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Research Paper

The Impact of the Tigray War on Persons with Disabilities and the Failure of Humanitarian Responses

Daniel Girmay Teka[1*], Askual Hagos[1]

[1] *Department of philosophy and Civics Studies, College of Social Science and Humanities, Mekelle University. Tigray, Ethiopia.*

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***Corresponding Author:**
Daniel Girmay Teka
Email:
daniel.girmay@mu.edu.et

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Abstract: This study examines the profound impact of the 2020-2022 war in Tigray on persons with disabilities with a focus on the failure of international humanitarian responses. Before the eruption of the war, approximately 169,000 persons with disabilities in Tigray received government support, but the war disrupted vital services, increasing vulnerability to violence, displacement, and exclusion. The study focuses on the psychological, economic, and social consequences of the war for persons with disabilities, alongside the insufficient intervention by local and international organizations. Using qualitative data from secondary sources, interviews (12) individual with disability and focus group discussions (2 group with total of 14 participant), key informant 9 total of 25 participant through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The research identifies barriers such as institutional neglect, lack of disability-inclusive aid, and compounded vulnerabilities from intersecting factors like gender and age. The study suggests for policy reforms to improve humanitarian responses to persons with disabilities who have been affected by the war in order to ensure that t their rights and needs are addressed in future interventions.

Keywords: Forced Displacement, Humanitarian Response, Persons with Disabilities, Tigray War, War and Conflict.

1. Introduction

Persons with Disabilities as a social category in society are defined differently by various institutions and legal frameworks. The difference in definition across different institutions and legal frameworks reflects variance in focus. While some institutions and legal frameworks emphasize medical conditions, others focus on functional limitations based on the types and severity of disabilities. For instance, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons defines persons with disabilities as persons who could not fully fulfill the necessities of their lives as a result of physical or mental impairments [1]. With higher prevalence in developing countries, an estimated one billion people that constitutes 15% of the global population, live with disabilities. 17.6% of the Ethiopian population is believed to be affected by disability, and this figure is exacerbated due to ongoing wars and conflicts [2]. Given the vulnerability of persons with disabilities in crises, investigating the impact of the war in Tigray on this group is essential.

During wars and humanitarian crises, persons with disability are often left behind or unable to escape violence, making them particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological harm [3]. They face increased risks of violence, including sexual assault, forced displacement, as well as exposure to psychological trauma [4]. Research has highlighted the neglect of persons with disability in conflict zones, where they endure violent attacks and inadequate humanitarian responses.

During the war in Tigray (2020-2022), persons with disability were disproportionately affected. Before the war, about 169,000 persons with disabilities in the region received government support. [5]. However, the war disrupted humanitarian assistance, leaving persons with disability without access to basic services and exposing them to displacement, injuries, and increased risks [6]. Despite their vulnerability, international organizations failed to prioritize persons with disabilities in aid programs, neglecting to provide essential support such as food, shelter, and protection.

In Mekelle City, persons with disability experienced severe psychological trauma, social exclusion, and human rights violations [7]. Many were abandoned when families fled, further exacerbating their physical and psychological suffering [8]. Even after the cessation of active fighting, international organizations continued to neglect persons with disabilities in Tigray, failing to fulfill their obligations under international law [9]. This study examines why international organizations failed to adequately support persons with disabilities during and after the war in Tigray, with a particular focus on the situation in Mekelle City.

The 2020-2022 war on Tigray has caused massive-scale human and material destruction. Although the impact of the war is so broad, its specific impact on the most marginalized section of society, persons with disabilities, deserves special investigation [10]. With the outbreak of the war, many persons with disabilities were left behind as their relatives and caretakers fled [11]. This situation exposed them to varied forms of violence and exclusion from social services [12]. Taking this problem into account, this study focused on examining the impact of the war on persons with disabilities in Mekelle City, with a particular emphasis on the lack of response from the international community during and after the war [13].

Although the crises caused by the war gained international attention, humanitarian organizations like the World Food Program, the International Organization for Migration, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Children's Fund failed to significantly address the needs of persons with disabilities in Tigray [14]. The regional Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs reported that 169,000 persons with disability were receiving government support before the war [15]. Accordingly, this study examined the adequacy of support and how persons with disabilities survived after the war broke out.

Various assessments have highlighted the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Tigray, including the limitations in humanitarian aid in terms of food, medical supplies, and recovery. Reports from UNHCR (2021) and World Vision (2020) document obstacles that hindered access to essential services due to socially constructed structures, institutional factors, and information gaps [16]. The Joint Investigation Team of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also found evidence of direct attacks on persons with disabilities, including physical assault and sexual violence [17]. However, few studies have been conducted on the response of international organizations to the needs of persons with disabilities during the war in Tigray [18]. This study has examined why the concerned international organizations failed to meet these needs, despite the urgent demands for multi-sectoral humanitarian interventions. The study also examined potential remedies, such as increased government attention, public awareness campaigns, and stronger support from international institutions [19]. By investigating these

issues, the study aimed at shedding light on the unmet needs of persons with disabilities in Tigray and offering recommendations for improving humanitarian responses to rectify the crises.

2. Review Literature

2.1. Understanding Disability

The war on Tigray, which broke out in November 2020, resulted in a tragic humanitarian crisis in Tigray. The war involved varied actors alongside the Ethiopian National Defense Forces, which include the Eritrean Defense Forces, the Amhara Armed Forces (Amhara Special Police, Fano and Militia), and other Ethiopian regions' militias and special police forces [20].In addition to these forces, the war also involved other external actors like the Arab Emirates in terms of logistics support to the Ethiopian government [21]. The war was a total war that caused incalculable human and resource destruction. Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray and the subject of this study, was heavily affected by the war [22]. Particularly, the impact of the war is more severe on persons with disabilities within the city [23]. They have been easily exposed to extreme vulnerability to risks associated with the war, such as restricted access to social services (healthcare, education, and rehabilitation) and other basic amenities.

2.1.1. Disability in War and Humanitarian Crises

Wars generate profound challenges for people with disabilities, particularly, in situations where social and government services are disrupted, infrastructure is destroyed, and humanitarian organizations are denied space to provide relief assistance to the needy people. [24] stress that in war affected areas, persons with disabilities frequently exposed to vulnerabilities like violence, neglect, and displacement from their localities. Such people are less able to escape violence because of their limited ability to flee, easily exposed to additional risks of physical injury, and largely lack access to necessary services and facilities. As [25] pointed out, the humanitarian sector's response often fails to address the essential needs of people with disabilities, who are among the most marginalized section of the society and easily exposed to conflict related risks.

2.1.2. The Issue of Disability in Humanitarian Response

Although they are vital, humanitarian responses like the provision of relief aid, frequently fail to sufficiently address the basic needs of marginalized groups such as people with disabilities. As [26) shows that humanitarian responses by the international community often overlook the specific barriers that hinder people with disabilitiesto have access to basic necessities like food, shelter, and other amenities as well as transportation in times of conflict or war crisis. As [27] point out that the mainstream humanitarian frameworks and practices tend to generalize needs, overlooking the multifaceted, complex and varied experiences of people with disabilities. With the outbreak of the war in November 2020, the international community's response to the crisis in Tigray faced similar criticisms, with persons with disabilities faced severe problems due to such systemic limitations. In this regard, the issue of people with disabilities in Mekelle City, a subject matter of this study, is a case in point.

2.1.3. Impact of the War on people with disabilities in Mekelle City

The war on Tigray significantly affected Mekelle City in varied respects. Artillery and aerial bombings resulted in substantial damage on residential houses, business enterprises and health as well as education infrastructures. As [29] explains that the damages caused on healthcare facilities and interruption of vital services seriously affected Persons with Disabilitieswho require regular and special attention and/or treatment as per level and specify of their problems. A number of people with pre-existing disabilities underwent additional injury because of the war. This also caused a substantial increase in the number of Persons with Disabilitiesin Mekelle city. As located in a war zone, this situation in the city, as [30] note, new disabilities such as amputations and severe trauma are common outcomes, which strained and make social services (health, education and others) weak and fragile.

2.1.4. Increased Vulnerability to Violence and Abuse

With their pre-existing marginalized status, as a result of the war, persons with disabilities in Mekelle City further exposed to vulnerability to physical and psychological violence in varied respects. This has been the case because people with disabilities are often easily exposed to become the target of abuse in war settings due to their social marginalization and their limited ability to escape violence

and defend themselves (31). Particularly, women and children with disabilities are more exposed to heightened risk of mistreatment and abandonment in times of war and conflict related crises. A critical problem in this case, as [32] points out is that in varied circumstances across societies in the contemporary international system, the vulnerability of Persons with Disabilities to violence, exploitation and abuse is often overlooked at any (local and international) interventions. This has been the case in Tigray since the outbreak of the war in November 2020.

2.1.5. Displacement and Social Exclusion

As a result of the war, Mekelle saw huge displacement, with thousands of people forced into collective sites or internally displaced people camps. Displacement for persons with disabilities is often understood as the denial of access to basic services (healthcare, education, rehabilitation, etc) and necessities. Congruent to this assumption, [33] claim that people with disabilities in Mekelle City were often denied or excluded from the relief assistance during and after. people with disabilities also faced physical barriers to have access to IDP camps due to limited infrastructure like poor road networks and less accessible shelters. Moreover, their needs were also largely overlooked as concerned bodies more focused on able-bodied individuals in the process of distributing relief and other forms of assistance.

2.1.6. International Humanitarian Response to the Tigray Conflict

The United Nations and concerned bodies like the United States of America (USA), the European Union (EU) and non-governmental organizations involving in advocacy and providing relief assistance responded to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Tigray. Nevertheless, such organizations have been criticized for their slow pace of response to the nearly humanitarian tragedy in Tigray. Moreover, they have been also blamed for their failure to properly coordinate their responses and for the exclusion of the vulnerable sections of the society in their responses, among which the people with disabilities are the most marginalized ones. [34] explains why the international organizations failed to quickly and adequately respond to the crisis of the war in Tigray. He outlines the disruption of supply chains, lack of security and logistical problems as the main challenges to reach the needy people in a conflict zone, Tigray. On top of this, however, in Tigray, humanitarian responses often inadequately tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities who particularly need accessible facilities that would help them quickly rehabilitate and interventions to ensure essential amenities for them are adequately available.

2.1.7. Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Action

International rules to govern humanitarian actions, like the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Disability and Emergency, advocate and call for the removal of the exclusion of persons with disability in all kinds and stages of the humanitarian intervention. [35]A humanitarian response that adequately includes persons with disability in war and conflict-related crises is supposed to address not only physical accessibility but also the inclusion of persons with disability in the decision-making processes [36]. Contrary to the international requirement, however, these rules or guidelines have not been fully implemented in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. As [37] report shows, although attempts were made to address the needs of persons with disability, disability-inclusive actions for broader disability-inclusive actions were not adequately incorporated into the general response framework in Tigray.

2.1.8. Role of International Advocacy and Policy

The international community has attempted to put diplomatic pressure and influence the actions of the Ethiopian government during and after the 2020-2022 war on Tigray. However, the international advocacy for the rights and needs of Persons with Disabilities in the war lacked the required focus on Persons with Disabilities. As [38] notes, the efforts for international advocacy have been more focused on the overall human rights violations and humanitarian access. Therefore, it lacked enough attention to the specific demands and needs of Persons with Disabilities. This problem has been reflected in the limited efforts to address the problems faced by Persons with Disabilities during and after the war. The international community, through diplomatic pressure, has attempted to influence the Ethiopian government's actions, but it has lacked effective results to particularly ease the challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities.

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2.4. Theoretical Perspectives

To study the impact of the 2020-2022 war on Tigray on persons with disabilities in the region in general and the subject of this study, Mekelle City, and the interventions made by the international community in an integrated approach that combines four theoretical perspectives, which include the Social Model of Disability, Human Rights Approach, Intersectionality Theory and Capability Approach, would provide an easy and comprehensive understanding. These theories provide a unique perspective to examine and make sense of the problems faced by Persons with Disabilities in times of armed conflicts. However, a single theory could not adequately address the challenges faced by Persons with Disabilities in the context of the war in Tigray, specifically, in Mekelle City.

2.5. Social Model of Disability

As expressed by [28], the Social Model of Disability postulates that disability as it is not an inherent condition of the individual, but rather the consequence of social and environmental obstructions that hider adequate participation in varied respects. Based on this view, it is not the injury/impairment itself that makes individuals disable, but rather the societal constructions and the physical environment that fail to embrace diversity and difference [29]. The framework of the social model of disability is relevant to analyze the challenges faced by PWDs within the context of the war on Tigray, where destruction of infrastructure made it difficult for this vulnerable group to have access to aid and the necessary social services.

The war on Tigray resulted in incalculable destruction. It almost destroyed healthcare and school facilities and severely damaged transportation systems. The overall damage on such infrastructures further complicated the preexisting obstructions to the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, making it more problematic for them to have access to social services and support schemes [29]. This is because less accessible road infrastructure and buildings where services are provided, and the destruction of community spaces, make Persons with Disabilities more vulnerable and isolated; hence, the challenges they face become harder and more complicated.

Instead of focusing solely on the individual impairment, the Social Model of Disability emphasizes more on achieving changes in the environmental and structures for systematic societal obstructions for disability inclusion. Societal failure in the context of the Tigray conflict, the failure to ensure inclusiveness in service provisions in war-affected areas, as it has been the case in Tigray, is a primary reason for the plight of Persons with Disabilities. As noted by the United Nations, if critical infrastructures are destroyed, persons with disabilities, as the most marginalized groups in society, are disproportionately affected, not only because of their physical injury but also because of the social

constructions that fail to embrace differences in post-war contexts. In this case, the Social Model of Disability calls for societal change in post-war contexts. In other words, it underscores that reconstruction and recovery processes in a post-war context should emphasize inclusive projects that would meet the needs of all sections of society [30].

2.6. Human Rights Approach

As specified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Human Rights Approach stresses that Persons with Disabilities have innate rights that shall be recognized and protected by state and international organizations. The approach also emphasizes that Persons with Disabilities are allowed to have the rights enjoyed by all other sections of society. Among other things, these rights include healthcare and education rights, the right to life and unrestricted participation in society. Employing this model to the war on Tigray shows the failure of both the Ethiopian federal government and the international community to ensure and protect the rights of Persons with Disabilities during and in the aftermath of the war which resulted in physical, social and economic suffers on members of this marginalized group.

As there was grave violation of basic human rights during the war on Tigray, mainly in relation to Persons with Disabilities' access to crucial services like humanitarian aid, health or medical care and the protection of such marginalized section of the society from any form of abuse and physical violence. The infrastructural destruction of health, education, and transportation systems has more impacted Persons with Disabilities than the other sections of society by denying them access to basic services and amenities.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to examine and understand the complex experiences of persons with disabilities in Mekelle City during the 2020-2022 war on Tigray, gathering rich, in-depth insights into their lived experiences, perceptions, and emotions in their natural setting. The interpretive nature of this method enables the researcher to make sense of the meaning behind participants' responses, identifying common themes and patterns. Primary data are gathered through semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable direct, face-to-face conversations to explore specific themes in depth, such as personal challenges, emotional and physical conditions, and the presence or lack of support from local and international organizations. Focus group discussions create a collaborative forum for participants to share collective experiences, interact with one another, and outline shared support systems. Key informant interviews are conducted with leaders of local organizations, relevant local authorities, and international organizations to gather institutional insights regarding specific measures taken and the challenges limiting effective interventions. Secondary data supplement these primary sources through online books, journal articles, UN and agency reports, and regional and national government policy papers.

A non-probability sampling procedure using purposive and judgmental sampling techniques identifies and selects knowledgeable participants based on their status as persons with disabilities living in Mekelle City during the war. Additionally, a snowball sampling technique is employed, utilizing recommendations from initial participants to locate further key informants and FGD attendees who reflect the attitudes of the target population.

Data analysis and interpretation rely on qualitative techniques involving continuous data reduction, selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and organizing data into words, clusters, and segments to construct patterns without losing valuable information. Finally, ethical considerations are strictly maintained: the researcher secures free and informed consent without coercion, avoids deceptive techniques that could yield negative consequences for informants, and ensures strict confidentiality and anonymity by withholding participants' identities.

4. Findings and Discussion

A total of 18 respondents participated in this study. They were selected from diverse backgrounds, reflecting variation in age, gender, and education level. Both key informants and participants in focus group discussions included a mix of younger and older individuals, with wide representation across different persons with disabilities as a group within the society. Gender was fairly balanced, with both male and female were equally participated. In terms of educational background, individuals with primary school education and higher education degrees, including first- and second-degree holders,

participated. Such a varied range of demographic composition of the respondents was helpful for adequately understanding the issue or topic of the study.

4.1. Compounded Vulnerabilities

From the perspective of intersectionality, multiple factors intersect with disability to create compounded vulnerabilities. This was the case during the war in Tigray. As views of the participants in the focus group discussions conducted for the purpose of this study show, women with disabilities, for example, faced the double burden of gender and disability discrimination. As families fled to safety, many women with disabilities were left behind, increasing their exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation. Likewise, children with disabilities were particularly vulnerable, unable to escape attacks, specifically airstrikes, and left without adequate care, education, and protection.

In this case, one respondent recalled:

> *"I was shocked because the Ethiopian soldiers were executing a disabled person because he was a fighter, and I was going back into a psychological crisis".*

The physical and psychological impact of the war on persons with disabilities in Tigray has been profound, further deepening their existing vulnerabilities and creating new or overwhelming challenges. As group discussions conducted for the purpose of this study show, the emotional toll of the war on persons with disabilities has been devastating, with a large number of them felt fear, anxiety, and depression. The destruction of social support systems, coupled with inadequate mental health services, has complicated these conditions.

As one participant shared, reflecting on the intense emotional strain caused by the war:

> *"I felt confused because there was no one to guide me when the airstrike hit. The fear and distress left lasting scars in my mind. I became anxious and fearful, overwhelmed by disappointment. The war darkened my hopes, and I inherited deep fears and anxieties, leaving me feeling empty and trapped in the past".*

This emotional disorder, driven by both the violence of the war and the lack of psychological support, has left many persons with disabilities feeling trapped in their trauma, unable to move forward from the overwhelming fear and confusion they experienced.

Additionally, persons with disabilities in Tigray face physical risks that others may be better able to escape. Many persons with disabilities are at greater risk of being caught in fighting or bombings, as they struggle to flee or find refuge. Due to their mobility challenges, they were often left behind when communities flee from attacks. Many relied on the assistance of relatives to escape or move to relatively safer places, and even then, they were faced with limited access to essential resources such as food, water, and sanitation.

For those who manage to flee, humanitarian assistance was often inaccessible or inadequate. Humanitarian workers themselves faced significant insecurity, and reports from organizations like Doctors without Borders described the looting and vandalism of medical supplies in Tigray, leaving the most vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, without critical support.

As one participant explained:

> *"I was shocked because the Ethiopian soldiers were executing the disabled for being he was a fighter, and I was going back into a psychological crisis. persons with disabilities like me have generally been greatly affected by the war more than anyone."*

This statement underscores the extreme vulnerability of persons with disabilities, who have not only faced direct violence but also the compounded trauma of exclusion and being targets due to their disabilities.

The combination of physical risk, lack of resources, and widespread insecurity led to an immense psychological burden.

As a UNHCR worker noted:

> *"The Tigray war has had severe impact on individuals with disabilities in Mekelle, which further complicated their existing problems that led to additional challenges of impairment".*

As the feelings of the participants in focus group discussions showed, the additional impairment conditions resulted in deeply intertwined and continuing challenges of survival and scarcity of support for persons with disabilities in the region.

One participant described the compounded difficulties they experienced during the war:

> *"When my salary was cut off because of the war, I was filled with despair and anxiety as the children cried because their needs were not met. I was experiencing a series of fears, despair, and mental instability, as the chances of disabled people escaping fighter planes were slim. persons with disabilities have been greatly affected by the war more than anyone. The war, coupled with the siege, has traumatized persons with disabilities in the region. persons with disabilities of all categories have been helpless and in a very desperate situation. The situation has tripled their problems disability, poverty, and trauma".*

4.2. Impact of the War on the Economic and Social Life of PWDs

Socially and economically, the war on Tigray has severely affected persons with disabilities in Mekelle City. Before the war, many people with disabilities in the City were already living in poverty, but the war deepened their financial difficulties. The demolition of business enterprises and the loss of employment opportunities left many in a vulnerable economic position. Discrimination, as a result of impairment, in the labor market further marginalized Peoples with disabilities, which led a large number of them into deeper and worse cycles of poverty. As participants of focus group discussions posit, with limited support systems available, some Peoples with disabilities were forced to depend on charity or resort to begging in order to survive.

As one respondent in a group discussion pointed out:

> *"We have a very limited opportunity to improve our economic well-being, because we face exclusion and being treated as if we are not able to work. When I take myself as an example, the seventeen (17) months of unpaid salary during the war put me in an economic crisis. I was in business but struggled to cover basic needs because thieves would rob my savings. At times, I lacked essentials like clothes, shoes, soap, and ointment, and even had lice in my hair".*

This stark account highlights the harsh realities of the economic deprivation many people with disabilities faced during the war. Despite meeting the necessary qualifications, many individuals with disabilities in Mekelle City have been excluded from employment opportunities. On top of this, one of the most devastating effects of the war has been the destruction of small-scale business enterprises that people with disabilities had established, which led them to remain without any means of income. With the rise in unemployment rates, the financial situation for people with disabilities has also grown increasingly dire.

Along with these financial struggles, the social impacts on Peoples with disabilities have been equally severe. As a result of the destruction of community structures and social networks by the war, marginalization of people with disabilities was worsened during the war. The collapse of the existing social networks left people with disabilities without the social support they once relied on, and the overall condition of people with disabilities, which is expressed by the critical symptoms of psychological disorder, exacerbated their feeling of isolation.

4.3. Responses from Government and International Organizations

Despite the pre-existence of some programs aimed at supporting people with disabilities, the response from the Ethiopian government and international organizations to the challenges faced by this

vulnerable group during the Tigray war was not adequate. While some organizations like UNICEF and IOM attempted to distribute aid, their efforts were strongly hindered by logistical limitations and a lack of disability-inclusive interventions. Such limitations resulted in several instances where humanitarian aid failed to reach people with disabilities, and even when aid was provided, it often did not meet the specific needs of this vulnerable group. As participants in group discussions expressed, the lack of expertise among humanitarian workers in supporting people with disabilities further contributed to the inadequacy of the response.

Moreover, as one key informant remarked:

> *"The focus of international organizations on people with disabilities was minimal. The main challenges they face included overlooking the needs of people with disabilities under the urgency of emergency response."*

Regardless of the attempts by organizations such as Bright Future, SNE (Special Educational Needs in Ethiopia), CRS, OSA, IOM, USAID, and UNICEF, efforts to assist people with disabilities during the war were inadequate and poorly coordinated. Several international organizations struggled with the complexities of the situation, which resulted in unequal distribution of aid. As some participants of group discussions repeatedly expressed, people with disabilities were often excluded from getting the assistance they needed, with some aid being allocated to a select few individuals based on unclear criteria. Moreover, they also argued that there was little oversight to ensure that aid reached its intended recipients, and some intermediaries tasked with distributing assistance lacked the commitment to serving the people with disabilities community effectively.

Along with these challenges, institutional barriers have long stalled the full participation of people with disabilities in varied sectors such as education, healthcare, and employment. Regardless of the existing policies designed to promote inclusion, discrimination and inadequate infrastructure continue to isolate people with disabilities. According to a survey conducted by Defend Defenders, unemployment remains a widespread issue, with nearly 70% of individuals with intellectual disabilities and mental health challenges excluded from the labor market. Defend for Defenders further indicated that even among those employed people with disabilities, many were engaged in self-employment or unpaid labor, as a result of the presence of workplace discrimination and inaccessible working environments.

Another critical issue has been the political and decision-making-based exclusion of people with disabilities. Although Ethiopia has the required constitutional and legal framework, it lacks specific laws to address the rights of people with disabilities. However, regardless of the existence of these frameworks, the political will to implement them is often lacking, and people with disabilities remain underrepresented in important state institutions like the parliament. Consequently, as noted by Defend Defenders, people with disabilities continue to face marginalization from participation, which leads them to remain without a critical voice in state institutions that would help them ensure their rights and needs.

Participants in the focus discussions suggested that, in addition to providing basic relief during the war, international organizations should focus on post-war psychological rehabilitation and assistance to achieve rehabilitation for people with disabilities. They stressed the importance of conducting detailed assessments of the condition of disability in the Tigray region and providing continued support for both psychological recovery programs and financial as well as material support at various levels. The need for specialized knowledge in disability support was also highlighted, as some international NGOs lacked the required level of expertise to effectively support people with disabilities during the war. This gap in knowledge led to reluctance in involving skilled people with disabilities in aid programs, further undermining the effectiveness of the interventions made so far.

Summing up, the role of the government and international organizations in addressing the needs of people with disabilities during the war in Tigray was very limited and inadequate. The institutional obstructions, such as discrimination and the absence of accessible infrastructure, also hindered the inclusion of people with disabilities in various sectors, and the response to the war-induced challenges failed to adequately address their unique problems. The attempts by international organizations, while having good intentions, were often poorly coordinated and lacked the necessary expertise to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities. As a result, many people with disabilities in Tigray are still left vulnerable and marginalized, further exacerbating their already difficult conditions.

5. Conclusion

Findings of this study show complicated challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Mekelle City during and in the aftermath of the war in Tigray. The devastating war worsened the pre-existing vulnerabilities of people with disabilities. Moreover, it also resulted in new levels of adversity, trauma and marginalization of Peoples with disabilities in terms of several respects. The social, psychological, economic, and physical impacts of the war were profoundly entwined, each contributing to the others in a complex cycle of vulnerability that was mainly a disaster for Peoples with disabilities as the most affected section of society. The collapse of essential services such as healthcare and the destruction of infrastructure, as well as the general breakdown of social and economic systems, caused the isolation of Peoples with disabilities. These instances also left Peoples with disabilities vulnerable to further problems without critical support systems.

The combined challenges of poverty, trauma, and disability suggest an urgent need for targeted interventions that specifically address the unique needs of Peoples with disabilities in the post-war-like situation in Tigray in general and Mekelle City in particular. The war in Tigray showed that persons with disabilities are more susceptible to crisis than any section of society. Such risks are not only a result of their impairments but also systemic and environmental barriers that hinder their ability to access assistance and support. The experiences of people with disabilities during the war serve as a stark reminder of the inadequacies of existing humanitarian interventions, which often fail to account for the intricacies of disability, thereby marginalizing people with disabilities from critical protection and relief assistance.

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