



Conflict and Its Impact On Mental Health With Special Reference To Kashmir Valley

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ABSTRACT

The armed conflict led to social disorder, disorganisation, and education backwardness, physical and mental deterioration. The conflict of Jammu and Kashmir has adversely affected the mental health of the people putting up in the state to a larger extent. The paper highlights as to what extent the conflict has affected the mental health of Kashmiri people. The paper is literature based on previous studies. It also aims at providing some viable suggestions to improve the state of mental health in Kashmir.

Key words: *Community, Conflict, Health, Kashmir, Mental Health*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is conceived as a purposeful struggle between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents in order to gain status, resources and push their values over other social groupings (Himes, J.S1980).

Conflict, clash of interests is universal in nature. It occurs in all times and places and is present in almost in all societies. There has never been a time or society in which some individuals or groups did not come into conflict. Conflict is experienced at all levels of human activity from the intra-personal to the international

Although conflict created by human beings is as old as the human civilisation, any organised effort to study and quantify the impact of conflict and violence on public health particularly mental health of the population, started only in 1970s by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the context of the humanitarian crisis in Biafra, Nigeria. Thereafter many studies and researches were conducted in this regard and today it is an area of concern of everybody.

Kashmir has been regarded by many as heaven on earth due to its physical environment (the scenic beauty and moderate climate) and the social environment (hospitable and peace loving population). But over the period of more than two decades, Kashmir valley became associated with violence arising out of violent insurgency movement resulted in the rise of loss of life and livelihood. The conflict having given rise to the loss of trust and values of co-existence that are essential for the survival of any community. More importantly the prolonged conflict affects all most all the elements of life of the peoples their physical and mental health gets affected and affects their normal way of living.

According to the WHO, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. While mental, physical and social health are vital strands of life that are closely



interwoven and severely interdependent .A.V.Shah has stated mental health is the most essential and inseparable component of health (Shah, 1982).

“Mental health is a state of well being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”(WHO, 2001d).

Mental Health is thus conceptualised as not merely the absence of psychopathology but the presence of sufficient levels of social, psychological and emotional well being.

2. MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS:

Mental Health is not only the issue to be addressed but vital attention is to be paid focussing on mental health. Investigators propose that there are signs of mental health represented in three domains (Ryff, 1995 and Keyes 1998) viz emotional well being, psychological well being and social well being.

As regards the mental illness(US department of health and services 1999 and Kessler et.al 2005),has defined mental illness as collectively all diagnosable mental disorder or health condition there are characterised by alternation in thinking mood or behaviour or some combination their off associated with distress and are impaired functions.

As defined in American psychiatric association diagnostic and statistical manual. Depression is more likely following specific classes of experience- those involving conflict, disruption, losses and experiences of humiliation and entrapment .World Health Organisation has ranked depression as the fourth among the list of most urgent health problems worldwide and has predicted it to become number two in terms of disease burden by 2020 overriding diabetes, cancer, arthritis etc (WHO 1996).Evidences have shown that mental disorders, especially depressive disorders are powerfully related to occurrence, treatment and course of many chronic diseases plus diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma and obesity(Chapman , D.P-2005) and many risk behaviours for these chronic diseases such as physical inoperativeness, smoking, excessive drinking and insomnia.

3. CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH IN KASHMIR:

The Valley of Kashmir popularly known as the paradise on earth is spread over an area of 105sqkm (222,236km) and is aboard to the human population of 12.55 million (2011 census). The conflict situation since 1989 has brought unprecedented suffering to the people. Under such circumstances the valley presents such a look that everyone here on every step in every walk of life feels fear, threat, uncertainty, unrest and insecure from the date.

The partition of India in 1947 was the start of a long history of dispute between India and Pakistan for control of Kashmir which today remains divided into three parts –governed by India ,Pakistan and China. Over the last 28 years liberation struggle has lead armed fights between India and Kashmiri militants resulting in thousands of deaths ,disappearances and injured persons.



A community survey done by MSF in 2005 found high levels of ongoing violence across the region, with civilians caught in the middle. The majority of people surveyed stated having been exposed to crossfire (86%) and round-up raids (83%). High members of people reported being subjected to maltreatment (44%), forced labour (33%), kidnapping (17%), torture (13%) and sexual violence (12%).

From the time this conflict has emerged, it is continuing and increasing day by day. What is seen or heard about (observed) by the inhabitants (common people) can be, the thunders of bomb explosion and motor shelling across the LOC between the India and Pakistan administered parts of J&K, firing of bullets, pellets, pepper gas and tear gas shells on protesters, heavy shootouts between militants and security forces in encounters and demolition of houses by security forces either by gutting them or with mine blasts, where the militants are reported taking shelter, syring of ambulances and fire service vehicles on roads, people rushing from one place to another mostly for attending the funeral ceremonies and to see the injured people in different hospitals, flag marches of security forces and armed vehicles, barricades of police and paramilitary forces on roads to check the flow of people towards encounter sites, shut down of markets in cities and villages, cries of children, women and even men, making slogans against government in protests on roads. How amazing is this when during such situations the birds are seen flying with fear in crews, street dogs and other animals running towards their shelters or to the safer places away from the encounter sites but the media personal rushing to record and catch these scenes in their cameras. Also the Kashmiri youths rushing to the shootout places for stone pelting over the armed forces and the result that many of the local media personal and a big number of these youths getting critically injured or expired due to such actions.

On the other hand people staying in their houses, on their business establishments or performing duties in government/private offices and do not come across such horrible experiences but came to know all about by reading and watching of death toll and number of injured and also viewing and watching their photos or videos in daily news paper, radio-TV channels and on social media. Above all this the Kidnapping and killing of local people, noticed as the sources of security forces by the militants and also the gutting of armed vehicles and public properties like schools etc by the protesters. Under these circumstances from morning to evening and even at night such practices are the daily routine. So, one can imagine the mental situation of the inhabitants living in Kashmir. Such conditions are not different from war affected countries/regions like Rwanda, Afghanistan, Sudan, Gaza strip and Chechnya where communities are suffering trauma as aftermath of continued violence.

Conflict affected people or even who witness it, can suffer from psychological stress, such stress may traumatise individuals. Trauma could be the result of living through violence or being directly inflicted by torture, sexual violence etc.

A sudden death in the family due to conflict might have long lasting physical and emotional repercussions on the survivors. It has been studied that like individuals, the society and the community may also get traumatised, if it happens to pass through the violent situation.

A research made by Asima Hassan and Aneesa Shafi (impact of conflict situation on mental health in Srinagar) depicts that the respondents had faced multiple psychological problems in which majority (90.5%) have become



fearful, 87% respondents having sleeping disorders followed by 86% of them experiencing stress, depression psychological stress. 66% having lost interest in their life, 59.5% where feeling their experience of the incidence, 31.5% experiencing nightmares, 38.5% had become aggressive in behaviour while 27% respondents were vulnerable to suicide. The paper has been published in Bangladesh e journal of sociology volume 10 number.1 January 2013. Since then six years have passed and the graph of violence is continuously at an increasing trend. As such the above findings can obviously be at an increase also.

As a result of this conflict, mobility is often being restricted and people could not reach their work places and occasionally the occurrence of long time continuous strikes, in which shops and business units are closed, transport services detained, daily labourers earn less number of work days and education institutions also remain static sometimes for 2-3 months in addition to the winter and summer vacations.

The situation of Kashmir with the insurgence since 1947 but mostly affected from 1989, things got affected. The prevailing condition from the time 1989 has not only depreciated the social setup, but the economic condition as well (sehgal, 2011).

With the conflict in civil areas various lives were lost, disabled and others disappeared such deaths and injuries left behind orphans, widows, half widows, widowers, handicapped adults/ children, loss of income sources there by economically weak or poor families, domestic violence, school dropout children, drug addict persons, child labourers, etc having vicious impact on individuals, households, community and society as a whole leading to psychological stress and impact on mental health.

In 1989 the psychiatric hospital at Srinagar saw 1700 patients, which rose to 35,000 in 1998 and then to about 50,000 in 2002. In 2005, the patients number had risen to 60,000.

A survey conducted by psychiatric hospital during the 90's, reveals that during ongoing turmoil the people firstly suffered from anxiety due to fear which later on termed as depression. Depression is an illness that interferes with the normal functioning of life. It complicates the life of not only those who have the disorder, but those who care about them. There is a definite increase in the incidence and prevalence of mental disorders. Large scale of destruction of life and poverty has caused not merely the physical loss and deprivation; it has also resulted in deep emotional scars. The experience of trauma and severity and the persistence of certain symptoms (i.e. anxiety, depression, liquor and drug and drug addiction, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder-PTSD) has raised the graph of mental set back in valley there by resulted the attack of resilience, social cohesion and social capital (Trust, reciprocity, community and civic engagement).

There are other mental diseases which have shown fourfold increase like bipolar disorder, phobia and sleep disorders. Many women in Kashmir who have experienced violent incidents also complain of nightmares and dreams full of blood and violence. Inability to cope with the distributing dreams full of violence and horrible experiencing have become a common phenomenon among the masses in this trouble torn state.

While pollution of poverty threatens the quality of life, the environmental concern may threaten life itself. What seems to be an approach towards corrective measures is to address with utmost importance the mental health also rather than currying only the mental illness. It will also help to some extent in bringing back peaceful situation and participation of the distressed youth in the redressal of the social setup of the valley.



The emotional and psychological affect of the consequential violence is deeply felt by all irrespective of gender, age, carrier, and locality. The insecurity of life is usually summed up in a common utterance that once people leave house, their families are not certain if they would return. The feelings of insecurity were associated with higher levels of psychological distress in both the genders (Kaz de jag, saskia van de kam et,el). More importantly the prolonged conflict affects almost all the elements of the life of the people, their physical and mental health gets affected and so affects their usual way of living.

The great scientist Newton's Third Law of Motion states that "To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction". This law is well applicable to the occurrence of conflicts in Kashmir valley when the common people facing atrocities by the security forces react in the form of violent protests/stone pelting and even choosing the path of fighting with arms. Saying this author never means to encourage such things but it is obvious and revealed in the previous studies that exposure to violence has potentially important implications for mental health.

4. CONCLUSION:

Recent years have witnessed alarming increase in conflict occurrences and thereby enhancement in deaths and injuries/loss of property giving rise to vicious circle of conflict. As more the conflicts more can be deaths, injuries, loss of property, resulting in direct or indirect economic crisis leading to aggressive behaviour under the prevailing circumstances which in turn can cause mental stress and finally the mental illness. The conflict situation has led to the increase in sadness, and depression. One of the biggest consequences of this conflict is the impact on the mental health of people in Kashmir. Studies clearly indicate that people in Kashmir face high levels of psychological distress. To achieve the goals of peace and prosperity in conflict affected areas like the Kashmir valley the welfare needs of the common people especially the victimised population must be addressed. Moreover, efforts should also be made to ensure the community participation in the aftercare and rehabilitation of mentally ill patients. Awareness generation campaigns are required where the general public could be educated about what mental disorders mean.

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