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Safe at Home?

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Abstract

This qualitative longitudinal study examines the coping experiences and home perceptions of twenty-five divorced mothers who were evacuated from their homes following the events of October 7th and the subsequent War. Based on two rounds of in-depth interviews conducted over the course of approximately one year, the study explores how divorced mothers navigated emotional, economic, and social stressors while managing family life under prolonged uncertainty. Using a hybrid thematic analysis informed by Lazarus and Folkman's stress and coping theory and Bandura's self-efficacy model, the study identifies dynamic coping patterns that combine emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies, supported by a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Whereas literature has extensively examined the outcomes of forced displacement around the world, fewer studies have explored the effect it has on divorced mothers and their perception of home, which used to symbolize their strengthening and resilience after the divorce crisis.

Findings reveal a significant shift in the meaning of "home" across three phases: before evacuation, during displacement, and after returning to permanent housing. Before evacuation, the home symbolized autonomy and post-divorce reconstruction; during displacement, it became an unstable symbolic and emotional space, yet one that mothers were able to recreate within temporary housing. Upon returning, home was redefined as a space of healing, belonging, and renewed growth.

These findings deepen theoretical understanding of coping under intersecting stressors among divorced mothers and underscore the importance of gendered and family-centered perspectives in research on crisis and displacement. Practically, the study offers insights for developing tailored intervention models, stage-specific evacuation policies, and community support systems designed to strengthen the resilience of divorced mothers in emergency contexts.

Keywords: divorced mothers, displacement, Intersecting stressors, Home perception, Israel-Gaza war