

Impact of Kashmir Conflict on Mental Health

**Altaf Hussain**

M.Ed. Student,
Directorate of Distance Education,
University of Kashmir,
Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir,
India

Abstract

This research paper attempts to study the impact of Kashmir Conflict on mental health of the people of Kashmir Valley. The paper is literature based on the previous studies. Kashmir has been witnessing a chronic armed conflict for three decades as of now which has had an enormous negative impact on both individual lives of the people of Kashmir Valley as well as on different aspects of Kashmir's society as a whole. In addition to displacement and killing of people, disrupted schooling, crumbling of life support systems, disruption of social fabric, colossal damage to the civil property and infrastructure its severe ramifications have been particularly felt on the mental health of the people of Kashmir Valley. The precedent reason put forth for it is unleashed and unmitigated violence on men, women and children irrespective of age, sex and geographical position on the part of both security forces and militant outfits due to their scant regard for human rights which creates psychological kind of warfare. As such the minds of the people of Kashmir Valley are permanently scarred and involved. Consequently all pervading sense of insecurity has become eternal feature of the society of Kashmir Valley which in turn is responsible for persistent development of psychological distress among the people of Kashmir Valley that manifests in the form of multifarious psychological disorders like anxiety, depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), bi- polar disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), et cetera. Before the emergence of armed conflict, peace pervaded across Kashmir valley and rate of mental disorders was very meagre. Mental disorders among people of Kashmir Valley have increased drastically since start of armed conflict in the Kashmir Valley in 1989. This fact is revealed by the studies conducted by renowned psychiatrists of Kashmir Valley as well as researchers other than them and supported by the exemplary relevant research done by international organisations related to health. Ever increase in strength of patients suffering from psychological disorders due to the prevailing Kashmir Conflict demands genuine attempt to fix it and then to bring it down in addition to changing focus from screening, diagnosis, treatment, follow up and referral to preservation and promotion of mental health.

Keywords: Conflict, Kashmir, Mental Health, Psychophysical Suffering.

Introduction

Conflict refers to severe clash caused due to difference of opinions, wishes, needs, values, et cetera resulting into fight between and among individuals and groups (A.S. Hornsby, 1995). Kashmir is witnessing armed conflict between security forces and militant outfits since 1989 till date which have not only led to destruction of infrastructure, destabilization of lifeline systems, displacement of pundits, deaths of thousands of people (Kashmiri and non Kashmiri) and human rights violation but have also serious negative implications on the psychological health of people of Kashmir valley irrespective of age, sex and location due to creation of psychological kind of warfare hence of sense of insecurity among people of Kashmir (A. R. Naik, 2016).

Mental Health

Mental health also referred to as soundness of mind, mental balance and absence of mental illness/freedom from mental illness is the state/condition of mind where an individual is able to think and behave normally/optimally as well as is able to adjust to varying environmental conditions/strains with maximum of effectiveness and satisfactorily. The chief characteristic of mental health is adjustment. The greater the degree of adjustment, the greater will be the mental health of an individual and *vice versa* (J. S. Walia, 2003).

Discussion**Mental Disorders**

Mental disorders are medical conditions that disturb an individual's feeling, thinking, mood and day today functioning. Mental disorders include anxiety, stress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, depression, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), sleeplessness, fear, nervousness, anger, aggressiveness, flashbacks, alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, domestic and sexual violence. Undue psychological stress is the cause of mental disorders (R. S. Feldman, 1990).

Objective of the Study

To assess the impact of Kashmir conflict on mental health of Kashmir's society.

Methodology

The present study is based on content analysis of available literature in the form of research papers, books, newspaper articles, internet blogs, et cetera.

Impact of Kashmir Conflict on Mental Health

Psychological suffering coupled with physical ailments and dysfunction of people of Kashmir Valley is the impact of ongoing Kashmir Conflict. Psychological sufferings have manifestation in the form of various mental disorders like anxiety, stress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, bi- polar disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), sleeplessness, fear, nervousness, anger, aggressiveness, flashbacks, alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, domestic and sexual violence. The people of Kashmir Valley first suffered from anxiety due to persistent fear created by security forces and militant outfits which later on culminated into depression with the passage of time reveals a survey conducted by only psychiatric hospital of the Kashmir Valley during the 90's. About 1. 8 million people in Kashmir Valley exhibit significant symptoms of psychological distress reveal a survey conducted by 'Medical Sans Frontiers' (A. R. Naik, 2016). The prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is 15.9% (Margoob & Sheikh, 2006) which is quite alarming and should catch immediate attention of policy makers (Nuzhat Firdous, 2015). Mental disorders among the Kashmiri people due to ongoing Kashmir Conflict have been found often associated with general health problems like diabetes, oncological and cardiological problems especially hypertension problem (The News, August 18, 2005). The argument is supported by the fact that in every family of Kashmir on an average the conflict has rendered members of family as patients of cardiological, neurological, oncological and other dreaded diseases (A. Hassan and A. Shafi, 2013). In addition to physical coupling mental disorders are also associated with dysfunction which tells upon the productivity in all spheres of personal and social life hence hinders both individual and social development (F. Baingana, 2005). Before the emergence of armed conflict, the situation in Kashmir valley was peaceful and the rate of mental disorders was very low. Mental disorders in the Kashmir Valley have increased drastically since start of armed conflict in the Kashmir Valley in 1989. This fact is revealed by the studies

conducted by Margoob, a renowned psychiatrist of the Valley. In his studies he reported that about 1700 patients visited Kashmir's sole psychiatric department in the year 1990 and in year 2002 their number reached up to 48,000 and by December 2004, a total of 62,000 patients visited the facility to avail its psychiatric services (A. R. Naik, 2016). Such alarming increase in the number of the people being diagnosed with serious stress, anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorders since 1989 in the Kashmir Valley justifies the deleterious impact claim of Kashmir Conflict on the mental health of the people of Kashmir.

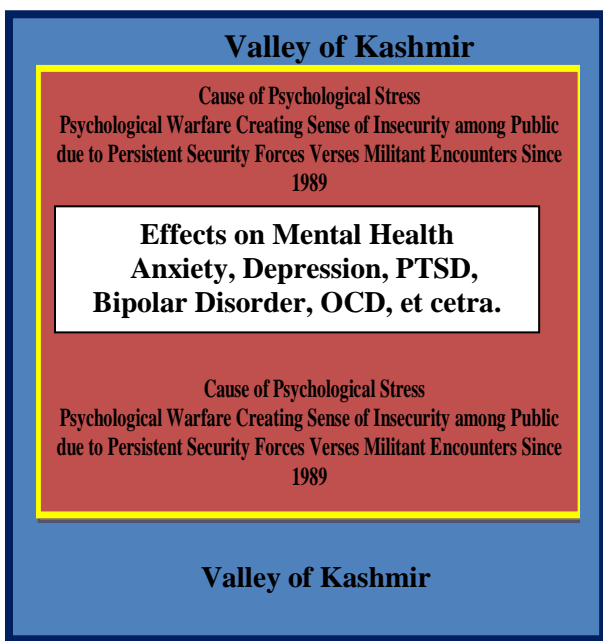
Conclusion

Routine harassment in the form of curfews, crackdowns, search operations, detentions, arrests, abductions, torture, custodial and extra-judicial killings, disappearances and human right violations while using people of the Kashmir Valley as shields on and off the encounter sites due to enforcement of draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), Prevention of Terrorist Activities (POTA) and Public Safety Act (PSA) and usual locking of horns between security forces and militant outfits resulting in firing, shelling and culminating into house blasts, torching and damaging of other civil property and infrastructure in addition to taking toll of life mostly during formal encounters coupled with use of modern weapons of warfare like Pellet Gun during occasional civilian resistance as dispersive measure cause serious misery to the general public of Kashmir Valley due to sense of unsafeness which ultimately tells upon mental health of the people of Kashmir Valley. Deterioration of their mental health is exhibited in several mental disorders diagnosed and reported so far by the only psychiatric facility of the valley installed at Kathi Darwaza Rainawari in Srinagar. Due to the extant conflict situation there is a definite increase in the incidence and prevalence of mental disorders among the people of Kashmir Valley which have caused unprecedented psychophysical damage to the Kashmir Valley. Reorganisation of the Jammu and Kashmir State by the recent Act enacted by the Parliament of India into three union territories namely Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh is believed to bring the mental peace and tranquillity in the Kashmir Division of State of Jammu and Kashmir hence to recede the ever increasing strength of psychiatric patients by elimination of the militant outfits and corrupt practices in addition to ensue of dawn of good governance, harmonious and rapid development.

Suggestion

Alarming increase in the number of patients suffering from mental disorders due to ongoing Kashmir Conflict demands genuine attempt to fix it and then to bring it down. This pursuit can be realised through immediate establishment of formal primary and secondary psychiatric facilities across length and breadth of Kashmir Valley which will serve as counselling centres for unaffected people in addition to screening, diagnosis, treatment, follow up and referral centres for affected people. Organisation of volunteer psychiatrists and psychologists association dedicated to preservation and promotion of mental

health of unaffected people of Kashmir Valley in addition to look after of mentally unwell people across nook and corner of Kashmir Valley as well as establishment of rehabilitation centres for the affected people in addition to taking impartial steps towards negotiation between two ever neighbouring rival countries pretending the Kashmir Valley integral part and parcel of their territory through the appointment of interlocutors is need of an hour to complement the attempt. Rather than focussing on preservation and promotion of mental health a lot of resources have been devoted to the screening, diagnosis, cure and follow up of mental illness in health care system which needs due cognizance.



Diagrammatic representation of Impact of Kashmir Conflict on Mental Health of the people of Kashmir Valley

References

Dhingra R. & Arora V. (2005). *At the Cross Roads: Families in Distress*. *J. Hum. Ecol.*, 17(3). pp. 217-222.

- Feldman R. S. (1990). *Understanding Psychology (Second Edition)*. USA; McGraw Hill, Inc. p. 230.
- Hassan. A. and Shafi A. (2013). *Impact of Conflict Situation on Mental Health in Srinagar, Kashmir*. *Bangladesh e-journal of Sociology*. Vol.10. Issue 1.
- Hornby A. S. (1995). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (Fifth Edition)*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Khan A. W. & Beg, A. A. (1993). *A Study of Psychiatric Morbidity in Kashmir under Stressful Conditions in the Valley*. MD Thesis (Unpublished).
- Margoob M. A. & Sheikh A. A. (2006). *Community Prevalence of Adult PTSD in South Asia-experience from Kashmir*. *JK-Practitioner*. Vol. 13. pp.18-25.
- Margoob M. A., Firdosi M. M., Banal, R., Khan, A. Y., Malik, Y. A., Sheikh, A. A., et al. (2006). *Community Prevalence of Trauma in South Asia-Experience from Kashmir*. *JK-Practitioner*. Vol. 13. pp. 14-17.
- Mir J. A., Sharma P. (2019). *Armed Conflict in Kashmir and Stress among People: An Overview. Remarking an Analisation*. Vol. 4, Issue 2 (Part-1), Epp. 94-97.
- Naik A. R. *Impact of Conflict on Mental Health with Special Reference to Kashmir Valley*. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*. Vol. 4, Issue 1. pp. 121 -129.
- Rather F. A. (2013). *Armed Conflicts in J&K and Its Impact on Society: A Case Study of Kashmir Valley*. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, Volume 3, Issue 2.
- Wani M. A. (2014). *Study of Mental Health among the People Affected by Terrorism in Kashmir*. *International Journal of Social Science and Language*. Vol. 01. Issue. 01. pp. 67-72.
- Walia J. S. (2003). *Psychology of Learning and Development*. Punjab; Paul Publishers. pp. 523-526.