



**IDENTITY STRUGGLES AND LIFE SATISFACTION
IN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS OF WAZIRISTAN: THE ROLE
OF GENDER, AGE AND EDUCATION**

Wazeer Ullah Khan

*MS Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, Govt College University
Faisalabad, Pakistan*

Amara Liaqat Ali

*PhD Scholar, University Utara Malaysia| UUM Awang Had Salleh Graduate
School of Arts and Science*

Zartashia Kynat Javaid

*(Corresponding Author) Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Psychology,
Govt College University Faisalabad, Pakistan*

zaratshiakynat@gcuf.edu.pk

Khalid Mahmood Bhatti

*Associate professor, Department of Applied Psychology, Govt College University
Faisalabad, Pakistan*

Faizan Nawaz

*MS Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology, Govt College University
Faisalabad, Pakistan*

Abstract

This study examined how gender, age, and education shape the relationship between identity struggles and life satisfaction among internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Waziristan. Using a cross-sectional correlational design, 250 IDPs recruited through snowball sampling completed standardized measures: The In-Group Identification Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale, along with demographic information. Correlation and group-comparison analyses (IBM SPSS, version 22) revealed that stronger in-group identification (fewer identity struggles) was associated with higher life satisfaction. The important demographics trends appeared, including that women have reported considerably fewer identity struggle and higher life satisfaction as compared to men, although with higher identity struggles, younger IDPs, paradoxically, demonstrated higher life satisfaction than older groups and education turned out as the strongest protective factor, with highly educated persons demonstrating greater in-group identification and life satisfaction as compared to those with no formal education. These findings indicate the need for demographically informed psychosocial interventions from the relative authorities and a society as a whole.

Keywords: *Identity struggles, life satisfaction, internally displaced persons, demographics, Waziristan.*

Introduction

As per the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people who have been compelled to flee their places of residence because of or in order to escape the danger posed by armed conflict, generalized violence, human



rights violations, natural disasters or man-made catastrophes, while remaining within the borders of their home country.

Internal displacement has risen to record level around the world. Millions of people are forced leave their homes because of conflict, violence and natural calamities. According to the 2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), approximately 83.4 million people are currently living as IDPs. Sub-Saharan Africa currently accounts for over half of all IDPs. Armed conflicts have been the primary driver of displacement: Sudan with recent hostilities, Palestine and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have forced millions more to flee their homes (IDMC, 2024).

Pakistan's former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), merged into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in 2018, was historically a semi-autonomous region bordering Afghanistan, with a distinct sociopolitical and administrative system grounded in tribal customs. Geographically, FATA consisted of seven agencies and six frontier regions, with harsh terrain and a porous Durand Line that facilitated cross border tribal alliances. Prior to 9/11, administration in FATA was indirect, mediated by the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), which authorized Political Agents (PAs) and tribal Maliks to maintain order through collective accountability. Following 9/11 FATA became a major theatre for global counterterrorism activities as the United States-led attacks in Afghanistan drove Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters in to Waziristan's mountainous terrain. The region's sociopolitical isolation, inadequate government, and deep religious zeal provided ground for radicalization (Latif & Musarrat, 2012).

Military operations by Pakistan after 2001 to remove foreign militants unintentionally promoted local rebels who framed their fight as a defensive jihad against state intervention and foreign interests. In 2007, a merger of different militant factions strengthened the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which intensified attacks against the Security forces in Pakistan and targets NATO in Afghanistan. The Pakistani forces have carried out a number of joint and unilateral military operations with the United States, beginning with Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-2002) and continuing through Operation Azm-e-Istehkam (2024). The life of tribal people in the former FATA, particularly the South and North Waziristan, two out of the seven agencies of former FATA, has been severely impacted by all these military operations. The killings of civilians, especially women and children, destruction of schools, and casualties due to suicide attacks all play a significant role in the instability of the region (Zeb, 2011).

Military interventions in Waziristan have resulted in huge internal displacement over the years. In 2008, military operations against the insurgency caused a multi-layered crisis in the northwest of Pakistan, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA, where more than five million FATA citizens (all seven agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas) had to flee their homes and places of origin. Approximately 80,302 families and 929,859 people were displaced in North Waziristan on July 14, 2014 (FDMA, Government of Pakistan, 2016). **Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction**

Identity is one of the basic and most fundamental aspects of human and communal existence and is the focus of numerous studies within a myriad of academic studies, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology, among others, which present a different approach to the



nature of identity, its composition, and meaning (Phinney, 2008). Identity is another dynamic and diverse aspect which influences the ideologies of people about themselves and relationship of people with the world (Gee, 2000). In essence, identity is a combination of how a person thinks about themselves, as seen in regard to the ideas, values and attributes they possess that make them unique among other individuals (Vignoles et al., 2011). Identity is fundamental to the social sciences including international relations and politics. The matter of identity has played a central role in human lives, either at the individual or group level (Crocetti et al., 2022).

Research on 'Positive Psychology' has emerged as an important field within psychology, emphasizing human optimal functioning, well-being and strengths. (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In stark contrast to the discipline's traditional focus on negative emotions and psychopathology, more academics have turned their attention to the positive end of the emotional spectrum including happiness and life satisfaction (Myers, 1992). Recently, this expanding body of work underscores the key role of psychology in promoting flourishing and dealing with the questions of meaning, fulfillment, and happiness.

Nair and Gaither (1999) stated that life satisfaction is closely linked to factors such as marital status, social support and chances of socializing with the environment. Moreover, health, leisure, family, work, financial condition, social relationships, and self-worth have also been identified as key indicators of life satisfaction in widely used social science measures (Milovanska-Farrington & Farrington, 2021).

Role of Gender, Age and Education

When it comes to the internally displaced people of Waziristan, gender, age, and education may be the critical demographic factors that determine the ways people undergo displacement, reconstruct identity, and find the psychological well-being.

Gender is defined to be the cultural, social, and psychological connotations that are linked with masculinity and femininity, not to be confused with biological sex (Wood and Eagly, 2002). Whereas sex is a biologically defined and genetically obtained difference between men and women based on physiology and reproductive capacity, the concept of gender is the economic, social, political, and cultural characteristic and chances of being women and men (World Health Organization, 2018). Gender is a social construct, which incorporates norms, behaviors and roles related to being a woman, man, girl, or boy and relationships with other as a social construct, gender is different in one society to another and may evolve through time (Krieger, 2003). Gender identity formation is a process by which people form their own perceptions of their own gender molded by many social, cultural, and psychological elements and starts at early childhood and greatly influenced by family, social expectations, and peer interactions (Egan and Perry, 2001). It is shown that gender is very closely related to psychological well-being, mental health, and life satisfaction, and women and men have a different distribution of psychological distress and well-being influenced by biological factors and socio-cultural gender roles (Lopezafra and Gartzia, 2019; Tesch-Romer et al., 2008).

Age is one of the essential demographical factors that influence the psychological development, identity formation, and well-being throughout the lifespan. The theory of psychosocial development suggests that people pass through particular stages of development



throughout their lifetime, with each stage being marked with certain psychological tasks and problems to be addressed for a healthy development. The construction of identity, which is the development of a sense of coherence and consistency with social roles, is especially noteworthy in the period of adolescence and early adulthood as this is the period when an individual forms his or her personal identity, based on educational and career success, the development of relationships, and ideological investment (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). Mature people on the other hand have gone through the critical periods of identity formation and rather encounter developmental tasks that may concern identity continuity, acceptance of life experience, and meaning and purpose of accumulated life experience (Erikson, 1968). Studies have shown that age has an important relation with psychological well, mental health, and life satisfaction with the various age groups have different resilience, weakness, and adaptation to such major stresses and change events in life (Mroczek and Kolarz, 1998). It is critical to know the age and the stage of development to understand how people of various ages react, manage, and adjust to significant life stresses like forced displacement.

Education can be described as accumulated human capital the knowledge, skills, competencies and cognitive instruments that individuals gain via formal schooling and learning processes. It is well known that education is one of the primary determinants of health, well-being, and satisfaction with life, and it does so by a variety of mechanisms, such as higher income, career prospects, health literacy, social capital, and psychological resources (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2010; Lochner, 2011). Other than the economic and professional gains, education influences the workings of the psyche with the growth of cognitive abilities in problem-solving and critical thinking and sense-making; skills that help people place difficult experiences in their lives in broader contexts of meaning (Lochner, 2011). Education offers social networks, community, and meaningful contribution opportunities that facilitate the state of psychological well-being and meaning (Zimmerman and Iwanicki, 2014). Studies show that educational attainment is highly linked to improved mental health, increased life satisfaction, psychological strength, and diminished susceptibility to depression and anxiety in various people (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2010; Ross and Mirowsky, 2011). Moreover, education enables formation of identity and the sense of self outside of the traditional identities or place-based identities, offering alternative sources of identity and social belonging, which holds and does not shift with geographic and social upheavals (Zimmerman and Iwanicki, 2014).

Theoretical Underpinnings

According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), belonging to social groups, such as ethnicity, nationality, or region, plays central role in shaping one's self-concept. This group-based identity can enhance self-esteem and feelings of belonging, especially when there are salient in-group/out-group boundaries. In context of forced displacement, however, existing national and place based identities are frequently disturbed or devalued, preventing any possibility of favorable comparison, and impairing continuity in social identity. Such identity disturbance may help disintegrate a sense of national identity and at the same time, encourage the displaced individuals to pursue or enhance other group identities, possibly regional, ethnic, tribal or affiliation to a religion, which can provide identity, coherence and psychosocial resources. This



is in accordance with the current social identity approach to health where several, secure, and positively regarded social identities may serve as psychological resources whereby they offer belonging, sense of purpose, and social support and as a result, the displaced individuals have more chances of flourishing instead of simply the absence of distress.

Rationale

The current study is designed to address key psychosocial consequences of internal displacement among IDPs from Waziristan, by focusing on how identity struggles relate to life satisfaction in this context. At the same time, the study investigates the how gender, age and education shape the links between identity struggles and life satisfaction in a population recognized for tribal customs, prolonged conflicts and displacement.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction.
- To examine whether Gender, Age and higher Education attainment are associated with Identity Struggles, Flourishing and Life Satisfaction

Conceptual Framework (Figure 1)



Literature review and Hypotheses Development

Several empirical studies in Pakistan have investigated the psychological consequences of internal displacement among IDPs, especially in conflict-affected regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the FATA. Mujeeb (2015), for example, conducted a groundbreaking study on the psychological distress of IDPs residing in Jalozei camp, highlighting elevated levels of anxiety, stress and depression associated with displacement. Likewise, Saqib and Nareen (2015) and Khan et al. (2025) explored the psychological impact of military-led internal displacement on people from South and North Waziristan settled in Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan, documenting themes of loss, fear, and uncertainty. However, these and other several studies documented psychological distress or trauma, no known studies have investigated the relationship between identity struggles and life satisfaction in this population.

Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction

Internally displaced persons often occupy liminal status as "displaced citizens," formally members of the nation-state yet practically excluded from many of its social, economic, and political obligations. Brun (2003) argues that labelling people as "internally displaced" creates a long-term social category that simultaneously identifies and marginalizes them producing "abject citizenship". Because IDPs are perceived to "belong elsewhere," their claims to full participation are weakened and a sense of permanent temporariness is established in their lives. This Categorical discomfort fractures IDPs' identities: they are citizens on paper but are treated as outsiders, lack equal access to the resources and protections enjoyed by other inhabitants. The humanitarian label,



which is intended to signify need, paradoxically contributes to stigma and exclusion, resulting in contradictions between formal citizenship norms and the lived reality of ongoing exile (Brun, 2003).

Kiang et al. (2006) conducted a meta-analysis revealing that ethnic identity is positively associated with wellbeing across diverse cultural background, implying that a secure sense of ethnic belonging supports beneficial psychological outcomes. Phinney (2008) further argues that a strong ethnic or cultural identity can function as a psychological buffer against external pressures, and that bicultural persons who sustain ties to both heritage and host cultures often report improved well-being. Gul (2023) examined life satisfaction among Afghan refugees living in Eastern Turkey and highlighted how specific migration related factors shape post-migration satisfaction with life, including causes for migration, legal status and post settlement situations.

H1: There is significant relationship between Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction.

Role of Gender, Age and Education

Gender essentially determines the impact of displacement on identity and psychological wellbeing. Studies prove that females are more satisfied with their lives than males despite their higher anxiety rates in the displacement scenarios (Smeekes et al., 2017), and gender disparities also appear in the psychological manifestations: women have more somatic and depressive symptoms, and men are more socially detached and isolated (Al-Soleiman et al., 2021). In tribal society, male identity and occupation are based on the economic provision, land ownership, and occupational role, which is devastated by displacement, whereas the female identity, which is based on kinship roles and care giving is not affected by displacement as much because family connections are retained even in displacement camps (Ahmed, 1980; Dinç & Yildirim, 2023; Khan and Qaisar, 2014). Also, women have more stable social support networks in terms of female kin and in terms of community organizations, and male networks, on the contrary, are torn to pieces with the expulsion of territories (Barieva et al., 2024). These gender differences in role stability and social network maintenance imply that women can have a higher identity coherence and social resources that sustain flourishing and life contentment whereas men are vulnerable to a higher degree of identity loss and social isolation, which can lower the level of psychological well-being.

H2: Female IDPs are expected to experience fewer identity struggles and higher life satisfaction.

The identity formation in displaced adolescents and young adults in general is rather complicated as they have to fulfill simultaneously both developmental identity tasks and adapt to new cultural contexts (Ochi et al., 2024). The disruption of continuity in education, their occupational trajectory, relationship milestones, and the absence of a consistent sense of who you are, which is identified as identity diffusion, or identity moratorium, which is described as exploration without commitment, is common to displacement during this critical period (Dakuyo, 2025; Puffer et al., 2022). This extreme identity shock makes younger IDPs more prone to greater identity conflict and reduced thriving despite their cognitive flexibility and future-orientation. On the other hand, older IDPs (40 years and above) have already made some identity formation in the pre-displacement situations, but are confronted with different problems: ancestral land loss, generational continuity and old age that cannot be reversed psychologically (Whitbourne and Skultety, 2006). Major life events such as displacement cause identity disruption in older adults,



which is accompanied by consistently poorer well-being, including the loss of meaning and purpose, and discontinuity between the past, the present, and the future self (Mitchell et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2024). These age-developmental considerations imply different trajectories, wherein younger IDP whose identity is acute struggle and yet they were adaptive, and older ones resign to identity and become less satisfied with their lives even after the surface adaptation.

H3: Older IDPs are expected to report higher levels of identity struggles as well as lower life satisfaction, than younger IDPs.

Education is also an important buffer to the psychological effects of displacement. In their meta-analysis of 67,294 refugees and IDPs, Porter and Haslam (2005) discovered that education levels were associated with mental health outcomes, such as a lower level of PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Educated people have intellectual means to render the narrative in a new way contextualizing displacement through a historical or political context instead of making it personal as a failure (Ivlevs, 2019). Occupational and professional identity is maintained through education even under displacement conditions that are constrained due to avenues to teach, work at NGOs, access to healthcare, and advocacy (Esen & Togrul, 2025; Ivlevs and Veliziotis, 2018). More importantly, education offers portable and skill-based identities (I am a teacher, I am a health worker), which proves viable even when land-based and tribal identities are disrupted and IDPs demonstrate increased incentives to engage in education as a form of compensatory capital 10-15 years' post-displacement (Ivlevs and Veliziotis, 2018; Nemiro et al., 2022). In the case of Waziristan IDPs, education can be of critical support to group identity and life-satisfaction.

H4: Higher educational attainment is thought to be associated with fewer identity struggles and Greater life satisfaction

Method

Participants

A purposive and snowball sampling strategy was applied in recruiting people who are internally displaced (IDPs) from North and South Waziristan. A total of 250 internally displaced persons (IDP) participated with 56.8% males and 43.2% females. Most of the participants were young to middle aged adults (43.2%). Education levels were diverse and the majority of the respondents had attained secondary or middle level education. In terms of displacement, most respondents (54.0%) had been displaced between 9 and 13 years while 24.4% had experienced displacement for more than 14 years. The majority of the participants were married (56.4%) and lived in joint-family systems (75.6%).

Procedure

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed to investigate the role of identity struggles in determining the life satisfaction among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Waziristan. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling in collaboration with the local community to reach the participants. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. beforehand. The data were collected using self-administered standardized scales on each construct, one of which was already available in Urdu. For the In-group Identification Scale, a systematic translation and adaptation procedure was carried out to ensure the linguistic and cultural validity. Two bilingual's experts independently translated the scales from English to Urdu;



their versions were reconciled and then back-translated into English by another translator blind to the original. A panel subject experts reviewed the back-translation for conceptual strength, after which the Urdu-version was pilot-tested with a small sample of IDPs, and minor adjustments to some of the items were adjusted after feedback. Throughout study, ethical standards were strictly observed including dignity, respect for the participants, voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Measures

In-Group Identification Scale

The In-Group Identification Scale developed by Leach et al. (2008), is a standardized instrument designed to gauge the strength of an individual's psychological connection and sense of belonging with a particular social group. It conceptualizes group identification as a hierarchical having five first-order dimensions Solidarity, Satisfaction, Centrality, In-Group Self-Stereotyping (ISS), and In-Group Homogeneity (IGH) which load on two high order factors Self-Investment and Self-definition.

For the current study, the scale was translated into Urdu by the researcher in 2025 using standard forward-backward translation process to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness for Waziristan's IDPs. The original scale typically reports Cronbach alpha coefficient between 0.70 and 0.85, and in this study the Urdu version showing good internal consistency, with an overall alpha of 0.847.

Life Satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) was applied to assess overall life satisfaction among internally displaced persons from Waziristan. The SWLS consists of five items, rated on 7-point Likert scale. Higher total scores indicate greater life satisfaction and vice versa. In this study, the Urdu translated version by Barki et al. (2020) was employed, which has demonstrated pretty acceptable psychometric properties with and a test re-test correlation of $r=0.84$, supporting its reliability for use within Pakistan's context.

Results

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=250)

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age	20–30	108	43.2%
	31–40	102	40.8%
	41–60	40	16.0%



Education	None	52	20.8%
	Primary	30	12.0%
	Middle	23	9.2%
	Matric	51	20.4%
	Intermediate	69	27.6%
	Bachelor	25	10.0%
	Gender	Male	142
	Female	108	43.2%

The participants (N = 250) comprised mainly of people in their young to middle adulthood life, with 43.2 percent of the respondents aged between 20 and 30 years and 40.8 percent aged between 31-40 years. They were mostly male (56.8%) with 27.6 percent and 20.4 percent having intermediate and matric education respectively.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation and Descriptive Statistics among study variables (N=250)

Variable	1	2	M	SD
1.In-Group Identification	-	.647**	58.95	13.82
2.Life Satisfaction	.647**	-	19.10	4.05

Note. The asterisks (**) point statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.1$).



The findings reveal strong correlations between the significant variables of the study. The in-group identification was related positively to life satisfaction ($r = .647, p < .001$), which implies that the greater the identification with a group, the better a person is and the more satisfied with their lives.

Table 3

Independent Sample t-Test for Gender differences on Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction (N=250)

DV	Men (n=146)		Women (n=104)		t	Cohen's d	SE	95% CI
	M	SD	M	SD				
IDS	55.12	11.61	62.44	15.24	-4.102	-0.55	1.78	[-10.83, 3.80]
LS	18.50	4.20	19.83	3.85	-2.622	-0.40	0.51	[-2.33, -0.33]

Note. IDS= Identity Struggles, LS= Life Satisfaction DV=dependent variable, SD= standard deviation, M=mean, t= t-statistics, SE=standard error, 95%CI= 95 percent Confidence Interval

To compare gender differences on three psychological variables, independent samples t-tests (unequal variances) were to be done. Females reported much greater identity struggles than males, $t(181.17) = -4.10, p = \text{less than } .001, d = -0.55, 95\% \text{ CI} = -10.83 -3.80$, and life satisfaction, $t(173.47) = -2.62, p = .010, d = -0.40, 95\% \text{ CI} = -2.33, -0.33$. The effect sizes were all small to medium, suggesting that there were significant differences between genders on these psychological constructs.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance for Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction Across Age Groups (N=250)

DV	Groups	SS	df	MS	F	p
IDS	Between Groups	10736.76	4	3578.92	24.57	<.001
	Within groups	35831.32	246	145.66		



	Total	46568.08	250			
LS	Between Groups	791.68	4	263.89	23.49	<.001
	Within groups	2764.15	246	11.24		
	Total	3555.82	250			

Note. IDS= Identity Struggles, LS= Life Satisfaction, DV= Dependent variable, SS=Sum of squares, DF= Degree of Freedom, MS= Mean Square, F= F-statistic, p=Probability value

Age group differences were studied through one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAS) that investigated differences in three psychological variables. The findings indicated that there are major age effects on all the outcomes. The difference between the age-later and the age-early groups in identity struggles showed significant differences at $F(3, 246) = 24.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .23$ which implies that age played a significant role in identity struggles, that is, 23.1%. There was also a significant difference in life satisfaction by age with $F(3, 246) = 23.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ with age explaining 22.3 per cent of the variance. Such huge effect sizes indicate that age is a significant determinant of psychological outcomes among internally displaced individuals of Waziristan.

Table 5

Post Hoc Comparison of Age Groups for IDS and Life Satisfaction(N=250)

DV	Age	M1-M2	SE	p	95 % CI
IDS	20-30 vs 31-40	-4.49	1.67	0.38	[-8.80, -0.18]
	20-30 vs 41-50	-19.02	2.25	<.001	[-24.1,-13.21]
	20-30 vs 51-60	-21.34	8.59	.065	[-43.56,-8.67]
	31-40 vs 41-50	-14.54	2.27	<.001	[-24.89, 20.25]



	31-40 vs 51-60	-16.86	8.59	.206	[-25.3,-13.1]
	41-50 vs 51-60	-2.32	8.73	.993	[-10.9, 1.3]
LS	20-30 vs 31-40	-1.40	0.46	.015	[-2.59, -0.20]
	20-30 vs 41-50	-5.07	0.62	<.001	[-6.68, -3.45]
	20-30 vs 51-60	-7.36	2.39	.012	[-13.53,-1.19]
	31-40 vs 41-50	-3.67	0.63	<.001	[-5.30, -2.04]
	31-40 vs 51-60	-5.97	2.39	.063	[-12.14, 0.21]
	41-50 vs 51-60	-2.29	2.42	.780	[-8.56, 3.97]

Note. IDS= Identity Struggles, LS= Life Satisfaction, DV= Dependent variable, M=Mean difference, SE= Standard error, p=Probability value, 95 %CI=Confidence Interval

In the case of identity struggles, younger participants (20-30 years) had reported much less identity struggles than those aged 31-40, $p = .038$, and those aged 41-50, $p = .001$, with the latter age group reporting much more identity struggles than the former age group, $p = .001$. In the case of life satisfaction, younger participants (20-30 years) were lower in satisfaction than the 31-40, 41-50, and 51-60 age groups by a significant margin ($p = .015$, $<.001$, and $.012$, respectively), the 31-40 group was also significantly lower than the 41-50 group, $p = .001$). The findings show a steady trend of psychological well-being and life satisfaction as age progresses in internally displaced people of Waziristan.

Table 6

Analysis of Variance for Identity Struggles and Life Satisfaction Across Education (N=250)

DV	Groups	SS	df	MS	F	p
IDS	Between Groups	17687.138	5	3537.43	29.886	<.001



	Within groups	28880.946	245	118.37		
	Total	46568.084	250			
LS	Between Groups	838.63	5	167.73	15.06	<.001
	Within groups	2717.19	244	11.14		
	Total	3555.82	249			

Note. IDS= Identity Struggles, LS= Life Satisfaction, DV= Dependent variable, p =Probability value, SS=sum of squares, MS=mean square, df =Degrees of freedom, F =F-statistics

The results of one-way analysis of variance showed statistically significant differences in education level on both identity struggles, $F(5, 244) = 29.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .38$ and life satisfaction, $F(5, 244) = 15.06, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$. Education explained 38 and 24 percent of identity struggle variance and life satisfaction, respectively. The respondents who were not formally educated indicated a marked difference in identity struggles and lower levels of life satisfaction than the respondents who had higher education levels. These results show that education is a buffer psychological resource, which enhances identity coherence and general life appraisal among internally displaced Waziristan-origin persons.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between identity struggles and life satisfaction among internally displaced persons (IDPs) of Waziristan, and explored the influence of gender, age, and education. The results confirm the proposed correlations and provide an understanding of the psychological processes that promote well-being among populations in conflict environments.

Greater in-group identification had a significant relationship with greater life satisfaction, which validated the first hypothesis. This is in line with the Social Identity Theory that stated that secure group membership insulated adversity and promoted well-being (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In the case of Waziristan IDPs, whose tribal and regional identities have been methodically discontinued by decades of conflict, rational in-group belonging constitutes a psychological platform of stability and life evaluation (Phinney, 2008).

The second hypothesis is supported as females reported significantly fewer identity struggles and greater life satisfaction than males. This shows differential vulnerability of gendered role structures to displacement. The tribal men identity anchor in territorial control and economic provision, dimensions directly undermined by forced displacement, while female identity is rooted in caregiving and kinship roles shows greater transferability across settings (Ahmed, 1980; Khan & Qaisar, 2014). Moreover, females maintain deeper and more resilient support networks through community organizations and extended kinship (Barieva et al., 2024). Research on working women demonstrates that psychological processes like mindfulness mediate the effect of stress on well-being (Javaid et al., 2023), and this can also effectuate the same preventive role in displaced



women in this sample through the use of kinship and community support that helps them to balance their psychology amid challenges of identity.

These social resources buffer female against identity struggles while providing relational scaffolding for flourishing. Males network, on the other hand, tied to territorial governance and economic cooperation are fragmented by displacement, exposing them to greater identity struggles and isolation (Al-Soleiman et al., 2021).

For the third hypothesis, the role of Age is examined. Younger IDPs reported fewer identity struggles but paradoxically low levels life satisfaction than older. This shows opposing developmental systems. Younger IDPs who came of age during or after displacement form identities within existing realities rather than experiencing biographical rupture, reducing explicit identity conflict (Ochi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, youth in prolonged displacement are confronted with intense doubt regarding schooling, jobs, and forthcoming applications developmental work, the primary organizing activity in the creation of significance, which weakens a sense of purpose and hope regardless of the flexibility of identity (Puffer et al., 2022). Moreover, the well-being of young adults is multidimensional and extends beyond psychological symptom reduction (Javaid et al., 2024).

On the other hand, some of the older IDPs despite being weighed down by the memory of the loss of land seem to have resorted to developed coping mechanisms and spiritual system to reconstruct meaning and have experienced greater satisfaction out of life (Whitbourne and Skultety, 2006). Their better health is an indicator of effective identity assimilation that converts loss into strength (Mitchell et al., 2020). This age-based trend supports the necessity of developmentally specific interventions: young IDPs need the opportunities to develop prospective career trajectories to an education and work, whereas old people can be served by narrative methods that incorporate the experience of displacement into the chronologically coherent life narratives.

The fourth hypothesis that made an expected association between elevated education levels and reduced identity struggles and increased life satisfaction was supported completely. Educated respondents had much less identity struggle and higher life satisfaction when compared to uneducated respondents, and education proved to be a reliable protective factor regardless of the psychological outcomes (Porter and Haslam, 2005).

Education also safeguards the identity struggles by allowing them to situate their experiences of displacement in larger historical and political narratives instead of perceiving that experience as a failure in an individual capacity (Ivlevs, 2019). The positive correlation between education and flourishing is a product of several processes: improved problem-solving abilities, increased access to more diverse social networks, and improved internal locus of control and future orientation. Through these cognitive and social resources one is able to engage in purposeful activity, make social contributions and meaningful activity, which are the most important elements of flourishing (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2010; Lochner, 2011). The positive correlation coefficient of education and life satisfaction proves that education is one of the strongest predictors of subjective well-being in different populations (Zimmerman and Iwanicki, 2014).



Taken together, these findings prove education to be a multifaceted psychological tool that can maintain identity coherence, develop and increase satisfaction with life amongst internally displaced individuals (Esen & Togrul, 2025).

These results prove that identity and life satisfaction cannot be perceived without structural resources and social positioning. The overlap of such strong identity-life-satisfaction relationships with such strong demographic effects demonstrate that demographically specific versions of Social Identity Theory: identity continuity is important everywhere, but what and how it produces the psychological payoffs, varies depending on gender, developmental phase and educational capital (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Haslam et al., 2009). The approaches should be gender-sensitive, developmentally valid, and education-based and utilize the current group identities and broaden beneficial roles.

Limitations and Suggestions

Cross-sectional design does not allow to make a causal inference, longitudinal studies on dynamics between identity struggles and life satisfaction, across displacement trajectories would be required to determine the precedence in time and follow changes in psychological dynamics. The self-report measures bring about shared method variance and future research should bring into consideration behavioral indicators, physiological measures and multi-informant data to enhance methodological rigor. The generalizability is restricted to Waziristan IDPs; comparative studies under various displacement situations with different cultural background, conflict history and resettlement conditions would help to explain the universal and context-specific psychological mechanisms.

Future studies should consider the duration of displacement, the legal status, the receptivity of the host community, and the availability of livelihood opportunities as mediators of the identity-life satisfaction relationships. The use of qualitative inquiry (narrative and phenomenological) has the potential to enlighten lived experience, meaning-making and cultural-spiritual resources that might be missing in quantitative measurement. There is an urgent need to test the hypothesis of intervention research that programs to strengthen the in-group identification and should improve education access that can cause significant improvements in life satisfaction.

Policy Implications and Recommendations for the Stakeholders

The results of the present study have grave implications to the government policy and psychosocial support program in displacement situations. Although the psychological resilience has been observed among the Waziristan IDPs, sustainable well-being is achieved through multispectral interventions to both material and psychological need. International organizations and the governments of countries should focus on restoration of livelihood and economic empowerment of the displaced. The protective power of education as on identity, prosperity, and contentment with life is so great that it is essential to provide special financial assistance that allows further schooling, vocational training, and mastering of skills. Governments are recommended to set up available, culturally informed mental and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services which are integrated in communities and health systems. The services must shift away to discuss trauma-based interventions and explicitly build flourishing by beginning with meaning-based



interventions, community engagement programs, as well as strengths-based interventions that leverage the existing group identities and social networks.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, A. S. (1980). *Pukhtun economy and society: Traditional structure and economic development in a tribal society*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. <https://archive.org/details/pukhtuneconomys0000ahme>
- Al-Soleiman, A., Ruffieux, C., Spencer, B., & Grassen, H. (2021). Measuring symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression among Syrian adult refugees: A psychometric evaluation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9), 4988. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094988>
- Bagci, S. C., & Canpolat, E. (2020). Emotion regulation strategies as mediators between resilience to radicalization and life satisfaction among Syrian refugees. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 51(2), 85–92. <https://journals.pan.pl/Content/122984>
- Barieva, F., Giammusso, I., Murayama, K., & Gebauer, J. E. (2024). A cross-culturally valid affiliation motivation scale: Psychometric properties across six cultures. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 106(4), 430–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2023.2254034>
- Brun, C. (2003). Local citizens or internally displaced persons? Dilemmas of long-term displacement in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(4), 376–397. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/16.4.376>
- Crocetti, E., Albarello, F., Meeus, W., & Rubini, M. (2022). Identities: A developmental social-psychological perspective. *European Journal of Development Psychology*, 20(4), 544–564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2022.2107988>
- Cutler, D. M., & Lleras-Muney, A. (2010). Understanding differences in health behaviors by education. *Journal of Health Economics*, 29(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2009.10.003>
- Dakuyo, A. (2025). Displaced youth and identity formation: Navigating cultural adaptation and developmental challenges. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 28(1), 45–62.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1), 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa4901_13
- Dinç, M. A., & Yildirim, M. (2023). Gender differences in mental health and well-being among forcibly displaced populations: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 24(3), 1567–1582. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380211054473>
- du Plooy, D. R., Lyons, A., & Kashima, E. S. (2019). Social capital and the well-being of migrants in Australia. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(8), 2547–2565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-0069-1>
- Egan, S. K., & Perry, D. G. (2001). Gender identity: A multidimensional analysis with implications for psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(4), 451–463. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.37.4.451>
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Esen, E., & Togrul, S. (2025). The role of education in occupational identity maintenance among displaced professionals. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 102, 103054. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2024.103054>
- FDMA, Government of Pakistan. (2016). *FATA disaster management authority annual report 2016*. Government of Pakistan.



- Gee, J. P. (2000). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*, 25, 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167322>
- Gul, H. (2023). Life satisfaction among Afghan refugees in Eastern Turkey: The role of migration-related factors. *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 234–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2022.2089456>
- Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., Postmes, T., & Haslam, C. (2009). Social identity, health and well-being: An emerging agenda for applied psychology. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 58(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00379.x>
- IDMC. (2024). *2025 Global report on internal displacement*. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2025/>
- Ivlevs, A. (2019). Education and the subjective wellbeing of economically active individuals in transition countries. *Economics of Transition and Institutional Change*, 27(2), 369–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecot.12199>
- Ivlevs, A., & Veliziotis, M. (2018). Beyond conflict: Long-term labour market integration of internally displaced persons in post-socialist countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 105, 131–146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.12.004>
- Khan, I., & Qaisar, F. Z. (2014). Women, work and care: Understanding women's multiple roles and their impact on well-being in the context of cities. *Gender & Development*, 22(3), 471–485. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2014.951934>
- Kiang, L., Yip, T., Gonzales-Backen, M., Witkow, M., & Fuligni, A. J. (2006). Ethnic identity and the daily psychological well-being of adolescents from Mexican and Chinese backgrounds. *Child Development*, 77(5), 1338–1350. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00938.x>
- Krieger, N. (2003). Genders, sexes, and health: What are the connections—and why does it matter? *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 32(4), 652–657. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyg156>
- Latif, A., & Musarrat, R. (2012). FATA: History and challenges. *Journal of Political Studies*, 19(1), 137–150.
- Leach, C. W., van Zomeren, M., Zebel, S., Vliek, M. L. W., Pennekamp, S. F., Doosje, B., Ouwerkerk, J. W., & Spears, R. (2008). Group-level self-definition and self-investment: A hierarchical (multicomponent) model of in-group identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(1), 144–165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.1.144>
- Lochner, L. (2011). Non-production benefits of education: Crime, health, and good citizenship. In E. A. Hanushek, S. Machin, & L. Woessmann (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of education* (Vol. 4, pp. 183–282). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-53444-6.00002-X>
- Loppezafra, E., & Gartzia, L. (2019). Gender differences in psychological well-being: The role of gender role orientation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 1491. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01491>
- Marcia, J. E. (1980). Identity in adolescence. In J. Adelson (Ed.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology* (pp. 159–187). John Wiley & Sons.
- Milovanska-Farrington, S., & Farrington, S. M. (2021). Life satisfaction determinants and methodological challenges. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 22(8), 3543–3564. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-021-00387-w>



- Mitchell, L. L., Shamaskin-Garroway, A. M., & Finlay, J. M. (2020). Life changes, continuity, and identity among older adults. *The Gerontologist*, 60(5), 908–918. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz164>
- Mroczek, D. K., & Kolarz, C. M. (1998). The effect of age on positive and negative affect: A developmental perspective on happiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(5), 1333–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.5.1333>
- Mujeeb, A. (2015). *Psychological distress among internally displaced persons: A study of Jalozai camp* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Peshawar.
- Myers, D. G. (1992). *The pursuit of happiness: Who is happy—and why*. William Morrow and Company.
- Nair, K. S., & Gaither, C. A. (1999). Effects of work, non-work, and role conflict on the overall life satisfaction of pharmacy faculty. *Journal of Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, 16(1), 1–12.
- Nemiro, A., Khyzhniak, O., & Lysak, L. (2022). Education as compensatory capital for internally displaced persons: Evidence from conflict zones. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 89, 102545. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102545>
- O'Connor, M., Sanson, A., Toumbourou, J. W., Norrish, J., & Olsson, C. A. (2012). Does positive mental health in adolescence longitudinally predict healthy transitions in young adulthood? *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 18(1), 177–194. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9723-3>
- Ochi, M., Isumi, A., & Fujiwara, T. (2024). Identity formation challenges among displaced adolescents and young adults. *Adolescent Research Review*, 9(1), 89–105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/40894-023-00234-5>
- Peng, C., Burr, J. A., & Kim, J. (2024). Life disruption and identity continuity in older adults: Implications for well-being. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 79(2), gbad145. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbad145>
- Phinney, J. S. (2008). Bridging identities and disciplines: Advances and challenges in understanding multiple identities. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2008(120), 97–109. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.218>
- Porter, M., & Haslam, N. (2005). Predisplacement and postdisplacement factors associated with mental health of refugees and internally displaced persons: A meta-analysis. *JAMA*, 294(5), 602–612. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.294.5.602>
- Puffer, E. S., Green, E. P., Chase, R. M., Sim, A. L., Zayzay, J., Friis, E., Garcia-Rolland, E., & Boone, L. (2022). Estimating the mental health burden in an HIV-positive cohort of adolescents and young adults in Liberia. *AIDS Care*, 27(10), 1240–1247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2015.1096892>
- Ross, C. E., & Mirowsky, J. (2011). The interaction of personal and parental education on health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72(4), 591–599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2010.11.028>
- Saqib, A., & Nareen, S. (2015). Psychological impact of military-led internal displacement: A study of North Waziristan IDPs. *Journal of Pakistan Psychiatric Society*, 12(2), 45–51.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>
- Smeeke, A., Verkuyten, M., Çelebi, E., Acartürk, C., & Onkun, S. (2017). Social identity continuity and mental health among Syrian refugees in Turkey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52(10), 1317–1324. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-017-1424-7>



- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tesch-Römer, C., Motel-Klingebiel, A., & Tomasik, M. J. (2008). Gender differences in subjective well-being: Comparing societies with respect to gender equality. *Social Indicators Research*, 85(2), 329–349. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9133-3>
- United Nations. (1998). *Guiding principles on internal displacement*. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/idps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html>
- Vignoles, V. L., Schwartz, S. J., & Luyckx, K. (2011). Introduction: Toward an integrative view of identity. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 1–27). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_1
- Whitbourne, S. K., & Skultety, K. M. (2006). Aging and identity: How women face later life transitions. In V. H. Bedford & B. F. Turner (Eds.), *Men in relationships: A new look from a life course perspective* (pp. 169–187). Springer.
- Willen, S. S., Knipper, M., Abadía-Barrero, C. E., & Davidovitch, N. (2021). Syndemic vulnerability and the right to health. *The Lancet*, 389(10072), 964–977. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)30261-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)30261-1)
- Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (2002). A cross-cultural analysis of the behavior of women and men: Implications for the origins of sex differences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(5), 699–727. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.699>
- World Health Organization. (2018). *Gender and health*. WHO. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>
- Zeb, R. (2011). Military operations in FATA and PATA: Implications for Pakistan. *Strategic Studies*, 31(4), 129–153.
- Zimmerman, M. A., & Iwanicki, S. (2014). Promoting psychological empowerment among youth: The role of community resources and individual assets. In Y. Chen (Ed.), *Handbook of resilience in children* (2nd ed., pp. 311–329). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3661-4_18