



Sense of Community and Conflict-induced Displacement: A Study among Iraqi IDPs in Camps

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Abstract

This paper examines how experiences of forced displacement impact Sense of Community (SOC). SOC captures how community members feel towards the community, through four elements: 'membership,' 'influence,' 'needs fulfilment,' and 'shared emotional connection'. Drawing on original data collected through a survey of 89 Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) hosted in camps and displaced as a result of the Islamic State (IS) crisis, this study explores changes in overall SOC levels as well as in its four elements by using the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS). The findings show a universal decrease in SOC levels during displacement, yet this decrease is not uniform across demographic groups. Significant variations appear during displacement that were not observable before. Men compared to women felt a stronger decrease in SOC due to the loss of livelihoods and decision-making authority during which challenge the traditional role of men as main decision-makers in the community and as families' breadwinners. Similarly, the elderly compared to the young, the better educated compared to those with lesser degrees, and the farmers compared to other professions have experienced relatively severer drops in SOC scores in addition to those who cannot provide for the basic needs of their families during displacement. On the other hand, the shared experience of forced displacement seems to have acted as a bonding event among community members, as shown by the 'shared emotional connection' element of SOC becoming the most preponderant dimension during displacement.

Keywords

Sense of community (SOC), Iraq, IDPs, Islamic State, community belonging

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Introduction

Conflict-induced displacement might affect the individual's feeling of belonging to the community. When one gets displaced, it does more than adding physical distance to their location and peers. Displacement challenges the displaced community member's capacity to influence community decisions, to actively participate as a full-fledged member in community affairs, to engage in community relations through the set of common values and norms, and to participate in shared events, which defines how individuals experience Sense of Community (SOC). The loss of income linked to the displacement and the conflict-related infrastructural damage also leads to a reduction of the material means individuals can contribute to, and invest in, the community. At the same time, high levels of material damage and service disruption as a result of conflict inhibits the ability of the community to fulfil its members' needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

While damage to and absence from the community of origin might decrease the SOC experienced by community members toward its community of origin, the shared experience of conflict and forced displacement among community members might serve as a deep bonding event that reinforces SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Feelings of nostalgia toward the community of origin are commonly felt by internally displaced persons (IDP) as a result of the disruption of identity caused by the experiences of forced displacement (Milligan, 2003). Faced by difficulties to adapt to a new environment, IDPs tend to reinforce their shared set of community norms and traditions (Majidi & Hennion, 2014). The longing for the community and its known norms might act as a catalyst toward higher levels of SOC. This two-way dynamic, with displacement playing in favor of and against community members' feelings toward its community of origin, raises important questions on the level of SOC experienced by forcibly displaced community members in fragile contexts.

The main research question of this study is whether forced displacement weakens or strengthens overall SOC and each of its four elements, as well as how these variations differ across demographic groups. Does the length of displacement, or dependency in terms of income, affect the SOC felt for the community of origin? The paper aims to contribute to the research of SOC among population groups facing a vulnerable situation, by looking at an often-neglected group: persons internally displaced due to conflict, commonly referred to as IDPs. It does so by looking at the SOC among Iraqi IDPs living in camp settings, displaced as a result of the Islamic State (IS) conflict in Iraq.

Our sample consists of Iraqi IDPs from Anbar forcibly displaced due to the 2014–2017 IS conflict who were hosted in camp settings at the time of data collection. Anbar is a largely agricultural governorate in the western part of the country, the vast majority of the population of which was displaced at some point between 2014 to 2017 due to the IS-related conflict, while more than 200 000 of whom remained displaced at the time of data collection in February 2019 (IOM Iraq, 2020). The SOC scores of the respondents referring to before and during displacement have been collected together with relevant demographic and situational information utilizing the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) developed by Peterson et al. (2008) and based on the McMillan & Chavis SOC theory (1986) to assess the four elements of SOC: 'membership,' 'needs fulfilment,' 'influence,' and 'shared emotional connection.'

The next chapter provides a literature review on SOC. It is followed by a chapter on the Iraqi context including the advance of IS and the related displacement crisis which ensued. The methodology and the characteristics of the sample are revealed next, proceeded? by the findings where we discuss differences in SOC before and during displacement as well as between demographic groups. The article finishes with a conclusion covering the impact of conflict-affected displacement on SOC.

Literature review

Sense of Community, conceptualized by McMillan & Chavis (1986:9) as the “feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together,” builds upon four elements: ‘membership,’ ‘needs fulfilment,’ ‘influence,’ and ‘shared emotional connection.’ ‘Membership’ is the sense of belonging and relating to one’s community. ‘Influence’ refers to the individual’s capacity to have a say on what the community does as well as on the capacity of the community to influence the individual and make it conform. ‘Fulfilment of needs’ relates to the material and non-material rewards the individual benefits from by being part of the community. ‘Shared emotional connection’ is the community’s shared past, built upon bonding events, that brings the community together (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Since its conceptualization within community psychology by McMillan & Chavis in 1986, SOC theory has been expanded and integrated into a vast array of disciplines, including migration studies. The experience of a voluntary migrant might be quite different from that of a displaced person, though their presence in a foreign setting is similar. For example, studies looked at SOC among migrant communities and satisfaction with life in comparison to their host communities (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2013, Babieri & Zani, 2015), variations of SOC among migrants depending on the time spent in their host communities (Maya-Jariego & Armitage, 2007), the association of SOC with feelings of marginalization and integration (Mannarini et al., 2018), and the link between SOC and successful aging among elderly migrants (Li et al., 2014).

Sense of Community has also been explored in relation to conflict or its aftermath. For example, Brodsky (2009) explored SOC among supporters of a women’s organization in Afghanistan. The negative SOC felt toward the community partially explained the decision of its members to join the organization for which they felt a positive SOC, despite the challenges and dangers that joining the organization implied. Gómez & Vázquez (2015), when analyzing individual participation to armed groups carrying out violent extremist activities, suggested that individuals are more willing to act in defense of a group and undertake high-risk activities when the boundaries between the person and group become blurred, as reflected in the ‘membership’ element of SOC.

Despite the growing body of literature on SOC and migration, and on SOC and conflict-affected populations, the study of SOC among IDPs remains underexplored. Studying communities in the aftermath of conflict might be challenging in many ways due to access and security constraints, the difficulty to find a homogenous sample to survey, as well as ethical considerations to ensure the well-being and anonymity of the respondents. On the other hand, the sheer safety of displaced persons does not necessarily translate into belonging and familiarity. In a recent study on Yazidi IDPs in Northern Iraq, 94% of respondents stated that they felt safe at their current location, while only 69% of them considered their current place of residence their home (Pham et al., 2021). As stated by Sonn et al. (1999: 206), it is in the foundation of community psychology to try researching and addressing those groups in more vulnerable situations for the

guiding reason that “if people are integrated into networks in which they can experience belongingness, have meaningful roles and relationships, they will be less likely to experience alienation. This, in turn, would promote psychological well-being and quality of life.” Membership to a refugee group can be stigmatic, but it can also lead to positive outcomes in line with the social cure perspective as mentioned by Alfarhli & Drury (2018) in their analysis of mutual support among Syrian refugees in Jordan. The influx of refugees or displaced persons to a locality, on the other hand, can depress the SOC among the host community as highlighted by Alhusban et al. (2019) in the example of the Jordanian city of Al Mafraq.

Previous studies have emphasized the link between higher scores in SOC scales and well-being. For example, Hombrados-Henrietta et al. (2013), looking at levels of life satisfaction among migrants and the native population, showed a positive association between SOC and well-being, also pointed out in studies on migrants (Davidson & Cotter 1991; Farrell et al., 2004) and among the general population (Baker & Palmer, 2006; Kutek et al., 2011) separately. Studies on the SOC of IDPs, though, are rather rare which will be one of the contributions of the present paper.

Iraqi context: the advance of IS and the ensuing displacement crisis

The violent advance of IS to Iraq’s territory and ensuing military campaign to retake IS-controlled areas has been the latest in the waves of conflict Iraq has experienced since 2003. Prior to 2003, Iraq was ruled by an autocratic regime led by Saddam Hussein characterized by being highly reliant on Arab Sunni tribal loyalties (Barak 2007). The power-sharing system dominated by the Sunni minority collapsed following the US-led military campaign against Saddam’s regime (Mueller, 2005). The security vacuum that followed the military campaign allowed for a growing Sunni insurgency to emerge. Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) was established in this context, first welcomed by some of the Sunni tribes of Anbar (Zelin, 2014). However, tension soon emerged between AQI and the Sunni tribes due to AQI’s imposition of a rigid Salafi-oriented observance of religion and moral conduct (Phillips, 2009), as well as differences in goals. Sunni leaders, threatened by AQI, did not participate in the political process to appoint an Interim Iraq Government, boycotting the 2005 parliamentary elections, which led to Sunni groups being excluded from drafting the new Iraqi constitution (McClure, 2010). Sunni tribal leaders then partnered with US forces to regain power, and to expel AQI from their territory (Phillips, 2009).

Poor results in the 2009 provincial elections by Sunni candidates due to fragmentation within the traditional Sunni coalition parties, and the Sunni political aspirations curtailed in the 2010 parliamentary elections, when several election slates of prominent Sunni candidates were invalidated for their alleged support of Baathism. This added to a growing sense of discontent and resentment among the Sunni population of Iraq (Katzman, 2009). At the same time, the Islamic State, which derived from AQI, re-organized. Growing tension between the Sunni population and a dysfunctional Iraqi government benefited the growth of the group (Hashim, 2014).

Sunni resentment exploded in 2013 with large demonstrations held across Sunni majority governorates with Anbar taking a central role, accusing the government of political marginalization and discriminatory practices (Schweitzer, 2016). The violent crackdown of the protests and the arrest of prominent tribal leaders and MPs was the turning point for Sunni tribal forces to allow the initial expansion of IS into their territory (Al Arabiya News, 2014; Al-Qarawee 2014). The Iraqi Security Forces, ill-trained and poorly equipped, withdrew posing little resistance to the group’s advance (IOM Iraq, 2017).

Both the advance of the self-proclaimed IS and the subsequent four-year military campaign to dislodge the group caused one of the largest waves of internal displacement Iraq has ever seen.

Approximately 15% of Iraq's total population, 6 million people, were internally displaced as a result of the crisis. Anbar, the largest governorate of Iraq in terms of area, was disproportionately affected; more than 1.5 million people out of an estimated population of 1.7 million were displaced at some point between 2014 to 2017 due to the IS-related conflict. Between January to May of 2014, 480 000 Iraqis had fled the group. By the end of 2014, the number of IDPs from Anbar had reached 576 000 individuals. One year later, by December 2015, the number had increased to almost 1.5 million people, with more than half a million of them displaced within the same governorate (IOM Iraq, 2018a). By the time IS was officially defeated in December 2017, 400 000 Anbaris were still in displacement, with 71 700 of them hosted in camps throughout Anbar. At the time of data collection, February 2019, almost 200 000 people from Anbar remained displaced, with 30 000 persons hosted in camps (IOM Iraq, 2020). Some IDPs were facing a legal challenge referred to as a 'blocked return' whereby a displaced family had not yet received their security clearance from the relevant law enforcement bodies.

As characteristic of Arab Middle Eastern social systems, the social pattern in Anbar communities can be defined as a patriarchal kin contract in which kinship relates to the tribe (Joseph, 1993). The paternal tribal lineage defines identity and status within the community (Gospodinov, 2015).

Methodology

Sampling and fieldwork

A quantitative survey was administered to a target sample of 100 respondents of Iraqi citizens displaced to two IDP camps located in Anbar governorate: Amariyat al Fallujah (AAF) camp and Habaniya Tourist City (HTC) camp. 103 interviews were conducted in total, 14 of them excluded from the analysis as the respondents were not regularly residing in their communities of origin right before their displacement.¹ Hence, the remaining sample comprised of 89 IDPs.² The main tool of data collection has been the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) developed by Peterson et al. (2008), based on the McMillan & Chavis SOC theory (1986). Through an eight-item scale, four elements were measured: 'membership,' 'needs fulfilment,' 'influence,' and 'shared emotional connection.' Respondents were asked about their SOC referring to two points in time: before displacement (BD) and at the time of data collection in camp settings of Anbar, referred to as during displacement (DD).

Respondents in the survey were asked about their SOC toward their community of origin referring to two points in time: before displacement and at the time of data collection. We are aware of certain caveats regarding retroactive recall. However, since it is not possible to predict in advance which communities and which community members will be exposed to forced

¹ Respondents who were not residing in the community of origin before displacement were excluded from the analysis, since the aim of the study is to see variations in the SOC experienced toward the community of origin due to the IS conflict-related displacement.

² Data for this study comes from a larger cross-sectional survey conducted on a sample of 820 internally displaced adult individuals across different areas of Iraq administered in February of 2019. The survey tool incorporated two main modules: a set of socio-economic and demographic questions, including perceptions of displacement and conflict-related issues, and a set of mental health and psychological wellbeing scales from the psychology field. The data of the present paper was generated by an additional module on SOC, added in between the two other survey modules, as advised by the lead author. The SOC module was only administered to the respondents residing in camp settings in Anbar. Further information on the parent study conducted by RWG Iraq, Social Inquiry, and IOM Iraq can be found in Returns Working Group (2019). Psychosocial Dimensions of Displacement. Prevalence of Mental Health Outcomes and related stressors among IDPs in Iraq.

displacement, a panel study would be impossible to conduct. Hence, respondents were asked to recall their SOC prior to displacement. Despite being widely used in social science surveys, retrospective questions might add bias to responses given. For instance, answers might be affected by the respondents' attempt to be consistent over time, but also by inaccurate recollection of memories. To mitigate these effects specific and subjective time references regarding the time of displacement such as 'before your displacement' and 'now while you are displaced' were included in the wording of each set of questions (Van Der Vaart, 1995). Participation to the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Verbal consent was obtained before any questions were asked to the participants. No personal identifiable information was collected. The survey was administered by the IOM field research team, composed by four enumerators balanced in terms of gender with 2 female and 2 male field enumerators, and one team leader, who conducted data collection in February 2019 overseen by the lead author.

Enumerators adhered to cultural sensitivity norms of interviewing, such as female interviews being conducted by female enumerators and male interviews by male data collectors. No SOC instrument, to our best knowledge, has been developed specific to the Iraqi context, hence, we opted to use the standard scale of SOC translated to the Iraqi dialect, administered by field enumerators originating from the same province of that of the respondents.

Characteristics of the sample

Table 1 briefly summarizes the demographics of the sample. Seventy nine percent of respondents were originally from Anbar and 21% from the bordering governorate of Babylon. All of them identified as Arab Sunni. 55% of respondents were male and 45% female. Almost two thirds of the sample (65%) was over 40 while a similar proportion of respondents (64%) had children of school age. 62% of respondents had only received schooling up to elementary (including the illiterates); and more than half (55%) were engaged in agriculture as their main source of income before displacement.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	49	55.1
	Female	40	44.9
Age group	40 or above	58	65.2
	Under 40	31	34.8
Education Level	Illiterate to elementary	56	62.9
	Secondary and up	33	37.1
Has school-age children	Yes	64	64.0
	No	36	36.0
Source of Income BD (Farmers vs non-farmers)	Farmers	49	55.1
	Other (all non-farmers)	40	44.9
Source of income DD (own income vs dependent)	Dependent	56	62.9
	Own income	33	37.1
Respondent able to provide for the basic needs of his/her family	Yes	43	48.3
	No	46	51.7
Duration of Displacement	More than 3 years	67	75.3
	3 years or less	22	24.7

As per their current situation in displacement, three-quarters of the respondents (75%) were in a situation of protracted displacement, as they had been in displacement for more than three years; and more than six in ten respondents were dependent on financial support to survive (63%).

The families of half of the respondents (52%) had not been able to provide for their basic needs for the previous three months, such as housing, health care, education, food and water, and electricity, which might explain why they remain in camps as they are not able to afford the cost associated with residing outside the camps.

Findings and discussion

Intentions and expectations

Despite the significant level of blocked returns, the cases where IDPs do not possess the required security clearance given by security actors to leave their displacement location or to re-enter their area of origin, and the concerns among IDPs linked to the return to divided communities in the aftermath of IS, when asked about their family's preference for a future place of residence in the near future, returning to their place of origin was the preferred option to resolve their displacement situation (62%) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Intentions and Expectations

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Future Intention to end displacement	Return	55	61,8
	Locally integrate	4	4,5
	Move to other location in Iraq	9	10,1
	Don't know	21	23,6
Belonging to current place	Strongly Agree	1	1,1
	Agree	15	16,9
	Neither nor	19	21,3
	Disagree	23	25,8
	Strongly disagree	31	34,8
Belonging to place of origin	Strongly Agree	33	37,1
	Agree	36	40,4
	Neither nor	15	16,9
	Disagree	4	4,5
	Strongly disagree	1	1,1
Prospects of findings a good source of income in the event of return	Agree	47	52,8
	Disagree	42	47,2
Prospects of adequate schooling upon return	Agree	55	61,8
	Disagree	34	38,2

Apart from the feeling of belonging toward their places of origin, the respondents were also asked if they felt any belonging to their current place of displacement, that is, the respective camps they were residing during the interview: 6 out of 10 respondents disagreed. When asked if the respondents belonged to their place of origin, 77% strongly agreed or moderately agreed while only 22% strongly or moderately disagreed or remained neutral in their answer. Hence, despite their ongoing displacement situation, the majority of IDPs interviewed have expressed continued emotional affiliation to their origin community.

Differences in SOC before and during displacement

As mentioned above, we have utilized the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) developed by Peterson et al. (2008), which is an eight-item scale with a minimum value of 1 and a maximum value of 5 for each item, comprising four elements, namely 'membership,' 'influence,' 'needs fulfilment,' and 'shared emotional connection.' Mean scores of the elements as well as overall SOC are presented in Table 3 according to demographic and situational variables.

Table 3 SOC mean scores (overall and elements) by demographics before displacement (BD) and during displacement (DD)

		Overall SOC		Needs Fulfillment		Membership		Influence		Shared Emotional Connection	
		BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD
Full sample		4.00	2.99	4.06	2.92	4.04	3.06	3.87	2.92	4.03	3.07
Gender	Male	3.96	2.70	4.09	2.52	4.01	2.82	3.74	2.65	3.98	2.81
	Female	4.05	3.35	4.03	3.41	4.08	3.35	4.01	3.24	4.09	3.39
Age	40 or above	4.00	2.91	4.06	2.79	4.02	2.99	3.89	2.84	4.05	2.99
	Under 40	3.99	3.15	4.06	3.16	4.08	3.18	3.82	3.05	3.98	3.21
Education	Illiterate to elementary	3.98	3.08	4.02	3.05	4.01	3.13	3.88	2.96	4.01	3.16
	Secondary and up	4.03	2.84	4.14	2.70	4.09	2.94	3.85	2.83	4.06	2.91
Has school-age children	Yes	3.98	2.91	4.05	2.77	4.04	3.01	3.82	2.88	4.00	2.98
	No	4.04	3.13	4.08	3.19	4.05	3.14	3.94	2.98	4.08	3.22
Source of income BD (Farmers vs non-farmers)	Farmers	3.98	2.85	4.09	2.70	4.01	2.98	3.83	2.83	4.00	2.91
	Other (all non-farmers)	4.02	3.16	4.03	3.19	4.08	3.15	3.91	3.03	4.06	3.26
Source of income DD (own income vs dependent)	Dependent	3.99	2.98	4.09	2.90	4.04	3.06	3.82	2.90	3.99	3.07
	Own income	4.02	3.00	4.02	2.95	4.03	3.05	3.94	2.94	4.09	3.06
Respondent able to provide for the basic needs of his/her family	Yes	4.10	3.28	4.10	3.30	4.15	3.24	4.07	3.22	4.09	3.35
	No	3.90	2.72	4.02	2.57	3.93	2.88	3.67	2.63	3.97	2.80
Duration of displacement	More than 3 years	4.04	2.98	4.11	2.85	4.06	3.06	3.91	2.91	4.07	3.09
	3 years or less	3.88	3.03	3.91	3.14	3.98	3.05	3.73	2.93	3.89	3.00

Table 4 The drop of SOC from before displacement (BD) to during displacement (DD) within each demographic (paired samples t-tests comparing BD to DD)

		Overall SOC		Needs Fulfillment		Membership		Influence		Shared Emotional Connection	
		BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD
Full sample		-1.01**		-1.14**		-0.98**		-0.95**		-0.96**	
Gender	Male	-1.26**		-1.57**		-1.19**		-1.09**		-1.17**	
	Female	-0.70**		-0.61**		-0.73**		-0.76**		-0.70**	
Age	40 or above	-1.10**		-1.27**		-1.03**		-1.04**		-1.06**	
	Under 40	-0.84**		-0.90**		-0.90**		-0.77**		-0.77**	
Education	Illiterate to elementary	-0.90**		-0.96**		-0.88**		-0.91**		-0.85**	
	Secondary and up	-1.19**		-1.44**		-1.15**		-1.02**		-1.15**	
Has school-age children	Yes	-1.07**		-1.28**		-1.03**		-0.95**		-1.02**	
	No	-0.90**		-0.89**		-0.91**		-0.95**		-0.86**	
Source of income BD (Farmers vs non-farmers)	Farmers	-1.13**		-1.39**		-1.03**		-1.00**		-1.09**	
	Other (all non-farmers)	-0.86**		-0.84**		-0.93**		-0.89**		-0.80**	
Source of income DD (own income vs dependent)	Dependent	-1.00**		-1.19**		-0.98**		-0.92**		-0.92**	
	Own income	-1.02**		-1.06**		-0.98**		-1.00**		-1.03**	
Respondent able to provide for the basic needs of his/her family	Yes	-0.83**		-0.80**		-0.91**		-0.85**		-0.74**	
	No	-1.18**		-1.46**		-1.05**		-1.04**		-1.16**	
Duration of displacement	More than 3 years	-1.06**		-1.26**		-1.00**		-1.00**		-0.99**	
	3 years or less	-0.85**		-0.77**		-0.93**		-0.80**		-0.89**	

**: significant ($p < 0.01$)

To compare before displacement (BD) and during displacement (DD) scores, paired samples t-tests were conducted comparing overall SOC scores and each of its four elements mentioned above for every demographic group, the results of which are indicated in Table 4. As expected, the findings of the paired samples t-tests show that – without exception – SOC scores for all four elements, as well as overall, have fallen significantly ($p < 0.01$) during displacement within all demographic and situational categories. This is an expected result. These declines, while statistically significant, occurred at differing degrees for each of the elements as well as within several demographic and situational categories. As a result, the ranking of elements in terms of scores has changed during displacement. Prior to displacement, for the full sample, ‘needs fulfilment’ (4.06) was the element with the highest score, closely followed by ‘membership’ (4.04) and ‘shared emotional connection’ (4.03). The element of SOC before displacement with the lowest score was ‘influence’ (3.87) while the overall SOC score was 4.00. Among most demographic groups, SOC scores (overall and elements) before displacement hovered around 4, while none but a single significant difference could be observed between demographic categories (indicated in Table 5 and further elaborated below in the next sub-section).

As a result of displacement, the overall SOC toward their community of origin dropped from 4.00 to 2.99. ‘Shared emotional connection’ became the element which ended up with the highest score (3.07), followed by ‘membership’ (3.06). ‘Needs fulfilment’ and ‘influence’ both scored 2.92. ‘Needs fulfilment,’ it appears, was the element which suffered the highest drop in value (-1.14 points), followed by ‘membership’ (-0.98), ‘shared emotional connection’ (-0.96), and ‘influence’ (-0.95). This drop in ‘needs fulfilment’ might relate to the high levels of destruction of infrastructure mentioned below, as well as the dire economic situation in the communities of origin of the respondents in the aftermath of the campaign by the Iraqi Army to retake the areas previously held by IS. An assessment conducted by IOM Iraq in 2018 a few months prior to the data collection for this study, identified the top basic needs among returnees to Anbar governorate as access to health services, followed by access to drinking water, and access to education. Access to employment and livelihood opportunities, on the other hand, were the top recovery needs among returnees to Anbar (IOM Iraq, 2018b).^{3,4} Thus, IDPs might correctly have assumed that their community has lost its ability to provide for their needs. In fact, 42% of respondents did not expect to have a good source of income in the event of their return (Table 2). Also, almost 4 in 10 respondents (38%) in the sample did not expect to find adequate schooling for their children (Table 2).

During displacement, ‘shared emotional connection’ emerged as the element of SOC with the highest score. As explained by McMillan & Chavis (1986:14) in their foundational article on SOC theory, “the more important the shared event is to those involved, the greater the community bond. For example, there appears to be a tremendous bonding among people who experience a crisis together,” therefore the experiences of conflict and displacement the IDPs went through could have acted as a bonding event reinforcing their ‘shared emotional connection’ toward their communities. Nostalgia toward the communities of origin, which Milligan (2003) links to

³ IOM Iraq, Integrated Location Assessment (ILA-III) estimates that access to employment and livelihood opportunities was a priority need in 198 locations of Anbar out of 200 locations assessed, where 204,715 returnee families lived at the time of the data collection. It was the top recovery need at governorate level. The Integrated Location Assessment is a yearly needs assessment at location level conducted by IOM Iraq assessing conditions in areas of displacement and/or areas of return.

⁴ Basic needs are those associated to access to food, basic infrastructure such as electricity and water, and basic services, including schooling and health care. Recovery needs are those associated to the restart of economic and social activity in conflict-affected areas.

experiences of forced displacement, could also have played a role in enhancing community sentiment which is part of the ‘shared emotional connection’ element of SOC.

Realignment of SOC components during displacement

After describing the changes across elements before and during the displacement above, we have also looked at the differences between demographic and situational categories within each timeframe (BD and DD) separately. It is important to hone into these differences as the decrease in SOC levels within all groups (for overall SOC scores as well as for all its four elements) during displacement was universal but not uniform across demographic and situational categories. Whereas before displacement, there were nothing but a single statistically significant difference across demographic groups in overall SOC scores and its elements. During displacement, various demographic groups started to significantly differ in their SOC scores, as shown by the results of the independent samples t-tests conducted comparing the SOC scores of demographic and situational categories within each timeframe. The results are presented in Table 5.

[Table 5 Means differences between demographic factors in before displacement (BD) SOC scores and during displacement (DD) SOC scores (separate independent samples t-tests for BD and DD scores comparing demographic categories)]

		Overall SOC		Needs Fulfillment		Membership		Influence		Shared Emotional Connection	
		BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD	BD	DD
Gender	Male (minuend)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Female	-	0.65**	-	0.89**	-	0.53**	-0.27*	0.58**	-	0.58**
Age	40 or above (minuend)	-	-	-	-0.37*	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Under 40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Education	Illiterate to elementary (minuend)	-	-	-	0.36*	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Secondary and up	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Has school-age children	Yes (minuend)	-	-	-	-0.42*	-	-	-	-	-	-
	No	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Source of income before 2014 (Farmers vs non-farmers)	Farmers (minuend)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Other (all non-farmers)	-	-0.30*	-	0.48**	-	-	-	-	-	-
Current source of income (own income vs dependent)	Dependent (minuend)	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-
	Own income	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-
Respondent able to provide for the basic needs of his/her family	Yes (minuend)	na	0.56**	na	0.74**	na	0.36*	na	0.59**	na	0.54**
	No	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-
Duration of displacement	More than 3 years (minuend)	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-
	3 years or less	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-	na	-

** : significant (p < 0.01)

* : significant (p < 0.05)

- : not significant

na : not applicable

The most notable difference is observed between the sexes. Before displacement, the only statistically significant difference between any demographic category was recorded between males and females for the ‘influence’ element (p < 0.05). Interestingly, before displacement, the female group presented a significantly higher score (4.01) than the male group (3.74). This might be due to the dichotomy of rigidly gender segregated private/public spheres of influence, as it is the case

for Anbar in particular and Iraq in general. In this context, home is perceived as a safe space dominated by women from where they exert their influence within and beyond family, while men have to compete in the public sphere which might explain their lower scores in the ‘influence’ element even before displacement. The scope of this study goes beyond the debate in literature on the dichotomy of private/public space, introduced by feminist anthropologists (Rosaldo, 1974; Lamphere, 1974) which tends to associate the role of women in the domestic space as limited and powerless (El-Solh & Mabro, 1994) – and those who criticize this approach for overlooking cultural diversity, and for its rigidity in the categorization of home as a purely private space as rather western-centric (Sharistianian, 1987). What most scholars mentioned above agree on, however, is that it is the home from where a woman exerts her influence toward her family as well as the community in general. Moreover, in Muslim societies, the domestic space is considered as a center for important socio-economic and community decisions beyond the nuclear unit, in which women act as informal brokers from which they extend their network emphasizing the importance of home as a focal point of women’s community among extended kin and beyond (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001; Nelson, 1974).

Displacement, however, exacerbates this initially slight male–female divergence in that during displacement male and female scores have become significantly different from each other for overall SOC as well as for all four of its elements (Table 5, $p < 0.01$). While females exhibited a drop of 0.70 points in their overall SOC (Table 4), for males this decline is measured as 1.26 points so that a statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) difference of 0.65 points between males and females (Table 5) emerged during displacement. Interestingly, during displacement, the largest difference between the sexes is no longer observed for the ‘influence’ element as was the case before displacement, but in the ‘needs fulfilment’ element. For males, the ‘needs fulfilment’ score exhibited the largest decrease (1.57 points) during displacement (Table 4) resulting in a significant ($p < 0.01$) difference between the sexes of 0.89 points during displacement (Table 5).

This might be due to the challenges males face in a camp setting conflicting with their traditional roles as breadwinners organized around a patriarchal kin contract (Joseph, 1993). This contract establishes a hierarchy which is gender-based, with men dominant over women (at least in the public sphere), and the elderly dominating over the young (Olmsted, 2005). The gendered distribution of roles puts men in charge of economic, social, and protection aspects while demoting them to a secondary role in day-to-day family affairs, whereas women are granted a primary role within the family and a secondary role in the public sphere (Abugideiri, 2004).

The loss of livelihoods and the shattering of their social position due to forced displacement appears to have created a context in which men might feel emasculated as they are not able to fulfil their traditional role as the protector and breadwinner of their families. In camps, men cannot fully participate in the outside life that this role requires, while their traditional protective authority is transferred to camp authorities. Consequently, forced displacement shatters the traditional notion of masculinity (Ritchie, 2018; Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016; Kleist, 2010). Among women, on the other hand, the largest decrease in SOC scores is observed for the ‘influence’ element (a drop of 0.76 as indicated in Table 4) which might be related to the loss of their homes—a space from where women can influence their community.

As expected, those who were not able to provide for the basic needs of their families had significantly ($p < 0.01$) lower overall SOC scores compared to those who were able to provide (with or without assistance) for their basic needs. Being able to provide for one’s family not only affects overall SOC scores but has a significant effect on all of its elements ($p < 0.01$ except for the ‘membership’ element where $p < 0.05$) in that those who can provide for the basic needs of

their families, as expected, have significantly higher scores for all four elements compared to those who cannot. Whether that ability is based on the IDPs' own income or on support from relatives or from various UN agencies and NGOs appears to be irrelevant as those with a dependent income do not exhibit significantly different SOC scores during displacement compared to those who are able to generate their own income (such as receiving a pension, rent, or by working outside of the camp).

Significant differences were also found according to type of employment. Those who had been farmers (a rather independent profession but also an engagement bound to the soil, thus, to location) expressed significantly lower overall SOC scores during displacement compared to non-farmers ($p < 0.05$). Farmers also exhibited significantly lower 'needs fulfilment' scores ($p < 0.01$) compared to non-farmers which might be due to their dependency and strong bondage to the land in their origin communities.

While gender and the ability to provide for their families' needs appear to exhibit significant differences for overall SOC scores as well as for all four elements during displacement, three basic demographic characteristics, namely age group, education level, and having school-age children have significant effects on only the 'needs fulfilment' element of SOC. During displacement, the older age group (40 or above) who are expected to head the family due to the age-based hierarchic nature of the community, have significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) 'needs fulfilment' scores compared to the younger age cohort (under 40). The younger group has less family-related responsibilities as well as a lower level of decision-making power within kin and community in the Iraqi context, therefore they might feel less pressure to provide for the needs of their families. Probably related to similar considerations, those who have school-age children also exhibit significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) 'needs fulfilment' scores during displacement than those without any such children.

When it comes to education, respondents with at least secondary education or a higher level experienced a strong decrease in overall SOC scores during displacement (1.19 points in Table 4) compared to those with only up to elementary education (0.90 points). The SOC element exhibiting the largest drop among respondents with secondary or higher education was 'needs fulfilment' (1.44 points), followed by 'membership' and 'shared emotional connection' (1.15 points in both elements). The drop in 'needs fulfilment' was more moderate among respondents with no or primary education (0.96 points), followed by 'influence' (0.91) and 'membership' (0.88). Hence, during displacement, the difference between the two education categories became statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) only for the 'needs fulfilment' element in that those with an education higher than compulsory level (secondary school or above) have 0.36 lower 'needs fulfilment' scores during displacement than those with a lesser level of education (Table 5).

Consequently, we can argue that those groups who traditionally are expected to provide for the rest of their family (males, older persons, educated classes) as well as groups who have actual provision needs (those with school-age children, or those who cannot provide for their family in displacement) have experienced significantly larger drops in their 'needs fulfilment' scores compared to their counterparts (females, youth, the lesser educated, and those able to cover for their families' basic needs).

Lastly, long-term IDPs (those who are displaced for more than 3 years) were statistically no different in their SOC scores (overall and elements) than those who were displaced only up to 3 years. Thus, not sheer duration of displacement, as such, but rather the demographic and situational characteristics of IDPs during displacement appear to affect their SOC they feel toward their origin communities.

Conclusion: the impact of conflict-related displacement to SOC

Future studies of SOC among Iraqi communities might benefit from the results of this study to tailor their SOC instruments to Iraq. As such, this study is rather on the etic side of the etic/emic scale, short from incorporating the social and cultural specificities of the Iraqi context that would help understand how SOC is understood in a contextualized manner according to different world views.

The findings of this study indicate which demographic and situational characteristics appear to cause differences in SOC felt by IDPs toward their communities of origin before and during displacement. While displacement has caused an overall decrease in SOC scores, this drop has not been uniform for the elements of SOC as well as across different demographic and situational categories.

The shared experience of forced displacement seems to have acted as a bonding event among community members, as shown by the ‘shared emotional connection’ element of SOC becoming the most preponderant among the four elements during displacement, as compared to before displacement where the ‘needs fulfilment’ element exhibited the highest scores among the four elements. Displacement has caused the largest decrease in the ‘needs fulfilment’ element. Depleted of financial resources, IDPs would rely on the community to provide for basic services and a safe and stable environment conducive of restarting livelihood opportunities, however high levels of damage to the community caused by conflict hinder the ability of the community to do so. Understanding how the quality and value of each element influences SOC can facilitate broadening the understanding on the concept and might be key on defining tailored interventions at the individual and community level (Brodsky, 1996; Brodsky & Marx, 2001).

Regarding demographics, the differences for SOC scores before and during displacement is particularly salient between the sexes. Males appear to have felt a stronger decrease in SOC during displacement compared to females. The loss of livelihoods and decision-making authority suffered during displacement in camps might have challenged the traditional role of men as main decision-makers in the community as well as breadwinners and protectors of their families. This also explains the major drop in SOC among those aged 40 and above, which represent the traditional heads-of-household in charge of family wellbeing. However, women have also exhibited a drop in SOC, particularly when it comes to influence as they have lost their homes, a space that they traditionally rule and exert their influence from within in a rigidly gender-segregated society. Former farmers, elder age groups, and males most strongly have shown a drop in SOC scores in addition to those who cannot provide for the basic needs of their families during displacement. Thus, the present paper backs the findings of scholars who have shown how males are most affected by displacement due to the challenge it presents to their traditional role as breadwinners (Ritchie, 2018; Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016, Kleist, 2010), and contribute to expanding the theory of SOC on how various population groups experience SOC differently (Pretty & McCarthy, 1991; Royal & Rossi, 1996).

Additionally, the paper contributes to the growing body of literature on SOC and migration by looking at a largely underreported group: IDPs displaced to camps due to conflict. We have examined how experiences of forced displacement in relation to demographic and situational factors affect SOC among IDPs who fled their communities due to conflict. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study which measures SOC among IDP populations in a camp setting, as well as the first study on SOC among Iraqis.

IDPs face challenging circumstances in displacement and are expected to face many more upon return to their communities. These challenges go beyond the logistical, administrative, and

material challenges of the return process and relate to the way IDPs navigate their relationship with their communities of origin, and vice-versa, which significantly impacts the IDPs chances to successfully return and socially reintegrate into often divided communities in the aftermath of conflict. For example, IDPs might return to communities who oppose them if they are perceived as being affiliated with the Islamic State (Aymerich, 2020). IDPs might also return to damaged property, where the perpetrator and timing of the house destruction has significant effects on fears and perceptions of the returned IDPs toward their community (Aymerich & Zeyneloglu, 2019). A strong SOC felt toward the communities of origin can help alleviate this burden, broaden opportunities for IDPs within their communities, and contribute to their psychosocial wellbeing.

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