The Role of Academia in Advancing Child Rights in Conflict Settings: A Study of Sexual Abuse and Rights Violations among Internally Displaced Children in Cameroon's Centre, Littoral and West Regions of Cameroon.

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Cameroon faces multiple, overlapping humanitarian crises: the Boko Haram insurgency and Nigerian refugee influx in the Far North since 2014; the arrival of Central African refugees in the East and Adamawa regions since 2012; and the socio-political conflict in the North-West and South-West regions since 2017. These crises have caused mass internal displacement, forcing thousands of children into precarious living and educational conditions, particularly in host regions like the Centre, Littoral, and West. This study examines how teacher training affects educators' capacity to adopt and integrate Child Rights education to mitigate the vulnerability of internally displaced children (IDCs) to sexual abuse and other rights violations within school settings. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered from 350 internally displaced pupils, 40 teachers, 10 school administrators, and 15 child protection actors through structured surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings reveal a sharp increase in sexual exploitation, harassment, and psychological trauma among IDCs, largely due to overcrowded schools, absence of trained personnel, and weak protective frameworks. The study emphasizes academia's pivotal role not only in generating evidence but also in promoting systemic change. Higher education institutions can lead in mainstreaming child rights education within teacher training and faculty programs, building capacity for child-sensitive research, and influencing policy through advocacy and strategic partnerships. It calls on national and international academic institutions to prioritize child rights, especially in conflict-affected settings by embedding them in research, curriculum reforms, and intersectoral collaboration. This aligns with SDG 16.2 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, reinforcing academia's responsibility to protect displaced children and champion systemic transformation.

Keywords

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