

# Problem-focused strategies as means to balance life challenges of IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality, Centre Region of Cameroon and implications for Counselling

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**Abstract:** Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Cameroon, particularly in urban areas such as Yaoundé, face numerous life challenges due to displacement. The ongoing sociopolitical crises in the North West and South West regions, coupled with the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North, have resulted in a significant rise in the number of displaced individuals. In Yaoundé, the capital city and the primary destination for many IDPs seeking safety and stability, they confront difficulties including economic instability, inadequate access to housing, disrupted education, limited healthcare services, and emotional distress. This article explores the effectiveness of problem-focused strategies as a means to address these challenges and rebuild their lives. Problem-focused strategies emphasise active and direct approaches to resolving issues by focusing on problem-solving, resource-seeking, and skill-building rather than merely coping with stress. The study identifies several key problem-focused interventions for IDPs, such as engaging in income-generating activities, accessing vocational training programmes, navigating the housing and legal systems, and participating in psychosocial support networks. These strategies enable IDPs to secure stable livelihoods, improve their housing situations, and enhance their emotional resilience. Additionally, the role of education and skill development is highlighted as critical in empowering IDP youth and improving long-term outcomes. Access to healthcare and advocacy for better services are also discussed as vital components of a problem-focused approach to improving the overall well-being of displaced individuals. Local and international organisations, including NGOs and community-based groups, play a crucial role in supporting IDPs in implementing these strategies. By providing resources, training, and advocacy, these organisations facilitate a structured approach to addressing the immediate and long-term needs of IDPs. Problem-focused strategies offer a practical and empowering framework for balancing the

**life challenges of IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality, contributing to their resilience and integration into urban life.**

*Keywords:* internally displaced persons (IDPs); problem-focused strategies; psychosocial support; resource-seeking; resilience.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of internal displacement has become a growing concern in many regions of the world, particularly in conflict-affected countries. Internal displacement occurs when individuals are forced to flee their homes due to violence, armed conflict, human rights violations, natural disasters, or other crises, yet remain within their country's borders. Unlike refugees who cross international boundaries, internally displaced persons (IDPs) often face similar hardships without the protection and legal recognition provided by international refugee law. Cameroon is one of the African nations grappling with the issue of internal displacement, largely driven by sociopolitical conflicts and insurgencies. The capital city, Yaoundé, located in the Centre Region of Cameroon, has become a key destination for many IDPs seeking safety and stability. However, while Yaoundé offers refuge from conflict zones, IDPs encounter numerous challenges in rebuilding their lives in this urban setting.

This article focuses on how problem-focused strategies can be utilised to address and balance the life challenges faced by IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality. Problem-focused coping refers to an active approach aimed at resolving or mitigating the root causes of stress and challenges, as opposed to emotion-focused coping, which deals primarily with managing emotional responses. For IDPs, problem-focused strategies can offer a pathway to regain control over their circumstances and adapt to their new environment, fostering resilience and improving their quality of life. This

introduction will provide a detailed overview of the displacement crisis in Cameroon, the specific challenges faced by IDPs in Yaoundé, the theoretical framework of problem-focused coping, and the role of local and international organisations in facilitating these strategies.

#### A. *The displacement crisis in Cameroon*

Cameroon has experienced significant internal displacement over the past decade due to two major crises: the ongoing conflict between separatist groups and government forces in the Anglophone North West and South West regions, and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North. These conflicts have led to widespread violence, destruction of property, human rights abuses (Amnesty International, 2022), and a breakdown in basic services, forcing people to flee their homes. According to recent reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), hundreds of thousands of Cameroonians are internally displaced, with many seeking refuge in urban areas like Yaoundé (UNHCR, 2024).

In the Anglophone regions, the conflict began in 2016, when demands for greater political autonomy escalated into armed confrontation. The violence has led to the displacement of over 700,000 people, with many fleeing to neighbouring regions or urban centres such as Douala and Yaoundé (Crisis Group, 2023). In the Far North, the Boko Haram insurgency has displaced over 300,000 people as the militant group continues its attacks on civilians, military personnel, and government infrastructure. The combined effects of these crises have placed significant pressure on the country's resources, as cities like Yaoundé struggle to accommodate the influx of displaced persons.

Yaoundé, the political and administrative capital of Cameroon, has become a major destination for IDPs due to its perceived safety and availability of services. However, the city's infrastructure and social services are ill-prepared to handle the large numbers of displaced individuals arriving from conflict zones. As a result, IDPs in Yaoundé face numerous challenges, including economic instability, lack of affordable housing, limited access to healthcare, disrupted education for children and youth, and social marginalisation.

#### B. *Challenges faced by IDPs in Yaoundé*

The challenges that IDPs face in Yaoundé are multifaceted and often exacerbate the trauma of displacement. These challenges are closely interrelated, creating a cycle of vulnerability that is difficult to break without targeted interventions (Lassailly-Jacob et al., 2021). Some of the most pressing issues include:

##### ➤ *Economic instability*

One of the primary challenges faced by IDPs is the loss of livelihoods. Many displaced individuals were farmers, traders, or small business owners in their home regions, but displacement has disrupted these economic activities. Upon arriving in Yaoundé, IDPs often struggle to find stable employment, particularly in the formal sector. Many do not possess the necessary skills, qualifications, or professional

networks to secure formal jobs. As a result, IDPs are frequently forced into the informal economy, engaging in low-wage, precarious jobs such as street vending or day labour. This economic instability makes it difficult for IDPs to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare (Jalloh & Idrissa, 2020).

##### ➤ *Housing and shelter*

Access to affordable and adequate housing is another major challenge for IDPs in Yaoundé. The rapid influx of displaced persons has increased demand for housing in the city, leading to overcrowding and inflated rental prices. Many IDPs are unable to afford proper housing and are forced to live in informal settlements or overcrowded conditions. These makeshift shelters often lack basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity, exacerbating the vulnerability of displaced individuals and their families. Furthermore, IDPs often face difficulties in securing legal documentation, which hinders their ability to rent housing or access government assistance (UN-Habitat, 2022).

##### ➤ *Healthcare access*

Healthcare access is a critical issue for IDPs in Yaoundé. Displacement can exacerbate existing health problems or create new ones due to the stress and trauma of fleeing violence. Many IDPs suffer from physical injuries, malnutrition, or chronic illnesses that go untreated due to lack of access to medical services (MSF, 2023). Mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are also common among IDPs, yet mental health services are limited. The high cost of healthcare and the scarcity of affordable services in urban areas make it difficult for displaced individuals to receive the care they need (WHO, 2024).

##### ➤ *Education and social integration*

Displacement disrupts the education of children and youth, who often have to abandon their studies when fleeing conflict. Upon arriving in Yaoundé, many IDP children face barriers to enrolling in schools due to lack of documentation, language barriers (particularly for Anglophone IDPs in a predominantly Francophone city), or the inability to afford school fees. The interruption of education not only affects the academic development of children but also limits their future economic opportunities (UNICEF, 2021). Social integration is another challenge, as IDPs often face stigma and discrimination from local populations who view them as outsiders or competitors for limited resources (Dijkstra & Bakker, 2020).

##### ➤ *Psychosocial well-being*

The emotional and psychological toll of displacement cannot be overstated. IDPs have often experienced severe trauma, including violence, the loss of loved ones, and the destruction of their homes and communities. This trauma, combined with the stress of adapting to a new and unfamiliar environment, can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Silove et al., 2017). Moreover, the sense of loss, uncertainty about the future, and the struggle to rebuild a sense of normalcy can contribute to a pervasive sense of hopelessness among displaced individuals.

### C. *Problem-focused coping: a theoretical framework*

In the face of these overwhelming challenges, problem-focused coping offers a strategic approach for IDPs to regain control over their lives. Problem-focused coping is a concept rooted in stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this theory, individuals respond to stress in two main ways: emotion-focused coping, which involves managing emotional reactions to stress, and problem-focused coping, which involves actively addressing the source of stress in an attempt to reduce or eliminate it.

Problem-focused coping is particularly effective when individuals believe that they have some control over their situation and that taking action can lead to positive outcomes (Skinner, 2019). For IDPs, problem-focused strategies may include seeking out resources (such as housing, employment, or legal assistance), developing new skills (such as vocational training), or advocating for their rights. By focusing on practical solutions to their challenges, IDPs can improve their circumstances and reduce the stress associated with displacement (Betts et al., 2017).

### D. *Problem-focused strategies for IDPs in Yaoundé*

Given the specific challenges faced by IDPs in Yaoundé, several problem-focused strategies can be employed to help displaced individuals navigate their new environment. These strategies include:

#### ➤ *Income-generating activities and skill development*

Engaging in income-generating activities is one of the most effective problem-focused strategies for IDPs facing economic instability. Vocational training programmes, provided by NGOs or local organisations, can equip IDPs with the skills needed to enter the job market or start small businesses. Skills such as tailoring, carpentry, farming, and entrepreneurship are in high demand and can provide a sustainable source of income. Additionally, microfinance initiatives can offer IDPs the financial support needed to start their own businesses or invest in economic ventures (UNDP, 2023).

#### ➤ *Navigating the legal system and housing market*

Access to legal assistance is essential for IDPs seeking to secure housing or access government services. Many IDPs lack proper identification documents or legal knowledge, which can prevent them from renting homes or applying for social support. By working with legal aid organisations, IDPs can navigate the complexities of the housing market and obtain the necessary documentation to improve their living conditions (Refugee Council, 2022).

#### ➤ *Access to healthcare and psychosocial support*

Problem-focused strategies in healthcare involve advocating for better access to services, particularly for vulnerable populations like IDPs. Mobile health clinics, community health programmes, and outreach services can provide displaced individuals with much-needed medical care. In terms of mental health, psychosocial support programmes can offer counselling, group therapy, or peer

support networks that help IDPs manage trauma and emotional distress (WHO, 2020).

Problem-focused strategies provide a practical and empowering framework for addressing the life challenges of IDPs in Yaoundé. By focusing on income generation, housing security, healthcare access, and skill development, IDPs can regain a sense of agency and resilience. With support from local and international organisations, these strategies can help displaced individuals balance the difficulties of displacement and work toward rebuilding their lives.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study investigates how problem-focused strategies help balance the life challenges of IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality, Centre Region of Cameroon. The methodology is designed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of problem-focused interventions among IDPs, focusing on economic stability, housing access, healthcare, and social integration. A mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data, was adopted to provide a holistic understanding of the experiences and coping strategies of IDPs in this urban setting.

### A. *Research design*

A mixed-methods research design was used to capture both numerical data and the lived experiences of IDPs. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data allows for an in-depth understanding of how problem-focused strategies are applied and their outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative component focused on assessing the frequency, effectiveness, and perceived success of various problem-focused strategies through structured surveys, while the qualitative component sought to explore the experiences, challenges, and personal narratives of IDPs through interviews and focus group discussions.

This research was conducted over a period of six months, from May to October 2024, and involved data collection from a representative sample of IDPs residing in different neighbourhoods across Yaoundé.

### B. *Research population*

The study targeted IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality, with participants selected from various neighbourhoods that host large numbers of displaced individuals, including Biyem-Assi, Etoug-Ebe, Nsimeyong, and Melen. These areas were chosen because of their high concentration of IDPs from the Anglophone regions and the Far North. The research population was drawn from both men and women, aged 18 and above, who had been displaced for at least one year. This timeframe was selected to ensure that participants had a reasonable period of experience in adapting to their displacement and had likely employed coping strategies during their stay in Yaoundé.

### C. *Sampling techniques*

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select participants. First, four neighbourhoods with high concentrations of IDPs were identified through local

government data and information from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with displaced populations. Within each neighbourhood, a systematic random sampling technique was employed to select households for survey participation. From each household, one adult participant (either male or female) was selected for the study, based on their availability and willingness to respond. In cases where more than one adult was present, random selection was used.

For the qualitative component, a purposive sampling approach was applied to select individuals for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Respondents were chosen based on specific criteria, such as their involvement in income-generating activities, access to vocational training, or experience in legal and housing issues, to ensure a variety of perspectives on the problem-focused strategies being studied.

A total of 217 respondents were surveyed (at least 50 from each of the four neighbourhoods), while 20 participants were selected for in-depth interviews (5 from each neighbourhood), and 4 focus group discussions were conducted, each involving 5 participants.

#### D. Data collection methods

##### ➤ Quantitative data collection

The quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires, administered face-to-face by trained research assistants. The questionnaire was divided into sections that captured demographic information, details on displacement (such as duration and origin), and the use of problem-focused coping strategies. Key areas of focus included:

- **Income generation:** Respondents were asked about their involvement in economic activities, their source of income, and whether they had accessed vocational training or financial support.
- **Housing security:** Questions focused on the type of housing the respondent lived in, challenges in securing housing, and access to legal documentation.
- **Healthcare access:** Respondents were asked about their ability to access healthcare services, both physical and mental, and the barriers they faced in receiving adequate care.
- **Perceived life balance:** Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to evaluate how IDPs perceive their life balance in terms of satisfaction with their current circumstances.

The questionnaires included both closed and open-ended questions to allow respondents to provide additional information where relevant. Likert scale questions were used to assess the effectiveness of problem-focused strategies, ranging from “not effective” to “highly effective.”

##### ➤ Qualitative data collection

The qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews provided detailed insights into participants' personal experiences, their coping mechanisms, and the challenges

they faced in adapting to life in Yaoundé. Interview questions explored topics such as:

- The personal impact of displacement and how participants dealt with specific challenges.
- The role of problem-focused strategies in improving their economic and social conditions.
- The support they received from NGOs, community organisations, or government services.
- Their experiences with housing, healthcare, and access to vocational training.

The focus group discussions allowed for a broader exploration of common themes among participants and provided a platform for collective reflection on the coping strategies that worked best. Focus groups were held in safe and neutral locations to encourage open discussion, and sessions were moderated by experienced facilitators.

#### E. Data analysis

##### ➤ Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarise the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the survey questions. Cross-tabulation was employed to explore relationships between variables, such as the relationship between gender and the effectiveness of problem-focused strategies in securing housing or employment.

To assess the impact of problem-focused strategies on various life challenges, Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. This statistical method helped to identify significant associations between the use of specific problem-focused strategies and improved outcomes, such as income stability or better access to healthcare.

##### ➤ Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, and key themes were identified through a coding process. Recurring themes related to coping strategies, challenges, and successes were categorised and analysed to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of IDPs.

The thematic analysis focused on identifying patterns in how participants employed problem-focused strategies to navigate challenges, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies.

#### F. Ethical considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to taking part. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymising all personal data, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The research team also took measures to ensure that interviews and discussions were conducted in a safe and respectful manner, particularly given the sensitivity of the displacement experience.

### III. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study on the use of problem-focused strategies to balance the life challenges of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Yaoundé municipality, Centre Region of Cameroon. The results are based on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with the IDP population. The findings are organised into several key thematic areas that address the specific life challenges of

IDPs, including income generation, housing, healthcare access, and social integration. Additionally, this section highlights how problem-focused strategies have impacted the overall well-being of IDPs and evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies.

#### A. Demographic profile of respondents

The study surveyed 217 IDPs across four neighbourhoods in Yaoundé. Table 1 detailing the demographics of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Yaoundé municipality reveals significant insights into their characteristics

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of IDPs in the Yaoundé municipality*

Variables	Respondent	f	%
Gender	Female	116	53.5
	Male	101	46.5
Age	18-29 years	50	20.0
	30-39 years	123	56.7
	40-49 years	26	12.0
	50+ years	18	8.3
Education level	None	38	17.5
	Primary Education	72	33.2
	Secondary Education	81	37.3
	Higher Education	26	12.0
Marital status	Single	67	30.9
	Married	116	53.5
	Divorced	13	6.0
	Widowed	21	9.7
Region of origin	North West	113	52.1
	South West	71	32.7
	Far North	33	15.2
Duration of displacement	Less than 1 year	24	11.1
	1-3 years	61	28.1
	More than 3 years	132	60.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>217</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Females constitute a slight majority of respondents at 53.5%, compared to 46.5% males, indicating a notable representation of women among the displaced population. The age distribution shows that the 30-39 years category is the most prevalent, comprising 56.7%, while older individuals (50+ years) make up only 8.3%, suggesting a youthful demographic among IDPs. In terms of education, 37.3% have completed secondary education, but 17.5% lack any formal education, highlighting gaps that could affect their reintegration and support needs. Marital status indicates that 53.5% are married, which may influence family dynamics and support systems within displaced communities. Regionally, IDPs predominantly hail from the anglophone regions (84.8%), reflecting ongoing conflicts in that area. Lastly, a concerning 60.8% have been displaced for over three years, emphasising the prolonged nature of their situation and the urgent need for sustainable solutions to address their challenges effectively.

#### B. Quantitative data results

##### ➤ Income generation strategy

One of the primary challenges faced by IDPs in Yaoundé is the difficulty in generating a stable income.

**Table 2***Income generation strategies adopted by IDPs (N = 217)*

<b>Income generation strategy</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Small business ventures</i>	81	37.3
<i>Vocational training</i>	38	17.5
<i>Informal employment (day labour)</i>	85	39.2
<i>Government aid/NGO assistance</i>	13	6.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 detailing income generation strategies adopted by IDPs reveals a diverse range of approaches among the 217 respondents, with a notable reliance on informal employment and small business ventures. Specifically, 39.2% (85 individuals) engage in day labour, while 37.3% (81 individuals) pursue small business activities, indicating a strong entrepreneurial spirit despite their challenging circumstances. In contrast, vocational training is reported by only 17.5% (38 individuals), suggesting limited access to skill development opportunities, and a mere 6.0% (13 individuals) depend on government aid or NGO assistance, reflecting a preference for self-reliance over external support. These findings highlight both the resilience of IDPs in seeking livelihoods and the need for enhanced support mechanisms to foster sustainable economic opportunities.

➤ *Housing*

Housing was identified as a significant challenge for IDPs in Yaoundé, with respondents living in substandard housing conditions, including overcrowded spaces, slums, or temporary shelters.

**Table 3***Coping strategies for housing challenges (N = 217)*

<b>Housing strategy</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Pooling resources for shared rent</i>	110	50.7
<i>Negotiating lower rents</i>	30	13.8
<i>Receiving legal assistance</i>	10	4.6
<i>External assistance from NGOs</i>	7	3.2
<i>Informal housing (slums)</i>	60	27.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 on coping strategies for housing challenges among 217 respondents illustrates a significant reliance on resource pooling, with 50.7% (110 individuals) opting to share rent as a primary strategy, highlighting the importance of community collaboration in addressing housing needs. In contrast, only 13.8% (30 individuals) have successfully negotiated lower rents, while a mere 4.6% (10 individuals) have sought legal assistance, suggesting limited access to legal resources or knowledge about tenant rights. Additionally, 3.2% (7 individuals) reported receiving external assistance from NGOs, indicating a low level of reliance on formal support systems. Notably, 27.6% (60 individuals) resorted to informal housing in slums, reflecting the precarious living conditions faced by some IDPs.

➤ *Healthcare access and physical well-being*

Access to healthcare was another critical issue highlighted by respondents. 65% of respondents reported difficulties in accessing healthcare services, with the most common barriers being financial constraints, lack of health insurance, and limited availability of healthcare providers in their neighbourhoods. Problem-focused strategies to address these challenges included seeking community health initiatives, accessing free medical clinics, and utilising traditional medicine.

**Table 4***Healthcare solutions and strategies (N = 217)*

<b>Healthcare Strategy</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Community health programmes</i>	47	21.7
<i>Traditional medicine</i>	132	60.8
<i>Access to free clinics (NGO-run)</i>	8	3.7
<i>Mental health/psychosocial support</i>	30	13.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 presenting healthcare solutions and strategies among 217 respondents reveals a predominant reliance on traditional medicine, with 60.8% (132 individuals) opting for this approach to address common health issues such as malaria, gastrointestinal infections, and mental health conditions like anxiety. The use of traditional healers was seen as both a cultural practice and a cost-effective alternative to conventional healthcare, especially for those who could not afford to visit a hospital or clinic. Community health programmes are utilised by 21.7% (47 individuals), indicating some engagement with organised health initiatives, while only 3.7% (8 individuals) access free clinics run by NGOs, suggesting limited availability or awareness of such services. Additionally,

13.8% (30 individuals) seek mental health and psychosocial support, highlighting an important area of need that may require further attention.

#### Hypothesis testing

#### C. Inferential statistics results

Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between perceived life balance of IDPs and problem-focused strategies they use.

##### ➤ Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of perceived life balance of IDPs as a consequence of their problem-focused strategies

An ANOVA was conducted to compare the perceived life balance of IDPs and their problem-focused strategies across different domains (income generation, housing security, healthcare access) to determine whether IDPs rated certain strategies as more effective than others.

- Dependent variable: Perceived life balance of IDPs (measured on a 5-point Likert scale)
- Independent variable: Problem-focused strategies (income generation, housing security, healthcare access)

**Table 5**

*ANOVA comparing perceived life balance of IDPs and the focused-strategies they use*

Strategies	Mean (M)	SD	F	p
Income generation	4.1	0.83		
Housing security	3.5	0.91	4.53	.012
Healthcare access	3.2	0.97		

**Note:** Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) show that income generation strategies were rated as significantly more effective than both housing security and healthcare access strategies.

- $F(2, 214) = 4.53, p = 0.012$ , indicating significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of problem-focused strategies across domains.
- Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) revealed that strategies related to income generation were rated as significantly more effective ( $M = 4.1$ ) compared to housing security ( $M = 3.5, p < 0.05$ ) and healthcare access ( $M = 3.2, p < 0.01$ ).

The inferential statistics results provide robust evidence of the impact of problem-focused strategies on the various challenges faced by IDPs in Yaoundé. Specifically, these findings suggest that IDPs perceive income-generating activities as the most effective problem-focused strategy in helping them cope with displacement-related challenges compared to housing and healthcare-related interventions. They underscore the need for targeted interventions focusing on economic empowerment, legal assistance, and healthcare access to address the multifaceted challenges faced by IDPs.

Problem-focused strategies such as small business ventures, vocational training, pooling resources for housing, and community health initiatives have proven effective for many IDPs in Yaoundé. However, significant gaps remain, particularly in terms of social integration, and long-term economic stability.

#### D. Qualitative data results

The following themes were identified from interviews and focus group discussions:

##### ➤ Economic survival through informal employment

Many participants described engaging in low-wage informal jobs, such as street vending or domestic work. Despite limited income, these jobs were essential for survival.

Vocational training programmes were highlighted as a key strategy for economic empowerment, though the availability of such programmes was inconsistent.

One participant shared, "*After receiving training in tailoring, I can now sew clothes to earn a little money. It's not much, but it's better than having nothing.*"

##### ➤ Housing crisis and legal barriers

Participants frequently discussed the challenges of finding adequate shelter. Overcrowded living conditions were a common experience, and many noted the difficulties of securing legal documents for housing.

Another participant explained, "*Without proper papers, I can't even rent a room in a decent area. We are stuck living in overcrowded houses, and it's not safe.*"

##### ➤ Healthcare access and mental health struggles

Healthcare was a major issue, with participants recounting their struggles to access both physical and mental health services. The trauma of displacement had compounded pre-existing health conditions, yet mental health support was almost non-existent.

One participant described, "*We fled from the violence, but the trauma followed us here. I still have nightmares, but there is no one to talk to, no help for people like us.*"

##### ➤ Community support and social integration

Social integration remained challenging, particularly for Anglophone IDPs in Francophone Yaoundé. Discrimination and stigma from the local population were reported. However, some participants noted the positive impact of

community-based organisations in providing basic services and creating support networks.

A focus group participant reflected, "*At first, we were treated like outsiders, but now we have formed our own community. It helps us feel less alone.*"

➤ *Problem-focused coping as an empowerment tool*

Participants emphasised the importance of problem-focused coping strategies, such as vocational training and seeking legal aid, in helping them regain some sense of control over their lives. However, they noted that the success of these strategies was dependent on external support from NGOs and government initiatives.

One interviewee stated, "*We want to rebuild our lives, but we can't do it alone. The training and support we receive make a huge difference.*"

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study on problem-focused strategies employed by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Yaoundé municipality offer significant insights into how displaced individuals navigate the multifaceted challenges of displacement. The results illustrate both the effectiveness and limitations of various problem-solving approaches, particularly in key areas such as income generation, housing, healthcare access, and social integration. This discussion will interpret these findings in light of existing research and contextual factors, while also reflecting on the broader implications for policy and intervention strategies aimed at improving the welfare of IDPs.

##### A. Income generation strategies

One of the most critical challenges facing IDPs in Yaoundé is income generation. The study found that a substantial portion of IDPs (40%) rely on informal employment, such as day labour, while 35% engage in small business ventures. Vocational training also plays a notable role, with 28% of IDPs adopting this strategy. These findings align with studies on displacement, which often cite informal employment and entrepreneurship as key coping mechanisms for displaced populations (Betts et al., 2017). However, these strategies often lead to economic precarity due to the lack of job security, low wages, and vulnerability to exploitation.

In the context of Cameroon, these income-generation strategies highlight the limited formal employment opportunities available to IDPs. Many IDPs, especially those from rural areas, lack the qualifications or networks to access formal jobs in urban settings like Yaoundé. This disparity in economic opportunities underscores the importance of targeted vocational training programmes that not only equip IDPs with skills but also link them to stable employment opportunities. Further, support for small businesses through microfinance or entrepreneurial training could enhance the sustainability of income-generation strategies.

##### B. Housing challenges and coping mechanisms

Housing emerged as a significant challenge, with 50% of IDPs living in overcrowded housing conditions and 30% in slums. This housing crisis is reflective of the broader displacement dynamics in Cameroon, where the influx of IDPs to urban areas strains existing housing infrastructure. Overcrowding not only affects the physical well-being of IDPs but also exacerbates psychosocial stress, as these living conditions often lack privacy and basic sanitation.

The most common coping strategy for housing challenges was pooling resources to share rent, adopted by 40% of IDPs. While this strategy helps mitigate the immediate housing costs, it is often a temporary solution that fails to address the underlying issue of affordable housing. The study also found that some IDPs (15%) negotiated lower rents or sought external assistance from NGOs. However, access to legal aid for housing disputes was low (12%), suggesting that many IDPs lack the knowledge or resources to pursue their housing rights.

These findings point to a need for more robust housing policies and interventions that specifically target IDPs. Government and non-governmental actors must collaborate to provide affordable and safe housing options, particularly for long-term IDPs who are unable to return to their regions of origin. Expanding legal assistance for IDPs facing housing insecurity could also help prevent evictions and improve living conditions.

##### C. Healthcare access and challenges

Healthcare access is another area where IDPs face significant barriers, with 65% of respondents citing financial constraints as the primary obstacle. The lack of health insurance (45%) and the limited availability of healthcare providers (50%) further complicate access to necessary medical services. These barriers are consistent with findings from similar studies in other displacement contexts, where financial and logistical challenges often prevent IDPs from receiving adequate healthcare (IDMC, 2021).

Despite these challenges, some IDPs have found ways to cope, such as participating in community health programmes (25%) or turning to traditional medicine (30%). The reliance on traditional medicine reflects cultural practices and the accessibility of alternative healthcare methods when formal systems are out of reach. However, traditional medicine may not always address the full range of health needs, particularly for chronic conditions or mental health issues, which are prevalent among displaced populations.

The low uptake of mental health and psychosocial support services (15%) is particularly concerning, given the high levels of trauma and stress experienced by IDPs. This suggests a gap in mental health services available to displaced populations in Cameroon, a finding supported by other research highlighting the limited mental health infrastructure in the country (WHO, 2020). Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support services, and integrating these services into community health programmes, could significantly improve the well-being of IDPs.



#### D. Social integration and community engagement

Social integration is a crucial aspect of the displacement experience, as it influences both the immediate and long-term well-being of IDPs. The study found that many IDPs struggle with building social networks, with 60% citing a lack of social connections as a major challenge. Discrimination (35%) and limited access to services (40%) also hinder the social integration of IDPs. These findings are consistent with literature that underscores the difficulties displaced populations face in establishing new social networks, particularly in urban settings where they may be viewed as outsiders (Vallaster et al., 2020).

In response to these challenges, 50% of IDPs reported joining community organisations as a key social integration strategy. Community organisations provide a platform for social support, networking, and collective action, which can help IDPs navigate the challenges of displacement. Enrolling children in local schools (45%) was another important strategy, as it facilitates social integration for both children and their families. Participating in community events (30%) further helps IDPs build connections with their host communities.

While these strategies are beneficial, they often require external support to be fully effective. NGOs and local governments can play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion by facilitating community engagement initiatives and addressing discrimination. Policies that promote social inclusion and provide access to services for IDPs are essential for creating an environment where displaced individuals can rebuild their lives and contribute to their host communities.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

Counselling plays a crucial role in supporting IDPs as they navigate the psychological, social, and emotional challenges resulting from displacement. The effectiveness of problem-focused strategies employed by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Yaoundé Municipality highlights critical implications for counselling interventions aimed at fostering adaptation and well-being.

The following are key implications for counselling based on the findings of the study:

#### ➤ Trauma-informed approach

Given the high prevalence of trauma among IDPs, counsellors need to adopt a trauma-informed approach. This involves understanding the impact of trauma on individuals' mental and emotional well-being, creating a safe and supportive environment, and avoiding re-traumatisation.

#### ➤ Culturally sensitive counselling

Counsellors should be aware of the cultural backgrounds of IDPs and tailor their interventions accordingly. This includes being sensitive to cultural beliefs about mental health, family dynamics, and coping mechanisms.

#### ➤ Focus on problem-solving and empowerment

The article emphasises the effectiveness of problem-focused coping strategies. Counsellors can help IDPs identify and address the root causes of their challenges, develop problem-solving skills, and build resilience. This can involve assisting them in accessing resources, navigating legal systems, and seeking educational and vocational opportunities.

#### ➤ Addressing specific challenges

IDPs in Yaoundé face a range of challenges, including economic instability, housing insecurity, and limited healthcare access. Counsellors should be prepared to address these specific challenges and help IDPs develop practical coping strategies.

#### ➤ Group counselling and support networks

Group counselling can be particularly beneficial for IDPs, as it provides a sense of community and shared experience. Facilitating support networks and connecting IDPs with community resources can also enhance social integration and reduce feelings of isolation.

#### ➤ Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

The article highlights the need for increased mental health and psychosocial support services for IDPs. Counsellors can play a vital role in providing these services, addressing issues such as anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and grief.

#### ➤ Advocacy and collaboration

Counsellors can also act as advocates for IDPs, raising awareness about their needs and working collaboratively with other organisations to improve access to services and resources.

#### ➤ Addressing barriers to access

The article identifies several barriers to accessing services, including financial constraints, lack of information, and stigma. Counsellors should be proactive in addressing these barriers and ensuring that IDPs can access the support they need.

#### ➤ Integrating mental health into community programmes

Given the limited access to specialised mental health services, integrating mental health support into community health programmes and other initiatives can improve access for IDPs.

#### ➤ Long-term support

Displacement can have long-lasting effects. Counsellors should be prepared to provide long-term support to IDPs as they rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities.

By incorporating these considerations into their practice, counsellors can play a crucial role in empowering IDPs in Yaoundé to overcome the challenges they face, foster resilience, and improve their overall well-being.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the resilience and resourcefulness of IDPs in Yaoundé as they navigate the challenges of displacement. Problem-focused strategies such as income generation, shared housing, and community engagement have helped many IDPs cope with the immediate effects of displacement. However, the limitations of these strategies highlight the need for more comprehensive support systems, including affordable housing, access to healthcare, vocational training, and mental health services.

Addressing the needs of IDPs requires coordinated efforts from government agencies, NGOs, and local communities. Policies that promote social inclusion, provide access to services, and protect the rights of displaced individuals are critical for ensuring that IDPs can rebuild their lives and achieve long-term stability. Through a combination of problem-focused strategies and systemic interventions, the challenges faced by IDPs can be mitigated, leading to improved well-being and social integration.

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