# The impact of displacement on gender relations and the roles of women: the case of Afridi IDPs from FATA, Pakistan

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**Executive** **summary**

As part of a four-year thematic study of the potential contribution of multi-year humanitarian financing towards building resilience, Valid Evaluations has been undertaking primary research in Pakistan, DR Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan in order to better understand what factors determine how well people cope with the difficulties of life. Unsurprisingly, gender power relations have been one of the most important factors in shaping individuals’ resilience in all four countries.

It is natural to imagine that the experience of crisis, and displacement in particular, would lead to changes in gender roles. Crises cause disruption to normal economic and other living conditions, creating a need or incentive to change roles; and at the same time, crises and displacement can also disrupt the social structures (including family) that pass on and enforce social norms, creating opportunities for more rapid change in norms to take place. This seems an obvious topic for study, particular by interested in the well-being and resilience of those affected by crises and displacement. Surprisingly, such literature is hard to find. Valid Evaluations aims to contribute to this evidence gap with one case study, a study into the changing roles of women as a result of displacement among Afridi IDPs from Khyber Agency to Peshawar District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan. The study is based on 98 individual interviews and 63 group discussions with men and women, girls and boys living in 14 Union Councils in Peshawar district. Participants and interviewees, from unmarried adolescents to the elderly, spoke of changes in their lives as a result of displacement, and compared their own lives as males and females to the generations before them and to what they saw of the generations after them.

The study shows how the lives of women and girls have been limited and controlled by a network of different factors – social, legal, cultural, economic, physical geography, etc., which interact and combine to create a set of gender rules that ‘fits’ with all of those factors. The changes in gender roles that have occurred since displacement can then be understood by seeing how displacement caused fundamental changes in the various factors (physical geography, economics, social imperatives, etc.), creating possibilities for a new logic of gender rules to emerge which fit the new circumstances.

The IDPs were predominantly from two sub-districts (*Tehsils*) in Khyber Agency, Bara and Tirah. Khyber Agency is a part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, whose distinct relationship to the state has created conditions for an extreme form of patriarchy. The normal rule of law has not run in FATA since colonial times, where authority, including the ability to use coercive force (normally the monopoly of the state), was handed over to local leaders. The effect on women of this special status has been catastrophic. Robbed of any protection by the state, and living a culture where a notion of ‘honour’ obliges men to kill women for even the suspicion of breaking a strict code, they live only under sufferance, their very existence subject to the will of those who control them. Locally, authority for settling disputes is given to the *jirga*, a council where not only are women never represented, but where they are also not allowed to bring any complaints or be heard. In the absence of state law, lives are ruled by the cultural rules set by the *jirga* and the (male) elders, a code known as Pakhtunwali.

Most girls were betrothed at a very young age, and married as soon after puberty as possible, with no possibility to express any opinion about their husbands. Living in a joint family system, often of upwards of twenty people living together and sharing a household economy, girls were largely controlled by their mothers-in-law, and their husbands spent most of their time in the male domain.

Before displacement, Afridi in Khyber agency mainly lived in small dispersed settlements, often far from people outside their families. As a result, the strict code of purdah was not broken by girls and women moving outside close to the house. From a young age, with no access to school, girls had to get used to an immense and physically demanding work burden, combined with their domestic duties. Women were not even allowed to go out to markets, and had no control over any resources - even money sent by their husbands would be taken by their brothers- or mothers-in-law.

The shock of displacement was traumatic, with many forced to flee on foot with no notice, leaving behind all their possessions. Those who went towards Peshawar mainly went to stay with relatives, and unless they moved into camps, then found places to rent in the villages around town, living in communities almost entirely with fellow Pashtun, and often with many Afridi.

Subsequently, and although their household economies were much poorer than before, displacement was hugely positive for many women in several respects. Their roles and status changed because of changes in the underlying material circumstances in which they lived, and five (though not six) changes can be traced as fundamental.

1. Huge houses for a large joint family system were simply not available to them in Peshawar District, so people lived in smaller family units. Many lived without their mothers-in-law, and since men had to go out to work, women no longer faced constant control of their behaviour. Men no longer inhabited a purely male domain, and instead talked more with their wives and children, who all spoke of coming to know each other for the first time.
2. Displacement meant a degree of dispersal of tight-knit communities, and their dilution within a much larger host society. The peer pressure and fear of condemnation which had kept men in line weakened, and men felt able to follow their own principles to a much greater degree. At the same time, these living conditions imposed an increasing need for women to cover themselves with the burqa outside the house – which in turn made it possible for them to move (albeit not freely) to markets, hospitals, etc.
3. With the loss of land and agricultural production, IDPs depended on a wage economy. Economic activity thus became individual (each person’s work brought in an independent stream of income) rather than a collective endeavour. Economic hardship made it imperative for women to remain economically active, but they now had their own role (eg bringing in cash from sewing) rather than ‘supporting’ the household’s (ie men’s) farming economy. Many were given – and some demanded – a new respect as independent providers for their families.
4. Outside FATA, IDPs enjoyed the same basic amenities that others in Pakistan took for granted. Piped water was available in close proximity; cooking gas, and sometimes electricity, took away so much of women’s domestic burden that they permitted other life-changing transformations. Girls could go to school, partly because their huge labour burden was reduced and partly because all-girls’ schools were available. Moving to a wage/urban economy also gave education a much higher priority for both boys and girls, and this had many secondary effects beyond job prospects.
5. Living with relatives from Peshawar District, IDPs were exposed to people who both shared their culture but who at the same time lived in a very different culture. This facilitated the speed with which exposure to a different way of living transformed the behaviour of so many IDP men. Their local relatives sent their daughters to school with no loss of honour – almost immediately, they too did the same. Domestic violence was also less acceptable.
6. No IDPS, men or women, mentioned that a different rule of state law now applied compared to in FATA. In theory, this should have played a significant role in changing the lives of women (e.g. fear of honour killings, the end of underage marriage, inheritance rights for women, the opportunity to take legal action for violence). That his was not a factor is in part explained by the degree to which these continue to exist in other parts of Pakistan, despite their formal illegality.

Beyond the myriad specific changes detailed in the paper, several general lessons were striking.

There is some debate about the degree to which challenging gender norms in different societies is a cultural imposition of one’s own values. Although Afridi IDP women and girls in Peshawar had a vision for the roles of women and men in society that is much more gendered than in (for example) Western Europe, the extreme forms of gender inequality that they suffered was clearly not regarded by them as a part of their culture. Women and girls of all ages felt it as oppressive, as something which caused them misery and which was *unfair*, justified neither by their religion nor by their culture. Previously, if they accepted it, it was because they felt powerless to change it. Many now are now anxious to secure, and feel some hope for, changes in future.

Education may be a key factor in longer term change. There has been a clear attitudinal change vis a vis education for girls by almost everyone, men and women of all ages. Many now spoke with regret of previous decisions to deny their daughters an education. Greater economic independence and professional success even for a few women may provide role models for further change. Many spoke of the transformative power of education in giving girls the ability to express a voice and know their rights.

Gender outcomes are not a zero sum game. Gains for women were not seen as a loss for men, and most men spoke positively about most of the improvements in the lives of their wives and daughters. They spoke of having their eyes opened; of being relieved of the pressure (‘back-biting’) to conform to standards they had never really liked by their communities. These changed male attitudes were instrumental in facilitating change.

Much too has not changed, or is changing only slowly. Marriage commonly remains at young age and with only minimal consent, if any, from girls. Purdah remains strict. And even after the significant changes to the lives of women and girls, inequality remains high.

Change is taking place within society in Pakistan at many different levels. There are clear intergenerational differences in the aspirations of both males and females, with younger generations tending to expect a greater role for women (girls to be educated to a greater, if not equal, degree; some possibilities for women to work; greater voice for women in marriage). Though much depends on future security considerations, the situation in FATA may be transformed in the medium term: a political revolution is bringing it legally into mainstream Pakistan; a possible economic revolution with new transport and communication links may bring integrate it with the national economy; and if investment in services is made, this could bring health and education in FATA to the levels of the rest of the country. Such changes are taking place on time frames which are medium term (10 to 15 years) and long term (one to two generations). Those interested in change, such as those working for development or humanitarian causes, need to analyse change and the potential for change on these same time frames, not in the short term (less than 10 years).

There are few signs that aid programmes for women in displacement have been important in changing gender relations. The aid which they reported receiving was largely restricted to a food ration. The agents of change for gender power relations were almost entirely within the host environment.

Understanding the *logic* to gender relations conveys a huge explanatory power. Gender reports which describe the symptoms of gender inequality (e.g. counting the hours that each sex works or listing the tasks which each does) does little to help us understand why those rules exist, what keeps them in place – and where the potential for change could come from. Such studies are not yet common in the humanitarian world.

Aid programmes for returnee IDP women to FATA are not engaging sufficiently with gender relations, let alone with an analysis of the potential for changing them. It is hard to see how severe gender exploitation is challenged by interventions which aim to increase the economic productivity of women’s labour in enterprises which are controlled by men (eg agricultural production).

1. **Introduction**

## Background to the study

Valid Evaluations is undertaking a four-year thematic study for DFID of the potential benefits from managing humanitarian funding over longer time-frames for improving both cost-efficiency and effectiveness. In particular, the study is examining how far such multi-year humanitarian financing (MYHF) can help address underlying causes of vulnerability and so help to ‘build resilience’. The study approaches the question by examining separately where people find resilience in the face of crises; and then analysing how far features of MYHF enable aid agencies to intervene better to support those factors from which their resilience and agency are drawn.[[1]](#footnote-1) The study is taking place in Pakistan, Sudan, Ethiopia and DR Congo. In all four countries, gender relations in society and within the family were found to be critical in shaping vulnerability and resilience.

It is natural to imagine that the experience of crisis, and displacement in particular, would lead to changes in gender roles. Crises cause disruption to economic and other living conditions of men and women; and they can also disrupt the social structures (including family) that pass on and enforce social norms. It would be expected that crises and displacement create a need or incentive to change roles; and at the same time create opportunities for more rapid change in norms to take place. This seems an obvious topic for study, particular by those who offer assistance to those affected by crises and displacement. Surprisingly, though, such literature is hard to find. Searches revealed literature or assessments on topics such as violence against women, but not on women’s changing roles. Valid Evaluations therefore decided to make a contribution to this evidence gap[[2]](#footnote-2) by conducting its own research into the changing roles of women as a result of crises among Afridi IDPs in Peshawar, Pakistan and among women of the Hadandawa community in Kassala, Sudan. Unfortunately the field research team in Sudan did not get permission to ask detailed questions about gender in Kassala, and so this paper focuses solely on women and girls displaced by conflict from Khyber Agency to Peshawar District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province in Pakistan.

Following a description of the methodology in section 1.2, Section 2 sets out the differences in the lives of males and females as they existed before displacement. It presents the logic, revealed in the interviews, which explains the features of their society which created and maintained those differences, describing the logic of gender inequality[[3]](#footnote-3) pre-displacement.

Section 3 examines how that logic of gender inequality has changed since displacement, describing how the lives of women and girls have changed, but also describing changes that have taken place in the factors which shaped the differences between the lives of males and females. It thus offers an explanation of changes in the roles of women and girls by showing how a new logic of gender inequality has been created as a result of displacement.

Sections 4 and 5 look respectively at likely future trends, and the implications of the evidence for supporting the lives of IDPs.

## Methodology[[4]](#footnote-4)

Because of the lack of published evidence or analysis of changing gender norms in displacement, this study was necessarily exploratory. Only two in-depth studies of gender norms in FATA were found (Khan and Samina, 2009 and Khan 2012), which were used to help understand the interviewees’ stories and to inform section 2.1. No openly accessible, published paper was found on the roles of IDP women after displacement in Peshawar, or of changed roles in comparable situations of displacement elsewhere in the world[[5]](#footnote-5).

The study approached the examination of changes in the role of displaced women with as few preconceptions as possible. No specific gender framework was used; no pre-identified theory of change was tested; and interviews and discussions did not direct people to talk about specific features of their lives, assumed as key to understanding gender roles. Males and females of different ages gave their stories, and the study team then looked in what people said for patterns of change and for explanations of those patterns[[6]](#footnote-6). Interviewees and participants in group discussions brought up a wide range of themes when asked about their lives: the society and culture in which they grew up or lived; marriage arrangements and relations within marriage; family structures and roles within the family; livelihoods and economics; how time was spent; education; movement, socialising and information (including, post-displacement, the use of phones and TV); decision-making, the ability to speak and have a voice heard; and diet, health and health care[[7]](#footnote-7). In total, 63 group discussions and 98 individual interviews were held with IDPs. The analytical team aimed for a balance of insider and outsider perspectives, combining the insights of Pashtun researchers familiar with life in Peshawar with the external eye of an international researcher. All interviews were carried out in Pashto, the first language of interviewees and interviewers.

In examining change over time, we wanted to distinguish changes due to displacement from other changes which were due to people getting older or their status changing, e.g. from child to parent. Interviews and FGDs were therefore constructed in two ways. In some, people were asked to make comparisons over time (before, during and after displacement); and in others, people reflected on cross-generational comparisons, e.g. the difference between their lives, aspirations and expectations from those of their daughters and mothers. Discussions and interviews were held separately with males and females, and in three broad age groups: adolescent and unmarried girls and boys (aged from 14 to 17); young married adults with young children (often aged in late twenties or thirties); and older people, usually grandparents, aged from fifty to over seventy.

The study team spoke with IDPs from a range of environments in Peshawar District[[8]](#footnote-8). Some lived in villages on the outskirts of Peshawar city or University Town (with its own population of around 25,000, some 10 km from Peshawar) in the first half of July 2017. These people had easier access by foot or public transport to Peshawar, electricity and a reasonable education infrastructure. Others were in more rural villages, further from services, with fewer schools, no electricity and a more rural economy. Remoteness was not simply a matter of physical proximity: some areas close to town were made more remote by insecurity and fear of violence. Achini Payaan (Upper Achini), for example, is separated from University Town by a wall, and is poorly served by assistance or government services, in part due to fear. In each site, IDPs were identified using snowballing sampling, where IDPs led the researchers to other IDPs and to areas in the village or community where the IDP concentration was high, with the guiding principle that the study aimed to sample as wide a diversity of people and situations as possible. No attempt was made to create a representative sample[[9]](#footnote-9).

IDPs came predominantly from two sub-districts (or *tehsil*) in Khyber Agency, Bara Tehsil and the recently created *tehsil* of Tirah, previously part of Bara Tehsil. At the time of the study in July 2017, many IDPs from Bara and Tirah had returned from displacement. It is difficult to quantify exactly how many people had returned to Tirah and Bara. Official figures from August 2017 (e.g. USAID 2017) were that over 80% of households displaced in KP Province and FATA had returned, with just 46,000 household remaining out of a total displacement of just over 300,000 households. Caution is needed in interpreting these figures, though. First, they only relate to registered IDPs. Many IDPs choose not to register: IDMC 2017 warns that “in some cases as few as half of all displaced heads of household may be registered”. Secondly, there is wide variation in rates of return depending on the security, or the perception of security, in the place of origin, so the overall return rates may not reflect the position for particular places (eg Tirah valley). Thirdly, the simple division into returned households and remaining (displaced) households does not fit well with how displacement and return occur in real life. It is well-known from other displacement situations that families do not simply change from living in displacement on one day to returning home the next. The head of a family may register for return (especially where a resettlement grant is offered) but other family members may remain, and even the head may move between two locations. The local field researchers for this study informally estimated that a far higher proportion of IDPs from FATA were still living around Peshawar, possibly as many as half.

Since it was not possible to undertake field work in FATA with returned IDPs, this study only interviewed IDPs still living in Peshawar District. Return has depended partly on personal choice, which would introduce an inherent bias if the findings were presented as representative of the views of the population which had been displaced as a whole. The paper must be read as a representation of changes in the roles of women still living in Peshawar District, from among IDPs from Khyber Agency.

**A methodological note: estimating prevalence from non-quantitative research**

This study is an exploratory one, meaning that it is a first attempt to understand the issues in how women’s lives have changed in displacement. In order to achieve this understanding it was necessary to talk to as diverse a range of people as we could find; and, whilst the agenda for the interviews was clearly set, we had to let people tell us what was important for them. As a result, some interviews concentrated on a narrower range of topics or sets of experience than others, as was felt necessary to maximise our understanding of the picture of changing gender relations as a whole. Such an approach, though, makes it impossible to draw quantitative conclusions. The sample was deliberately diverse rather than representative; and because people were not asked the same direct set of questions, nothing can be concluded from the fact that someone (for example) did not mention suffering domestic violence.

A different kind of study is needed to quantify the prevalence of any of the issues covered in this report – but such a study could not have been planned or designed without having first understood what the important issues were and how they can be identified. Nonetheless, it seems necessary to distinguish between statements that were only made by one or two people from those that were quite common. This paper sometimes refers to statements being made by ‘many’ or by ‘a few’ people. Such imprecision may be frustrating for those who want more precise quantification, but it would be meaningless to say how many people, or what percentage of interviewees had made a similar statement. Indeed, such false precision would only serve to mislead.

## The places of origin

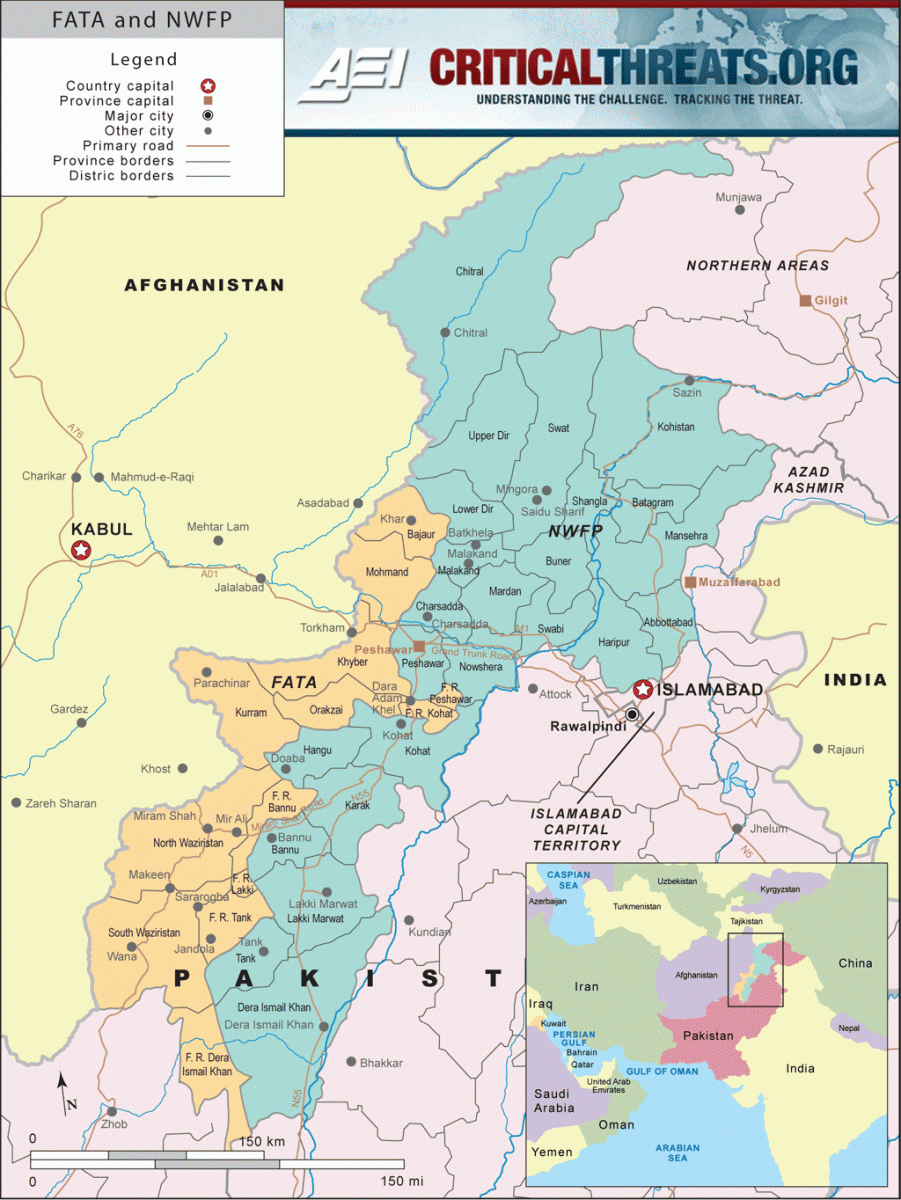
The majority of the population of Khyber Agency are from the Afridi tribe within the Pashtun ethnic group. As mentioned, IDPs were predominantly from Bara and Tirah. Tirah Valley[[10]](#footnote-10) or Tirah Tehsil is the most remote part of Khyber Agency, on the border with Afghanistan. Although only around 60 miles (in a straight line) from Peshawar city, it was very cut off by a lack of passable roads, apart from by culture, politics[[11]](#footnote-11) and insecurity. This remoteness from the rest of Pakistan has meant that trade was often easier between Tirah and Afghanistan, even by going over the mountains for two days with mules, than between Tirah and the rest of Pakistan. The high altitude and climate of Tirah (at around 2,300m above sea level) keep it green in summer and when much of Pakistan is dry; and very cold, covered in snow, in winter. Tirah had very few services or amenities: no health care (even no medically trained midwives), very few schools and no electricity. There were no permanent shops or markets, only weekly travelling fairs, where everything from livestock, food, clothes and the main cash crop, hashish, were traded. Bara Tehsil is much closer and better connected to Peshawar city (which has a population of around 2 million) and to Kohat city (which has a population of around 1 million). It also enjoys better services: some electricity is available, there is some health care and better education facilities (though secondary schools are few). Market infrastructure is also more developed. Bara is situated at a much lower altitude, and many Afridi spent summer in Tirah valley, moving to Bara in winter. The population in Bara was displaced from 2009; displacement occurred more suddenly in Tirah in 2012.

1. **Gender differences and the structure of gender inequality before displacement**

## The socio-political background and the role of Afridi women in Khyber Agency[[12]](#footnote-12)

Women and girls in Khyber Agency lived in one of the most extreme patriarchies in the world today. Their situation was created by the unique legal situation of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA, of which Khyber Agency is a part[[13]](#footnote-13). Discussions have been ongoing for some time on possible changes in the status of FATA as a whole. The Committee on Federally Administered Tribal Areas, set up by the Prime Minister in November 2015, made recommendations for their inclusion into the Pakistan mainstream by incorporating them into the Province of KP. These recommendations were approved by the Government in March 2017. The description below of the life of women in Khyber Agency relates to the time before their displacement, i.e. before such changes were being proposed. These changes, and their possible implications for women and girls are considered in section 4.)

Figure 1. Map of FATA, Pakistan and of Khyber Agency.





Source: <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/fata-conflict-maps> (left) and UNOCHA (right).

Since the time of British rule, the areas along the border with Afghanistan have been treated as a buffer region, never fully incorporated into British ruled India or independent Pakistan. In common with such physically and culturally isolated – and economically marginalised – areas in other countries, they acquired a reputation for unruliness, and a modus vivendi was sought where the ruling power had as little responsibility as possible for managing the domestic affairs of the inhabitants, in return for acceptance of its sovereignty over the area as a whole. The British did not extend normal laws to the area, making them instead subject to a special legal code, the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). This was in essence akin to a form of feudalism that had not been seen in Britain for centuries, where autonomy was given to the Lords (or *Maliks*) to rule over their lands largely as they sought fit, in return for overall allegiance to the Crown. On independence, Pakistan maintained this situation, and the territories are ruled by the FCR to this day[[14]](#footnote-14), with the Political Agent, now the representative of the President rather than the British Crown, wielding powers that cross the lines of legislature (rule maker), executive and judiciary.

It may be convenient to represent this situation as tribal autonomy: the state leaves people to live as they wish, as long as trade is secured and overall peace maintained. (In FATA, apart from on government property, the State’s law applies only on main roads and a hundred yards on either side of it.) However, what this freedom means for the citizens of Pakistan who live in FATA is that the protections of the Constitution do not apply to them; the Federal Parliament has no power to legislate for them; they have no recourse to the High Court or the Supreme Court for their protection; and until 1996, the population – apart from the *Maliks* – were ‘free’ of any right to vote for the Federal authority that ruled them. The population of Khyber Agency, almost entirely from the Pakhtun or Pashtun ethnic group, has been largely free of state investment in infrastructure and services since colonial times.

*“Special Status has been partially successful in inculcating a notion, Azad Qabail, of autonomous (free) tribes, a misnomer as they are neither free nor tribes. In concrete terms this so-called freedom expresses itself as the freedom of colonial/Pakistani authorities from administrative costs and responsibilities…”*

*Khan and Samina, 2009*

The effect on women of this special status has been catastrophic. Robbed of any protection by the state, and living a culture where a notion of ‘honour’ permits – or perhaps better, obliges – men to kill women for even the suspicion of breaking a strict code, they live only under sufferance, their very existence subject to the will of those who control them.

Locally, authority for settling disputes is given to the *jirga*, a council where not only are women never represented, but where they are also not allowed to bring any complaints or be heard[[15]](#footnote-15). In the absence of state law, lives are ruled by the cultural rules set by the *jirga* and the (male) elders, a code known as Pakhtunwali. A full description of this system is beyond the scope of this paper, but a few elements are critical for understanding the changing role of women and girls with displacement.

Hospitality is a key virtue, given in a *hurja*, a place built outside the domestic home – and a male only arena. The giving of hospitality (food) is important for the respect of the man, but is provided for by the women. Land can only be passed down a male line, and a family with no male heirs loses its claims to land. Land has to be protected by strength against challenges from rivals, often relatives. Such strength is manifested mainly in arms: education is regarded as bringing weakness, since it makes people ‘soft’, less willing to kill or be killed in struggle over land[[16]](#footnote-16). Revenge is either encouraged or required by the culture, and feuds between families can continue for generations. Several of the interviewees for this study spoke of grandparents and other relatives who had been killed in such feuds. However, the culture also provides for conflict resolution, where one party admits doing wrong and asks for forgiveness. Such a party may bring the feud to an end by offering a girl from the family in marriage (‘*swara*’) to the offended family. Notions of honour and self-respect are also intimately tied up with the strict rules of behaviour for women: a man’s honour depends on the behaviour of his female relatives. Two aspects of this behaviour are critical: the absolute taboo not just of sex before or outside marriage but of any contact between a girl or woman and a man from outside the family; and perceived obedience to the decisions of the man. Because there is no legal authority (or protection) outside Pakhtunwali, men have untrammelled power of coercion and punishment over women and girls who either transgress those rules or upon whom the slightest suspicion falls.

It is beyond the scope of this study look in detail at the history of FATA as a whole or Khyber Agency in particular. One or two observations regarding changes over the past thirty or more years are however necessary. The 1980s saw the start of a rise of religious adherence that increased until the occupation of much of the area by Islamic militants, whose control led to the military activity which cause the displacement. This was linked directly by some interviewees with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. These armed groups came from outside the tribal structure, and did not seek to build power along tribal lines. As a result they saw themselves in opposition to the tribal heads, the Maliks, many of whom were killed by these militants. This has brought long-term weakening of the Malik as an institution, since it was a hereditary office, with the son being gradually trained by the father in the role. The decapitation of the institution through the assassination of many Maliks undermined the authority which their children could claim in taking on the role. The 1980s was also the start of an economic boom for many in the area, brought about by the rise of the drugs (hashish) trade. This wealth, held at family level, also weakened the power of the tribal authority. Furthermore, the wealth enabled more people to travel more extensively, for trade or for employment, and this too weakened the power of the Malik over the clan or tribe.

The rest of Section 2, based on the interviews from the primary research, examines how gender inequality is created and maintained. In the sub-sections below, various dimensions of gender inequality are discussed in turn: by analysing the relationship between these elements, the logic of discrimination is revealed.

## Joint family system and the gender division of roles

The overall context of women’s lives is set by the interplay between the politico-legal status of FATA and the highly patriarchal Pakhtunwali code: their day-to-day lives, their welfare and the rules which governed them were shaped to a large degree by the physical way in which they lived before displacement. A useful entry point to seeing how gender relations were shaped, and how changes have occurred after displacement, is to look at how different forces came together to create the Afridi joint family system.

This joint family system (JFS) is rooted in elements that are physical, economic and social. Twenty or more people from three or four generations could live together under one roof, in one large multi-storeyed house, built up over several generations. There are a number of drivers for this physical living arrangement. In an area covered in snow for months of the year, there are practical reasons for preferring a single, multi-storeyed, multi-occupied structure over several smaller ones. Collecting firewood is time consuming task, and a single fire can warm more people in a multi-storeyed joint family system arrangement. Many families spend the summer months in the high altitude areas such as Tirah valley, but move to the lower, and warmer, areas in Bara for winter. One person can remain behind to ensure that snow does not pile too high on the roof to cause damage, and in a JFS, one person can thus protect the home of over twenty others. There are cultural drivers of the JFS too. There is strict enforcement of almost total separation of women and men from outside the family and a constant fear that family honour will be threatened by suspicion of a girl or woman coming into contact with ‘outsider’ men. (This is discussed in more detail below). It is easier to ensure that women are never left alone when they are living in the JFS with many other people. However, the principle driver of JFS is probably the nature of family feuds and the need for ‘strength’. People live together for protection from armed attacks, and because it is necessary to have as many carriers of guns (i.e. males) as possible, in order to increase the likelihood of simple survival. It is this same practical need that creates the demand for male children, to be future claimants over land, defenders of the family’s claims and armed protectors of the extended family.

Four elements have thus combined: a politico-legal system where a family’s protection is its own responsibility, rather that of the state; a culture where honour and respect set rules for using violence, rather than seeking to avoid it; a cultural rule that inheritance passes only through males; and gender norms that create very different roles for males and females, such that women cannot take part in armed, physical defence of the family. The combination of these four forces is a family need for boys rather than girls (who will in any case leave the home on marriage), and for as many of them as possible. This in turn creates pressure on a wife to bear sons, her failure[[17]](#footnote-17) to do so probably resulting in the husband taking another wife and strong social stigma; and it creates a demand for girls to marry and to start producing sons as soon as they are physically able to do so.

**What is strength?**

Families need to be strong. They need to fight off attempts from rivals who may try and claim their land; and they need to fight off families with whom they (or the generations before them) have become embroiled in feuds. Just as importantly, exhibiting strength will deter such attacks.

Where then does strength lie? First and foremost, strength is in the number of sons who can carry guns, and in the number of males in the extended family who will carry guns on your behalf. Strength can lie in wealth, snice this is also the ability to hire people with guns. People who have political connections may be strong, and in some areas connection to the police may also lend strength. Education, though, is a sign of weakness. Many female interviewees spoke of the advantages of an educated husband, who behaves in a more polite and ‘civilised’ way. From another perspective, that means that education makes you a coward, less likely to be extreme in violence.

Early marriage[[18]](#footnote-18) of girls even before they are sixteen (the age of consent in Pakistan) is thus partly driven by this need to produce as many sons as quickly as possible. (A more important driver is the need for a girl to remain chaste until marriage, discussed below: the sooner she is married, the quicker the danger is over.) The economic arrangements of the joint family system facilitate early marriage, which is often between girls of 13 to 14 years and boys from fifteen upwards. Children of this age cannot be expected to be entirely economically independent. The joint family system provides a single, shared economy, to which all contribute and from which the needs of all should be met. (Such a system also made it possible for families to cope with men who were less able to work because of addiction to the hashish which they produced.) This permits the division of labour, and it facilitates a sharper division of roles between males and females than is often seen even in societies where gender roles are quite different. Women’s movement has been extremely restricted on the grounds of honour (see 2.3 below). Men are thus responsible for all the tasks which involve movement outside the immediate settlement, which includes everything from going to local market fairs, to trade (or smuggling), or working in the Gulf and sending remittances. The income from any such remittances belongs to the joint family, and the money will not be paid to the wife but to the family patriarch, the father or the eldest son. Men are also responsible for agriculture, and for processing the main cash crops: hashish and opium. Women “assist” their husbands with the farming, and are responsible for looking after livestock. They also responsible for all the domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, and for looking after men, as well as children, the sick and elderly relatives. Because the dispersed settlement pattern meant that there would usually not be any close neighbours other than relatives, women and girls were also responsible for fetching water and firewood. The workload of girls and women was both enormous and physically demanding, having to climb great heights on steep slopes, often carrying heavy loads to find fodder for the animals, firewood for cooking and heating, and water for the family. Because girls were freer to move before puberty (see below), they often found themselves burdened with this hard physical labour. Men had far more time to socialise in the *hurja*, and boys regularly played while the girls were busy working for the family.

Two dimensions of this life need to be distinguished: the rural life from the gender relations. From the physical confines of peri-urban displacement (see below), many of the older women spoke with some nostalgia of their previous outdoor rural life, and of the health that they enjoyed in the fresh air, with clean water and physical exercise. At the same time, though, all the women resented the inequality with which this physical burden was shared. Most older men, and some older women too, initially portrayed this pre-displacement life as one of harmony and mutual support between the two sexes, though in the course of the interviews, all the women and girls and many of the men and boys then went on to explain and describe the inequalities in this joint family system.

**Gender discrimination as respect: men’s views on gender relations before displacement**

*Females in our society were respected in every way*.

*Females in the past were the important part of a home. Females were respected, but compared to males they were considered inferior.*

*Most decisions were taken without the consent of women, but women were considered the most important part of the society. They were respected and their needs were looked after. Responsibility for looking after their needs depended solely on the man.*

Inequality was not merely between the sexes. Just as overall authority rested with the oldest man, domestic authority lay with his wife – which, for most women, meant their mother-in-law. In the domestic realm her power was almost absolute, subject only to the intervention of her husband. A disfavoured daughter-in-law could be given a much greater burden of menial tasks, and punishments which included physical and psychological violence such as regular beatings and even denial of food.

## 2.2 Marriage

On marriage, a girl left her parents and family, and moved to live with the family of her husband. Her own family were barely permitted to help her, whatever troubles and abuse she was facing from her husband’s family. Because life was governed by the joint family system, a girl was not really marrying a man so much as marrying into a family. Indeed, several women interviewed spoke of having a good relationship with a reasonable husband, but a life made a misery by their mother-in-law and (older) brothers-in-law. All of these observations on the institution of marriage would, of course, be equally true for many other girls and women in other parts of Pakistan.

Girls were not consulted in the choice of husband (and his family), and were forced to accept whatever choice was made by her father. Boys too had to accept the choice of bride made for them by their father or parents, but with this key difference: the boy remained living with his family, and the choice related only to his wife, whereas for a girl, the choice of husband determined everything about the rest of her life. (Although everyone agreed that the final decision in marriage for children rested with the father, a number of interviewees reported the mother may have some word in the decision, though others said that it was the father alone.) Several interviewees left clues that suggested some difference in the way in which the autonomy of a male and female was seen, even if with little difference in practice. Everyone agreed that girls had no opportunity to offer an opinion over the choice of the husband, and no one would even think to ask their consent. On the other hand, a few interviewees said that boys were asked if they agreed with the choice of bride – but that it would be unthinkable for them to refuse, given the strict respect for elders demanded by the Pakhtunwali code.

Even if they had been asked, girls could not give informed consent because betrothal took place at such a young age, with marriage often following immediately after puberty and usually between about thirteen and fifteen[[19]](#footnote-19). Before puberty girls were able to move fairly freely, but the most restrictive time was between puberty and marriage. This was the most dangerous time for the girl’s family because any contact between the girl and a male outside the family would endanger the family’s honour. Once married, the danger for her family was reduced. The danger for the girl herself would never be over, as the frequency of so-called honour killings justifies. Such murders could even be ordered by the only accessible law courts, the *jirga*. (So-called honour killings occur in many other parts of Pakistan, but they are, at least officially, illegal outside FATA. Reliable comparative data on prevalence is, of course, impossible to obtain.)

Girls were also married off early for economic reasons. The bride’s family receive a payment, bride price[[20]](#footnote-20), on the marriage of the girl. In principle, women all said that this money is supposed to be used for the benefit of the bride; the bride takes possessions purchased with this money with her on marriage, and these remain her own private property. Bride price was also said to ensure a measure of respect for the girl, as a girl who is given away for free is said to be disrespected by the family into which she marries. However all the female respondents reported that only a fraction of this money is actually used for their benefit, and the rest was an economic profit the family.

*we are sold to men like cattle in the name of marriage. So, we are treated like cattle. Young married woman, FGD*

Families which cannot afford to pay bride price to marry their son, or who wish to avoid paying the bride price, may instead offer a daughter in marriage, for example to the brother of the girl about to marry their son. This is known as an exchange marriage (*adal* *badal* or *badal).* Every report which we heard of *badal* had been negative for the women involved. A woman married in *badal* is hostage to the treatment given to the other bride in the exchange. If her brother mistreats his wife, then she is almost certainly going to be mistreated in revenge.

The most pernicious form of marriage for a woman, though, was to be used as payment of recompense by a family requesting forgiveness to end the feud, called *swara*. Although in theory such a marriage is supposed to end enmity, in practice every respondent reported that the woman married for *swara* was despised as the daughter of their enemies and perpetually mistreated by everyone in what was supposed to be her new family.

## 

### 2.3 Movement

In the days before the militants penetrated Khyber Agency and gained influence or control, women had greater freedom of movement in the area around their own settlement. Families lived in small villages, essentially groups of their own relatives. As a result, within the settlement and in the fields and forests around there were no risks of a woman being seen by a male non-family member. She could thus go visiting in the homes of her female relatives (wearing a *dupatta*, or head-scarf), but more importantly for the family, she was able to move to collect firewood, fodder and water, and to work labouring in her husband’s fields unimpeded by the constraints of a *burqa*. (As discussed above, restrictions were tightest for an unmarried adolescent girl.) After displacement, with the different set of restrictions that this imposed, there was some nostalgia for this, albeit very limited, freedom for a social life (see below). However movement beyond her immediate settlement was not allowed, unless escorted by a male family member. Women could not go to the regular market fairs in neighbouring villages, but could only request male family members to make purchases on their behalf, even for their own clothes. Even if young girls received some education, they were not allowed to move to schools once they reached puberty, typically around Grade 5 (but see 2.4 below on education).

Women had to be escorted by a man if going to any health facility, where such existed. In Tirah valley, heath care was simply unavailable, for men or women. Many respondents spoke of the long trek by donkey to hospital in Peshawar town being a last resort for a patient who was very ill, and that ‘usually they died on the way’.

With the arrival of the Islamist militants, much stricter rules on purdah and movement were enforced. Initially, the militants tried to ban all female movement outside the home without a *burqa*, but the men successfully argued against this, since they saw it conflicted with their own interests: women could not work adequately in the fields or collecting fodder, water and firewood with the restricted physical movement that a burqa permits. The women’s own opinion on the trade-off between having to wear a burqa (and having movement restricted) or having continued responsibility for the heavy workload of fetching fodder, water and firewood, was reportedly not a factor in the discussion.

### 2.4 Education

Education was not a high priority for most in Khyber Agency. Literacy rates were low, even for men, and were below 10% for females – and very much lower even that that in Tirah Tehsil, by all accounts. In Bara, some girls – a significant number, though a minority – had more schooling, finishing primary or in some cases attending secondary schooling, though only very rarely beyond five years of primary. More boys attended school, and some from Bara even finished secondary school. Again, several factors can be seen to interact (and to reinforce each other) to create the situation where education was poor for boys, and for girls minimal.

The first explanation offered by most respondents for girls not being schooled, or for receiving only limited schooling, was the lack of schools. In Bara, some girls’ schools are available, but not everywhere, and girls are not allowed to move far. In Tirah, secondary schools for boys were not available, primary schools for boys were not found everywhere and no respondent had a girls’ primary school at an accessible distance, given the limited movement allowed to girls. Education opportunities for girls were further restricted in Bara after the militants assumed such a strong degree of power and control in the district. They placed a ban on schooling for girls, and although the reports from interviewees suggest that this was not completely followed, it did further narrow the few opportunities which had existed.

However, availability of schools was only a part of the story. There were few obvious advantages to education for anyone in Khyber Agency. There were no employment prospects, and education, perhaps beyond very basic literacy, was not seen to help in any of the functions of life, whether economic or social. Education or literacy was not a feature of participation in a jirga, and if anything, as mentioned above, men and women both reported that education would be seen to weaken a man rather than to empower him. This is taking a cultural view of strength and empowerment: among the interviewees, there were one or two examples of boys who had been educated and who were subsequently professionally successful. Many boys who were enrolled in primary school were often truant, preferring to play instead, and there had clearly been no pressure from their parents to attend.

It is common in many societies for families to prioritise education for their sons on what could be considered to be rational economic grounds[[21]](#footnote-21). Because of the way in which marriage was conducted and responsibilities allocated to men and women, the parents’ future depended on the sons, whilst the daughters leave the family on marriage and no claim could be made on them by their parents for their welfare. This logic was regularly quoted by interviewees from FATA. On top of this though, if there was a general perception that there was little reason for a boy to go to school, then there was a much stronger view that there was no advantage at all to educating girls, even for the families into which they would marry. Women had no opportunity at all for employment or for making use of (secular) education. Tight restrictions on their unaccompanied movement, even to markets, meant that was no advantage even to basic literacy, since they never had a need – or opportunity – to read or write.

Although this was never stated as a reason for girls having been denied education pre-displacement, evidence that this logic was at play comes from changes post-displacement, as discussed below. (For example, if education had been seen as an advantage by her future husband’s family, then this might have changed the girl’s economic value, i.e. the value of bride price she could attract.)

As discussed above, girls were married at a young age. Once married, it was not socially acceptable for girls to continue at school. There was no provision of any education facilities for married girls or for adults. Even if not yet married, a girl would not usually be allowed to move to school once she reached puberty. As a result, even when girls were attending primary school (as was often the case in Bara), they were not allowed to continue beyond roughly 5 years of primary schooling.

One of the reasons why there were so few schools, particularly in Tirah, was the historic opposition locally against any attempt by the state to introduce schooling. Several respondents spoke of the role of the *maliks* in fomenting this opposition. Education was portrayed as foreign, Western, as something that would undermine the culture of the Afridi or something that was secular and would undermine their religion. However, those same respondents who mentioned this all spoke of the fact that they had since realised that the *maliks* had been sending their own children to school and even university, and that the people had been made fools of by the *maliks* who wished to keep them ignorant.

*“There were no schools [back in the village]. The Maliks condemned schools as “the education of the west”. But now we realise that their own children were studying in schools in town. It wasn’t ‘the education of the west’ for them.” (FGD 8, younger men)*

*“…schools were only built on paper. The Maliks took all the funds and the poor people of the area remained ignorant” (FGD 7, younger men)*

*Long before in our village, only the children of the malik were educated. They opposed the promotion of education, because they didn’t want our children to be educated and find good jobs for themselves. They wanted to keep us poor. (FGD 1, old women)*

*We didn’t study, because of our elders. They listened to the maliks. The maliks didn’t allow schools or roads and anything like that. But the malik’s children studied abroad and now they are living happy life abroad, and we are where we were 50 years ago. (man, 70 years)*

There were hints too, never fully expressed directly, of fears that education threatened the cultural status quo. Educated girls were considered to be at risk of becoming less obedient and compliant, harder to marry off. (Other studies have suggested that one reasons for preferring early marriage is that a girl is more pliable for her in-laws and husband[[22]](#footnote-22): education would obviously make a girl even less pliable.) Several women, and surprisingly even adolescent girls, spoke very openly about how they had been denied education in order to prevent them from knowing their rights, claims probably substantiated by the language of some of those who continued to oppose female education.

*“Men did not let women to go to school, because they feared that if they started going to school, they wouldn’t work in the fields. They would revolt against the rules [about how women should behave], so they kept women suppressed and beat them, so that they would obey their orders without asking any questions.”* Adolescent girl, FGD*.*

Even where a male head of family did not feel personally driven by all these forces to reject or downplay the value of education for his daughters, he felt compelled to follow the cultural norms of the society. Again and again, interviewees (mainly men) spoke of the problem of “backbiting” or malicious talk of those who did not rule their women strictly or for those who allowed their children a voice. In a culture that places such a high value, even obligation, on honour; and in a society where being perceived as “educated”, “civilised” or a coward brings direct threats including armed threats to life itself; it is unsurprising that men were kept in line in denying or restricting education for their daughters.

*“the husband was not supposed to help his wife with her tasks. That was a sign of weakness and then people used to taunt that person.*”

Religious education was generally not seen in opposition to secular schooling, but as a complement or as an alternative form of education. If schooling was not possible, whether because of lack of availability, restricted access or lack of money, many girls and their parents would look for some religious schooling (madrassa) instead. Such schooling was contrasted with the simple rote learning to recite the Koran which girls would receive at the homes of some aunt or other relative. Madrassa education was not widely available before displacement.

## 2.5 Livelihoods

Before displacement women had no independent livelihoods in Tirah valley: even in Bara, an independent livelihood for women was incredibly rare. (The interviews contained one single example, see Box \* “an exceptional case”.) Although they were heavily involved in economic activities, as described above, this was as a contribution to the household or family enterprises of agriculture and livestock keeping. Any trading from this, the act of bringing in income, was in the hands of men. In any case, without independent access to any shop or market, women had few opportunities to use any money independently even if they had earned it. Women had no opportunities for the other economic or productive activities which some men were able to engage in. The only activities which women could engage in were those which took place entirely in the home, and this was almost entirely restricted to sewing. It did not appear from the interviewees that this was seen as a way of making money though, which would be unsurprising given that other women had such little access to money and the impossibility of a woman engaging directly in business with a man.

**Box \*: An exceptional case**

“My husband was involved in smuggling, so he was away most of the time. Whenever he was away, I felt insecure, because my in-laws started taunting and beating me. ..When my husband moved abroad in search of work, I was left alone with my child and my in-laws had a free hand then [to abuse me]. .. I learned tailoring from a neighbour, and started stitching clothes for my self and later on for others in the village to earn something for myself. Later on when I had saved some money, I took a huge step - I started a cloth business in Bara market. I was the first lady in whole of Bara to start my own business. Day by day, I became known in nearby villages, and I was encouraged by many other women. It was the only shop in the market run by a woman, so it was very easy for other women to come and buy from me. That market is still known by my name.

Some other women in my community were also encouraged and they also started their own businesses… When my husband came back from abroad, he found I had a booming business. He was happy and he decided to support me. We were earning well enough from my stall that my husband could leave smuggling, and he decided to stay here and work with me to improve my business….We were living a happy and prosperous life until Mangal Bagh [the leader of Lashkar-e-Islam militant organisation] came…they were against women education and their jobs outside home and I had no choice but to abandon my shop …and move to Peshawar.”

# The shock, displacement and the new situation

The shock of displacement was forced upon the local population is in different ways in Bara and Tirah, which fell under the control of different militant organisations with different relationships to the state. Bara was occupied by a more anti-state faction: many fled progressively because of the nature of their rule, and these people were only considered as IDPs after the large wave of forced displacement in 2012. The military operation here was more gradual and those forced to flee had more warning and were able to leave with greater preparations. In Tirah Tehsil, a more pro-state faction held sway: military action by the army was more sudden here, in response to a takeover of control by the anti-state faction from Bara. People’s stories from Tirah are shocking. Families were forced to flee for their lives in an instant, leaving everything behind and running at night with only the clothes they were wearing, carrying their children with them. Many (men and women) spoke of the difficulties which women faced, fleeing in groups which included men from outside their families, and the struggle which they and their menfolk faced to keep them safe and protect their honour. There were stories of people dying on the journey, of people fleeing being captured by the militants, and of the desperate fears of rape should this happen to them.

Almost all of those we spoke to first went to stay with relatives, where they arrived hungry, tired, penniless and with no possessions. Although their relatives frequently had little, and the space in their homes was limited, every single respondent expressed deep gratitude to the way in which their relatives had looked after them, sometimes for several months. As quickly as people could, they found work, registered to receive assistance and they began to look for accommodation of their own. Most women did not have computerised National Identity Cards (NIC or CNIC), because there was no mechanisms by which they would be allowed to go and register (which also involved having their faces photographed) (Mosel and Jackson, 2013) and partly because they had little reason to apply before displacement. For most, the economic necessity for the household to gain access to a food ration outweighed any cultural sensitivity preventing them from applying and most women now have CNICs. The respondents for this study were still mostly living in rented accommodation in suburbs and villages in the peri-urban area around Peshawar, as described in the introduction above. A few successful IDPs have been able to buy property.

The contrast with their livelihood situation before displacement was stark. They had lost their fields and their livestock, and with it their near self-sufficiency in food and their sources of income. Instead most survived by taking various forms of daily unskilled work. They had also lost their large houses in which they lived together in the joint family system. Property of such size was simply not available for rent in the peri-urban area, even had they been able to afford it. As it was they were typically spending around USD 400 per month on rent, living in much smaller houses and, although they were not living as an entirely nuclear family, the family system was fragmented with typically only nine or ten people living together rather than the previous twenty or more.

Although in many ways they were economically much worse off than before, they enjoyed the availability of basic services and utilities. Piped water was available nearby, if not in the home; gas was available for cooking, and in most places electricity was also available, though power outages were common in some areas. Schools were available for both boys and girls; madrassas were also available; and healthcare was accessible, either from local health posts or from the main referral hospitals in Peshawar city. Men’s lives were very different after displacement: but for women and girls, the transformation was almost total. This transformation was brought about because every one of the factors which had shaped people’s lives in Bara and in Tirah, discussed in Section 2 above, was changed by the fact of displacement, even though they continued living with people from their own ethnic group and from their own culture.

# **Section 3 The changing role of women after displacement**

## 3.1 Joint family system

The change in physical geography to one where joint family living was no longer possible on the same scale had far-reaching implications for women and girls. The subjugation of a married girl or woman to her mother-in-law was often broken. Equally, her husband no longer felt the pressures from his own family (and most particularly from his elder brothers) to control his wife and daughters as they wanted him to. There had already been a few instances where a husband had disliked the treatment given to his wife by his family, and so had broken with them by building a separate home and moving away. This had been an extreme measure to take : the husband lost access to his livelihood (the family land), to any claim on the family for support and to his share in inheritance. A man could only undertake this in extreme circumstances and where he felt confident he could support his wife and children entirely on his own, for example if he returned from work in the Gulf with some savings.

[My grandfather] used to beat my mother every day. But my mother never complained to our father, because she thought our grandfather was the elder and had the right to beat her. My father … knew what was going on at home, though, so he decided to separate his family, so that we could live without being tortured by our grandfather. … It was a wonderful feeling for us to be in a separate family. Our mother was finally at ease, after long struggles in her life.

Several women spoke of how moving had opened up an easier possibility to separate from the extended family, and how this transformed their relationships with their husbands. Their husbands were no longer socialising all the time with their brothers and (male) relatives, but now were free to talk to them instead and several women indicated that domestic violence had reduced. Although the man remains the decision maker, many wives now spoke of being able to discuss things with their husbands, e.g. about their children. It was very clear from many interviews with men that they were well aware of their wives’ feelings on many subjects, and for many this was an important consideration in decision making. The older woman in a household had always benefited from a particular status, with some say in the running of a household. In so far as displacement caused many families to have to fragment their joint living arrangements, it meant that far more women are now ‘the eldest woman’ in their households.

This change was about more than just women acquiring a voice, but, for many, it was a transformation in the relationship between a man and wife, as they became co-parents and, in some cases, co-providers for their families.

Right after we were displaced to Peshawar, I pushed my husband for us to live in a separate house, because I was tired of being abused by my mother-in-law. ... I am now living alone with my husband. I am very happy because I finally had a chance to develop an understanding with my husband, we’ve had an opportunity to get to know each other properly. (married woman)

After we started living separately, we saw such a change in how men behaved. In the village, our fathers would never ask about us or about our mothers. Living in the [extended] family, it wasn’t done to take an interest in children or your wife. But when we came here, living now as a separate family, our father takes an interest in our lives. He takes care of us. We do miss our big house and the extended family, but we are so happy to live separately.   
 (FGD, adolescent girl)

The implications of a change from a joint family economy went further than this. Before displacement, a girl on marriage was given a number of tasks to support the family; and her boy-husband might contribute some labour to the family farming enterprises but he had no overall burden of responsibility to keep a household. After displacement, and with much smaller family units, a boy would find it much harder to marry without being able to take care economically for his wife and, very shortly after, children. After just a few years of displacement it was already seen that both boys and girls were marrying at a slightly older age. (This study cannot be used to quantify such changes, but many reports suggested that marrying age was about 2 to 3 years older for both boys and girls.)

As discussed in section 2, above, apart from the demands of the joint family system, the role of women and girls within the family sphere had been shaped by a combination of the external economic realities and infrastructure (e.g. needs to collect water and firewood); social rules on their mobility; and the cultural norms of what was appropriate and valued for both men and for women. Each of these was turned on its head by displacement. A woman no longer had to work in the fields or collecting fodder for livestock – they had lost their land and livestock, and women could not move out of the house freely to work in other ways. A family no longer needed an army of young females to spend the day collecting firewood for warmth and for cooking, for carrying water up steep slopes for so many people. The hot climate of Peshawar did not need heating, and, though expensive, gas is a far more convenient way of cooking. Piped water was available near the house, and it was no longer the responsibility of the females to fetch it: this responsibility was transferred to the boys. Women were not able to move outside the house without a *burqa* to fetch water (see below, 3.5), and boys were able to take over the responsibility to fetch water because collecting water was a much lighter burden than before.

As a result of all these changes, women now had time on their hands but few ways to occupy it. This was not entirely positive. Most women complained that they had become lazy and overweight, that they were no longer strong and healthy as they used to be (from the hard physical activity of agricultural work, collecting water and firewood), that they were often bored and they missed the social life of being able to visit their relatives nearby. On the other hand, girls now had time to go to school and women or older girls had time to engage in their own economic projects, even if the opportunities to do so were actually very constrained.

This increase in time has also brought about another change in women’s roles: they are now more active as mothers.

*Women [in Peshawar] take care of the home and also look after their children. Some of them also go out to work. We were very surprised at first, because it was so new for us. We always saw our mothers working, but they took care of their animals, not their children. They never cared for us the way they cared for animals. But mothers here work as well, and still take interest in their children. This is very good for a child’s upbringing.*

## 3.2 Livelihoods

Before displacement, women had no independent livelihoods: no independent ownership of productive assets; no independent income sources; no ability to spend money directly; and very little say, if any, in decisions of the joint family. On the other hand, they had a major responsibility for supporting the economic production of the family, though, apart from the elder woman of the family no ability to choose what activities they engaged in.

The picture in displacement combines elements of radical change with some maintenance of the previous status quo. Overall, the family economic system was completely transformed. Families have lost their wealth, their land and with it the ability to earn money from cash crops (largely drugs) and to grow their own food. They have lost their large houses and now struggle to earn enough to pay rent. Economically, most families are worse off than before. As discussed above the family economic unit has also been transformed, with much greater responsibility falling on each household for its own economic survival and advancement. From a gender perspective, women and girls spend far less time on economic activities than before; they have more licence to have a semi-independent economic life; but their opportunities to be economically independent remain very much constrained.

### Economic activities for women

Men remain heads of household, including in the sense that they are expected to be the main breadwinners for their families. The woman’s domain remains the domestic one. Post-displacement poverty is certainly a driver for women to take on their own income generating activities, because many men struggle to earn enough through daily wage labour to keep their families. This report has detailed several times how change for women was possible because of the simultaneous changes in drivers and constraints that shaped social norms. This is true of women’s working patterns too. The economic incentive alone might not have been enough for everyone, but because displacement fragmented their tightly closed communities, people were to some extent liberated from constricting peer pressure.

*We are happy here because there is no backbiting and taunting if a woman works to support her family.* FGD 2:1, old men

*There is no back biting here and there is less interference in other people’s lives. If I had worked in Bara, people would have made my life hell over it*. Young married woman

Economic pressure for women to work could be high. Rent was typically around PKR 5,000 per month: the typical daily wage was just PKR 500. An archetypal household or family unit has one or more male breadwinner, one or more women looking after the domestic sphere and children going to school or, in the case of daughters, helping their mothers. However, many households did not follow this pattern. Drug addiction had been very high pre-displacement in an area where drugs were the main cash crop: availability was high, there was no direct economic cost and there was a degree of social acceptance. Several interviewees reported that enterprises use had gone down since displacement, and many women said that one of the reasons that they preferred living in Peshawar district and did not want to return was precisely the lower availability of drugs and the fact that the price reduced, as they believed, the risks of addiction. Nevertheless, addiction rates still appear to be high, though it was obviously beyond scope of this study to assess prevalence. Several women were interviewed, though, who bore the main economic responsibility for their households, because their husbands were unable to earn money because of drug use. In the joint family system, the loss of the labour of one adult male would be covered by the contributions of several others together. Many women now bear greater economic responsibility on their sole shoulders, because of the fragmentation of that system (whatever benefits its diminution has also brought) and because of the general loss of family wealth and income.

It would be wrong to portray this increased burden in a solely negative light, for two reasons. First, the interests of women and their husbands should, of course, not be presented as in simple opposition to each other. Many women spoke positively of their ability to help their husbands and their families, especially where they saw that their husbands were also working as hard as they could to support their families. Despite the overall characterisation of the community as patriarchal and deeply unequal to women, this does not exclude positive relationship between individual husbands and wives. Secondly, some women spoke of the change in the way in which they were regarded within their families as a result of the contributions that they were making. The same women had always been making an economic contribution to their family even before displacement, having to give their labour in the fields and being responsible for collecting fodder for the family livestock. However, they laboured fields controlled by the men and collected fodder for livestock controlled by the men. These were not seen as the women’s enterprises. Because all the sales and production were controlled by the men, the women themselves did not directly bring in money to the family. Their work was seen as a duty to assist in the enterprises of the husbands or their families (i.e. in-laws). Some women now took on income generating activities in which men were not at all involved. Instead of handing over their labour to their husbands (or families), they were handing over the money which their labour had earned. Although in many ways this change in women’s economic contribution was one of perception, it has had huge implications for some women.

*I keep the money I earn locked in a box in my room. Now I take the decisions at my home. Even my son listens to me. When I was first married, my husband treated me really badly… I do not have teeth in my mouth, because my husband beat me so badly…..but unlike in the village, he cannot rule and abuse me anymore... I am now earning and having money, and he knows it.* Woman, 55 years

Despite this, women’s economic life remains highly restricted. They engage in very few kinds of activities: most only do some sewing in the home, and one or two worked as domestic servants. The main constraint on women’s income generation was purdah. Women were now allowed out of the home without a male escort, but only covered in a burqa and only to a limited number of places, such as a market for clothes, or hospital. Most people still regarded it as wrong for a woman to work in a workplace with other men or for a woman to move freely outside the home. The same fear keeps people in line: “*We can’t allow our girls to have jobs because in our society it is considered bad for a female to work. Those girls are not accepted for marriages.”*

Because of their lack of education, almost the only opportunity available for women to earn money from within their homes was by sewing. This limited their potential earnings, and although it was an expressed aspiration of many women and girls to learn sewing, the lack of alternative opportunities would also obviously limit the number of women able to earn money.

Restrictions on movement alone are not the only constraining factor for women. Despite restrictions in general on women’s engagement in the workplace outside the home, one or two professions were regarded by some as acceptable and indeed desirable. These including teaching (at a girls’ only school), working as a doctor (for women patients) and one or two young men or adolescents also included work as a civil servant as professions that they would allow their wives to take up. All of these opportunities require a high degree of education, a level almost totally lacking among the IDPs. Apart from any ongoing restrictions on post-primary education, it will take several more years for any girls who started their education after displacement to reach higher education. (And as discussed above, only a very few will as yet be able to enjoy such opportunities.)

Very few other opportunities are currently possible, with the strict code of purdah as currently practised (see below). It is possible for some women to run small kiosks, from a window in their homes opening out on to the street. Such kiosks are only frequented by female clients or children and so are acceptable: but this restriction also means that potential takings are relatively small, since major purchases are still made by men.

Apart from the limitations imposed by purdah and a lack of education, there may be a degree to which opportunities are constrained by a limited vision of what is possible. Women themselves spoke of little apart from sewing, and most of the aid projects that they spoke about had also focused on sewing[[23]](#footnote-23). Some women have access to mobile smartphones, and thus internet access (see further discussion, below, 3.5). Potentially, this could open up a whole area of at-home employment as girls and women gain in education, but this does not appear to feature either in women’s awareness or in the interventions of the aid agencies they spoke about.

## 3.3 Education

By all accounts, the changes in attitudes towards girls schooling took place very quickly, within just a couple of years. From the interviews it seems to be the case that most girls, though not a large majority, now attend school at least until grade 5 (typically the age when they reach puberty). In a few places girls are still limited by the availability of girls only primary schools, though this is no longer a constraint for most. Although the change in girls’ education has been huge, this does not mean that gender equality has been achieved. The revolution in attitudes to education in general has been just as strong, if not stronger, regarding boys. Most boys now attend school, and many see education as their way to progress in life. Most boys were able to attend secondary school, whereas this was rare for girls. State education is free, and even thought the quality of education in the free schools is lower, most families could not afford to pay the fees demanded in private schools. Those families that could afford to send their boys to private schools were doing so; but those same families were sending their daughters to a local state school. Boys were thus receiving both more years schooling and, in some cases, higher quality education.

*Both our sons are studying in a [fee-paying] private school, and our daughter is studying in a [free] government school. We can’t pay fees for a private school for our daughter. We have to find a way to pay the fees for our sons, because they will support us in the future. Our daughter, though, will get married one day and will join another family.* Woman, 25

The economic logic that made it rational to spend resources on sons rather than daughters has not entirely changed. Nonetheless, opening up the prospect of girls’ schooling has been of enormous consequence, as discussed further below.

The reasons which interviewees gave for this change in attitude reflects changes in each of the individual reasons that had been constraining girls’ education pre-displacement (as detailed above): cultural, economic, social and religious.

The overall neutral or negative attitude to education had almost totally disappeared, even among the elderly. An old man who blamed education for having spoilt the younger generation stood out because his was a lone voice.

*The future of our generation is dark, there is no difference left between males and females. Both go to the school, neither listen to their parents and elders. They watch TV and follow what they see there, rather than their elders and their culture. There is no benefit in this kind of education, that means our future just following the western culture and the next generation forget their own.* Old man

Again, several factors helped bring about this broad change. IDPs were now living outside FATA, in territory governed by the laws of Pakistan and under the authority of the forces of law and order. This change, together with the enforced move away from their lands towards engaging in a wage economy, mean that wealth and power no longer come from the ability to hold on to land through force of arms – or the ability to demonstrate a willingness to engage in armed struggle to defend one’s territory. It was less of a worry that education would make a person be seen as a coward: instead, the ability to integrate into and advance in the new community was enhanced by literacy and the respect given to education.

The very rapid change in attitude to education was facilitated in large part by the influence on the displaced families of the practice of the host community.

*We saw that here children go to school, so we also sent our children to school*

young man

Schooling for girls, at least to primary school, was normal in the areas around Peshawar. In other situations, it has been noted how displaced populations often work hard to maintain their culture in the face of a foreign host community, resisting assimilation, through which they fear loss of identity. However, the Afridi IDPs were staying with a host community that was from their own culture, and even made up of their own relatives. It was striking how many men, in particular, openly spoke about having their eyes opened when they saw how their relatives in the peri-urban areas lived, particularly in relation to education for girls and marriage.

Overall, the changing economic circumstances brought about by the move to a peri-urban economy meant that education was now highly prized for boys by everyone we spoke to, young and old, men and women alike. Many boys expressed aspirations to become educated and get professional jobs, e.g. as doctors or engineers. Education was seen as the root to economic advancement, replacing the economic advantage from being “strong” (hence preferably uneducated) in order to hold on to productive assets. More than one adolescent boy explicitly used the language of competing in association with education.

*When we have children, we want them all, boys and girls, to study and get government jobs or private jobs like other people. In order to keep up with the competition in this world, you have to become like everyone else.* adolescent boy

*Nowadays, people don’t mind their girls studying. Before they would have taunted her and looked down on her, education was seen as the teaching of Angreez (‘the white man’). … Now everyone knows the importance of education, they also want to get qualified so they can compete in society.* adolescent boy

Many men and boys, and almost all women and girls, also saw a value in girls receiving at least some basic primary education. The economic incentive for girls to have primary education is more difficult to pinpoint. Certainly, many spoke of the advantages for women and girls being able to read and write, in order to negotiate their way around a city in which they were to some extent able to move unaccompanied by men (though still with strict restrictions, see below 3.5).

The overall change in attitude to education, and the recognition of how much the life of a married woman has changed in displacement, appears to have brought an appreciation of the value of some education for girls before they marry. Some adolescent boys were very clear that they would prefer to marry a well-educated girl, though others were more clear that they could not allow a future wife outside the home, and were perhaps fearful that education would threaten their own status. Though it would be socially unacceptable for a well-educated girl to marry a man who was less educated than herself, there were suggestions that an educated girl could attract a higher quality husband. A well-educated, professional husband would in turn be attractive both economically, and, for most girls and their mothers in particular, because better educated men were regarded as treating their wives better. It is again striking how far change can occur when several interacting factors all change. The change in the ability to attract marriage partners can only take place where marriages are arranged later, after a girl is already studying at school. Very early betrothal to close family members is declining somewhat, as discussed below.

As discussed above, girls are married at a young age, as quickly as possible after puberty in many cases and once married, cannot continue at school. Girls are still marrying young, and this has continued to prevent most girls from studying beyond primary school. However marriage and betrothal are taking place a little later, which means that although many girls still face the same limit to the education (around grade 5), far more girls are at least able to reach this level. There were, too, a number of stories of girls who had gone beyond this.

Very few interviewees (limited to a few older men) expressed any idea that secular education was in any way foreign or wrong. As mentioned, most people openly admitted that they had changed their mind and that they had now learned the value of education, and that when the *maliks* had opposed it, it had been for their own interests.

Two more factors were critical in facilitating the rapid change. As discussed, gender norms has been maintained very strictly before displacement, by a combination of open criticism or contempt (“backbiting”), by threats to the honour of the family and even in extreme cases by orders of the *jirga* that included capital punishment (“honour killing”[[24]](#footnote-24)). The power of this social condemnation, in a small, closed and isolated community, is evidenced by the number of interviewees and FGD participants who brought it up in conversation. A more fragmented family system allowed individual men to make their own decisions, and this indirectly gave many women greater voice, where their husbands (or fathers) had been constrained from listening to them by their elder relatives rather than by their own wishes. Several men spoke very much in these terms, happy that they were now able to do what they had always wished and give their daughters an education. This also played out at a wider, society level, because previous tightknit communities became spread out across several villages. Men were no longer working and spending their whole time in such small communities, but were travelling into town to work and were mixing to a greater or lesser degree with their host community. The social pressure to keep the cultural rules from Khyber Agency became diluted. Not everyone wanted to change, but many of those who did – from a combination of changed incentives, changed opportunities, learning from their relatives, etc.– were able to do so.

Secondly, there was a virtuous circle, that as (some) women began to feel they had more voice, they felt able to take part in the decision to educate their daughters. What this woman said is revealing:

*I did not have any education whereas my brother studied up to 8th grade. I felt the discrimination, so when I had daughters I enrolled them in schools.*

She did *not* say that she asked her husband to send the girls to school: she quite naturally and unthinkingly referred to it as a decision that she had taken.

#### Religious education

There is sometimes a preconception in the West that religious, Islamic education is, in some senses, in opposition to secular (“western”) education, or at least, that is in such a different dimension that it not education in the same sense at all. The evidence from the study was that religious education was usually seen as an *alternative* form of education. Many girls who could not go to school did, at least, attend *madarassa* in Peshawar, which had not been widely available before displacement. This education showed a clear impact in raising the awareness of girls and young women about their rights, as enshrined in Islamic law. The concept of full equality in women’s rights, at the heart of feminist and human rights thinking, was not present in the religious law that they were being taught. Nevertheless, they found revolutionary the notion of women as individuals with rights, and as people whose welfare and respect mattered; and perhaps the most significant change was that girls and women started to talk about their right to make claims on men. The three key areas that women and girls brought up were inheritance, marriage and bride price. They had been taught that Islamic law gives daughters a share of the inheritance of their parents: although this was not an equal share (it is one half of that given to sons), previously women in Khyber Agency had been given no inheritance rights. The importance of inheritance may well go beyond the actual value of what they would receive: it fundamentally changes the notion of property and assets as being a male-only domain. The madrassa education had also taught girls that forced marriage – including all child marriage – was against Islamic law. It would be wrong to exaggerate the extent to which this had brought about changed practice: a few groups and interviews with girls raised this as something vital they had learned, rather than recounting many success stories of challenging their forced marriages. However, as one of several factors leading to changes in marriage, it may well help girls (and their mothers) if they can call on a code to which their parents subscribe. It may also be important in helping fathers, who are pushed into accepting marriage offers for their daughters from close relatives, to stand up to or even to avoid the social condemnation that in the past accompanied a refusal, or any suggestion that the daughter should be given some say.

## 3.4 Marriage

The institution of marriage was identified above as one of the main ways in which girls’ rights were violated and (for many) their lives forced into subjugation and misery. The changes which have occurred in the relationship between many husbands and their wives has been described above (3.1, Joint Family System). For many, having a personal relationship at all was new, and, as has been described, there has been a reported increase in conversation and partnership and a reduction in the use of domestic violence. Changes in formal arrangements around marriage have perhaps not been as sudden or as dramatic as those regarding girls’ education, but nonetheless there were clear signs of shifts in several of the underlying attitudes and practices that shaped marriage norms. These will be dealt with in turn, looking at the changes which are being seen and how changes in the overall situation of Afridi IDPs has made those changes possible.

### Marriage partners

Previously, almost all marriage was contracted between close relatives, often first cousins, and there was a deep suspicion of marrying into families from outside the community. This practice has not disappeared, but more girls are marrying outside the very close family circle, as a result of two changes. First, IDPs’ wider families may now be more dispersed, making it harder to find cousins and arrange marriages. This also may be linked to the role of feuds in determining life. Marriages were often linked to feuds (and to the threat of feud if a marriage offer, *gagh[[25]](#footnote-25)*, were rejected) but, as discussed above, this feud culture is weakening in displacement for several reasons.

All IDP families are now also exposed to a much wider community than previously. Many of the marriages that have taken place since displacement were contracted previously, so change is taking some time, but it appears that there is a widening of the circle within which families look for partners for their children. In some cases, this has even been with girls from families from outside the immediate community, i.e. girls from families living in Peshawar. Such cases were few, but none were found of girls being married to boys from outside the community. The change, limited as it is, has been facilitated by the greater voice that some children, especially boys, are claiming in relation to their own marriages.

*I argued many times at home. My father said that they had not even been asked when they got married. So, I replied that when he got married it was the 80’s, and now it’s the modern age. I am now engaged to a girl from Peshawar.   
 FGD 4:3, Adolescent boy*

This young man was an exception, though: several others in the group discussion said that their fathers had already chosen brides for them. “*There is no question asked. This has always been the way. We have to marry someone. It’s better to marry according to your parents will.”* Some boys were showing a preference for girls with some education, and this too could be a factor in widening the scope of potential marriage partners to those outside the narrow circle. As girls became more educated, they too were able to attract potential matches from a wider circle.

*Education is the fundamental part of life nowadays. No one prefers to marry an uneducated girl. FGD, young married men*

*If your wife is educated, then all your coming generation will be educated.   
 FGD, young married men*

Traditionally, neither girls nor boys were expected to give consent to the marriages arranged by their fathers. Broadly speaking this culture is largely holding but showing some clear cracks. Some boys are claiming a right to a say in their marriages; many mothers too are becoming more important players in the decision; and some specific marriage practices are changing. Change here will take some time to be felt, because many betrothals were arranged when girls were very young, and, whatever changes in attitude are taking place regards consent or the voice of a mother in choosing a marriage partner, if the father has already given his word on a marriage, this cannot be broken. One 17 year old girl had been promised at birth in an exchange marriage (*adal badal*) with a man who has since had an accident and become paralysed. There is no way for her to avoid going through with the marriage. This voice of an uneducated and illiterate adolescent is worth hearing in full:

*I do not know that how will I raise my children alone with a paralyzed man. My family doesn’t care about any of that, though, because my brother [with whom she was exchanged in marriage] is very happy with his wife and children. My family traditions have spoiled my life and I can do nothing about it. My life has been sacrificed on the rules of my family’s culture. Because of these so called cultural traditions, I wasn’t allowed to have any worldly education. If I were educated, I could take my own decisions about my life, but as I am, I can’t do anything. I am at the mercy of my family – that is, my father and brother. And later on my owner will be the husband to whom I will be married.*

*I am uneducated but I am a normal human being. I could have received another good [marriage] proposal from any good family, but my father decided my fate when I was born. I was at an age to be playing with dolls, not to be swapped for my brother’s bride.… No one cares except my mother. I can only shed my tears in front of her, but she is also afraid of my father, because she has no right to go against the decision of her husband.*

*Because I am not educated, I can’t decide my own future for myself but I will not let this happen with my daughters. I will educate them, so that they can have the possibility to make their own decisions about their lives. They won’t have to obey the decisions of their elders and parents. I want to see my daughters self-sufficient and empowered. I want my children to get an education – girls and boys – so that both can take a stand for themselves… And I will not have a dozen children. You shouldn’t have more children than you can raise easily and look after properly.*

The most pernicious of all marriage practices was *swara*, or offering a girl to an aggrieved family as a peace offering or compensation to end a feud. Everyone spoke of this in the past tense, and it seems that it is no longer practised at all. It is unclear whether it had entirely died out before displacement or whether this played a part in bringing about its total demise.

#### Early marriage

As discussed, very early marriage appears to be diminishing, with a tendency for marriage to take place at a slightly older, if still quite young, age[[26]](#footnote-26). It would be wrong to paint too clear a picture of the situation though: some interviewees spoke of significant changes in marriage, whilst others were categorical that things had remained the same. There is no reason to believe that both views are not accurate within their own social spheres.

Some women and girls were starting to see both child betrothal and child marriage as a consent issue as a result of the religious education that they had stated to receive. They had clearly been taught that Islamic law demanded that marriage could only be between a consenting man and woman; since a child was not old enough either to offer informed consent or to have the power to make her lack of consent known, both child betrothal and early marriage were against *shariya[[27]](#footnote-27)*.

“A*fter displacement, some girls have even broken off engagements, arguing with their parents that according to Islamic Sharia it is their choice who to marry, and they did not want to marry the person who had been chosen for them.”* Married woman.

Although this argument was offered by both women and girls, it does not appear to be the driver of the current trend, and indeed consent and child marriage are not always linked.

*There is still no consent taken from the girls about a marriage proposal, but, yes, there is decrease in childhood engagements.*

It is more likely that the overall slow change in attitudes is opening up for women and girls to speak openly in such terms. If this continues, it may, in future, become a force accelerating the change in early marriage.

There does not appear to be any single driver of the change in marriage age, that is affecting both boys and girls. The impact of the weakening of the joint family system (meaning that children have to be more independent on marriage) has already been discussed. However, several informants linked the change more to an overall opening up of attitudes: wider opportunities for life choices are on the table (especially education), families now discuss things to a (slightly?) greater degree than before and more voices are considered.

Officially, the choice of marriage partner still rests with the father, but the influence of the mother is possibly underappreciated. (Women would be unlikely to speak very openly about their influence over their husbands, since social acceptability relies on such influence applied discretely and gently, and its use denied.) Several younger informants spoke of being unable to argue directly with their fathers, so they would talk to their mothers instead – implicitly acknowledging that their mothers must have some influence over the decision. Several mothers spoke of what they would or would not accept for their children, again, strongly implying that they believe they have some influence over decisions. This appears to be much greater than before, probably linked at least in part to the change in the joint family system discussed above.

**Marriage consent: a diverse picture**

*I have told my parents, please don’t arrange an engagement for my younger brother until he is old enough, and completes his education. I want them to realize that getting engaged in childhood is wrong. Let children grow up and then decide about their engagement and marriage. My parents have accepted my argument.*

*Boys, especially, are now refusing early marriages.*

*Early marriages are still common. Girls are still not asked for their consent.*

*Now there is a visible decrease in early marriages. Parents are now asking their children before engagement – both girls and boys*

*There is a practice of early marriages among the Afridi which we dislike. We want to get educated first, but our elders don’t allow it.*

*Every person has the right to choose who they marry, a girl has the right to choose too. But only in certain limits.*

It must also be acknowledged that being asked to give consent is not necessarily the same as having a real say over marriage. Before displacement, some informants described a situation where a daughter was not asked at all about a marriage proposal, whereas a son was asked if he consented – but he did not dare refuse his father’s wishes. Now, some are describing a situation where a son is often asked his opinion: some feel it right to accept, anyway, some feel they can give a genuine opinion. Girls are now starting to be asked, but “*she would be considered shameless if she didn’t agree*” (interviewee, 15 year old girl).

### Bride price

Many interviewees spoke of the fact that they were holding on to their culture unchanged. This was also raised specifically in regard to marriage, because the local Peshawar custom is for dowry (paid by the bride’s family) and not for bride price (paid to the bride’s family). The Afridi IDPs are, on the whole, maintaining this practice. Nonetheless, some changes are taking place. One important one for women is that exchange marriages (‘*adal badal’*) are decreasing. As discussed above, these are a life-long potential threat to women, making them hostage to the perceptions of their in-laws of their sister-in-law’s behaviour, and this perception was widely shared by men and women alike. This perception is important, because it is an implicit recognition that the welfare of a girl on marriage is of some consequence – not an attitude that could be taken for granted.

The study was not able to get such a clear picture regarding trends in bride price. One feature was striking though was just how vocal and articulate both women and girls were in condemning the system and this seems to be a recent development, the fruit of their expanded horizons. Older women reported that “even our girls themselves say that we shouldn’t take bride price from the groom’s family. They say that it’s like you are selling us”, evidence that the change is also part of changes in the overall family dynamic, with young people able to talk more freely to parents, and women to men. In the face of this ever increasing open hostility, it is possible that the future will see a major change in bride price as currently practised.

## 3.5 Movement and communication

The limits of freedom of movement for women, described in section 2.3, had been predominantly set by the interaction of four factors: the requirements of purdah, i.e. for girls (after puberty) and women to avoid being seen by unrelated males; patterns of settlement, where small populations of relatives lived in close proximity but largely isolated from any others; the economic and practical needs of the family (seen most clearly when men negotiated with the Taliban around the use of the burqa), with the demand for female labour outside the home, in the fields and forests around the settlements; and the fact that there was nowhere for women to go, without going far. The first of these four factors has remained largely unchanged since displacement: culturally, the host community is similar in this regard and the same *principles* continue to apply, although because the situation has changed regarding the other three factors, the application of these same principles created very different rules on women’s and girls’ freedom of movement in the host communities, which the displaced Afridi also follow.

Population density is much higher, and villages much bigger. The displaced Afridi families no longer live surrounded only by their family members. The economic necessity for women to move outside has also disappeared, because, as discussed, all those outside tasks have disappeared. (Piped water is in close proximity; firewood has been replaced by bottled gas; and they now have neither livestock nor agricultural lands.) Movement outside the home is now much more limited.

Even with the burqa, excuses are found to rationalise why women are not allowed to move alone: “*Women can’t visit markets, or go shopping. There are many reasons for that. One is the security issue, blasts happen all the time. Second, women are not that literate. So, they can’t go alone”* (adolescent boys, FGD)*.* Two things are striking in what they said. The first is that the explanation they give is obviously nonsense (are illiterate men banned from going to markets?). The second is that they offer it at all. It is unlikely that they made up this reason, but they have been brought up knowing that gender discrimination is given a pseudo-rational cover. It is difficult to know how this relates to the fact that most of the local women among whom they are living have more freedom to move to markets than the women from the displaced Afridi community.

Women have lost a social life – in the limited time that they had to enjoy it, beyond the socialising that was part of the task of collecting water: more, they have lost their access to the outdoors, and even if this represented hard physical labour, it has been replaced with a large degree of confinement to the home, with all that brings. (Almost all adult women spoke nostalgically of their previous strength and good health from an active outdoor life, even as they complained of the difficulty and unfairness of their workloads.) It is clearly beyond the scope of this study to assess the psychological impacts of this confinement and the loss of their previous family social networks.

On the other hand, the same factors have brought about some positive changes in their freedom of movement, and on balance most of the women interviewed – which, it should be restated, was only from families who had not returned to their previous homes – felt that the positive changes in displacement outweighed those advantages. The *burqa* is confining, but once protected from the gaze of men, it alleviates some of the restrictions on movement beyond the immediate home where non-relatives are absent. The peri-urban areas offer more possibilities for women’s movement. Although they would still not go to the main markets, they live within easy reach of female-oriented markets, such as those for clothes, and more women had some independent income that they could spend there. Health services are now easily available by public transport or short taxi ride. Peshawar city boasts women-only parks, which permit women to move around and socialise freely, and though such facilities did not exist in any of the peri-urban villages or suburbs that formed part of this study, one NGO had created indoor centres for women to receive training and advice. (These centres were only run as part of a specific short-term aid project, though, and none were intended to have any longer term existence.) Coupled with this change, women are no longer surrounded by their male relatives (working in the lands adjacent to the settlement), and so there are fewer possibilities for men to accompany their women if they need to move. As a result, more women are now allowed to move unaccompanied by males. They would not move on their own – culturally, even a woman who worked in Peshawar among men would not choose to go to the hospital without an escort[[28]](#footnote-28) – but could be accompanied by an elder woman. On balance, it might be argued that practically women enjoyed less freedom of movement than before displacement; but that a deeper shift may have opened up more space for women to think of independent movement, and of enjoying more independent lives.

Life in displacement also offers more possibilities for communication without movement, through television, internet and telephones. Pre-displacement, any television would be in the *hurja,* the male only domain. Now it was widely accessible, with perhaps half of all IDP homes having a TV. In the host community, women’s access to TV was high, and, though not all IDP women were able to watch, many were. It is hard to imagine quite how liberating this must have been for women from isolated communities. For the first time for many women, their access to information and ideas was not controlled through men. Many children are not allowed to watch television, but some have phones and can secretly watch films on these. Access to phones is not equal: boys are more likely to be allowed to use them, whereas girls are not allowed, for fear that they will use them to communicate with boys. The situation for women varies: some have to ask permission from their husbands to use their phone, others have less restricted access. Receiving a call would always be a matter of more concern than making a call. Nonetheless, even limited access for women by only some members of the community still represents a communication and information revolution for IDP women as a whole.

# **Section 4: Return and the future**

The study population from Khyber Agency was forcibly displaced by insecurity and military action against militants. The displacement is supposed to be temporary: as is usual in such situations, there is an implicit assumption by those dealing with displacement situations that once the specific acute cause of displacement is over, the displaced populations ought to (and will) return home. On-going relief assistance (largely, food aid) for the IDPs has ended, and grants to assist with return and reconstruction being progressively made available. As mentioned above, official figures were that over 80% of all IDPs in KP and FATA had returned home, though there are reasons to treat such figures with caution.

## Return

The first big question is who will return home and who will stay in the Peshawar District. This study only interviewed people who had not (yet) returned home from displacement and so they are not a representative sample, at least on this issue. The majority of people that we spoke to were not looking to return, though a sizeable minority, and perhaps half of the men, did regard return as a future option. It is difficult though to know how to interpret an expressed desire to return, accompanied with raising reasons to delay: is the wish to return in such cases genuine – or perhaps a more accurate framing would be, is return in such cases likely?

For most people, the incentive to return was economic. People were struggling to pay for rent and food in displacement, and yet they owned fertile agricultural land and had owned big houses. A few people wanted to return because they were missing the life there – the community that they had had (though only males spoke of this), or life in nature, with fresh air, a good climate and clean water (both men and women). Some, particularly women and the elderly, accepted that they might have to return because the decision would be taken by other members in their families. Some men, too, though, acknowledged that their wives would not want to return.

In Bara there was an appreciation that services were now much better than they had been and that it was now possible to enjoy a good life back home.

*“There is now a good network of roads to our village. We have schools, colleges and hospitals. Before displacement, we had no hospitals and only a few schools, where the education was poor – not comparable to what you get in Peshawar.”*

Most of those who expressed a vague preference for returning then qualified this immediately, saying that return would not yet be possible, because they had no means to rebuild their lives there. Most said that their houses had been completely destroyed, and they did not have the resources to rebuild them. The assistance offered by the Government was regarded as hopelessly insufficient for this. Money was not the only difficulty in rebuilding. The houses they left had been built up over generations, and could not quickly be replaced. The construction season, especially in the higher altitude of Tirah, is short, and the other demands on time for returnees are huge. Their fields have become overgrown and the labour required to produce food quickly will leave little time for rebuilding large houses. The difficulty of feeding a family during the period of preparing the land, planting and harvesting is already a major constraint on return. The financial assistance is not sufficient even for materials, let alone for paying builders to work for those who need to farm.

A majority of interviewees felt that the education opportunities for themselves and their children in Peshawar were reason enough to prefer to remain. Some from Bara said that if schools were built, and schools for girls were specifically mentioned by some, then they would look forward to returning. The availability of health services in Peshawar was another reason for not wanting to return home. Some women also mentioned the advantages of living with basic utilities, gas electricity and water, which had reduced the burden on them considerably. Some spoke simply having adapted to a different way of life, and not wanting to go back to the old way. Older people rarely spoke of this for themselves, but did talk of how life had changed for their children and grandchildren, that they had become used to a life with mobile phones, facilities and opportunities, and would not want to return. Those now dependent on their children recognised that decision-making had passed to those who are supporting them, and even if they themselves wished to return, they might not be able to do so. (It will be interesting to see if this calculation changes if the journey from Peshawar to Tirah Valley is reduced to 2 hours, possibly making it easier for older people to retire home, whilst maintaining dependent links on working adults living near town.)

It was clear that there was a role for women in the decision to return or stay. This was seen in two ways. Most men spoke as if it would be their decision, but many mentioned the preferences of their wives, and had clearly taken this into consideration in the decision to stay.

*Our women don’t want to go back because they have facilities here, like hospitals, electricity, gas and water at home. …They can contact relatives on mobile phones and travel easily with vehicles. They are getting empowered here.* Old man

Most women also spoke in terms of the what they wanted for their future, with very few speaking of their future in terms of following whatever their husbands decided. Some talked of telling their husbands what they preferred; others simply spoke of the desire to stay, apparently taking it for granted that they would be able to do so; and a few women even said that they would simply not accept a decision to return even if their husband wanted this.

*I want my son to go to school and get an education. I would like to stay in Peshawar, even if I had chance to go back to my village. I will not agree to go back, because here I have facilities like school, electricity, hospitals. I want my children to have the same facilities, so* ***I have decided*** *to stay here in future.* Married woman (emphasis added).

*I want to stay here, but I will definitely make visits [to Bara] from time to time. That is my home, where I am from. And I would rather spend summers there, as it is hot in Peshawar, but cool there.* Young married woman

From everything that we heard, from old and young, from men and women, it would have been unthinkable for most women to have spoken in this way before displacement.

### Family splitting

One way of dealing with the competing demands of short-term economics (the need to gain income from the land assets owned in the village) and of the longer term (opportunities for advancement through education) or the need to be able to access health services is for different members of an extended family to live in different places. Family splitting is normal among displaced populations and it is a common strategy for progressive return. However, in this case, something other than a temporary coping arrangement seems to be at play. Several interviewees spoke of the likelihood that in future some family members may return to farm, whilst others would remain in Peshawar district, especially children and those looking after them in order for them to be able to continue with schooling. It was common previously for some men in the joint family to go away to earn money, e.g. to the Gulf, and some suggested that movement to the home village could be similar to this. Women were far more likely to suggest that they would stay whilst other family members returned.

### What are they returning to?

Decisions on whether or not to return, and what kind of life to rebuild if return is chosen, would have to consider also the nature of the place to which they are returning. Many spoke of the physical change in their villages – the destroyed houses, abandoned fields and how this would make return more difficult. Others, especially in Bara, spoke of improved services since they lived there before, and how this would facilitate return. However none of our interviewees engaged with the bigger question of how life in Khyber Agency was likely to change in the coming years. Any analysis of the likely future situation for IDP women must not only consider whether or not they return home, but also, should they go back, the likely changes that will occur to the places that they return to. It is difficult to imagine that pre-displacement life will be recreated in the future for reasons internal and external to Afridi society. For example, if the big houses, capable of accommodating a large extended family, cannot be recreated in the short term, it is unclear in what way the joint family system will be re-established. There will be certainly many who try to re-establish it, particularly, one imagines, those who held the most power in this arrangement. However, having had a taste for life in smaller family units, it is possible that many women – and some men – will finding greater freedom in continuing that arrangement. From the external perspective, major changes are taking place in the governance of Khyber Agency and its infrastructure, which are likely to lead in turn to major changes in livelihoods, society more generally and how people live together in families. Life there was shaped by a culture that had grown up in a large degree of isolation, and which was adapted to marginalisation though an extreme and jealously guarded self-sufficiency. The Government is now planning to end the previous situation of a lack of externally imposed law, the absence of external judicial institutions and the unavailability of even the most basic services and utilities. It is planned that FATA, including Khyber Agency, is about to be incorporated into KP Province in some way[[29]](#footnote-29). It is not yet clear exactly what will replace rule under the Frontier Crimes Acts. A proposed Rewaj Act will give traditional customs legal status and so could mean relatively little change in practice. (*Rewaj* means customs or traditions. Discussion of the Rewaj Act and subsewuent proposals for FATA reform are beyond the scope of this paper, but should be of central concern for anyone interested in the future rights and welfare of women in FATA.) Debate is taking place and women’s voices are trying to make themselves heard in this debate, and to prevent a continuation of rule by ‘elders’ (aka ‘men’), but these topics were not raised by interviewees in the primary research for this study. It is possible that the previous power holders, those who would be called upon to be part of the *jirga*, would fight to re-establish the power and influence of such old institutions, and it is easy to imagine that this will be attempted under the banner of “culture”.[[30]](#footnote-30) It is difficult to know how far this will be successful, and how much untrammelled power the old institutions will have, but a change in governance does at least provide the opportunity for the state to extend to the local population the protection it has offered other citizens through its laws and through the institutions of justice and law and order, highly imperfect though this has been.

At the same time, the state is seeking to bring the territory much more into the mainstream of Pakistani life and the economy. A road is being constructed from Peshawar through to Tirah Valley, the furthest part of Khyber Agency, which will cut journey times to around two hours, opening up opportunities for regular pubic transport and the easy movement of trade. Culturally, this brings even the most remote parts of Khyber Agency closer to mainstream Pakistani society. This will work in both directions. Not only are citizens living there likely to become culturally and socially closer to society in Peshawar, but there is likely to be greater penetration of mainstream Pakistani society into Khyber Agency. For example, it will probably be easier to recruit teachers and other civil servants to live there.

An unknown dimension on which everything else depends is the future security situation in FATA. Much of the discussion around the economic development and the political mainstreaming of FATA seem to assume that the security situation will remain favourable. This may be much hoped for, but it is hard to guarantee. The marginalisation and political isolation of FATA have probably been an important factor in making the spread of militancy possible, and the attempts to bring FATA into the mainstream may owe much in part to a desire to prevent its return. The strategy may be successful, but this cannot be taken for granted. A return to insecurity may have a highly prejudicial effect on political and economic regeneration.

The full impact of all of these changes on the economy, society and on the lives of girls’ and women is thus impossible to predict, and it is in any case beyond the scope of this study to analyse. Potentially, everything changes. The previous mainstay of the local economy in Tirah was hashish production, and this is already falling under greater restrictions by state authorities. How far the state will try to control, or succeed in controlling, drug production remains to be seen, as do the consequences for livelihoods. Already, restrictions and control were being cited by some interviewees as a reason why they could not afford to return home. Other economic opportunities are likely to become available, from supplying the urban market of Peshawar with vegetables and other agricultural crops, to the possibilities of (internal) tourism. Quick transport in and out of the area will also open up the possibility of new relationships between people and their land, e.g. greater family splitting whilst maintaining economic support within the family, the possibility of spending different ages in different places, the ability to manage the cultivation of land back home whilst spending most of the week near town, etc. such economic changes may bring far reaching consequences, which are impossible to predict. If the economic value of land changes, and if there is an ability to exploit that economic value even when living in town, then it is likely that there will be pressures on the land tenure system. There may be pressures for a land market to develop, allowing the concentration of land in the hands of the economically powerful; or the culture of feuds and the aggressive seizing and holding of land though arms may allow the concentration of land in the hands of those with a different kind of power. It is quite possible that the extent to which laws of the state are imposed on the territory will be influenced to a great degree by the competing interests of different power holders.

The nature of the paths chosen in all of these dimensions will largely shape the possibilities and constraints for further changes in women’s roles.

# **Conclusions**

**Box: Aid and women in displacement**

Although this study is a part of a larger research project looking at how best to use humanitarian aid resources, it tells the lives of people in their own terms, and avoids taking the aid-centric perspective which is so common in studies undertaken by and for the sector. A discussion of the role of aid in the lives of men or women was therefore not initiated by interviewers in talking to the IDPs. Some IDPs chose to bring up the subject. Most people spoke warmly and spontaneously of the help that they had received from family members, especially in the first weeks and months after displacement. Many also mentioned the importance of receiving food assistance from the Government, or talked of their difficulties in obtaining the identity card necessary to claim this assistance. Beyond this, little was mentioned. Two people mentioned distributions of various household items. One man spoke of NGOs forming committees and running a cash for work project; and one woman knew of some other women who had benefited from a tailoring project, where an NGO had paid the women for sewing blankets. If aid has played any role in helping address gender inequality, the IDPs appeared to be unaware of it.

## The positive story of displacement

Displacement is often treated as a problem to be solved: displaced people tend to be seen as victims, and an end to displacement as the solution. The IDPs from Bara and Tirah Tehsils certainly suffered an initial catastrophe in their sudden forced displacement. The shock of the physical displacement was intense and they were turned overnight from being self-sufficient to a position of complete dependence, both economically and even for finding somewhere to sleep at night. For most households, their livelihoods never reached the degree of comfort that they had enjoyed before. This sentence is presented here as a simple truth about the IDP population as a whole. However, since women did not share in that previous comfort, the statement is inherently, if not obviously, a statement about *men*, even if it was presented as a gender-neutral statement about *households*.

Women shared the economic difficulties of displacement with men to some degree, but the loss for men was greater for three reasons: women had not shared equally in the benefits of their pre-displacement livelihoods; men still feel the responsibility for providing economically for their families, which has often been difficult for them; and, as described in detail in this paper, women have enjoyed far more non-economic benefits from displacement than men have.

The tendency to focus on needs and losses is a natural one for the humanitarian sector. Because the sector also prioritises the most urgent and most basic needs, it is not surprising that the focus of assessments – and of most relief aid – is on the material side of life, e.g. livelihoods (or food security) and housing. The narrative which then emerges, of difficulties in the lives of IDPs and of IDPs as victims, dominates how displacement is addressed by aid agencies. It is an important narrative, but it is only part of the story. More pertinently, for the reasons outlined above, it is disproportionally the story of only part of the population. It is predominantly a male story, though one with the appearance of a gender-neutral analysis. Although various tools exist within the humanitarian sector for conducting gender analysis, it is still common to find such analyses (if done at all) existing as a complement to the main needs assessments which are presented as being gender-neutral. Even within gender analyses, there is often an expectation that women will be victims in a crisis such as displacement: the language to describe women taking on new roles is often one of ‘increased burden’, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence. Mosel and Jackson’s (2013) study of IDPs and refugees in Peshawar is rare in finding that “[s]ome female IDPs reported seeing displacement as a blessing in disguise, allowing them better access to services and education and exposing them to a whole new lifestyle”.

A gender analysis may result in some initiatives for women[[31]](#footnote-31) but they are limited in the degree to which they influence the dominant narratives of humanitarian need. The interviews for this study, conducted with men and women, girls and boys, made it clear just how inappropriate it would be to programme any interventions without giving equal consideration to how the lives of the female half of the IDP population have been shaped.

A gender perspective of displacement from Khyber Agency shows that much has improved in the lives of women and girls, and, from a non-economic perspective, for many boys and men too. For women, the physical act of displacement created an opportunity. It was an opportunity to leave behind a highly exploitative and often cruel way of life, that was maintained by a mesh of interwoven forces that determined the logic of the joint family system and supremacy of males. It was also an opportunity to experience new opportunities: to see and learn from different ways of living, to take advantage directly of such opportunities of education, services and utilities as were available, and then to construct a new way of living together, with less exploitation. It has also transformed their relationship as citizens to their State. Women now possess CNICs, giving them a formal independent identity, and they are increasingly seeing state services as their right as citizens.

A cautionary note needs to be maintained in describing the huge advances which women and girls have made since displacement. To some extent the lives of women and girls from FATA have become much more like those of the women and girls from the peri-urban areas of KP Province. If this must be seen as a huge improvement, the huge inequality that continues to exist between the sexes in the host community must also be recognised. A central argument of a previous paper from this study program (Valid Evaluations 2016) was that one of the key factors shaping vulnerability among the host community was rampant gender inequality.

## The logic of systems

Again and again, this paper has shown how a status quo has been created and maintained through the interaction of many forces, political, cultural, economic, geographic, etc. Systems have a logic. There is a logic too behind patriarchal systems, and behind the various smaller systems through which women and girls are discriminated against and exploited. Change after displacement did not come about simply because some people wished it to, but because change became possible: new circumstances provided a logic which made their wishes feasible. This was clear from how quickly some people, including men, embraced the possibility to change, showing that they had indeed wished change to have come even before – and without – displacement. However change only became possible when the logic behind the *status quo ante* broke down, when the combination of forces that created and maintained it were themselves changed.

Such a perspective offers limited encouragement. It suggests that isolated external interventions to improve the lives of women and girls may often come to nothing, if they are opposed by strong logic and many interacting forces maintaining a status quo. If one is trying to raise women’s awareness, or to campaign against domestic violence, success may well be limited by the opportunities for change which a logic of the current status quo permits. Women and girls all made it clear that they did not lack awareness of the discrimination they were suffering before displacement. What they lacked was the power to do anything about it. On the other hand, it should be encouraging to note that the major victories which women and girls have achieved in improving the lives were not dependent on the interventions, priorities or culture of any external agents in trying to change a conservative, traditional society. When the status was disrupted by circumstances, the changes that followed were the result of people’s own preferences in what is, in many ways, a highly dynamic society.

Some features of the previous society have remained, and there are some which may be labelled “conservative”, e.g. regarding a strict code of purdah. However, if properly considered, these elements do not have to prevent change. Women’s economic opportunities are currently highly constrained, as discussed above, because there are so few ways in which they can make money whilst staying at home. It is possible to support those who are challenging some of the restrictions of purdah, especially when the limits on freedom of movement for women are less among the host community than for the IDPs from Khyber Agency. At the same time, looking carefully at how women are allowed to move around shows that they can respect religious/cultural norms of purdah and still engage in economic activities – if they have the skills to do so and if economic arrangements can be found which are consistent with the rules of purdah. The existence of women-only parks in Peshawar shows that it is possible to create public spaces, where women can interact and socialise freely, without compromising the norms of their religion/culture. Women only (indoor) spaces could be envisaged where economic activities could take place, and the increasing access, even by women, to mobile phones and Internet open up possibilities for women to engage in many ways with clients or colleagues without risking coming into physical contact with men[[32]](#footnote-32). As more girls gain higher levels of education and as women broaden their horizons on the kind of skills which they can acquire, new forms of economic activity are likely to emerge if the fundamental infrastructure and opportunity are created. Such activities do not need to be determined in advance by an external agency; second guessing future market opportunities is always difficult, and rarely useful. There are myriad opportunities for external agencies to support and encourage change, where they see that the logic of change is already at work[[33]](#footnote-33).

It is not clear that this kind of analysis is yet a mainstream approach to gender programming in the humanitarian sector. In its livelihood support for return and recovery, the UN is proud that it includes “Empowering women in Bara” in its gender programming (FAO, Sept 2017). It is less clear what power analysis underpins such an intervention, though, since it consists of its standard farmer field school approach to teaching better vegetable farming, only targeted at women. This remains a typical approach to ‘gender programming’ – ensuring that a programme, designed with little or no gender analysis, will have a minimum percentage of beneficiaries who are women. The assessment of returnees to FATA by the Food Security Cluster (FSC 2015) was in many ways similar, despite a dedicated chapter to gender and protection. Gender concerns were raised regarding the ability to implement standard programmes with women – was it acceptable to give girls at school a take-home food ration? Should a food aid ration be given to men or women? What is the food security of female-headed households?

## Whose culture is it anyway?

People’s right to their own culture is enshrined in international law. It is understandable that Governments wish to show respect for the rights of citizens to practice their own different cultures; it is even more understandable if those working with people of a different culture – outsiders, such as international agencies – hesitate to support efforts which are deliberately aimed at changing people’s culture[[34]](#footnote-34). The discussions currently taking place in Pakistan with regard to the proposed changes in the status of FATA show just how delicate is the balance between respecting the autonomy of different cultures within Pakistan, and the right or duty of a state to extend its rule of law across its entire territory. People’s way of life includes the way in which men and women relate to each other. Outsiders to a culture may hesitate, asking themselves if they have a right to work to change (or undermine) a culture, when they feel that the way in which men and women relate to each other does not conform to their own cultural values on how such relations should take place.

The testimonies and stories collected for this study answer that question very clearly. It was argued above (section 5.1) that it is a frequent mistake to present as a ‘gender-free’ description of how a population live what is in fact only a description of half the population at most – but that part of the population which is capable of capturing the narrative. The same applies to a description of culture. The subjugation, mistreatment and denial of rights of women in Khyber Agency and, albeit to a lesser extent, in displacement in Peshawar is not a foreign or western characterisation of their situation. It was the opinion and analysis of almost every single female spoken to in this study, from the youngest to the oldest. It was also the description of very many of the men and most of the boys spoken to, though they too do not have the power to own the narrative of their people, or to represent their people when future relations between the state and the populations of the so-called tribal areas are being argued over. It is no more the culture of Afridi women to be sold by their fathers, deprived of education by their families, beaten by their mothers-in-law and denied any right to complain by their societies than it is the culture of livestock to be kept in confinement, fattened up and slaughtered. (The comparison of their situation with livestock is that of Afridi interviewees, not of the authors of this paper.) The choice of a minority of a population to use their power to force half of its members to be reduced to their servants cannot and should not be described as the culture of the population as a whole.

## Gender relations in future Afridi society?

It may be tempting to imagine that the improvements which women and girls of one for their lives are irreversible, and more than that, the first steps along an inevitable path towards greater equality. That would of course be naive. If most people do find that they have to return home, for whatever reason, it is not impossible to imagine that over time previous norms will be re-established and previous power relations hold sway. Nevertheless, there are also reasons to believe the things will not return as they were.

Wider changes which are being brought about as a result of the greater integration of FATA into mainstream Pakistan have been discussed above. Hopes for a longer term improvement in the lives of women and girls rests on four other changes being harder to reverse.

Many people, including many men, spoke of changing their attitudes while they were living with their relatives in Peshawar district, and several men spoke of regret about previous behaviour or decisions – and perhaps more revealingly, women and girls also spoke about changes in men’s behaviour.

*I think that life [in Tirah] was wild, but it’s now that I am living in Peshawar after displacement that I see that. After being in Peshawar for 7 years, I now see that our attitude to our women was wrong.… 51 year old man*

*When you grow up in a certain environment you don’t question whether a tradition is right or wrong because you are so used to it. That’s how we were. After coming to Peshawar, we saw that we had been living like animals. We didn’t know anything about the world we lived in. After seeing Peshawar, we became aware of how much we had been left behind. dYoung woman*

*we learned a lot from this society [in Peshawar]. Our men behaved badly in many ways, but this is because it was the culture in our village, so we do not blame them as individuals. After living here, they changed their way of thinking. Now they are not the same. 20 years ago, men used to beat their wives and think she can be controlled by being beaten. … after living for several years in Peshawar they now understand that a woman is not just for beating, so [domestic violence] is slowly disappearing in our men. They also love their wives like people in cities do. Even though we women feel shy when our husbands express their feelings, but still it is good. And better than beating her instead!* Married woman

If this is true (though there is always a danger that we take things at face value when people are telling us what they think we want to hear), then it may be hard for people to deliberately re-close their minds when they return home. The greater willingness to educate girls, the small increase of space around consent in marriage et cetera might be reversed over time, but it would demand the powerful logic of an economic and power system. If economic and political relations do not revert to those which had existed before, such a logic might not be recreated.

Education is potentially another game changer. More boys are now receiving higher quality and higher levels of education, and is changing the outlook on life and their hopes for the future. In some ways inequality in education may be increasing, but it may also be that higher levels of education for men are an important factor in helping women to improve their lives. More girls too have received education, and it may be that as they grow up they would fight harder for the education of their daughters than previous generations were able to. More fundamentally, both men and women have seen that girls’ education can be encouraged, albeit to a limited degree, within a strict Islamic framework. If the various drivers that were seen to promote girls’ education continue to exist, this too may be irreversible.

Although girls, young women and older women tended to share a similar analysis of gender relations and aspirations for the future, adolescent boys had a very different, and more egalitarian, outlook on life from their parents, and young married men also had very different perspectives and aspirations for themselves and their children from the older generation. If the current status quo is maintained for a few more years, more and more of the power holders in families will be from these new generations. Attitudes varied enormously even among boys and young men, from those who wanted their wives to go out to work and wanted to marry educated girls, to brothers who were forcing their parents to prevent their sisters from becoming more educated than they were, but not only was there a very wide acceptance that girls had at least some rights, but there was very little heard from them about the positive nature of the society which they had left. They had seen a more modern world, and they preferred it. For things to revert back to the pre-displacement situation, the perspectives of young people would have to somehow be changed to those of the grandparents. It is certainly true that attitudes change over time, and that if their economic interests changed as a result of a move back to the village and their attitudes to power relations might also change. It is not naive though to think that future change will be to a completely different reality rather than to that of the past. It is surely not naive to believe that any future reality is highly unlikely to be as bad for women and girls as the past was.

The fourth possible factor would be the most encouraging. Even more than boys’ and men’s attitudes are changing, those of girls and women have been transformed. The next generation of girls talks of equal rights as a ‘fact’ that their parents were ignorant about. They are quick to analyse discrimination not in terms of culture or religion but of power, as this group of adolescent girls illustrates:

*“Men didn’t allow women to go to school, because they feared that if they started schooling, they wouldn’t work in fields for them. They knew they wouldn’t accept their rules, so they kept women suppressed and beat them, so that they would obey their orders without asking any questions.”*

More and more IDP women are claiming a voice in their marriages and in their families. Those voices are limited, and, with the exception of some of the younger voices, there remains an implicit acceptance by almost all of a high degree of inequality. Nevertheless, there is a hope that attitudes have changed on a wide enough level and to a deep enough extent for women not to easily accept the return to the pre-displacement life. Rather, having seen the possibilities of an alternative, they may continue to strive to create new lives and opportunities for themselves and their families.

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1. Gray et al, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The design of the overall thematic study by Valid Evaluations included provision for three studies which took an in-depth examination of particular issues which proved to be important for understanding resilience and where there was an evidence gap. The other two studies look at the role of early emergency response and of investments in resilience in helping avoid losses for people affected by the 2014-16 drought in Ethiopia (Levine et al, 2017); and the costs of ill-health in North Kivu, DR Congo (Levine and Kusnierek, 2018a) and in West Darfur, Sudan (Levine and Kusnierek, 2018b). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In theory, differences in gender roles do not necessarily equate to inequality. In the case of Afridi in FATA and Peshawar, they do. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thanks are due to Kanwal Ahluwalia for her assistance in developing a methodology for capturing gender differences and the dynamic of change. She drew on the work of Eleanor Jackson on using participatory techniques for analysing gender norms in Pakistan. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Much time was invested in this search for literature. Internet searches were conducted; libraries of displacement literature and journals dedicated to displacement were searched; and experts in the field of displacement and of gender were consulted. We found two publicly available studies of how gender roles have changed as a result of displacement, Pirtskhlava (2015), writing about Muslim Meskhetians for Russia who migrated to the USA, and Franz (2003), writing about the adaptation of Bosnian refugees to life in Vienna dn New York. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This parallels the way in which Valid Evaluations researched and analysed resilience. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Once the interviews have been anonymised, Valid Evaluations hopes to make them available for research purposes, subject data protection legislation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Individual interviews and group discussions were held in UC Khazar Khawani, UC Peshtakhara, UC Sufaid Dheri, UC Mera Surizai, UC Achnee, UC Achnee Bala, UC Larama, UC Pajaggi, UC Harayana, UC Mera Kachoori, UC Daag, UC Deh Bahadur, UC Bahadar Kalley and UC Spena Warai. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In the absence of a sampling frame (i.e. a population list of all IDPs living in Peshawar District), this would have been impossible. A representative sample was in any case not necessary, since quantitative would not have been appropriate in the absence of any published exploratory research which would have enabled a study to know what would be useful to quantify. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tirah Valley is the name given to network of valleys of the upper tributaries of the River Bara. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Khyber Agency is designated as a ‘prohibited area’. See also below. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This overview draws significantly on Kahn S and Samina (2009), one of the only available published papers on gender roles in FATA, together with interviews from the primary research. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The FATA consist of seven Tribal Agencies, of which Khyber is one, and six Frontier Regions. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Although, as mentioned, the Federal Government agreed in March 2017 to the repeal of FCR and to the incorporation of FATA into KP Province, at the time of writing FCR is still in force, and the overall process is expected to take five years to implement. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. If a woman wished to bring a complaint against her husband or in-law, she would have to find a ‘suitable’ male among her husband’s family to bring the case for her! [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The connection between education, more gentle behaviour and a perception of *weakness* was repeatedly made in interviews with both men and women. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The implication that it is the woman’s failure if no sons issue from the relationship is one held by the culture, not science. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The legal codes of almost every country include the concept of an age of consent, or legal minority. Inherent in this concept is the idea that a child, who cannot understand the implications of some decisions and who has to be protected from manipulation by adults, cannot therefore give consent to them. Such decisions include sexual relations, marriage or signing a contract. This mean that any marriage that takes place with a minor is a marriage where one party has not given consent. Even if no threat, duress or physical force had to be applied to the minor, it is by its very nature a forced marriage. This paper uses the simple term ‘early marriage’ rather than ‘early forced marriage’, because it better reflects how informants spoke and their attitudes. Since child marriage is *by definition* forced marriage, this should not be seen as representing any other difference. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. One interviewee suggested that in the past, Afridi girls had married a little older, at around eighteen, and that very early marriage had begun some thirty or forty years ago. It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate this, but it does warn against a too-easy use of words such as "traditional". [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This payment is referred to locally as ‘dowry’ in English. However, dowry is usually associated with a payment made by the bride’s family to the husband’s family, the common practice in South Asia. In order to avoid confusion, this paper uses the term ‘bride price’, one commonly used in parts of the world where payment is traditionally made by the boy’s family on marriage. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The use of the term ‘rational’ does mean that it is fair, and in this sense, ‘rationality’ is consistent with the decision being the outcome of a highly discriminatory patriarchy. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “… a young bride is preferred, so that her personality can be moulded by both her husband and his parents”, Caldwell et al, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This study was not designed to examine aid interventions, and organisations working for women’s economic empowerment were not interviewed. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. E.g. “A teenage girl was reportedly murdered by her relatives allegedly on the orders of a tribal jirga in Khyber Agency on Friday”, Dawn newspaper, June 30, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See 'Ghagh': The Pashtun Custom of Men Forcing Marriage Proposals on Women. The Atlantic,

    Dec 9, 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Early marriage remains fairly common in other parts of Pakistan, but there has a trend towards later marriage taking place or the past 50 years or more. Between 1950 and 1998, the average age of a girl on marriage in Pakistan rose from 16 to 22 (Sathar and Kiani 1998). However, in 2014, 15% of girls across Pakistan were still married before they reached 15 (Plan International, 2015, Getting The Evidence: Asia Child Marriage Initiative). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. It was unfortunately beyond the scope of this study to interview religious teachers and to investigate in proper detail the full role played by religion and Islamic law in marriage in Pakistan. Some religious elites disagree with the interpretation given by the IDPs, and the Council of Islamic Ideology, the constitutional body responsible for giving legal advice on Islamic issues to the government and Parliament, recently forced the withdrawal of a Bill outlawing child marriage on the grounds that it was ‘un-Islamic’ and ‘blasphemous’. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. It may be tempting to argue that this is not a true choice of women, but rather a case of “internalised discrimination” where women have been conditioned by cultural pressure to choose to accept restrictions, perhaps not even realising the nature of the discrimination . However, life is rarely a simple case of black or white. How then to interpret the life of a policewoman in the study area, the friend of one of the study team, who, by her own choice, would not go to a health centre without being escorted by her son or younger brother. ‘I am the one who protects all the citizens here’ she would joke, ‘but I still take this young boy to protect me!’ [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. This will be an extremely complex process and it is already a contested one, beyond the scope of this paper to discuss. It is intended that the merger begin by next year, and that Khyber Agency be ‘mainstreamed’ within 5 years. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. There are attempts by some women's forums such as the newly-formed Qabaili Khor, to ensure that in the future every jirga has female representation. See for example “*Tribal women seek representation in Jirga, reject ‘Riwaj Act’ in FATA reforms*” in Tribal Post, March 15, 2017, and *Tribal women seek political, social rights in FATA* Pakistan Forward of 28th March 2017. It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper to look at women’s engagement in this political process or changes in their voice at national policy level. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. It should not need stating that a true gender analysis is no more about women than it is about men: it is the analysis of how gender shapes people’s lives. Anyone familiar with the humanitarian sector will know, though, that actual practice is often different. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This does not mean having to accept that rules preventing women and men from coming into contact have to be maintained, but merely that many women will continue to feel themselves bound by such rules for the foreseeable future, and it would be fundamentally wrong to ignore any possibilities for improving these women’s lives in the name of demanding more revolutionary paradigm changes. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Valid Evaluation’s forthcoming summative report for the thematic evaluation of multi-year humanitarian financing will use this analysis of changing gender relations in its consideration of the potential roles of aid in relation to resilience building in Pakistan, including for displaced populations. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See, for example, the discussion in Benjamin and Fancy 1998, pp16-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)