

Forced Migration, Contraceptive Utilization, and Women's Empowerment: Evidence from the Boko Haram Insurgency

Project stakeholders

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Funding agency, duration and funds

Funding agency: World Bank

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Project goals

This project examines the link between violent attacks of the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram, forced migration, and the empowerment of women. It estimates the effects of violent events on economic activity, decision making autonomy, contraceptive utilization, and gender norms. It also extensively examines the role of forced displacement as a mediating variable and its importance relative to other possible channels for the spatial dispersion of the effects.

Background and project description

About 90 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by war, conflict, persecution, and human rights violations. One of the factors contributing prominently to the rise in the number of people forced to flee is the surge in violent events perpetrated by armed Islamic extremist. Violent extremism has become especially pervasive in low- and middle-income countries.

The existing empirical literature on the consequences of conflict focuses on the locations directly affected by violent events. The implications for the remaining relatively safe areas within conflict-affected countries have received surprisingly little attention, even though these areas are likely to be strongly impacted by the same violent events through, for instance, the arrival of internally displaced people (IDPs).

The project analyzes the spatial effects of violent attacks perpetrated by the jihadist group Boko Haram in Nigeria. Its primary motive is to establish an Islamic State under a version of the Shariah law which promotes narrow gender roles for women, restricting their access to education and employment, enforcing strict modesty rules, and instituting other discriminatory as well as abusive practices against women.

The analysis investigates the effects on economic activity of women and men (employment and wealth accumulation), women empowerment (decision autonomy and fertility choices), and gender norms (attitudes towards and experience of domestic violence). It combines two rounds of geo-referenced cross-sectional household survey data, information on geo-referenced violent events, and novel geo-localized displacement data.

The focus on the gender dimensions of the spatial dispersion of the impacts of conflict is motivated by the surge of jihadist groups which may have particularly strong implications for women given the misogynistic nature of their ideology, the associated tactics of combat, and the gender composition of the IDP population which is predominantly composed of women.

It also examines the arrival of IDPs in host communities as an effect channel through which Boko Haram attacks potentially have an impact across space. To give further credence to effect channel results, the project assesses the spatial effects of violent attacks of the Fulani militia on the same outcome space. This militia engages in a typical herdsman-farmer conflict fighting for control over natural resources. Contrary to Boko Haram attacks, deadly activities of the Fulani militia are not associated with substantive forced migration.