

# The effects of armed conflict on the families of slain members of armed groups in Kashmir: A sociological study

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Armed conflicts have debilitating effects on all aspects of life and on all sections of society. Conflicts worldwide have complex and wide-ranging impact on people. As the fact stands, children and women suffer the most in conflict situations throughout the world, even in modern times. In actuality, they suffer in totality at the individual as well as group levels. In a paper titled 'Promoting wellbeing among Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Displacement published by 'Save the Children Foundation' (SCF), it was revealed that in a conflict situation, 80 to 90% of the victims are civilians, most of them children and women. In reality, continuous conflict situation engulfs these weak and dependent beings wholly, which sharply reflects in their life-living conditions. Like in other countries of the world, armed conflict in Kashmir, which erupted in late 1980's had a devastating impact on the civilian population, particularly women and children. In present study the families of slain militants represent an extremely suffering group in present-day Kashmir, which has emerged mainly due to the armed conflict between the Kashmiri militants and Indian security forces from 1989 onwards. Official figures reveal that more than 50% of the people killed in Kashmir in the last more than three decades were militants. In this study, the researcher carried out complete profiles of 100 families of slain militants who died in the last 30-years of insurgency, through random sampling. The respondents were selected from various districts of Kashmir division. The present study depicts miserable and pathetic condition of their families, worst economic conditions; educational backwardness, social disorganization and social disorder that help understand nuances and leftover of destruction on these families.

**Key words:** Armed conflict, Kashmir widows, orphans, militants, families, Kashmir Valley.

## INTRODUCTION

India's J&K state is divided into three culturally distinct districts: Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh. More than half of the mostly mountainous state's nearly 1.25 million residents live in the fertile Kashmir Valley, (7% of the state's land area is home to 55% of its population). Srinagar, in the Valley, is the state's summer capital and

by far its largest city with some 1.3 million residents. Jammu city, the winter capital, has roughly half that population, and the Jammu district is home to more than 40% of the state's residents. About a quarter-million people live in remote Ladakh, abutting China. Less than 1% of India's total population lives in J&K. J&K's

population are about 68% Muslim, 28% Hindu, 2% Sikh, and 1% Buddhist. At least, 97% of the Kashmir Valley's residents are Muslims; the vast majority of the district's Hindus fled the region after 1989. The Jammu district is about two-thirds Hindu, with the remainder mostly Muslim. Ladakh's population is about evenly split between Buddhists and Muslims (<https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/1-jammu-and-kashmir.html>). Since the partition of Indian subcontinent after the British left in 1947, conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir remains as one of the most intractable and long-standing disputes in the world. Both the nuclear armed countries have fought three wars (1947-48, 1965 and 1971) besides several border skirmishes over Kashmir.

The armed conflict of the last three decades can be categorized into different periods – ranging from discontent over rigged Assembly elections in 1987, leading to the rise of militant groups backed by Pakistan from late 1980s onwards (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-18738906>), and the gradual reduction in violence in the region in recent years. A bomb blast in Srinagar on 31 July, 1988 carried out by Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), a nationalist and nominally secular group that seeks independence of Kashmir from both India and Pakistan, in effect marked the start of the insurgency (Ibid).

In the last more than three decades, violence has shattered the population of Kashmir. Over the years and decades it has been seen that the government of India has failed to fulfill its political commitments and promises of development in Kashmir due to which people have lost faith in the system. Erosion of political autonomy guaranteed under the Constitution of India, broken political promises, bad governance and rigging of 1987 Assembly elections are some of the reasons which triggered the armed conflict in 1989. As the insurgency swept Kashmir in subsequent years, thousands of youths crossed over the LoC\* to Pakistan and Pakistan-administrated-Kashmir (PaK) in large numbers for the arms training (Jayanth and Aurangzeb, 2017). In the weeks and months that followed, dozens of militant groups emerged and wreaked havoc throughout Kashmir, killing government officials, security personnel, and innocent civilians (Table 1) (Mudasir, 2019).

### Social implications of militancy in Kashmir

In the last more than three decades, Kashmir valley continues to be in thick of turmoil. The armed conflict has a wider and deeper impact on the Kashmiri society. It has adversely affected almost all the institutions of the society, like political, social, educational, economic and ecological. The doors of democratic forums got shuttled down, lawlessness increased and violation of human rights at high rate took place. The cultural and moral

values got degraded among certain groups of the society. The economy is in doldrums. The worst hit social sector is education and other intellectual activities. The sex ratio has been upset by the death of thousands of young men (Asima, 2012). The impact of conflict situation is experienced by people of all ages, who suffer displacement, loss of home, property, family separation and disintegration and indirectly had negative impact on the process of independence and development of Kashmiri people. They suffered qualitatively as well as quantitatively in all fields of life; this situation has led to their backwardness in all crucial fields of life. Apart from these debilitating effects, the turmoil has resulted in emotional distortion of people, mental imbalance, feeling of insecurity and uncertainty among the people of Kashmir (Ibid).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### The aim of this literature review is to gain insight into the subject matter

A research study carried out by Mercy Corps (2015) finds no relationship between unemployment and young people joining armed violence. The study based on interviews and surveys with youth in Afghanistan, Colombia and Somalia found that political violence is not rooted in poverty, but in experiences of injustice: discrimination, corruption and abuse by security forces. The research reveals that mostly youth choose to become militants not because of they are poor, but because they are angry. In light of this, many prevailing development approaches are unlikely, in isolation, to make youth more peaceful.

Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS, 2007) undertook a door to door survey in Baramulla district of Kashmir – Dead but not forgotten: Baramulla 1989-2006. The survey revealed that out of 5,106 people killed in Baramulla district in 17-years (1990-2007), a disproportionately higher number (3,634) were in the age group of 18-35. As this age group comprise the principal bread-earners, their killing not only left their families in abject poverty, but also had a devastating psychological effects on them.

Dar (2011) conducted a need assessment study of youth in Kashmir supported by conciliation resources N.G.O based in London. The study found that the youth feel deprived of their rights like, right to freedom of expression, right to life with dignity and other civil and political rights. Majority of youth feel misrepresented outside Kashmir primarily by media and politicians. Political conflict was identified as a major problem and alienation was another major issue. Major socio-economic problems as identified by respondents were corruption, lack of employment and entrepreneurship, environmental degradation and drug abuse. Identified

**Table 1.** Fatalities in Militant Violence in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K): 1988 - 2019\* (UMHA).

| Year         | Civilians    | Security force personnel | Militants    | Total        |
|--------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1988         | 29           | 1                        | 1            | 31           |
| 1989         | 32           | 13                       | 0            | 92           |
| 1990         | 862          | 132                      | 183          | 1177         |
| 1991         | 594          | 185                      | 614          | 1393         |
| 1992         | 859          | 177                      | 873          | 1909         |
| 1993         | 1023         | 216                      | 1328         | 2567         |
| 1994         | 1012         | 236                      | 1651         | 2899         |
| 1995         | 1161         | 297                      | 1338         | 2796         |
| 1996         | 1333         | 376                      | 1194         | 2903         |
| 1997         | 840          | 355                      | 1177         | 2372         |
| 1998         | 877          | 339                      | 1045         | 2261         |
| 1999         | 799          | 555                      | 1184         | 2538         |
| 2000         | 842          | 638                      | 1808         | 3288         |
| 2001         | 1067         | 590                      | 2850         | 4507         |
| 2002         | 839          | 469                      | 1714         | 3022         |
| 2003         | 658          | 338                      | 1546         | 2542         |
| 2004         | 534          | 325                      | 951          | 1810         |
| 2005         | 557          | 189                      | 917          | 1663         |
| 2006         | 389          | 151                      | 591          | 1131         |
| 2007         | 158          | 110                      | 472          | 740          |
| 2008         | 91           | 75                       | 339          | 505          |
| 2009         | 71           | 78                       | 239          | 388          |
| 2010         | 47           | 69                       | 232          | 348          |
| 2011         | 31           | 33                       | 100          | 164          |
| 2012         | 15           | 15                       | 72           | 102          |
| 2013         | 15           | 53                       | 67           | 135          |
| 2014         | 28           | 47                       | 110          | 185          |
| 2015         | 17           | 39                       | 108          | 164          |
| 2016         | 15           | 82                       | 150          | 247          |
| 2017         | 40           | 80                       | 213          | 333          |
| 2018         | 39           | 91                       | 257          | 387          |
| 2019         | 9            | 59                       | 62           | 130          |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>14930</b> | <b>6413</b>              | <b>23386</b> | <b>44729</b> |

\*LoC is a military control line between the Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir—a line which does not constitute a legally recognized international boundary, but serves as the de facto border. \*Data from 1988 till March 31, 2019 Source: Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA).

needs of Kashmiri youth were: A democratic space free from fear, guarantee of rights and safety, resolution of political conflict, unbiased and enabling education system, meaningful livelihood generation opportunities, improved infrastructure, an independent effective and vibrant civil society that engages young people, transparent and corruption free governance and society, improved infrastructure and health care, it was indicated in the study that young Kashmiri's are sensitive,

thoughtful and willing to identify issues, contribute ideas and engage in bringing change.

Sikander (2012) analyzed the struggle and survival of women in conflict ridden Kashmir. The paper highlighted that the armed conflict has forced new roles on women in Kashmir. They have to shoulder responsibilities not only at home but also outside the home. They joined the men in resisting illegal detentions, atrocities, disappearances and they are also active in the peace and reconciliation

efforts though these initiatives are still an elite venture. Also, they face multidimensional problems. They are among the worst sufferers of sexual violence in the world. Furthermore, conflict situation has also contributed to steep rise in suicide rate among women in Kashmir.

Dabla (2011) in his study 'Victims of militancy in Kashmir: The case of widows and orphans' highlighted the plight of orphans and widows in Kashmir. The study found that, as a direct impact of armed conflict a new group of widows and orphans emerged in Kashmir. With every single death in conflict situation 3-4 members are added in to this suffering group. The estimated number of orphans and widows in Kashmir, 2008 were 129,600-226,800 who belong to ex-militants and civilians killed in armed conflict. They live in miserable and pathetic conditions, they are harassed and exploited. Orphans had to drop out of schools and colleges and work as child labourers, they became educationally backward. Among some of the orphans there is delinquency, deviance, drug abuse and crime. This group faces mass depression and psychological problems.

### Statement of the problem

It is believed that in the first decade of the insurgency (1990-2000), a good percentage among those, who picked up arms against the state were married and had families. A good number of them were killed leaving behind devastated families. The trend of married people becoming militants dwindle after the 1990's, however, has not stopped completely even till now. However, there is no data available with any government agency or civil society group which can give an exact number of those militants, who were married and got killed. After surveying across Kashmir, the researcher presumes that 10% among the militants who were killed in the last 30-years were married and had children. (The present study only covers slain militants and not the civilians, who were subjected to enforced, disappeared.) And it is these families, who had to suffer a lot on economic front as they were not entitled for any compensation from the government like the families of the slain civilians.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on both primary as well secondary source of data collection.

#### Objectives of the study

- (i) To assess the socio-economic condition of the families of slain militants
- (ii) To get the facts before people regarding the real sufferings of the families of the slain militants.
- (iii) To understand the impact and influences of the past on the present and future lives of the affected families

### Universe and Sample of Study

The families of the slain militants were randomly selected from across the Kashmir valley. For the purpose of the study, the researcher carried out a sample of 100 families of slain militants, who died in the last 30 years of insurgency. Among them, 35 families were selected from south Kashmir districts of Anantnag, Pulwama, Shopian and Kulgam – the epi-centre of new age militancy (where mostly teenage local youth, indifferent to their parents' pleas, join militant groups and are killed a few weeks or months later ([https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/how-to-tackle-kashmir-militancy-youth-need-change-not-surrender-policies-118060600247\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/how-to-tackle-kashmir-militancy-youth-need-change-not-surrender-policies-118060600247_1.html))). Similarly, equal number of families were taken from north Kashmir districts of Kupwara, Baramulla and Bandipora – which saw maximum killings during 1990's and 2000s as all the three districts share border with the PaK. In central Kashmir districts of Srinagar, Ganderbal and Budgam, which comparatively saw lesser number of killings, 30 such families, were interviewed.

For collecting primary data, interview schedule prepared for the purpose was processed through sociological pre-testing before the actual fieldwork was taken up. The researcher surveyed the various districts of Kashmir Valley and tried to gather information about the victim families. The families (widows and children) of slain militants comprised the sample. The researcher used the snow ball sampling and selected the sample in each district with the help of accidental sampling method out of whole population. Sometimes the respondents themselves used to act as a source, itself imparting information about other victims or at times, accompanied the researcher to another fellow victim's home till the desired numbers of respondents were collected. This type of sampling was used, as it is otherwise very difficult to identify such families. The information about such victim families was also gathered from people like community heads, journalists and police officials.

### Analysis and implications

After the information was collected, it was tabulated into data, by organizing or classifying it. The process involved formation of groups or arranging the data into these groups on the basis of similarities and differences of the units of the study. All the units of one group were thus similar to each other on the basis of certain characteristics. The frequency of each response or unit was noted. Analysis should has been done objectively.

### Background of respondents

The respondents belonged to the following age groups:

Table 2 reveals the greater percentage that is 45% slain militants belonged to the age group of 25-35 at the time of death while another 32% were in the age group of 35-45. 16% deceased belonged to 45-55 age group and 6% of the slain militants were in the age group of 18-25 years and only 1% was above 55 years of age.

Table 3 clearly depicts that most of the slain militants in Kashmir were from lower socio-economic background. It shows that 46% slain militants were laborers by profession before joining militancy while 20% were involved in other jobs like carpentry, painters, shawl weaving and other. 19% of the slain militants were involved in small business like shopkeepers, tea stall owners and small contracting etc, while 15% were government and private employees. Among these 15%, only one was on a gazette post in the government sector while 5 slain militants were doing class III and class IV jobs in the government sector. And rest nine were either salesmen, teachers in private schools or doing some other

**Table 2.** Age distribution of respondents.

| S/N          | Age group | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1            | 18-25     | 06         | 06         |
| 2            | 25-35     | 45         | 45         |
| 3            | 35-45     | 32         | 32         |
| 4            | 45-55     | 16         | 16         |
| 5            | 55-65     | 1          | 1          |
| <b>Total</b> |           | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 3.** Occupation prior to joining militancy.

| S/N          | Occupation prior to joining Militancy | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1            | Business                              | 19         | 19         |
| 2            | Govt /private employ                  | 15         | 15         |
| 3            | Laborer                               | 46         | 46         |
| 4            | Other                                 | 20         | 20         |
| <b>Total</b> |                                       | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 4.** Appx family income per month (in Indian rupees).

| S/N | Income groups    | Responses  | Percentage |
|-----|------------------|------------|------------|
| 1   | Upto Rs 1000     | 12         | 12         |
| 2   | Rs 1000- Rs 3000 | 55         | 55         |
| 3   | Rs 3000- Rs 5000 | 24         | 24         |
| 4   | Rs 5000-above    | 9          | 9          |
| 5   | <b>Total</b>     | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

private jobs. It has been observed across the world where insurgencies erupted that people from lower and lower-middle class families usually join militancy and Kashmir is no exception. As the poverty deprives people to obtain proper education, it leaves many of them vulnerable to negative influences. This deprivation in many cases means that the person can't get suitable unemployment which can lead to extremist thoughts, thereby inviting him to engage in terrorist activities (<https://borgenproject.org/10-facts-about-povertys-role-in-terrorism/>). It has been seen even in the first world that people living below poverty line have more inclination towards terrorism. According to a 2008 Census Bureau study, American Somalis, 82 % of who live near or below the poverty line, were the largest group traveling to fight with jihadist groups abroad. It has been agreed by the world leaders that poverty is linked to terrorism and needs a solution. The respondents in this study fall in the income groups shown in Table 4.

Table 4 reveals that majority of 55% families of the slain militants belonged to Rs 1000-3000 per month income bracket. While 24% had per month income of Rs 3000-Rs 5000, 12% of the slain militants belonged to families whose monthly income was less than 1000 Indian rupees when they joined militancy. Only 9% of the slain militants belonged to well-off families whose monthly income was above Rs 5000 when they joined militancy. Even in 1990s, per month income of below Rs 3000 for a family was not enough for them to have basic amenities of life. Most of these slain militant had joined militancy in 1990s or either in the early years of next decade.

The details of the Educational Background of the slain militants are shown in Table 5. After battling with terrorism for years, focus of the World has now shifted from hard security measures to battle violent extremism to a more multi-sectoral and development approach. Yet some researchers found the link tenuous. Kruger and Malečková for example, noted that "any connection between poverty, education and terrorism is indirect, complicated and probably weak" (Kruger and Malečková, 2003). They also noted that drawing a connection between poverty and terrorism, if it is not justified, could be potentially dangerous. A study of Middle Eastern and North African demonstrates that individuals with secondary educations who are unemployed or underemployed have the highest risk of becoming radicalized (Bhatia and Ghanem, 2017). Regardless of whether lack of education in and of itself is a driver of radicalization, there seems to be a general consensus that education is one of the most important tools to reach young people and therefore can be used to address some of the "push and pull factors" that may drive young people towards violent extremism. High drop-out rates among primary and secondary school leavers contributed significantly to recruitment to extremist groups, in some contexts. Children and youth who have no access to formal education may be susceptible to recruitment and radicalization (Samantha de Silva, 2017).

In the current research study, the low income background of the families clearly depicts in the educational background of the slain militants. A majority of 45% in Table 5 showed that they had not

**Table 5.** Educational background.

| S/N          | Educational Background | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1            | Illiterate             | 45         | 45         |
| 2            | Upto class 8th         | 20         | 20         |
| 3            | 10 <sup>th</sup> Pass  | 12         | 12         |
| 4            | 12 <sup>th</sup> Pass  | 11         | 11         |
| 5            | Graduate and Above     | 12         | 12         |
| <b>Total</b> |                        | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 6.** Whether armed training received from Pakistan or locally.

| S/N          | Arms training received from | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1.           | Pakistan                    | 76         | 76         |
| 2.           | Local                       | 24         | 24         |
| <b>Total</b> |                             | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 7.** Impact of incident on the family.

| S/N          | Incident impacted | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|------------|
| 1            | Negative          | 94         | 94         |
| 2            | Unchanged         | 05         | 5          |
| 3            | Positive          | 01         | 1          |
| <b>Total</b> |                   | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

attended any school and were illiterates while another 20% had dropped out of schools before reaching 9th class. 12% of the slain militants had passed 10th standard but couldn't continue their studies beyond while 11% after passing 12th standard discontinued their studies and started supporting the family financially due to extreme difficult financial situations. Of the 12% surveyed slain militants, who were graduates and above were either in a government job or from the families who had relatively better financial conditions. These 12% highly educated slain militants were normally given leadership positions by the militant outfits. It was observed that the commanders of militant outfits were those who were senior in age and were professionals like lawyers, teachers and mid-level government officials. Worldwide it has been observed that people who feel alienated or victimized join militant groups. After taking violent path, they remain devoted to their political or religious cause and never regard their actions as unlawful. They remain loyal to each other but deal with a disloyal member more harshly than with the enemy (The Sociology And Psychology of Terrorism, 1999).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To a question whether the slain militants received arms training in Pakistan or locally, the respondents gave the following response. It is no secret worldwide that Kashmiri militants cross over Line of Control (LoC) to get arms training in Pakistan. According to media reports still

around 3,000 trained Kashmiri militants remain stationed in PaK. They are among those groups of the militants, who in 1990s or early 2000s had crossed over the LoC to get arms training. While most of those who went to PaK for arms training returned back to Kashmir, a good percentage among them remained there and subsequently got married to Pakistani women. Some media reports say that these militants are now being told that after getting arms training they should go back to Kashmir as it was their duty to fight for their land. (Shift from PoK to Valley, 2021).

This fact was corroborated in the current research study as 76% of the slain militants had received arms training in Pakistan and PaK. Only 24% were locally trained and it was observed by the researcher that most of these were from southern districts of Kashmir, which don't share the border with Pakistan. Another point observed by the researcher was that militants, who were slain in the last one decade (2010-2020), were mostly trained locally and they again belonged to the south Kashmir – considered as epicentre of new-age militancy in the Valley (Table 6). On enquiring from the respondents about how the incident of killing in their family impacted them, the answer is tabulated in Table 7.

The above graph clearly shows that whopping 94%

**Table 8.** Whether widow remarried or not after militant husband's death.

| S/N           | Remarried or not | Responses  | Percentage |
|---------------|------------------|------------|------------|
| 1             | Yes              | 15         | 15         |
| 2             | No               | 85         | 85         |
| <b>Total:</b> |                  | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 9.** Any experience if stigma /isolation attached before /after death.

| S/N           | Any experience of stigma/isolation | Responses  | Percentage |
|---------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| 1             | Yes                                | 68         | <b>68</b>  |
| 2             | No                                 | 22         | <b>22</b>  |
| 3             | Unchanged                          | 10         | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>Total:</b> |                                    | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

respondents had a negative impact of the incident (killing). These killings occurred during encounters with security forces, the respondents stated. Majority of the respondents revealed that constant raids and harassment by security forces when the militant was alive created a sense of fear among them. Added with financial problems and lack of social support, the incident had devastating impact on the respondents. The respondents revealed that the sympathy of the people in the initial days after the killing of the militant vanished with time and they were later left to fend for themselves.

However, 5% respondents said that the incident did not make any changes in them. These were the cases where either the slain militant had no children and the widow remarried or the family had a strong social and financial support. A negligible 1% respondent said that the incident had a positive impact as they received overwhelming support from the society after the killing of the militant. These families had moved on in their life after the incident. Thus it can be inferred that killing of a person in a family created a sense of uncertainty and fear in the survived family members of the slain militant. It was observed that the mode of death specifically due to brutal act, which was unexpected and sudden, has led to all kind of psychological stress among the family members of the slain militants.

In response to a question whether the widow of slain militant remarried or not, the response they put forward is as follows in Table 8.

Most of the respondents revealed in clear-cut terms that did not re-marry after the death of their husbands. This is a general practice in the valley, if the women have any child/children, they seldom go for remarriage. The research findings revealed that majority of the 85% women respondents did not remarry after the death of their militant husbands. It was also observed that the women who did not remarry faced lot of problems which

included loneliness at home, mental torture, lack of control and guidance in home, fearful moments, failure of control over children, social insecurity, economic hardships, social apathy, discrimination and rough treatment by relatives and neighbours. Only 15% of the widows of slain militants in Kashmir have remarried. These include those who either had no children after the first marriage or were from well-off families. One of such widow of the militant had remarried with a senior Congress leader in Kashmir, who was a cabinet minister in the erstwhile state government. Another widow of the slain militant, who remarried, had tied a nuptial knot with PaK based chief commander of the Hizbul Mujahideen, Syed Salah-ud-Din (Table 9).

On being asked whether the family members experienced any stigma/isolation after the death of militant, the respondents revealed in 2.2. 68% respondents in the study stated that before and after the death of the militant, they faced isolation. Before the killing of the militant, security forces constantly raided their houses due to which relatives, neighbours and friends of the family would maintain distance with them leaving the family without any social support. This decreased after the death of the militant as security forces stopped the search for him.

However, 22% respondents said they did not face any isolation from the society before or after the death of the militant. 10% respondents stated that the isolation remained before as well as after the death of the militant. It is believed that militancy generally has social acceptance in Kashmir and due to this reason none of the respondents apparently faced any social stigma. However, during the intensive interactions with these families, it was observed that underneath the families of slain militants were facing several social issues; including finding a suitable match for their children.

On being asked whether children of slain militants faced

**Table 10.** Problems faced in finding suitable Match

| S/N          | Problems faced in finding suitable match | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|--|------------|------------|
| 1            | Yes                                      | 37         | 37         |
| 2            | No                                       | 36         | 36         |
| 3            | Don't know                               | 27         | 27         |
| <b>Total</b> |  | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 11.** Any other family /extended family member became victim of militancy.

| S/N           | Any other family/ extended family member became victim of militancy? | Responses  | Percentage |
|---------------|--|------------|------------|
| 1             | Yes  | 32         | 32         |
| 2             | No   | 68         | 68         |
| <b>Total:</b> |  | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 12.** Any other family/extended family member joined militancy.

| S/N           | Any other family/extended family member joined militancy? | Responses  | Percentage |
|---------------|---|------------|------------|
| 1             | Yes   | 21         | 21         |
| 2             | No  | 79         | 79         |
| <b>Total:</b> |   | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

problems in finding suitable matches, the following responses are as seen in Table 10.

Over the last two decades, sociologists have time and again raised the issue of social implications of militancy in Kashmir with some suggesting that girls of militant families, dead or alive, such as their sisters, daughters, cousin sisters and other female relatives suffered a lot. They opined that the girls belonging to militant families have lesser chances of getting good, equal and choicest match. Though marriage with girls related to militant families has not emerged as a taboo, they were considered undesirable and were often avoided. As the financial condition of most militant families in Kashmir is weak, families looking for a match for their kin prefer not to marry them with the girls and boys belonging to militant families as they are not in a condition to pay dowry. Besides, harassment of such families by the security forces is the other reason for families to stay away from militant background families when it comes to marriage. This fact was corroborated in the current study as shown in Table 10 that 37% of the families faced difficulty in finding suitable match for their children after the death of their father. 36% respondents stated that they did not face any problems in finding a suitable match. In 27% of the cases, the children were still young and had not reached to marriageable age or the respondents did not want to answer this question.

On being asked whether any other family/extended family member became victim of armed insurgency or

any other family/extended family member joined militancy after the militant's death, the responses came in the following manner. Several families in Kashmir lost more than one family member due to militancy in the last 30-years of conflict (Zulfikar, 2019). Table 11 of the research study corroborates this fact as in 32% families the second or the third member became the victim of the armed insurgency. The second or the third member either joined militant ranks and was subsequently killed by the security forces or became target of militants who killed him on the suspicion of being informer. Some of them also died in cross firing. This 32% also includes the family members of the slain militants who were either tortured by the security forces or their houses were burnt down.

The lingering conflict in Kashmir Valley is also pushing sons of slain militants to follow the path of their fathers and creating a martyrdom cult. While in the initial years of militants, most of the militants were fighting for 'Azadi' (freedom) from India, in the recent years the narrative has changed and now youths, who pick up arms and become militants, are being told by their handlers that if they are killed, they will go to 'Jannat' (Paradise). In several instances in the recent years, sons and close relatives of those militants, who were killed in 1990's are joining militant outfits and subsequently getting killed (Ibid).

This fact was corroborated in the Table 12, which shows that in 21% cases the second member of the family/extended family joined militancy after the killing of



**Table 13.** How did the family manage financial requirements.

| S/N           | Financial requirements managed through: | Responses  | Percentage |
|---------------|---|------------|------------|
| 1             | Extended family                         | 42         | 42         |
| 2             | Civil Society                           | 10         | 10         |
| 3             | Government                              | 8          | 8          |
| 4             | Others                                  | 40         | 40         |
| <b>Total:</b> |   | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

**Table 14.** How was financial and other support given to family.

| S/N          | How was financial and other support given to family? | Responses  | Percentage |
|--------------|--|------------|------------|
| 1.           | Dignified manner                                     | 24         | 24         |
| 2.           | Undignified manner                                   | 22         | 22         |
| 3            | Unknown  | 54         | 54         |
| <b>Total</b> |  | <b>100</b> | <b>100</b> |

one member as militant. Of these 21%, in four cases father and son or two brothers were militants and both got killed.

On enquiring from the respondents how they managed financial requirements after the death of the militant, the respondents put forth responses as tabulated in Table 11.

Table 13 clearly depicts that 40% respondents (including the widow and her children) had to seek financial help from others after the death of the militant to make both ends meet. As it was observed by the researcher that in majority of the families, the slain militant was a lone bread winner before joining the militancy and his death led to enormous economic crisis for the family. The burden of earning fell mostly on the shoulders of the widow of the militant or his children who in most of the cases were minors at the time of the death of their militant father. A good number among these widows and the orphans had to work in handicraft and automobile sectors or work as domestic helps to feed themselves. However, in many cases they were exploited and harassed and not paid due wages. In many of the families the widow and her children had to menial jobs after the death of the militant to make both ends meet. Some widows of the slain militants even said they had to beg to feed their children in the initial years and some of even faced starvation.

It was observed by the researcher that the living conditions of some of the widows and orphans who belonged to slain militants are still miserable and pathetic. 42% respondents in the study revealed that the extended family provided some financial help to them in the initial years, but it was not enough to empower them financially. Due to initial sympathy after the death of militant husbands, in some cases, the in-laws, provided shelter, food and clothes to the widow and her children.

But, it was short-lived, as most of them were thrown out later due to social compulsion. Majority of these families faced social disorganisation in terms of loss of traditional patriarchal authority, loosening of social control, erosion of values and norms and undesirable socialisation. In this situation, traditional kinship ties got disturbed which created a feeling of helplessness and insecurity among widows and orphans of the slain militant. 10% respondents were helped out by the community which included civil society groups, NGOs and Mohalla-Masjid committees, but it had compromised the dignity of the family as the help was provided without keeping it secret. Nominal 8% respondents had been helped by the government in the form of SRO-43 jobs or widow fund. Asked whether financial and other support was given to the family in a dignified manner, the respondents gave the following response.

Table 14 clearly reveals that a majority of 54% respondents did not want to answer whether financial aid given to them by relatives, civil society or any other agency was provided in a dignified manner or not. They did not want to make this issue public as, according to them, it would further compromise their dignity. However, 24% of the respondents stated that they were provided the financial support in a dignified manner and these mostly included the families who were supported by the extended family. 22% respondents said that the little financial help provided to them was given in an undignified manner as there was no secrecy in it. This type of help was mostly given by the NGOs or by local Mohalla-Masjid committees.

It was found during the study that the widows and the orphans were helped by extended family in the initial years, who besides financial help provided them accommodation, education, security, and diet to them. But non-regular and unstable help couldn't last long. In

**Table 15.** Did the family receive any compensation from government.

| S/N           | Family received any compensation from government? | Responses | Percentage |
|---------------|---|-----------|------------|
| 1             | Yes   | 8         | 8          |
| 2             | No  | 92        | 92         |
| <b>Total:</b> |   | 100       | 100        |

some cases, the in-laws families proved crueller to these widows and orphans and these suffering people had to search themselves for some income.

It is pertinent to mention here that, a narrative of heroism constructed around the militancy is believed to be one of the reasons for people in Kashmir to become militants. It is evident in the crowds that pelt stones to distract security forces during encounters and the protests that break out afterwards. Support is also counted in the attendance at funerals, the serpentine procession of mourners trailing behind the bodies of dead militants. The funerals of slain militants have become a matter of pride for grieving families, a validation of the armed struggle that killed their sons. However, this heroic image and sympathy vanishes within a few days after the militant's death and his family is left alone. Though some monetarily help is being provided by relatives, neighbours and charity organisations to those families, whose financial conditions are worse, it is either insufficient to make the family financially empowered or it compromises the dignity of the family as the little support is not provided secretly. At last when the respondents were asked, if they have availed any kind of help/received any compensation from the government; the researcher got the following response in Table 15. As the research reveals, most of the slain militants belonged to lower and lower-middle class families, their dependents had to face tremendous hardships after their death. The struggle of widows and children of the killed militants continues even years after the incident.

The families of the slain militants are not covered under Jammu and Kashmir government's SRO-43, they are not entitled for any type of compensation from the government (Government of Jammu And Kashmir General Administration Department, 1994). Table 15 clearly shows that 92% families of the militants received no compensation from the government after their death leaving them vulnerable to financial exploitation. Only 8% families received compensation from the government. This 8% includes, the widows of the militants, who are getting a meagre widow fund from the government which is less than a thousand rupees per month. Two widows, where the slain militant was in government job before joining militancy and had not crossed over to Pakistan for training, got a job on compensatory grounds under SRO-43. It is believed that the families managed to get non-involvement in militancy certificate from the police in

1990s to get the job under SRO-43 to the next of kin of the slain militant.

## Conclusion

The present study depicts miserable and pathetic condition of the widows and orphans of the slain militants in Kashmir, their worst economic conditions, educational backwardness, social disorganization and social disorder. No credible research had been carried out so far in Kashmir to ascertain this facet of militancy. Though a lot of researches have been done on Kashmir conflict and its off-shoots, so-far no attempt was made to study the impact on the families of the slain militants. The unending violence of the last three decades has devastated thousands of families in Kashmir, which includes families of security forces personnel, who died in the line of duty, civilians who were killed by the militants and security forces, or died in cross-firing, and the families of the slain militants. While the living conditions of widows and orphans of police and security forces personnel are better as the organizations they belonged to took sufficient care of their needs, especially in the field of education and employment to family members, The findings of the study revealed that families of the slain members of armed groups are living in miserable and pitiable conditions. Economically and socially they have been debased and some of them even face starvation. The earliest response to the problems of widows and orphans of members of armed group came from family and relatives who provided financial help, in addition to accommodation, education, security, diet and so on. But, this type of help, which was not regular, constant and organised, could not last long. In many cases the in-laws families proved crueller to these widows and orphans and these suffering people had to search for some income themselves.

The research findings revealed that majority of the widows did not remarry after the death of their militant husbands. These women faced lot of problems which include loneliness at home, mental torture, lack of control and guidance in home, fearful moments, failure of control over children, social insecurity, economic hardships, social apathy, discrimination and rough treatment by relatives and neighbours. Majority of the families faced difficulty in finding suitable match for their children after the death of their father. The total dependence of these

widows and orphans on others outside their own families have made them totally and socially handicapped in the patriarchal society of Kashmir. The living conditions of those widows and orphans stands worse, as helping them is still considered as taboo.

### Suggestions

All basic rights of children and women (especially orphans and widows of the slain members of armed groups) have to be necessarily protected, especially in the areas of property, income, employment, health and social betterment. In this regard, while the government help is needed through the adoption of social legislations and introduction of various relevant programmes/schemes, the social initiatives/actions are also needed. Special concern must be shown for education of children of these slain members of armed group. They must be provided all necessary facilities including financial. The government as well as non-governmental agencies and organization can provide valuable help in this regard. It has to be ensured that the widows of these slain militants get minimum amount of money regularly for themselves and their families' survival. These widows must be helped by the government on priority basis. Social esteem of the orphan especially girl has to be elevated necessarily. It will help these orphans throughout their life span, especially at the time of their marriage. Both governmental and nongovernmental efforts in this regard are needed.

The current research has a vast significance in the present circumstances as it can sensitize various sections of the society, who use the data to score their political points as well without attaching any human and social significance to it. The study will hopefully generate interest of media and in future they will try to focus on this vital area and see how they can project the miseries of the families of the victims irrespective of their links and affiliations. It is also hoped to create sensitization among the stakeholders about need for urgent conflict resolution with a dignified exit to ensure lasting peace. Since the study had several limitations, such research with a bigger sample size needs to be carried out. Future study has more scope, if carried out at the sample of at least 300 to 500. That can reveal more unhidden facts and details about the victims' families. More importantly, such study should cover the totality of the situation related to orphans and widows of slain militants in Kashmir.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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