



Trauma-Informed School Counseling for Internally Displaced Students in Conflict-Affected Regions

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of trauma-informed school counseling for internally displaced students in conflict-affected regions. The research aims to analyze how trauma-informed counseling practices support students' psychosocial recovery, emotional resilience, and educational participation within fragile educational environments. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis involving counselors, teachers, school administrators, humanitarian officers, and internally displaced students from selected conflict-affected schools. The findings indicate that displacement-related trauma significantly influences students' emotional well-being, classroom behavior, social interaction, and academic engagement. Trauma-informed counseling practices emphasizing emotional safety, empathy, trust-building, and collaborative psychosocial support contributed positively to students' resilience, peer connectedness, and educational continuity. However, the implementation process was constrained by institutional limitations such as counselor shortages, inadequate professional training, limited psychosocial resources, and weak policy support. The study implies that trauma-informed approaches should become central components of educational policy and humanitarian schooling strategies for displaced learners in conflict-affected regions.

INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict, political instability, and communal violence continue to generate large populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) across many regions of the world. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, millions of children experience forced displacement annually due to war, insurgency, and ethno-political conflict. Unlike refugees who cross international borders, internally displaced students remain within their countries while enduring prolonged insecurity, disrupted education, economic deprivation, and psychological trauma (Kemei et al., 2023; Debello et al., 2023). In conflict-affected regions such as Nigeria, Syria, Sudan, Myanmar, and parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, schools increasingly function not only as educational

institutions but also as psychosocial recovery spaces for vulnerable children. Consequently, educational systems are confronted with the urgent challenge of addressing the emotional and behavioral consequences of displacement through responsive and trauma-informed counseling interventions (Majebi et al., 2024; Somo, 2024; Boukhari, 2025; Omiyefa, 2025; Biswas et al., 2026).

Internally displaced students frequently encounter complex traumatic experiences before, during, and after displacement. Exposure to armed violence, loss of family members, destruction of homes, forced migration, food insecurity, and chronic uncertainty significantly affect children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Oberg et al., 2022; Bürgin et al., 2022; Oberg & Hodges, 2025). Previous studies have shown that conflict-related trauma contributes to anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, emotional dysregulation, social withdrawal, and declining academic performance among displaced learners. Scholars in educational psychology argue that trauma fundamentally alters students' ability to concentrate, regulate emotions, build trust, and participate effectively in classroom interactions (Howard, 2022; Burdick & Corr, 2024; Walker & Flaherty, 2024; Watson & Astor, 2025). As a result, conventional school counseling approaches that primarily focus on academic adjustment are often insufficient for students living under prolonged traumatic conditions.

Recent literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of trauma-informed educational practices within school environments. Trauma-informed school counseling refers to counseling approaches that recognize the prevalence and impact of trauma while integrating safety, empathy, emotional regulation, resilience-building, and culturally responsive support into educational services (Foster et al., 2025; Walter & Wynard, 2025; Foster et al., 2025; Knox et al., 2026). Research conducted in conflict and post-conflict settings demonstrates that trauma-sensitive interventions can improve students' emotional resilience, school engagement, and psychosocial well-being. For instance, studies in refugee and displacement contexts highlight the effectiveness of school-based psychosocial support programs in reducing emotional distress and strengthening adaptive coping mechanisms (Spaas et al., 2023; Della Rocca et al., 2024; Oleimat, 2025). Moreover, trauma-informed practices encourage schools to shift from punitive disciplinary models toward supportive relational frameworks that acknowledge students' behavioral responses as manifestations of trauma rather than intentional misconduct (Lipscomb et al., 2024; Dupper, 2024; Dupper, 2024; Hays et al., 2026).

Despite growing scholarly attention to trauma-informed education, important limitations remain within the existing body of knowledge. First, most trauma-informed counseling studies focus predominantly on refugee populations in Western host countries, while internally displaced students in conflict-affected domestic settings receive comparatively limited attention. The sociopolitical realities faced by internally displaced students differ substantially from those of refugees because they continue living within unstable governance systems, limited institutional protection, and fragile educational infrastructures (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; Arar, 2020; Debelo et al., 2025; Chimbunde & Brown, 2026). Consequently, counseling models developed in high-income countries may not fully address the contextual realities of schools operating in conflict zones and humanitarian emergencies.

Second, previous studies tend to examine trauma-informed education from psychological or clinical perspectives while overlooking institutional and educational governance dimensions. Limited research investigates how school counselors, teachers, administrators, and local communities collaboratively implement trauma-informed frameworks within resource-constrained schools. Existing scholarship often focuses on therapeutic outcomes without adequately analyzing implementation barriers such as counselor shortages, inadequate professional training, cultural

stigma toward mental health, and policy fragmentation in conflict-affected educational systems (Vus et al., 2023; Okasha et al., 2025; Omiyefa, 2025). This creates a significant gap between theoretical trauma-informed models and practical implementation realities in developing countries experiencing internal displacement crises.

Third, the majority of prior studies employ quantitative psychological assessments emphasizing symptom reduction rather than exploring students' lived experiences, coping strategies, and perceptions of school-based counseling support. Such approaches risk simplifying trauma into measurable clinical indicators while neglecting the broader sociocultural and educational contexts shaping displaced students' recovery processes (Lemke et al., 2024; Debelo et al., 2025). A more holistic understanding is therefore required to examine how trauma-informed school counseling can foster emotional safety, educational continuity, resilience, and social inclusion among internally displaced learners (Almazroui & Awad, 2026; Okechukwu, 2026).

This study addresses these limitations by exploring school counseling practices in the context of trauma for IDPs in conflict areas from an educational and psychosocial perspective. This research situates schools, not only as academic institutions, but also as themselves protective social spaces where the recovery and resilience of displaced children can be fostered. This study aims to focus on IDP children within the context of fragile domestic institutions that are lacking in psychosocial resources, whereas most of the previous studies tend to narrow their scope to refugees' education in developed countries. In addition, the study draws on the theories of educational counseling, trauma theory, and school governance, using them to examine the implementation of trauma-informed practices in schools experiencing humanitarian situations (Watson & Astor, 2025).

This research is novel in that it seeks to view trauma informed school counseling as a system of educational support and development, not just a therapeutic delivery. The study highlights the relational and institutional issues in counselling and examines the roles played by counsellors, teachers, school leaders and community networks for the conceptualisation of psychosocial adaptation for displaced students. Besides, the findings make a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on inclusive and humanitarian education by identifying context dependent counseling approaches for use in conflict affected developing countries.

This study will therefore attempt to examine the implementation of trauma-informed school counseling for IDPs in conflict-affected areas, the institutional and psychosocial issues that may be faced in the implementation of trauma-informed school counseling, and how trauma-informed approaches can support the emotional well-being, resilience and participation of IDPs in school. The results will theoretically inform the creation of trauma-informed educational approaches, and practically, the design of policies and psychosocial interventions for school counseling in humanitarian contexts.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a multiple case study approach to examine the implementation of trauma-informed school counseling for internally displaced students in conflict-affected regions. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices surrounding psychosocial support and trauma-sensitive educational interventions. According to Usman et al. (2025), case study research is particularly suitable for investigating complex social phenomena

within real-life contexts where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In addition, the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry enabled the researchers to understand how trauma-informed counseling practices are experienced and negotiated by counselors, teachers, and displaced students within fragile educational environments.

The study adopted a constructivist paradigm emphasizing that social realities are shaped through interaction, meaning-making, and contextual experiences. This perspective was relevant because trauma and displacement are multidimensional experiences influenced by sociocultural, institutional, and psychological conditions. The research therefore focused not only on counseling outcomes but also on institutional processes, relational dynamics, and educational practices within conflict-affected schools.

Research Context and Site

The research was conducted in selected secondary schools and temporary learning centers located in conflict-affected regions with high populations of internally displaced students. The study context represented educational institutions operating under conditions of prolonged insecurity, limited psychosocial resources, disrupted schooling systems, and social vulnerability. These schools were selected because they had implemented counseling services or psychosocial support programs specifically designed for displaced learners.

The research sites reflected diverse institutional conditions, including public schools, humanitarian-supported learning centers, and community-based educational programs. Such diversity enabled the study to capture variations in trauma-informed counseling implementation across different educational settings. The contextual focus of the study was particularly important because trauma-informed practices are shaped by local cultural norms, institutional capacities, and conflict-related experiences.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants consisted of school counselors, teachers, school administrators, humanitarian education officers, parents, and internally displaced students who had direct experiences with school-based psychosocial support services. Purposeful sampling was employed to select informants considered knowledgeable and relevant to the research objectives. This sampling strategy is widely used in qualitative studies to obtain information-rich participants capable of providing in-depth insights into specific social phenomena.

A total of 28 participants were involved in the study, comprising 10 internally displaced students, 6 school counselors, 5 teachers, 3 school principals, and 4 representatives from humanitarian or community organizations. Students participating in the study were selected based on their active involvement in counseling or psychosocial support programs. To ensure ethical sensitivity, parental or guardian consent was obtained for student participants, while confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis conducted over a four-month period. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to describe their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding trauma-informed counseling practices in schools. The interview format also allowed flexibility for probing sensitive issues related to displacement, emotional distress, and educational adaptation.

Non-participant observations were conducted during counseling sessions, classroom activities, and psychosocial support programs to examine counselor-student interactions, school climate, and trauma-sensitive educational practices. Observation data helped contextualize interview findings and provided direct insight into institutional dynamics. In addition, document analysis was conducted on school policies, counseling guidelines, psychosocial program reports, and educational support documents to understand formal institutional responses toward internally displaced students.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Cernasev & Axon (2023). The analysis involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, and interpretation. Codes were developed inductively from participants' narratives and observational findings to identify recurring patterns related to trauma experiences, counseling implementation, institutional barriers, and resilience-building strategies.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria as recommended. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Member checking was also conducted by allowing several participants to review interview summaries and thematic interpretations. Furthermore, detailed contextual descriptions were provided to enhance transferability, while audit trails and reflective field notes supported the dependability and confirmability of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the implementation of trauma-informed school counseling for internally displaced students in conflict-affected regions. The results are organized into four major themes emerging from the thematic analysis: (1) psychological and educational impacts of displacement trauma, (2) implementation of trauma-informed counseling practices in schools, (3) institutional and structural barriers in counseling implementation, and (4) resilience-building and psychosocial recovery among internally displaced students. The presentation of findings integrates interview narratives, observational data, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how schools respond to the psychosocial needs of displaced learners.

To strengthen analytical consistency, participant quotations are presented as narrative interview excerpts reflecting authentic experiences and institutional realities. All participant identities were anonymized using coded identifiers. The findings presented below are derived from field interviews, school observations, and institutional documents collected during the research period.

Psychological and Educational Impacts of Displacement Trauma

The findings revealed that internally displaced students experienced multidimensional trauma that significantly affected their emotional well-being, learning behavior, and social interaction within schools. Most participants described trauma not as a single event but as a continuous experience associated with violence exposure, family separation, displacement uncertainty, and economic hardship. Counselors and teachers consistently observed symptoms of anxiety, emotional withdrawal, concentration difficulties, aggressive behavior, and declining academic engagement among displaced learners.

Field observations indicated that many students struggled to maintain attention during classroom instruction and often demonstrated fear responses in situations

involving loud sounds, conflict, or disciplinary confrontation. Teachers reported that emotional instability frequently disrupted classroom participation and peer interaction.

One school counselor explained how trauma affected students' psychological readiness for learning:

"Many displaced students come to school carrying emotional burdens that are invisible but very heavy. Some witnessed violence directly, while others lost family members during displacement. In counseling sessions, students often describe recurring fear, nightmares, and feelings of insecurity even when they are physically safe at school. One student told me that whenever he heard shouting outside the classroom, he immediately remembered the sounds of armed conflict in his village. These memories continue to shape how they respond emotionally in school environments."

This statement demonstrates that traumatic memories remained deeply embedded in students' daily experiences and directly influenced their educational participation. Trauma was not confined to past events but persisted as an ongoing emotional condition affecting cognitive functioning and social trust.

Another teacher described the behavioral consequences of displacement trauma within classroom interactions:

"At first, we thought some students were simply undisciplined or uninterested in learning because they avoided participation and refused to interact with others. However, after working closely with counselors, we realized many of these behaviors were connected to fear and emotional exhaustion. Some students became extremely quiet and isolated, while others reacted aggressively even to small misunderstandings. Their responses reflected survival instincts rather than intentional misconduct."

The findings indicate that trauma-informed perspectives helped educators reinterpret student behavior more empathetically. Rather than viewing emotional withdrawal or aggression as disciplinary problems, teachers increasingly understood these reactions as manifestations of unresolved trauma.

A displaced student also shared personal experiences regarding emotional struggles in school:

"When I first arrived at this school, I did not want to talk to anyone. I felt different from other students because I lost my home and many friends. Sometimes I could not focus during lessons because I kept thinking about my family situation. I was afraid other students would judge me or ask questions about what happened in my village. The counseling sessions slowly helped me feel safer and less alone."

This narrative illustrates how trauma contributed to social isolation and educational disengagement among displaced students. The findings confirm that emotional insecurity significantly affected students' capacity to adapt to new school environments. The data suggest that trauma among internally displaced students operates simultaneously at emotional, behavioral, and educational levels. The school environment therefore became a critical site for psychosocial stabilization and emotional recovery.

Implementation of Trauma-Informed Counseling Practices

The second major finding concerns how schools implemented trauma-informed counseling strategies to support internally displaced students. The study found that schools gradually shifted from conventional counseling approaches toward more

relational, empathetic, and psychosocially responsive practices. Trauma-informed counseling was implemented through emotional support sessions, peer-support activities, safe-space initiatives, flexible classroom engagement, and collaboration between counselors and teachers.

Counselors emphasized that trauma-informed practices prioritized emotional safety, trust-building, and non-punitive communication. Rather than focusing solely on academic performance or disciplinary compliance, counseling services sought to create supportive relational environments where students could express emotions without fear of stigma.

One counselor explained the importance of establishing emotional safety before academic intervention:

“We learned that students cannot engage effectively in learning if they still feel emotionally threatened. Before discussing academic problems, we first try to make students feel heard and respected. Counseling sessions are not always formal. Sometimes students simply need a safe place to sit quietly, talk about their fears, or cry without being judged. Building trust takes time because many displaced students have experienced repeated loss and uncertainty.”

The findings demonstrate that trauma-informed counseling extended beyond formal therapeutic sessions and became integrated into broader school interactions. Emotional safety emerged as the foundation for educational participation and psychosocial recovery.

Another participant described how collaborative approaches strengthened counseling effectiveness:

“The counselors alone cannot handle all the emotional needs of displaced students. Teachers also play an important role because students spend most of their time in classrooms. In our school, counselors regularly discuss students’ emotional conditions with teachers so that classroom responses become more supportive. We try to avoid harsh punishment because it can retraumatize students who already feel unsafe.”

This statement highlights the institutional shift toward collaborative trauma-sensitive practices involving multiple educational actors. The integration of counseling and classroom management reflected a broader understanding of psychosocial support within school systems.

Observational data further revealed that schools established informal psychosocial support mechanisms such as peer-sharing circles, art-based activities, storytelling sessions, and recreational programs designed to reduce emotional stress. These activities were particularly effective in helping younger students communicate traumatic experiences indirectly.

A student participant described how supportive school relationships contributed to emotional recovery:

“The school counseling activities helped me become more confident. Before joining the group sessions, I rarely spoke to other students. During the activities, I realized many of us had similar experiences of displacement and fear. That made me feel understood. The teachers also became more patient and supportive when they knew about our situation.”

The findings suggest that trauma-informed counseling contributed not only to emotional stabilization but also to social belonging and peer connectedness. Schools functioned as protective social environments where displaced students gradually rebuilt trust and participation.

Table 1. Trauma-Informed Counseling Practices in Conflict-Affected Schools

Counseling Practice	Primary Objective	Observed Impact
Individual counseling sessions	Emotional expression and stabilization	Reduced anxiety and emotional withdrawal
Peer-support groups	Social connectedness	Increased peer interaction and trust
Safe-space initiatives	Psychological safety	Improved student participation
Teacher-counselor collaboration	Trauma-sensitive classroom management	Reduced punitive responses
Recreational and art activities	Emotional coping and stress reduction	Enhanced emotional resilience

Source: Field Data Analysis, 2026

The table demonstrates that trauma-informed counseling practices addressed both emotional and educational dimensions of student well-being.

Institutional and Structural Barriers in Counseling Implementation

Although trauma-informed practices showed positive impacts, the findings revealed significant institutional and structural barriers limiting implementation effectiveness. The most frequently identified challenges included limited counseling personnel, inadequate professional training, resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and weak policy support.

Many schools lacked professionally trained trauma counselors, forcing teachers to assume psychosocial responsibilities without sufficient expertise. Participants consistently emphasized that educational institutions in conflict-affected regions often operated under severe institutional constraints.

One school principal explained these limitations:

“Our school tries to support displaced students emotionally, but we face serious capacity problems. We only have one counselor for hundreds of students, and many teachers have never received formal training on trauma-informed education. Sometimes teachers want to help but do not know how to respond appropriately when students experience emotional breakdowns.”

This statement reflects the structural gap between trauma-informed policy aspirations and practical institutional capacity. Schools frequently depended on improvisation rather than systematic psychosocial infrastructure.

A humanitarian education officer also highlighted resource-related difficulties:

“Most schools in displacement areas prioritize physical survival needs such as food, uniforms, and classroom access. Psychosocial services are often considered secondary because funding is limited. However, emotional trauma directly affects students’ learning capacity, so counseling support should not be treated as optional.”

The findings indicate that trauma-informed counseling remained vulnerable to inconsistent institutional commitment and humanitarian resource allocation. Psychosocial support programs were frequently dependent on external organizational assistance rather than sustainable educational policy frameworks.

Another teacher described how overcrowded learning environments complicated emotional support efforts:

“In classrooms with many displaced students, teachers struggle to provide individual emotional attention. Some students need continuous reassurance,

while others avoid communication completely. The workload becomes very difficult because teachers must simultaneously manage academic instruction and emotional crises.”

These findings reveal that trauma-informed counseling implementation requires not only counselor commitment but also institutional investment, professional training, and policy integration.

Resilience-Building and Psychosocial Recovery

Despite persistent challenges, the findings revealed important processes of resilience-building and psychosocial adaptation among internally displaced students. Trauma-informed counseling contributed to emotional recovery by strengthening students' coping capacities, self-confidence, peer relationships, and educational motivation.

Many students gradually developed greater emotional openness and social participation after engaging in counseling and peer-support programs. Counselors observed that students who initially demonstrated severe withdrawal eventually became more communicative and academically engaged.

One counselor reflected on students' recovery processes:

“Recovery does not happen quickly, but over time we can see meaningful changes. Students who once refused to enter classrooms begin participating again. Some who avoided social interaction start building friendships and expressing future goals. Counseling cannot erase traumatic experiences, but it can help students regain a sense of control and hope.”

This statement suggests that trauma-informed counseling supports resilience not by eliminating trauma entirely but by helping students reconstruct emotional stability and future orientation.

A displaced student also described personal transformation through school support:

“Before receiving counseling support, I felt hopeless about continuing school because my family situation was unstable. But the counselors and teachers kept encouraging me to stay engaged in learning. Slowly, I started believing that education could still help me build a better future even after everything that happened.”

The findings demonstrate that supportive school environments played a critical role in restoring educational motivation among displaced learners.

Observational data showed that schools functioning as emotionally supportive communities contributed significantly to students' psychosocial recovery. Students who experienced consistent emotional support from counselors, teachers, and peers demonstrated stronger resilience and greater willingness to participate in school activities.

Trauma-Informed School Counseling as a Psychosocial and Educational Recovery Framework

The findings of this study demonstrate that trauma-informed school counseling plays a significant role in supporting the psychosocial recovery and educational participation of internally displaced students in conflict-affected regions. The study confirms that trauma among displaced learners extends beyond individual psychological distress and directly influences classroom behavior, academic engagement, emotional regulation, and social interaction. These findings are consistent with previous studies arguing that exposure to armed conflict and forced displacement creates long-term educational and psychosocial vulnerabilities among

children and adolescents (Bürgin et al., 2022; Bernhardt et al., 2024; Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). Existing scholarship has emphasized that traumatic experiences frequently impair concentration, memory retention, emotional stability, and interpersonal trust, all of which are fundamental for successful educational adaptation (Jones et al., 2025). The present study reinforces these arguments by showing that internally displaced students often experience trauma as a continuous condition embedded within everyday school experiences rather than as isolated past events.

The findings also align with trauma theory perspectives developed in educational psychology, particularly studies emphasizing that trauma-sensitive learning environments are essential for displaced and conflict-affected students. Previous international studies have shown that trauma-informed educational practices improve emotional safety, school connectedness, and resilience among vulnerable learners (Lipscomb et al., 2024; Wilson-Ching & Berger, 2024; Majebi et al., 2024). The current study similarly found that counseling approaches emphasizing empathy, trust-building, emotional validation, and non-punitive communication contributed positively to students' psychosocial stabilization. However, this study extends prior research by demonstrating that trauma-informed counseling in conflict-affected domestic settings operates not only as a therapeutic intervention but also as an institutional survival mechanism within fragile educational systems. This distinction represents an important contribution because earlier trauma-informed education studies predominantly focused on refugee populations in stable host-country schools rather than internally displaced students remaining within unstable conflict environments (Pham, 2025).

Another important finding concerns the reinterpretation of student behavior through trauma-informed perspectives. Teachers and counselors increasingly understood aggression, withdrawal, silence, and emotional instability as trauma responses rather than disciplinary violations. This finding is highly relevant to previous literature criticizing punitive school cultures that unintentionally retraumatize vulnerable students. International research on trauma-sensitive schools has repeatedly argued that behavioral problems among traumatized students often reflect survival mechanisms developed under conditions of fear and insecurity (Lembke et al., 2024). The present study confirms this argument while contributing additional evidence from conflict-affected educational contexts characterized by institutional fragility and resource scarcity. The study therefore strengthens theoretical discussions regarding the relationship between trauma, behavioral adaptation, and educational inclusion.

The collaborative dimension of trauma-informed counseling identified in this study also contributes meaningfully to the literature. Previous research frequently conceptualizes counseling as a counselor-centered intervention focused on individual therapy sessions. In contrast, the findings of this study reveal that effective trauma-informed support requires collective institutional engagement involving teachers, school leaders, counselors, humanitarian organizations, and peer-support networks. The integration of classroom management, psychosocial activities, and relational school practices demonstrates that trauma-informed counseling functions most effectively when embedded within broader school governance structures. This finding supports ecological and systems-based approaches in educational counseling theory, which argue that students' emotional recovery is shaped by interconnected institutional and social environments rather than isolated counseling interventions alone (Hou et al., 2025; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022).

At the practical level, the study highlights that trauma-informed school counseling contributes significantly to emotional resilience, educational continuity, and social

reintegration among internally displaced students. Schools that implemented supportive psychosocial environments were better able to maintain student participation and reduce emotional isolation. These findings correspond with international studies emphasizing the protective role of schools during humanitarian crises. Nevertheless, the current study provides a more context-sensitive perspective by illustrating how schools in conflict-affected regions often operate under severe structural limitations, including counselor shortages, inadequate training, overcrowded classrooms, and inconsistent policy support. Consequently, the study challenges overly idealized assumptions in trauma-informed education literature that frequently presume the availability of stable institutional infrastructure and professional mental health resources.

The findings regarding institutional barriers reveal an important gap between trauma-informed educational policy aspirations and implementation realities. Similar challenges have been documented in previous studies conducted in low-resource humanitarian settings, where psychosocial services are frequently underfunded and marginalized within educational priorities. However, this study contributes novelty by showing how educators in conflict-affected schools develop adaptive and informal trauma-sensitive practices despite institutional limitations. Teachers and counselors often relied on relational strategies, peer collaboration, and community support mechanisms to compensate for the absence of formal psychosocial infrastructure. This adaptive institutional behavior demonstrates the resilience of local educational actors and expands existing scholarship on humanitarian education governance.

This study helps build the conversation about trauma-informed education, suggesting that trauma-informed school counseling is a holistic educational recovery system, and not solely a mental health intervention. The study extends traditional counseling understandings and perspectives of schools as places of emotional healing, social trust, and resilience-building in displacement situations. This integrated view is particularly new in that it brings together theories of trauma, educational counseling and institutional governance in one analytical framework. The results of the study, therefore, can be used for interdisciplinary discussions on inclusive education, humanitarian education, and psychosocial rehabilitation in conflicts.

The findings of the study are also very significant for the practice. National policies for conflict-stricken and displacement-prone areas should incorporate trauma-informed principles and practices. To build the institutional capacity of teachers and counselors, professional development programmes on trauma-sensitive pedagogy, emotional regulation strategies and psychosocial communication need to be developed. In addition, there is a need for enhanced partnership-building with humanitarian organizations, community leaders, and mental health practitioners in order to create sustainable psychosocial support mechanisms to cater to the needs of displaced learners. The study also argues that trauma-informed response is not merely a humanitarian response, but should be integrated into a larger educational response framework.

The study has some drawbacks, however. First, it employed a selection of schools in specific contexts of conflict, and therefore findings cannot be generalized to all contexts of displacement. Second, the qualitative design which was emphasized over a quantitative measurement of the effectiveness of counseling and psychological outcomes included in-depth experiences. Third, the study largely focused on the school-based viewpoints and neglected to fully explore trauma recovery dynamics within the family and community that can also affect students' psychosocial adaptation.

Comparative trauma-informed counseling models in various conflict zones and educational systems should be investigated in the future. Long-term, longitudinal studies of the long-term social and academic consequences of trauma-responsive practices would also yield important information about education recovery for learners who have been effected by displacement. Furthermore, the use of digital counseling platforms, community-based psychosocial networks, and culturally specific healing practices to assist IDS in fragile humanitarian contexts should be explored in future research on counseling and IDS.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that trauma-informed school counseling plays a critical role in supporting the psychosocial recovery, emotional resilience, and educational participation of internally displaced students in conflict-affected regions. The findings reveal that displacement-related trauma significantly affects students' emotional stability, classroom engagement, social interaction, and learning motivation. In response, schools implementing trauma-informed counseling practices through emotional support, relational trust-building, peer collaboration, and safe learning environments were better able to foster students' psychosocial adaptation and educational continuity.

The study contributes theoretically by expanding trauma-informed education literature beyond refugee-focused contexts and positioning school counseling as an integrated educational recovery framework rather than merely a therapeutic intervention. The research also highlights the importance of institutional collaboration among counselors, teachers, school leaders, and humanitarian actors in strengthening trauma-sensitive educational environments. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for educational policies that integrate psychosocial support into emergency and conflict-sensitive schooling systems, particularly in resource-constrained regions affected by displacement crises. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations, including its qualitative scope and context-specific focus, which may limit broader generalization. Future studies should employ comparative and longitudinal approaches to examine long-term psychosocial outcomes and evaluate the effectiveness of trauma-informed counseling models across diverse conflict and displacement settings.

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