



**Psychological consequences of forced displacement in children and adolescents in  
the context of the Colombian armed conflict**

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## **Abstract**

This study addresses the psychological consequences of forced displacement in children and adolescents who are victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, a population deeply affected by significant losses, extreme violence, and stigmatization. Using a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design, 12 testimonies from the final report of the Colombian Comisión de la Verdad (*No es un mal menor*, 2022) were analyzed. These testimonies, selected through case-based sampling and representative of various regions in the country, were examined using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development. This framework enabled the identification of risk and protective factors influencing biopsychosocial development, as well as resilience-related elements.

The findings reveal that forced displacement not only disrupts family and community dynamics but also exposes young individuals to various forms of violence, including family member murders, sexual violence, and recruitment threats, profoundly impacting their psychological, social, and emotional development. Nevertheless, the resilience of many young people is evident, as they adapt to new circumstances and rebuild their lives despite the adversities they face.

The conclusions highlight the urgent need to design inclusive public policies that address the needs of this population by ensuring access to education, healthcare, and justice, while strengthening community support networks and promoting psychosocial interventions that foster resilience and well-being. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of addressing the structural conditions of exclusion and inequality that perpetuate the vulnerability of these communities. It emphasizes the need to consider the interactions across ecological system levels to propose comprehensive and sustainable solutions. This research contributes to the development of care strategies that not only mitigate the impact of displacement but also promote the holistic development of children and adolescents affected by Colombia's armed conflict.

**Keywords:** Forced displacement, Psychological impact, Children and adolescents, Resilience and Colombian armed conflict.

## **Resumen**

Este estudio aborda las consecuencias psicológicas del desplazamiento forzado en niños, niñas y adolescentes víctimas del conflicto armado en Colombia, una población profundamente afectada por pérdidas significativas, violencia extrema y estigmatización. Utilizando un enfoque cualitativo y un diseño fenomenológico, se analizaron 12 testimonios del informe final de la Comisión de la Verdad de Colombia (No es un mal menor, 2022). Estos testimonios, seleccionados a través de un muestreo basado en casos y representativos de diversas regiones del país, fueron examinados utilizando el modelo bioecológico del desarrollo humano de Bronfenbrenner. Este marco permitió identificar los factores de riesgo y protección que influyen en el desarrollo biopsicosocial, así como los elementos relacionados con la resiliencia.

Los hallazgos revelan que el desplazamiento forzado no solo perturba la dinámica familiar y comunitaria, sino que también expone a los jóvenes a diversas formas de violencia, como asesinatos de familiares, violencia sexual y amenazas de reclutamiento, impactando profundamente su desarrollo psicológico, social y emocional. Sin embargo, la resiliencia de muchos jóvenes es evidente, ya que se adaptan a nuevas circunstancias y reconstruyen sus vidas a pesar de las adversidades que enfrentan.

Las conclusiones destacan la urgente necesidad de diseñar políticas públicas inclusivas que aborden las necesidades de esta población, garantizando el acceso a la educación, la salud y la justicia, al tiempo que fortalecen las redes de apoyo comunitario y promueven intervenciones psicosociales que fomenten la resiliencia y el bienestar. Además, el estudio subraya la importancia de abordar las condiciones estructurales de exclusión y desigualdad que perpetúan la vulnerabilidad de estas comunidades. Enfatiza la necesidad de considerar las interacciones entre los niveles del sistema ecológico para proponer soluciones integrales y sostenibles.

Esta investigación contribuye al desarrollo de estrategias de cuidado que no solo mitiguen el impacto del desplazamiento, sino que también promuevan el desarrollo integral de los niños, niñas y adolescentes afectados por el conflicto armado en Colombia.

**Palabras clave:** Desplazamiento forzado, Impacto psicológico, Niños, niñas y adolescentes, Resiliencia y conflicto armado colombiano.

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## **1. Introduction**

In a context marked by decades of conflict in Colombia, understanding the phenomenon of displacement is of current relevance. In 2021, the country ranked third globally in terms of internally displaced persons, surpassed only by Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (IDMC, 2022). Although the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla initially reduced displacement figures, the following years showed an increase once again (ACNUR, 2017; IDMC, 2022).

The armed conflict in Colombia has had a devastating impact on the country's children and adolescents. According to UNICEF (2016), children have suffered forced displacement, recruitment by armed groups, homicides, kidnappings, sexual violence, and injuries caused by landmines, among other aggressions and violations of their human rights. National data (UNICEF, 2016) reveals that of the 7.6 million people registered as victims of the conflict, 2.5 million are children, equivalent to 1 out of 3. Nearly 45,000 children have lost their lives, almost 2.3 million have been displaced, and 8,000 have disappeared between 1985 and 2016. The most vulnerable have been Indigenous and Afro-Colombian children, constituting 12% of the displaced, 15% of survivors of sexual violence, and 17% of those tortured.

The Colombian government reports that 8,375,715 people have been included in the Unified Victims Registry for events of forced displacement between 1985 and December 31, 2022 (News and Press Release, 2023). According to UNHCR (2023) by 2021, data collected by the United Nations indicated the verification of 23,982 serious violations, 22,645 of which occurred during that same year, while 1,337 cases occurred earlier but were officially verified during 2021. Specifically, a total of 19,165 children (13,633 boys, 5,242 girls, and 290 whose gender could not be determined) were affected by these violations. The most recurrent rights violations consisted of acts of homicide, which reached 2,515 cases, and mutilations that affected 5,555 children, according to UNHCR (2023). These acts of violence caused irreparable harm and profoundly impacted the lives of 8,070 children in total. Additionally, there was considerable recruitment and use of minors in armed situations, involving 6,310 children. This issue was compounded by 3,945 incidents of denial of access to humanitarian assistance, further complicating the situation for these children affected by conflicts. An aspect that deserves attention is the detention of children, which reached a total of 2,864 cases. These detentions were often carried out due to alleged real or suspected connections with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist organizations by the United Nations, or due to issues related to national security (UNHCR, 2023).

This situation reflects an urgent need to address and mitigate the devastating effects that armed conflicts have on the lives of children and adolescents in the country. The international community faces the challenge of developing concrete strategies and measures to protect and safeguard the fundamental rights of these children and young people who, involuntarily, find themselves caught amid violence and hostilities. The magnitude of forced displacement in Colombia is reflected in data collected by the joint JEP-CEV-HRDAG project, which reveals that between 1985 and 2019, 7,752,964 victims were recorded, half of whom were children and adolescents, totaling 3,049,527 people (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a).

The armed conflict and its aftermath have left deep scars on individual, family, and social levels, surpassing the coping capacities of the affected population, especially concerning mental health. Forced displacement has resulted in a significant impact on the mental health of those who have been victims of this experience. Research such as that by Castañeda & Camargo (2018) has shown that disorders like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress are common among displaced people. It is crucial to understand that the concept of mental health goes beyond the mere absence of mental illness, encompassing a state of integral well-being in biological, psychological, and social aspects (World Health Organization, 1948). This means that mental health is not only related to the absence of biological diseases but also to the absence of factors that may affect mental balance and functioning in society (Castañeda & Camargo, 2018).

The armed conflict has not only disrupted the present situation of communities but has also left its mark on individual and collective life projects. The constant threat, fear, loss of autonomy, and changes in traditional forms of production and socialization have transformed the life dynamics in affected communities (Jiménez & Nubio, 2008). In this context, forced displacement emerges as one of the most impactful consequences of the armed conflict in Colombia. For children and adolescents, this experience exposed them to extreme violence, the murder of their caregivers, sexual violence, and threats of recruitment (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a). They were deprived of a normal childhood, where play, education, and recreation should have been their priorities. Instead, they were forced to deal with basic needs and the struggle for survival. Forced displacement is defined by the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a) as:

una situación en la que las personas se ven obligadas a dejar sus hogares, sitios de trabajo, lugares de residencia y/o comunidades debido a diversos factores como conflictos armados, persecuciones, violaciones de derechos humanos y otras

circunstancias que ponen en peligro sus vidas, seguridad y bienestar. Como resultado, estas personas, familias y comunidades buscan refugio dentro de su propio país. (p. 194)

These losses go beyond the material, affecting symbolic relationships with friends, pets, and toys, negatively impacting their learning and socialization processes (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a). Despite these adversities, it is also important to identify factors that aid in the recovery of these children and adolescents. In this regard, the ability to adapt and overcome adversity, known as resilience, has been identified as a protective factor that can offer individuals a sense of purpose and meaning amid difficulties (American Psychological Association, 2023; Collet, 2017).

Colombian society needs to take responsibility for addressing the psychological consequences that have affected and continue to affect generations of children and adolescents trapped in the armed conflict, and to make all available resources available for their recovery. Many of them have lacked attention, arriving in unfamiliar places and facing terrifying situations without any support.

It is crucial, then, to analyze, from their experiences and narratives, the psychological impact of forced displacement to identify the risk factors and protective factors that have influenced their life trajectories. The psychological impact of forced displacement on child and adolescent victims is intricately linked to a combination of risk and protective factors, thus outlining a complex web of influences on their mental health and emotional well-being. Arellano et al., (2022) explain that among the predominant risk factors is direct exposure to violence, whether during the displacement process or in the receiving environments. This contact with traumatic situations can leave significant psychological scars on the child population, exacerbating emotional vulnerability. Additionally, the loss of family and community support networks constitutes another crucial risk element, contributing to feelings of isolation and helplessness in these children affected by displacement (Arellano et al., 2022).

The recurrent experience of displacement, in turn, stands as an additional risk factor, generating instability that permeates the children's sense of security. Similarly, the limitation in access to basic services, such as education and healthcare, is a significant obstacle that negatively impacts the overall development of displaced children, exacerbating the complexity of their situation. Finally, the stigmatization and discrimination these children often face in host locations constitute an additional risk factor, affecting their self-esteem and contributing to the development of emotional problems (Arellano et al., 2022).

In contrast, various protective factors emerge as fundamental elements to mitigate the adverse effects of forced displacement. Arellano et al. (2022) mention that family support, when maintained as a stable and supportive environment, can act as an essential buffer against the psychological challenges associated with displacement. The availability of mental health services and psychosocial support represents another crucial protective component, providing children and adolescents with tools to cope with trauma and facilitating emotional adaptation processes. Access to education, as a third protective factor, not only provides a sense of normality and structure but also offers displaced children the opportunity to develop stress-coping skills.

Community support networks are the fourth protective factor, offering a sense of belonging and social support, countering the tendency towards isolation. Finally, early interventions and appropriate psychosocial support constitute a fifth and crucial line of protection, preventing the exacerbation of mental health problems and promoting health adaptation to the post-displacement environment (Arellano et al., 2022). It is through the complex and dynamic interaction of these risk and protective factors that the resilience of children and adolescents affected by situations of vulnerability is forged, underscoring the importance of holistically addressing their psychological well-being (Ungar et al., 2013).

With the aim of shedding light on this issue, this project seeks to identify the psychological consequences of forced displacement on child and adolescent victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. To this end, a content analysis of the testimonies collected in the final report of the Comisión de la Verdad from children and adolescents will be carried out, seeking to understand the emotional and psychological implications they have experienced amid extreme circumstances.

The specific objectives of this research are: (1) to describe the psychological consequences of forced displacement through a review of the existing literature, (2) to identify and analyze the psychological repercussions in the testimonies of children and adolescents present in the Final Report of the Comisión de la Verdad, (3) to examine the risk and protective factors for the mental health of these children and adolescents, and (4) to propose care and protection strategies based on the findings, aimed at child and adolescent victims of displacement and armed conflict in Colombia.

This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of the complex interaction between armed conflict, forced displacement, and their effects on the mental health of the most vulnerable population, offering useful information for the formulation of policies and programs

that adequately address the psychological needs of children and adolescents who have been and continue to be affected by these traumatic circumstances.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Forced Displacement and Armed Conflict in Colombia**

Forced displacement in Colombia has a long and complex history within the context of the armed conflict. Although it is recognized as a widespread problem in the country from the late 20th century to the early 21st century, its roots trace back to processes of exodus and displacement since the time of colonization and independence. Displacement is not a recent phenomenon but rather a structural element that runs through Colombian history, resulting from various processes of dispossession and population expulsion (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015).

The Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNHM, 2015) has pointed out that in the context of the internal armed conflict, forced displacement has its antecedents in manifestations of violence in the 20th century, which are crucial for understanding its historical evolution and current expression. Despite its central role in the genesis and evolution of the Colombian conflict, for much of the 20th century, displacement remained invisible because of the armed conflict. This invisibility has left an outstanding debt to the victims: recognizing the essential role that displacement has played in the genesis and evolution of the conflict and working to prevent its repetition (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015).

In this disposition, analyses conducted also suggest that the total number of displaced persons during the period from 1996 to 2006 reached 3,911,782. This figure represents approximately 6% of Colombia's total population, thus highlighting the significant humanitarian impact that derives from the armed conflict in Colombia (Restrepo & Sardinle, 2009). This data underscores the magnitude of the humanitarian impact arising from the armed conflict in Colombia.

In Ruling T-025 of 2004, the Constitutional Court of Colombia declared the situation of forced displacement as an unconstitutional situation due to the grave, massive, and systematic violation of the fundamental rights of the displaced population (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2004). According to Law 387 of 1997 (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1997) the condition of being displaced is defined as affecting any person forced to migrate within the national territory due to the violation or direct threat to their life, physical

integrity, security, or personal freedom. This circumstance may arise from situations such as internal armed conflict, disturbances, the spread of violence, mass human rights violations, among other factors. Communities and residents of affected regions are displaced as a strategy to mitigate the risks imposed on them by the groups involved in the Colombian armed conflict (Restrepo & Sadinle, 2009). Likewise, this action may constitute a direct response to pressures exerted by illegal armed groups. Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) asserted that in hostile contexts, for example, individuals may choose to displace to minimize the likelihood of physical harm. Evidence has been documented suggesting that these groups employ direct threats to force displacement, thereby weakening the presence of the population in specific areas (Restrepo & Sadinle, 2009). Moreover, these same groups may have incentives to instigate displacement, with the aim of seizing lands and resources (Restrepo & Sadinle, 2009).

Although forced displacement is the most common crime associated with the Colombian armed conflict, there is no exact figure for the number of victims. However, the Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV), from the Unit for the Comprehensive Care and Reparation of Victims, created in 2012, and part of the Social Inclusion and Reconciliation Sector headed by the Department of Social Prosperity (DPS) of the National Government of Colombia, provides valuable information on the magnitude of this form of violence in the country. While this information is constantly updated, the RUV is the primary source for consolidating data on forced displacement in Colombia. According to the Unit for Victims, as of December 31, 2014, the RUV registered a total of 6,459,501 people as victims of forced displacement (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2024). This official figure is close to estimates made by civil society and human rights organizations, such as the projections from the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES), which at that time exceeded the official record by over a million victims. Within this total, it is noted that one-third of the victims were under 18 years old, with more than 500,000 being under 5 years, approximately 978,000 between 6 and 12 years, and around 799,000 teenagers aged 13 to 17 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015).

As Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) have pointed out, internal forced displacement emerges as one of the most serious consequences derived from armed conflicts, representing a significant expression of human insecurity associated with such situations. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report in 2006, Colombia held the highest number of internally displaced persons in the Western Hemisphere, positioning it as the second country with the highest incidence globally, only surpassed by Sudan. This unfortunate situation is largely attributed to the country's internal armed conflict.

This issue has seen an increase in displacement cases in recent years, and its impact is not limited to the economic realm but also encompasses psychosocial aspects and gender equity issues. The family configuration of those affected by forced displacement often undergoes significant changes, which can lead to additional tensions and challenges in terms of support and equity (Restrepo & Sadinle, 2009).

Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) categorized the displaced population into groups to understand its nature. The terms "class," "category," and "general base" are used to organize and analyze information about forced displacement in Colombia. Classes represent broad groups of displaced people with similar characteristics, categories group people within classes with even more specific characteristics, and the general base is the total set of displaced persons included in the study. The following describes the most important aspects of these populations according to these authors.

- **Group 1: 1,525 families (2%).** Displaced by actions of the State. The authors describe this demographic group as individuals from families displaced by State actions such as bombings, armed confrontations, fumigations, or arbitrary detentions. These families often share the characteristic of having collectively owned land and express a collective desire to either return to their place of origin or be relocated. A significant 84.1% of individuals in this category attribute their displacement to State actions. Although they represent only 2.1% of the total families registered in the RUV, 99.9% of families displaced by State actions fall within this category. Among families displaced specifically by bombings or fumigations, 17% and 10.4%, respectively, belong to this group. Notably, 5.2% of those who owned collective lands are included, representing 10.5% of the group compared to just 5% in the overall RUV database. Furthermore, 24.4% of individuals in this category express a desire to return to their places of origin, a rate notably higher than the 8.8% observed in the total population. Similarly, 21.6% aspire to be relocated. Geographically, this group is concentrated in municipalities heavily impacted by armed conflict, including Cartagena del Chairá and San Vicente del Caguán in Caquetá, Miraflores in Guaviare, Ricaurte in Nariño, Buenaventura in Valle del Cauca, Tame in Arauca, and Tibú and El Tarra in Norte de Santander. The south of Colombia—especially in departments such as Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, and Putumayo—shows a higher prevalence of this type of displacement.

- **Group 2: 6,444 families (11%). Collective landowners displaced by paramilitary actions.** This group is defined by its experience of displacement caused by paramilitary groups, either through direct confrontations or the fear instilled by these organizations. A key

characteristic is the collective ownership of land and the shared aspiration to return to their places of origin. Notably, 43.5% of those in this category were displaced by paramilitary actions, exceeding the general percentage of 34.9% in the broader displaced population. Fear emerges as a central strategy for displacement, with 47.7% of displaced families supported by the Catholic Church reporting land abandonment due to intimidation. Land abandonment is particularly prominent among families displaced by guerrilla groups, with 74.1% citing various reasons, including threats, violence, or recruitment. The issue of land disputes is a recurring theme, underscoring the vulnerability of collective landowners, who make up 94.3% of this group. This group also demonstrates a striking contrast in aspirations, with 63.7% expressing a desire to return, compared to just 8.8% of the general displaced population. The most affected municipalities include Buenaventura, Bojayá, and Quibdó, among others, regions marked by a strong paramilitary presence and persistent land ownership disputes. These factors highlight the intertwined issues of forced displacement, land rights, and the broader dynamics of the armed conflict.

• **Group 3: 11,576 families (19%). Displaced by paramilitary actions.** Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) identify this group as families displaced primarily by paramilitary actions, often due to fear, detention, mutilation, or unspecified causes. A significant portion, 38.5%, attributes their displacement to paramilitaries, surpassing the 34.9% of the general displaced population with similar claims. Fear is a predominant factor, accounting for 17.2% of cases, higher than the overall proportion of 13.8%. This group also includes 6.7% who did not specify the reason for their displacement, a notable contrast to the 1.7% of the total displaced population. Cases of mutilation, though rare, are more prevalent in this group (0.2%) compared to the general population (0.1%). Another distinctive characteristic is the lack of expressed desires regarding their current circumstances, reported by 46.4% of families in this category, compared to 9.6% of the total displaced population. Regarding land tenure, 69.6% of families in this group did not provide information, a stark contrast to 13.8% at the general level. Additionally, 75.8% indicated they did not abandon land, a significantly higher proportion than the 52.4% recorded in the broader displaced population.

• **Group 4: 17,622 families (29%). Landless displaced by paramilitary actions.** This group comprises families displaced by paramilitary actions, primarily due to threats or recruitment, with a notable absence of land abandonment or ownership, often involving leased properties. Among the forcibly displaced individuals in this category, 34.1% identify paramilitaries as the cause of their displacement, a slightly lower proportion than the 34.9%

observed in the broader database, although this group accounts for 41.3% of the total displaced population. A significant characteristic is the prevalence of threats (64.7%) and recruitment (6.8%) as primary causes of displacement. Distinctively, this group includes a substantial percentage of displaced individuals who wish to leave the country (45.4%), though this represents only 2.9% of this class and remains marginal compared to the total displaced population (1.9%). Conversely, those wishing to remain in their place of arrival make up 36.7% of this group, encompassing 79.9% of this category, compared to the general displaced population, where 62.9% share this preference. Notably, all families in this class report not abandoning lands, and 54.5% of those who had leased land fall into this category, representing 13.5% of the group, a figure considerably higher than the 7.2% registered among all displaced individuals in the RUT.

• **Group 5: 23,859 families (39%). Displaced by guerrilla actions.** This group has the largest number of families among the five analyzed. Its distinguishing feature is having been displaced by the guerrilla, motivated by threats, rape, recruitment, the membership of relatives to armed groups, forced disappearance, or coercion to sell lands. Those displaced by the guerrillas represent 71.7% of this class, exceeding 62.8% which is the proportion at the population level. This group is notable for having owned lands, either as owners, holders, or settlers, and expresses the desire to remain in the place of arrival, be relocated, or leave the country. In this class, 83.2% of families were landowners, compared to 41.7% in the general base. Additionally, the categories of settler and holder are also characteristics of this group. 72.4% express the desire to remain in the place of arrival, while 2.3% wish to leave the country. The main reason attributed by families in this class for their displacement is threat, reaching 57.9%, differing significantly from the percentage in the base. The municipalities with the highest number of displaced individuals belonging to this group are Buenaventura in Valle, Tumaco in Nariño, Florencia, San Vicente del Caguán, and Cartagena del Chairá in Caquetá, Tibú in Norte de Santander, and Carmen de Bolívar in Bolívar.

Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) concluded that it is evident that the phenomenon of displacement does not manifest in the same way for all families, and this is associated with the type of armed group that caused the displacement and the type of relationship they had with the land. In the first two identified groups, a relationship is highlighted between having had collectively owned land and the desire to return, a difference not observed among individual landowners. On the other hand, not having left land does not generate the desire to return to places of origin. There is a clear connection between having been displaced by the guerrilla

and having been a landowner. Moreover, being displaced by this actor is inversely associated with having had collectively owned land and with not having left land.

Additionally, Restrepo & Sadinle (2009) explain that having possessed collectively owned land is related to having been displaced by paramilitaries and by the State. Displacement due to bombings and fumigations is linked exclusively to the State as an armed actor, as it is the only one with the infrastructure to carry out these actions.

Paramilitaries generated three types of displacement: the first relates to the ownership of collective land, the second to not having land but being displaced due to fear and not providing information to the Church, and the third to families without land. In all cases, there is an inverse relationship between being displaced by paramilitaries and having individually owned land.

Paramilitaries originated three categories of displacement: (1) those related to the possession of collective land, (2) those in which no land was owned, but displacement was due to fear or reluctance to provide information, and (3) those involving families without land ownership. Geographically, the authors described displacement hotspots in specific areas such as Buenaventura, Tumaco, Carmen de Bolívar, the Catatumbo region in Norte de Santander, and the Caguán region in Caquetá.

It is important to highlight that, although these data do not constitute a random sample reflecting displacement nationwide, the information provided a useful typology to guide public policies aimed at assisting the displaced population. Additionally, it allowed for the alignment of land restitution and reparation strategies with the desires of the affected individuals and the specific circumstances of their displacement (Restrepo & Sadinle, 2009).

On the other hand, Ruiz (2011) conducted a study focusing on migration in Colombia caused by involuntary displacement of the population, known as forced migration. For the author, this type of migration is influenced by a series of historical and current situations related to the political and social conditions of the country. Over the past 15 years, forced displacement in Colombia has led to a flow of migrants to metropolitan areas and urban centers, reactivating the internal rural-to-urban movement (Ruiz, 2011).

The author explained that this phenomenon intensified in the 1990s, generating a population flow mainly towards intermediate cities and then towards urban areas from rural or semi-rural regions. This forced migration often endangered people's lives, leading to unplanned movements and seeking refuge in the nearest towns. In this regard, the author stated that it is a chaotic process involving violent displacement of the population. She also argued that forced

migration involved short-distance movements that increased the poverty conditions of those affected, and that this poverty usually occurred in strategic territories or regions with natural wealth or geopolitical importance. According to Ruiz (2011), displacement is not simply a result of the presence of armed actors but is linked to land ownership and the interests of large territorial owners. In this line of thought, Ruiz (2011) mentioned that some researchers suggest that violence is a tool that facilitates land expropriation, intended for extensive cattle ranching, industrial production, trade, and infrastructure projects. The author also mentioned that researchers have established a connection between displacement, violence, and land appropriation because of violence exerted on the rural population.

Forced displacement is considered a form of migration, as suggested by Ruiz (2011). It is a complex process affected by psychological, sociological, and economic factors. These factors are not static and vary according to education levels, aspirations for social mobility, prevailing social norms and institutions, as well as the material needs of the population, natural resources, and the technology used in production (Ruiz, 2011). This definition highlights the complexity of studying migrations and the importance of understanding the context surrounding these movements, especially in conflict situations, such as forced migration in Colombia.

In the case of forced displacement, as it involves coerced migration, it is determined by expulsion forces, according to Ruiz (2011). For the author, in forced displacement, the most powerful motivations for migrating are found in the place of origin rather than in the attractions offered by the destination. In this sense, Ruiz (2011) explains that the forced nature of this displacement gives it a particular dimension compared to other types of migration: it is not a voluntary choice based on better work or social conditions, but a movement compelled by the violence present in the usual place of residence.

Ruiz (2011) emphasizes that forced migration is not merely a daily displacement to a nearby place; it involves a profound transformation in living conditions. The author argues that the distance between the place of origin and the destination is not only geographical but also carries a significant social dimension. Ruiz (2011) explains that displacement generates uprooting and disintegration of the social fabric, causing a break with the environment in which one lived. In this sense, in forced migration, the decision to migrate is influenced by a series of highly negative and complex factors.

In the Colombian context, forced migration does not alleviate poverty; rather, it tends to increase it. According to Ruiz (2011), displaced populations lose their land, their territory,

their social fabric, and their sources of income, leading to an increase in poverty and vulnerability for both them and the receiving communities in urban areas. In this regard, the effects of forced displacement extend to the individuals, communities, and territories involved. Ruiz (2011) considers that understanding the territorial approach to forced displacement is crucial, recognizing space as vital for the construction of life. The author explains that populations affected by forced displacement experience a change in their rhythm of life, affecting deep aspects such as fertility and employment. Understanding the demographic effects of forced migration on population structures is crucial for comprehending its economic and social impacts (Ruiz, 2011).

Ruiz (2011) argues that the problem of forced displacement in Colombia has deep roots in the economic, political, social, and military conflicts that have persisted throughout the 20th century. In the last two decades, these conflicts have continued and remained unresolved, leading to the emergence of forced displacement as a serious issue in the country (Ruiz, 2011). According to the author, factors such as the emergence of paramilitary groups, the strengthening of guerrillas, drug trafficking, the militarization of society, and U.S. intervention have contributed to the conflagration of violence experienced in Colombia.

According to the Centro de Memoria Histórica (CNMH, 2013) the current location of displacement victims in Colombia reveals that most are settled in the country's poorest and most vulnerable municipalities. Approximately 14% of the displaced population resides in major cities such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Bucaramanga (CNMH, 2015). In contrast, 50% of the victims live in municipalities classified as category 6, i.e., with a population of 10,000 or fewer inhabitants and with low or no institutional capacity and fiscal resources (CNMH, 2015). To understand how Colombia became the second country with the highest number of internally displaced persons, it is necessary to analyze the historical evolution of forced displacement in the context of internal armed conflict and violence against the civilian population.

### ***2.1.1. Historical Background of Violence in Colombia***

According to Jiménez et al., (2009) and Ruiz (2011), Colombia has historically experienced a series of civil and regional wars that have influenced its territorial and demographic development. The authors explain that over its 185 years as a republic, the country has witnessed around 25 national civil wars and approximately 60 regional wars. As a result of these conflicts, there has been significant population migration and an expansion of the

agricultural frontier, with vast areas of territory converted to agricultural activity. Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011) note that throughout its history, disputes in Colombia originated from the opposition between sectors seeking development based on the internal accumulation of industrial and financial capital, and conservative groups aiming to maintain their economic positions through the concentration of land ownership. These tensions led to uprisings and conflicts, such as the artisan revolution and the "War of a Thousand Days" from 1898 to 1901, during which approximately 60,000 combatants and between 100,000 and 180,000 civilians are estimated to have died, according to historians (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011).

Jiménez et al. (2009) explain that during the first 30 years of the 20th century, Colombia began a modernization process linked to economic and political changes. This process involved a transition to capitalist development, influenced by colonial values and the impact of the United States. According to the authors, under the presidencies of Enrique Olaya Herrera and Alfonso López Pumarejo, modernization reforms were promoted in the 1930s, including agrarian, labor, social security, and state organization laws. These reforms aimed to institutionalize economic, social, and legal changes to advance the implementation of capitalism in the country.

Thus, economic modernization in Colombia required not only economic changes but also an expansion of the demand for goods and services in the domestic market. Consequently, actions such as the commercialization of the countryside, the development of export agro-industry, and the acceleration of urbanization were undertaken (Jiménez et al., 2009). Ruiz (2011) pointed out that a fundamental part of this process was both forced and voluntary migration from rural areas to cities. The author explained that migration helped consolidate an urban middle class that became the main consumer of goods and services, serving as a crucial pillar in the country's modernization process.

Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011) commented that the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, known as "El Bogotazo," triggered a series of conflicts and social movements that were latent in the country. According to these authors, this event marked a turning point in Colombia's political and social dynamics, and the conditions of violence that emerged at that time seem to connect with the current conflicts in the country. The 1950s and 1960s also saw significant migration, contributing to the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the urbanization process. In this regard, Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011) explained that urbanization was considered fundamental for modernization, and efforts were made to

encourage rural populations to move to cities in search of a more modern life and greater economic opportunities.

Ruiz (2011) mentioned that the Currie Mission (from 1949) advocated for the mass relocation of rural populations to cities as part of the modernization process, which implied the dissolution of old relationships in rural areas and migration to urban centers in search of supposed economic progress. However, the author explained that as the 1970s progressed, the development theories underpinning this approach began to show limitations and problems throughout the Latin American region. Urbanization and the modernization process did not resolve issues of poverty, social and regional inequality, and structural heterogeneity, and in many cases, these problems worsened (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011).

Based on this information, a historical overview of the decades can be summarized as follows:

Campos et al., (2005) highlighted how violence, especially during the period of "La Violencia" between 1948 and 1957, had a disorganizing impact on the agrarian structure. The concentration of landownership and the forced displacement of the labor force to cities has intensified because of this period of violence. In some regions affected by the violence, agricultural production continued in the hands of overseers linked to armed groups. During the bipartisan violence era, significant internal migration occurred in Colombia. Cities such as Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, among others, acted as magnets for the displaced. However, this migration led to social problems in the cities, including the proliferation of marginal neighborhoods with extreme poverty conditions, which in turn generated resentment, misery, and violence. This migration affected both wealthy and poor farmers, and urban placement largely depended on the socio-economic condition of the migrants. In this internal migration, urban areas with middle incomes, such as residential neighborhoods and middle-class districts, consolidated, while simultaneously, belts of misery emerged where poor migrants settled. This led to high social and spatial segregation in cities where inequalities and social fragmentations became evident (Campos et al., 2005).

This process of urban concentration and massive internal migration that occurred in Colombia during the 1950s to 1970s was like trends experienced in other Latin American countries, though with some variations in timing and specific circumstances. According to Campos et al. (2005), current forced migration continues to reflect similar patterns of displacement, concentration, and segregation in Colombian cities.

In the 1960s, internal migration exhibited important characteristics that laid the foundation for the population redistribution of that time (Ruiz, 2011). There was a movement of rural population towards urban areas, with a strong expulsion of countryside inhabitants; the expulsion areas were usually those with traditional crops, while there was a migratory flow to vacant land areas where land exploitation occurred without property titles (Ruiz, 2011). This period also saw the emergence of colonization in areas such as high Caquetá, Putumayo, and Arauca, where forced migrants from central areas of the country arrived, contributing to the expansion of the agricultural frontier (Ruiz, 2011).

Finally, according to Ruiz (2011), in the 1980s, the escalation of violence worsened, and forced displacement became one of the most prominent consequences of the conflict the country was experiencing at that time. This crisis of the modernization model coincided with a period when forced displacement became more recurrent and severe, having a significant impact on the redistribution of the population in Colombia (Ruiz, 2011).

From the above, it can be concluded that during the period covered, from the 1930s to the end of the 20th century, Colombia experienced a profound demographic transformation that altered the distribution of its population between rural and urban environments, as noted by Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011). The key points characterizing this metamorphosis according to these authors are:

- **Initial Population Distribution in 1938:** In 1938, the demographic distribution in Colombia leaned towards rural areas, where 69.1% of the total population resided, while 30.9% lived in urban areas. Cities with a population exceeding 100,000 housed about 20.1% of the total population.

- **Demographic Evolution:** Between 1938 and 1951, the Colombian population grew by 2,850,000 people, representing a 32.7% increase. This growth was more pronounced in urban areas, which saw a 66% increase, compared to 17.8% in rural regions.

- **Population Distribution Transformation:** Despite this urban increase, Colombia still retained its predominantly rural character. In 1951, 61.3% of the inhabitants lived in agricultural areas, while 38.7% lived in urban zones. However, a decline was observed in the concentration of people in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, contradicting the aspiration to centralize the population in a limited number of cities.

- **"La Violencia" and Its Demographic Influence:** The period known as "La Violencia" (approximately between 1948 and 1957) had a considerable impact on urban concentration and population growth rates. During this time, the total population increased by

51.4%, while growth in rural areas was limited to 18.5%. The proportion of rural population decreased to 48%.

- **Expansion in Urban Areas:** Municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants experienced a particularly notable increase, with growth rates of 124.8%. Their contribution to the total population of the country reached 27.4%.

- **Advancement of Urbanization and Concentration:** By 1964, modernization had substantially reconfigured population distribution. From the 1970s, the concentration of population in urban areas deepened further, reaching 60%. By 2005, according to that year's census, this figure had risen to 75%.

- **Challenges of Urban Concentration:** The densification of the population in urban areas, especially in large cities, generated problems in providing services for a constantly growing population. The so-called "belts of misery" emerged, comprising mostly rural migrants and displaced people from the center of the cities. These phenomena extended throughout the 1970s and 1980s, initially affecting the main cities and later all departmental capitals.

In this context, the phenomenon of forced displacement in Colombia has shown a historical repetition across different periods, with varied actors and changing contexts. Despite these differences, the process of displacement and its effects persist over time, highlighting its ongoing impact on society. As Fajardo (2015) notes:

el agotamiento productivo, el crecimiento demográfico y los conflictos y ante las limitaciones del desarrollo económico del país, los campesinos debieron “saltar” dicho cerco e internarse en las colonizaciones más allá de las fronteras agrarias, dando impulso a la espiral de la valorización de las tierras por la vía de los ciclos “colonización-conflicto-migración-colonización” que perdura hasta hoy, empujado por la guerra y por las “leyes para el destierro. (p.9)

For Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011), this contemporary displacement is considered a humanitarian tragedy with serious consequences for the country. Those forced to leave their homes face family disintegration, loss of land, deterioration of social ties, and a profound transformation in their living and working spaces. Moreover, these effects extend to both the areas of origin and the destinations of the displaced.

Regarding the receiving regions, Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011) explain that they also faced challenges in terms of resources and infrastructure to accommodate the influx of displaced persons. This population, often characterized by marginality and poverty,

contributed to the increase in urban poverty in these areas. Migration patterns follow routes established by family and cultural networks, resulting in the concentration of population in regions with historical ties to migration. However, according to the authors, the areas of highest expulsion do not always correspond with the most impoverished parts of the country. In fact, displacement often occurs in areas with rich natural resources, conducive to activities such as mining, oil extraction, or illicit drug cultivation, suggesting an intrinsic relationship between displacement and political and economic motivations (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011).

This phenomenon has caused the redistribution of impoverished populations, predominantly from rural areas to urban zones in large and medium-sized cities. This internal migration contributes to the increasing concentration of population in urban areas, which, according to Ruiz (2011), could have profound implications for the demographic and socioeconomic dynamics of these cities.

### ***2.1.2. Magnitude of Forced Displacement in Colombia***

Regarding the magnitude of forced displacement in Colombia, according to Jiménez et al. (2009) and Ruiz (2011), it can be stated that the armed conflict in Colombia has left a significant mark on the country's population and territorial dynamics. Forced displacement has led to the depopulation of rural areas and small municipalities, resulting in the uprooting of approximately 4 million people before 2011 (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011), and 8,219,403 due to violence from 1985 to 2021, according to the RUV (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2024).

Forced migration patterns show that displaced populations tend to settle in the marginal areas of large and medium-sized cities, as well as in nearby municipalities (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011). This dynamic has created territorial rings of population reception, with smaller municipalities acting as links to larger urban areas (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011).

The phenomenon of forced displacement has contributed to increasing poverty and marginality in urban areas. As of 2022, monetary poverty affected 36.4% of Colombia's population, and extreme monetary poverty affected 13.8%, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Reuters, 2023).

In this context, the predominant presence of women and children among the displaced population is notable. As specified by the RUV (Unidad para las Víctimas 2024) of the total number of women registered as victims of the conflict with the Unit, 4,092,494 are displaced, corresponding to 91.1% of the total. This phenomenon may be attributed to various reasons, such as the tendency of women to migrate within the country, gender imbalances in medium

and large municipalities, and the search for a non-violent environment that provides protection for children (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011). The uprooted population is predominantly composed of children, adolescents, and middle-aged individuals, particularly women (Jiménez et al., 2009; Ruiz, 2011). According to the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a) among those who were minors at the time of displacement: 47,126 were between 0 and 5 years old; 47,043 were between 6 and 11 years old; and 45,673 were between 12 and 17 years old.

### ***2.1.3. Patterns of Forced Displacement in Colombia***

According to the final report by the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a) forced displacement has been one of the severe consequences of the armed conflict in Colombia. The report indicates that forced displacement affected over 8 million people during the armed conflict, representing nearly one-fifth of the Colombian population. The actual figures might be even higher due to underreporting of cases. Below are some patterns of forced displacement in Colombia, identified and reported in the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a):

#### **Responsible Agents:**

- **Illegal Armed Groups:** Mainly the FARC-EP, but also the ELN, paramilitaries, and common crime groups.
- **State Agents:** In some cases, members of the public forces acted directly or in collaboration with paramilitary groups to displace communities.

#### **Modes of Operation:**

- **Violence:** Homicides, massacres, threats, torture, and kidnappings were used to create terror and force people to flee.
- **Threats:** The proliferation of threatening letters, pamphlets, and graffiti was used to instill fear and compel displacement.
- **Mobility Restrictions:** Curfews were imposed, access roads were blocked, and the movement of people was controlled to isolate communities and facilitate displacement.
- **Conflicts over Land and Resources:** Disputes over land, illicit crops, and natural resources were determining factors in many displacements.

The Comisión de la Verdad (2022a) reported that forced displacement in Colombia has disproportionately impacted the civilian population, especially among groups considered more vulnerable. Rural farmers, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and minority communities have been most affected by this phenomenon, being forced to leave their homes and traditional livelihoods amid violence and persecution. The report demonstrated with figures that women,

children, and adolescents have particularly suffered from the consequences of displacement. Women have been victims of sexual violence, forced displacement, and loss of economic opportunities; children and adolescents have been deprived of education, access to healthcare, and a stable family environment, leading to severe repercussions for their physical and emotional development.

Geographically, the most affected groups were in Antioquia, Chocó, Urabá, and Putumayo, regions that have witnessed a massive exodus of rural populations because of the armed conflict. However, cities have also played a significant role in the dynamics of forced displacement. Departmental capitals and intermediate cities have become centers for receiving large contingents of displaced people, who have sought refuge and survival opportunities in urban environments Comisión de la Verdad (2022a).

Forced displacement in Colombia has left deep scars on the country's social fabric (Comisión de la Verdad 2022a). Victims, uprooted from their lands and homes, have faced widespread impoverishment due to the loss of their traditional livelihoods. This precarious situation has led to social disintegration, fragmenting families and communities and causing profound uprooting and painful loss of cultural identity (Comisión de la Verdad 2022a). Additionally, there are precarious conditions and overcrowding in the arrival areas, creating contexts with issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, further worsening the suffering and increasing the psychological repercussions of displacement. Victims have had to face high levels of post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety because of the traumatic experiences endured (Comisión de la Verdad 2022a).

## **2.2. Forced Displacement and Armed Conflict in Colombia: Figures and Impact on Children and Adolescents**

According to ACAPS & MIRE (2022) during 2021 in Colombia, a total of 231 serious violations against 192 children (136 boys and 56 girls) were recorded, 26 of whom were victims of multiple forms of abuse within the context of the armed conflict. Monitoring by the United Nations revealed that 123 children (98 boys and 25 girls) aged between 12 and 17 years were recruited and used. These acts were carried out by dissident groups of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP) (75 cases), the National Liberation Army (ELN) (17 cases), the Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AGC) (17 cases), unidentified perpetrators (8 cases), and Los Caparrapos (6 cases).

The children were employed both as combatants and in support roles (ACAPS & MIRE, 2022). During this involvement, unfortunately, 13 children lost their lives or suffered mutilations, and three of them were victims of sexual violence. The regions most affected by these violations were Nariño (16 cases), Chocó and Antioquia (13 cases each), Norte de Santander and Caquetá (12 cases each), and Arauca (10 cases).

According to UNICEF (2016) between January 2013 and March 2016, more than 250,000 children were affected by the internal armed conflict; of these, 230,000 were victims of forced displacement, which equates to an average of nearly 6,000 children per month. According to Mafla (2022) the neglect by the Colombian State is what has allowed children and adolescents to become victims in the context of the Colombian armed conflict.

Forced displacement is a tragic link in the chain of violence that has affected children and adolescents in Colombia, depriving them of the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022b) . In a context marked by the presence of various armed actors in the territories, these minors have faced the possibility of losing their family members through murders and disappearances, have been victims of sexual violence, and have lived under the constant threat of being recruited and used in violent activities (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022b). All these forms of violence have forced many of them to flee, alone or with their families, in search of survival.

In this regard, the Comisión de la Verdad (2022b) pointed out that for these children and adolescents, leaving their homes violently means abandoning not only their house but also their friends, school, and toys. Arriving in a new place where everything is unknown becomes an overwhelming challenge for the more than three million minors who have been registered as victims of forced displacement from 1985 to 2019 (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022b). Additionally, the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición noted that this reality continued to affect nearly 140,000 displaced children and adolescents between 2020 and 2021, representing 39.5% of all displaced persons during those two years.

Although forced displacement has received significant attention from institutions and has led to the formulation of policies and regulations, a differential policy that guarantees the rights of displaced children and adolescents was not implemented until 2004. That year, the Constitutional Court recognized the existence of an "unconstitutional state of affairs" and highlighted the special vulnerability of minors (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a). However, violence persists, and despite state efforts, the response remains insufficient, especially

regarding the full enjoyment of the rights of minors under eighteen who are victims of displacement (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a).

Regarding the consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents, the Comisión de la Verdad (2022c) asserts that they are profound and devastating. In addition to facing the loss of their homes, friends, schools, and familiar environments, they are exposed to a series of new violences and challenges in the places they flee to. Child labor in its worst forms, sexual violence, and the possible involvement in urban criminal structures and illegal armed groups are some of the risks that displaced minors face (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022a). The passage of time and the persistence of violence in their original territories, as well as the consolidation of violence in new places, often make returning to their homes an unviable option, states the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición. This has resulted in the loss of young populations in rural areas, negatively impacting society.

According to the study conducted by Acosta et al., (2019) more than 50% of adolescents and young people who were victims of forced displacement experienced one or more additional victimizing events, such as land dispossession, threats, and terrorist acts. According to Castellanos & Vásquez (2021) displacement affected around 13,000 children and adolescents during the armed conflict in Colombia between 1958 and 2020.

Acosta et al. (2019) conducted a study in Colombia with 471 adolescents and young people aged 13 to 28 years, residing in Bogotá, Medellín, and Buenaventura, on the circumstances and consequences of their displacement. They found that 86.4% of the participants fled abruptly, resulting in the loss of family assets, investments, and lifelong savings. Additionally, half of the sample experienced forced displacement at a young age, 14 years or younger, exposing them to traumatic events during a critical period of their development (Kieling et al., 2011; Ogden & Hagen, 2018).

Regarding mental disorders, Acosta et al. (2019) identified significant prevalence among the participants, with specific phobia (6.8%), post-traumatic stress disorder (5.7%), and major depression (5.1%) being the most common in the past year. These results are consistent with previous research indicating that individuals who are victims of traumatic experiences often present symptoms of depression, panic disorder, specific phobias, and attentional disturbances (Bui et al., 2017). Additionally, it is noteworthy that the population exposed to violence is 4.7 times more likely to exhibit excessive fear, phobias, feelings of threat, avoidance behaviors, and anxiety compared to the non-exposed population (Teunisse et al., 2022).

Acosta et al., (2019) explained that specific phobia, characterized by an intense and irrational fear of people, situations, or things, developed in adolescents and young people who were victims of forced displacement, generating intense fears related to the intimidation associated with displacement, exposure to violence, and the anxiety of leaving everything behind. Montoya (2015) emphasized that these fears can be transmitted from generation to generation and that constant exposure to insecurity and threats intensifies symptoms, especially when recalling the trauma experienced. This link between specific phobia and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is explained by the anxiety generated during displacement and is maintained due to uncertainty in the new settlement, social stigmatization, and challenges in adapting to new urban and social (Montoya, 2015). Acosta et al. (2019) reported that 5.7% of the adolescents and young people in their study met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD.

Acosta et al. (2019) also mentioned that major depressive disorder, which is the third most prevalent disorder (5.1%), has been the subject of numerous studies in people who are victims of armed conflicts. For example, the research conducted by Ramírez et al. (2017) in a subregion of the Colombian Caribbean found a higher prevalence, 24.8%, of major depressive disorder among 129 people interviewed, aged between 18 and 77 years, who were victims of the armed conflict. The disparity in figures could be explained by the wide age range covered by the study of Ramírez et al., (2017) compared to that of Acosta et al. (2019), which explored the mental health of young people.

Regarding anxiety disorders, Acosta et al. (2019) reported an overall prevalence of 21.2% in their study, described as follows: specific phobia (6.8%), PTSD (5.7%), social phobia (3.8%), separation anxiety (2.3%), agoraphobia (1.3%), panic disorder (1.1%), and generalized anxiety (0.2%). On the other hand, mood disorders, such as depressive disorder (5.1%), dysthymia (0.6%), and bipolar affective disorder (0.4%), accounted for 6.1% of the total reported disorders. Regarding suicidal behavior, Acosta et al. (2019) revealed that the adolescents and young people who were victims of forced displacement and participated in their study showed a 14.6% rate of suicidal ideation, 5.3% of planning, and 6.4% of attempted suicide at some point in their lives.

Regarding drug use among adolescents and young people, Giaconia et al., (2003) found that by the age of 18, almost one in five young individuals (18.5%) who had experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives met the diagnostic criteria for a Substance Use Disorder (SUD). In the study conducted by Acosta et al. (2019), it was found that 50% of the adolescents and young people who were victims of forced displacement and participated in the research

began using psychoactive substances such as alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and cocaine at the age of 15. In their analysis of the effects of psychoactive substances on the adolescent brain, these authors explained that "they affect brain circuits involved in learning, memory, reward, decision-making, and behavior control; cognitive processes that continue to mature until early adulthood, which may explain why drug use during brain development generates profound and lasting consequences" (Acosta et al., 2019, p. 13).

### **2.3. Human Development and Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of Forced Displacement**

In Colombia, according to the Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) for the year 2023, the armed conflict in Colombia has left 9,593,356 victims, of which 8,549,416 are part of forced displacement. It is important to highlight that internal displacement in Colombia is one of the highest in the world and is related to drug trafficking and terrorism (Registro Único de Víctimas, 2023). Other figures on violence due to the internal conflict in Colombia appear in the report "*¡Basta ya! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad*," by the (Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2013). According to this report, between 1958 and 2012, the conflict caused the deaths of 40,787 combatants and 177,307 civilians. Additionally, it is estimated that there were 25,000 disappeared between 1981 and 2010, 27,023 kidnapped, and 150,000 murders, of which 38.4% were the responsibility of paramilitaries, 16.8% of the guerrillas, and 10.1% of the Public Force (Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2013). According to figures from the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a), in Colombia, between 1985 and 2018, at least 450,664 homicides were recorded due to the internal armed conflict. However, considering the underreporting, it is estimated that this figure could reach around 800,000 victims. Paramilitaries were primarily responsible for these murders, accounting for approximately 45% of the cases, followed by guerrilla groups and state agents with 27% and 12%, respectively (Chevalier, 2022).

Castañeda & Camargo (2018) mentioned that much of the research on the mental health of conflict victims conducted so far is of an empirical-applied nature, involving the analysis of variables in specific populations. However, there are also documentary research approaches aimed at analyzing and describing specific aspects related to mental health in the context of armed conflict. For example, some documentary research has addressed topics such as resilience, post-traumatic stress disorder, and psychosocial care, seeking to understand and improve psychological and psychosocial care programs, especially for children and adolescents (Castañeda & Camargo, 2018).

These authors indicated that the most frequently researched psychological disorders in the context of the armed conflict were post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mood disorders (such as depression and anxiety), and issues related to adaptation and resilience. They also reported that participants in empirical studies have varied widely, including the civilian population, victims of forced displacement, ex-combatants, children, adolescents, and adults. In terms of intervention techniques and programs, they found that psychosocial care strategies are most frequently used. Additionally, they mentioned among the intervention techniques used, cognitive-behavioral interventions, narrative therapy, and community-centered approaches.

For Castañeda & Camargo (2018), besides trauma-related disorders, there are other mental health consequences for people affected by the armed conflict in Colombia, including symptoms of anxiety, mood disorders, suicidal thoughts, behaviors related to the abusive consumption of psychoactive substances, as well as alcohol abuse and eating behavior disorders.

Ojalehto & Wang (2008) pointed out that according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1998) in Article 14, it is established that children have the right to "freedom of thought, conscience, and religion," which is part of their self-determination, a necessary condition to fulfill their "best interests" (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008, p. 13). These authors recognized that there is a lack of understanding of this right of children in the international community, which implies ensuring an adequate standard of living that allows their spiritual development, especially in contexts marked by forced displacement.

The authors highlighted the emotional and psychological impact of displacement on the spiritual well-being of children and suggested that intervention programs should address their spiritual needs. To demonstrate this, they relied on the experience of refugee children around the world, referring to the statement by Simó et al. (2002), about children living through violent displacement: "it affects the essence, the soul of the child and challenges the child's understanding of a meaningful world" (Simó et al., 2002, p. 208). Ojalehto & Wang (2008) noted that refuge is a unique context to study the potential and limitations of children's spiritual development. For these authors, these children often faced deprivation of education, nutrition, freedom of movement, family, and were exposed to various forms of adversity. From a human rights framework, all these limitations also affected adequate spiritual development, impacting the well-being of children in war and displacement situations. For them, spiritual development

involves acquiring and enriching an integrated understanding of oneself, others, and the world in a meaningful way.

Ojalehto & Wang (2008) also mentioned that the physical and spatial environment plays a fundamental role in shaping the representation that children have of their physical surroundings and their relationship with the ecosystem from an early age. The quality of this environment, therefore, has implications for the development of identity and the construction of values in children within refugee settings. The experience of refugee children is intrinsically linked to these ecological spaces of development, which are dynamic and mostly lacking in adequate physical conditions, as much of their childhood experiences are defined by geographical displacements, including passage through shelters (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). Spatial environments determine how communities' structure themselves and configure their spiritual cosmologies, and the disruption of the community's geographical units can have devastating consequences for its social fabric and the construction of identity (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). However, the authors also pointed out that many refugee communities successfully rebuild their cultural, social, and spiritual patterns in new geographical spaces.

Much of the relevance of spirituality in the refugee context stems from its role in identity and shared experience for adolescents. It has been shown that spirituality fosters collective identity over time among various refugee communities (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). On the other hand, it has been proven that spiritual development is intimately linked to processes of self-understanding, emotional regulation, and meaning making (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). Specifically, spirituality provides a sense of continuity in children's self-theories by instilling a sense of "personal history" or a "spiritual history of the self," and by enabling the "meaningful connection of the self" with the world beyond their experience (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). Thus, forced displacement presents challenges for formulating a coherent sense of self in a fragmented social world, characterized by changing environments and new experiences, especially for children (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008).

The conclusions reached by Ojalehto & Wang (2008) revealed that spiritual development plays an important role in the lives of refugee children and adolescents, and that it takes place within their immediate physical and social ecological system. Essentially, the right to spiritual development recognizes that children continuously seek to make sense of their experiences and understand their place within the physical and social worlds (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008). This cognitive-cultural process is involved in the development of self-understanding, identity, emotional regulation, and value systems (Ojalehto & Wang, 2008).

#### **2.4. Human Development and Mental Health of Children and Adolescents from Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development**

Mental health has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (World Health Organization, 2011). In this sense, for the WHO, mental health goes beyond the mere absence of disorders; it encompasses emotional, psychological, and social balance that empowers individuals to face life's challenges. Thus, the WHO points out that mental health affects both the life of each individual and the overall well-being of a society.

At an individual level, mental health promotes optimal functioning in daily life and helps to face adversity, as strong mental health facilitates informed decision-making, the establishment of healthy relationships, and successful job performance (World Health Organization, 2011). At a social level, mental health contributes to community cohesion by fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and solidarity among members of society (World Health Organization, 2011). Additionally, it promotes inclusive social environments that respect and value diversity, thereby reducing stigma and discrimination associated with mental disorders (World Health Organization, 2011).

Globally, mental health is positioned as an integral component of general well-being and national prosperity. Countries that prioritize mental health promotion not only experience healthier and more resilient individuals but also build stronger societies capable of facing challenges and crises more effectively (World Health Organization, 2011).

Human development is a broad field of developmental psychology, and a theoretical model that allows for addressing the development of individuals in both vulnerable and well-being contexts is Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development. According to Bronfenbrenner (2002) human beings develop being affected by an intricate web of environmental systems that range from immediate to more distant environments. To structure this idea, the author organized the levels of environmental influence on developing individuals into levels ranging from the immediate environment to the more general living environment, as follows: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. These levels are interconnected, and for Bronfenbrenner, understanding how these systems interact with individual variables at different life stages and historical contexts provides a deeper

understanding of an individual's life trajectory and allows for a better understanding of developmental outcomes.

In this theoretical model, moments of transition and change, such as moving to a new school or experiencing changes in family structure, are crucial (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). These moments trigger adjustments and adaptations in the individual, highlighting the bidirectionality of influences: not only does the environment affect the individual, but the individual also exerts influence on their environment. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner introduced the concept of the chronosystem, referring to historical time and social changes that influence environmental systems at different levels (micro, meso, exo, and macrosystem) and, therefore, affect human development.

Bronfenbrenner's (2002) proposal offers a perspective on mental health and the development of children that emphasizes the direct influence of microsystems on emotional well-being. For example, a warm and supportive family environment can positively contribute to a child's mental health, while a conflictual environment could have negative implications. Moreover, the emphasis on bidirectionality influences highlights how children can also affect their environment, which can influence their mental health.

The interaction between different microsystems, which are the environments in which the person participates face-to-face, known as the mesosystem, is also key to child development. When these microsystems adjust and interact appropriately, they work together to promote healthy development (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). Conversely, conflicts between microsystems could have negative effects on children's well-being. The external environment of the developing person, or exosystem, also relates to mental health and well-being, but indirectly. According to the author, aspects external to the developing person, such as access to mental health resources and services in the community or unstable or exploitative employment of parents, can influence children's ability to cope with emotional challenges, as parents may be less available to interact appropriately with their children due to lack of time (Bronfenbrenner, 2002).

In exosystems, indirect variables affecting the developing person can be analyzed. For example, parents affected by mental health issues without access to care or support may lack the emotional availability to interact adequately within their families, i.e., within the child's microsystem or the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). Limited access to these resources (exosystem) can increase vulnerability to mental health problems in developing children.

Finally, the macrosystem, which encompasses cultural values, laws, and social norms, plays a crucial role in how mental health and well-being issues are addressed and understood for the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). The cultural interpretation of mental health, for example, can significantly impact the perception and treatment of related issues when they arise in children, adolescents, women, young people, etc. Similarly, at the macrosystem level, specific cultural practices of a region or the laws of a country can affect mental health practices and policies (Bronfenbrenner, 2002).

## **2.5. Resilience as a Protective Factor: Emphasis on Children and Adolescents**

Resilience is defined as the capacity of individuals to cope with and recover from adverse situations by developing internal and external resources that allow them to overcome challenges and maintain an adaptive level of functioning (Ungar et al., 2013). Resilience involves not only resistance to adversity but also reflects appropriate psychosocial adaptation, the ability to grow and learn through difficult experiences, and serves as an indicator of mental health (Truffino, 2010; Ungar et al., 2013).

Ungar et al. (2013) conducted a study and identified several factors that can promote resilience in individuals. These factors include social support, positive family and community relationships, self-esteem and self-efficacy, the ability to regulate emotions, and optimism. Exposure to positive role models and participation in activities that foster a sense of achievement were also highlighted as elements that contribute to resilience. Additionally, Ungar et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of personal beliefs and values that provide a framework of meaning and purpose in life.

On the other hand, the same study observed that a lack of social support, the presence of unresolved traumatic experiences, and continuous exposure to stressful situations can undermine resilience. Additionally, a lack of opportunities to develop coping skills, as well as negative self-belief and pessimism, can weaken an individual's ability to effectively face adversity.

Ungar et al. (2013) mentioned that resilience focuses closely on the qualities of individuals and their interacting environments, qualities, and interactions that contribute to satisfactory development. For this reason, this model does not concentrate on common patterns across all populations. To identify patterns of interaction indicative of coping, whether perceived by others as adaptive or maladaptive, these interactions must be observed over time, as what is adaptive in one context or during a developmental period may not be in another

(Ungar et al., 2013). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of resilience requires first stepping back and carefully examining the data predicting life courses in particular contexts.

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (2002) notion of development in context, Ungar et al. (2013) proposed assessing resilience through the quality of interactions between the developing child and their environments, from both sides of the individual-environment equation, to identify and provide what is necessary to maintain well-being. An adequate environment makes it more likely that the child's motivation, temperament, and special talents contribute to successful developmental outcomes (Ungar et al., 2013).

From the perspective of positive psychology, the strengths and resources of individuals, in this case, children and adolescents in displacement due to armed conflict, are also addressed. This framework allows for the identification and enhancement of their skills, interests, and relationships; according to Ungar et al. (2013), experiencing a sense of achievement and satisfaction counters the negative effects of trauma and loss. Moreover, promoting optimism and gratitude can help children in adversity cultivate a resilient mindset, focusing on the positive even in very difficult circumstances (Ungar et al., 2013).

The creation of social and community support networks is another crucial aspect of resilience and corresponds to one of the characteristics of protective environments. Participation in recreational, educational, and social activities can help children facing adverse situations to establish meaningful connections and find a sense of belonging in their new environments (Ungar et al., 2013). Access to positive role models and warm support figures has also been identified as fundamental for their emotional and adaptive development (Ungar et al., 2013).

According to the resilience guide published by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF, 2021), promoting resilience in children, adolescents, and their families involves understanding the dynamics that may arise in contexts of rights violations, addressing close relationships, coordinating between environments, ensuring access to community resources, respecting cultural diversity, and considering events over time. Recognizing the rights of children and adolescents, it emphasizes the need to safeguard their well-being and facilitate their adequate development.

In this regard, the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF, 2021) approaches resilience as a dynamic process rooted in an ecological and cultural environment that enables individuals to effectively tackle challenges. This ability is directly related to higher levels of psychological well-being and mental health, as well as the capacity to manage stress and

progress in adverse situations (ICBF, 2021). Cultivating resilience is understood as an individualized task, where parents and caregivers play a crucial role. For the ICBF (2021), recognizing the varied responses that adults, children, and adolescents may have to different circumstances, and understanding them, avoids assumptions and allows for adapting both guidance and support to the specific needs and characteristics of everyone.

Resilience has also been studied from the perspective of neuroscience, and according to these models, there is a biological basis rooted in the neural systems that synchronize the brain with the social environment and in the adaptive strategies that allow the individual to face environmental difficulties (Feldman, 2014). Neural systems include the affiliative brain, the oxytocin system, and biobehavioral synchrony (Feldman, 2014). According to these models, social affiliation mechanisms, which are species-specific, begin with the primary caregiver-child bonds and continue throughout life through all affiliative connections, making resilience a reflection of a developmental trajectory rather than a specific outcome or state (Feldman, 2014). This trajectory, which is structured from birth through adolescence or young adulthood, results in components of the "neurobiology of affiliation" that constitute what is understood as resilience (Feldman, 2014, p. 132). As seen, these models highlight the central role of infancy and caregivers in fostering resilience, especially for children exposed to adversity, as the care provided establishes the foundation of corticolimbic circuits central to emotional functioning (Kribakaran et al., 2023).

Additionally, studies in comparative brain development have found that adolescence is a stage in which the brain is particularly sensitive to the negative effects of stress, making it a period of special vulnerability. However, it is also a period of opportunity, as there is greater plasticity in the developing brain compared to later ages, offering adolescents a unique chance for biological adaptation that enables them to cope with stress (Kribakaran et al., 2023). For this reason, at the neurobiological level, adolescence is both a period of special vulnerability and an opportunity for promoting resilient human development (Kribakaran et al., 2023).

## **2.6. Tools for Promoting Resilience: Emphasis on Children and Adolescents**

The Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF, 2021) argues that promoting resilience among young people involves nurturing their autonomy, creativity, self-esteem, empathy, and sense of humor, encouraging their active participation as agents of change, even after experiencing traumatic events. Additionally, resilience involves the ability to identify opportunities and solutions in adverse contexts, transforming them into opportunities for

growth and overcoming challenges. This approach largely depends on individual factors such as personality and previous experiences, which influence resource management and individual well-being (ICBF, 2021).

At the same time, family aspects also play a relevant role in promoting resilience, where parenting practices that highlight achievements and positive recognition of children's skills, along with the establishment of open dialogues for emotional expression, act as protective environmental factors (ICBF, 2021). Furthermore, the characteristics of broader social environments, such as family and social contexts, have a substantial impact on resilience (ICBF, 2021).

Identifying these three levels of intervention—individual, family, and social—allows for understanding how risk factors and protective factors interact at each level, which is crucial for designing and implementing more effective and contextually relevant strategies for children (ICBF, 2021). In the ICBF's Resilience booklet (2021), it is also mentioned that in the context of children and adolescents who are victims of armed conflict, individual "protective factors" such as realistic expectations about their abilities, capacities, and individual resources can be identified. At the family level, protective factors include parenting practices that value achievements and skills, as well as open communication that facilitates emotional expression. Finally, at the social level, the document notes that community connections and support networks act as mitigators of the impact of risk factors present in the environments of children and adolescents.

In the context of children aged 0 to 5 years, resilience takes on a specific nuance due to the difficulty of expressing emotions or feelings, especially those related to anxiety or fear (ICBF, 2021). However, it is known that young children are capable of perceiving and understanding events around them and reflecting this in their behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, in these early ages, behaviors and attitudes, particularly those reflecting fear or anxiety, should be observed (ICBF, 2021). For children under 5, some attitudes and behaviors might be signs that they are experiencing environmental stress and need to communicate it, but lack verbal means to do so. For example, they may seek more hugs or kisses than usual or might lose control of their bladder at night (ICBF, 2021). Additionally, they might revert to habits such as thumb-sucking or behaviors they had previously outgrown, such as sleeping with others (ICBF, 2021).

For children aged 6 to 11 years, studying and promoting resilience should consider more varied interaction environments, such as those where children interact with peers (ICBF,

2021). At this age, interactions also involve various authority figures such as teachers, mothers, fathers, or secondary caregivers, who are central in helping them understand the changes they are experiencing (ICBF, 2021). In this sense, it is crucial for these children to feel secure in all their environments, including family and school, and that these environments promote daily dialogue based on simple questions addressing the emotions arising from new dynamics (ICBF, 2021). Additionally, it is essential to validate their expressions and provide direct, clear, and reassuring responses to dispel any additional concerns they may have about their experiences (ICBF, 2021). This stage of childhood represents a crucial period for strengthening resilience, as it lays the foundation for confidently and adaptively handling social experiences and changes throughout their development (ICBF, 2021).

Finally, to foster resilience in adolescents, it is crucial to show them that everyone, including themselves, experiences a range of emotions and to validate that experience (ICBF, 2021). It is essential for adolescents to understand the diversity of these emotions and to feel comfortable expressing them, without losing sight of the true magnitude of situations (ICBF, 2021). Facilitating emotional expression, as adolescents experience it now, is key for proper management of their emotions and feelings (ICBF, 2021). Particularly when facing high-impact situations that generate stress or emotional discomfort, it is crucial not only to allow them to express these emotions but also to provide support and security by validating their feelings, thereby helping them achieve the desired emotional stability (ICBF, 2021).

In the stage of adolescence, emotions and feelings can be more intense and experienced to a greater extent compared to adults (ICBF, 2021). According to ICBF (2021), during adolescence, these emotions can be volatile and superficial, making it difficult for caregivers to clearly discern what the adolescent is feeling at that moment. For this reason, it is crucial to establish understanding dialogues that allow for the free expression of emotions and validate these feelings. To facilitate this approach, strategies such as using everyday moments to encourage dialogue, even when it seems the adolescent is not interested, are suggested (ICBF, 2021). Asking simple questions in a calm tone to get the adolescent's opinion about the situation and avoiding judgment or criticism are effective strategies. By doing so, the adolescents will feel secure in an open space to learn and express themselves freely (ICBF, 2021).

The perspective from resilience in addressing children and adolescents highlights the importance of creating and fostering environments that provide support and respond to the specific needs of those who have been victims of conflict; it also requires providing tools for positive transitions (Song & Ventevogel, 2020). Song & Ventevogel (2020) stated that for

professionals working with refugee adolescents, “this implies the need to adopt a holistic view of the situation of young refugees and develop continuous care” (p. 53).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The present study aimed to identify the psychological consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents who are victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. To achieve this, a qualitative content analysis study was conducted (Hernández et al., 2010). For this, testimonies collected from the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its Volume *No es un mal menor* (2022) were analyzed. These testimonies were subjected to content analysis to deeply understand the subjective experiences of children and adolescents affected by displacement. The study sought descriptions in the narratives of risk and protective factors for the psychological development of children and adolescents who suffered forced displacement in Colombia, according to Bronfenbrenner's (2002) bioecological model of human development, to characterize aspects of resilient human development (Moll, 2016).

##### **3.1.1. Qualitative research**

This approach, according to Hernández et al. (2010), is defined as a methodological approach that seeks to deeply understand and describe social phenomena and situations from a holistic and subjective perspective. This research design is characterized by using techniques such as in-depth interviews and participant observation, conducted by the Comisión de la Verdad (2022c) and content analysis, used in this research, which allows the extraction of experiences, perceptions, and meanings that the protagonists attribute to their experiences. In contrast to a quantitative approach, the qualitative approach is usually the most appropriate tool when the goal is to learn and understand human behavior or a social phenomenon "from the inside" (Kvale, 2007, p. 10). Its objective is to capture the complexity and diversity of human perspectives, thereby providing a more complete and enriching view of the phenomena studied.

##### **3.1.2. Phenomenological research**

In the context of qualitative research, Hernández et al. (2010) define phenomenological design as a methodology that focuses on a deep understanding of the experiences and meanings that each person constructs in relation to a specific phenomenon from various perspectives.

This approach aims to capture the essence and unique experience of everyone involved in a study, avoiding preconceived notions and biases from the researcher. Phenomenological research is based on the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and is guided by the systematic exploration of the testimonies, narratives, and descriptions that subjects provide about their personal experience with the phenomenon under study (Hernández et al., 2010). Through techniques such as in-depth interviews and qualitative analysis, phenomenological design allows for the discovery of emerging patterns and significant themes that contribute to a richer understanding of a phenomenon from the subjective perspective of the individuals involved (Hernández et al., 2010).

### **3.1.3. Research method**

The proposed study adopted a qualitative approach due to its objective: to gain an in-depth understanding of the psychological consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents who are victims of armed conflict in Colombia, according to the bioecological model of development, and then establish possible elements associated with resilience, i.e., the capacity to face and overcome adversity. Qualitative research is characterized by focusing on the subjective and holistic understanding of social phenomena, and in this case, aimed to explore the experiences and meanings attributed by participants to their situation. To achieve this, the study design was based on the qualitative analysis of the content of testimonies collected in the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c). The Comisión de la Verdad collected and compiled testimonies from individuals affected by the armed conflict in Colombia through a meticulous and empathetic process. The stories, told by people who have experienced loss since childhood, reveal a deep reality of suffering. These individuals recounted to the Commission's teams how they lost their parents, witnessed the breakdown of their families, were forced to leave their territories, and how a culture transmitted by their ancestors was lost. Additionally, their ambitions and work capacities were wasted, with incalculable costs for both themselves and society.

To gather these stories, the Commission listened to 2,744 people who reported experiences of violence against children and adolescents in the context of armed conflict. These testimonies documented the experiences of 4,014 victims who were under eighteen years old. This approach not only allowed the Commission to understand the magnitude and depth of the conflict's impact on youth but also to humanize the statistics and figures, giving a voice to the victims and highlighting the devastating consequences of the war on younger generations. For

this research, 12 testimonies from children and adolescents displaced by the Colombian armed conflict were extracted from the final report of the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c)

By using qualitative techniques such as content analysis, the researcher sought to discover emerging patterns and significant themes that provide a deeper and richer understanding of the psychological experiences related to forced displacement and the resilient development of children and adolescents in the context of armed conflict, organizing the information according to Bronfenbrenner's (2002) bioecological model of human development. This model values both the subjective experience of individuals in development and the objective events occurring in their environment. From this perspective, human development is understood to be complex, and its outcomes, which can range from health and well-being to illness and suffering, result from the interaction of multiple factors. In this model, understanding human development involves considering the interaction over time of physical and psychological factors, social networks, and the subjective valuation of experiences, among other variables.

Through this approach, a contextualized and rich understanding of the reality experienced by a group of children and adolescents in the context of armed conflict and displacement in Colombia was obtained, allowing for the identification of potential strategic areas for promoting their psychological well-being and recovery from adversity.

#### **3.1.4. Scope of Research**

The scope of the research focused on identifying and describing the psychological consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents who are victims of armed conflict in Colombia. According to Hernández et al. (2010), a descriptive approach in research focuses on specifying and detailing the properties, characteristics, and important features of the studied phenomenon. This type of study aims to provide a clear and precise view of situations and events, answering questions such as: What is it? How is it? and What are its components? The researcher uses measurement tools such as questionnaires and structured observations to systematically collect data, always considering the specific context of the phenomenon. The primary purpose is to describe, not to explain, providing a solid and detailed foundation that can serve for subsequent explanatory or exploratory studies, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a comprehensive and precise understanding of the subject of study.

The descriptive approach was adopted to thoroughly characterize the various psychological implications faced by young people affected by forced displacement. Through the qualitative content analysis of the testimonies collected in the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c) the aim was to capture the subjective experiences and meanings of the participants, providing a deep and contextualized understanding of the psychological experiences related to displacement and violence experienced at an early age. The descriptive approach allowed this research to present a detailed and complete account of the psychological consequences for this population in the specific context of displacement within the armed conflict, without seeking causal relationships or generalizations, but rather an enriched understanding of the experienced reality (Hernández et al., 2010), in this case, by 12 children and adolescents who were victims of displacement. Additionally, the literature review of various sources helped uncover possible relationships and associated factors that might have a significant impact on the resilience and coping of children and adolescents according to recent studies.

### **3.2. Population and Sample**

The target population of this research consisted of children and adolescents who were victims of displacement within the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. To address this population, a sample was composed of narratives from 12 children and adolescents who had been displaced due to the armed conflict in Colombia. These narratives were published in the final report of the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c) and were selected after reviewing the narratives of all children and adolescents under 18 years old featured in that volume. The narratives of 12 children and adolescents who had been affected by the armed conflict through displacement from their homes were chosen.

According to Hernández et al. (2010), a case-type sampling approach involves the careful selection of specific cases that represent relevant characteristics or situations for the study. These testimonies provided valuable information for generating an enriched understanding of the psychological consequences of forced displacement in the target population, from the voices of the participants themselves.

Additionally, the case-type study method was implemented, considered highly useful for in-depth understanding of a topic, event, or phenomenon within the context of real-world experience. According to Crowe et al., (2011) this method, widely used especially in social

sciences, provides detailed and contextualized information about explanatory issues, allowing analysis of how, what, and why certain phenomena occur.

The 12 analyzed testimonies included 6 females and 6 males; 5 children under 12 years old and 7 adolescents aged 13 to 17 years. Geographically, the children and adolescents whose testimonies were analyzed came from various regions of Colombia. Alejandra experienced displacement from Urrao, Antioquia, to Belén de Umbría, Risaralda. Gabriela returned to her village in Necoclí after sixteen years of displacement. Other testimonies originated from places such as Medellín, Bogotá, Villavicencio, Caquetá, Chocó, Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo, and Catatumbo, reflecting the geographical dispersion and diversity of contexts in which these traumatic experiences occurred.

### **3.3. Procedure**

#### ***3.3.1. Analysis of Testimonies from Children and Adolescents Victims of Forced Displacement in the Context of the Colombian Armed Conflict***

A search was conducted for testimonies from children and adolescents who were victims of forced displacement within the context of the Colombian armed conflict, specifically from the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c). A qualitative analysis was performed on the content of the 12 selected testimonies. This phase involved applying coding and categorization techniques to identify patterns, themes, and underlying meanings according to the bioecological model of human development and the psychological consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents.

Once the results were obtained, they were interpreted and discussed in the context of existing literature. The most significant psychological consequences identified in the study were highlighted and their implications for the well-being of displaced children and adolescents were discussed, along with recommendations for intervention.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

To analyze the psychological consequences of forced displacement on children and adolescents who are victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, a thematic analysis approach was utilized. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify and categorize patterns, themes, and emerging meanings present in the testimonies and collected documents (Hernández et al., 2010).

The data were organized into relevant categories that reflect the various experiences and psychological consequences associated with the phenomenon of forced displacement and human development according to the bioecological model. This approach aimed to achieve a deeper and contextualized understanding of the experiences of children and adolescents affected by this issue.

In addition to thematic analysis, open and axial coding techniques were employed. Open coding facilitated the identification of units of meaning within the testimonies and documents, while axial coding assisted in organizing these elements into related categories and subcategories (Hernández et al., 2010). This data analysis procedure allowed for the establishment of connections between different components of the narratives and structured the information for a more detailed and systematic analysis. This analysis was conducted by the author and supervised by the advisor from the Universidad del Rosario, a psychologist expert in child development.

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

In terms of ethical considerations, the data collection process was conducted without the need for specific authorization, as the documents used were public. Confidentiality and privacy of the participants were ensured, as no direct contact with the study population was involved; all interactions were based on anonymized material already published by the Comisión de la Verdad. The research utilized secondary data the *Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad* in its volume *No es un mal menor* (2022c). This approach adhered to ethical standards by working with publicly accessible documents and protecting participant privacy, as verified by the Ethics Committee in the Social Sciences and Humanities Department at the Universidad del Rosario and communicated on August 17, 2023 (see Appendix 1).

## **4. Results**

According to the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a), forced displacement, a chain of violence that violates people and, above all, subjects' children and adolescents, stands as a lament in Colombian history, where the effective enjoyment of their rights vanishes. In the tapestry of this tragedy, armed actors create a scenario where these populations are forced to face murder, the disappearance of loved ones, sexual violence, and the threat of being recruited, pushing them to flee alone or with their families to survive. A fabric of human rights violations is evident in the records: 3,049,527 children and adolescents displaced between 1985 and 2019,

and the 2,045 child victims registered by the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a). But what does it mean to abruptly leave home, friends, school, and toys? How is it perceived to arrive in a new territory where everything is unknown?

The Comisión de la Verdad (2022a) explains that these questions are not abstract for the 139,842 children and adolescents displaced between 2020 and 2021. Of the 353,746 people displaced in these two years, 39.5% were minors, of whom 47,126 were between zero and five years old, 47,043 between six and eleven, and 45,673 between twelve and seventeen. The testimonies, true evidence of anguish, reveal the uncertainty that engulfs those who arrive in unknown lands, where ensuring the enjoyment of their rights becomes a daily battle. At ages where education, recreation, and play should be their everyday life, children and adolescents are forced to deal with survival in environments often unprepared to receive them. Despite being a phenomenon that has captured institutional attention, from Law 387 of 1997 to Ruling T-025 of 2004 (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1997, 2004), the Comisión de la Verdad (2022a), states that the policies and regulations developed so far do not effectively translate into guaranteeing rights for this especially vulnerable population. The insufficient attention from the State, evidenced in Order 251 of 2008 by the Constitutional Court, and the persistence of the declaration of an "unconstitutional state of affairs" in 2018, underline that gaps in the protection of these populations persist, despite governmental advances (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2008).

Although the national measurement of Effective Enjoyment of Rights Indicators (IGED) in 2014 showed improvements in basic rights such as food, health, and education, there are still lags in immediate humanitarian attention, housing, and family reunification. The Constitutional Court, in its 2018 evaluation, reiterated these shortcomings and highlighted the impossibility of lifting the "unconstitutional state of affairs", especially concerning children and adolescents (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 2008)..

Upon reviewing the volume *No es un mal menor* published by the Comisión de la Verdad (2022c), a chapter dedicated exclusively to forced displacement in children and adolescents was found, describing 12 testimonies in which the primary or secondary agent of the narrative was a child or adolescent (under 18 years). For this analysis, being a primary agent in the narration of these testimonies meant that the child or adolescent was the protagonist of the story, meaning their experience and perspective were the focus of the account. In contrast, being a secondary agent implied that the child or adolescent was a secondary character in the story, and their role was more peripheral or related to the experience of other main characters.

Through the experiences of María Victoria and other voices described in the following pages, the Comisión de la Verdad (2022c) sought to unravel the violence, losses, and complexities faced by children and adolescents forcibly displaced within the framework of the armed conflict in Colombia. These narratives not only bear witness to the reality of millions of families but also shed light on the urgent need to address the aftermath of a devastating and persistent conflict in Colombia for those who need the most protection in situations of violence: children and adolescents.

The 12 selected testimonies are presented below, with information organized for this analysis based on the postulates of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (2002) as follows: a) a brief summary of the testimony and the story, b) a summary of the biopsychosocial aspects identified according to the ecological levels in which the development of individuals is immersed and occurs (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem). In this section, some testimonies lacked complete information to identify the biopsychosocial characteristics at all ecological levels (microsystem, mesosystem, etc.) or of all variables of interest (biological, psychological, or social), so only the elements for which information was available are described; c) protective and risk factors for human development identified in the testimony; and d) analysis of results in development according to vulnerability or resilience identified in each testimony. The definitions of each variable of interest, according to the bioecological model, which can either protect or risk the person's development, are presented below.

**Person Variables:**

- **Biological or Physical:** Refers to variables determined by the biology or epigenetics of each person, such as age, sex (male, female, intersex), and diseases with some genetic component, as well as reflex/physiological reactions, and all those physical characteristics of the person such as hair color and length, skin tone, and gender expression.
- **Personality or Psychic:** These are characteristics of the way a person thinks and acts, their behavior patterns, emotional aspects that characterize them, and gender identity. They are usually described with adjectives, for example, creative, sensitive, tough, sedentary, etc.

### **Levels of the Ecological System of Human Development according to Bronfenbrenner (2002):**

- **Microsystem:** Refers to close, face-to-face interactions that the developing individual has with other people, usually part of the family or friends. It also includes prolonged interactions with objects or animals. It is the most immediate ecological level of a person's development. In this category, the person's variables are relevant because part of the individual's microsystemic interactions is determined by these characteristics. For example, in the microsystem of a person described as calm or introverted, microsystemic interactions such as reading or contemplation may appear, while in that of a person described as active or extroverted, a more extensive network in terms of the number of activities or people they interact with may be observed.
- **Mesosystem:** The interaction of two or more microsystems, for example, the family interacting with the teacher responsible for the child's education would form the family-school mesosystem of that child.
- **Exosystem:** These are external factors to face-to-face interactions that indirectly influence the individual's development. For example, whether the school where a teenager study is public or private (exosystemic factors) can affect the form and content of that teenager's interactions in that context. Thus, in a public school, there may be more children per responsible educator, while in a private school, there may be a lower proportion of children per educator, affecting the quality of interactions between the teacher and the student. In this example, the exosystemic variable type of school for the adolescent (public or private) indirectly affects and causes the school microsystem in which the adolescent develops to have particular characteristics.
- **Macrosystem:** At this level, the characteristics of the systems that globally or distally influence the individual's developmental environment are described, such as the characteristics of the State (a young democracy or a dictatorial system, etc.), the cultural values of society, the general social conditions of society, etc.  
These aspects will be presented for each case in a narrative form.

#### **4.1. Testimony 1 - María Victoria (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 106–134)**

On January 15, 1999, at the age of fourteen, María Victoria suffered an unforgettable tragedy. In Puerto Lleras, Meta, she witnessed the brutal murder of her family by men linked to the FARC-EP. This massacre marked the beginning of multiple displacements during her

adolescence. In this context, María Victoria described the assassination of her father and siblings, as well as her solitary flight to Bogotá in search of her mother.

María Victoria and her family lived in a municipality affected by violence since the mid-20th century. Puerto Lleras, in the Meta department, has been the focus of territorial disputes between various armed actors, from the FARC-EP to paramilitary groups. The massacre she witnessed was part of the violence that has characterized this region. After losing her family, María Victoria embarked on a painful journey to Bogotá, facing threats and mistrust.

At the microsystem level, María Victoria's close relationships were profoundly affected. She experienced violence firsthand, losing her father, family, and home. Additionally, she had to interact with the perpetrators of violence, confronting complex family and social dynamics during her displacement.

The term "mesosystem" refers to the interactions between two or more environments in which a person regularly participates. In María Victoria's case, these environments included her home and school, as well as support organizations. The relationship between her family and the school community was crucial. However, the disruption caused by displacement weakened these connections, which in turn negatively affected her emotional and social development. Support organizations attempted to fill this void, but integration into the new community and the establishment of strong support networks were slow and difficult processes.

At the exosystem level, indirect external factors played a role in María Victoria's story. The political violence in her region of origin, characterized by clashes between armed groups and the government, generated a constant climate of insecurity that forced her family to flee. The unfavorable social and economic conditions of her family also significantly influenced her: poverty and a lack of job opportunities in her community of origin limited the resources available for her education and well-being. Moreover, the lack of institutional support both in her place of origin and during her displacement exacerbated these problems. For example, in her community of origin, they did not have access to adequate mental health services or social assistance programs that could have mitigated the impact of the armed conflict. During displacement, the lack of integration and support policies for displaced persons made it difficult for her to adapt to a new environment and affected her emotional and social stability.

At the macrosystem level, María Victoria's testimony reflects the global influence of the armed conflict in the region of the Meta department. During her childhood, this region was marked by the presence of illegal armed groups such as the FARC and paramilitaries, which

generated a climate of violence and constant fear. This situation was aggravated by the inequitable social conditions she lived in, where poverty and lack of access to basic services were prevalent, directly affecting her community and family. Additionally, the ineffectiveness of child protection policies in Colombia was evident in the lack of institutional guarantees for safe return. The absence of effective structural support from the state left María Victoria and her family without the necessary resources to rebuild their lives after displacement, thus perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability and exclusion.

Among the protective factors, her determination to rebuild her life and her attempts to adapt to new circumstances stood out. This was evident both in María Victoria herself and in her immediate family, in the face of the constant difficulties presented by displacement. Additionally, an affective bond with her mother was evident, serving as the primary source of emotional support for María Victoria during her displacement and relocation process.

However, risk factors were also observed, such as the loss of loved ones and possessions during displacement, exposure to precarious working conditions, and the lack of institutional guarantees for a safe return and the effective enjoyment of her rights in the rural areas she inhabited. The interruption of her studies due to displacement represented a significant barrier to her educational and socioeconomic development, as she was unable to continue her academic training regularly, which limited her employment opportunities and her ability to fully integrate into society. Furthermore, constant mobility and the instability associated with displacement prevented María Victoria from establishing lasting and meaningful relationships with peers and a community. The lack of access to adequate mental health services also aggravated her situation, as she could not receive the necessary support to cope with the trauma and post-traumatic stress derived from violent experiences and displacement.

When analyzing María Victoria's testimony in light of statistics and development outcomes, the vulnerability and resilience experienced by children and adolescents, victims of forced displacement in Colombia became evident. While displacement implies significant risks to the physical, emotional, and socioeconomic well-being of those affected, María Victoria's case also highlights the resilience of some displaced families that allows them to adapt and rebuild their lives. In this family, it was found that unity and mutual support between mother and daughter were fundamental for them to be able to face the challenges of displacement. Their determination to continue their studies, despite the difficulties, shows how education can serve as a key protective factor in the process of recovery and empowerment of displaced children and adolescents. María Victoria demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation

and perseverance, which not only strengthened her own academic and personal development but was also essential for maintaining hope and resilience in her family during a difficult period of transition and adjustment to new living conditions.

#### **4.2. Testimony 2 – Clara (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 109-132)**

Clara, displaced twice, lived a childhood marked by paramilitary violence in Belén de Bajirá, Chocó department. In 1986, when she was 6 years old, her family was threatened and displaced to Llano Rico, also in Chocó. Ten years later, in 1996, at the age of 16, new threats forced her second displacement to Medellín. The paramilitary presence and violence intensified in the second half of the 1990s in Colombia and in her immediate environment, forcing Clara and her family to confront acts of violence in their immediate surroundings. The family separation during the displacements increased Clara's feeling of orphanhood, as she experienced the anguish of being separated from her loved ones and of living in an unknown and hostile environment. This experience made her feel vulnerable and helpless, facing the challenge of adapting to new living conditions without the close support of her family.

In adolescence, Clara became pregnant and struggled to rebuild her family after breaking up with her partner. Poverty, the loss of support networks, and the lack of psychosocial attention increased her vulnerability. Clara's testimony reflects the complexity of motherhood and adolescence for a woman in the context of forced displacement in the country.

At the microsystem level, Clara and her family were threatened by paramilitaries in Belén de Bajirá, Chocó, where her father was assaulted, and they had to leave. Later, when they moved to Llano Rico, Chocó, they faced threats again and a new displacement occurred, this time to the capital of Antioquia, Medellín, evidencing the persistence of violence in their immediate environment.

The mesosystem level reveals the complexity of the interactions between Clara's family, paramilitary groups, and the public force in the different places where she experienced displacement. These relationships show how local systems interact and directly affect Clara's life, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

De Bajirá nos desplazaron y ahora aquí. Pa dónde más vamos a pegar nosotros?”. Cuando mi papá le dijo que no, que nos dejara trabajar, que él no se metía con nadie, el tipo le exigió una vacuna. Mi papá le dijo que no tenía con qué, que estaba tratando de sobrevivir y que nosotros éramos once hermanos, la situación estaba muy dura. “Ah, bueno, le vamos a dar un plazo; si la vacuna no aparece, a usted le toca salir, y si no, no

respondemos”, le dijo. Imagínese, ya nosotros entre la espada y la pared, no sabíamos qué hacer. (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022d, p. 121)

At the exosystemic level, indirect factors such as the actions of paramilitary groups and military operations like "Genesis" and "Cacarica" contributed to the massive displacement in the region. The constant presence of these external forces illustrates how external dynamics—such as the presence of armed groups and military confrontations—can have a devastating impact on the lives of people at the local level. These events, beyond Clara’s control, compelled her father to face the inevitability of displacement, as he was threatened with death if he did not leave.

At the macrosystem level, the persistence of paramilitary groups in the region, the neglect by the State, and the widespread violence in these territories of Chocó—a department that has been one of the most neglected in the country for decades—highlight the lack of institutional guarantees for safety during displacement and the absence of healthcare services for pregnant women. These macro-level systems had a profound influence on Clara’s life, shedding light on the complexity of her experience and underscoring the need to address the risks and developmental challenges faced by children and adolescents at a structural level.

In Clara's testimony, several protective and risk factors for her development were identified. Among the protective factors was the resilience and adaptability demonstrated by Clara and her family in the face of threats from armed groups and forced displacement. They sought refuge in neighboring communities and later in Medellín, confronting significant adversities at each step. Their determination to rebuild their lives amid hardship showcases remarkable resilience. For instance, upon settling in Medellín, Clara began attending a new school despite economic and emotional challenges.

Additionally, the solidarity and mutual support within the displaced community also served as protective factors for Clara's development. When they settled in Medellín, they received help from other displaced individuals, which provided them with a sense of belonging and emotional support in a hostile environment.

However, risk factors for Clara were also identified, such as her continued exposure to violence and the constant threat posed by armed groups, which caused significant stress and a persistent sense of insecurity for her and her family. Furthermore, forced displacement led to the loss of economic resources, including their home in Belén de Bajirá, which further complicated their situation upon arriving in Medellín, where they faced challenges in achieving financial stability and regaining their balance.

### **4.3. Testimony 3 – Diego (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 110-128)**

Diego, displaced from Ituango to Medellín between 1994 and 1995 at the age of fourteen, faced the pressure of paramilitary groups. His father, falsely accused of being a guerrilla, fled first, followed by the family, fearing reprisals. Violence and threats persisted in Medellín, where Diego experienced coercion by an armed group and the pervasive presence of drug trafficking. The lack of alternatives led some youth, including Diego, to join criminal groups as a means of survival.

At the microsystem level, Diego and his family were forced to flee their home in Ituango due to pressure from paramilitary groups. Diego was specifically targeted, and his father, sensing imminent danger, made the difficult decision to relocate to protect himself and his family. These close interactions demonstrate how violence directly impacted Diego and his family in their most immediate environment.

At the mesosystem level, Diego's experience transitions from his interactions with armed groups in Ituango to life in Medellín, where he faced new paramilitary threats and pressure to join local criminal groups. The complex interactions between these microsystems shaped Diego's displacement experience, marked by tensions between aligning with one group or another for protection and survival.

At the exosystem level, indirect external factors such as the continued presence of armed groups in both his place of origin and destination (Ituango and Medellín, in the Antioquia department), along with the dynamics of drug trafficking and urban militias in Medellín, influenced his displacement situation. These external elements underscore the complexity of factors contributing to Diego's forced displacement.

At the macrosystem level, Diego's testimony reflects the historical context of violence in Antioquia and Medellín during the mid-1990s, a period characterized by high levels of forced displacement and alarming rates of violent deaths among youth from marginalized communities. Additionally, the lack of institutional recognition and support for intra-urban displacement cases in one of the regions most affected by violence highlights the need to address these issues at both national and local structural levels, particularly focusing on adolescent boys who are often targeted for recruitment by armed groups.

Diego's testimony identifies various protective and risk factors for his development. Among the protective factors, Diego's determination to continue his education despite administrative and economic challenges in Medellín stands out. For instance, he found support in community programs or educational institutions that provided him with additional

opportunities to study. His persistence and pursuit of educational opportunities demonstrate his resilience in the face of a context filled with threats, violence, and displacement.

Furthermore, the solidarity and support of his family and community also served as protective factors. For example, Diego received emotional and practical support from his relatives and neighbors when leaving the armed group, finding a sense of belonging and an environment of support amid adversity.

However, the risk factors identified in Diego's testimony include his continued exposure to violence in Medellín and the structural barriers that delayed and hindered his access to education and other basic services. These conditions jeopardized his personal safety, health, and short- and medium-term aspirations, affecting his emotional and physical well-being.

Examining Diego's testimony alongside statistics and developmental outcomes reveals both the vulnerability and resilience of displaced children and adolescents in Colombia. Diego's story illustrates how forced displacement can negatively impact children's and adolescents' access to education and emotional well-being. However, it also highlights their capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity. Diego's case emphasizes the importance of addressing structural barriers faced by displaced individuals during their reintegration into society, particularly during adolescence, a critical period when they must overcome societal prejudices stemming from their involvement with armed groups.

#### **4.4. Testimony 4 - Mercedes (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 110-111)**

Mercedes, an indigenous Nasa woman from Tacueyó in the Cauca department, was displaced due to threats of sexual violence and harassment by a commander of the FARC-EP at the age of thirteen. At the microsystemic level, Mercedes faced harassment from a guerrilla member, a constant pressure that forced her to make the critical decision to relocate. These close interactions with a guerrilla member reveal violence directed towards individuals based on their physical characteristics and how this violence can compel adolescents to make life-altering decisions, such as displacement at a young age.

At the mesosystemic level, a complex network of Mercedes' microsystems illustrates significant mesosystemic interactions in her life. Her family, deeply rooted in the Nasa indigenous community of Tacueyó, played a crucial role as a support system in the face of persistent harassment by a FARC-EP commander. The protection provided by her family, especially her older brother, reflects the solidarity and resilience within the community against external threats. However, the constant presence and threats from the guerrilla member

disrupted family cohesion, creating an atmosphere of fear and vigilance at home and ultimately breaking familial ties due to displacement.

The interaction between Mercedes' family and the FARC-EP guerrilla reveals how armed conflicts permeate community life, disrupting daily activities and social relationships. This context of insecurity and pressure eventually led Mercedes to decide to move to Bogotá at eighteen, seeking to escape persecution and the risk of forced recruitment. While displacement mitigated the immediate threat, it also represented a painful rupture with her community and cultural roots, underscoring the devastating impacts of armed conflict on family and community dynamics.

The mesosystemic analysis of Mercedes' testimony highlights the interactions between her family, community, and the FARC-EP guerrilla. These interactions shaped her experience of forced displacement, revealing the vulnerability of family and community microsystems to the threats of armed groups. At the same time, Mercedes' resilience in adapting to new circumstances in Bogotá illustrates the capacity of these microsystems to provide protection and foster recovery. This mesosystemic perspective underscores the importance of interpersonal and community dynamics in understanding the impact of armed conflict on displaced individuals, especially in terms of adolescent development and protection.

At the exosystemic level, the context of armed violence and displacement in Tacueyó, Cauca department, acted as an indirect external factor contributing to Mercedes' experiences of displacement. Thus, an external armed conflict prompted an individual decision: to relocate for self-protection.

At the macrosystemic level, Mercedes' testimony reflects the disproportionate impact of displacement on women, particularly the threat or experience of sexual violence. Her story mirrors those of many women victims of sexual violence who are threatened and displaced merely because they are women, indigenous, and rural. Moreover, it highlights the connection between displacement and prior violence, such as harassment, showing that displacement and sexual violence are not isolated events but often result from accumulated and escalating violence.

Mercedes' testimony allows for an observation of the differentiated impact of the armed conflict in Colombia on women with rural, afro, or indigenous identities, who are even more vulnerable as they are not recognized as rights holders but rather as property. These contextual elements reveal the complexity of gender dynamics in the Colombian conflict and displacement, with Mercedes' case involving the intersection of ethnicity and origin.

Mercedes faced threats and sexual harassment from the age of thirteen by a commander of the FARC-EP, posing a severe risk to her physical and emotional well-being. In this context, her nuclear family, especially her older brother, played a crucial role in protecting and emotionally supporting her during these threats. Mercedes' decision to relocate to Bogotá at eighteen highlights her search for safety amidst persistent persecution. However, forced displacement represents a significant risk, as it entails the loss of security, exposure to new forms of violence, and difficulty accessing basic resources in new locations.

Furthermore, the reference to Ruling T-025 of 2004 emphasizes institutional efforts to address unconstitutionality for victims of violence, although challenges to accessing legal and justice resources remain evident in armed conflict contexts.

Studying Mercedes' testimony considering statistics and outcomes reveals the extreme vulnerability of displaced women and girls in Colombia. According to data, a high percentage of displaced women are victims of sexual violence, underscoring the urgency of addressing this issue and providing necessary support for prevention and recovery. Mercedes demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of threats and harassment she endured from a young age by a FARC-EP commander. Despite the pressure and persecution, she experienced from age thirteen, she made the decision to leave her territory and seek a safer environment in Bogotá. This action reflects her determination to protect herself and pursue a better future, bravely confronting a situation of violence and sexual harassment.

This underscores the importance of strengthening mechanisms of protection and support for victims of gender-based violence in displacement situations, considering their origin characteristics and socioeconomic status.

#### **4.5. Testimony 5 – Isabel (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 112-126)**

Isabel lived in Ábrego, in the department of Norte de Santander, and was forced to displace herself in 2001 at the age of fourteen due to the threat of recruitment by the ELN, which operated in the area alongside the FARC-EP. Her testimony highlighted the everyday reality of child recruitment in rural contexts, which for Isabel was the reason for her displacement. The guerrilla groups maintained a constant presence in the region, and families were compelled to host them, exposing young people to the risk of recruitment. Feeling the pressure and fearing recruitment, Isabel decided to move to the city to live with a relative. In Cúcuta, where she arrived from Ábrego, Isabel faced the challenges associated with labor

exploitation. At the age of fourteen, she worked in private homes and at a food stall preparing meals for sale.

At the microsystemic level, Isabel faced the direct threat of recruitment by the ELN, a situation that jeopardized her safety and future. This close interaction with actors in the conflict illustrates the specific dangers she faced in an environment already affected by the presence of armed groups. In Isabel's testimony, beyond the microsystem related to her family, another microsystem emerges: the work environment she encountered upon arriving in Cúcuta. This environment includes the homes where she performed domestic tasks and the food stall where she worked preparing meals. These places not only represent the settings where she spent most of her time but also where she interacted with strangers who directly influenced her daily life, emotional well-being, and physical health. Thus, these work environments were crucial to her displacement experience, affecting both her working conditions and her adaptation to life in the city.

At the mesosystemic level, the displacement from Ábrego to Cúcuta revealed interactions between her family microsystem and the guerrilla group. The guerrilla recruitment threats influenced her decision to relocate, as reflected in Isabel's testimony:

La guerrilla permanecía ahí y había días que tocaba darles posada en la casa. Entonces uno se daba cuenta de que se llevaban muchos jóvenes. Por eso yo le dije a mi mamá que me dejara venir para acá, para la ciudad, a vivir con un familiar, porque no quería correr con que de pronto vinieran y me llevaran o que pasara algo más grave en la casa. (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022d, p. 121)

This decision disrupted her family dynamics and impacted her developmental trajectory.

At the exosystemic level, the context of recruitment in Ábrego, marked by the presence of the ELN and FARC-EP guerrillas, serves as an indirect external factor that shaped Isabel's life. These actors altered the environment, reflecting the complexity and influence of external factors on Isabel's micro- and mesosystems, ultimately determining her forced displacement.

At the macrosystemic level, Isabel's testimony highlights the vulnerability of girls and adolescents to recruitment, reflecting that this phenomenon affects both boys and girls in urban and rural contexts like Isabel's. The impact of displacement also emerges in terms of educational processes and its relationship with labor exploitation. These aspects of Isabel's story reveal the broader consequences of armed groups' actions in vulnerable rural

communities. Her displacement abruptly interrupted her education and immediately placed her in a situation of economic and social precarity.

Examining Isabel's testimony through the lens of protection and risk factors underscores the vulnerability faced by displaced girls and adolescents in their destinations. Her experience reveals how economic hardships, and a lack of opportunities and protection can expose them to situations of labor exploitation and vulnerability. On the other hand, her testimony also highlights the importance of individual and family resilience in adverse situations, as Isabel and her family struggled to survive, find a place to rebuild their lives, and stay away from armed groups.

Analyzing Isabel's testimony alongside statistical data and developmental outcomes reveals the prevalence of similar situations among displaced girls and adolescents in Colombia. Statistics indicate that a significant percentage of displaced girls and adolescents are forced to work under precarious conditions, negatively affecting their physical, emotional, and social development. However, the resilience demonstrated by these young women is also evident, as they strive to survive and avoid armed violence, leaving their environments to protect their lives.

#### **4.6. Testimony 6 – Víctor (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 123-125)**

Víctor, who was ten years old at the time of displacement in 2004, experienced the paramilitary incursion in his village in Tibú, Norte de Santander. His testimony highlights the economic impact and precarious living conditions he and his family faced because of this event. During the incursion, according to Víctor, his family lost all their livestock, their chickens were stolen, and their house was shot at. Displaced, they arrived in the town of La Gabarra and settled on a soccer field alongside other displaced families.

Víctor recalls that they lived under these conditions for two to three months. His sister, who was pregnant at the time, gave birth just five days after arriving at the new location. The lack of adequate housing forced them to live in makeshift tents in a temporary camp. Despite having an aunt in town, they could not stay at her house due to space constraints. As a result, they endured difficult conditions, cooking on the street and facing daily hardships.

At the microsystemic level, Víctor's displacement resulted from the paramilitary incursion in his village, highlighting the direct and violent interactions that forced him and his family to leave their home. Like other displaced villagers, Víctor was deeply affected by the violence in his immediate environment, which threatened his life and that of his family.

At the mesosystemic level, life on a soccer field with other displaced individuals illustrates the interaction between the microsystems of family, the displaced community, the local community in La Gabarra, and support services. The formation of temporary communities in displacement situations underscores the need for solidarity and mutual support among those sharing similar experiences, as Víctor's case demonstrates.

At the exosystemic level, the paramilitary presence and expansion in the area served as an external factor that endangered Víctor's life and triggered his displacement. At the macrosystemic level, the lack of adequate housing for displaced populations represents a systemic issue in the country that affects people in situations like Víctor's on a broader scale. The absence of state resources in Víctor's case highlights the necessity of governmental presence not only to address the immediate causes of displacement but also to improve living conditions afterward.

Víctor's testimony reveals the extreme vulnerability faced by displaced children and adolescents, particularly regarding inadequate housing and unmet economic needs. Víctor and his family were forced to live in precarious conditions, without proper shelter and struggling with significant financial difficulties. This lack of protection had a detrimental impact on the physical and psychological well-being of displaced children.

In contrast, analyzing statistics and developmental outcomes reveals that Víctor's situation reflects a common reality among displaced children in Colombia. This population often endures precarious living conditions and faces prejudice from local communities where displaced families settle, affecting their holistic development. The lack of proper housing and the need to contribute economically to their households often limit their access to education and future opportunities. However, Víctor's testimony also highlights the resilience of these children, who, despite adversity, find ways to survive and hope for a better future. This resilience is evident in his account:

Andábamos pidiendo trabajo por ahí y por allá. Por ejemplo, en mi caso me tocaba recoger latas de cerveza, hueso, hacer cualquier cosa para ayudar a mi papá y a mi mamá. Duramos tres meses en eso. Después mi papá nos llevaba a nosotros a trabajar en fincas para poder subsistir. Yo estuve unos cinco años que no estudiaba, igual que mis hermanos, pues teníamos que trabajar. Siempre nos acostumbró mi papá a trabajar, a ganarnos nuestra comida, nuestras cosas. (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022d, p. 125)

#### **4.7. Testimony 7 – Sebastián (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 114-132)**

Sebastián, displaced at the age of eleven from Lejanías, Meta, in 1992, shared his testimony about the threats made against his father, a member of the Unión Patriótica. He experienced the displacement with his mother, who was pregnant, and his younger sister. Their departure from Lejanías was marked by uncertainty and the lack of information about his father's whereabouts, who effectively disappeared. They eventually arrived in the municipality of Soacha, Cundinamarca.

In Soacha, as Sebastián grew older, he formed new connections and participated in various social spaces. At seventeen, he began practicing breakdancing and befriended young people in his neighborhood who were also dance enthusiasts. Around 2001, at approximately 21 years old and while attending university, he became aware of the presence of a paramilitary group in Soacha responsible for threats and killings of young people in the area.

At the microsystem level, Sebastián experienced displacement alongside his mother and sister, coupled with the uncertainty surrounding his father's disappearance. His involvement in activities like breakdancing and forming bonds with neighborhood youth highlights individuals' ability to find avenues for expression and connection amid adversity. His awareness of the violence in his environment reflects an early understanding of the political complexity of his context.

At the mesosystem level, Sebastián participated in civil society collectives, demonstrating the development of community leadership. This interaction between different microsystems underscores the importance of community involvement to address challenges.

At the exosystem level, the threats and deaths of young people in the area, along with the identification of paramilitary groups in Soacha, indirectly influenced his environment. These external factors reveal the complexity of the contexts displaced individuals navigate and the need to develop coping and adaptation strategies early in life.

At the macrosystem level, the transformation of violence into more complex forms emerges as a global phenomenon that affects entire communities, including members and families of the Unión Patriótica. The potential exposure to risks and threats associated with community leadership highlights Sebastián's courage in taking an active role in seeking solutions for his community, in some way following in his father's footsteps in defending rights, which had led to his father's disappearance.

Sebastián's testimony reveals how displaced adolescents strive to build new connections and participate in various aspects of society. Through activities like breakdancing

and interacting with neighborhood youth, they attempt to express themselves, adapt to their new surroundings, and overcome difficulties. However, they also face the harsh reality of paramilitary presence, making them targets of persecution and jeopardizing their safety and well-being.

Analyzing these factors within the context of statistics and developmental outcomes shows that many displaced adolescents seek ways to integrate into their new communities and rebuild their lives. They create bonds and forms of youthful expression that help them denounce and overcome the adversities they have endured. However, the presence of armed groups, stigmatization, and violence in these urban settlement areas can hinder their efforts and expose them to new risks. Despite this, Sebastián's testimony also demonstrates how some displaced youths find ways to resist and confront adversity, forming meaningful emotional bonds with peers and discovering shared forms of communication. This resilience and adaptability exemplify their capacity to thrive despite the challenges they face.

#### **4.8. Testimony 8 – Óscar (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, p. 114)**

Óscar, a rural teenager who experienced the mass displacement of his community, shared his testimony about the events that led to their departure from Viotá, Cundinamarca, in 2003. At the age of fifteen, Óscar and his community decided to leave their homes in the face of the imminent arrival of paramilitary forces.

Óscar's account highlights the image of crowds fleeing their homes, each carrying whatever they could. The community was forced to take emergency measures, loading food onto vehicles to ensure their survival during the displacement. The presence of children, elderly individuals, and entire families, many of whom were very poor and lacked transportation, exacerbated the situation. To avoid potential attacks and the threat of violence if they dispersed, the community decided to descend together in caravans.

At the microsystem level, the displacement of Óscar, his family, and his community reflects the profound impact on close-knit interactions. The family's active involvement in mobilization and mutual protection underscores the importance of solidarity in adverse contexts. The decision to use a personal vehicle to transport community members and travel together in caravans illustrates collective strategies to ensure safety.

At the mesosystem level, the collective mobilization of the entire Viotá community underscores the necessity of creating collaborative responses to shared threats. This interaction among different microsystems highlights the importance of community coordination during

crises and demonstrates how this serves as a protective strategy employed by victims of forced displacement in the country.

At the exosystem level, the threat of the paramilitaries' arrival and the potential violence if the community dispersed reveal the influence of external factors in the context of displacement. The presence of paramilitary groups instilling fear in communities and the mass displacement resulting from collective violence are macrosystemic phenomena that provide a broader context for Óscar's experience.

Óscar's testimony reflects the anguish and urgency faced by displaced communities when forced to flee due to collective violence. His account underscores the harsh reality many rural communities face amid Colombia's armed conflict, where fear and uncertainty drive urgent decisions, prioritizing the safeguarding of lives.

Considering these elements considering statistics and developmental outcomes, it is evident that forced displacement profoundly impacts the mental and emotional health of children and adolescents in entire communities. Óscar's experience illustrates the vulnerability of these populations to violence and how such sudden events can result in lasting trauma. Nevertheless, his account also highlights the resilience of displaced communities, which strive to stay united and rebuild their lives through collective strategies amid adversity.

#### **4.9. Testimony 9 – Lucía (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, p. 117)**

Lucía, who experienced displacement at the age of twelve from La Montañita, Caquetá, shared her story, highlighting the unique losses faced by children and adolescents during such events. Beyond the material and cultural losses endured by communities, Lucía emphasized the loss of significant personal relationships.

In her testimony, Lucía recalled her best friend, a girl with whom she shared a close bond. Her detailed description of her friend, with a hairstyle resembling Paquita Gallego, reflected the special connection they had. On the day of the displacement, a line of guerrilla fighters gave her friend's family ten minutes to leave their farm. At that moment, Lucía witnessed how the family, barefoot and carrying just one bag each, abandoned their home. This event marked the loss of her best friend, which Lucía described as her "first lost friendship."

At the microsystem level, the account details the loss of friendships, toys, pets, and territory, emphasizing the direct impact on Lucía's daily life. The forced displacement of Lucía and her family, along with the displacement of her best friend due to guerrilla presence, highlights close interactions and the immediate consequences of violence in their environment.

The description of the guerrilla fighters forcing her friend's family to leave illustrates the specific dynamics of conflict that disrupt personal relationships.

At the mesosystem level, the emotional and symbolic impact on the relationship between Lucía and her best friend is evident. Displacement not only affects individual lives but also alters interpersonal dynamics and emotional connections. At the exosystem level, the guerrilla presence influencing her friend's family's decision to leave underscores how indirect external factors shape families' choices in conflict contexts.

At the macrosystem level, Lucía's testimony fits into the broader context of the mass displacement of families affected by violence. Her story becomes a representative account of the shared experiences of many others who have faced similar situations, living the violence of forced displacement not necessarily through their own relocation but through the displacement of significant people in their lives.

Lucía's testimony sheds light on the familial and community tragedies experienced by children and adolescents during forced displacement. Her narrative reveals how human, and material losses deeply affect interpersonal relationships and the emotional stability of displaced children, as seen through the subjective experience of a significant loss.

Considering these aspects in relation to statistics and developmental outcomes, it becomes evident that displacement can rupture the social and symbolic bonds essential for children's and adolescents' growth and well-being. Lucía's story highlights the importance of addressing the psychosocial impact of forced displacement, providing appropriate support to mitigate emotional scars, and fostering resilience in these vulnerable populations.

#### **4.10. Testimony 10 – Carla (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 125-126)**

Carla, an Afro-Colombian woman, experienced displacement at the age of eleven when her family was displaced from the village of Rodea in Iscuandé, Nariño, in 2007 due to a clash between the Army and the FARC-EP. Her testimony reveals the challenges they faced when arriving in the urban center of Iscuandé and later settling in El Charco, Nariño.

In Carla's narrative, the precarious situation she faced upon arriving in Iscuandé stands out. After the displacement, the family found themselves without help, spending three days on the streets of the town with hunger, thirst, and no clothes. Carla describes the lack of government support and the urgent need they had for assistance. As a united family, they went out to seek help, visiting every house in search of assistance. However, the responses varied—

some people helped, while others looked at them as "odd," unable to understand that they had lost everything at that moment.

When they arrived in El Charco, the situation did not improve significantly. Carla recounts how they set up in the park and approached the town's Human Rights Office (Personería del Pueblo) and the Mayor's Office for help, but after receiving no assistance, they had to scavenge cardboard from trash bins to sleep. The family had to beg for survival, facing homelessness and a lack of understanding from those around them.

At the microsystem level, the narrative reveals Carla's family's forced displacement from the village of Rodea, Iscuandé, Nariño. Carla and her family faced homelessness and begging in Iscuandé, where they had to take survival actions like seeking help and collecting support from neighbors. The experience of being seen as "odd" or discriminated against due to their condition illustrates the social difficulties and stigma associated with displacement. The story continues with their displacement to El Charco, Nariño, where the family searches for resources in trash bins and experiences the harsh reality of sleeping in the park and again having to beg for survival.

At the mesosystem level, the impact on Carla's family and the survival strategies they had to implement to cope with adverse conditions are emphasized. At this level, it is observed that the support networks from the government and community were ineffective and failed to protect the family, leaving Carla in a precarious economic and emotional situation.

In the exosystem, the testimony highlights the absence of governmental support in the displacement and adaptation process, as well as the negative perception and stigmatization from the local community. At the macrosystem level, Carla's narrative reflects the structural conditions that contribute to the lack of help and resources for displaced persons, pointing out possible deficiencies in government policies for assisting displaced populations.

Carla's testimony illuminates the harsh reality of the economic and survival difficulties faced by displaced children and their families. Her account underscores how these extreme circumstances expose young people to child labor, humiliation, and social mistreatment, compromising their physical and psychological integrity.

Analyzing this testimony considering statistics and developmental outcomes reveals the prevalence of stigmatization and discrimination as additional risk factors for the mental health and well-being of displaced children and adolescents. Carla's experience emphasizes the urgency of implementing comprehensive policies and programs that address both the material and psychosocial needs of this vulnerable population, as well as social and community-level

interventions that combat prejudice. The family, as Carla's microsystem, served as a protective factor, keeping her surrounded by loved ones with whom she shared and survived the adversities.

#### **4.11. Testimony 11 – Gabriela (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, pp. 127-136)**

Gabriela experienced multiple displacements from her childhood to adolescence, finally arriving in Cartagena at the age of sixteen, coming from Necoclí, Antioquia, in 1993, due to threats and accusations from paramilitary groups. Gabriela recalls that, as the eldest sister, she took on the responsibility of caring for her siblings while her mother worked to obtain food in the city. This role forced her to mature early, and although she studied up to the eleventh grade, she had to sacrifice her education to help support her siblings. The lack of timely institutional responses exacerbated the precariousness that already existed in the countryside, exposing displaced children to situations of exploitation, where violence was legitimized by age and family position.

Stigmatization also affected Gabriela and other displaced students. She recalls how a teacher claimed that the arrival of displaced people from Urabá had made Cartagena “bad,” which made her feel stigmatized. The overload of responsibilities led Gabriela and other families to face secondary individual displacements. Gabriela shared the experience of her younger sister, who, being very young when they arrived in Cartagena, was raised by another woman due to the difficulties their parents faced.

At the microsystem level, the narrative reveals Gabriela's forced maturity at an early age, taking on the care of her siblings and facing significant family responsibilities, including obtaining financial resources. The displacement, motivated by threats from paramilitary groups, led Gabriela to experience stigmatization as a displaced person, even by teachers in her school microsystem. The division of the family, due to the need for third parties to care for her younger siblings, added layers of complexity to her story of uprooting and emotional separation. Gabriela's return to her hometown, Zapata, Necoclí, after sixteen years, was marked by precarious situations and lack of state protection.

At the mesosystem level, the impacts on the family dynamic are evident, with additional responsibilities assumed by Gabriela to care for her younger siblings and her early entry into the workforce. Furthermore, stigmatization and lack of support in the educational environment added difficulties to her adaptation process, as did the separation from her younger sister.

In the exosystem, Gabriela faces challenges related to the lack of resources and institutional support for managing her banana farm. Economic and social conditions affected her stability and hindered the family's return to their homeland. At the macrosystem level, the lack of state protection during the displacement and return becomes a common thread in Gabriela's story. Bureaucratic problems, such as land ownership and farm title issues, persist, highlighting the complexity of the violations experienced by displaced people, affecting them even into adulthood.

Gabriela's testimony highlights the ongoing violence that marks the lives of displaced children and adolescents. Her return to the village in Necoclí, after sixteen years of wandering, did not resolve the precarious situation she faced. Despite receiving some assistance and care, limited in fulfilling her rights, she continued to struggle to recover what she had lost and rebuild her life.

When analyzing these aspects considering statistics and developmental outcomes, Gabriela's case highlights the need to ensure safe return and effective access to basic services, as well as to strengthen protection and support mechanisms for displaced children and adolescents within their family units to prevent sibling separation. Protective factors and resilient development in Gabriela include her persistence and ability to navigate the scarce legal and social resources to defend her rights and rebuild her life.

#### **4.12. Testimony 12- Alejandra (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022c, p. 128)**

Alejandra experienced displacement at the age of twelve, moving from Urrao, Antioquia, to Belén de Umbría, Risaralda, in 2005, because her father refused to pay the extortion demanded by the FARC-EP. Upon reintegrating into the educational system, she faced discrimination and labeling by her peers. Despite her efforts, she struggled to relate to others, and during her high school years, she was able to form a friendship only with a classmate who also had a disability. The discrimination worsened due to her skin color and the accent from her place of origin, which made it even more difficult for her to integrate into the school community.

At the microsystem level, the testimony highlights interactions at school and the difficulty of forming relationships due to prejudices. This context shows the direct impact on Alejandra's daily life, particularly in her immediate educational environment.

There are no mentions of mesosystem-level interactions, suggesting that the narrative focuses on Alejandra's individual experiences at school without exploring broader relationships

in her environment. At the exosystem level, the discrimination she faced at school, related to her skin color and accent, reflects social differences absorbed by groups of children, teenagers, and teachers from their families and communities. These external factors indirectly influenced her educational and social experiences. At the macrosystem level, the testimony does not provide specific information on macroeconomic or sociopolitical factors that may have contributed to the discrimination Alejandra experienced. However, we can infer that the same exosystemic variables reflected in discriminatory face-to-face interactions—such as prejudices based on origin, ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status—reflect the values of an inequitable, classist, and racist culture in the country.

Alejandra's testimony reveals the experience of forced displacement at an early age, marked by discrimination and difficulty integrating into the new community. Her return to the educational system was hindered by her peers' discrimination, exacerbated by factors such as her skin color and accent, with no protective factors identified within the system.

When studying these aspects considering statistics and developmental outcomes, the importance of addressing stigmatization and promoting the social inclusion of displaced children and adolescents in educational contexts is highlighted. These settings are privileged environments for fostering the comprehensive development of all children without distinctions of origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender. Alejandra's case emphasizes the need to implement policies and programs that promote diversity and raise awareness in society—particularly among teachers and the educational community—about displacement experiences and their impacts on young people's lives. Protective factors identified in Alejandra's narrative include her ability to recognize the injustice present in the situations she faced, as well as her reflective capacity on the pain caused by those situations, which she could express in her testimony, suggesting it as a form of denunciation.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Impact of Forced Displacement on Human Development and Mental Health: Consequences for Children and Adolescents**

Forced displacement, as a traumatic and devastating experience, has left deep psychological scars on its victims, especially on children and adolescents. Some of the psychological consequences most reported among victims include depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which in turn have an impact on child development, as

well as relationship and trust issues (World Health Organization, 2024). It is important to note that these consequences are evident in the long term, even when individuals find stable living conditions, and the causes of displacement vary within the context of the Colombian armed conflict. The testimonies of María Victoria, Clara, Diego, Mercedes, Isabel, Víctor, and others provide a mosaic of experiences that reflect the complexity and diversity of traumatic experiences.

Regarding depression and the loss of educational opportunities, María Victoria's testimony shows that she experienced the loss of her loved ones and belongings, and the abrupt interruption of her life in Puerto Lleras, which had deep emotional consequences, as evidenced in the following passage:

Cuando nos pasó todo lo que nos pasó y nos vinimos de Puerto Lleras, mi mamá fue y enterró a mis hermanos, y luego nos fuimos para Coscuez. No conocíamos, pero igual nos fuimos. Llegamos sin ropa ni nada, porque todo se nos había perdido. Cuando llegamos, mi mamá lloraba porque no sabía qué iba a hacer con nosotras, cómo nos iba a alimentar si no conocíamos a nadie. Mi mamá ni había pensado dónde íbamos a dormir, lo único que le importaba era que estuviéramos lejos de esa gente que nos había hecho daño. (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022d, p. 121)

The Comisión de la Verdad highlights how school dropout, a significant impact for displaced children, affected María Victoria's plans and dreams in Bogotá, plunging her reality into a painful loss of educational opportunities. This testimony emphasizes how displacement affects the comprehensive development of children and adolescents, limiting their academic opportunities.

On the other hand, Mercedes' testimony reveals the specific vulnerability of women in the armed conflict. Her testimony highlights how sexual violence, which can begin with harassment and threats, disproportionately impacts women, generating not only psychological trauma but also social and cultural consequences. Furthermore, in this case, we observe how the loss of ethnic or rural identity among displaced women increases their risk of experiencing differentiated violence, contributing to the complexity of the traumatic experience of displacement.

Víctor's testimony, by highlighting the lack of adequate shelter, reveals how deteriorated living conditions affect the physical and mental integrity of displaced children. This testimony illustrates how adequate housing is essential to safeguarding their

comprehensive development and how the denial of this right profoundly impacts children and adolescents.

Regarding the consequences on identity building and social relationships, Isabel's testimony reveals how displacement exposed her to labor exploitation and discrimination. Thus, forced displacement is not only violent because of the uprooting, but also because of the arrival in places where unfavorable economic consequences, psychological violence from discrimination, and lack of social support are experienced, affecting trust in relationships and limiting the construction of protective networks and a positive self-identity.

As Ojalehto & Wang (2008) point out, the characteristics of the physical environments where children and adolescents develop have implications for their identity development. The alteration of geographical environments can have devastating consequences for their social fabric and the construction of their cultural, ethnic, or religious identity. In Víctor's case, we observe how living in a park impacted him, María Victoria being separated from her land, and Mercedes leaving her community. All of them were discriminated against because of their origin and status in the places they arrived.

Experiences of discrimination due to displacement, origin, or socioeconomic status were also identified in the testimonies of: Carla, who describes how she and her family were seen as "strange creatures"; Alejandra, who faced discrimination at school for her skin color, origin, and accent; Sebastián, who was stigmatized in his settlement for being a popular young man, among others. These experiences narrated by adolescents can contribute to a more negative self-concept as they may internalize these derogatory statements. The stigmatization and discrimination that children and adolescents often face in reception areas, as Arellano et al. (2022) point out, constitute a risk factor that can affect their self-esteem and contribute to the development of emotional issues.

According to Carvajal (2002) post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. The analysis of the testimonies reflects the complexity of the traumatic experiences that forced displacement brings to children and adolescents. In most cases, traumatic situations are not only the event that triggered the displacement but also the situations experienced before, during, or after the displacement.

The testimonies reveal experiences of fear and anguish lived by children and adolescents affected by forced displacement. In Oscar's words, the massive flight was due to the imminent threat of the arrival of paramilitaries, illustrating the constant sense of danger that

marked their lives. This fear, fueled by the possibility of collective violence, massacres, and armed confrontations, forced them to abandon their homes hastily to preserve their lives.

On the other hand, María Victoria witnessed the massacre of her loved ones and her experience of solitary flight, which may have exacerbated the fear in her experience of displacement. Trauma also becomes evident when she faces hostile conditions in Bogotá and experiences the abrupt interruption of her hopeful academic plans.

Isabel, for her part, experienced discrimination and stigmatization in her new school environment, exacerbating her difficulty in relating to others. Fear arises from the discrimination based on her skin color, accent, and origin, generating a constant sense of vulnerability.

Clara lived through family separation, generating a sense of orphanhood. She endured the anguish of being separated from her loved ones and living in an unknown and hostile environment while pregnant and being a single mother.

Carla's account also highlights the extreme conditions to which these children and adolescents were subjected during displacement. Hunger, thirst, and lack of clothing became a constant during the three days Clara and her family spent on the streets of Iscuandé. This extreme situation generated not only immediate anxiety, but also persistent stress related to uncertainty and the lack of basic resources to survive. In the testimonies of Clara, Sebastián, and Alejandra, clear manifestations of anxiety and stress generated by the conditions of forced displacement are also observed in the settlement areas.

Clara, in recounting her family's displacement due to the occupation of the region by guerrillas and paramilitaries, demonstrates how the constant threat from armed groups created an environment of distress and permanent stress. Sebastián, through his testimony, shows how the growth of displaced adolescents is affected by the presence of paramilitaries in their new community. His involvement in break dance and interaction with local youth exposed him to new forms of urban violence, of which he and his peers are victims. This illustrates how displacement initially affects in one way, but exclusion and stigmatization may persist, transforming into other forms of violence that will affect the victims later in life. Thus, elevated stress and anxiety are a constant part of the violent reality surrounding their developmental environments.

Alejandra, who was displaced at an early age due to her father's refusal to pay extortion by the FARC-EP, experienced discrimination and stigmatization upon reintegrating into the educational system. Anxiety is evident in her difficulty in relating to others and the

discrimination based on her skin color and accent, exercised by her peers. These factors contribute to persistent stress throughout her schooling experience.

The loss of bonds and social networks is a characteristic of forced displacement and is not a recent phenomenon, but rather a structural element that runs through Colombia's history because of various processes of dispossession and expulsion of populations (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2015). This situation is illustrated in the testimonies of displaced children and adolescents in Colombia. Lucía, in recounting the family and community tragedy, highlights how children and adolescents experienced the loss of essential human and symbolic relationships. While adults worried about what was left behind in terms of economic and symbolic losses, such as homes, lands, and belongings, children and adolescents feel the abrupt disruption of their personal connections, which can affect their socialization and learning processes typical of this stage in life.

Carla, in her testimony, highlights the economic and survival difficulties faced by displaced children. This situation exposed them to child labor in its most extreme forms, putting their physical and psychological integrity at risk. The need to contribute economically to the household and the adult tasks that Carla and other adolescents were forced to confront affected their social relationships and their typical development.

Gabriela, who decided to return to her place of origin after sixteen years of wandering, describes how she faces the difficulty of rebuilding her life and maintaining her home in a context of persistent state neglect over time. This account, like Sebastián's, exemplifies the ongoing violence in the lives of displaced children and adolescents, who, despite settling in another place, receiving assistance or attention for the fulfillment of their rights, continue to fight to recover what was lost, defend their rights, and rebuild their lives. This constant struggle reflects the need to re-establish social, geographical, and identity bonds that allow them to overcome adversities and build or rebuild meaningful and lasting support social networks.

The stigmatization and discrimination mentioned by Gabriela, even from authority figures such as teachers, contributed to the creation of an environment where displaced children and adolescents feel distrust and insecurity. Hostile and stigmatizing social interactions can lead them to perceive themselves as directly or indirectly responsible for the negative transformations in their surroundings, and this can contribute to negative narratives about their worth, affecting their mental and emotional health. The feeling of insecurity in the environment can transform into a sense of distrust towards oneself, affecting the perception of their worth

and abilities, potentially contributing to the development of emotional problems (Arellano et al., 2022; Ungar et al., 2013).

Another example is that of María Victoria, who after multiple moves and temporarily settling in Otanche, Boyacá, experienced the lack of institutional support and the desperate need to find a place to spend the night. Her adolescence was marked by working in precarious conditions in a mine, exposing her to risks and labor exploitation. This context contributed to the generation of distrust towards institutions and the feeling of insecurity in her environment, and possibly towards herself.

This phenomenon is also observed in Isabel's testimony. Upon arriving in Cúcuta from Ábrego, she faced difficulties associated with labor exploitation, loneliness, and uprooting. The vulnerability of displaced girls and adolescents is accentuated in the places they arrive, where they are exploited due to their age, economic needs, and lack of education. Labor exploitation creates distrust towards those seeking to take advantage of their vulnerable situation, and insecurity is manifested in the precariousness of working conditions.

In Víctor's testimony, the lack of adequate shelter is observed as one of the factors that affected him most intensely, and this is common for much of the displaced population, revealing how deteriorated living conditions affected their well-being. The economic need and the difficulties of daily life forced Víctor and his family to engage in precarious jobs, preventing him from studying for about five years. This context generates distrust in stability and economic security, contributing to a constant and generalized sense of insecurity in the environment.

The negative impacts on the development of displaced children and adolescents can be observed in various ways. In the testimonies collected from María Victoria, Isabel, Víctor, Sebastián, Oscar, Lucía, Alejandra, and others, the complexity of the consequences of forced displacement on their development, associated with school dropout, becomes apparent. In the case of María Victoria, who lived through multiple forced relocations, her frustration with school disengagement stands out. The abrupt interruption of educational processes becomes a painful reality for many of these children and adolescents. This finding, identified in most of the testimonies analyzed, highlights this reality as a loss of developmental opportunities, leaving children and adolescents vulnerable to the inability to develop life skills, such as knowledge, peer social networks, and the construction of cultural capital. This negative effect on development is verified as a common factor experienced by this population, previously

reported by the Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (2022).

Additionally, when some children and adolescents manage to re-engage with educational processes, such as in the cases of Diego or Alejandra, they face challenges both in their reintegration and in overcoming discrimination from their peers and teachers. For example, Diego in Medellín, due to administrative and economic issues, expresses the structural barriers that affected the continuity of his education. Alejandra's testimony, on the other hand, exemplifies the experience of discrimination from both peers and educators. In this regard, Bronfenbrenner (2002) points out that experiences during moments of transition and change, such as leaving school or moving to a new one, are crucial developmental moments as they involve a significant effort from the developing individual due to the change in role. Therefore, it is evident that these transitions associated with educational contexts must be addressed in interventions, both to prevent dropouts and to facilitate reintegration, as it is a clear negative consequence experienced by displaced children and adolescents.

Another aspect that affects the development of this population is socioeconomic. For example, Isabel, at the age of fourteen, was forced to work in precarious conditions in Cúcuta, illustrating the labor exploitation that especially affects displaced girls and adolescents. Her testimony reflects the adverse economic consequences that impact the integral development of displaced children, not only through their separation from educational processes but also through their insertion into abusive and harmful labor contexts at an early age. Victor's testimony also exemplifies this reality, as he, due to the lack of proper housing for his family, was forced to contribute economically to the household to obtain resources, which prevented him from studying for about five years.

Integration into receiving communities presents additional difficulties for the social development of children and adolescents, as there is discrimination and exclusion. Alejandra, for instance, when reintegrating into the education system after displacement, recounts experiencing discrimination and being singled out by her peers. Sebastián, after settling in Soacha, narrates how he had to face the reality of paramilitary presence in the area and being stigmatized for engaging in activities like breakdancing. Stigmatization and discrimination emerge as a significant social consequence that can emotionally affect children and adolescents who are victims of forced displacement in the country. This discrimination intensifies according to factors such as origin, gender, and socioeconomic status, which can increase the negative effects on the development of the population and generate vulnerability. Isabel, due

to her age and economic needs, narrates how she was stigmatized and exploited for these reasons. Alejandra recounts that she experienced discrimination and exacerbated accusations because of her skin color and accent from her place of origin. Carla, in her testimony, was called a "weirdo" because of her appearance. Thus, it is evident how discrimination translates into exposure to precarious labor conditions, exclusion, and symbolic violence that puts the physical and psychological integrity of minors at risk.

Exclusion and the difficulties affecting the development of children and adolescents reflect the lack of protection from the State that persists across different regions and over time; even in their return to their places of origin, as seen in Gabriela's case; after the departure of armed groups, as in Diego's case; or after resettlement, as in Sebastián's case. Collectively, these testimonies show that stigmatization and discrimination are not only present in the microsystems, in the daily lives of displaced children and adolescents, affecting their access to opportunities and adaptation, social integration, and emotional well-being, but also reflect the violence that is structurally imposed by the State and society, which does not protect them and imposes social and structural barriers that perpetuate stigmatization and discrimination towards this population, increasing their vulnerability.

The loss of connections and meaningful social networks identified in the testimonies can lead to difficulties in the interpersonal relationships that children and adolescents establish, which are crucial for their development during and after displacement. The testimonies collected reveal the profound impact on their ability to establish and maintain meaningful connections. María Victoria, after multiple relocations and temporary settlements, expresses the rupture of ties with her family; Alejandra, after experiencing displacement at an early age, faces discrimination and labeling from her peers upon reintegrating into the education system; and Sebastián states that his breakdancing friends are pursued and murdered. Thus, the lack and reduction of protective, permanent, and meaningful social networks, which are essential for adaptation, highlight the tremendous challenges children and adolescents face when trying to integrate into new and unfamiliar environments.

It is possible that the adverse situations experienced by the protagonists before, during, and after forced displacement have left deep and lasting psychological scars that have affected their development and social adaptation. The testimonies of María Victoria, Clara, Diego, Mercedes, Isabel, Víctor, Sebastián, Óscar, Lucía, Carla, Gabriela, and Alejandra allow us to identify some difficulties in this adaptation.

Although the testimonies analyzed do not explicitly mention "anxiety" or PTSD symptoms, the narrative elements of traumatic experiences, the losses described, and the adaptation difficulties identified suggest that such psychological disorders may have developed or could have developed in the cases analyzed. The experience of hasty flight, the constant fear of violence, and the uncertainty about being able to meet basic needs are conditions conducive to the development of these mental health conditions. Depression and hopelessness are also not explicitly mentioned in the testimonies, but they could also be expected consequences. The loss of loved ones in violent circumstances or through disappearance, as in María Victoria's and Sebastián's cases, or the loss of a friend, as in Lucía's case; the loss of home, possessions, and close relationships are traumatic experiences that can trigger feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness. Additionally, the lack of adequate support and exposure to new situations of violence, such as economic precariousness or discrimination, may contribute to the development of mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

To sum up, the impact on the emotional and social development of these young people after displacement, the abrupt disruption of meaningful interpersonal relationships, and the facing of new roles without support and resources, can have lasting repercussions. These effects can lead to isolation and feelings of inferiority and frustration, which may affect mental health in the medium and long term. Displacement also creates problems with trust and security in both the environment and oneself. Stigmatization and discrimination, even by authority figures such as teachers, directly impact the building of trust relationships and the development of self-worth. The feeling of insecurity becomes rooted in the perception of being directly or indirectly responsible for the negative changes, as well as in the perception of being incapable of solving the problems.

Additionally, difficulties in learning and adaptation represent another dimension of the harmful psychological impacts of displacement. Gaps in educational processes and challenges in adapting to new environments can contribute to the development of emotional and mental stress. Vulnerability in family relationships also manifests because of displacement, reflecting the lack of significant and effective support networks that could help cope with stress. The emotional burden and additional responsibilities that arise during and after displacement contribute to the emotional vulnerability of these children and adolescents.

Thus, it is evident that forced displacement complicates the construction of these young people's identity and presents a significant challenge to their development. The loss of cultural, family, and territorial roots hinders the development of a positive self-image, and hostile social

environments, without effective support networks, can have harmful consequences for the mental health and emotional well-being of the affected children and adolescents.

## **5.2. Resilience as a protective factor: Emphasis on children and adolescents**

Despite the overwhelming difficulties and traumas experienced, the testimonies of children and adolescents also reveal remarkable demonstrations of resilience. The ability to face adverse situations and adapt to hostile environments is manifested in various aspects.

Firstly, emotional resilience is evident in many of these young people as they cope with the loss of their homes, loved ones, and family environments. Through narratives like Gabriela's, those who take on leadership and responsibility roles amid adversity show emotional resilience that helps them maintain some balance in difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, resilience is shown in the search for support and solidarity among peers, as highlighted in Alejandra's story and her friendship with a classmate with a disability. Connecting with others who have experienced similar situations demonstrates the ability of these young people to build support networks and find strength within the community.

Resilience is also reflected in the determination of many children and adolescents to continue their education despite the obstacles. Despite interruptions and gaps in their learning processes, some persist in their pursuit of knowledge, as illustrated by Alejandra's testimony, who graduated despite the social and academic difficulties she faced upon entering a new school environment.

The ability to adapt to unfamiliar urban environments, as experienced by many when they arrived in cities after displacement, also highlights the resilience of these young people. The need to seek sustenance and rebuild their lives in unknown surroundings tests their adaptability and resilience.

Finally, returning to their communities of origin, as Gabriela did after sixteen years of displacement, is also an expression of resilience. Despite the persistent adverse conditions, some choose to return and rebuild their lives in their places of origin, demonstrating a deep connection to their roots and a remarkable determination to overcome challenges.

## **5.3. Tools to Promote Resilience: Emphasis on Children and Adolescents**

In the experiences that children and adolescents went through due to forced displacement, the collected testimonies reveal the need to cultivate resilience in children and

adolescents. In this regard, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2010) provides key recommendations that promote resilience in children and adolescents.

First, building strong relationships emerges as a cornerstone. Gabriela's story highlights the importance of establishing strong social connections to counteract the loss of family and community ties during displacement. Fostering the development of new relationships and strengthening family bonds could have cushioned the negative impact of her displacement, providing the necessary support system.

Oscar's narrative, the rural teenager, underscores the significant connection between resilience and contributing to others. Encouraging displaced youth to engage in age-appropriate volunteer activities could not only provide them with a sense of purpose but also show them that, despite their own difficulties, they can make a positive impact on others.

Maintaining daily routines appears as a crucial component for providing structure and comfort in displacement environments marked by uncertainty. Lucía's experience emphasizes the need to address the emotional needs of children, highlighting the importance of establishing stable routines that offer a sense of normality and security.

Another central aspect is teaching children to care for themselves. Alejandra's story, who experienced unknown changes when moving to Belén de Umbría, highlights the importance of instilling healthy habits and the need for time dedicated to rest and play. The development of self-care skills emerges as a key factor in promoting resilience.

Progressing towards achievable goals and celebrating accomplishments, no matter how small, presents itself as an essential catalyst for self-esteem and the ability to face challenges. Oscar's story suggests that recognizing and valuing individual achievements can strengthen resilience by providing a clear path to success, even in situations of displacement.

Nurturing positive self-esteem and maintaining an optimistic perspective are interconnected elements in building resilience. Gabriela, who took responsibility for her siblings during displacement, emphasizes the importance of helping children understand that past hardships contribute to their present strength. The ability to maintain a positive outlook even in adverse situations thus becomes an essential skill.

Seeking opportunities for self-discovery in difficult moments is an effective strategy for fostering resilience. Oscar's story illustrates how facing challenges can offer meaningful opportunities for learning and personal growth. Encouraging displaced children to reflect on what they are facing and how it may contribute to their self-understanding becomes a valuable strategy.

Finally, accepting change as an intrinsic part of life reveals itself as essential in building resilience. Lucía's experience highlights how unmanaged changes can negatively affect children. Facilitating the understanding that change is constant and can be replaced by new goals can help displaced children develop resilience.

#### **5.4. Limitations of the Research**

Despite the valuable contributions provided by this research, it is necessary to acknowledge and address some limitations that could influence the interpretation of the results and the generalization of the conclusions. First, the qualitative nature of the collected testimonies may involve some subjectivity in the interpretation of forced displacement experiences, as they are inherently influenced by individual perception. Although efforts have been made to maintain objectivity in the analysis, the subjectivity inherent in personal accounts could introduce certain biases.

Another notable limitation lies in the representativeness of the sample. Although diversity has been sought in the collected testimonies, the selection of participants has been limited by logistical and access factors. The lack of equitable representation from different geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts may affect the generalization of the findings to the overall population of displaced children and adolescents.

Furthermore, it is important to consider that the research focused on specific testimonies of forced displacement, and extrapolating the results to other forms of trauma or displacement may require caution. The uniqueness of the experiences related to forced displacement could limit the applicability of the findings to different situations.

Additionally, the temporal nature of the research constitutes another limitation. Since the testimonies were collected during a specific period, the evolution of the participants' experiences over time has not been thoroughly addressed. This may limit the complete understanding of the temporal dynamics of the psychological aftermath of forced displacement in children and adolescents.

From a methodological standpoint, it is recognized that the interviews may have generated some level of distrust or reservation among participants, potentially limiting the depth of disclosure regarding their experiences. Although strategies have been implemented to mitigate this impact, the influence of the interviewer-participant dynamic on the truthfulness and openness of the accounts cannot be completely ruled out.

## 6. Conclusions

Through the exploration of the impact of forced displacement on the human development and mental health of children and adolescents, this research sheds light on the deep and lasting consequences this traumatic experience leaves on the young psyche. The collected evidence, based on moving and revealing testimonies, has demonstrated the persistence of anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress, and depression, highlighting the urgent need for adequate and contextually sensitive psychosocial interventions.

The narratives offer a vivid view of how constant fear, the loss of home, and the disruption of fundamental relationships affect not only emotional well-being but also the cognitive and social development of displaced youth. Identity construction presents a significant challenge, with the loss of cultural and territorial roots further complicating the reconciliation between the past and present of these children and adolescents.

However, amidst these adversities, a thread of inspiring resilience emerges. Despite the extreme conditions, many displaced youths exhibit an astounding ability to face adversity, maintain meaningful social connections, and persist in their educational efforts. Resilience, manifested in various forms, emerges as a crucial protective factor that can mitigate the negative impact of displacement and offer a path to overcoming challenges.

The tools proposed to promote resilience, according to the recommendations of the American Psychological Association, provide practical guidance for formulating effective interventions. Building strong relationships, contributing to others, maintaining daily routines, self-care, and fostering achievable goals emerge as essential elements for strengthening resilience in displaced children and adolescents.

However, the research acknowledges its limitations, including the qualitative nature of the testimonies and the limited representativeness of the sample. These limitations urge future research to address the diverse dimensions of forced displacement more comprehensively. In conclusion, this study provides a significant contribution to understanding the psychological and social complexities associated with forced displacement, highlighting the urgency of holistic and resilience-based approaches to support the well-being of affected children and adolescents.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1.**

*Research Ethics Committee*

**MIEMBROS**

DIANA ROCIO BERNAL CAMARGO  
ABOGADA; ESP. DERECHOS HUMANOS; PHD BIOÉTICA  
Y BIOJURÍDICA- PRESIDENTE

ALIX ROCIO BARRIOS MÉNDEZ  
MÉDICO; MSc EPIDEMIOLOGÍA  
SECRETARIA TÉCNICA

CLAUDIA MARGARITA CORTES GARCIA ANTRÓPOLOGA;  
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FRANKLIN GIOVANNI SOLER ESPARRAGOZA PSICÓLOGO;  
MSc BIOÉTICA; MSc PSICOLOGÍA.

JUAN THOMAS ORDONEZ ROTH ANTRÓPOLOGO; MSc  
ANTRÓPOLOGÍA; PHD ANTRÓPOLOGÍA MÉDICA

ANDREA CAROLINA PADILLA  
ABOGADA; MSc EN DERECHO; MSc EN MEDIACIÓN  
EUROPEA; PHD EN CIENCIAS JURÍDICAS.

OSCAR JULIAN PERDOMO CHARRY  
INGENIERO ELECTRÓNICO; MSc EN INGENIERÍA  
ELÉCTRICA CON CONCENTRACIÓN EN INGENIERÍA  
BIOMÉDICA; PHD EN INGENIERÍA DE SISTEMAS Y  
COMPUTACIÓN.

MARTHA ISABEL BAUTISTA DUEÑAS  
AUXILIAR ADMINISTRATIVA



DVQ005 801 – CS477

Bogotá D. C., 17 de agosto de 2023

Doctora

**KOLJA MENZE**

Investigadora principal

Estudio: “Consecuencias psicológicas del desplazamiento forzado en niños, niñas y adolescentes en el marco del conflicto armado colombiano”.  
Bogotá, D. C.

Apreciada investigadora,

El Comité de Ética en investigación de la Universidad del Rosario (CEI-UR), evaluó de forma expedita su proyecto de investigación. Fecha de recepción: 27 de julio de 2023.

Una vez realizada la revisión expedita de su proyecto “Consecuencias psicológicas del desplazamiento forzado en niños, niñas y adolescentes en el marco del conflicto armado colombiano”. Se considera exento de evaluación por el CEI-UR, este proyecto no implica el contacto con seres humanos, ni especies biológicas; solo se revisará literatura.

Le recomendamos el uso responsable de la información, que la información consignada en los resultados sea veraz, y no se vaya a afectar la reputación de los autores analizados.

Para el Comité de Ética es importante acompañarla. Por favor no dude en contactarnos en caso de tener alguna inquietud o de necesitar apoyo para el análisis de alguna situación específica. De igual forma le recomendamos notificar cualquier modificación en el diseño del estudio que requiera la evaluación y aprobación por el CEI-UR.

Cordialmente,

*Alix Rocio Barrios Méndez*  
**ALIX ROCIO BARRIOS MÉNDEZ,**  
Secretaria Técnica.  
(CEI-UR)



c.c. Archivo  
Proyectó: Martha Isabel Bautista

Este comité se rige por los lineamientos jurídicos y éticos del país a través de las resoluciones 8430 de 1993 y 2378 de 2008 del Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social. Igualmente, se siguen los acuerdos contemplados en la declaración de Helsinki (Fortaleza, Brasil 2013) y de la Conferencia Internacional de Armonización para las Buenas Prácticas Clínicas. Recuerde visitar nuestra página web, en donde encontrará información actualizada de los procedimientos del Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad del Rosario, así como cursos en ética de la investigación de acceso libre. <https://urosario.edu.co/investigacion/comite-de-etica-en-investigacion>