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**CHANGING PLACE ATTACHMENT AND BELONGING AMONG
INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN IN THE MANDALAKKUDHA
WELFARE CAMP IN KALPITIYA IN THE DISTRICT OF
PUTTALAM: IMPLICATIONS FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO IDP
ISSUES**

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The gendered impact of protracted displacement has become the object of geographical, sociological, political, psychological and economic research and the focus of policy analysis by the international community, academia, national governments and NGOs. Hence, a durable solution to problems related to displacement must acknowledge gender as an important dimension. This study is aimed at bringing to the fore the voices of some internally displaced women who live in the Mandalakkudha camp in Kalpitiya, Puttlam district. The focus is to understand whether place attachment and belonging have an impact on Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) when deciding whether to remain in the host community or to return to their places of origin after a prolonged displacement.

In order to study this situation, the analytical concepts of place attachment and sense of belonging were used. Data from forty internally displaced women were gathered using questionnaires, narratives, informal discussion and field observation.

Based on the narratives of the experiences of living in protracted displacement and attitudes expressed towards return/remain by the participating women, this paper argues, it is important that women's voices should be heard in finding solutions to problems related to internal displacement and to ensure that their return is voluntary, safe, and occur under conditions of dignity. Their narratives reveal that their place attachment towards their places of origins have become fluid during the last two decades due to many factors including negative and positive experiences of living in displacement and the protracted nature of displacement. Internally displaced women are skeptical of considering the camps they currently occupy as a place of stability and a point of reference and they do not believe they would ever be insiders in the host community. Even with the prospect of resettlement, the decision to return home for these women, after 20 years in Puttalam, is not uncomplicated.

The paper concludes that the majority of them struggle with the idea of 'belonging' which is hardly acknowledged or understood in resettlement programmes. Resettlement should not be mere technical planning especially in the context of protracted displacement. This study is significant in providing a platform for further research and debate by highlighting alternative arguments in relation to attitude towards IDPs, identity, belonging and resettlement.

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