



Gender, Displacement, and Statelessness: Early and Forced Marriage as a Mechanism of Survival

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Abstract

This paper explores how gender, displacement, and statelessness intersect to produce early and forced marriage as a mechanism of survival among displaced girls and young women. Statelessness—often resulting from conflict, discriminatory nationality laws, or protracted displacement—creates conditions of extreme precarity in which legal invisibility strips individuals of basic rights to protection, education, and livelihood. Within these conditions, marriage frequently becomes a coping strategy, offering social legitimacy, economic stability, or physical security in the absence of state protection. Grounded in feminist and intersectional theory, the paper argues that early and forced marriage should be understood not solely as a cultural or religious practice, but as an outcome of structural inequalities shaped by gendered power relations, statelessness, and displacement. Drawing on evidence from refugee populations such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and South Sudanese communities in East Africa, the analysis illustrates how the convergence of patriarchy, poverty, and legal exclusion compels girls into marriages that reinforce gender hierarchies while simultaneously serving as adaptive responses to statelessness. The paper concludes that international humanitarian and legal frameworks inadequately address the gendered dimensions of statelessness and calls for gender-equitable nationality laws, inclusive education policies, and protection systems that prioritize the rights and agency of displaced girls.

Keywords: displacement; early marriage; gender; statelessness; survival