

AFGHANISTAN

Fragmented Families Assessment

Assessment Report

May 2018



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Cover photo: A man walks to his shelter in an informal settlement in Herat, Afghanistan © REACH, 2017

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

SUMMARY

Forty years of conflict in Afghanistan have resulted in the displacement of millions of people, within the country and across national borders.¹ Hopes for improvement have been undermined by the continued escalation of the conflict since 2016, resulting in the new displacement of 360,000 people in 2017, two thirds of whom were reported women and children.² This adds to the 8.7 million people that were in need due to more chronic issues such as long-standing insecurity, poverty, or climate change.³ Displacement and migration in Afghanistan are so severe and wide-spread they are considered to have had “an impact on the demographic composition of large parts of the country”.⁴

However, it is not just the composition of the country that is increasingly affected. Families, the smallest unit of society, are continuously torn apart as a result of the conflict, insecurity, and poverty. Moreover, at the international level, the number of families separated due to conflict and violence is at a five-year high, shedding light on the worsening vulnerability of such families.⁵ Yet, despite this increased attention, research on separated families remains scarce due to the difficulty to identify and categorise the varied characteristics of this group. This leads to fragmented families⁶ being implicitly referred to as a homogenous, vulnerable group, which effectively conceals the varied underlying factors of separation and how they relate to the protection challenges and concerns affected families face.

To address this information gap and support the humanitarian community in the development of a targeted response framework, the assessment was designed by REACH in close collaboration with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) to build an analysis framework with which to identify the characteristics that contribute to key vulnerabilities and primary needs of fragmented families, in line with programmatic relevance of the APC and its partners.

A family is considered to be comprised of members related by blood or marriage. Families typically live in one housing unit and are directly dependent on the family head.⁷ In the majority of cases this does not include members of the extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and siblings-in-law. Broadly accepted within the humanitarian community, a separated family refers to a family in which one or more members have departed from their home, residing in a separate location outwith the district. The remaining family, particularly those in which a female lead remains without the capacity and agency of a family head, may present a unique set of cultural, financial and educational vulnerabilities as well as broader protection and security needs.

Initial planning of this assessment highlighted the need to broaden the interpretation of a separated family to include families in which the family head has died (a departing rather than a separation, with no scope of reunification). As such, the assessment broadened the scope from separated families to fragmented families, enabling it to draw additional comparisons on what characteristics of fragmentation distinguished families and their need for humanitarian assistance.

REACH collected primary data through Key Informant Interviews (KII) between 18 March and 12 April 2018 in the districts surrounding the five regional capitals of Afghanistan (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar), chosen as the location of data collection with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster due to the high prevalence of separation by family members from the surrounding districts into the economic capitals of the region. In total, 50 KIIs were conducted with representatives of fragmented families, sampled based on the reasons and nature of their separation. The qualitative data collection and thematic analysis applied allowed the research to identify themes and patterns for the categorisation of fragmented families,⁸ rather than measuring the prevalence.

¹ IRC (2016) Afghanistan: What you need to know about one of the world's longest crises

² OCHA 2018 HNO

³ OCHA 2018-2021 HRP

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ICRC <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/number-families-separated-conflict-violence-or-natural-disaster-five-year-high-says>

⁶ “Fragmented families” refers throughout this report to families that have separated family members that would otherwise reside within the home, and families who have suffered the bereavement of the household head within the last year.

⁷ In the majority of cases this does not include members of the extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and siblings-in-law.

⁸ Boyatzis, R. (1998). Transforming Qualitative Information, Sage Publications.

Overall, the assessment provides practitioners with an initial understanding of the broad categories of fragmented families, identifies their varied vulnerabilities, concerns and needs and indicates how they may be incorporated into future humanitarian intervention planning.

Key findings of the assessment, grouped according to key dimensions of family fragmentation, included:

Autonomy over the decision to fragment

1. **Family separation was found to be a last resort – the vast majority of respondents felt that they were forced to separate.** The perception of being forced to separate applied equally to families separated due to either livelihoods or conflict factors. Almost all respondents that separated for economic reasons stated that they had either no other option to survive or tried other options but failed.
2. **Families who had limited or no time to prepare for their separation developed greater needs than those that did, regardless of whether the separation was due to livelihoods or conflict factors.** Families that were abruptly confronted with separation, either by external factors, such as conflict, or internal factors, such as decisions by family members, failed to make contingency plans and were often unable to mitigate the subsequent challenges.
3. **Livelihoods- and conflict-based separation were commonly linked, particularly for families that predominantly or entirely left their AoO.** Separations that involved families either leaving their AoO entirely or leaving one family member behind in the AoO were often composed of two or more separations that happened in close succession, with additional displacements contributing to increased vulnerability⁹. For instance, families that first displaced due to conflict factors then often had to send one family member back or on to further displacement, to ensure an income for the remaining family members in the new location.

Type of fragmentation

4. **Separation had a more unpredictable impact on families that predominantly or entirely left their Area of Origin.** While families that separated to new districts often benefitted from improved access to services, such as medical care and education, they simultaneously commonly faced increased livelihood vulnerabilities. While separated individuals were often able to live at their work or rent shared rooms, families that predominantly or entirely left their AoO had to rent larger houses, reducing financial wellbeing. Families further commonly reported reduced access to food, as they previously relied on their own agricultural harvest, which was no longer possible in the new location.
5. **Families which fragmented due to the death of their family head within the last year were found to be some of the most vulnerable, facing critical needs.** Despite the hypothesis that such families may face fewer vulnerabilities due to extended family and community support, this was not found to be the case with all families in this category noting a worsening in needs. Instead the family representatives faced some of the highest psychological concerns, as they feared that if something would happen to them, such as a medical emergency, their children would be unable to cope.
6. **Not all families were worse off after fragmentation, with some reporting less vulnerability and fewer needs after separation.** However, the research indicated that this group was the minority and was largely composed of families in which only one member left the AoO and in which separation was planned beforehand. In line with separation being a coping strategy of last resort, the improvements largely only applied to core needs, such as food and clothes, but not less essential needs, including stationery and school uniforms.

⁹ REACH (2017), Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment: WASH and ESNFI.

Distance of separation

7. **Families with a separated member residing outside of Afghanistan were often left in greater needs than families separated within Afghanistan.** Migrating to other countries, such as Iran, was often considered attractive due to the expectation of higher-paying jobs, but also commonly illegal and subject to lower planning. Families often underestimated the time it would take for separated members to find a job in another country and to send remittances, while also facing barriers to communication with families, leading to psychological hardship. As such, financial and health needs reportedly worsened.

Lengths of separation

8. **Families consistently underestimated the length of separation and lacked any defined plan on reunification.** Almost all respondents indicated that the time of separation was longer than initially planned, displaying a lack of agency in reuniting due mainly to ongoing conflict and the lack of employment opportunity.
9. **The length of separation was indicated to have a two-sided enhancing effect,** further worsening the situation of families that failed to properly plan their separation in the beginning, and continuously improving the situation of families that initially separated with a clear plan and purpose.
10. **Community support was an important factor that helped families cope with the vulnerabilities of fragmentation but was found to be time-bound and did not usually exceed the first year of separation.** Families that displaced predominantly or entirely to a new location were found to have received the least community support, indicating a higher level of vulnerability.

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List of Acronyms

AoO	Area of Origin
APC	Afghanistan Protection Cluster
HH	Household
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
KII	Key Informant Interview
NSAG	Non-State Armed Groups
SDR	Secondary Data Review

Key Concepts

Household – A housing unit in which there is one clearly defined head of household, with all other individuals living within the boundaries of the household. Members of the household typically share meals. The household can consist of multiple families and can include directly related and non-related members provided they are permanent residents at the time of interview.

Family – A family is considered to be comprised of members related by blood or marriage. Families typically live in one housing unit and are directly dependent on the family head. In the majority of cases this does not include members of the extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and siblings-in-law.

Family representative – The family representative is typically the household lead, providing decision-making power, particularly in lieu of the household head, due to separation. If the household lead was unavailable, another member of the house represented the household lead in the interview.

Fragmented family – Fragmented families refers throughout this report to families that have separated family members that would otherwise reside within the home, and families who have suffered the bereavement of the household head within the last year.

Separated family – Separated families have at least one family member residing in a separate district (or further). For this assessment, family separation is in reference to some version of a coping strategy and so does not refer to adult children separating from the family to move to a new home, such as for marriage.

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INTRODUCTION

Forty years of conflict in Afghanistan have resulted in the displacement of millions of people, within the country and across national borders.¹⁰ Hopes for improvement have been undermined by the continued escalation of the conflict since 2016, resulting in the new displacement of 360,000 people in 2017, two thirds of whom were reported women and children.¹¹ This adds to the 8.7 million people that were in need due to more chronic issues such as long-standing insecurity, poverty, or climate change.¹² Displacement and migration in Afghanistan are so severe and wide-spread it is considered to have had “an impact on the demographic composition of large parts of the country”.¹³

However, it is not just the composition of the country that is increasingly affected. Families, the smallest unit of society, are continuously torn apart as a result of the conflict, insecurity, and poverty. Moreover, at the international level, the number of families separated due to conflict and violence is at a five-year high, shedding light on the worsening vulnerability of such families.¹⁴ Yet, despite this increased attention, research on separated families remains scarce due to the difficulty in identifying and categorising the varied characteristics of this group. This leads to fragmented families¹⁵ being implicitly referred to as a homogenous, vulnerable group, which effectively conceals the varied underlying factors of separation and how they relate to the protection challenges and concerns affected families face.

To address this information gap and support the humanitarian community in the development of a targeted response framework, the assessment sought to identify the different characteristics of family separation and assess how these impact key protection vulnerabilities and needs. The assessment was designed by REACH in close collaboration with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) to build an analysis framework with which to identify the characteristics that contribute to key vulnerabilities and primary needs of fragmented families, in line with programmatic relevance of the APC and its partners.

Broadly accepted within the humanitarian community, a separated family refers to a family in which one or more members have departed from their home, residing in a separate location out-with the district. The remaining family, particularly those in which a female lead remains without the capacity and agency of a family head, may present a unique set of cultural, financial and educational vulnerabilities as well as broader protection and security needs.

Initial planning of this assessment highlighted the need to broaden the interpretation of a separated family to include families in which the family head has died (a departing rather than a separation, with no scope of reunification). As such, the assessment broadened the scope from separated families to fragmented families, enabling it to draw additional comparisons on what characteristics of fragmentation distinguished families and their need for humanitarian assistance.

REACH collected primary data through Key Informant Interviews (KII) between 18 March and 12 April 2018 in the districts surrounding the five regional capitals of Afghanistan (Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Mazar), chosen as the location of data collection with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster due to the high prevalence of separation by family members from the surrounding districts into the economic capitals of the region. In total, 50 KIIs were conducted with representatives of fragmented families, sampled based on the reasons and nature of their separation.

Overall, the assessment provides practitioners with an initial understanding of the broad categories of fragmented families, identifies their varied vulnerabilities, concerns and needs and indicates how they may be incorporated into future humanitarian intervention planning. By gathering an in-depth qualitative understanding of the different profiles of fragmented families, the assessment generated findings that can help increase awareness of these population groups and support their inclusion in upcoming intervention planning.

¹⁰ IRC (2016) Afghanistan: What you need to know about one of the world's longest crises

¹¹ OCHA 2018 HNO

¹² OCHA 2018-2021 HRP

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ ICRC <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/number-families-separated-conflict-violence-or-natural-disaster-five-year-high-says>

¹⁵ “Fragmented families” refers throughout this report to families that have separated family members that would otherwise reside within the home, and families who have suffered the bereavement of the household head within the last year.

In addition, this qualitative assessment met the following objectives:

- Identified the characteristics of a fragmented family that contributed to vulnerability to support the prioritisation of such groups during programmatic interventions.
- Outlined the underlying vulnerabilities and primary needs of these vulnerable fragmented families, in line with programmatic relevance to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan.

The next chapter outlines the methodological approach of this study, including sampling methods, population of interest, analysis framework and limitations. Following this, the main findings of the assessment are presented in four chapters, assessing the characteristics and impacts of four key dimensions of fragmentation. First, the report analyses whether, why, and how families were forced to separate and how being forced contributed to the challenges affected families faced. Subsequently, the report compares the different types of fragmentation (see Table 1 below) and their interaction with the force-choice dimension impacting the vulnerabilities of families. In the last two chapters, the report examines whether and how the length and distance of separation influence its effects on families and how either relates to the first two dimensions. Finally, the conclusion summarises key conditions of fragmentation and associated vulnerabilities and needs, supporting key areas for further required research.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment drew upon a qualitative methodology, using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to achieve its objectives. The interviewed Key Informants (KIs) were representatives of families in which family members were either physically separated or in which the family head died within the last year. Participants were sought through purposive and snowball sampling techniques building on established urban communication networks. The sampling strategy was guided by pre-defined categories of fragmented families, based on a) types of separation and b) reasons for separation. This stratification included a set of seven categories of fragmented family groups, generally perceived to be vulnerable, which allowed the analysis to assess whether these families did in fact exhibit vulnerability or not. The stratification thereby allowed for a core set of relevant research questions to be explored: 1) What are the broad types of fragmentation, associated with reasons for separation; and 2) Which conditions of fragmentation contribute to the vulnerability, needs and concerns of such families.

Secondary Data Review (SDR) and close collaboration with the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) identified two main groups of interest. First, families in which at least one family member displaced to at least a separate district, or further afield, to the remainder of the family. Second, families in which the family head, defined as the main decision-maker, passed-away within the last year. Combined these two groups compose the population of interest: fragmented families.

Importantly, for the purpose of this assessment, families were defined as single-family households that did not include extended family members, who were not directly dependent on the family head. In Afghanistan many households are composed of multiple families, which were therefore not included in the population of interest. To ensure a homogenous population with comparable characteristics, families that live in the immediate neighbourhood of extended family members were also excluded from the study. This ensured a comparability of the cases and affected vulnerabilities, as extended families could easily support families with access to markets, household chores, etc.

Furthermore, for the purpose of this assessment, family separation refers to some version of a coping strategy and does not therefore include adult children separating from the family to move to a new home, such as for marriage.

Extensive SDR was carried out during the planning stage of the research cycle. The SDR achieved three objectives: a) increased the contextual understanding of Afghanistan and family fragmentation, b) ensured the indicator selection improved complementarity with existing research on relevant topics, and c) contributed to answering part of the first research question: “What are the broad types of fragmented families that exist in Afghanistan?”

In addition to SDR, close collaboration with the APC and partners was integrated to ensure the broad themes and indicators identified were in line with programmatic relevance of the APC and its partners. The SDR and partner meetings highlighted two key dimensions of fragmentation, which were considered to inform the meaningful categorisation of fragmented families. First, the ‘type of fragmentation’ – how the family is effectively divided – was expected to contribute to the particular vulnerabilities and needs of families. Through this dimension, the research could distinguish between a) families in which one family member left the area of origin (AoO), while the rest of the family remained, b) families which left the AoO, aside from at least one family member who stayed behind, c) families which left the AoO entirely, but separated into at least two parts, and d) families in which the family head died within the last year.

Second, the ‘driver and nature of fragmentation’ – why a family separated – was considered key to distinguish between separations of choice or force. Divided along the established boundaries of the humanitarian/development spheres, separations were considered forced if they were due to conflict, violence, or natural disaster and determined chosen if based on other factors, such as livelihoods or access to services.

Based on these two dimensions, the sample of families included in the assessment was stratified into the following seven categories:

Table 1: Sampling categories, stratified by type and reason of fragmentation

	Family member left Area of Origin (AoO) (family remains)	Family left at least one family member in AoO	Whole family displaced & family separated into at least two parts	Family head died in the last year
Separated by force/necessity	Category 1	Category 3	Category 5	Category 7
Separated by free choice	Category 2	Category 4	Category 6	N/A

Based upon the above delineation of fragmented families, a sampling strategy was developed that allowed comparisons to be made between the different categories and across the five main regions of Afghanistan (North, East, South, West, Central). This enabled the nuances between the different categories and regions to be captured and to indicate the specific needs and vulnerabilities of each group.

Within the five regions, respondents were identified in districts surrounding the main urban centres (Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Herat, Kabul). These districts were considered most relevant for fragmented families as it is likely family members moved from their home to urban centres for economic or safety gains.

Given the inductive nature of the qualitative analysis (see more below), the sampling strategy was essentially data driven and based on the concept of saturation. Saturation is considered to have been achieved when no new themes/issues appear in the interviews and all concepts in the theory are developed.¹⁶ Based on this analytical framework, the following sample was implemented, achieving data saturation for each of the seven categories:

Table 2: Key Informant Interview sample

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5	Category 6	Category 7	Total
6	8	8	6	8	6	8	50

Overall, REACH accordingly conducted 50 Key Informant Interviews (KII) between 18 March and 12 April 2018 throughout the country, stratified along the key dimensions of fragmentation (see table 1).

The Key Informant questionnaire was developed after an indicator workshop with key project partners, namely UNOCHA and the APC. Questions were largely semi-structured, with a small number of prompts provided to allow for open discussion as well as a few key structured questions to gather respondent characteristics.

All enumerators received extensive training in the administration of qualitative surveys, including their introduction to the participants (highlighting the confidentiality of the information, and the intended use of the data). REACH hired female enumerators in each of the five regions to ensure interviews with female respondents were conducted exclusively by female enumerators. Prior to each interview, respondent consent was gathered.

The qualitative survey was designed and noted in written format. Interviews were conducted, transcribed, and translated in a 2-day iterative cycle, which allowed for continuous review of the data and feedback and ensured the necessary quality of data collected.

Data Analysis

The study applied a thematic analysis that allows the research to identify themes and patterns for the categorisation of the fragmented families and the nature of typical fragmentations.¹⁷ The thematic analysis combined a deductive

¹⁶ Morse (2004) The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods

¹⁷ Boyatzis, R. (1998). Transforming Qualitative Information, Sage Publications.

template of pre-defined codes¹⁸ and an inductive approach for themes to emerge directly from the key informant interviews.¹⁹

The deductive coding frame was based on thorough SDR and close coordination with the APC. This ensured findings were triangulated with patterns identified by previous research and closely aligned with the programmatic priorities of the humanitarian community. The inductive approach allowed for new themes to emerge, detecting how key needs and concerns are connected to family fragmentation and worsening vulnerability; something previously concealed by the broad perception of fragmented families.

The thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Using the software facilitated a more systematic and verifiable coding procedure and helped minimise the subjective and biased selection of data.

The interpretation of data was guided by two well established criteria of Krueger's (1994)²⁰ framework of qualitative data analysis: a) extensiveness and b) specificity. Extensiveness refers to the number of respondents that expressed a particular view or raised a certain issue/theme. Importantly, extensiveness is not associated with higher or lower importance of a theme, but rather how much this issue is spread amongst the research target groups. It allows the research to draw initial conclusions about which fragmented family types face certain vulnerabilities and needs.

Specificity notes that detailed descriptions of experiences should be given more weight than general and impersonal responses. Follow-up probes in the questionnaire, asking the interviewee for examples, ensured that the qualitative data would allow for this distinction. Specific references to experiences strengthen the key messaging throughout the assessment, indicating that particular vulnerabilities and needs relate directly to fragmentation, rather than a more general problem faced by the wider population in the area.

Other common qualitative analysis criteria, such as intensity/emotion and frequency were not considered in the analysis. Intensity/emotions are difficult to spot with transcripts alone, as feelings are often communicated non-verbally and likely to be misrepresented/lost during the translation by Field Officers, who did not always conduct the interviews themselves. Frequency assesses how often a theme was mentioned during an interview as well as overall. How often an issue was raised may indicate its importance, but throughout the qualitative analysis it became apparent that the repeated expression of issues was more often than not due to a misunderstanding by the respondents. A frequency criterion would accordingly over-represent more complex themes.

Limitations

- **Data collection focused on the districts surrounding urban areas**, which is likely to present a sampling bias towards the vulnerabilities and needs of families in an urban setting. However, given the exploratory purpose of this study – assessing the diverse impact of fragmentation itself – this is an expected limitation at this stage and facilitates potential research objectives in the future.
- **Using purposive and snowball sampling techniques unavoidably involves a selection bias.** Respondents were identified through existing REACH contact networks and snowballing to seek respondents outwith these contacts, potentially favouring the inclusion of vulnerable families, as these are commonly more known within communities. In response, broad eligibility criteria were defined to establish the seven categories of fragmented families, outlined above. This stratification of the sample reduced the selection bias and facilitated the comparison between potentially highly vulnerable and less vulnerable fragmented families.
- **The sensitive nature of some questions may have led to underreporting, as respondents may have felt uncomfortable discussing these, particularly regarding issues specific to women and girls.** To

¹⁸ Crabtree, B. and Miller, W. (1999). *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd Edition), Sage Publication.

¹⁹ Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming Qualitative Information*, Sage Publications.

²⁰ Krueger, R. (1994). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide to Applied Research*, Thousand Oaks.

better prevent this issue arising, emphasis was placed on hiring female enumerators, to support open and honest discussion by female respondents; given that female voices contributed 44 interviews compared to 6 with men. This was to be expected, since female household members typically assumed the position of household representative when their husbands were displaced.

- **Inflated results in terms of vulnerabilities and needs are possible, given that respondents may feel this would increase their likelihood of receiving assistance.** To minimise this, all interviews were conducted in person and began with a clear explanation that the assessment is independent and would not directly lead to any form of assistance.
- **Given participants were asked to discuss events and decisions made in the past, there is a possibility of recall bias.** Focusing on the specificity of examples and avoiding direct questioning on emotional or upsetting issues helped to detect and minimise this bias. Furthermore, to ensure the recall period was realistic, all respondents were part of a family that had become fragmented in the last year.
- **The study had to discard 20 interviews and only rely on 50 of the 70 interviews conducted.** To ensure the comparability of the individual cases, a strict definition of a fragmented family had to be implemented throughout. In 20 cases the transcribed and translated interviews suggested that extended family or friends live in close proximity to the fragmented family, a common practice in Afghanistan, particularly for female-headed families. As this would, however, often render the family less vulnerable and address certain concerns (i.e. access to markets through male family members), follow-up calls were conducted to clarify the situation and if doubts were sustained the interview was excluded from the analysis, to ensure comparability. As data saturation was reached with the remaining 50 interviews, no additional interviews had to be conducted.
- **Vulnerabilities were examined exclusively from the perspective of the main family** and not the separated family member(s). If the family split in two, the larger part of the family (i.e. the main family) was interviewed. While interviewed families sometimes commented on the perspective of the separated members, the analysis, to ensure consistency, focused solely on the main family's point of view.
- **The threat to life was excluded from the analysis of vulnerabilities and needs.** While this was arguably the main vulnerability/concern for conflict-displaced families, including it would have hindered the meaningful comparison with families separated for livelihoods and services factors. The report therefore focused on vulnerabilities caused by worsening economic capabilities, physical and psychological health and community relations, concerns surrounding limited access to services and the use of concerning coping mechanisms, and needs linked to these concerns, namely food, water shelter, fuel and protection needs.

FINDINGS

Chapter 1: Reason & Process of Fragmentation

The fragmentation of the smallest social unit, the family, is in many cases a turning-point in the lives of the affected individuals. However, the paths that have led up to this turning-point are varied and shaped by a range of structural and individual factors.

To identify and understand the impact of the different factors, the research framework built on an initial distinction between families that were forced to displace by conflict or natural disaster (categories 1, 3, 5) and those that chose to separate due to other factors, including economic distress or lack of access to basic services (categories 2, 4, 6).²¹ This distinction and related definitions are long-standing conceptualisations of force-choice that inform the support structure and assistance beneficiaries receive: humanitarian assistance (aimed to be short-term) for those that fled conflict/natural disaster and more long-term development support (aimed to be more sustainable) for those that migrated for livelihoods aspects.

However, this long-standing separation is increasingly being questioned and more comprehensive solutions are being sought at the international level through the strengthening of a humanitarian-development nexus. This is particularly pertinent for protracted and large-scale displacements, such as in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Government of Afghanistan has officially expressed its interest to be part of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in March 2018.

In line with this global trend, the following chapter will analyse how well the pre-defined force-choice delineation maps onto the varied characteristics and realities of family fragmentations and can account for their diverse impact. This will help policy makers better understand different dimensions of force and how these can be used to focus upcoming intervention planning on particular characteristics of fragmented families who are most in need.

Section 1.1: Forced From the Outside?

According to the initial categorisation, families in categories 2, 4, and 6 had autonomy over the decision to separate, in search of better livelihoods opportunities or access to services. However, the qualitative analysis of the interviews questioned the extent to which families freely chose separation and instead found that most families in these categories felt that their separation was, to a large degree, forced. Out of the families interviewed, only 3 specifically presented their separation as a choice, while 23 respondents made direct references to feeling forced to separate.

This extensiveness measure suggests that the notion of being forced to separate cuts across the study's pre-defined conflict/economic demarcation. Humanitarian response programmes developed along this demarcation may accordingly fail to fully identify the features of forced separations and their impact on affected families.

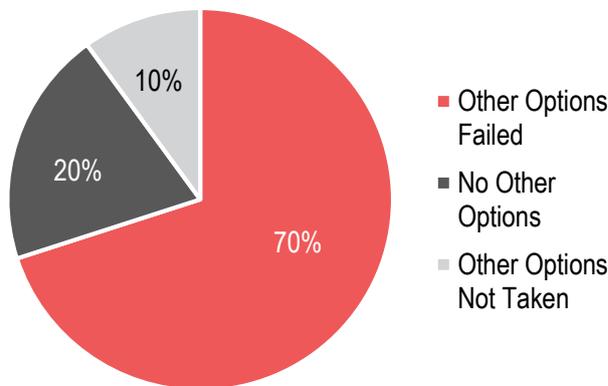
For example, a family that was displaced as a whole from their AoO to Kabul highlighted that the head of the family had no other choice but to subsequently separate from the family in order to find work elsewhere, as they were forced to pay rent in their new location and without an additional income would have been evicted and homeless²². Another family noted that their head had to separate.

Aside from these economic and livelihood-based scenarios, families may further feel forced to separate by their surrounding context and community. For instance, in the case for a respondent whose in-laws would not allow her to send her daughters to school, as it was deemed inappropriate, where her husband had died several years before, this led to further fragmentation. To ensure her daughters were able to enjoy their right to education, the respondent stated she had no choice but to move with them to an urban district out of the extended family's reach and influence. However, she was also forced to leave her son behind, as someone needed to continue cultivating the family's land to ensure a source of income.

²¹ Category 7 is excluded from this chapter, as it only includes families in which the family head died within the last year, due to conflict or other reasons.

²² Kab_C6_3, and a similar example with Kan_C6_3

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents reporting use of alternative options to separation



Aside from the respondents that made clear references to feeling forced to separate, almost all families indicated during their interview that separation was only considered as a last resort. As Figure 1 highlights, the majority of families (70%) included in Categories 2, 4, and 6 stated that they had previously tried to find other coping mechanisms and only opted for separation once these other options failed, including working seeking low skilled employment²³, borrowing money from friends and shopkeepers²⁴, and working as a daily laborer²⁵.

Indeed, only two respondents stated that there could have been another possibility to their separation, but that would have been in both scenarios, to join the Afghan National Army (ANA)²⁶ - a dangerous option in Afghanistan.

The above examples highlight that sometimes families may be forced to separate due to economic hardship or constrained access to services, with an urgency comparable to that of conflict-related separations. Moreover, as the alternatives to fragmentation include concerning coping strategies, such as resorting to extreme hunger, homelessness, or joining the ANA, this indicates that fragmented families are both vulnerable by nature and face exacerbated vulnerability to protection concerns as a result of fragmentation. This indicates that excluding families from response frameworks solely because they were not separated due to conflict factors may lead the humanitarian community to omit highly vulnerable families from lifesaving assistance programmes.

Box 1: Conflict and Economic Factors Intertwined

A female respondent and her family were displaced from Pachi Agam district in 2017, due to armed fighting between NSAGs. As she described: “When we saw the children, male and female running barefoot shouting to leave your homes because [an armed group] looted and burned all our houses and killed a lot of civilians and [took] females with themselves [...] my family was obliged to leave our area of origin.”

The respondent and her family settled in Bihsood district of Nangahar province but with no family or friends that could take them in, they had to move to a rental house. While her husband tried to find work to pay for the rent, he was only able to find irregular daily labour jobs that could not cover the monthly expenses. After six months they were in so much debt that the woman’s husband felt that despite on-going conflict he had no choice but to return to their AoO and cultivate the family’s plot of land and earn additional money “in the narcotics fields”.

As the above example of a female respondent from Pachi Agam highlights, not only did the notion of ‘fragmentation by force’ cut across the pre-defined categories, but the distinction between conflict and economic separations within individual cases became more blurred over time. In the outlined interview, the family was initially forced by conflict to uproot from the AoO, however, their final decision to separate was, to a larger extent, immediately motivated by their need to find a revenue to fend for themselves in their new location. What started as a displacement by conflict, turned into an economic separation, with both phases displayed as similarly urgent and necessary.

23 Kab_C2_1
 24 Kan_C4_3
 25 Her_C2_1
 26 Kab_C6_4 and Nan_C6_4

While this section noted that the notion of ‘force’ may be too limited in the original delineation, it is not supposed to question special legal status and protection needs of refugees and IDPs (commonly fleeing from conflict/natural disaster). Rather, findings of this section suggest that if characteristics of force are spread more widely, maybe its impact may also be better addressed through a more comprehensive humanitarian-development response. Indeed, as box 1 illustrates sometimes separations initially caused by conflict can turn into separations sustained by economic concerns, requiring more long-term and sustainable response frameworks.

Before analysing the impact of forced separations on vulnerabilities and concerns of affected families, the next section will identify the characteristics of families that were not displaced by conflict but nonetheless forced to separate and how humanitarian actors could identify them during response planning.

Section 1.2: Forced From the Inside?

In order to fully understand the perception of force and how it is displayed in characteristics of separation, it is important to not only analyse the external factors that may force families to separate but also the internal decision-making process within a family. Indeed, this section argues that understanding how a family decided to separate may play as much of a role as why a family separated and serve as an inclusive indicator through which humanitarian actors can identify families that were forced to separate.

Analysing the internal processes of decision-making showed that the perception of force not only varied across different cases, but also within families themselves. Multiple families with one family member having been ‘forced’ to leave the AoO (Category 1) stated that while the separated member felt forced to leave, the rest of the family considered other options to have existed. This includes cases where the household head was involved in a personal feud that left a family member facing reportedly unfair and unjust arrest²⁷ or potential revenge by the family of an injured ‘third’ person²⁸, in line with vigilante-style justice sometimes implemented under traditional Afghan law²⁹. While the families in these scenarios considered it possible to deal with these conflicts through local justice mechanisms, the household head decided unilaterally that there was no other option but to leave the AoO and separate from the family. This suggests that separation may sometimes be forced upon the main family by the family head.

In this regard it is important to note that when the family head is separated, the most common observed type of fragmentation, women in the household typically take over family management responsibilities; only in one case was the responsibility assumed by another male member. While this might point to women’s agency and importance within a family, it is telling that, in the majority of interviews, the decision of the family to separate was not considered a joint decision (within the family), but a decision made unilaterally by the (male) family head – only eight respondents across Categories 1-6 reported that the family took the decision together. In roughly half of the interviews, the family head never even mentioned or discussed his decision to separate, but simply presented the family with a *fait accompli*. This indicated that in particular women who were left with the burden of taking over family head responsibilities often had no agency in decision-making process.

This finding differs from previous research on separated families between Afghanistan to Europe, which, in the context of mixed migration, found that the ‘large majority of families reported that the decision was made jointly’.³⁰ This may be explained by the fact that separations to Europe require extensive time for planning and ensuring family support, while migration within Afghanistan and to neighbouring countries can be more easily realised, at least in logistical terms.

This interpretation is strengthened by the timespan families reported it took from the moment the idea of separation was discussed within the family, to the moment of the actual separation. Table 3 highlights that in about half the cases, this timespan was less than 1 week.³¹

27 Kab_C1_3

28 Kan_C1_4

29 LandInfo (2011), Report: Afghanistan: Blood feuds, traditional law (pashtunwali) and traditional conflict resolution.

30 MMP (2017), Separated Families Assessment

31 In the case of family members separated to Europe, almost all decisions took more than 1 month from the initial idea to departure (REACH – Separated Families, p. 12)

Table 3: Timespan from the initial idea of separation to the family separation

Less than 2 days	Less than 1 week	Less than 1 month	1 month and more
12	9	12	8

Note: Based on the statements of 41 respondents across Categories 1-6

Comparing the distribution of the time families reported for the decision-making process with the external factors causing the separation, the analysis found that in the majority of cases that had less than one week to decide, the separation was forced by the imminent threat of violence and armed actors. For instance, a male respondent in Herat described how he was forced to tell his wife to pack for their escape during the night, as the Taliban were surrounding their AoO. They had to leave their 4-year old daughter behind with neighbours as the escape route was too dangerous for a small child.³² This correlation reinforces the notion that the time and process of the decision making may be a good indicator of whether a separation was forced or chosen.

“His leaving was unbelievable for me, he was sometimes joking that he may leave for a time [to find a job in Iran to pay off family debts], but when I realised he had left [to Iran] I was frightened, I couldn’t even think what I should do, just me with the children.”³³

However, the above quote shows that there were also cases without any imminent threat to life where the decision to separate was taken in less than 1 week or even 2 days, leaving family members with the feeling that they had no other choice but to “resign themselves to the decision”³⁴. In addition, the research found families in all regions of Afghanistan that reported family heads having left within 1 week of first mentioning the possibility of separation, due to economic reasons.

Assessing the process of decision making suggested that the timeframe of the decision process may be a good indicator for both separations that were forced upon the family as a whole (e.g. armed conflict) as well as separations that were forced upon parts of the family by the family head. Humanitarian actors may accordingly best identify forced separations by focusing on the internal decision-making processes and in addition to pre-defined external causes.

Having outlined how the notion of force cuts across the original delineation of conflict/economic separations and how humanitarian organisations may better identify forced separations, the following section outlines the impact forced separations had on affected families, exacerbating their vulnerability and indicating how the dynamics of separation lead to different needs and concerns faced by those affected.

Section 1.3: Impact of Forced Separations

Table 4 outlines the overall impact that the families reported as a result of fragmentation, grouped by fragmentation category. For instance, the 8 families interviewed in Category 3 (main family forced to separate from AoO by conflict) reported, altogether, 6 times that some aspect of their situation improved, resulting mainly in better access to services following separation. However, at the same time, the 8 families noted altogether 30 times in their interviews that fragmentation exacerbated some vulnerabilities, particularly regarding access to food, economic resilience, and facing barriers to community integration. Judging solely by this broad extensiveness measure, families in Category 3 are accordingly commonly left with more needs than before separation.

³² Her_C2_4

³³ Her_C2_5

³⁴ Kan_C2_2

Table 4: Impact of fragmentation on vulnerabilities, by fragmentation category

	Vulnerabilities	
	Lessened	Worsened
Category 1	0	22
Category 2	5	5
Category 3	6	30
Category 4	12	11
Category 5	7	30
Category 6	6	17
Category 7	0	35

While table 4 does not yet inform on any specific vulnerabilities, the broad correlations provide us with an initial idea of what impact the reason for fragmentation and the notion of force may have. If we compare the families that were separated by conflict (Categories 1, 3, 5) with the families that separated due to economic/access-to-services reasons (Categories 2, 4, 6) we find that families separated by conflict reported greater/worsened vulnerabilities (i.e. financial, emotional and health issues) significantly more often than other fragmented groups. This suggests that conflict-displaced families, overall, exhibit greater vulnerability as a result of fragmentation and thus require targeting interventions by the humanitarian community.

However, the families in Categories 2, 4, and 6 did not always succeed in improving their overall situation through separation, with numerous references to worsened vulnerabilities. To understand why this was the case and what role force played, the following outlines the specificities of Category 2 interviews (individual family members separated from AoO due to economic/access-to-services reasons).

Consider, for instance, the stories of two respondents (A and B) from Category 2, who separated from their family to increase the income of their respective families. Only one male respondent (A) improved the economic resilience of his family and addressed the family's need for food and clothes.³⁵ The difference between respondents A and B was that respondent A planned and discussed the separation with his family and only separated once the family agreed the family head had a clear opportunity to improve the family's situation. Respondent A found a job close to Kabul in a factory that would provide accommodation in addition to his salary, allowing him to send a large part of his income as remittances. In contrast, respondent B made the decision to separate and migrate to Kandahar city after less than a week of discussion, pressured by community members that lent his family money.³⁶ While he did find a job in Kandahar, he did not consider the "extra rent he has to pay in the city, [which] is now missing from the monthly budget"³⁷. Furthermore, he was not able to make any arrangements for his family left behind, with no-one remaining who could easily fetch water from the public well.

The above comparison highlights the factor of time and planning as the deciding factor for separations to function as a positive coping mechanism. Whether caused by conflict or not, respondents that reported a very limited time to discuss the separation, were subsequently left without any plan for their new location or contingency plan, for financial or other challenges. Multiple families then reported unexpected expenses in the new location, such as rent or education fees, and difficulties to find an adequate source of income. In most of these scenarios, families had to start borrowing money, putting additional pressure on the separated family member to find a job (see impact of time discussed in Chapter 4). This then left the separated family less economically resilient than before separation with severe short-term needs to pay for rent and food.

³⁵ Kab_C2_1

³⁶ Kan_C2_1

³⁷ Ibid.

Figure 2: Mechanism of forced separations contributing to worsened economic resilience



In contrast, families that had more time to discuss, often had job opportunities lined up and/or arranged for separated family members to stay with extended family members or arrange accommodation at the work space.

As such, it is proposed that humanitarian organisations prioritise fragmented families based on their timeframe for separation, considered in tandem with the economic wellbeing of the family. Since those that reported little planning time for their fragmentation were found to have poor economic resilience, this ought to directly support the intervention planning of the humanitarian community. While short term cash support may help families address current rent/food needs, most of the families highlighted being in debt requiring them to stay separated until these debts are paid off. More sustainable solutions may accordingly try to aim to reduce the expenses of separated family member(s) by providing housing and/or access to free services allowing the family to save money for a reunification.

Beyond the financial concerns, families that had no time to discuss their separation also reported psychological health concerns, such as high levels of stress and concern. The situation was reportedly of particular concern for families separated due to conflict as they a) had no time to prepare for the new situation and b) they were in constant concern about the security and well-being of their separated family members. The latter was particularly often reported by families that left one family member in their AoO despite armed conflict (Category 3), as they would have otherwise lost their only income or rights to their agricultural land.

Families that displaced due to economic reasons, but still had no time to discuss and prepare reported similar psychological vulnerabilities, such as anxiety. Women and children were particularly affected. Women because they were commonly left with the family head responsibilities without time for preparation and often under particularly difficult conditions (e.g. no stable income; residing in a new location; subject to potential harassment for being a female-headed household). Children were reported to struggle not having the family head around all of a sudden, with them showing signs of shock, not being able to attend public forums including mosques or schools. These affects were reportedly worst in the first couple of months, with children slowly adapting to the situation.

Humanitarian response frameworks emphasising psychological health may accordingly want to focus on women and children in families that were not able to discuss the separation with their family head and also conflict-displaced family members that had to leave one family member in their AoO.

Having analysed how the varied characteristics of forced separations align and cut across the pre-defined conflict/economic delineation and discussed their impact on affected families, the following chapter will focus on the second dimension of the initial categorisation outlined in Table 1, the different types of fragmentation.

Chapter 2: Types of Fragmentation

As specified in the methodology section of this report, the initial categorisation of fragmentation distinguished between 4 types: a) families in which one family member left their AoO (Categories 1-2), b) families which left the AoO, aside from at least one family member (Categories 3-4), c) families which left the AoO entirely, but separated into at least two parts (Categories 5-6), and d) families in which the family head died within the last year (Category 7). This chapter examines how these types of fragmentation interacted with the families' autonomy over the decision to fragment, and how this affects financial needs, emotional concerns and other factors leading to worsened levels of vulnerabilities.

First, the chapter will identify important differences between the cases in which only one family member left the AoO (Categories 1-2) and those in which most or all family members left the AoO (Categories 3-6). It will show that the families in the latter group faced significantly more uncertainty and unforeseen challenges after their separation, identifying initial conclusions and recommendations for humanitarian response planning. The second section will

then discuss the specific cases of Category 1 and 7 and outline particular challenges and vulnerabilities that affected families of either group faced.

Section 2.1: Number of separated family members

In order to identify the specific role and impact each type of fragmentation has on a families' specific concerns and needs, the following section compares the previously discussed cases in which one family member left the AoO due to economic reasons (Category 2) with cases where the main family left the AoO leaving at least one member behind (Category 4). This approach holds the force-choice dimension constant and allows for a semi-controlled comparison of different fragmentation types.

An initial comparison between the overall relationships between those in Categories 2 and 4, showed that overall families in both categories reported approximately an equal increase and reduction in needs, making an overall conclusion on the impact of separation difficult. Solely assessed through this extensiveness criteria, the two types of fragmentation could be considered to have had a similar impact. However, the key difference is that, while the lessened/worsened proportions stayed the same, families interviewed in Category 4 (i.e. main family left AoO) reported more than twice as many changes in needs than families in Category 2 (i.e. individual member left AoO).

The higher reported change in vulnerabilities for families in Category 4 could have been expected given that a separation in which the main family leaves the AoO entails more structural changes for more individuals than if only one family member separates. In other words, if more family members separate to a new location, more family members face a new context and environment, which has the potential to change their situation for the better or worse. Families in which the main family remained in their AoO and only one member left (Category 2) were accordingly less likely to report changes with regard to access to water, services and other contextual factors.

However, this finding is also contradicted in the analysis, as in some cases the main family reduces access to services and markets in their AoO after the family head separated, as respondents reported that cultural barriers sometimes hinder women from leaving the house by themselves, particularly in the South and East.³⁸ Given that the interviews of the assessment were conducted exclusively around the regional capitals, this issue may actually have been under-reported and play more of a role for separated families in rural areas.

The varied impact of contextual factors suggests that humanitarian response frameworks need to assess and be tailored to the different structural and social limitations separated families may face in different locations, with a particular focus on female-headed families in the South and East region. However, one aspect that most families which separated predominantly or entirely from their AoO (Category 3-6), shared was the difficulty to find adequate and affordable housing for the main family.

Box 2: More Rent, Less Money, Less Access

When a woman's family had to displace from Logar province in 2013 due to heightened insecurity, her husband stayed behind to not lose his stable government employment. However, when the woman's family arrived in Bagrami district in Kabul province, they were only able to find a rental house that cost 10,000 Afghanis a month. Even with her husband's continued income, they were not able to afford this and after two months had to relocate to another village with a smaller and cheaper house.

Nonetheless, the woman reported that each month she has to make a choice, either pay rent or buy other essential goods, such as food and clothes. Whatever she cannot pay she had to borrow from shops or neighbours, increasing the family's debt. While the woman appreciated the new access to schools for her children in Bagrami, she was not sure how much longer she could afford their education, as she required an additional breadwinner to cover the extra rent and could not pay for their transport to school or stationery.

The new-found security and services for the family would eventually force one of her sons to drop out of school and find a job in the nearby city. (Kab_C5_4)

³⁸ Kan_C2_2; Nan_C5_4

As the example in Box 2 indicates, adequate and affordable housing was reported a main need and concern by families that separated from their AoO. While individual separated family members also faced the challenges of additional rent payments, the issue was significantly more common for main families, even if they planned and discussed the separation beforehand. When sufficiently planned individual members could often stay at the workplace or with extended family/friends, whereas whole families commonly lacked this option. Shelter concerns of main families also particularly affected women and children, who reported feeling unsafe staying in “unfinished shelters that do not protect us from the rain and cold”³⁹.

The above highlights that the type of fragmentation can make separations significantly more unpredictable and difficult to plan for families in which most of the family separated from their AoO, with shelter concerns reported across forced and chosen scenarios. Humanitarian response frameworks focused on access to stable shelter and related issues may therefore want to focus on separated families who displaced from their AoO, regardless of whether they were forced or not. Particularly women and children required support when the family could not afford adequate shelter in the new location.

The scenario in Box 2 furthermore highlighted that the impact of separations with the main family leaving the AoO (Categories 3-6) was often complex with vulnerabilities simultaneously worsened and lessened. In this regard, the cases of two female respondents that both separated with their family from their AoO, while only the family of one of the respondents (A) had sufficient time to discuss and plan the separation.

When the son of respondent A was offered an opportunity to work in Kandahar city her husband and her discussed and decided it would be best if the main family separated to Kandahar city to seize this opportunity and furthermore have better access to services, while the respondent’s husband stayed behind in Panjwayee district to not lose his current job as a gardener.⁴⁰ However, while the economic resilience of the family improved significantly, the respondent also stated that she underestimated the harassment by her new community, which did not approve of her living without a husband. As a result of her restricted movement, she reported feeling less secure and having less access to drinking water and the market.

In contrast, the family of respondent B did not discuss and plan her family’s separation, as the husband one day decided that they should all move to Kabul, since the Taliban diminished all income opportunities in their AoO (Wardak).⁴¹ However, once they arrived in Kabul, the husband failed to find any job and after a month moved back to their AoO to work as a daily labourer with one of his friends. Living in a new location and rental house, the economic resilience of the family declined making them more vulnerable than before in this regard. However, despite this, the family reported that the new location offered them “access to health services, markets, water and latrine”, something they were missing in their AoO.⁴²

The two examples show that the effects of moving to a new location as a whole family could be challenging to plan and discuss. While the family of respondent A was able to address the vulnerability they set out to mitigate, unforeseen contextual factors created challenges and insecurities they had not had to face before. In contrast, the family of respondent B was unable to address the vulnerability they displaced for initially but reported to now be benefiting from the services available to them in Kabul.

The negative experiences of respondent A and several similar references provided by other respondents highlighted the need for programmes supporting better integration of separated main families in new communities, particularly female-headed families.

Aside from shelter concerns and community harassment, main families that displaced from their AoO (Categories 3-6) reported that their access to food often decreased after separation, with families that had no single member remaining in their AoO (Categories 5-6) identified as exhibiting the greatest variety of needs. In their AoO many of

³⁹ Kab_C5_5

⁴⁰ Kan_C4_3

⁴¹ Kab_C4_4

⁴² Ibid.

the families had agricultural land on which they could cultivate basic foods, such as grains⁴³, hence even if they had only a limited or no income, they were still able to cover basic needs in terms of food. In contrast, in their new locations, displaced or migrated families often lacked any agricultural opportunities and had to buy their food entirely at markets or super-markets, which were reported to be significantly more expensive than in their AoO.

Indeed, due to the concern for food, several families in Category 3 and 4 reported that the separated family member stayed behind especially to continue taking care of the family's agricultural land or farm. These families therefore sometimes received food remittances from their separated members (for instance after the harvest) and thereby still had a limited access to food outside of the market. In contrast, families in Categories 5 and 6 lacked this option, since no family member stayed in the AoO and separated members commonly displaced or migrated to other urban regions to find unskilled job opportunities.

Humanitarian organisations working on access to food and providing agricultural opportunities may therefore want to focus on separated families in which the main part of the family left the AoO and in particular those that have no single member remaining in their original location. Furthermore female-headed families in the East and South that have no access to markets may benefit from access to land and training that would allow them harvest some essential food items and cover their basic needs.

Section 2.2: Special types

Two Categories of family fragmentations stood out during the qualitative assessment, as no interviewed family from either type reported a single vulnerability to have lessened after fragmentation, indicating these fragmentation Categories to be particularly vulnerable. The first family Category this applied to was families in which an individual family member separated due to conflict from the AoO leaving the main family behind (Category 1), while the second Category includes families in which the family head died within the last year (Category 7). The reason for this was that for neither Category fragmentation actually functioned as a coping mechanism, while for all other Categories, fragmentation, at least partially, helped address issues such as access to services and economic resilience.

As stated in the limitations of the assessment, the impact of fragmentation was only assessed from the perspective of the main family, and not the individual separated member. When an individual member displaced from the AoO due to conflict leaving the rest of the family behind (Category 1), the separation was accordingly only supposed to help the individual cope with the security risks and was not intended to address vulnerabilities and needs of the main family. From this perspective it is hence less surprising that not a single respondent from Category 1 reported lessened vulnerabilities for the main family.

Furthermore, it is important to note that almost all conflict-displaced individuals that left their family behind in their AoO, fled from personal or communal conflict and not wider clashed between armed actors. Those were not scenarios in which the family was threatened as a whole, but only the individual member due to family and communal feuds and/or revenge killings. Therefore, the separated family member often did not aim to establish a life for the main family elsewhere, but rather displaced to hide from his adversaries in the hope to return once the feud settled down. The reason the assessments mostly found families in which an individual member separated due to personal and communal conflict in Category 1 was due to the research framework's focus on urban areas, outlined in the introduction. For Category 1 the families hence had to have their AoO around the five regional capitals, which are commonly less affected by active conflict between armed groups.

Focusing on the particular group that displaced to personal or communal feuds highlighted some specific vulnerabilities and needs. Families interviewed as part of this group highlighted heightened psychological stress and concerns that the adversaries who forced the separated family member to flee would now come after and threaten the remaining family. In particular, families raised particular protection concerns, including the possibility that their children could be kidnapped, thus encouraging the displaced family member to return. As a result of this harassment and threat children sometimes stopped going to school and mosques. They noted as their number one need a better governance structure that could mediate between the conflicting parties, as local authorities and

⁴³ Her_C3_1

communal structures failed to stop revenge killings. Given that conflict-separated families commonly had no time to discuss and plan separation most also noted the previously outlined worsened economic resilience.

In response to the specific vulnerabilities and needs of families that have one family member separated due to personal/communal conflict, the humanitarian community may want to engage with government or development partners to develop more long-term solutions to local governance gaps and awareness programmes addressing revenge killings. Women and children may further require direct psychological support and, if the security situation necessitates, relocation to a safer area.

Families in which the household head died within the last year reported the overall highest number of vulnerabilities that worsened after separation. As the interviewed families had no time to prepare for this loss (in all but two of the cases the head died due to armed conflict or in an accident) they displayed similar vulnerabilities and needs to families that were forced to separate without any time to discuss. First and foremost, losing their main breadwinner, all families reported a significant decrease in economic resilience. Second, families noted psychological stress and shock, particularly of children who suffered from the sudden loss of their family head. In the South and East the situation was reported particularly dire, given the social restrictions on women's movement hindering them to access markets and even hospitals, worsening their access to food and essential services. Indeed, multiple women whose husband died reported that their biggest worry was falling sick as they would have no one that could either take them to the doctor or take care of the children. While families in other Categories could at least commonly call their separated family member for advice or support, the women of Category 7 (family head died) reported that they would know no one that would be able to take care of their children, if something happens to them.

Despite these significant vulnerabilities and concerns, families in which the family head died within the last year (Category 7) also most often noted that they receive community support for covering their basic needs, such as food and water. Families reported neighbours and community members to regularly bring them water or food. However, the interviews provided an initial indication that this community support is time bound, with neighbours eventually "stopping their help of giving food"⁴⁴. References indicate that this timeframe may be around a year, but further research would have to confirm this. The humanitarian community should accordingly not only consider focusing on families that recently lost their family head, but also include those that have lost their family head longer ago, as they may lack communal support structures.

After the first two chapters assessed the interactions and impact of the two fragmentation dimensions that made up the initial sample categorisation – the reason and types of fragmentation – the following two chapters will focus on two other key dimensions: time and distance. These chapters will examine if the distance or length of separations had any particular impact on the situation of separated families and either reinforced or lessened the fragmentation effects outlined previously.

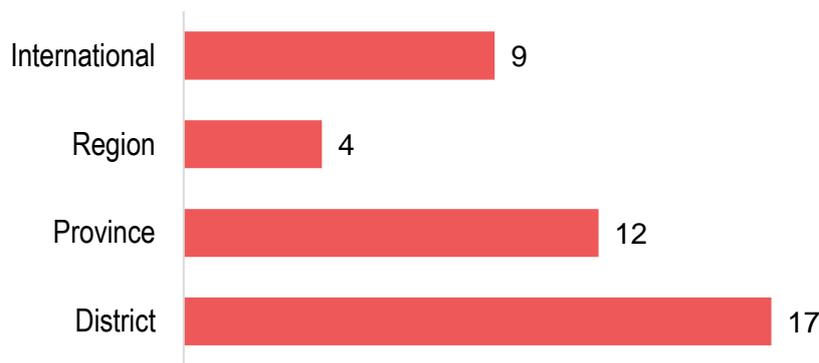
Chapter 3: Distance of Fragmentation

As varied as the paths that lead up to family separations, were the destinations of the separated family members. As figure 3 highlights, more than half of the families were separated across provincial borders (or further) and one in five families had a member living in a different country. Aside from one case, where the family member lived in Turkey, families were separated between Afghanistan and Iran.

Whether the separation was attributed to conflict or economic/livelihoods factors was not found to have any effect on the distance of separation. The distribution of conflict and economic family separations was almost the same across the four categories outlined in figure 3.

⁴⁴ Kan_C7_1

Figure 3: Distance of separation



Note: Based on the statements of 42 respondents across Categories 1-6

In order to understand why and how distance varied between the families, we need to assess the interaction of two main contextual factors: a) distance to the main family (i.e. other family members) and b) perceived opportunity to separate.

Being displaced or migrating to distant places was found to come with several obstacles and challenges, including the cost of travelling, living in new, unknown areas, and potential language barriers, as reported by many respondents. In all but one case, families with a separated family member wished either that the family could be reunited or at least closer together – as a way to maintain, or relieve strain on, family relations. Families accordingly aimed to keep the distance of separation as close as possible.

One family, for instance, highlighted that after the family head was not able to find work in Balkh, he had “the options [of separating to] Kabul, Iran, Pakistan, and Dare Soof in Samangan”.⁴⁵ The family head “selected Dare Soof because it was near” and because he had friends that could help him in the area, despite other destinations offering reportedly greater economic opportunities. The shorter distance combined with the specific opportunity provided by his friends accordingly convinced the head of the household to separate to Dare Soof.

Conflict-displaced individuals similarly chose their destination on the basis of the distance to the other family and the prospect of safety and security. Consider the case of a family head who was involved in an inter-communal conflict in Kandahar province and had to flee to avoid being killed. In the interview, the family left behind stated that he “selected Kandahar city because it is close to his [...] area of origin and [because] it is big enough to hide [from his adversaries]”.⁴⁶

If family members prefer to keep a close distance of separation, it raises the question of why many displaced and migrated to far-away places, including other countries.

“My 9-year-old son was helping by selling plastic files in Kabul city, but his salary was not enough to provide for the family. I [then] heard of the possibility of sending my son to work in Mazar in a carpet weaving factory to get [a regular salary] including accommodation. [As] there was no other option in the area [...] I made the decision to send my son to Mazar.”⁴⁷

The above case combined the two scenarios that most often accounted for distant separations: a) closer opportunities having failed and b) exceptional opportunities that family members felt they needed to seize.

In this regard, the conflict-displaced example of a family from Sayed Mohammad district in Logar which initially separated to Logar city (with the family head staying behind) due to harassment by the Taliban. Despite the initial

45 Bal_C2_6

46 Kan_C1_4

47 Kab_C2_1

displacement to a close location, targeted threats continued against the family, due to the government job of the family head, and eventually the family had to separate again, this time to Kabul.⁴⁸

Exceptional opportunities that presented themselves were sometimes concrete job prospects or safe living arrangements organised by extended family and friends, as reported by multiple respondents. However, more often they were nothing but logistical opportunities that facilitated the migration/displacement itself but offered no clear plan after that.

“My husband’s salary as a labourer was not sufficient to provide for the family. [Living close to the Iranian border], the possibility of working in Iran had been mentioned before, but when he learned of a group of men planning to go to Iran, he suddenly seized the opportunity to go with them.”⁴⁹

The quoted example of an international separation being based on no more than a general idea of higher paying jobs in Iran and the opportunity to join a group on their way to Iran was not the exception. The same scenario was described by a female respondent in Herat whose son had “no idea of exactly where he may go but said he [has the chance] to go along with about five other boys [...] who know the way.”⁵⁰

Overall, an extensiveness measure showed that none of the individuals that separated internationally had any clear plan, destination, or opportunity when they displaced to hide from adversaries⁵¹ or find employment⁵². Furthermore, 5 of the 9 families separated internationally reported that the separation took place within a week of first mentioning the possibility of a separation and was initiated by hearing about “a group of other guys” going.⁵³

Psychological research refers to these scenarios as “forced choices” and explains how the combination of time pressure and an apparent lack of options may lead individuals to separate across national borders, despite the distance to the main family and the lack of a clear opportunity.⁵⁴ The studies show that if individuals perceive there to be only two options, such as staying in Afghanistan with no employment or moving abroad and potentially finding a job, and have to make this decision under time pressure (e.g. seize the opportunity of joining a group migrating to Iran), then individuals are “more prone to take risks”, such as migrating abroad⁵⁵.

Counterintuitively, the furthest (i.e. international) separations were thereby not the ones that were commonly best planned by families, but instead found to be based on a very limited timeframe of decision-making. Furthermore, given that separated family members were in almost all cases considered irregular in Iran, they were often unable to rely on any pre-arranged employment or accommodation opportunities. These characteristics accordingly are in direct contrast to the generally preferred option for families to remain within short distances of each other while seeking verified economic opportunities, consequently resembling features of forced separations outlined in Chapter 1.

Indeed, families with a separated family member in Iran not only shared the characteristics of forced separations but also reported a similar impact on vulnerabilities, worsening economic wellbeing and psychological health, exacerbating financial and medical needs. Families reported having commonly underestimated the time it would take for the separated member to find a job in Iran (with the migration/displacement taking up to a month itself) and stated to have often fallen into debt to cover the costs of the migration/displacement and the opportunity cost of previous incomes. Even if separated members managed to find a job, they were often unable to consistently send remittances as they were paid irregularly and sometimes changed jobs regularly to avoid being detected by the police. The families left behind could rarely plan with and count on the separated member and were left wondering how “to afford food and pay rent in the near future”.⁵⁶

48 Kab_C5_5

49 Her_C2_2

50 Her_C5_RC6_1

51 Kab_C1_2

52 Her_C2_1

53 Her_C5_RC6_3

54 Naefgen et al. (2017), ‘Why free choices take longer than forced choices: evidence from response threshold manipulations’, *Psychological Research*

55 Dror et al. (1999), ‘Decision making under time pressure: An independent test of sequential sampling models’, *Memory & Cognition*.

56 Ibid.

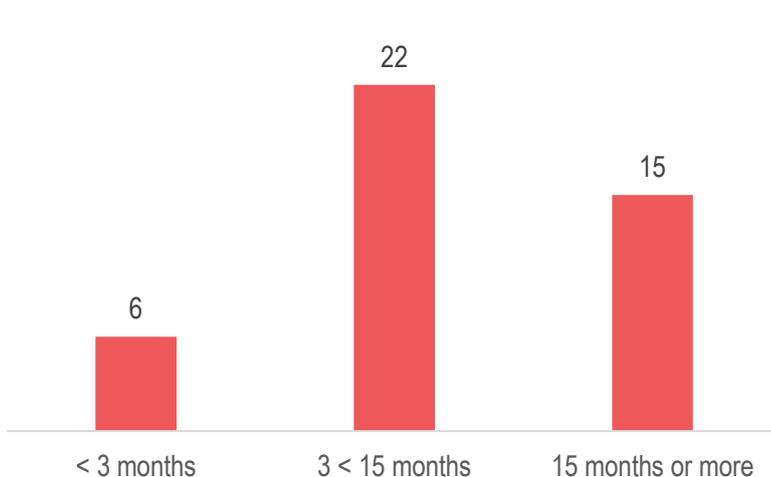
This highlights that while distant destinations may promise higher incomes and working opportunities, for families to actually benefit from them still required planning and discussion, which was reported difficult in Iran as most crossed the border as illegal immigrants. Therefore, in factoring fragmented families into interventions, the humanitarian community may consider economic support programmes as an effective means of supporting families that have a separated family member(s) in Iran, particularly if families report signs of the separation having been a forced choice, with limited discussion in the family.

Families with a separated member abroad also reported some of the highest psychological concerns of remaining family members. This was because none of the interviewed families had seen their separated member since the separation and further noted limited telephone contact, worsening emotional wellbeing. Not knowing how the separated family member was doing and not being able to share family concerns and/or plans, heightened the worries of family members and weakened family relations. On contrast, families with short separation distances tried to visit each other at least every 3 months, some even weekly, and call 2-3 times a week re-assuring each other of their well-being and holding up family relations.

Families with separated members in Iran explained that visiting in person was not an option, given that it takes about a month one-way and often means that the family member may not be able to return to his job in Iran. Phone calls were also difficult as these were reported very expensive and only for emergencies. In several cases the main family had no current phone number and did not know where the separated member lived “as most of illegals [avoid] staying too long in a location as that may lead the police to catch and deport them”⁵⁷.

Chapter 4: Length of Fragmentation

Figure 4: Length of family separations at the time of the interview



Families interviewed as part of this study have been separated between 1 month and 5 years up until this point. As shown in figure 4, the majority of these families had been separated between 3 and 15 months. This assessment did not identify a correlation between either the reason (conflict- or economically- motivated) or the type of fragmentation (how the family is effectively divided), and the length of separation. In fact, families that were separated due to conflict or livelihoods factors were, in both cases, spread equally across the three classifications specified in figure 4.

Most of the families interviewed indicated that they initially expected the family separation to last between 6 months and 2 years, with the longest predicted separation being 5 years. Nonetheless, while all but one family wished for reunification, no respondent had a clear plan for the family to permanently reunite in the next 6 months.

This lack of plans to reunite can point to a sense of emotional desperation – of being resigned to suffer the consequences of separation on their families. Indeed, 27 families noted that they consider reunification impossible in the next 6 months, while 14 respondents imagined imprecise scenarios of reunification (e.g. “when conflict ends”), suggesting that their plans to reunite are probably unfounded and unlikely. Indeed, only 9 families voiced their hopefulness that the family separation would end at some point in the future.

Overall, almost all families interviewed highlighted that, regardless of the reason why their families became separated or the amount of time that had passed since the separation, they felt a sense of powerlessness and experienced a lack of agency in facilitating family reunification.

57 Her_C2_1

“We cannot change anything [...] all factors are out of our hands because everything is related to employment opportunities and we cannot provide employment opportunities.”⁵⁸

The above quote illustrates how a family viewed reunification as something outside of their own influence and power. The respondent, as the majority of families in this assessment did, saw the possibility of reunification as depending entirely on exogenous factors, such as “the government forces making an area safe”⁵⁹, “the government or NGOs provid[ing] job opportunities”⁶⁰, and the establishment of institutions to settle personal disputes⁶¹.

To empower separated families and address their lack of agency, humanitarian organisations may accordingly want to support families establish relevant skillsets through vocational training and community awareness programmes, which may help them find or establish employment opportunities and thereby facilitate reunification.

While the length of separation was not found to have a significant impact on families’ perceived possibilities of being reunited, the interviews highlighted the multifaceted impact of fragmentation, leading to the worsening of existing economic and health vulnerabilities, and the introduction of greater need. Time was reported as an ambiguous factor for separated families, strengthening those that were already able to benefit from well-planned separations from the start and further weakening families that struggled with ill-planned separations. While some, for instance, noted that with additional time, they would be able to “save enough money” to address their economic needs⁶², others reported being drawn deeper into a vicious cycle of debt and negative coping strategies.

In the latter scenario families either underestimated the rent they would have to pay in their new location or the time it takes for separated members to be in a position to send remittances –causing the family left behind to become more indebted, more vulnerable and having to prolong the timespan of separation. At times, the “additional costs”⁶³ were so steep that it required a second member to separate⁶⁴. With time, the coping mechanism, separation, may thereby become itself the issue/problem that separated families need to cope with.

Humanitarian organisations may accordingly want to focus on families that have been separated for a longer period of time (>1 year) and assess whether they had to employ additional negative coping mechanisms, just to cover the costs of separation itself. These would be some of the most vulnerable families, since they are caught in the cycle of debt and separation and require support escaping it, for instance through a combination of short-term cash support and more sustainable vocational training. Specifically, this type of programme would support in the repayment of loans, in turn facilitating a family reunification.

58 Nan_C5_4

59 Her_C3_1

60 Bal_C3_RC5_1

61 Kan_C1_1

62 Her_C2_2

63 Kan_C6_3

64 Kab_C6_3

CONCLUSION

Family fragmentations are widespread, diverse and poorly understood in Afghanistan. Families are torn apart due to structural factors, including conflict and poverty, as well as individual considerations, such as the influence of family and friends or job opportunities. However, despite the prevalence of this, the diversity of cases renders the phenomena of family separations difficult to pinpoint and categorise, which in turn facilitates the continued absence of research on separated families.

In response, this assessment report aimed to identify and delineate the varied characteristics of family separations, begin to understand how different separation characteristics interact at the individual case level, and accordingly assess how these features shape protection vulnerabilities and concerns of affected families. Family separation was thereby found to be, on the one hand, a distinctive phenomenon that presents a unique set of cultural, financial, and emotional vulnerabilities, as well as wider protection needs. On the other hand, a broad term that needs to be broken down by defining features to better understand which separated families are vulnerable, why this is the case, and how these families can best be supported through a targeted humanitarian response framework. This also involved broadening the scope of the assessment from separated families to fragmented families, including families in which the family head died within the year preceding this assessment.

Throughout the report, the analysis of family fragmentation was divided along four dimensions: autonomy over the decision to fragment, type of fragmentation, distance of fragmentation and lengths of fragmentation. Based on this delineation, the assessment compared the impact and interaction of key fragmentation characteristics and identified related vulnerabilities and primary needs of affected families. This will provide an evidence base with which to support the humanitarian community in establishing response strategies, while also outlining further research avenues to gather operational data and develop specific response programmes.

First, the assessment challenged the common distinction between families that were forced to displace by conflict or natural disaster and those that chose to separate due to economic vulnerability or lack of access to basic services. The chapter showed that almost all interviewed families felt that they were forced to separate, despite any underlying reasons, and identified a link between this and the timeframe of the decision-making process. The qualitative interviews highlighted that families who had limited or no time to prepare for their separation became more vulnerable than those families that had time to prepare, regardless of whether the separation was due to livelihoods or conflict factors. The chapter further showed that livelihoods and conflict factors were often intertwined, affecting families simultaneously or at different stages of their separation.

Beyond Afghanistan, this finding relates to wider global discussions about the humanitarian-development nexus, which seeks more comprehensive solutions to protracted and cross-cutting vulnerabilities of displaced populations. This suggests potential further research on how fragmented families could benefit from multi-faceted support from both the humanitarian and development communities, provided responses are streamlined and coordinated, and on what affect this could have on protection vulnerabilities of families displaced by conflict or livelihoods considerations.

Secondly, FFA demonstrated how the type of fragmentation interacted with the impact of the decision-making process and how it made separation less predictable for families that predominantly or entirely left their AoO, compared to just one family member fragmenting. Findings indicated that even if families had time to prepare for their separation, if most or all members left their AoO, a significant number of unforeseen factors such as rent or cultural issues, shaped the impact and outcome of separation. This often resulted in a situation where some protection concerns of separated families improved, while others worsened. In contrast, families in which only one family member displaced were better able to implement their separation plan, if they had time to make one.

Thirdly, this study indicated that fragmented families favoured separation in close geographical proximity, only considering further separations if the presented opportunity provided a perceived high benefit. However, the section also demonstrated that this logic no longer holds once a family feels forced into its choice to fragment. Time pressure and lack of options in these circumstances leads to poorer planning and in some cases, cross-border displacement without regular legal status, typically to Iran. However, despite higher-paying job opportunities in Iran,

the issue of unpreparedness outlined in the first chapter of this report equally affected families with a member separated in Iran and often left them particularly vulnerable. To best address this issue and to support humanitarian response programming, additional research that clarifies the initial conceptualisation of “forced choices” of separated families may be required.

Lastly, the report discussed how the length of separation had multiple impacts in worsening vulnerability and increasing needs of families that were unable to fully plan their separation, and continuously improving the situation of families that separated with a clear plan. The length of time the family had been separated was found to interact with and reinforce the family’s perceived autonomy over decision-making characteristics outlined in the first chapter. The section also noted that families consistently underestimated the length of separation and lacked any plan of reunification.

Therefore, overall, this in-depth qualitative study of fragmented families provided practitioners with an initial understanding of the nature and differences of such families, within the context of Afghanistan. This report provided findings and insights that increase awareness of the issues faced by this vulnerable population group, and indicated their needs, providing an evidence-base for humanitarian programming. However, this assessment was a first qualitative step towards understanding the different characteristics, vulnerabilities and needs of fragmented families, which ought to substantiate further study on this topic. The assessment thereby provides an important basis for research to better comprehend the increasing phenomenon and impact of family separations.