

International Conference on Women Health



Fanny Nadia Dissak Delon^{*1}, Patrice Gérard Ngangue², Douglas Mbang Massom³, Daniele Sandra Yopa⁴, Philippes Mbevo Fendoung⁵, Jeanne Claire Dissak Delon⁶, Theodore Tameh¹

- 1: *Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Bamenda, Bamili, Cameroon;*
 2: *Faculty of Nursing, Laval University Quebec, Québec, Canada;*
 3: *Département Epidémiologie d'Intervention et Formation, Epicentre, Paris, France;*
 4: *Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Yaoundé, Cameroon;*
 5: *National Advanced School of Public Works, Yaoundé, Cameroon;*
 6: *Institut Universitaire des Grandes Ecoles des Tropiques, Douala, Cameroon.*

Swallowed Silence and Chronic Survival: The Intersectional Trauma of Displacement and Gender-Based Violence among Anglophone Women in Cameroon

Abstract:

Background: Internally displaced women (IDW) affected by Cameroon's "Anglophone crisis" navigate overlapping vulnerabilities, including poverty, gender-based violence (GBV), and systemic linguistic minoritization. While war's psychological impact is documented, mental health consequences of intersecting urban stressors in host settings like Douala remain under-researched.

Objective: To explore how displacement, GBV, and Anglophone identity intersect to shape mental health experiences and resilience among IDW in Douala.

Methods: This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews with 33 Anglophone IDW (Median age: 34; median displacement: 5 years). Participants were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling. Data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis in NVivo 12, guided by an intersectional socio-ecological framework.

Results: Four major themes emerged: (1) "Swallowed Silence," where emotional repression and internalizing pain function as strategic social protection against ethno-linguistic stigma; (2) Embodied Trauma and Cognitive Paralysis, manifesting as somatic distress and dissociation; (3) Chronic Survival Anxiety, driven by economic precarity and discrimination; and (4) Adaptive Resilience, anchored in peer networks, spirituality, and cognitive restructuring.

Conclusion: Mental health among Anglophone IDW is a dynamic process shaped more by ongoing structural "daily stressors" than past events alone. Current clinical models are insufficient for displaced populations in linguistically divided settings. To achieve sustainable impact, interventions must transcend clinical boundaries to integrate GBV prevention, livelihood protection, and culturally safe MHPSS services delivered in English and Pidgin. Future health policies in Cameroon must prioritize linguistic equity and community-led resilience networks as foundational components of care.

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Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons; Gender-Based Violence; mental health; intersectionality; Cameroon; qualitative research; socio-ecological model.

Biography: Dr. Fanny Nadia Dissak Delon is a Lecturer in the Department of Public Health at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Bamenda, Cameroon. She is also the Executive Director and Hub Administrator of the D-SINE Africa Hub, a DS-I Africa Research Center dedicated to leveraging data science to promote equity in injury and surgical care across Sub-Saharan Africa. Her work focuses on the intersection of public health, gender-based violence, and mental health in conflict-affected populations. Within D-SINE Africa, she oversees research projects and administrative supplements aimed at integrating mental health screening and social protection into clinical surgical surveillance.