

Essays on conflict-induced displacement and gender in Colombia

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Appendix E. Summary of the Dissertation

The UNHCR estimates that nearly 80 million people were forced to flee their homes worldwide by the end of 2019 as a result of conflict, violence, persecution and human rights violations. Among them, 26 million were refugees, 4.6 million were asylum seekers, and 45.7 million were displaced within their own countries. The IDP population in Colombia, the setting of this dissertation, is the second largest in the world, with government estimates varying from 5 to 6 million people. The underlying causes of displacement in Colombia include armed conflict, illicit drugs, land disputes, weak institutions, poverty and inequality, but violence is most frequently the main reason for people to flee their homes.

Many reports suggest that, because of the prescribed roles and power relations in society, the experience of and response to displacement is delineated along the gender lines. Displaced women and men, girls and boys often acquire vulnerabilities that are specific to them, such as psychological trauma, exposure to GBV, and catastrophic losses of physical and human capital. These vulnerabilities set them apart from non-displaced populations and affect their ability to seize opportunities. However, partly due to the lack of data, few empirical studies in the growing field of research on the effects of conflict-induced displacement consider gender-specific effects.

This study contributes to the literature by applying a gender lens to the empirical analysis of the impacts of conflict-induced displacement. The analyses presented in each chapter employ a quasi-experimental research design and large-scale household surveys that capture a sample of displaced households. The studies included in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 use three waves of the Colombian Longitudinal Survey (2010-2016) and a kernel-based propensity score matching difference-in-differences approach to estimate the effects of displacement on household structures, gender roles, and poverty. The research in Chapter 5 employs three rounds of the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) collected between 2005 and 2015, a municipal panel on conflict, violence and public finances and a two-stage estimation involving kernel-based propensity score matching and multilevel models to examine the extent to which gender norms become less traditional in situations of displacement.

The dissertation shows that between 2010 and 2016, conflict-induced displacement in Colombia accelerated reductions in the average household size and increased the prevalence of non-traditional structures such as *de jure* female-headed households, households with single female caregivers, and one-person households. Some of these changes appear to be driven by marital dissolutions or separations resulting

from tensions associated with changes in traditional gender roles within the household. Compared with their non-IDP counterparts, displaced women work more hours than their male partners and they are also more likely to be the main breadwinners in their households. When it comes to gender roles at the community level, estimates show a slight increase in the probability that women who were displaced would participate in political activism, compared to women who were not displaced by conflict. In contrast men's engagement in these activities remains unaltered and their overall participation in civic organizations decreases with displacement.

The findings in the dissertation also indicate that displaced households are characterized by higher poverty rates and lower levels of wealth relative to their non-displaced counterparts. However, over time, the likelihood of being poor decreases more rapidly among households in the panel that were forced to flee due to conflict. While the analysis of transmission mechanisms goes beyond the scope of the study, some of the potential reasons behind these patterns include a 'catch-up' effect, as many of the households that were displaced between survey rounds were already poor when they joined the panel; a consequence of changing household structures, or an improved access to social assistance. Despite the decrease in overall poverty rates, a large share of the displaced remains chronically poor or vulnerable to poverty; in particular, households that changed their structure, either becoming households with single caregivers or consisting of multiple generations with children.

These dynamics suggest that, even though displacement is one of the worst victimizations of civilians, it can also offer opportunities to break with traditional stereotypes and challenge gender norms around the appropriate role of women and men in society. Nevertheless, the findings in this dissertation reveal mixed evidence regarding the norm change. Specifically, gender norms that tolerate violence against women become less traditional in the context of displacement, while those that limit women's economic opportunities become more rigid. This is consistent with previous studies suggesting that loss of financial stability, psychological trauma and stress associated with displacement can increase men's controlling behaviors, particularly when they face unemployment while women pursue income-generating activities to support their families—as is the case of Colombia. Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of looking at gender norms across a number of domains as change can be contradictory and improvements in one area do not imply that all others will automatically follow, as illustrated by the dissonance between violence against women and economic opportunities in this study.

This dissertation adds to the existing literature on several levels. First, from a methodological standpoint, it brings together various academic disciplines, namely studies on conflict, voluntary migration, and economic shocks, as well as the literature of feminist economics and social norms to analyze the gendered effects of conflict-induced displacement, a subject that remains under-researched in the empirical literature. Second, building on these different strands of the literature, the dissertation adapts the existing approaches that go beyond the traditional headship comparison to analyze the gender dimensions of displacement.

The studies presented in each chapter also make specific contributions to the literature. Chapter 2 exhibits the first study to empirically estimate the impact of conflict-induced displacement on household structures using longitudinal data, while exploring the role of marital separations as one of the mechanisms of transmission underlying these changes. The research in Chapter 3 expands the level of analysis from a unitary approach to the household to consider the changes in intra-household dynamics resulting from displacement. It explores gender differences in household- and community-level activities and adapts a composite index of gender roles in the labor market for the displaced taking advantage of limited survey data. The study in Chapter 4 adds to the literature by exploiting the nature of longitudinal data to examine changes in the likelihood of escaping poverty over time and to better understand the risk of experiencing transient and permanent poverty in situations of displacement. Furthermore, it is the first study with IDPs in Colombia that applies a gender lens to the data to capture the intersection between changes in household structures and poverty dynamics. Finally, the research described in Chapter 5 contributes to the literature in two main areas. First, it provides empirical evidence regarding the relationship between conflict-induced displacement and changes in gender norms, an area where most of the evidence comes from qualitative research. Second, it is the first study that operationalizes a definition that recognizes the dual nature of gender norms using a nationally representative household survey in the context of conflict-induced displacement.

From the policy perspective, the dissertation stresses the importance of including displaced women and men in efforts to collect and rigorously analyze data, particularly in the context of protracted conflict and large-scale displacement. When it comes to development programming, in the short term, cash transfers and other instruments of social protection can reach households that are highly vulnerable to poverty such as households with single caregivers and households consisting of multiple generations with children. Moreover, regular income received via cash transfers can reduce anxiety and improve the psychological wellbeing of displaced populations thereby decreasing men's controlling behaviors and the risk of domestic violence. However, given that the displacement situation in Colombia is long term

for many people, it is important to build capacity for both displaced women and men to access economic opportunities, which can eventually replace social assistance. Importantly, the findings of this dissertation show that, in situations of displacement, paid work does not necessarily translate into increased decision-making power for women. Hence, providing access to economic opportunities is not a guarantee that durable solutions to displacement will be found and that gender gaps will be reduced if men have full control of gains, as determined by patriarchal norms. Economic empowerment programs for displaced women should thus have built-in guidelines for the protection of women and should engage men in promoting more gender-equitable relationships.