

Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘a and Forced Displacement: An Islamic Ethical Analysis of Women’s and Children’s Protection in Borno State

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the conditions and vulnerabilities of women and children internally displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, through the analytical lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘a* (the higher objectives of Islamic law). This study seeks to explore how Islamic ethical frameworks can inform protection responses in Muslim-majority humanitarian contexts.

Research Methodology: This study employs a PRISMA-ScR-guided scoping review of academic literature, humanitarian reports, and policy documents published between 2010 and 2025. This review systematically synthesizes the evidence related to displacement-induced risks affecting women and children.

Results: The findings indicate that internally displaced women and children face persistent threats, including gender-based violence, food insecurity, disrupted education, psychosocial trauma and economic marginalization. These conditions reflect systematic violations of the core *maqāṣid*, particularly the preservation of life, dignity, intellect, lineage and property.

Conclusions: A *maqāṣid*-based framework provides a coherent ethical foundation for aligning Islamic values with contemporary humanitarian protection norms while offering a normative critique of harmful practices within displacement settings.

Limitations: This study relied on secondary data sources and did not include primary field research, which may limit its contextual specificity.

Contribution: This article contributes to interdisciplinary debates on faith-sensitive humanitarianism by integrating Islamic legal theory into rights-based protection discourse in conflict-induced displacement contexts.

Keywords: *Boko Haram Insurgency, Faith-Based Humanitarianism, Internal Displacement, Maqāṣid Al-Sharī‘a, Women and Children*

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1 Introduction

Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has constituted one of the most protracted and devastating armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, with its epicenter in Nigeria’s northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. Initially emerging as a radical Islamist movement opposing Western education and governance, Boko Haram has evolved into a violent insurgent organization characterized by mass abductions, targeted killings, and large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure ([Salihu & Shodunke, 2024](#)). The escalation of violence

following the group's allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 further intensified its attacks on civilian populations, particularly women and children ([Duursma, 2022](#)).

The humanitarian consequences of this conflict have been profound. According to the International Organization for Migration, Nigeria hosts one of the largest internally displaced populations in Africa, with over two million internally displaced persons, the majority of whom are located in the Borno State. Displacement has been driven by repeated attacks on villages, forced recruitment, sexual violence, and the destruction of livelihoods, compelling entire communities to flee to government-controlled urban centers or informal camps. Internal displacement in northeast Nigeria is not merely a by-product of armed conflict but a sustained condition shaped by insecurity, restricted humanitarian access, and limited prospects for safe return ([Balogun, Salleh, & Ahmad, 2020](#)). Even in areas reclaimed by government forces, landmines, destroyed housing, and the absence of basic services have rendered return unviable for many displaced households.

Consequently, displacement has become increasingly protracted, exposing IDPs to chronic poverty, social marginalization, and protection risks ([Brown, Mackie, García Amado, Barratt, & Kriščiūnaitė, 2024](#)). The Nigerian state's response, although significant in scale, has faced structural challenges, including limited resources, coordination gaps, and allegations of human rights violations by security forces during counter-insurgency operations. These dynamics have deepened the distrust between displaced communities and state institutions, reinforcing their reliance on humanitarian actors, community networks, and faith-based organizations for survival and protection ([Sempijja, Mora Brito, & Moutaouakil, 2023](#)).

Armed conflict and forced displacement do not uniformly affect populations. Numerous studies have demonstrated that women and children experience displacement in gender- and age-specific ways that exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and generate distinct forms of vulnerability ([Kelly, Holmes, Gibbons, Matabaro Tom, & Voors, 2024](#)). In northeast Nigeria, these vulnerabilities are particularly acute due to the deliberate targeting of women and children by Boko Haram as instruments of terror, coercion, and ideological reproduction. Women and girls face heightened risks of gender-based violence, including rape, forced marriage, sexual slavery, and exploitation, both during displacement journeys and within IDP camps ([Ajayi, 2020](#)).

Survivors of Boko Haram captivity often encounter stigma upon return, as sexual violence and forced association with insurgents are frequently interpreted through moralized and gendered norms. This stigma can lead to social exclusion, divorce, or rejection by families and communities, further undermining women's access to protection and livelihoods ([Lugova, Samad, & Haque, 2020](#)). Children constitute more than half of the displaced population in northeast Nigeria and are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, interrupted education, and psychosocial trauma. Many children have witnessed extreme violence, including the killing of family members, village raids, and prolonged captivity. These experiences are associated with long-term developmental consequences, including impaired cognitive development, emotional distress, and increased susceptibility to armed group recruitment ([Jordans, Pigott, & Tol, 2016](#)).

Age intersects with gender to intensify the harm. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to early marriage, transactional sex, and domestic servitude, often as negative coping mechanisms adopted by households facing economic desperation. Meanwhile, younger children face elevated mortality risks due to preventable diseases linked to overcrowded living conditions, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to healthcare services. These gendered and age-specific vulnerabilities underscore the inadequacy of gender-neutral humanitarian response. Without targeted protection measures, displacement settings can reproduce and, in some cases, amplify the structural inequalities that place women and children at disproportionate risk ([Wagner et al., 2018](#)).

In communities where religion, such as Islam, shape's social identity, moral authority, and community trust, Islam-based approaches to humanitarian response occupy a complex and contested space. In northeast Nigeria, where Islam is deeply embedded in social life, Islamic institutions and values play a significant role in shaping responses to displacement, vulnerability, and social obligation. Islamic ethical teachings emphasize the protection of human life, dignity, and vulnerability. The Qur'an explicitly enjoins care for those in need, stating, "And they give food, despite their love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive" (Qur'an 76:8). Classical Islamic jurisprudence further recognizes the duty to protect displaced and persecuted persons, drawing on the concept of *aman* (asylum and protection) and Prophet Muhammad's own experience of forced migration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina ([Fadil, Moors, & Arnaut, 2021](#)).

Faith-based humanitarian actors often possess contextual knowledge, local legitimacy, and access to communities that international agencies struggle to reach. Mechanisms such as *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving), *sadaqa* (voluntary charity), and *waqf* (endowments) have historically functioned as systems of social welfare in Muslim societies and continue to support food assistance, education, and healthcare in displacement settings ([Wilkinson et al., 2022](#)). However, integrating faith-based approaches into humanitarian action is not without its challenges. Critics caution that faith-based organizations may unintentionally reinforce gender hierarchies, exclude non-adherents, or blur the line between assistance and religious proselytization. In the Nigerian context, concerns have also been raised about the politicization of religion and the risk that faith-based initiatives may be co-opted by local power structures or armed actors ([Sabates-Wheeler & Barker, 2024](#)).

Moreover, aligning Islamic ethical frameworks with international humanitarian principles, such as neutrality, impartiality, and non-discrimination, requires careful articulation rather than assumed compatibility. While Islamic teachings strongly condemn harm (*darar*) and injustice (*zulm*), their operational translation into contemporary humanitarian programming requires rigorous ethical and institutional safeguards. Therefore, recognizing both the potential and limitations of faith-based approaches is essential. Rather than treating religion as either a panacea or a liability, a critical and evidence-based engagement with Islamic ethics offers an opportunity to enrich humanitarian protection frameworks while remaining attentive to gender equity, accountability, and universal human rights ([Marshall, Roy, Seiple, & Slim, 2021](#)).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on Boko Haram-induced displacement in northeast Nigeria, existing studies remain largely fragmented across disciplinary and normative boundaries. Humanitarian and development research has produced extensive empirical documentation on displacement patterns, protection risks, gender-based violence, and child vulnerability. Parallel to this, a smaller but expanding body of literature on Islamic humanitarianism and faith-based aid has examined the role of religious actors, charitable instruments, and moral frameworks in crisis response ([Owonikoko & Momodu, 2020](#)).

However, three critical gaps remain. First, most displacement and protection studies adopt secular humanitarian frameworks without sustained engagement with Islamic normative ethics, even in contexts where Islam profoundly shapes social organization, moral authority, and community trust. As a result, Islamic concepts are often reduced to descriptive references, such as mentions of *zakat* or mosque-based aid, rather than being analyzed as coherent ethical systems capable of informing protection standards, accountability, and rights-based programming ([Rawashdeh, Azid, & Qureshi, 2017](#)).

Second, existing Islamic humanitarian literature tends to be either historical or abstract, focusing on classical jurisprudence or charitable traditions without systematically connecting these principles to contemporary humanitarian protection challenges, particularly those related to gender-based violence, child protection, and protracted displacement. Where Islamic ethics are invoked, they are often presented as morally consonant with international norms but without rigorous analytical mapping or operational implications of such a claim. Third, there is a notable absence of scholarship that applies the maqāsid al-

sharī'a framework to the lived realities of women and children displaced by armed conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.

While maqāṣid-based reasoning has been widely employed in Islamic finance, bioethics, and governance, its potential contribution to humanitarian protection in conflict-induced displacement remains underexplored (Sukri & Fauzan, 2025). This study addresses these gaps by integrating empirical insights from displacement in Borno State with a systematic maqāṣid-based Islamic ethical framework. Rather than treating Islamic values as supplementary or symbolic, this study positions them as an analytical lens through which protection gaps, humanitarian responsibilities, and ethical obligations can be critically examined.

1.1 Research Questions

To achieve this aim, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the principal protection and welfare challenges facing women and children internally displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria?
2. How can the maqāṣid al-sharī'a framework illuminate the ethical responsibilities toward displaced women and children in the contexts of armed conflict and protracted displacement?
3. In what ways can Islamic ethical principles be meaningfully aligned with contemporary humanitarian protection norms while safeguarding gender equity, accountability and non-discrimination?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Humanitarian Protection Norms and Vulnerability in Displacement Contexts

Contemporary humanitarian protection frameworks are grounded in international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and refugee and displacement norms that emphasize civilian protection, dignity, and freedom from harm. Within this paradigm, women and children are recognized as groups requiring specific protection due to structural inequalities, social roles and heightened exposure to violence in conflict settings (Stark, Seff, & Reis, 2021). Protection mainstreaming further requires that all humanitarian actions actively prevent harm, promote access to assistance without discrimination, and support the safety, dignity, and participation of affected populations. While these principles are normatively robust, their effectiveness often depends on local legitimacy, cultural resonance, and moral authority—factors frequently shaped by religious worldviews in Muslim-majority societies (Liden, 2019).

2.2 Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a as an Islamic Ethical Framework

The maqāṣid al-sharī'a (higher objectives of Islamic law) constitute a well-established interpretive framework within Islamic jurisprudence, articulated most systematically by classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī and al-Shāṭibī. The maqāṣid seek to preserve essential human interests, traditionally articulated as the protection of life (ḥifẓ al-nafs), religion (ḥifẓ al-dīn), intellect (ḥifẓ al-'aql), lineage (ḥifẓ al-nasl), and property (ḥifẓ al-māl) (Kamali). Contemporary Islamic scholarship emphasizes that maqāṣid reasoning is inherently welfare-oriented, prioritizing human dignity, justice, and the removal of harm (*raf' al-darar*). The Qur'an explicitly affirms the sanctity of human life: "Whoever saves one life, it is as if he has saved all of humanity" (Qur'an 5:32).

This principle establishes a moral imperative that transcends legal formalism and extends to all people, regardless of status or affiliation. In displacement contexts, maqāṣid reasoning enables a shift from procedural compliance to ethical considerations. Protection is not merely the avoidance of physical harm but encompasses safeguarding dignity, family integrity, mental well-being, and future prospects, dimensions that are acutely relevant to women and children subjected to forced displacement (Raftery, Howard, Palmer, & Hossain, 2022).

2.3 Maqāṣid and the Protection of Women and Children

The preservation of life (*hiḏ al-naḏs*) obliges the prevention of violence, starvation, and preventable diseases, aligning directly with humanitarian imperatives related to food security, healthcare access, and physical safety. The preservation of lineage (*hiḏ al-naṣl*) is particularly relevant for women and children, encompassing protection from sexual violence, forced marriage, and the disruption of family structures. Classical Islamic jurists regard violations of bodily integrity and coercion as grave injustices (*ẓulm*), a position reinforced by the prophetic maxim: “*There shall be no harm and no reciprocating harm*” ([Kasdi, 2019](#)).

The preservation of intellect (*hiḏ al-‘aql*) underscores the ethical necessity of education, psychosocial support, and protection from trauma, which are critical concerns for children exposed to prolonged conflict and displacement. Similarly, the preservation of property (*hiḏ al-māl*) extends beyond material assets to encompass livelihood restoration and economic dignity, particularly for displaced women, who often assume sole responsibility for household survival ([Demsie, 2024](#)). These maqāṣid collectively articulate a holistic vision of protection that resonates strongly with contemporary child protection and gender-sensitive humanitarian frameworks while grounding them in locally meaningful ethical reasoning.

2.4 Islamic Ethical Duties toward the Displaced

Islamic ethical teachings recognize displacement as a condition warranting special protection. The Qur’an repeatedly commands care for the vulnerable, including orphans and those in need, while Prophet Muhammad’s own experience of forced migration (*hiḏra*) establishes displacement as a morally significant condition within Islamic moral memory ([Ibrahim, Karimullah, Assaad, Septiani, & Okur, 2025](#)). The Qur’an states: “*And worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbour, the distant neighbour, the companion at your side, the traveller...*” (Qur’an 4:36). Classical concepts, such as *aman* (guarantee of safety) and *kafāla* (guardianship), further articulate communal responsibility toward those lacking protection. In contemporary displacement settings, these principles can be interpreted as ethical foundations for shelter provision, child guardianship, survivor-centered protection and inclusive assistance mechanisms ([Tohari, Fawwaz, & Swadjaja, 2022](#)).

2.5 Bridging Islamic Ethics and Humanitarian Practice

While Islamic ethics and humanitarian norms share substantial moral overlap, meaningful integration requires critical engagement rather than mere assumption. Maqāṣid-based reasoning provides a framework through which Islamic principles can be translated into operational commitments compatible with humanitarian standards of neutrality, impartiality, and non-discrimination ([Hilhorst, Melis, Mena, & van Voorst, 2021](#)). Simultaneously, ethical vigilance is required to ensure that appeals to religious values do not legitimize gender exclusion, silence survivors, or reinforce patriarchal authority structures. A maqāṣid approach, when properly applied, prioritizes outcomes over symbolism and justice over custom, thereby offering a normative basis for challenging harmful practices rather than entrenching them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study adopts a scoping review methodology, guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) framework. A scoping review was selected due to the heterogeneous nature of the literature on Boko Haram-induced displacement, which spans peer-reviewed academic research, humanitarian assessments, policy reports, and faith-based analyses. The objective was not to evaluate intervention effectiveness, but to map existing evidence, identify dominant themes, and examine how Islamic ethical frameworks, particularly maqāṣid al-sharī‘a, have been addressed or omitted in relation to the protection of displaced women and children. Scoping

reviews are particularly appropriate where research questions are exploratory, conceptual boundaries are broad, and the literature includes diverse methodologies and disciplinary perspectives ([Tricco et al., 2018](#)).

The methodological approach follows established scoping review procedures, including the identification of research questions, systematic search strategies, study selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, data charting, and thematic synthesis. This structured approach ensures transparency, replicability, and methodological rigor while accommodating the interpretive dimension required for ethical analysis. Unlike systematic reviews that prioritise quality appraisal for intervention comparison, this study emphasises breadth of coverage and conceptual mapping to capture the full spectrum of humanitarian and Islamic scholarship relevant to displacement ([Peters et al., 2020](#)).

The design also enables the integration of normative and empirical sources. In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, the review incorporates reports from international organisations, regional policy documents, and Islamic scholarly writings where relevant to protection ethics. This inclusive strategy is consistent with scoping review methodology, which recognises the value of grey literature in fields where practice-based knowledge plays a significant role, particularly in humanitarian and conflict contexts ([Tricco et al., 2018](#)).

By employing a PRISMA-ScR-guided framework, the study maintains systematic documentation of search processes, screening decisions, and data extraction procedures. This enhances methodological credibility while allowing analytical flexibility to interpret findings through the lens of *maqāsid al-sharī‘a*. The design therefore supports both descriptive mapping of displacement-related vulnerabilities and normative evaluation of their ethical implications within Islamic jurisprudential thought.

3.2 Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted between January and March 2025 and covered publications from 2010 to 2025, corresponding to the period following the escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency. The temporal scope was defined to capture both the evolution of displacement dynamics and the development of related humanitarian and Islamic ethical scholarship.

The search strategy was developed in accordance with international scoping review guidance, particularly the PRISMA-ScR framework ([Tricco et al., 2018](#)) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodological recommendations for scoping reviews ([Peters et al., 2020](#)). Consistent with these standards, a multi-source approach was adopted to ensure comprehensive coverage of both empirical and normative literature. Sources included peer-reviewed academic databases, humanitarian and policy repositories, and relevant books and scholarly monographs from recognised academic publishers addressing displacement, protection, and Islamic ethics. This multi-source strategy reflects best practice in scoping review methodology, which recognises the importance of incorporating grey literature in fields where practice-based knowledge significantly shapes the evidence base ([Peters et al., 2020](#)).

Search strings combined thematic clusters using Boolean operators to enhance sensitivity and specificity of retrieval. Core search combinations included:

1. “Boko Haram” AND “internal displacement”
2. “women” OR “children” AND “IDPs” AND “Nigeria”
3. “Islamic ethics” OR “maqasid al-sharia” AND “humanitarian”
4. “faith-based organisations” AND “displacement”

Search terms were iteratively refined to balance breadth and relevance, in line with established scoping review procedures. Reference lists of key articles were manually screened to identify additional relevant publications, a technique recommended in international scoping review methodology to improve search comprehensiveness ([Peters et al., 2020](#); [Tricco et al., 2018](#)).

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Publications addressing internal displacement related to Boko Haram or north-east Nigeria
2. Studies focusing on women, children, or gendered and age-specific vulnerabilities
3. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and authoritative humanitarian reports
4. Publications in English

Exclusion criteria:

1. Opinion pieces without analytical or empirical grounding
2. Media reports lacking methodological transparency
3. Publications unrelated to forced displacement or protection issues

3.4 Screening and Selection Process

Following the PRISMA-ScR framework, records were screened in two stages. Titles and abstracts were first reviewed for relevance. Full-text screening was then conducted for eligible publications. Sources were retained if they provided substantive discussion of displacement conditions, protection risks, or ethical frameworks relevant to women and children ([Mattos, Cestari, & Moreira, 2023](#)). Given the scoping nature of the review, no formal quality appraisal tool was applied; however, attention was paid to the credibility of sources, institutional authorship, and consistency of findings across documents.

The initial database search generated a broad pool of records, which were imported into reference management software to remove duplicates. After deduplication, the remaining records underwent title and abstract screening based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria required that publications: (1) focus on Boko Haram-related displacement or closely related conflict-induced displacement in north-east Nigeria; (2) address protection concerns affecting women and/or children; and (3) provide empirical, analytical, or normative discussion relevant to humanitarian or Islamic ethical frameworks. Exclusion criteria included opinion pieces lacking substantive analysis, publications outside the specified time frame (2010–2025), and sources unrelated to displacement protection dynamics.

Full-text screening was conducted to assess thematic relevance and depth of engagement with protection issues. Particular attention was given to whether sources addressed dimensions aligned with the maqāṣid al-sharī'a, such as life, dignity, education, family integrity, and livelihood. Even where Islamic ethical language was not explicitly used, studies were included if their findings could be analytically interpreted through a maqāṣid lens.

To enhance transparency, screening decisions were documented, including reasons for exclusion at the full-text stage. Although a formal risk-of-bias assessment was not undertaken consistent with scoping review methodology the review prioritised peer-reviewed journals, established humanitarian organisations, and recognised academic publishers. This approach ensured a balanced synthesis of empirical evidence and normative scholarship while maintaining methodological integrity appropriate to exploratory and conceptual research.

3.5 Data Extraction and Analytical Approach

Data were charted using a structured matrix capturing:

1. Publication type and year
2. Geographic focus
3. Population group (women, children, IDPs)
4. Key protection concerns
5. Ethical or normative frameworks referenced

A thematic synthesis approach was employed, involving iterative coding and grouping of findings into analytically coherent themes. These themes were subsequently examined through the lens of maqāṣid al-sharī'a to identify points of convergence, tension, and ethical insight. This interpretive dimension aligns with scoping review methodology where conceptual mapping and thematic integration are central objective.

3.6 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

As this study relied exclusively on secondary sources, no direct ethical approval was required. Nonetheless, ethical sensitivity guided the analysis, particularly in relation to representations of survivors of violence. The study acknowledges limitations related to reliance on humanitarian reports, potential reporting bias, and restricted access to conflict-affected areas, which may influence the scope and depth of available data ([Clark-Kazak, 2021](#)).

4. Result and Discussion

The thematic synthesis yielded six interrelated themes characterizing the lived realities of women and children displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria.

4.1 Protracted Displacement and Structural Insecurity

The literature consistently depicts displacement in the Borno State as protracted rather than temporary. Many IDPs have experienced repeated displacement cycles due to ongoing insecurity, military operations, and limited prospects for safe returns. Camps and host communities are frequently characterized by overcrowding, inadequate shelter, and restricted freedom of movement ([Owonikoko & Momodu, 2020](#)). This prolonged condition of insecurity exacerbates dependency, erodes social networks, and places sustained pressure on women and children, who often lack access to stable livelihood or education.

4.2 Gender-Based Violence and Exploitation

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive and documented protection concerns. Women and girls face the risk of sexual violence during attacks, captivity, displacement journeys, and within camps. Reports indicate that exploitation may also occur in exchange for food, shelter, or protection, reflecting severe power asymmetry. Stigma associated with sexual violence, particularly for women returning from Boko Haram captivity, often results in social exclusion and psychological distress, limiting access to community support and services ([Okoli & Nnaemeka Azom, 2019](#)).

4.3 Child Vulnerability, Trauma, and Disrupted Development

Children constitute the majority of the displaced population and experience compounded vulnerabilities. The literature highlights widespread educational disruption, with many children spending years outside formal education. Exposure to violence, family separation, and loss contributes significantly to psychosocial trauma. Formerly abducted children face specific reintegration challenges, including suspicion, discrimination, and limited access to tailored mental health services ([Heleta, 2025](#)).

4.4 Health, Nutrition, and Care Deficits

Food insecurity and malnutrition are recurrent themes, especially among pregnant women, lactating mothers and young children. Overburdened health systems, inadequate maternal care, and poor sanitation contribute to preventable illnesses and mortality. These deficits are often intensified by restrictions on humanitarian access and funding shortfalls, underscoring the fragility of life-sustaining services in displacement settings ([Kadir, Stevens, Takahashi, & Lal, 2025](#)).

4.5 Social Stigma, Marginalisation, and Loss of Dignity

Beyond material deprivation, displacement entails profound social and moral harm to the displaced. Women associated, willingly or forcibly, with insurgents frequently experience rejection by their families and communities. Children born in captivity face identity-based discrimination and uncertain legal status

([Riniawati, Fatoni, & Badina, 2025](#)). The loss of dignity, agency, and belonging has been repeatedly identified as a critical yet under-addressed dimension of harm.

4.6 Gaps between Humanitarian Norms and Local Ethical Frameworks

Finally, the literature reveals a disconnect between internationally articulated humanitarian protection norms and locally embedded ethical systems. While faith-based actors play a visible role in assistance delivery, their ethical frameworks are rarely systematically integrated into protection strategies. When religion is engaged, it is often instrumental rather than analytical. This gap highlights the missed opportunity to employ Islamic ethical reasoning, not merely as cultural accommodation but as a normative framework capable of reinforcing protection, accountability, and survivor-centered responses ([Puspita, 2025](#)).

4.7 Discussion

The thematic findings of this study reveal that displacement in northeast Nigeria constitutes not only a humanitarian crisis but also a profound ethical rupture affecting life, dignity, social belonging, and future capability, particularly for women and children. Interpreted through the lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*, these harms can be understood as systematic violations of the core objectives of Islamic law, thereby reframing displacement-related suffering as an ethical failure rather than merely a logistical or security challenge ([Saputri & Noviarita, 2026](#)).

4.7.1 Preservation of Life (Ḥifẓ al-Nafs) and Structural Insecurity

The persistence of food insecurity, preventable diseases, and exposure to violence among displaced populations directly contravenes the maqṣad of preserving life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). Classical jurists regarded the protection of life as the highest objective of the Sharī'a, overriding procedural constraints in situations of necessity (*darūra*). The Qur'an's affirmation that saving a single life is equivalent to saving all humanity (Qur'an 5:32) underscores the moral gravity of the systemic conditions that allow avoidable mortality among displaced women and children. From a maqāṣid perspective, the findings suggest that humanitarian responses that maintain minimum survival without addressing structural insecurity, such as prolonged camp dependency, restricted mobility, and inadequate health infrastructure, fall short of ethical sufficiency. The preservation of life extends beyond immediate survival to the creation of conditions that sustain physical and psychological well-being over time.

4.7.2 Preservation of Dignity, Lineage, and Bodily Integrity (Ḥifẓ al-Nasl)

Gender-based violence, forced marriage, and social stigma against survivors of captivity constitute grave violations of *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, which encompasses the protection of bodily integrity, family relations, and moral agency. The Islamic legal tradition treats sexual coercion and bodily harm as forms of injustice (*zulm*) warranting communal and institutional intervention rather than moral scrutiny of survivors. The prophetic maxim “*There shall be no harm and no reciprocating harm*” (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*) establishes a foundational ethical rule that prohibits both direct violence and the structural conditions that enable it. When displacement environments expose women and girls to exploitation or silence survivors through stigma, the harm is both physical and moral, implicating a collective responsibility.

4.7.3 Preservation of Intellect and Future Capability (Ḥifẓ al-'Aql)

The disruption of education, exposure to trauma, and absence of psychosocial care for displaced children undermine *ḥifẓ al-'aql*, traditionally understood as the protection of human intellect and reasoning. Contemporary maqāṣid scholarship interprets this objective expansively, including education, mental health, and the conditions necessary for moral and cognitive development. The findings indicate that prolonged educational exclusion and untreated trauma risk producing a “lost generation,” perpetuating cycles of marginalization and insecurity. From a maqāṣid standpoint, such outcomes represent not only developmental failure but also ethical negligence, as children's future capacities are integral to communal well-being (*maṣlaḥa 'amma*).

4.7.4 Preservation of Property and Economic Dignity (Hifz al-Māl)

The erosion of livelihoods, dependence on aid, and exclusion of women from economic recovery mechanisms violate *hifz al-māl*, which encompasses not only property ownership but also economic dignity and self-sufficiency. Islamic ethical reasoning emphasises that poverty resulting from injustice or displacement imposes obligations on society, particularly toward those unable to secure livelihoods through no fault of their own. The findings suggest that humanitarian assistance that neglects livelihood restoration, especially for female-headed households, risks entrenching dependency and undermining the ethical aims of empowerment and self-reliance embedded in Islamic social justice thought.

4.7.5 Bridging Ethical Convergence and Normative Gaps

Importantly, the maqāṣid framework reveals a strong ethical convergence between Islamic principles and international humanitarian norms, particularly regarding protection, dignity, and non-harm. However, the findings also expose a normative gap: while Islamic ethics possess strong moral authority at the community level, they are rarely mobilized analytically within humanitarian protection strategies. A maqāṣid-based interpretation thus offers a dual function: reinforcing humanitarian norms through culturally resonant ethical reasoning while also providing an internal Islamic critique of practices, such as survivor stigmatization or gender exclusion, that contradict the higher objectives of the Shari‘a.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that internal displacement in northeast Nigeria, particularly affecting women and children, represents not only a humanitarian emergency but also a profound ethical crisis when examined through the lens of maqāṣid al-shari‘a. The findings indicate that displacement-related harm including gender-based violence, food insecurity, disrupted education, psychosocial trauma, and economic marginalization constitutes systematic violations of the core objectives of Islamic law: the preservation of life, intellect, lineage, and property.

By applying a maqāṣid-based analytical framework, this study reframes protection as an ethical obligation deeply embedded in Islamic moral reasoning rather than solely as an externally imposed humanitarian norm. This approach strengthens the normative legitimacy of protection interventions in Muslim-majority contexts and provides an internally grounded critique of practices that perpetuate harm, exclusion, or injustice. Ultimately, integrating Islamic ethical principles with contemporary humanitarian standards offers a coherent pathway toward faith-sensitive, rights-based protection that enhances community acceptance while upholding the universal principles of dignity, justice, and non-discrimination.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study is based on a scoping review of secondary sources, including academic literature, humanitarian reports, and policy documents published between 2010 and 2025. The absence of primary field research limits the ability to capture lived experiences, local perceptions, and context-specific implementation dynamics in the displacement camps in Borno State. Furthermore, the conceptual application of maqāṣid al-shari‘a remains interpretive and normative. While grounded in established Islamic jurisprudence, variations in religious interpretation across communities may influence how such frameworks are understood and operationalized in practice. Finally, the study focuses specifically on northeast Nigeria, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Muslim-majority displacement contexts with differing sociopolitical dynamics.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Future research should incorporate empirical fieldwork involving displaced women, children, religious leaders, and humanitarian practitioners to assess how maqāṣid-informed protection frameworks are

perceived and operationalized in practice. Mixed-methods approaches could further evaluate whether faith-sensitive programming improves protection outcomes, community trust, and survivor reporting mechanisms.

Comparative studies across different Muslim-majority conflict settings would provide valuable insights into the contextual variations in faith-based protection models. Additionally, interdisciplinary research exploring the integration of Islamic social finance instruments, such as zakat, ṣadaqa, and waqf, into coordinated humanitarian recovery frameworks could strengthen the evidence for sustainable, ethically grounded livelihood restoration strategies. Future inquiries would contribute to refining the theoretical and practical interface between Islamic ethics and contemporary humanitarian protection systems.

Author Contributions

ZMJ. conceptualized the study, designed the research methodology, conducted the literature search and data analysis, developed the maqāsid-based analytical framework, drafted the manuscript, revised the article critically for intellectual content, and approved the final version for publication. V. takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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