving forward. Reflect on the strengths of the analysis, such as capturing Hawraa's personal narrative, and consider areas for further exploration, such as the long-term impact of displacement on individuals like Hawraa.

## Interview 3

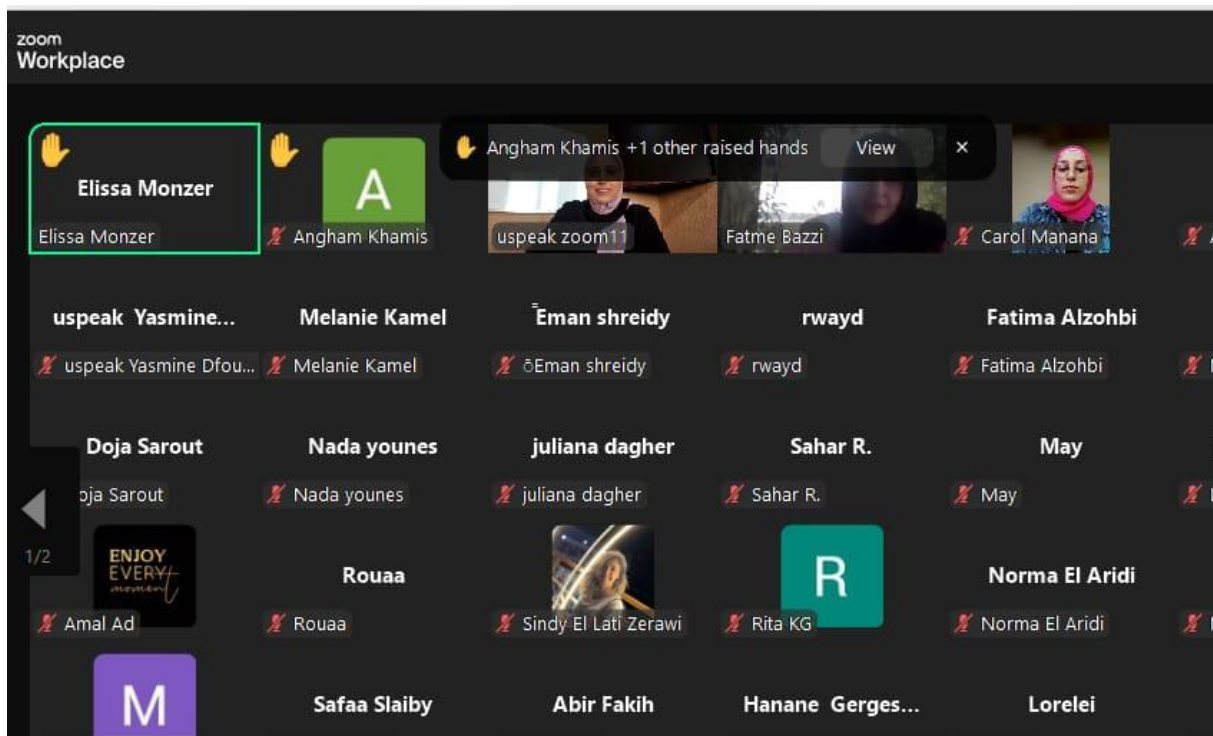
Interview 3 was with Mrs. Madlein Al Saady, a married woman from Shebaa (an English Teacher and Coordinator as well). This interview was done on June 30, 2024. The most challenging moments were at the beginning of the displacement due to the difficulty adapting to the new environment. Also, she was uncomfortable and spent most of the time thinking about what might happen next. Madlein's most significant concerns and worries are related to the future. After the war, they are trying a new lifestyle where many things have changed, especially our standard of living. Their daily routines, social connections, and access to basic needs have been disrupted. We are facing a completely different reality compared to our lives before displacement. Madlein already had a job before displacement; she was a teacher at Al Iman Arkoub School and continued her job online after



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displacement. She was not interested in seeking a new job since she did not feel included in the new district. It is still unclear and chaotic about the future, but her main concern is to rebuild a stable and secure life for herself and her family and pursue their dreams.

On the other hand, she remains anxious about returning home and enjoying all the details of her life before the displacement. She said rebuilding past goals in her original town would require a collective effort and favorable conditions. Madeleine managed to stay connected with her community and loved ones, which helped her to ease her concerns. Unfortunately, she received no support, and her children continued their education online. Concerning medical care, they relied on basic first aid and self-care measures to manage their health to the best of their abilities. Finally, she advised the displaced women to keep going and try their best to stay robust and manage the challenges.



## Interview 4

An interview was conducted with a member of the municipality of Shabaa Omar Al-Saadi on July 1 at 2 pm. Summary of the Interview: Omar Al-Saadi acknowledges the challenges displaced women face in the area due to continuous influx. The municipality's plan for long-term support includes providing temporary shelter and seeking assistance from official authorities for sustainable living conditions. Services provided to displaced women include temporary shelter, food aid, and healthcare/psychological support through collaboration with international organizations. The war has resulted in infrastructure destruction, displacement, economic disruption, increased poverty, unemployment, and urgent humanitarian needs in the area. The municipality has communicated with authorities, coordinated with humanitarian organizations, and considered economic empowerment initiatives like craft and food exhibitions for displaced women. Despite significant challenges, the municipal council remains committed to supporting the local community and working towards sustainable solutions for the crisis.



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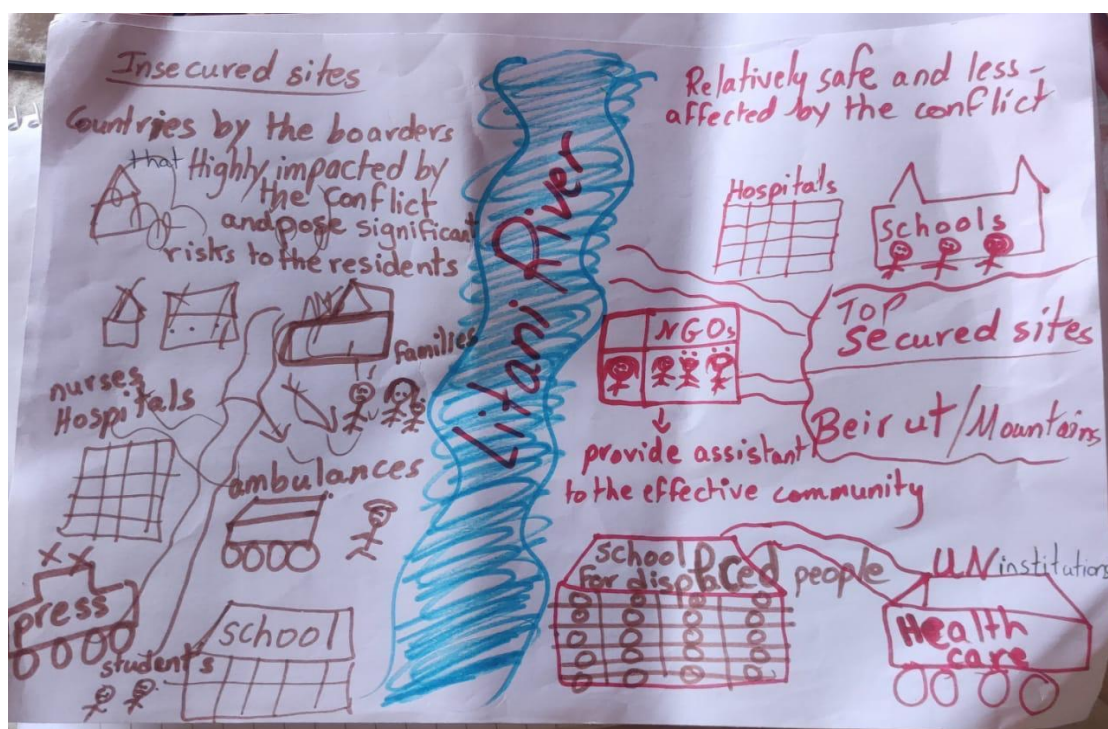
## Executive summary

Following the onset of the conflict across the borders of South Lebanon on October 7, 2023, numerous families were compelled to leave their homes, seeking refuge in safer regions. This mass displacement resulted in significant challenges for the affected families, particularly for women, who often bear the brunt of such crises. In response, this Participatory Action Research (PAR) conducted by TWEE females at USPEaK aimed to explore the multifaceted impact of war on the independence and security of women from southern Lebanon.

The study engaged 145 participants and employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (surveys distributed online) data collection techniques. The findings revealed that the ongoing conflict has adversely affected various dimensions of women's lives, including mental health, career opportunities, independence, and overall security. A significant number of respondents reported experiencing symptoms such as nervousness, depression, and severe anxiety. Notably, even with emotional support from family and friends, these women emphasized the urgent need for specialized psychological interventions to address their distress.

Interestingly, some participants noted that displacement had led to unexpected positive outcomes, mainly regarding financial and social empowerment. Many reported gaining new skills and confidence that they had not previously possessed. Despite these silver linings, a majority strongly desired to return to their hometowns once the conflict subsided, highlighting the deep emotional and cultural ties they maintain with their communities.

The findings of this research underscore the critical and challenging circumstances that displaced women are currently facing. They emphasize the need for immediate and sustained intervention on multiple levels, including mental health support, economic assistance, and community rebuilding. The research advocates for a comprehensive strategy that not only addresses the immediate needs of these women but also fosters long-term resilience and empowerment in the aftermath of conflict.





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## Recommendations to Support Displaced Women

### Short-Term Solutions:

1. Immediate Humanitarian Aid: Provide emergency food, water, shelter assistance, hygiene items, and temporary accommodation to displaced women and their families.
2. Psychosocial Support: Establish counseling services, support groups, and access to professional therapists to address the trauma and mental health needs of displaced women.
3. Legal Assistance: Offer legal aid, guidance on property rights and child custody, and collaboration with authorities to protect the legal interests of displaced women.

### Long-Term Solutions:

1. Education and Skills Development: Provide vocational training, language classes, and partnerships for higher education opportunities to help displaced women gain employable skills.
2. Economic Empowerment: Create business development initiatives and job placement services and advocate for inclusion in the workforce
3. Community Integration and Social Cohesion: Organize cultural events, encourage participation in decision-making processes, and promote diversity and contributions of displaced women within the community.
4. Advocacy and Policy Reform: Advocate for comprehensive policies, engage with policymakers and collaborate with international organizations to protect the rights and address the needs of displaced women globally.





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Baalbeck-Hermel, Lebanon

Social Media:

- uspeaklb.org
- USPEaK Info
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