Family in the Web of Protracted Forced Migration: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Family Resilience and Psychological Well-being in North-Eastern Nigeria and Gaza Strip

Emmanuel U. Awak[1]
Ememobong Emmanuel[2]

[1]Department of General Studies,
Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Nigeria
[2]University of Uyo

Corresponding Author: Emmanuel U. Awak, PhD
constructcritics@yahoo.com, aijmr@akwaibompoly.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8926-0975

Abstract

Sustained exposure to armed conflict, displacement, economic deprivation, and psychosocial distress are submerged in forced migration that continues to reshape families with untold significant humanitarian challenges in recent memories. These have transformed family structures, social relationships, and psychosocial well-being. There has been extensive examination of experiences of refugees, internally displaced persons, women, and children. However, family as an integrated resilience system and the psychological well-being of fathers, husbands, and brothers within displaced households are often ignored or considered inconsequential. This study comparatively examines family resilience in North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip within the theoretical anchorage of Family Systems, Ecological Systems, Ambiguous Loss, and Resilience theories. The patterns and realignments of family functioning across different cultural contexts immersed in prolonged conflict are explained. The study develops the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) as an analytical model. Findings indicate that despite contextual differences, families in both regions experience disruption and adaptation of semblance patterns. The study concludes that sustainable humanitarian recovery requires family-centred interventions that strengthen the psychosocial, economic, and relational capacities of all family members including fathers, husbands, brothers, women, children, and older adults, rather than addressing vulnerabilities in isolation.

***Keywords*:** family resilience; forced migration; Gaza Strip; Integrated Family Resilience Framework; North-Eastern Nigeria; psychological well-being

1. Introduction

The unprecedented escalation in forced migration arising from armed conflict, terrorism, political persecution, state fragility, environmental crises, and widespread violations of human rights (IDMC, 2024). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2025), more than 123 million people as at 2024 worldwide, have been forcibly displaced, making protracted forced migration one of the defining humanitarian and development challenges of modern history, with many experiencing prolonged displacement rather than rapid resettlement or voluntary return. Forced migration disrupts family relationships, livelihoods, education, healthcare, and psychological well-being, making family resilience central to humanitarian recovery ((IOM, 2024; Betts, 2021).

Families constitute the primary institution through which individuals acquire emotional security, cultural identity, social values, and economic support (Walsh, 2016; Prime et al., 2020; Awak, 2022a). Families develop strategies that sustain survival despite prolonged adversity, as well as advancing principal mechanisms through which communities recover and reconstruct after conflict (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). However, forced migration fundamentally alters family life by separating relatives, disrupting livelihoods, weakening traditional support systems, changing gender roles, interrupting children's education, and generating prolonged psychological distress (Boss, 1999; Nickerson et al., 2011). Displacement conjectures meanings beyond geographical movement to incorporate multidimensional social process that reconstructs family organisation and resilience. Resilience therefore, contextualises a dynamic process that evolves through routine interactions among family relationships, community structures, institutions, and wider humanitarian environments, rather than as an individual characteristic (Walsh, 2021; Masten, 2021).

Studies by Betts (2021), IOM (2024) and UNHCR (2025) have indicated literary scopes to concentrate around refugee protection, humanitarian governance, gender-based violence, child welfare, mental health, and post-conflict reconstruction across numerous displacement settings Correspondingly, humanitarian agencies have generated extensive evidence regarding food insecurity, shelter provision, education, healthcare, and psychosocial support among displaced populations. These contributions have significantly improved understanding of humanitarian needs and informed policy interventions across the globe.

However, there are still areas that lacuna exists that are in want of expansive knowledge relational to protracted forced migration. Much of the existing literature examines refugees, internally displaced persons, women, children, or older adults as separate analytical categories. While such approaches are valuable, but the family as an interconnected social institution in which the experiences of individual members are mutually reinforcing are often relegated to the background (Johansen et al., 2025; Rushworth et al., 2025). The import of this action manifests only in a fragmented understanding of resilience, and this obscures how family relationships influence adaptation during prolonged displacement.

Also, studies and humanitarian responses prioritise women and children because of their heightened vulnerability to violence, exploitation, interrupted education, and structural inequalities (Awak, 2022c). Comparatively, little or no focus is directed to the psychological well-being of fathers,

husbands, brothers, and adolescent boys. As asserted by Awak, (2022c) what traverses many societies is the fact that masculine identity remains closely associated with the ability to provide socio-economic security, psycho-social protection of family members, and maintenance of household stability. Conflict-induced unemployment, displacement, bereavement, and dependency on humanitarian assistance generate profound emotional distress among men, with important implications for parenting, marital relationships, family cohesion, and children's psychosocial development. Infusing the understanding of these dynamics around gender intersectionality broadens, rather than competes with established humanitarian primacies.

Again, there are relatively few studies that have undertaken theoretically integrated cross-cultural comparisons that are capable of explaining both the universal and context-specific dimensions of family resilience. Available comparative researches have frequently focused on humanitarian indicators, governance responses, or refugee policy without developing conceptual models that explain how families collectively negotiate prolonged displacement across different cultural settings. As a result, there remains limited understanding of the mechanisms through which family resilience emerges under varying political, economic, and social conditions.

This study fills these gaps through a comparative analysis of North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip**.** The selection of these two case studies is informed by both theoretical and practical considerations. North-Eastern Nigeria represents one of Africa's largest internal displacement crises resulting primarily from the Boko Haram insurgency and associated armed violence. Millions of people have experienced displacement, community destruction, livelihood disruption, and prolonged humanitarian dependence (UNOCHA, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). The Gaza Strip, by contrast, represents one of the world's most protracted conflict environments, characterised by repeated military escalation, infrastructure destruction, restricted mobility, economic instability, and recurring humanitarian emergencies, widespread psychological distress, deteriorating living conditions, and prolonged dependence on humanitarian support (UNRWA, 2024; WHO, 2024).

It must be understood that although they are geopolitically and historically distinct, both environments have experienced sustained pressures on family functioning. This has made them appropriate for comparative analysis in this study.

2. Statement of the Problem

The unprecedented rise in forced migration has generated extensive intellectual and policy attention regarding refugee protection, humanitarian assistance, internally displaced persons (IDPs), food security, public health, education, and post-conflict reconstruction. International organisations and humanitarian agencies have similarly developed numerous intervention frameworks designed to address the immediate needs of displaced populations (UNHCR, 2025; IDMC, 2024). Irrespective of these important advances, the family, which is the most fundamental social institution has received comparatively limited analytical attention. Not even as the nucleus of displacement and the central unit through which resilience is developed, sustained, and transmitted across generations.

Existing scholarship such as Johansen et al. (2025) and Rushworth et al. (2025) continue to examine forced migration, displacement and related issues through individual categories of vulnerability, including refugees, women, children, adolescents, older adults, or persons living with disabilities. These have significantly enriched understanding of humanitarian needs, but the studies remain

limited in scope since they often treat family members as independent units of analysis, rather than components of an interconnected social system. This has only revealed a fragment of how changes affecting one member of a displaced household influence parenting, marital relationships, emotional support, caregiving arrangements, household decision-making, and collective resilience. This fragmented perspective limits both theoretical understanding and the design of integrated humanitarian interventions.

Humanitarian literature including those from UNHCR (2025) and IDMC (2024) only prioritised women and children because of their disproportionate exposure to violence, exploitation, educational disruption, trafficking, and other forms of vulnerability. However, this emphasis has inadvertently resulted in comparatively limited investigation into the psychological experiences of fathers, husbands, brothers, and adolescent boys. In many societies, masculine identity remains strongly associated with providing economic security, protecting family members, and maintaining household stability. Conflict, unemployment, forced dependency, bereavement, displacement, and the inability to fulfil these socially expected roles generate profound psychological distress among men. Such distress may affect parenting practices, marital relationships, communication patterns, emotional availability, and household cohesion, yet these interconnected processes remain insufficiently explored within contemporary humanitarian scholarship.

The paucity of theoretically integrated cross-cultural analyses that are capable of explaining family resilience across different humanitarian settings has added to the twist. Existing comparative studies often focus on governance, humanitarian policy, refugee law, or displacement statistics without examining how families negotiate prolonged crises under different political, cultural, and institutional conditions. As a result, the appreciation of the universal mechanisms and the context-specific expressions of family resilience across diverse conflict environments is missing.

The absence of an integrated perspective has important practical implications. Humanitarian interventions that concentrate primarily on material assistance or individual categories of vulnerability may fail to strengthen the family relationships through which long-term recovery is sustained.

North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip represent two of the world's most protracted displacement contexts, yet comparative family-centred studies remain limited, while at best, scholarly comparisons are largely descriptive rather than explanatory. Obviously, without understanding how psychological well-being of every household member, family cohesion, and other indicators interact to shape resilience, humanitarian programming is nothing but a symptomatic appeal, than the structural dynamics of family recovery.

This gap is bridged in the study by enunciating a comparative evaluation where the family, as the primary analytical unit in North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip is repositioned. Additionally, the psychological well-being of fathers, husbands, brothers, women, children, and older adults are promptly streamlined, while the introduction of Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) as a unified conceptual model offers details of family adaptation during prolonged forced migration a guide for future research, humanitarian programming, and policy development.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

i. Examine the effects of protracted forced migration on family resilience and psychological well-being in North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip.
ii. Compare the adaptive mechanisms through which displaced families in the two humanitarian settings maintain cohesion, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological well-being.
iii. Analyse the psychological well-being of fathers, husbands, brothers, women, children, and older adults and how they influence family adaptation and resilience during prolonged displacement.
iv. Develop the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) as a comprehensive conceptual model for family adaptation under prolonged displacement.

4. Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

i. How has prolonged forced migration transformed family structures, relationships, and caregiving systems in North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip?
ii. What psychological, socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors influence family resilience across the two humanitarian settings?
iii. How does the psychological well-being of fathers, husbands, brothers, women, children, and older adults influence family adaptation and resilience during prolonged displacement?
iv. How can the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) improve scholarly understanding and humanitarian policy relating to family-centred recovery?

4.1. Geographic Scope of the Study

This study is geographically confined to North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip, two regions that have experienced prolonged armed conflict, large-scale forced migration, and sustained humanitarian crises, notwithstanding their contextual variations.

The Nigerian component focuses on the North-East geopolitical zone, comprising Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe States, with emphasis on Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, where the Boko Haram insurgency and related armed violence have generated the highest levels of protracted internal forced migration. Since the escalation of insurgency in 2009, these states have witnessed extensive destruction of settlements, displacement of millions of residents, disruption of agricultural production, educational interruption, weakened healthcare systems, and substantial transformation of family structures.

The second case study examines the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian territory situated along the eastern Mediterranean coast and bordered by Israel and Egypt. The region has experienced decades of political instability, repeated military confrontations, severe restrictions on movement, economic decline, destruction of public infrastructure, and recurrent humanitarian emergencies. These conditions have significantly affected family cohesion, livelihood opportunities, psychosocial well-being, and community resilience.

The selection of these geographical contexts is based on the fact that both regions have experienced protracted forced migration, a dimension that provides a ground for the examination of long-term family adaptation. The study sites have generated extensive humanitarian responses, thereby providing opportunities for comparative analysis of institutional support and family resilience. Again, by comparing an African conflict setting with a Middle Eastern humanitarian context, the broader applicability of the study's conceptual framework gathers momentum beyond a single regional experience.

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends across theoretical, methodological, empirical, policy, and humanitarian dimensions.

5.1 Theoretical Perspectives: From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to forced migration scholarship by repositioning the family as the primary analytical unit through which resilience should be understood. Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) therefore, extends existing theoretical approaches by integrating key concepts within a single explanatory model that can be empirically tested across different conflict and displacement settings.

5.2 Methodologies: The study advances comparative humanitarian research through an integrated cross-cultural analysis of North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip. It identifies shared patterns and context-specific variations in family adaptation, thereby providing a stronger basis for conceptual generalisation.

5.3 Empirical: The study expands available literature beyond its current scope by examining the psychological well-being of fathers, husbands, brothers, and adolescent boys within displaced households. The research broadens existing understandings of psychosocial resilience without diminishing the established humanitarian priority accorded to women and children. This is done by providing details on how men's emotional well-being influences parenting, marital relationships, communication, household stability, and children's development. While contributing to reshaping existing policy perspectives, the findings encourage governments, humanitarian organisations, development agencies, and mental health practitioners to move beyond individual-centred programming towards integrated family-centred interventions. It is expected that such approaches are likely to produce more sustainable outcomes since they strengthen the relationships through which resilience is maintained over time.

6. Literature Review

6.1 Forced Migration and Family Transformation

Forced migration is more than the physical movement of people; it is a multidimensional process that transforms family structures, livelihoods, social relationships, and psychological well-being (IDMC, 2024; UNHCR, 2025). Conflict, persecution, and humanitarian crises frequently result in family separation, loss of income, interrupted education, and weakened social support systems. Consequently, families must reorganise their internal structures while adapting to unfamiliar social and institutional environments. Walsh (2016) and Masten (2021) are of the view that families are

not merely victims of displacement, but active agents of survival and recovery, employing collective coping strategies to withstand prolonged adversity. Nevertheless, the capacity to adapt is strongly influenced by the availability of material resources and supportive institutional environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ager & Strang, 2008).

6.2 Family Resilience

Family resilience connotes the collective ability of households to withstand, adapt to positively and recover despite significant adversity, while maintaining or restoring functional relationships. It does not imply the absence of hardship; rather, it concerns the processes through which families mobilise protective resources and reorganise themselves in response to changing circumstances (Walsh, 2016; Walsh, 2021).

To Walsh, (2016) the family resilience is perceived when there are shared belief systems, organisational flexibility, and effective communication. These features propel families to reinterpret adversity, reorganise household responsibilities, and sustain supportive relationships during prolonged crises. Resilience is also influenced by wider social systems. Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) emphasise the multisystem nature of resilience, and posited that adaptive outcomes are shaped by interactions among individuals, families, communities, and institutions. Family resilience during forced migration depends not only on internal family strengths but also on access to supportive social and institutional resources including access to humanitarian assistance, education, healthcare, employment opportunities, community networks, and supportive governance structures (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012).

6.3 Psychological Well-being and Family Adaptation

Psychological well-being is both a determinant and an outcome of family resilience during forced migration. Exposure to armed conflict, repeated displacement, bereavement, and prolonged uncertainty increases the risk of anxiety, depression, traumatic stress, and emotional exhaustion other psychological difficulties associated with exposure of displaced populations to conflict and post-displacement stressors (Nickerson et al., 2011; Fazel et al., 2012).

The effects of psychological distress extend beyond individuals to family functioning. Persistent distress can affect communication, parenting, caregiving, emotional availability, and household decision-making. Conversely, supportive family relationships can provide emotional security and facilitate coping and recovery (Walsh, 2016; Prime et al., 2020). Family support enables members to process traumatic experiences collectively, while maintaining hope and social stability.

Although women and children receive considerable attention within humanitarian programmes, recent evidence indicates that men and older adults even when they also experience substantial psychological distress, are frequently left out in forced migration discourses and specific interventions. This omission compounds family systems reciprocal relationships. Conversely, emotionally supported fathers are often better positioned to participate actively in caregiving, conflict resolution, and household adaptation.

The present study therefore, argues that recognising men's psychological well-being does not diminish the established humanitarian priority accorded to women and children. Therefore, effective

interventions should adopt holistic family-centred psychosocial approaches that address the emotional well-being of all family members.

6.4 Adaptive Family Roles and Livelihood Recovery

Forced migration frequently alters established family roles because of death, separation, unemployment, injury, relocation, and loss of livelihoods. Families must consequently redistribute caregiving, economic, and decision-making responsibilities. Such reorganisation may be stressful but can also represent an important form of adaptive resilience (Walsh, 2016; Masten, 2021).

Flexible role allocation enables households to respond to changing circumstances and preserve essential family functions. UNICEF (2024) and UN Women (2023) in their various studies conducted among displaced populations in Africa and the Middle East indicate that women increasingly assume dual responsibilities as caregivers and income earners while simultaneously managing household welfare under conditions of insecurity, while experiences of men create dependency on humanitarian assistance that undermine socially constructed expectations associated with fatherhood, husbandhood, and community leadership. These contribute to feelings of inadequacy, depression, emotional withdrawal, and reduced participation in family life.

Children may also experience altered responsibilities within the household. These changes demonstrate that family resilience involves flexibility rather than rigid adherence to pre-displacement patterns. However, adaptive role changes may also create additional psychological and socioeconomic pressures where resources are inadequate. Resilience therefore, depends on whether families possess sufficient internal cohesion and external support to manage these transitions.

6.5 Community and Institutional Support

Community networks constitute important sources of resilience during forced migration. Extended families, neighbours, religious organisations, community associations, and other social networks can provide emotional support, information, material assistance, and a sense of belonging (Ager & Strang, 2008; Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012).

Institutional support represents another major dimension of family resilience. Governments, humanitarian organisations, healthcare providers, schools, and civil society organisations provide services that influence displaced families' ability to cope and recover. Such support may include food assistance, shelter, healthcare, psychosocial services, education, protection, and livelihood assistance (WHO, 2024; UNHCR, 2025).

6.6 Comparative Contexts: North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip

North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip provide important contexts for examining family resilience under prolonged humanitarian crisis. In North-Eastern Nigeria, prolonged insurgency has generated extensive internal displacement, livelihood disruption, insecurity, and humanitarian needs, affecting family stability and access to essential services (UNOCHA, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). In Gaza, recurrent conflict and severe humanitarian conditions have similarly disrupted housing, livelihoods, healthcare, education, and family life (UNRWA, 2024; WHO, 2024).

Families in both settings confront common challenges associated with prolonged displacement, despite their different historical, political, and cultural contexts. These include uncertainty, material deprivation, psychological distress, disrupted social networks, and changing household responsibilities. At the same time, families demonstrate adaptive capacities through cohesion, collective coping, community relationships, cultural and religious resources, and humanitarian assistance.

The comparison therefore, suggests that family resilience has both universal and context-specific dimensions. The underlying need for emotional security, material stability, social belonging, and institutional support is widely shared, while the particular ways families mobilise these resources are shaped by home-grown cultural, social, and humanitarian conditions.

6.7 Knowledge Gap

The review identifies that most studies focus predominantly on individuals rather than families as the primary unit of resilience. The theoretical explanations remain fragmented, with limited integration of family, psychological, ecological, and resilience perspectives. There are relatively few studies that have undertaken theoretically integrated cross-cultural comparisons capable of explaining both universal and context-specific dimensions of family resilience across different humanitarian settings. At best, existing comparative studies frequently describe humanitarian conditions without developing broader conceptual explanations.
There is no known study that has integrated Family Systems, Ecological Systems, Ambiguous Loss, and Resilience theories into a unified framework for explaining family adaptation during prolonged forced migration across North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip.

This gap is tackled in this study by addressing and offering solutions to the identified critical areas of need, in addition to the introduction of Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM).

7. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Family Systems, Ecological Systems, Ambiguous Loss, and Resilience theories. Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive explanation of family adaptation during prolonged forced migration and constitute the foundation of the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM).

7.1 Family Systems Theory

Family Systems theory (Minuchin, 1974; Bowen, 1978) views the family as an interconnected system in which changes affecting one member influence the entire household. During forced migration, bereavement, separation, unemployment, and displacement disrupt established family structures, requiring households to reorganise relationships and responsibilities. Families characterised by emotional cohesion, effective communication, and mutual support are generally better able to adapt to prolonged humanitarian crises (Walsh, 2016).

7.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems theory explains that family functioning is influenced by interactions between households and their wider social environment. Community organisations, schools, healthcare systems, religious institutions, humanitarian agencies, and government policies all shape opportunities for recovery. The theory demonstrates that resilience depends not only on family relationships but also on supportive external environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ager & Strang, 2008).

7.3 Ambiguous Loss Theory

Ambiguous Loss theory (Boss, 1999) examines the emotional consequences of prolonged uncertainty arising from separation, missing relatives, unresolved grief, and continuing insecurity. Such uncertainty complicates family adjustment because emotional closure is often impossible (Boss, 1999). The theory is particularly relevant to displaced families experiencing repeated displacement, disrupted communication, and uncertain futures.

7.4 Resilience Theory

Resilience theory conceptualises resilience as a dynamic process through which individuals, families, and communities adapt positively despite adversity (Walsh, 2016; Masten, 2021). Resilience is conceived not as an inherent personality trait, but is developed through interactions among protective psychological, relational, social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Considering forced migration settings, resilience is reflected in families' capacity to reorganise household roles, maintain emotional stability, mobilise resources, and sustain hope despite prolonged hardship (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Walsh, 2021).

Each of the theories explains an important dimension of family adaptation but remains incomplete when applied independently. Integrating these theories enables a more comprehensive understanding of family resilience and forms the conceptual basis of the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM).

8. Conceptual Structure of the IFRFM

The IFRFM conceptualises family resilience as a dynamic and interconnected process rather than a fixed family characteristic. It consists of six mutually reinforcing dimensions that include, family cohesion, psychological well-being, adaptive role reorganisation, socioeconomic stability, cultural and community resources, and institutional support. These dimensions interact continuously as families respond to conflict, displacement, uncertainty, and changing humanitarian conditions.

At the centre of the framework is family resilience, representing the household's capacity to maintain relationships, reorganise functions, mobilise resources, and sustain psychological and social functioning despite prolonged adversity. The six dimensions operate as interacting protective mechanisms rather than isolated variables. Further elucidations are germane to appreciating their role since they are veritable components of the model.

8.1 Components of the IFRFM

8.1.1 Family Cohesion

Family cohesion is particularly important where external social structures have been disrupted. When families remain emotionally connected, members can share responsibilities and resources and provide mutual psychological support. Conversely, persistent conflict, separation, or psychological distress may weaken family relationships and reduce collective adaptive capacity.

8.1.2 Psychological Well-being

The IFRFM therefore treats psychological well-being as dynamically connected to family cohesion where healthier relationships can strengthen psychological adjustment, while improved psychological well-being can enhance communication and collective coping (Walsh, 2016; Prime et al., 2020).

8.1.3 Adaptive Role Reorganisation

Forced migration frequently disrupts traditional family roles. The framework therefore views adaptive role reorganisation as a process through which families preserve essential functions while responding to changing humanitarian conditions. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the family's psychological cohesion and access to socioeconomic and institutional resources.

8.1.4 Socioeconomic Stability

Economic resources remain critical for sustaining resilience. The IFRFM therefore, recognises that resilience cannot be sustained through emotional and relational resources alone. Livelihood opportunities, education, healthcare, housing, and social protection are necessary complements to psychosocial adaptation. Economic stability can reduce household stress and increase families' capacity to exercise choice and rebuild their lives (Betts, 2021).

8.1.5 Cultural and Community Resources

Within the IFRFM, community resources operate as an extension of family resilience. They may compensate for disrupted household resources and provide access to information, assistance, and emotional support. Their effectiveness is nevertheless shaped by the wider humanitarian environment.

8.1.6 Institutional Support

The framework does not treat institutional assistance as a substitute for family resilience. Rather, institutional support strengthens families' existing capacities by providing resources that households cannot independently secure during prolonged crisis. Effective interventions should therefore, complement family and community strengths instead of displacing them.

8.2 Dynamic Relationships within the Framework

As posited by IFRFM, the six dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Family cohesion supports psychological well-being, while psychological stability strengthens communication and household cooperation. Adaptive role reorganisation allows families to respond to changing circumstances, while socioeconomic stability provides the material resources necessary to sustain these adaptations. Cultural and community resources reinforce identity, belonging, and collective coping, while institutional support expands access to essential services and opportunities for recovery.

These interactions create a continuing process of adaptation. When protective resources are available, families can strengthen their resilience; when insecurity, poverty, psychological distress, and institutional weakness persist, family resilience may become increasingly difficult to sustain. This dynamic relationship is consistent with ecological and multisystem perspectives on resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020).

8.3 Comparative Relevance to North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip

The IFRFM provides a common analytical structure for comparing the two humanitarian settings. In both North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip, prolonged insecurity and displacement disrupt family life, while simultaneously requiring households to mobilise internal and external protective resources (UNOCHA, 2024; UNICEF, 2024; UNRWA, 2024; WHO, 2024).

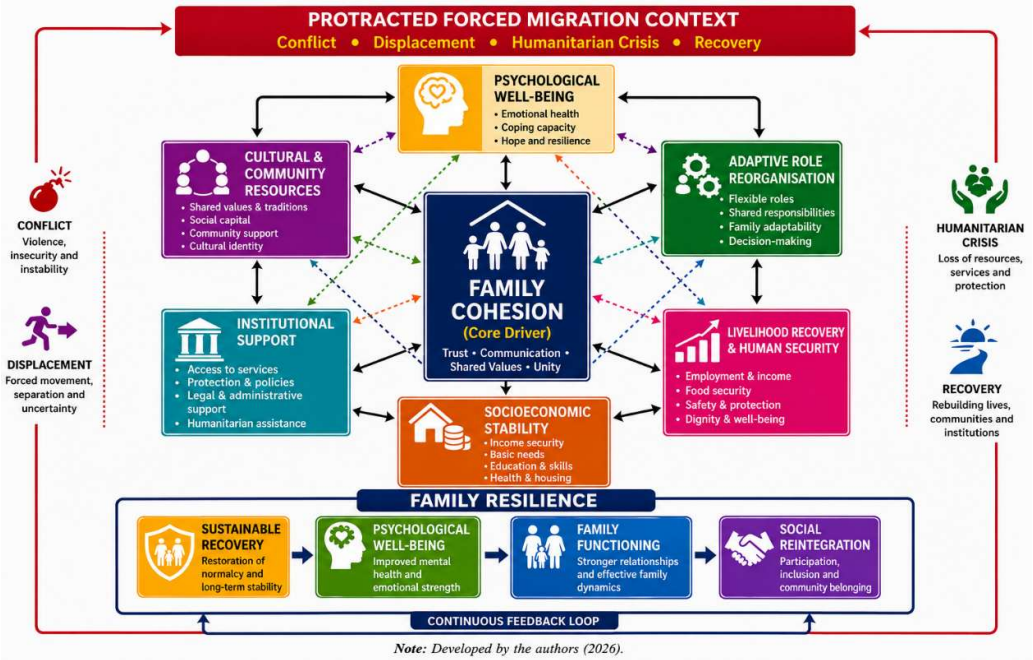
The framework does not assume that families in the two settings respond identically. Rather, it recognises that the six dimensions are expressed through context-specific cultural, social, economic, psychological and institutional arrangements. Its value therefore, lies in identifying common mechanisms, while allowing for differences in how resilience is experienced and sustained.

8.4 Contribution of the IFRFM

The IFRFM contributes to existing literature by bringing together dimensions that are often examined separately. Its major contribution is its positioning of the family at the centre of a wider ecological system of resilience. It links internal family processes with psychological well-being, socioeconomic conditions, community resources, and institutional structures.

The IFRFM bridges theory and practice, just as it delivers a comprehensive model for understanding family adaptation. It justifies why some families maintain functioning and sustainability, despite severe adversity, while others experience greater disruption. It also provides a conceptual foundation for family-centred humanitarian interventions and future empirical testing across different forced migration settings.

This interaction among various indicators is diagrammatically presented as shown in figure 1.



Note: Developed by the authors (2026).

Figure 1. Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM)

Table 1

Comparative Family Resilience Under Prolonged Forced Migration: North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip

Dimension	North-Eastern Nigeria	Gaza Strip	Comparative Insight
Conflict context	Boko Haram insurgency and related armed violence resulting in widespread internal displacement.	Protracted armed conflict, recurrent military operations, blockade, and restricted mobility.	Both contexts involve prolonged insecurity that disrupts family life and community stability.
Dimension	**North-Eastern Nigeria**	**Gaza Strip**	**Comparative Insight**
Family disruption	Separation of family members, loss of livelihoods, altered caregiving responsibilities, and educational interruption.	Family separation, housing destruction, repeated displacement, and disrupted livelihoods.	Conflict weakens traditional family structures while necessitating adaptive reorganisation.

Psychological well-being	Everyone faces trauma associated with violence, bereavement, economic insecurity, and prolonged displacement. However, men's psychological well-being is under-reported despite significant trauma and loss of livelihood	Everyone experiences chronic stress arising from repeated conflict, uncertainty, restricted mobility, and infrastructure destruction. However, men's psychological well-being is under-reported despite significant trauma and loss of livelihood	Psychological distress affects the functioning of the entire family, rather than isolated individuals.
Coping mechanisms	Kinship networks, religious organisations, community solidarity, livelihood adaptation, and humanitarian assistance.	Extended family support, religious commitment, community cohesion, and humanitarian assistance.	Informal social support complements formal humanitarian interventions in both settings.
Institutional support	Government agencies, humanitarian organisations, NGOs, and community-based interventions.	International humanitarian agencies, UN organisations, local institutions, and civil society.	Institutional support enhances resilience when aligned with existing family and community strengths.
Overall resilience pattern	Families adapt through flexible role reorganisation, social support, and livelihood recovery despite persistent insecurity.	Families sustain resilience through cohesion, shared identity, and collective adaptation under prolonged crisis.	Family resilience emerges from the interaction of relational, psychosocial, socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors.

Note. Synthesised by the authors from the reviewed literature (2026).

Table 1 enables systematic comparison across the two case studies and provides a structured basis for interpreting patterns of family resilience.

Table 2

Components of the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM)

Component	Description	Contribution to Family Resilience
Family Cohesion	Emotional connectedness, trust, communication, shared decision-making, and mutual support among family members.	Provides the relational foundation for collective coping, emotional security, and coordinated adaptation during displacement.
Psychological Well-being	The emotional and mental capacity of family members to manage trauma, stress, grief, and uncertainty.	Enhances coping, communication, caregiving, and household stability while reducing the adverse effects of prolonged displacement.
Socioeconomic Stability	Access to livelihoods, shelter, education, healthcare, and other essential resources required for family survival.	Strengthens recovery by reducing vulnerability and supporting sustainable family functioning beyond emergency relief.
Cultural and Community Resources	Religious beliefs, kinship networks, cultural values, community organisations, and traditional support systems.	Reinforces identity, social belonging, collective efficacy, and culturally appropriate coping strategies.
Institutional Support	Assistance provided by governments, humanitarian agencies, healthcare systems, educational institutions, and civil society organisations.	Expands family capacity through protection, psychosocial services, education, livelihood support, and coordinated humanitarian responses.

Note. Developed by the authors (2026).

9. Methodology

9.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative comparative literature review to examine family resilience and psychological well-being in North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip. The design was appropriate because it enabled the systematic synthesis of empirical and theoretical evidence on family adaptation across two protracted humanitarian settings. A comparative approach also facilitated the identification of common resilience processes while recognising context-specific differences, that support the development of a new conceptual framework (Awak, 2022b; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

9.2 Sources of Data

Data from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reports by reputable humanitarian and international organisations formed the bulk of data used in the study. The major sources included publications from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), World Health Organization (WHO), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

9.3 Data Analysis

The reviewed literature was analysed using thematic content analysis (Awak, 2022b; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Evidence was organised into major themes including family cohesion, psychological well-being, adaptive role reorganisation, socioeconomic stability, community resources, and institutional support. Comparative analysis was subsequently undertaken to identify similarities and differences between North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip. The synthesis of these themes informed the development of the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM), which explains resilience as a multidimensional interaction among family, community, and institutional systems.

10. Discussion

10.1 Family Resilience as a Dynamic Process in Forced Migration

The comparative analysis indicate that protracted forced migration fundamentally transforms family systems, rather than merely disrupting individual lives. Across North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip, conflict, displacement, livelihood loss, and humanitarian uncertainty reshape family relationships, caregiving responsibilities, economic roles, and psychological well-being. Families still remain primary sources of emotional support, social identity, and adaptive capacity irrespective of these pressures. The evidence therefore, supports the IFRFM's central proposition that resilience develops through continuous interaction among family cohesion, psychological well-being, adaptive role reorganisation, socioeconomic stability, cultural and community resources, and institutional support.

The findings also suggest that resilience involves adaptive flexibility, and not preservation of pre-displacement family arrangements. Families that successfully renegotiate caregiving responsibilities, livelihood strategies, and household roles are better positioned to manage prolonged displacement. This supports the family resilience perspective that organisational flexibility, effective communication, and shared coping are essential protective processes during adversity (Walsh, 2016; Masten, 2021, OpenAI, 2026).

10.2 Cross-Cultural Insights from North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip

The comparison reveals considerable analogies inconsequential of diverse political history, governance arrangements, and conflict dynamics. As found in the two settings, displacement weakens livelihoods, interrupts education, alters gender and caregiving roles, and produces

psychological distress. Families nevertheless, rely on emotional solidarity, kinship networks, faith-based organisations, and community support to sustain collective well-being.

However, how resilience is expressed is shaped by contextual variations. For instance, in North-Eastern Nigeria, prolonged internal displacement and the destruction of predominantly agrarian livelihoods contribute to dependence on host communities and humanitarian assistance. In Gaza, recurrent conflict, infrastructure destruction, and restrictions on movement impose additional constraints on economic recovery and family mobility. Nevertheless, the underlying mechanisms of resilience remain remarkably consistent, suggesting that adaptive strategies are context-sensitive, while the relational foundations of family resilience demonstrate considerable cross-cultural continuity.

This finding is significant because it establishes the value of comparative analysis. Family resilience should neither be treated as culturally uniform nor reduced entirely to context-specific responses. Rather, it emerges through interaction between universal family processes and the particular humanitarian, socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional conditions in which families live.

10.3 Implications for Theory and Humanitarian Practice

The findings reinforce the complementary contributions of Family Systems, Ecological Systems, Ambiguous Loss, and Resilience theories. This obvious declares that none of the theories independently provides a sufficient amplification of family adaptation during prolonged displacement. Their integration through the IFRFM delivers a more comprehensive understanding of resilience as an evolving family process that situates within wider social, cultural, and institutional environments.

The findings also have direct implications for humanitarian practice. Interventions focusing exclusively on individuals or isolated sectors may be insufficient for sustainable recovery unless they simultaneously strengthen family relationships, psychological well-being, livelihood security, and community support. Family-centred programmes integrating mental health services, economic recovery, education, and social protection are therefore, better aligned with the interconnected nature of family resilience.

The findings naturally dovetailed to a critical need to recognise and defend the interdependence of fathers, husbands, brothers, women, children, older adults, and extended family members in household adaptation. Programmes that acknowledge these relationships are better positioned to strengthen family functioning and promote sustainable recovery across displacement settings.

10.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study is based on a qualitative documentary analysis devoid of generated primary empirical evidence. As the analysis is confined to North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip, replication would require stringent observation of peculiar nature of the new setting when generalising the findings to other humanitarian contexts.

Future research should empirically examine the relationships developed within the IFRFM using applicable research designs including, quantitative, and mixed-method across diverse displacement settings. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable for examining how family resilience

evolves across different phases of forced migration, recovery, and post-conflict reconstruction. Such studies could refine the framework and strengthen the evidence base for family-centred humanitarian policy and practice.

11. Conclusion

This study examined family resilience and psychological well-being in the context of protracted forced migration through a comparative analysis of North-Eastern Nigeria and the Gaza Strip. The review suggests that forced migration extends beyond physical displacement to reshape family structures, caregiving arrangements, livelihoods, social relationships, and emotional well-being of every member of the household. Political and humanitarian contexts, no matter how distinct do not impinge on the similitude of patterns of disruption and adaptation in the two settings. This underscores the central role of families in sustaining resilience during protracted crises.

The introduction of the Integrated Family Resilience Framework for Forced Migration (IFRFM) and the focus on family as the principal analytical unit, as well as neglected members, IFRFM advances understanding of family resilience, while creating a foundation for family-centred humanitarian interventions.

It is concluded in the study that sustainable humanitarian recovery requires approaches that strengthen family relationships alongside psychosocial support, livelihood restoration, and institutional collaboration. Indeed, from the findings, there are indications that within forced migration contexts, there is an association. A strong nexus between recognition and acceptability of families as active agents of recovery, instead of passive recipients of assistance, and the emergence of a more holistic route to resilience, psychological well-being, and long-term community reconstruction.

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proffered:

- Adopt family-centred humanitarian programming that integrates psychosocial support, family counselling, parenting support, and relationship-strengthening initiatives into displacement responses.
- Integrate mental health and livelihood interventions by combining psychosocial services with economic recovery programmes, recognising the interdependence of financial security and family well-being.
- Strengthen community-based support systems through collaboration with religious institutions, community organisations, and local leadership to reinforce culturally appropriate resilience mechanisms.
- Promote coordinated multisectoral policies linking health, education, social protection, housing, and livelihood services within comprehensive family recovery frameworks.

- Empirically validate the IFRFM across diverse humanitarian settings using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research to refine its applicability and inform evidence-based humanitarian policy.

References

Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(2), 166–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016

Awak, E. U. (2022a). *The colloquies: Introductory sociological thoughts*. Jocular Prints.

Awak, E. U. (2022b). *Themes, approaches and finesses of research*. Jocular Prints.

Awak, E. U. (2022c). Attaining gender equality in post-conflict society: The inexorable course to sustainable peace-building. Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History, *3*(10), 193-206.

Betts, A. (2021). *The wealth of refugees: How displaced people can build economies*. Oxford University Press.

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief*. Harvard University Press.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage.

Fazel, M., Reed, R. V., Panter-Brick, C., & Stein, A. (2012). Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: Risk and protective factors. *The Lancet, 379*(9812), 266–282. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60051-2

International Committee of the Red Cross. (2024). *Annual report 2023*.

International Organization for Migration. (2024). *World migration report 2024*.

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2024). *Global report on internal displacement 2024*.

Johansen, J. D., Varvin, S., & Sagbakken, M. (2025). Family life under strain: The impact of forced migration on refugee parenting in reception centres. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1554692

Masten, A. S. (2021). Resilience of children in disasters: A multisystem perspective. *International Journal of Psychology, 56*(1), 1–11.

Masten, A. S., & Motti-Stefanidi, F. (2020). Multisystem resilience for children and youth in disaster. *Development and Psychopathology, 32*(5), 1628–1644.

Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Harvard University Press.

Nickerson, A., Bryant, R. A., Silove, D., & Steel, Z. (2011). A critical review of psychological treatments of post-traumatic stress disorder in refugees. *Clinical Psychology Review, 31*(3), 399–417.

OpenAI. (2026). *ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Luna)* [Large language model]. https://chatgpt.com

Panter-Brick, C., & Eggerman, M. (2012). Understanding culture, resilience and mental health: The production of hope. *Social Science & Medicine, 75*(8), 1495–1504.

Prime, H., Wade, M., & Browne, D. T. (2020). Risk and resilience in family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *American Psychologist, 75*(5), 631–643.

Silove, D. (2013). The ADAPT model: A conceptual framework for mental health and psychosocial programming in post-conflict settings. *Intervention, 11*(3), 237–248.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2024). *Humanitarian action for children 2024: Nigeria*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024). *Global trends 2023: Forced displacement in 2023*.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2025). *Global trends 2024*. UNHCR.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2024). *Nigeria humanitarian needs and response plan 2024*.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. (2024). *Gaza situation reports*.

Walsh, F. (2016). *Strengthening family resilience* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.

Walsh, F. (2021). Family resilience: A developmental systems framework. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 18*(6), 807–822.

World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*.

World Health Organization. (2024). *Occupied Palestinian Territory emergency situation reports*.