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## Impact of Conflict on Mental Health with Special Reference to Kashmir Valley

Abdul Raffie Naik<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Conflict has a negative impact on the lives of people and the society as a whole. The emotional and psychological effect of the consequential violence is deeply felt by all, irrespective of gender, age, career and locality. In Kashmir the conflict has brought about insecurity, breakdown of social relations and families. This has led to the youth of Kashmir to switch to drugs or undertake anti-social activities. In health care and the field of public health, a lot of stress and resources have been devoted to the screening, diagnosis, and cure of mental illness than focusing on mental health. Little has been done to guard the mental health of those free of mental illness. The present paper throws light on the impact of conflict on mental health with special reference to Kashmir. The paper is a literature based on the previous studies. The concept of conflict is looked into and a reference to the impact of conflict in Kashmir has been made. It explains health, mental health, the indicators of mental health and how there is more focus on mental illness rather than mental health. Finally there is an exploration of the impact of violence in Kashmir.

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<sup>1</sup> *Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India*

*\*Responding Author*

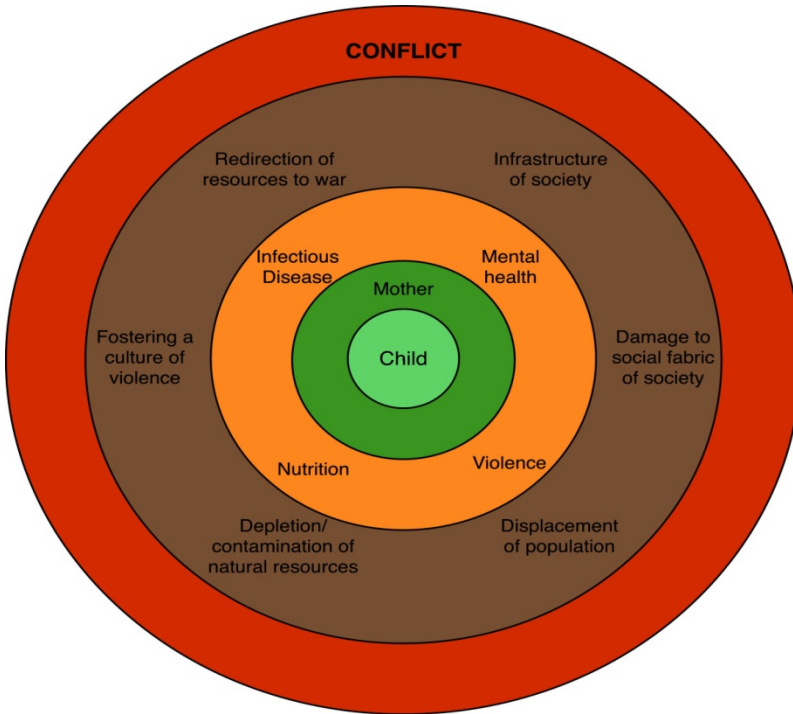
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The situation in Kashmir with the insurgence since 1947 but mostly effected from 1989 things got affected. The prevailing condition from the time 1989 has not only depreciated the social setup, but the economic conditions as well (Sehgal, 2011). With the conflict in civil areas and huge deployment of armed forces, thousands have been killed, and thousands became widows and orphans, social relations have been destroyed and in addition to these people became psychologically ill, and are unable to undertake day to day functions. Family breakdown, family conflicts, unemployment, late marriages, orphanage culture, etc., raise at fast rate in these circumstances of Kashmir. Most of the educated youth of Kashmir are unemployed or underemployed. With the result most of them either switch to drugs or indulge in anti- social activities resulting damage of social and economic fiber (Dar, 2011).The emotional and psychological effect of the consequential violence is deeply felt by all, irrespective of gender, age, career 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.

Conflict which is sometimes also known as collective violence is defined as ‘the instrumental use of [armed] violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives’. Wars are armed conflicts with more than 1,000 battle-related deaths in any one year (Devakumar, Osrin et.al 2014).Conflict causes illness, injury and breakdown in the system that provide protective, remedial and ameliorative care. It has a deep effect on society that form a tolerant outline for the effects we describe. The mediators of loss are several, but include population dislocation and interruption of health services and schooling, on a background of financial decline and supply restriction. Below the fig (A) shows how

these indirect effects are related with conflict and have a pervasive effect that reaches down to the following generation.

Meaning of health differs from person to person and from culture to culture. In terms of the traditional Indian view, health cannot be viewed as merely a state. It is a dynamic process of striving which ensures stability between the inner, as well as, outer factors which are continuously changing and therefore has no ideal state (Misra, 2005)



***Fig. (A) Direct effects (orange) and indirect effects- as described by Levy - (brown) of conflict on mother and child.***

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, physical and social health, are vital strands of life that are closely intertwined and severely interdependent. Defining health as physical, mental and social wellbeing. A.V. Shah stated that mental health is "the most essential and inseparable component of health (Shah,1982).

### ***Mental Health Indicators***

In health care and the field of public health, a lot of stress and resources have been devoted to the screening, diagnosis, and cure of mental illness than focusing on mental health. Little has been done to guard the mental health of those free of mental illness. Investigators propose that there are signs of mental health, represented in three domains (Ryff, 1995, and Keyes 1998). These include the following:

➤ **Emotional well-being**

Such as perceived life gratification, happiness, exuberance, serenity.

➤ **Psychological well-being**

Such as self-acceptance, personal growth including openness to new experiences, optimism, expectation, purpose in life, control of one's environment, spirituality, self-direction, and constructive relationships.

➤ **Social well-being**

Social getting, beliefs in the potential of individuals and society as a whole, own self-worth and usefulness to society, sense of community.

Mental illness is defined as “collectively all diagnosable mental disorders” or “health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.” (US Dept. of health and service, 1999 and Kessler et.al 2005). Depression is more likely following specific classes of experience – those involving conflict, disruption, losses and experiences of humiliation or entrapment. World Health Organization has ranked depression as the fourth among the list of the 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). Evidence has shown that mental disorders, especially depressive disorders, are powerfully related to the occurrence, successful treatment, and course of many chronic diseases plus diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and obesity (Chapman D.P 2005) and many risk behaviors for chronic

disease; such as, physical inoperativeness, smoking, excessive drinking, and insomnia.

### **The impact of conflict on mental health in Kashmir.**

The conflict situation since 1989 in J&K has brought unprecedented suffering to the people. It has affected every aspect of a common Kashmiri's life. Thousands of families have lost their sole bread earners. Children and women of the Kashmir valley have gone through trauma over the period of seventeen years. The conflict situation has left behind a track of sadness, and depression. The minds of Kashmir's are permanently scarred. One of the biggest consequences of this conflict is the impact on the mental health of people in Kashmir. In any conflict situation, people tend to develop a simplistic view of things - it's good or bad, black or white & look for simple solutions. "The impact stage occurs when disaster strikes (e.g., bombs explode) bringing with death, injury and destruction. The type of events includes loss, life threat Displacement torture and indirect effects like unemployment and poverty and so on. Home / communities have an important containing function as it provides a certain framework, boundary & secure base for all its members 'During conflict when homes & communities are shattered, people experience a lack of this containing function in a most acute way. This creates a sense of disruption of the secure base to all those affected.'" Once the conflict leads to violence, the fallout can be unforeseen in its extent and magnitude. 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 patient's number had risen to 60,000.

A survey conducted by psychiatric hospital during the 90's, reveals that during the ongoing turmoil the people firstly suffered from anxiety due to fear which later on turned into 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 the severity and persistence of certain symptoms (i.e., anxiety, depression, liquor and drug addiction, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD) has raised the graph of mental setback in valley thereby resulted the attack on resilience, social cohesion and social capital (Trust, reciprocity, community and civic engagement). The accompanying traumas have devastating consequences on a whole lot of people particularly those affected directly. The health impact of conflict situation cannot be seen only along the lines of absolute number of causalities and trauma-related disorders among survivors, but also on the individual and at collective levels. "The peak direct human costs of civil war are mortalities and population displacements." Since the conflict started in valley, people die every day some of the deaths are so shocking that take longer time to overcome the grief and loss. However, the psychological damage is being understood only now. The mental health problems of the people need to be addressed keeping in mind the duration of the conflict in the Kashmir. "According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the path of armed conflicts in the 1990s, over two million children were killed, six million injured/disabled, one million orphaned and fifteen million displaced."

Over this era of time, the number of people exposed to traumatic events has significantly increased. Psychological impact and additional burden of disease, death, and disability caused by violence has put people of valley in total lost. The situation of people with mental health problems in Kashmir are facing lot of problems due to the lack of infrastructure, trained and sufficient staff and social exclusion attached to the people who suffer from mental health problems due to the conflict situation. According to a survey by 'Medical Sans Frontiers' around 1.8 million people in Kashmir, accounting for nearly 45 percent of the valley's adult population, show significant symptoms of mental distress.

Mental disorders and psychosocial consequences associated with conflicts include sleeplessness, fear, nervousness, anger, aggressiveness, depression, flashbacks, alcohol and substance abuse,

suicide, and domestic and sexual violence. Following a traumatic event, a large proportion of the population may experience nightmares, anxiety, and other stress-related symptoms, although these effects usually decrease in intensity over time. For some, the hopelessness and helplessness associated with persistent insecurity, statelessness and poverty will trigger ephemeral reactions such as those mentioned above. For others, conflict experiences may lead to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and chronic depression. These conditions, in turn, can lead to suicide ideation and attempts, chronic alcohol and drug abuse, interpersonal violence, and other signs of social dysfunction. Studies indicate that populations affected by conflict are not only affected by mental health problems but have associated dysfunction, which can last up to five years after the conflict. This persistent dysfunction is linked to decreased productivity, Poor nutritional, health and educational outcomes and decreased ability to participate in development efforts. The effects of mental health and psychosocial disorders in conflict-affected populations can be an important constraint in reconstruction and development efforts (Baingana, F.2005).

Studies conducted so far clearly indicate that exposure to violence has latent implications for mental health. In areas affected by chronic strife a larger chunk of population is expected to experience mental health problems and such figures ought to apply to the people of Kashmir where high levels of psychological distress have been seen prevalent in the (Jong, Kam, Ford, Lokuge, Fromm, Galen, et al. 2008). A considerable increase in the number of people being diagnosed with acute stress reaction, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Khan & Beg, 1993; Margoob, Firdosi, Banal, Khan, Malik, Sheikh, et al. 2006) where the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder is reported to be 15.9% (Margoob& Sheikh, 2006) which is quite alarming for the state when compared to other places.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict leads to the breakdown of families, social relations, trust, economy and various other aspects of the life of the people who face it. This is true more so in the Kashmir Valley where there is a total disruption of the lives of people. This has led to unemployment or the underemployment of the educated youth where they eventually turn to drugs and anti-social activities. There is a lot of emphasis on the concept of mental illness rather than mental health and hence there is a need to bring out more focus on mental health. The conflict situation since 1989 in J&K has brought unprecedented suffering to the people and affected every aspect of their lives. Thousands of families have been broken and they face a lot of trauma. The conflict situation has led to 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. There is a considerable increase in the number of people being diagnosed with acute stress reaction, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder which is quite alarming compared to other places.

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